**4th Edition**

# Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods

## A Guidebook and Resource

Steven J. Taylor

Robert Bogdan

Marjorie L. DeVault

**WILEY**

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*During the revision of this book, Steven J. Taylor was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He continued to contribute to and guide this edition of* Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods *to the end. We dedicate this book to him and his legacy.*

—Robert Bogdan and Marjorie L. DeVault

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# Acknowledgments

In writing the first edition of this book and in subsequent editions, we have drawn on the experience and knowledge of early qualitative researchers, some of whom conducted their research in an era when their preferred approach was in disfavor. We value their commitment to the faithful reporting of what they heard and saw in the field, knowing that researchers can never capture the actual nature of reality. We also have learned from the epistemological and theoretical challenges to traditional

ethnography and qualitative methodology raised by researchers since the 1970s. We believe that much is to be learned from these challenges and hope that qualitative researchers will continue to use them to strengthen their own studies in the future.

Steven J. Taylor
Robert Bogdan
Marjorie L. DeVault
*Syracuse University*

# AMONG THE PEOPLE: HOW TO CONDUCT QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

# CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Go to the People

The term *methodology* refers to the way in which we approach problems and seek answers. In the social sciences, the term applies to how research is conducted. Our assumptions, interests, and purposes shape which methodology we choose. When stripped to their essentials, debates over methodology are debates over assumptions and purposes, over theory and perspective.

Two major theoretical perspectives have dominated the social science scene (Bruyn, 1966; Deutscher, 1973; also see Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2011).[1] The first, positivism, traces its origins in the social sciences to the great theorists of the 19th and early 20th centuries and especially to Auguste Comte (1896) and Émile Durkheim (1938, 1951). The positivist seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena apart from the subjective states of individuals. Durkheim (1938, p. 14) told the social scientist to consider social facts, or social phenomena, as "things" that exercise an external influence on people.

The second major theoretical perspective, which, following the lead of Deutscher (1973), we describe as phenomenological, has a long history in philosophy and sociology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bruyn, 1966; Husserl, 1962; Psathas, 1973; Schutz, 1962, 1966). The phenomenologist, or interpretivist (Ferguson, Ferguson, & Taylor, 1992), is committed to understanding social phenomena from the actor's own perspective and examining how the world is experienced. The important reality is what people perceive it to be. Jack Douglas (1970, p. ix) wrote, "The 'forces' that move human beings,

as human beings rather than simply as human bodies...are 'meaningful stuff.' They are internal ideas, feelings, and motives."

Since positivists and phenomenologists take on different kinds of problems and seek different kinds of answers, their research requires different methodologies. Adopting a natural science model of research, the positivist searches for causes through methods, such as questionnaires, inventories, and demography, that produce data amenable to statistical analysis. The phenomenologist seeks understanding through qualitative methods, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and others, that yield descriptive data. In contrast to practitioners of a natural science approach, phenomenologists strive for what Max Weber (1968) called *verstehen*, understanding on a personal level the motives and beliefs behind people's actions (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011).

This book is about qualitative methodology—how to collect descriptive data, people's own words, and records of people's behavior. It is also a book on how to study social life phenomenologically. We are not saying that positivists cannot use qualitative methods to address their own research interests: Durkheim (1915) used rich descriptive data collected by anthropologists as the basis for his treatise *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. We are saying that the search for social causes is neither what this book is about nor where our own research interests lie.

We return to the phenomenological or interpretivist perspective later in this chapter, for it is at the heart of this work. It is the perspective that guides our research.

## A NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

Descriptive observation, interviewing, and other qualitative methods are as old as recorded history (R. H. Wax, 1971). Wax pointed out that their origins can be traced to historians, travelers, and writers ranging from the Greek Herodotus to Marco Polo. It was not until the 19th and early 20th centuries, however, that what we now call qualitative methods were consciously employed in social research (Clifford, 1983).

Frederick LePlay's 1855 study of European families and communities stands as one of the first genuine pieces of qualitative research (Bruyn, 1966). Robert Nisbet (1966) wrote that LePlay's research represented the first scientific sociological research:

> But *The European Working Classes* is a work squarely in the field of sociology, the first genuinely scientific sociological work in the century . . . . Durkheim's *Suicide* is commonly regarded as the first "scientific" work in sociology, but it takes

nothing away from Durkheim's achievement to observe that it was in LePlay's studies of kinship and community types in Europe that a much earlier effort is to be found in European sociology to combine empirical observation with the drawing of crucial inference—and to do this acknowledgedly within the criteria of science. (p. 61)

In anthropology, field research came into its own around the turn of the century. Boas (1911) and Malinowski (1932) can be credited with establishing fieldwork as a legitimate anthropological endeavor. As R. H. Wax (1971, pp. 35–36) noted, Malinowski was the first professional anthropologist to provide a description of his research approach and a picture of what fieldwork was like. Perhaps due to the influence of Boas and Malinowski, in academic circles field research or participant observation has continued to be associated with anthropology.

We can only speculate on the reasons why qualitative methods were so readily accepted by anthropologists and ignored for so long by sociologists and other social researchers. Durkheim's *Suicide* (1897/1951), which equated statistical analysis with scientific sociology, was extremely influential and provided a model of research for several generations of sociologists. It would be difficult for anthropologists to employ the research techniques, such as survey questionnaires and demographics, that Durkheim and his predecessors developed: We obviously cannot enter a preindustrial culture and ask to see the police blotter or administer a questionnaire. Further, whereas anthropologists are unfamiliar with and hence deeply concerned with everyday life in the cultures they study, sociologists probably take it for granted that they already know enough about the daily lives of people in their own societies to decide what to look at and which questions to ask.

Yet qualitative methods have a rich history in American sociology. The use of qualitative methods first became popular in the studies of the Chicago school of sociology in the period from approximately 1910 to 1940 (Bulmer, 1984; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During this period, researchers associated with the University of Chicago produced detailed participant observation studies of urban life (N. Anderson, *The Hobo*, 1923; P. G. Cressey, *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, 1932; Thrasher, *The Gang*, 1927; Wirth, *The Ghetto*, 1928; Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, 1929); rich life histories of juvenile delinquents and criminals (Shaw, *The Jack-Roller*, 1930; Shaw, *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career*, 1931; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, *Brothers in Crime*, 1938; Sutherland, *The Professional Thief*, 1937); and a classic study of the life of immigrants and their families in Poland and America based on personal documents (W. I. Thomas & Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 1927). Up until the 1940s, people who called themselves students of society were familiar with participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and personal documents.

As important as these early studies were, interest in qualitative methodology waned toward the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s with the growth in prominence of grand theories (e.g., Parsons, 1951) and quantitative methods. With the exception of W. F. Whyte's (1943, 1955, 1981, 1993) *Street Corner Society*, few qualitative studies were taught and read in social science departments during this era.

Since the 1960s there has been a reemergence in the use of qualitative methods, and qualitative methodologies have moved in new directions (see DeVault, 2007 for an overview). So many powerful, insightful, and influential studies have been published based on these methods (e.g., E. Anderson, 1990, 1999, 2011; Becker, 1963; Duneier, 1999; Erikson, 1976; Hochschild, 1983; Kang, 2010; Lareau, 2001; Liebow, 1967; Thorne, 1993; Vaughan, 1997) that they have been impossible to discount. What was once an oral tradition of qualitative research has been recorded in monographs (Berg & Lune, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2012, 2014; Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Esterberg, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lofland, 1971, 1976; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Saldaña, 2011; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Silverman, 2013; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Stake, 1995; ten Have, 2004; Van Maanen, Dabbs, & Faulker, 1982; C. A. B. Warren & Karner, 2014; W. F. Whyte, 1984; Yin, 2011, 2014) and edited volumes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Emerson, 1983; Filstead, 1970; Glazer, 1972; Luttrell, 2010; McCall & Simmons, 1969; Van Maanen, 1995). There also have been books published that examine the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research (Bruyn, 1966; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Prasad, 2005), relate qualitative methods to theory development (Charmaz, 2014; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Prus, 1996; Saldaña, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), describe writing strategies for reporting qualitative research (Becker, 2007; Richardson, 1990b; Van Maanen, 1988; Wolcott, 2009), and contain personal accounts of researchers' experiences in the field (Douglas, 1976; Fenstermaker & Jones, 2011; Hertz, 1997; J. M. Johnson, 1975; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991; Shaffir, Stebbins, & Turowetz, 1980; R. H. Wax, 1971). In sociology alone, there are journals devoted to publishing qualitative studies (*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Qualitative Sociology*) and to qualitative inquiry generally (*International Review of Qualitative Research*, *Qualitative Inquiry*). Sage Publications produced short monographs on different slices of qualitative research starting in 1985 (edited by Van Maanen, Manning, and Miller), and the number reached nearly 50. Interest in qualitative methodology has grown so much that several publishers have produced encyclopedic handbooks on qualitative methods generally and on particular branches of qualitative inquiry (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013).

Paralleling the growing interest in qualitative research in sociology has been an increased acceptance of these methods in other disciplines and applied fields. Such diverse disciplines as geography (DeLyser, Herbert, Aitken, Crang, & McDowell, 2010; Hay, 2010), political science (McNabb, 2004), and psychology (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003; Fischer, 2005; *Qualitative Research in Psychology*) have seen the publication of edited books, texts, and journals on qualitative research methods over the past decade and a half. The American Psychological Association started publishing the journal *Qualitative Psychology* in 2014. Qualitative methods have been used for program evaluation and policy research (Bogdan & Taylor, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; M. Q. Patton 1987, 2008, 2010, 2014; Rist 1994). Journals and texts on qualitative research can be found in such diverse applied areas of inquiry as health care and nursing (Latimer, 2003; Munhall, 2012; Streubert & Carpenter, 2010; *Qualitative Health Research*), mental health, counseling, and psychotherapy (Harper & Thompson, 2011; McLeod, 2011), education (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*; Lichtman, 2010; *Qualitative Research in Education*), music education (Conway, 2014), public health (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005), business (Meyers, 2013), theology (Swinton & Mowat, 2006), disability studies (Ferguson et al., 1992), human development (Daly, 2007; Jessor, Colby, & Shweder, 1996), social work (Sherman & and Reid, 1994; *Qualitative Social Work*), and special education (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

One does not have to be a sociologist or to think sociologically to practice qualitative research. Although we identify with a sociological tradition, qualitative approaches can be used in a broad range of disciplines and fields.

Just as significant as the increasing interest in qualitative research methods has been the proliferation of theoretical perspectives rooted in the phenomenological tradition underlying this form of inquiry. We consider the relationship between theory and methodology more fully later in this chapter.

## QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

The phrase *qualitative methodology* refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data—people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. As Ray Rist (1977) pointed out, qualitative methodology, like quantitative methodology, is more than a set of data-gathering techniques. It is a way of approaching the empirical world. In this section we present our notion of qualitative research.

1. *Qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives.* Central to the phenomenological perspective and hence qualitative research is understanding people from their own frames of reference and

experiencing reality as they experience it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative researchers empathize and identify with the people they study in order to understand how those people see things. Herbert Blumer (1969) explained it this way:

> To try to catch the interpretative process by remaining aloof as a so-called "objective" observer and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectivism—the objective observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his[2] own surmises in place of catching the process as it occurs in the experience of the acting unit which uses it. (p. 86)

As suggested by Blumer's quote, qualitative researchers must attempt to suspend, or set aside, their own perspectives and taken-for-granted views of the world. Bruyn (1966) advised the qualitative researcher to view things as though they were happening for the first time. Nothing is taken for granted. Psathas (1973) wrote:

> For the sociologist, a phenomenological approach to observing the social world requires that he break out of the natural attitude and examine the very assumptions that structure the experience of actors in the world of everyday life. A method that provides assistance in this is "bracketing" the assumptions of everyday life. This does not involve denying the existence of the world or even doubting it (it is not the same as Cartesian doubt). Bracketing changes my attitude toward the world, allowing me to see with clearer vision. I set aside preconceptions and presuppositions, what I already "know" about the social world, in order to discover it with clarity of vision. (pp. 14–15)

2. *Qualitative research is inductive*. Qualitative researchers develop concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) coined the phrase "grounded theory" to refer to the inductive theorizing process involved in qualitative research that has the goal of building theory. A theory may be said to be grounded to the extent that it is derived from and based on the data themselves. Lofland (1995) described this type of theorizing as "emergent analysis" and pointed out that the process is creative and intuitive as opposed to mechanical.

In qualitative studies, researchers follow a flexible research design (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). We begin our studies with only vaguely formulated research questions. However we begin, we do not know for sure what to look for or what specific questions to ask until we have spent some time in a setting. As we learn about a setting and how participants view their experiences, we can make decisions regarding additional data to collect on the basis of what we have already learned.

Of course, qualitative researchers operate within theoretical frameworks. Pure induction is impossible (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). We can never escape all of our assumptions about the world, and we all approach our research with some goals and questions in mind. Even an interest in social meanings directs our attention to some aspects of how people think and act in a setting and not to others. Within a broad theoretical framework, the goal of qualitative research is to make sure the theory fits the data and not vice versa.

DeVault (1995b) cautioned against taking the principles of Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory approach too literally. As she pointed out, what is missing from the data may be just as important for theorizing as what is there. For the purposes of inductive reasoning, it is important to be sensitive to unstated assumptions and unarticulated meanings.

3. *In qualitative methodology the researcher looks at settings and people holistically; people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole*. The qualitative researcher studies people in the context of their pasts and the situations in which they find themselves (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Tracy, 2013; Yin, 2011).

When we reduce people's words and acts to statistical equations, we can lose sight of the human side of social life. When we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society. We learn about concepts such as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, and love, whose essence is lost through other research approaches. We learn about "the inner life of the person, his moral struggles, his successes and failures in securing this destiny in a world too often at variance with his hopes and ideals" (Burgess, as quoted by Shaw [1930/1966, p. 4]).

4. *Qualitative researchers are concerned with how people think and act in their everyday lives*. Qualitative research has been described as naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means that researchers adopt strategies that parallel how people act in the course of daily life, typically interacting with informants in a natural and unobtrusive manner (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In participant observation, most researchers try to "blend into the woodwork," at least until they have grasped an understanding of a setting. In qualitative interviewing, researchers model their interviews after a normal conversation rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange. Although qualitative researchers cannot eliminate their effects on the people they study, they attempt to minimize or control those effects or at least understand them when interpreting data (Emerson, 1983).

5. *For the qualitative researcher, all perspectives are worthy of study*. The qualitative researcher rejects what Howard Becker (1967) referred to as the

"hierarchy of credibility"; namely, the assumption that the perspectives of powerful people are more valid than those of the powerless. The goal of qualitative research is to examine how things look from different vantage points. The student's perspective is just as important as the teacher's; the juvenile delinquent's as important as the judge's; the so-called paranoid's as important as the psychiatrist's; the homemaker's as important as the breadwinner's; that of the African American (Puerto Rican, Mexican, Vietnamese American, Haudenosaunee, etc.) as important as that of the European American (English, Swedish, Italian, Irish, Polish, etc.); that of the researched as important as the researcher's.

In qualitative studies, those whom society ignores—the poor and the so-called deviant—often receive a forum for their views. Oscar Lewis (1965, p. xii), famous for his studies of the poor in Latin America, wrote, "I have tried to give a voice to a people who are rarely heard." Ironically, although Lewis's studies were filled with rich descriptions, his interpretations of the people he studied blamed their "culture" for the social inequalities they faced.

6. *Qualitative researchers emphasize the meaningfulness of their research*. Qualitative methods allow us to stay close to the empirical world (Blumer, 1969). They are designed to ensure a close fit between the data and what people actually say and do. By observing people in their everyday lives, listening to them talk about what is on their minds, and looking at the documents they produce, the qualitative researcher obtains firsthand knowledge of social life unfiltered through operational definitions or rating scales.

Whereas qualitative researchers emphasize the meaningfulness of their studies—or what some people term *validity* (Deutscher, Pestello, & Pestello, 1993)—quantitative researchers emphasize reliability and replicability in research (Rist, 1977). As Deutscher et al. (1993, p. 25) wrote, reliability has been overemphasized in social research:

> We concentrate on whether we are consistently right or wrong. As a consequence we may have been learning a great deal about how to pursue an incorrect course with a maximum of precision.

This is not to say that qualitative researchers are unconcerned about the accuracy of their data. A qualitative study is not an impressionistic, off-the-cuff analysis based on a superficial look at a setting or people. It is a piece of systematic research conducted with demanding, though not necessarily standardized, procedures. In the chapters that follow, we discuss some of the checks researchers can place on their data recording and interpretations. However, it is not possible to achieve perfect reliability if we are to produce

meaningful studies of the real world. LaPiere (quoted in Deutscher et al., 1993) wrote:

> The study of human behavior is time consuming, intellectually fatiguing, and depends for its success upon the ability of the investigator . . . . Quantitative measurements are quantitatively accurate; qualitative evaluations are always subject to the errors of human judgment. Yet it would seem far more worthwhile to make a shrewd guess regarding that which is essential than to accurately measure that which is likely to prove irrelevant. (p. 19)

7. *For the qualitative researcher, there is something to be learned in all settings and groups*. No aspect of social life is too mundane or trivial to be studied. All settings and people are at once similar and unique. They are similar in the sense that some general social processes may be found in any setting or among any group of people. They are unique in that some aspect of social life can best be studied in each setting or through each informant because there it is best illuminated (Hughes, 1958, p. 49). Some social processes that appear in bold relief under some circumstances appear only faintly under others. Of course, the researcher's own purposes will determine which settings and groups will be the most interesting and yield the most insights.

8. *Qualitative research is a craft* (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Qualitative methods have not been as refined and standardized as other research approaches. This is in part a historical artifact that is changing with the establishment of conventions for collecting and analyzing data and in part a reflection of the nature of the methods themselves. Qualitative researchers are flexible in how they go about conducting their studies. The researcher is a craftsperson. The qualitative social scientist is encouraged to be his or her own methodologist (Mills, 1959). There are guidelines to be followed, but never rules. The methods serve the researcher; never is the researcher a slave to procedure and technique. As Dalton (1964, p. 60; and see Dalton, 1961) wrote, "If a choice were possible, I would naturally prefer simple, rapid, and infallible methods. If I could find such methods, I would avoid the time-consuming, difficult and suspect variants of 'participant observation' with which I have become associated."

## THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The phenomenological perspective is central to our conception of qualitative methodology. What qualitative methodologists study, how they study it, and how they interpret it all depend upon their theoretical perspective.

Phenomenological Perspectives

The phenomenologist views human behavior, what people say and do, as a product of how people define their world. The task of the phenomenologist, and of qualitative methodologists like us, is to capture how people construct their realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). As we have emphasized, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from other people's points of view.

The phenomenological perspective is tied to a broad range of theoretical frameworks and schools of thought in the social sciences. We identify in different ways with a theoretical perspective known as symbolic interactionism or social constructionism (constructivism), and we treat this perspective as a point of departure for the discussion of other frameworks that have emerged more recently.[3]

*Symbolic Interactionism*
Symbolic interactionism stems from the works of Charles Horton Cooley (1902), John Dewey (1930), George Herbert Mead (1934, 1938), Robert Park (1915), W. I. Thomas (1931), and others. Mead's (1934) formulation in *Mind, Self, and Society* was the clearest and most influential presentation of this perspective. Mead's followers, including Howard Becker (Becker, Geer, & Hughes, 1968; Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961), Herbert Blumer (1967, 1969), and Everett Hughes (1958), have applied his insightful analyses of the processes of interaction to everyday life.

The symbolic interactionist places primary importance on the social meanings people attach to the world around them. Blumer (1969) stated that symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises. The first is that people act toward things, including other people, on the basis of the meanings these things have for them. Thus people do not simply respond to stimuli or act out cultural scripts. It is the meaning that determines action.

Blumer's second premise is that meanings are not inherent in objects, but are social products that arise during interaction: "The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing" (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). People learn how to see the world from other people. As social actors, we develop shared meanings of objects and people in our lives.

The third fundamental premise of symbolic interactionism, according to Blumer, is that social actors attach meanings to situations, others, things, and themselves through a process of interpretation. Blumer (1969) wrote:

> This process has two distinct steps. First, the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting; he has to point out to himself the things that have meaning. Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. (p. 5)

This process of interpretation acts as an intermediary between meanings or predispositions to act in a certain way and the action itself. People are constantly interpreting and defining things as they move through different situations. Social organization is built through these activities; that is, the activities produce particular social settings, communities, and societies.

We can see why different people say and do different things. One reason is that people have had different experiences and have learned different social meanings. For instance, people holding different positions within an organization have learned to see things in different ways. Take the example of a student who breaks a window in a school cafeteria. The principal might define the situation as a behavior control problem; the counselor, as a family problem; the janitor, as a clean-up problem; and the school nurse, as a potential health problem. The student who broke the window does not see it as a problem at all (unless and until he or she gets caught). Further, the race, gender, or class of any of the participants may influence how the participants view the situation and define each other.

A second reason why people act differently is that they find themselves in different situations. If we want to understand why some adolescents commit crimes and others do not, we cannot simply examine their demographic characteristics, but we must look at the situations they confront.

Finally, the process of interpretation is a dynamic process. How a person interprets something will depend on the meanings available and how he or she sizes up a situation. Something as seemingly unambiguous as the flick of an eyelid can be interpreted as a sexual advance, recognition of shared understanding, expression of superiority, or an involuntary tic.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, all organizations, cultures, and groups consist of actors who are involved in a constant process of interpreting the world around them. Although people may act within the framework of an organization, culture, or group, it is their interpretations and definitions of the situation that determine action, not their norms, values, roles, or goals.

You might be thinking that there are other social science researchers besides qualitative researchers who are concerned with how people perceive the world. After all, there are those operating within the positivist tradition who employ concepts such as attitudes, values, opinions, personality, and others that suggest that they want to know how their subjects think. In general, however, their approaches treat attitudes and other such mental states that they attribute to their subjects as causing behavior, and as fixed, rather than situational and evolving through interaction.

Many years after the articulation of symbolic interactionism by Blumer, this perspective and variants such as labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Kitsuse, 1962; Lemert, 1951), Goffman's (1959, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1971) dramaturgy ("all the world is a stage"), and social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Bogdan & Taylor, 1989; Schwandt, 2007) remain influential among qualitative researchers. Symbolic interactionism is not alone, however.

Since the late 1960s, a large number of theoretical perspectives rooted in the phenomenological tradition have achieved visibility in the social sciences. Here we review some of the major perspectives—ethnomethodology, feminist research, institutional ethnography, postmodernism, narrative analysis, and multi-sited, global methods.

### Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology was developed by Harold Garfinkel and was first articulated in his widely read book *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967; also see Garfinkel, 2002). Ethnomethodology refers not to research methods but rather to the subject matter of study: how (the methodology by which) people maintain a sense of an external reality (Mehan & Wood, 1975, p. 5). For the ethnomethodologists, the meanings of actions are always ambiguous and problematic. Their task is to examine the ways people apply abstract cultural rules and commonsense understandings in concrete situations to make actions appear routine, explicable, and unambiguous (R. Turner, 1974). Meanings, then, are practical accomplishments on the part of members of society.

A study by D. Lawrence Wieder (1974) illustrated the ethnomethodological perspective. Wieder explored how addicts in a halfway house use a convict code (axioms such as "do not snitch" and "help other residents") to explain, justify, and account for their behavior. He showed how residents "tell the code" (apply maxims to specific situations) when they are called upon to account for their actions:

> The code, then, is much more a method of moral persuasion and justification than it is a substantive account of an organized way of life. It is a way, or set of ways, of causing activities to be seen as morally, repetitively, and constrainedly organized. (Wieder, 1974, p. 158)

Consistent with the European phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (1962), the ethnomethodologists bracket or suspend their own belief in reality to study the reality of everyday life. Garfinkel (1967) studied the commonsense or taken-for-granted rules of interaction in everyday life through a variety of mischievous experiments he called "breaching procedures" in which the researcher breaks social rules intentionally in order to study people's reactions and how they try to repair the social fabric.

Through an examination of common sense, the ethnomethodologists seek to understand how people "go about the task of seeing, describing, and explaining order in the world in which they live" (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1970, p. 289).

One of the most productive areas of study in ethnomethodology is conversational analysis (Coulon, 1995). By closely observing and recording conversations—in medical encounters, for example (Beach & Anderson, 2004;

Beach, Easter, Good, & Pigeron, 2004) or in campus talk about racial identities (Buttny & Williams, 2000)—ethnomethodologists examine how people negotiate and jointly construct meanings in conversation (Psathas, 1995; Sacks, 1992).

Ever since the publication of Garfinkel's influential book on ethnomethodology, social scientists have debated the place of ethnomethodology within social theory. For some, ethnomethodology fell squarely within the symbolic interactionist perspective (Denzin, 1970). For others, it represented a radical departure from other sociological traditions (Coulon, 1995; Zimmerman & Wieder, 1970). Mehan and Wood (1975) characterized ethnomethodology as a separate enterprise from sociology.

Although interest in ethnomethodology peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, an international network of researchers continues to develop the perspective (the International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis; see http://www.iiemca.org/), and many of the insights and concepts developed by ethnomethodologists have been incorporated by researchers writing from different theoretical perspectives, including symbolic interactionism. For example, the idea that researchers and informants construct meanings together in interview situations can be traced to ethnomethodology (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

*Feminist Research*

Perhaps the most significant development in qualitative research over the past several decades has been the growing prominence of feminist research perspectives, due in large part to the establishment and growth of women's and gender studies as fields of teaching and research (DeVault, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Olesen, 2011; Reinharz, 1992; D. E. Smith, 1987, 1990). As Olesen (1994, 2011) noted, feminist research is not a single activity; there are many feminisms and many varieties of feminist research.

Early feminist scholars critiqued existing research for leaving women and their concerns out of the picture; they argued that bringing women's experiences into view would produce fresh insights, and the work that has been done since has certainly confirmed that view. A legitimate criticism of many of the classic urban ethnographies in the qualitative tradition is that women are missing from them. For example, W. F. Whyte's (1943, 1955, 1981, 1993) *Street Corner Society* and Liebow's (1967) *Tally's Corner* attempted to analyze the social organization of poor urban communities by a nearly exclusive focus on male members of street-corner groups. As Richardson (1992) noted, feminist scholarship showed that a look at urban life from the vantage point of women yields a very different picture (Ladner, 1971; Stack, 1974).

Most feminist research builds on the ideas of social oppression and inequality, and feminist researchers have joined with those concerned with other dimensions of inequality. From this perspective, qualitative research

must be conducted with an understanding of how the broader social order oppresses different categories of people by race, gender, or class. These researchers refer to the simultaneous, interwoven effects of these oppressions as "intersectionality." More generally, feminist research takes as subject matter for study issues of potential importance to women and uses women's standpoint as a point of departure for research.

A solid contribution of feminist research since the 1990s has been the publication of studies rooted in the qualitative tradition but undertaken with attention to women or from a woman's standpoint. For example, in Kanter's book *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1993), she analyzed work life in a large organization from a vantage point that included the predominantly female clerical staff and executives' wives, as well as the few women working as tokens in male-dominated occupational categories. In her book *Feeding the Family*, DeVault (1991) examined the gendered nature of the invisible work that goes into the preparation of food. DeVault provided insights into not only women's household work but the construct of family itself:

> I have argued that the feeding work traditionally undertaken by women is both produced by and produces "family" as we have known it—the work itself "feeds" not only household members but also "the family," as ideological construct. Thus, taken-for-granted, largely unarticulated understandings of family stand in the way of equity. (p. 236)

Thorne's (1993) participant observation study *Gender Play* analyzed scenes that will seem familiar to practically any reader. Through interactions with "kids" (as Thorne noted, how children define themselves) and close observation of school playgrounds, Thorne explored the social construction of gender and how different contexts shape gender-related patterns in children's play. Building on the work of other feminist researchers, Traustadóttir (1991a, 1991b, 1995) studied the nature of caregiving among family members, friends, and human service workers of people with disabilities. She showed how the concept of caring obscures the difference between affective attachments ("caring about") and the day-to-day work involved in supporting people with disabilities ("caring for"). The study of paid and unpaid carework has since become a lively area of research. Qualitative researchers have explored the work of paid domestics and child-care workers (e.g., MacDonald, 2010; Rollins, 1985), the lives of immigrant careworkers and their relations with brokers, employers, and their families (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Romero, 2011), and the unpaid work of mothering, in different communities and contexts (Garey, 1999; Hansen, 2005; Hays, 1996).

As demonstrated by feminist researchers, gender is not only a fruitful area for study, theorizing, and writing, but a factor that warrants methodological attention as well. Women may face special problems conducting research in male-dominated settings (Easterday, Papademas, Schorr, & Valentine, 1977;

C. A. B. Warren & Rasmussen, 1977). The British sociologist Ann Oakley (1981) argued that interviewing women in conventional ways could be a "contradiction in terms." As a feminist researcher, she wanted to do research to help participants, but she had been taught to respond in a noncommittal way if an interviewee asked her a question (saying, for example, "I haven't really thought about that"). However, she found that many of the women participants saw her as a knowledgeable friend and asked her for information about childbirth and motherhood; she didn't feel it was right to ignore or deflect those requests. DeVault (1990) also pointed out that interviewing with women may require special attention to the nuances of language and experiences that are not easily captured by conventional linguistic forms (for example, the distinction reflected in the terminology of work and leisure may not adequately reflect many of women's activities). Other researchers, such as Riessman (1987), have cautioned that "gender is not enough" and urged feminist researchers to be aware of similar issues related to race, ethnicity, and social class, in keeping with their commitment to intersectional analysis.

*Institutional Ethnography*
Institutional ethnography was developed by Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, as a feminist sociology (1987), and has since become more widely known and used as "a sociology for people" (2005). Institutional ethnographers think of the approach as more than just a method; it is a mode of inquiry that combines distinctive ways of conducting research with its own theoretical grounding—or more precisely, its ontological principles. ("Ontology" refers to the researcher's sense of what is "there" in the world we investigate, and institutional ethnographers are committed to the idea that social organization is always built from people's activities.) During the 1980s, Smith built on the feminist critique of male-centered scholarship and developed a mode of investigation that begins with the experiences and activities of some "anchor" group—women, people with disabilities, teachers or students, and so on—and then goes on to explore the web of social relations that produces those experiences (D. E. Smith, 1987, 2005). The central idea is to conduct an investigation "for" rather than "of" the group—that is, not just to describe the group's perspectives but instead to develop knowledge that will be useful for that group.

Like phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists, institutional ethnographers look closely at people's activities and how people work together. They also attend to the coordination of activity across different spaces, largely through documents and discourses, in order to extend the research beyond what people already know from their everyday lives (McCoy, 2008). These texts are seen as key elements in social organization that have become increasingly significant in societies no longer governed through face-to-face relationships. Institutional ethnographers study texts ethnographically; that

is, they are always interested in field-based study of "texts in use," rather than simply reading the documents. Following the lead of Marx (D. E. Smith, 1987), institutional ethnographers identify ideological modes of thought and action embedded in governing documents, and trace their consequences in people's lives.

Institutional ethnography has proved especially useful in applied fields and in social movements, where practitioners and participants wish to understand the broader contexts for their practice. For example, nursing researchers have explored the ways that nursing work is transformed when hospitals engage in cost-cutting reforms; nurses on the floor come to understand principles of quality care, for example, in new ways, responsive to management's rather than nurses' or patients' interests (Rankin & Campbell, 2006). Activist researchers, such as George Smith (1990), have used institutional ethnography to locate promising sites for intervention. For example, Smith was able to demonstrate that police responses to homosexual activities were shaped more by the legal framework in place than by homophobia, as some activists speculated. Institutional ethnography is often concerned with the ways that activity in one space is shaped by the activities of others, elsewhere—a phenomenon labeled *extra-local* social organization.

*Postmodernism*

The postmodern perspective rejects the Enlightenment's faith in reason and rationality and the belief in progress (the label, which Richardson [1990b] described as oxymoronic, derives from it being post or after the philosophical era of modernism). Postmodernism comes from the field of literary criticism and streams within philosophy. It challenges the authority of science as well as the idea of an all-encompassing master narrative, and examines the ideological underpinnings behind any text, including those we call scientific.

Interest in postmodernism and related schools of thought such as post-structuralism in qualitative research coincided with the emergence of critical ethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; J. Thomas, 1992). One could say that postmodern researchers take the idea of social construction to its limits, emphasizing the multiple truths that can be told in any situation. Like feminist researchers, some focus attention on how the researcher's race, class, gender, and social position structure the production of ethnographic accounts or "texts." Other postmodernist scholars deconstruct social science writing and hence strip the social scientist, whether quantitative or qualitative, of any claims to authority as an all-knowing observer of the social scene. J. Thomas (1992) offered a useful description of the postmodernist's process of deconstruction by comparing it to taking a building apart and examining

its underlying structure (in the case of social science writing, assumptions, ideologies, and literary devices).

Some postmodernists have questioned the distinction between fiction and nonfiction (Atkinson, 1992; Denzin, 1996) and welcome a blurring of genres, or types, of writing. From this perspective, both fiction and nonfiction (ethnography, social science writing) are narratives and are based on literary devices such as metaphors and synedoches (Richardson, 1990b). As Denzin (1996, p. 238) wrote, "the discourses of the postmodern world involve the constant commingling of literary, journalistic, fictional, factual, and ethnographic writing. No form is privileged over the other."

A series of exchanges between William F. Whyte and Norman Denzin in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (or *JCE*; 1992) and *Qualitative Inquiry* (1996) highlighted the differences between traditional qualitative research and the postmodern perspective. An entire issue of *JCE* (1992) was devoted to a reconsideration of Whyte's (1943, 1955, 1981, 1993) *Street Corner Society*. Widely considered a sociological classic in participant observation, Whyte's study made important contributions to our understanding of the social organization of lower-class urban areas and the social structure of small groups. Many years later, Marianne Boelen visited Cornerville, the site of Whyte's study, over an extended period of time and subsequently published a devastating critique of Whyte's study in *JCE* (Boelen, 1992), challenging his interpretations, conclusions, and ethics. Boelen's critique in *JCE* was followed by a rebuttal by Whyte; a strongly worded defense of Whyte by Angelo Ralph Orlandella, one of his original informants; and commentaries by sociologists Arthur Vidich, Laurel Richardson, and Norman Denzin.

The specifics of Boelen's charges against Whyte are less important than the issues raised in some of the commentaries in this exchange. Denzin's commentary on the Whyte–Boelen exchange was most instructive for understanding the postmodern stance. For Denzin, Whyte and Boelen were engaged in a hopelessly naive and outdated debate about who got the facts about Cornerville straight. Denzin (1992) wrote:

> It is the hegemonic version that must be challenged, and Whyte and Boelen refuse to take up the challenge. They still want a world out there that proves their theory right or wrong. But how do they find that world and bring it into existence? How do they record what it does when they push against it? Unfortunately, they never answer these questions. Hence the poverty of their respective statements, for social realism will not produce the kinds of definitive statements they seek, nor will social realism furnish the political foundations for the projects they pursue. (p. 126)

In concluding his commentary, Denzin (1992) equated ethnographic reporting with positivism and questioned:

> As the 20th century is now in its last decade, it is appropriate to ask if we any longer want this kind of social science. Do we want the kind of classic sociology that Whyte produced and Boelen, in her own negative way, endorses? (p. 131)

In Denzin's postmodern view, the task of the qualitative researcher is to produce provocative stories, which may or may not be definitive.

Whyte continued the discussion in the appendixes of the fourth edition of *Street Corner Society* (1993) and an article in *Qualitative Inquiry* (1996a) to which Richardson and Denzin responded. According to Whyte, some social phenomena are real. Whyte believed that Denzin failed to recognize the difference between description of facts and interpretation. Conceding that interpretations can be wrong, Whyte maintained that social and physical facts exist.

In an extended response to Whyte, Denzin (1996) argued that not only postmodernists but non-postmodern social constructionists have rejected Whyte's assumptions about the objective reality of social facts. Denzin proceeded to review the work of the "new journalists," which challenged the traditional distinctions between fact and fiction. In a terse rebuttal, Whyte (1996b) dismissed Denzin's view as a "fad" that "leads nowhere" (p. 242).

Some well-known qualitative researchers express discomfort over what Van Maanen (1995) referred to as this "new ethnographic turn" in the direction of the postmodern stance (also see Lofland, 1995). Some who defend postmodernism decry attempts to marginalize or politicize postmodern versions of qualitative research methods, yet call for a colonization of other versions of qualitative research:

> The constructionists in the subfield believe that their methods will do the interpretation for them, yielding up empirical materials that will allow them to produce true and faithful accountings of this socially constructed world . . . . These are the tough-minded empiricists. They like closed and realist texts, certainly, foundational criteria, substantive theory, single-voiced texts, and good science canons. It is this version of QRM that we think should be colonized. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995, p. 353)

And some (Snow & Morrill, 1993, 1995) seem to recognize the value of having multiple voices on qualitative methods and perspectives.

Although much of postmodernist writing has been devoted to deconstructing published studies and challenging the truth claims of researchers, some postmodernists have attempted to contribute to social understanding through alternative forms of research and reporting. These forms are grounded in personal reflection and subjective understanding and include

autoethnography or biography (Denzin, 2013; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003), fiction (Badley, 2013), and poetry (Lahman, 2013; Peté, 2013; Phillips, 2013).

*Narrative Analysis*

Postmodernism has been quite controversial in the social sciences. Narrative analysis, however, is one of its manifestations that has been taken up and developed more enthusiastically (and, we would suggest, more productively) throughout the social sciences. Narrative analysts work with stories, especially those told in interviews and in everyday life. The central insight of narrative analysis is the recognition that people are constantly telling stories, to themselves and to others (Richardson, 1990a). Like the social constructionists and postmodernists, narrative analysts usually reject the idea of a single "capital-T" Truth. Instead, they are interested in how people narrate their own versions of reality. One early formulation of narrative analysis came in the work of the medical sociologist Eliott Mishler (1986). In his work with interviews, he noticed that the data often contained lengthy narrative responses to the interviewer's questions. When researchers broke these stories into small pieces in their analyses, they often lost important aspects of the participant's perspective. Mishler urged researchers, instead, to preserve the integrity of participant narratives and to analyze not only the content of the story but also how it is told. In psychology, Jerome Bruner (1987, 1990) provided a foundation for using narrative approaches to bring processes of meaning making to the forefront. Narrative methodologies often require a more focused analysis of a smaller number of participant responses, but narrative analysts believe that the closer, more holistic attention to the narrator's perspective can provide extremely rich insights.

Narrative analysis refers to an extremely varied family of methodologies and a large tool kit of techniques for analysis. Narrative analysts may look at small stories told in everyday life, such as children's playground stories (Labov, 1972); at lengthy narrative encounters, as in therapy sessions (McLeod & Lynch, 2000); at narratives told in interviews about particular experiences, such as divorce (Riessman, 1990) or the different ways that people use legal remedies for problems (Ewick & Silbey, 1998); at research participants' written narratives (Emerson, 2011); or at narratives elicited around visual materials (Luttrell, 2003). Narrative analysis has been especially important in the study of illness and its consequences for identity (Charon, 2006; Frank, 1996), and narrative research is increasingly prominent in health-professional education. It has also been central to the development of critical race theory, which has emerged from legal studies (Bell, 1992). Researchers in this very broad tradition define narratives in different ways and adopt different methods for analyzing them (Riessman, 2008). What they have in common is an underlying view of the significance of narrative

and of the story as a "genre"—that is, a format for packaging (and making sense of) unruly experience.

The term *genre* comes from literature, where it is used to refer to different types of writing. When we pick up a novel or a book of poems or an autobiography, we know what to expect because these genre labels refer to different types of writing that are familiar to most readers. In the same way, the term *story* points to general expectations for the structuring of experience in narrative. (Most children learn quite early what will follow from "Once upon a time . . . .") Someone who tells a story will usually provide a brief opening, then recount a sequence of events (this happened, then this, then this), and then usually close with a coda that summarizes and points to the significance of the story. Narrative researchers often examine and interpret these structural aspects of people's stories in order to understand how people make sense of their lives.

### Multi-sited, Global Research

The processes and experiences associated with globalization have stimulated some qualitative researchers to develop theoretical perspectives that allow them to look at linkages and connections among field sites located in different settings or different parts of the world. Anthropologists have led the way in developing what they usually call *multi-sited ethnography*. In an early statement of goals and approaches, Marcus (1998, p. 79) discussed the idea of a "mobile ethnography" that can "examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space." Researchers in various fields, interested in global labor markets and production processes, have used commodity chain analysis to look ethnographically at the journeys of particular items, when raw materials are mined or harvested in one part of the world, crafted into products somewhere else, and sent to consumers in yet another place. Ehrenreich and Hochschild and their colleagues (2002) have applied that idea in research on migrant nurses, nannies, and domestics, developing the idea of a "global care chain." Michael Burawoy, a sociologist interested in using ethnography to extend existing theories, has developed a multi-sited "extended case method" (Burawoy et al., 1991; Burawoy, 2009), and he and a group of colleagues have applied those ideas in a variety of projects they collect under the label "global ethnography" (Burawoy et al., 2000).

Multi-sited ethnographic studies incorporate many of the same assumptions and use many of the same methodological tools as traditional ethnographies. However, they are usually based on very different understandings of the "field." While traditional ethnographers have typically been rooted in some place (studying a street corner, for example, or a hospital ICU, or a social movement organization), those undertaking multi-sited ethnography might locate their field of inquiry in multiple places. For example, Banerjee's (2006) study of Indian H1-B technology workers in the computer consulting

industry included data collection in the home country, brokering agencies, and worksites in the United States. Multi-sited researchers may also conceptualize their object of inquiry or unit of analysis differently. Martin's (1995) book on changing understandings of the immune system, *Flexible Bodies*, followed the idea of flexibility, investigating how it appears in interviews with lay people as well as scientists, and then showing parallels with constructions of flexibility in new theories of workplace management. Similarly, instead of looking at individual garment workers and asking how they understand their experience, anthropologist Jane Collins (2003) focused her research on the global system of garment production and fashion marketing.

Theorists of globalization debate whether the interconnections we see now are new or simply extensions of processes that have been ongoing for centuries. They also debate whether globalization is always a homogenizing process and the extent to which local people and communities can shape or resist the manifestations of globalization in their areas. Such theorizing opens intriguing new areas of investigation for qualitative researchers, inviting more international, multi-sited fieldwork, and we expect that global methods will continue to develop. As they grow, they illustrate how qualitative researchers rely on shared traditions from past work and also develop novel adaptations of those traditions in order to investigate changes in the social world. New methods for studying online behavior and social media, which we discuss further in the chapters to come, provide another, related example.

## Making Sense of Theoretical Debates

Novices to qualitative research—and even some experienced researchers—can be confused by the array of theoretical perspectives available within the qualitative tradition. Just learning the language associated with certain perspectives can be a daunting task. Even more intimidating are polarized debates that pop up from time to time, forcing practitioners to believe that they have to declare allegiance to one camp or another.

Although Taylor and Bogdan identify with the traditions of the Chicago school and symbolic interactionism and DeVault identifies with these traditions as well as feminist research and institutional ethnography, we believe that much can be learned from other theoretical perspectives without sacrificing the core tenets of this perspective (Blumer's three premises). The experience of ethnomethodology is instructive in this regard. Soon after the development of this perspective by Harold Garfinkel (1967), proponents sought to establish ethnomethodology as distinctive from all hitherto established sociology; thus ethnomethodology was incompatible with symbolic interactionism. Yet, decades later, we find ethnomethodological approaches

and concepts appearing in studies rooted in other traditions. For example, West and Zimmerman's (1987) analysis of "doing gender" found its way into works identified with feminist research and symbolic interactionism. The success of ethnomethodology was represented not by its domination but through its incorporation into other ways of theorizing about the world. So, too, we believe, will postmodern notions such as deconstruction and the questioning of voice and authority leave a mark on the qualitative research scene by bringing these questions to the forefront.

That said, there are differences among the various theoretical perspectives that exist today. An appreciation of the differences, and where these differences lead, can be realized by addressing three questions: What is the relationship between the observer and the observed? Whose side are we on? Who cares about the research?

*What Is the Relationship Between the Observer and the Observed?*
Depending on their theoretical allegiances, qualitative researchers differ on the relationship between the observer (the subject or knower) and the observed (the object or what is known). At one extreme are those qualitative researchers who share with the positivists a belief that reality exists and can be more or less objectively known by an unbiased observer. In the exchange between Whyte and Denzin discussed previously, for example, Whyte held firm to the belief that social and physical facts can be objectively discovered and reported on by a conscientious researcher. At the other extreme are some postmodernists who believe that objective reality does not exist and that all knowledge is subjective and only subjective. Thus Denzin took the position that there is no difference between fact and fiction. From this perspective, ethnographic reporting has no greater claim to truth than any other version of reality. Ethnography becomes autobiography.

The views of most qualitative researchers fall somewhere between these two positions. Becker (1996) argued that qualitative researchers can honor, respect, and allow for the points of views of others even if they cannot claim to represent these with total accuracy:

> All social scientists, implicitly or explicitly, attribute a point of view and interpretations to the people whose actions we analyze (Blumer, 1969). That is, we always describe how they interpret the events they participate in, so the only question is not whether we should, but how accurately we do it. We can find out, not with perfect accuracy, but better than zero, what people think they are doing, what meanings they give to the objects and events and people in their lives and experiences. (p. 58)

Within phenomenological, symbolic interactionist, and ethnomethodological perspectives, it is taken for granted that reality is socially constructed. Take the example of food and its preparation. Food seems, at first glance, to

be a fairly objective thing. If you do not eat and meet certain of the body's nutritional requirements, you die, no matter what your definition of the situation. Yet food, food preparation, and mealtimes are social constructions and phenomena. Religious belief systems revolve around what food can be eaten and how it can be prepared. Cultural definitions of health and beauty influence what people eat and how they think about food. Social customs surround how food is eaten and the proper behavior at mealtimes. Gender relations structure roles and responsibilities for feeding others (DeVault, 1991).

Now, everything we just said about the social construction of food and mealtimes is itself a social construction. It is one version of food told from one point of view and reflecting one set of interests. What we term *social constructions* might alternatively be viewed as conforming to God's will, good manners and proper etiquette, or the natural order of relations between women and men. Our definition of the situation is one out of many, but this does not mean that we cannot somewhat faithfully record and report on the cultural beliefs and practices surrounding food.

This is the phenomenological puzzle: As qualitative researchers, we develop social constructions of social constructions (and sometimes others come along and deconstruct our social constructions). Ethnomethodologists referred to this as reflexivity; the process is captured by Mehan and Wood (1975), who reprint Escher's famous "Drawing Hands" (in which two hands are shown, each drawing the other) in their ethnomethodology text. Most qualitative researchers accept the idea of reflexivity and take it for granted that the researcher's background and biography cannot be separated from his or her findings and interpretations (Tracy, 2013).

Merging the postmodernists' skepticism of the authority of the researcher's version of reality with a progressive impulse, Richardson (1990a) provided a useful analysis of the nature of qualitative knowledge:

> Sociological discovery, generally, happens through finding out about people's lives from the people themselves—listening to how people experience their lives and frame their worlds, working inductively, rather than deductively. Qualitative researchers, generally, learn about other people through interaction in specified roles, such as participant observer/informant, interviewee/interviewer, and so on. As a result, their knowledge of people's lives is always historically and temporally grounded. Most ethnographers are keenly aware that knowledge of the world they enter is partial, situated, and subjective knowledge. (p. 28)

In contemporary qualitative research, reflexivity is seen as an important part of the research process; researchers often keep notes and memos that are meant to increase their awareness of how the research process has been shaped by their own identities, histories, roles, and expectations, as well as the social and political context for the research (Presser, 2005).

*Whose Side Are We On?*

Qualitative research methods are ideally suited to examining the world from different points of view. As we have noted, there is no inherent hierarchy of credibility in qualitative research. All perspectives are valuable in the sense that there is something to be learned from them. For this reason, qualitative research and ethnography have been accused of being apolitical and upholding the status quo (J. Thomas, 1992).

Theoretical perspectives such as critical ethnography and feminist research highlight the importance of analyzing and presenting reality from the vantage point of powerless people in society. Feminist research develops theory, or tells the research story, from the historically neglected perspective of women. Critical ethnography and certain versions of postmodernism do not merely present the points of view of powerless people—the marginalized or oppressed—but challenge traditional authority structures.

Research can never be values-free (Gouldner, 1970). Values determine what we study, how we understand our data, and how we present our findings. Although qualitative researchers must seek to understand all perspectives, they must eventually decide from whose vantage point to write their studies. To refuse to give greater weight to one vantage point over another is, in fact, to leave the prevailing point of view unchallenged. This is a values position and a political decision in itself.

Within the qualitative tradition, the idea that researchers should side with powerless members of society is not new. Becker's (1967) essay "Whose Side Are We On?" presented a compelling rationale for presenting the perspectives of certain groups of people. According to Becker, we must necessarily present reality from someone's point of view. Becker argued that since powerful people have many means at their disposal to present their versions of reality, we should side with society's underdogs, the powerless.

In a similar vein, C. Wright Mills (1959) admonished social scientists to accept their political responsibility to help people understand their "personal troubles," problems experienced as individual and idiosyncratic, as social issues confronting others as well. Mills (1959) wrote:

> Whether or not they are aware of them, men in mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to tum into social issues. They do not understand the interplay of these personal troubles of their milieu with problems of social structure . . . It is the political task of the social scientist . . . continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. (p. 187)

Today, many, if not most qualitative researchers share a commitment to social justice and attempt to design studies to contribute to greater social equality (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

*Who Cares About the Research?*

The final question, "Who cares?" relates to the purpose of research and theorizing. As sociologists, we are interested in understanding social life and culture. Yet much of our research has been conducted in the applied fields of education, human services, and disability studies and explored gender, race, and disability in society. How can our theories and research improve the human condition, if only on a small scale? The most elegant and liberating theory does not interest us if it can only be understood by a small group of like-speaking people and cannot be translated into terms meaningful to people confronting problems in their everyday lives. As Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 5) pointed out, qualitative researchers should answer the "So what?" question in their studies.

The divide between so-called basic and applied research is not insurmountable. Qualitative research sometimes finds its way to broader audiences. Richardson's (1985, 1990b) feminist research was published not only in sociological journals but also in a trade book written for a popular audience. Even theories developed for a sociological audience can have a profound influence in applied fields and practice. In the field of disability studies generally and intellectual disability specifically, for example, Becker's (1963) labeling theory of deviance and Goffman's (1961, 1963) analyses of total institutions and stigma not only have inspired research in these areas but have been extremely influential in the evolution of policy and practice. The trend of deinstitutionalization is due, in no small part, to an understanding of the social construction of disability, stereotyping and the stigma of the disability label, and the devastating effects on the self of confinement in total institutions (Taylor, 2009). Conversely, research conducted for applied or evaluation purposes can sometimes yield sociological insights and understandings (Bogdan & Taylor, 1990).

In this book we describe qualitative research methods from the vantage point of the tradition of this approach in sociology and related social science disciplines. We are also interested in how research and theories can be applied to issues and problems experienced by people outside of the social sciences.

In this chapter we have attempted to give a sense of some of the methodological and theoretical dimensions of qualitative research. The remainder of this book covers data collection, data analysis, and writing in qualitative research. Part One deals with how to conduct qualitative research. We discuss participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and a host of creative qualitative approaches. Our intent here is not to offer recipes for conducting qualitative research. Rather, our purpose is to present some conventions that qualitative researchers have developed and to discuss how some researchers have dealt with the issues and dilemmas that arise in qualitative research. In a sense, we present an ethnomethodology of qualitative research—a description of the methodology of some people who conduct qualitative

research—based on certain traditions as well as our own experience and that of the students and others with whom we have worked. In Part Two we consider the presentation of findings in qualitative research and offer a series of articles based on qualitative data. After a concluding note, we include samples of field notes and a template for developing an interview guide in the appendixes, as well as the references list for Chapters 1 through 7.

## NOTES

1.  Although the distinction between positivism and phenomenology reflects the theoretical traditions in the social sciences, some commentators distinguish between variations of these two approaches. For example, Guba and Lincoln (2004) identified four paradigms in qualitative research: positivism (reality exists and can be known by the observer); postpositivism (reality exists but can only be imperfectly apprehended); critical theory (reality is shaped by political, economic, ethnic, gender, and other factors); and constructivism (reality can be apprehended through mental constructions held by individuals and groups).

2.  Sic! Sic! Throughout this book, we quote authors who, writing in a different era, used masculine pronouns and male-dominated language. So as not to disrupt the flow of the quote, we have decided not to use *sic* each time male-dominated language is quoted. Further, we have resisted the temptation to change male-dominated language in quotations, since this language serves as a reminder of who was doing the writing and their assumptions about the world.

3.  Even a cursory review of the qualitative literature over the past several decades yields an incredible number of new theoretical frameworks: a sociology of the absurd, reflexive sociology, post-structuralism, post-foundationalism, dramaturgy, critical ethnography, queer theory, critical race theory, interpretative biography, critical theory, standpoint theory, deconstructionism, ethnic modeling, critical hermeneutics, existential sociology, and so on. A review of all of these perspectives is beyond our interests and the scope of this book. Here we review some major frameworks that have been influential in recent theorizing in qualitative research.

# Research Design and Pre-Fieldwork

In this chapter we discuss the pre-fieldwork stage of qualitative research, including designing a study, getting permission from subjects, obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, and writing proposals for qualitative studies.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In contrast to most methods in which researchers' hypotheses and procedures are determined a priori, the research design in qualitative research remains flexible both before and throughout the actual research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Although qualitative researchers have a methodology to follow and

perhaps some general research interests, the specifics of their approach evolve as they proceed.

Until we enter the field, we do not know what questions to ask or how to ask them. In other words, the preconceived image we have of the settings and people we intend to study may be naive, misleading, or downright false. Most qualitative researchers attempt to enter the field without specific hypotheses or preconceptions. As Melville Dalton (1964) wrote:

> (1) I never feel sure what is relevant for hypothesizing until I have some intimacy with the situation—I think of a hypothesis as a well-founded conjecture; (2) once uttered, a hypothesis becomes obligatory to a degree; (3) there is a danger that the hypothesis will be esteemed for itself and work as an abused symbol of science. (pp. 53–54)

Taylor was involved with a large-scale structured interviewing project that highlights the dangers of beginning a study with a rigid research design. This study's research design revolved around the distinction between one- and two-parent families, a common distinction in social science research. Both the sampling and analytical procedures were designed around this distinction. When field researchers entered families' homes, however, they found that the differentiation between one- and two-parent families is a gross oversimplification of the living situation of families today. For example, in "two-parent" families the researchers found couples where one spouse accepted no responsibility for the child and where one spouse, while trying to fulfill the parental role, spent weeks at a time away from home. In "one-parent" families, researchers came across couples living together where the nonparent accepted equal responsibility for the child; divorced couples who had reunited, sometimes permanently and sometimes for only a night; couples living together where the nonparent ignored the child; and a host of other relationships. Further, the field researchers learned that living together, for married and unmarried couples alike, can be a fluid situation; living circumstances change regularly. Complicating the study even more, some families, especially those receiving public assistance, tried to conceal their living situation from the researchers. Despite these findings, the study was locked into the commonsense distinction between one- and two-parent families and proceeded according to the assumption that this corresponded to the actual nature of family relationships.

Most researchers do, of course, have some general questions in mind when they enter the field. These typically fall into one of two broad categories—*substantive* and *formal theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The first category includes questions related to specific issues in a particular type of setting. For instance, one might be interested in studying a psychiatric center, school, bar, or juvenile gang. The second category is more closely tied to basic sociological issues such as socialization, stigmatization, and social control.

For example, Goffman's (1963) stated purpose in studying a mental hospital was to develop a sociological version of the self by analyzing situations in which the self is assaulted. These two categories are interrelated. A good qualitative study combines an in-depth understanding of the particular setting investigated with general theoretical insights that transcend that particular type of setting.

After entering the field, qualitative researchers often find that their areas of interest do not fit their settings. Their questions may not be relevant to the perspectives and behaviors of informants. In a study of institutional wards for the "severely and profoundly retarded," Taylor (1977, 1987a, 1987b) began with the intention of studying residents' perspectives on the institution, only to find that many residents were nonverbal and others were reluctant to speak openly. Taylor then shifted his attention to staff perspectives, a line of inquiry that proved to be fruitful. The same occurred in Bogdan's (1971) study of a "hard-core unemployed" job training program. The researchers hoped to study resocialization in the program, but soon learned that other factors were far more important to understanding the experiences of the people involved.

Once you begin your study, do not be surprised if things are not what you thought them to be (Geer, 1964). This is likely to be especially frustrating for researchers who enter their studies with well-formulated interests and ideas. For example, one of our students conducted a study of a teenager with learning disabilities. She was interested in how the teenager coped with and managed her learning disability. To the researcher's dismay, the teenager's learning disability played an insignificant role in her life. Disappointed, the researcher wanted to give up the study and find a person who matched her preconceptions. Yet, if one wishes to understand people with learning disabilities, then one has to be open to the range of ways people in this category experience and view their lives. The experience of the person who is unaffected by the learning disability is just as fruitful for theorizing as that of the person who is consumed by it. Our advice is to not hold too tightly to any specific interest, but to explore phenomena as they emerge during your study. All people and settings are intrinsically interesting and raise important issues for understanding and theorizing.

Just as qualitative researchers begin a study with general research questions and interests, they usually do not have a rigid plan regarding the nature and number of cases—settings or informants to be studied. In traditional quantitative studies, researchers select cases on the basis of statistical probability. Random sampling, stratified sampling, and other probability techniques are designed to ensure that cases studied are representative of a larger population in which the researcher is interested.

Although qualitative researchers typically start with a general idea of how many settings or people they intend to study, they define their samples on an ongoing basis as the studies progress. Glaser and Strauss (1967) used

the phrase *theoretical sampling* to refer to a procedure whereby researchers consciously select additional cases to be studied according to the potential for developing new insights or expanding and refining those already gained. Through this procedure, researchers examine whether and to what extent findings in one setting apply to others. According to Glaser and Strauss, the researcher should maximize variation in additional cases selected in order to broaden the applicability of theoretical insights.

In qualitative fieldwork, the best advice is to get your feet wet: enter the field, understand a single setting, and only then decide upon other settings to study. Any study suggests almost limitless additional lines of inquiry. Until you are actually engaged in the study, you do not know which of these lines will be most fruitful.

In the state institution study, Taylor spent the first year conducting participant observation on a single ward. By the end of that year, he had acquired an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and routines of the attendants on this ward. In the words of Glaser and Strauss (1967), he had reached the data saturation point. Additional observations did not yield additional insights. Once deciding to continue his study, Taylor was faced with selecting other settings to observe. He could pursue either substantive (e.g., attendants on other wards or other institutions; other staff at institutions) or theoretical (lower-level staff at other types of organizations) interests. Since he had developed a specific interest in this type of institution, he continued his study by observing in institutions that varied according to different characteristics (size, age, location).

## SELECTING SETTINGS

The ideal research setting is one in which the observer obtains easy access, establishes immediate rapport with informants, and gathers data directly related to the research interests. Such settings seldom exist. Getting into a setting is often hard work. It can require diligence and patience. The researcher must negotiate access, gradually win trust, and slowly collect data that only sometimes fit his or her interests. It is not uncommon for researchers to spin their wheels for weeks, even months, trying to break into a setting or to become accepted by others.

You cannot always determine beforehand whether you will be able to get into a setting and pursue your interests. If you encounter difficulties, keep trying. There are no guidelines for determining when you should give up on a setting. However, if you cannot give your best effort to obtain access to a setting, it is unlikely that you will be able to deal effectively with the problems that inevitably arise in the course of fieldwork.

In the past, we generally recommended that people who are new to qualitative methods stay away from settings in which they have a direct personal

or professional stake. There is a tendency for novice observers to want to study friends and familiar surroundings, places where they are accepted and feel at home. When one is directly involved in a setting, one is likely to see things from only one point of view. In everyday life, people take their ways of seeing things for granted. They equate their views with an objective reality. As a researcher, you must learn to see their version of reality as only one out of many possible ways of viewing the world. If you are an active participant in a setting, you also have a preexisting identity. People know you and see you in a certain way, and this may affect how they act and what they say around you.

Although we generally advise students and novices to steer clear of settings to which they are closely connected, this is a guideline and not a rule. There have been outstanding observational studies written by participants of the settings they observed (Riemer, 1977). Becker's (1963) study of jazz musicians and Roth's (1963) study of a TB hospital are good examples. In autoethnographies, researchers have drawn on their personal experiences as a resource for understanding the perspectives and experiences of others. For example, Karp's (1996) insightful study of the social meaning of depression used his long-term efforts to struggle with his own depression as a point of departure for his interviews with others. Similarly, Ouellet (1994) recorded data on his own work as a short-haul trucker, and used those experiences to guide and supplement his interviews with others in the industry.

Those who are steeped in professional disciplines in applied fields can face special problems when they conduct qualitative studies in their professional domains. It is difficult for people trained in an area of professional expertise to hold their own perspectives and feelings in abeyance. They will tend to share common sense assumptions with other professionals in a setting. For example, teachers, social workers, health care workers, and other professionals can have perspectives that prevent them from viewing the world qualitatively. As a result, they may impose preconceived frameworks on people's experiences, rather than examining how people construct their worlds. We know one observer of a behavior modification program who characterized clients' behavior as "appropriate" and "inappropriate" and was unable to understand how the clients viewed their situations. If one has already formulated all of the questions to ask in a setting, there are probably simpler and more efficient methods to use than participant observation and other forms of qualitative research. These cautions are especially important in research based on the institutional ethnography approach, because those studies aim to explore the very categories that professionals take up and use in the setting. Therefore, institutional ethnographers are careful to guard against taking those categories for granted, a problem they label "institutional capture" (DeVault & McCoy, 2012).

Conventional wisdom among qualitative researchers traditionally advised against studying areas and issues in which the researchers had a political or ideological interest. Douglas (1976) argued that researchers should stay away from areas in which they have deeply felt commitments. It is probably wise to stay away from issues in which one merely has an ax to grind and has already come to conclusions. However, research is never value free (Becker, 1967; Gouldner, 1970; Mills, 1959), and current thinking among qualitative researchers acknowledges that it is not only impossible but also sometimes undesirable to adopt a neutral stance in research (Richardson, 1990b). What is more important than neutrality is awareness of one's own perspective and honesty about where one stands when research findings are reported. One can approach a topic from a feminist, critical theory or disability studies perspective and contribute solid research. Feminist researchers have developed an extensive literature on research methods based on goals and commitments such as improving women's status or services for women or advancing the cause of gender justice. DeVault (1999) wrote about the usefulness of feminist methodological principles in various kinds of oppositional research aimed at social change. Native researchers have also written about indigenous methodologies that take account of the perspectives and community-based values of native peoples (L. T. Smith, 1999).

## OBTAINING INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Quite apart from the ethical issues raised by research, U.S. universities and organizations receiving public funds are required to maintain Institutional Review Boards for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBs) to review and approve biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects (Stanley, Sieber, & Melton, 1996). Federal requirements for procedures to protect human subjects grow out of public horror at the biomedical experiments conducted on inmates of Nazi concentration camps as well as exposés of ethically problematic research in the United States (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). For example, starting in the 1930s, the Tuskegee syphilis study followed the untreated course of this disease without informing poor, rural African American men that they were infected. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, award-winning medical research directed by Dr. Saul Krugman sought a vaccine for hepatitis at the infamous Willowbrook State School by infecting children with intellectual disabilities ("mental retardation" in the language of that era) there with a live virus (Rothman & Rothman, 2005).

Many commentators have expressed concerns over IRBs' and their counterparts' in other countries (for example, General Research Ethics Boards in

Canada) oversight over social science, and especially qualitative, research (Becker, 2004; Haggerty, 2004; Klockars, 1977; M. Lewis, 2008; Shea, 2000; M. Wax, 1983). For example, Haggerty (2004) warned against "ethics creep" in which regulatory requirements and compliance replace ethical decision making. Both innocuous qualitative research and intrusive biomedical and psychological experiments are subject to the same IRB regulations. Others warn of what they see as unwarranted limits on qualitative researchers (Katz, 2013). Some of the older studies described in this book never would have been approved by IRBs today or would have been conducted very differently.

In accord with federal regulations (45 C. F. R. 46), IRBs require researchers to conduct an assessment of risks and benefits of research and to ensure that subjects grant informed consent to participate in the research. Special protections must be employed for potentially vulnerable populations, including children, prisoners, and persons with cognitive impairments. As part of the IRB process, researchers must submit written protocols describing the purposes of the research; the methods to be used; procedures used to select subjects; assessments of risks and benefits; mechanisms to minimize risks; and procedures to obtain written or oral informed consent from either subjects or, in some cases, parents or guardians. The IRB regulations tend to be procedural in nature. Investigators must address certain issues in their written protocols (for example, an assessment of risks and benefits or informed consent) and IRBs must make a determination that they have met the requirements.

Although one might question whether IRBs should have authority over qualitative research, IRBs are a reality today for social science researchers. All researchers must comply with IRB regulations and decisions. Many qualitative researchers contribute to discussions and debates about how IRBs should treat qualitative studies, and they sometimes write about their negotiations with IRBs (see, for example, Halse & Honey, 2005), so that others can learn from their experiences.

So, how should a qualitative researcher approach IRBs? It helps to know the IRB regulations very well so that you can demonstrate that what you propose meets the regulatory requirements. IRBs have flexibility and discretion in interpreting and applying federal regulations. Human subjects research is defined by federal regulations as "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" that involves data about a living individual obtained through intervention or interaction or based on identifiable private information. Although some qualitative researchers might claim that the findings of their studies are unlikely to be generalizable, qualitative studies are almost universally, if not always, viewed as subject to IRB review and approval. Program evaluations conducted exclusively for quality assurance,

improvement, or accountability are generally not considered to meet the definition of research since evaluators do not intend to contribute to knowledge or share information publicly.

The definition of what research requires IRB review and approval can vary from institution to institution. It is generally agreed that journalism, which can involve the same interviewing techniques as social science, does not fit the definition of research, but journalists who use survey and other methods to reach conclusions about the practice of journalism would require approval by many IRBs.

Many historians, and specifically the American Historical Association and the Oral History Association, have claimed that oral histories should not be subject to the IRB process. Responding to a memorandum submitted by representatives of historical associations in 2003, the federal Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), which is responsible for ensuring compliance with IRB requirements, agreed that oral histories can be excluded from IRB oversight. A 2004 statement of the historical associations affirmed that:

> While historians reach for meaning that goes beyond the specific subject of their inquiry, unlike researchers in the biomedical and behavioral sciences they do not reach for generalizable principles of historical or social development; nor do they seek underlying principles or laws of nature that have predictive value and can be applied to other circumstances for the purpose of controlling outcomes. Historians explain a particular past; they do not create explanations about all that has happened in the past, nor do they predict the future.
>
> Moreover, oral history narrators are not anonymous individuals.... Those interviewed are specific individuals selected because of their often unique relationship to the topic at hand. (American Historical Association, 2004)

Based on this letter, oral histories, which are based on similar methods as qualitative interviewing, are not subject to IRB oversight because they focus on a particular past and do not involve anonymous interviews. This interpretation would seem to apply to any research conducted by historians or social scientists that meets these criteria (focus on a particular past and nonanonymous interviews). Taylor did not obtain IRB approval for his study *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors* (2009), although he informed the IRB about this study and confirmed that the IRB would interpret it as an oral history that met these criteria.

Despite this 2003 letter, OHRP has never issued a regulation, policy, or guidance clarifying that oral histories can be excluded from IRB oversight. Thus, individual IRBs make the decision whether to subject oral histories to IRB approval. Historical societies have expressed dismay that OHRP has not provided clarification of its policy and have urged individual IRBs to exclude oral histories from the IRB process (American Historical Association, 2004; Oral History Association, 2014).

Because IRBs have discretion in making certain determinations, qualitative researchers need to educate themselves about federal regulations and policies and, in turn, educate IRBs about qualitative research (Bosk, 2004). It is also important that IRBs at universities and institutions that have social scientists have representatives with knowledge and expertise in qualitative research. We have been successful in advocating for our own university to include qualitative researchers on its IRB. Both DeVault and Taylor have served on Syracuse University's IRB, and Taylor chaired the IRB for 6 years. We have argued against the application of inappropriate requirements for qualitative studies as long as they meet the basic federal regulatory requirements.

Not all research subject to IRB oversight must meet the same requirements, and there are different levels of review for different kinds of studies. Individual researchers must be prepared to argue why their studies qualify for the appropriate level of oversight and procedural review.

Under the federal regulations (45 C.F.R. 46), six categories of human subjects research are exempt for normal IRB review. These categories receive less rigorous review and do not need to demonstrate compliance with all federal requirements. At least three categories are potentially relevant to qualitative research. Category 2 applies to research (educational tests, surveys, interviews, observations of public behavior) that is conducted anonymously (names and identifying information are not recorded) and that involves the collection of benign information that could not be damaging to an individual. *Public behavior* is generally understood to mean behavior in places that anyone can visit without special permission (for example, street corners, parks) or Internet communications in public forums. Observations of the public behavior of children do not qualify for exemption if the investigator interacts with them. Category 3 involves research (tests, surveys, interviews, observations of public behavior) that is conducted among elected or appointed public officials or candidates for office. This category only applies to higher level officials. Category 4 relates to research that involves the study of data, in existence prior to the research, that are publicly available or that are recorded in a manner in which they cannot be linked with individuals. This category would apply to archival research or studies involving public records. IRB oversight is only required for living human beings. So, archival and related research involving deceased persons would not need to be publicly available or impossible to be linked with human beings. The most important thing to understand about exempt human subjects research is that only IRBs, and not investigators, can make a determination that research qualifies for exemption. Most IRBs have simplified forms to make this determination.

Human subjects research that does not qualify as exempt is subject to one of two levels of IRB review. One is expedited IRB review in which the IRB chair or a designee can approve the research. Research eligible for expedited review involves no more than minimal risk and falls into one of nine

categories. Category 7 (45 C.F.R. 46) is most relevant to qualitative research: "Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies." The reference to oral histories in this category was not changed after OHRP's letter to historical societies. This has helped to add to the confusion over whether oral histories require IRB approval.

Minimal risk is generally understood as the risk associated with everyday life. Expedited review may not be used for research where identification of people or what they say would place them at a reasonable risk of criminal or civil liability, would have an impact on employability or reputation, or could be stigmatizing, unless there are protections for their privacy and confidentiality. Research that is not eligible for expedited review requires full IRB review by the entire committee. Federal regulations require that IRBs have at least five members, but university IRBs tend to have many more members.

It is almost always in a researcher's interests to obtain expedited review of IRB protocols. The more people who review an IRB protocol, the more likely someone will find something that the researcher needs to check. Our experience at IRB meetings is that some members will insist upon receiving additional information or on minor changes to consent forms and other documents. Whenever possible, investigators submitting IRB protocols should write their protocols in a way that qualifies them for expedited review. This might involve removing questions or lines of inquiry that could yield information damaging to a person's reputation or taking steps to protect people's privacy and confidentiality (for example, when recording field notes or other data, using pseudonyms and avoiding details that could reveal their identities). On the other hand, we encourage researchers not to limit the scope or methods of their research solely because of worries about IRB approval. Although gaining approval for some studies may become a time-consuming process, it is important that researchers engage the process so that fruitful lines of research can continue, with appropriate ethical safeguards.

Whether submitting an application for expedited or full IRB review, there are things you can do to maximize the possibility of obtaining approval. First of all, explain your methodology clearly and in detail. In describing your methods, emphasize that qualitative methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing have long histories in the social sciences and cite references to support this position. Refer to the qualitative tradition in your description of your research methods, sample selection, and other matters.

Second, you should expect to be required to obtain informed consent from participants. Under most circumstances, IRBs will require investigators to obtain written informed consent on university or institutional letterhead.

IRBs might waive the requirement of written consent and approve oral consent if the consent form would be the only record linking participants and the research and the major risk of the research would be harm from a breach of confidentiality, or in other limited circumstances. In either case, IRBs will expect to be provided with the consent form or oral consent script. For children, IRBs will require formal written consent from parents or guardians, in addition to oral assent from the children in most instances.

IRB informed consent requirements can wreak havoc on participant observers, in particular. Although most IRBs will not require informed consent for observations in public settings, including public Internet forums, they might expect informed consent to be obtained in quasi-public settings (i.e., settings in which people need permission to be present). For example, an IRB might expect investigators to obtain informed consent in schools and similar settings. Yet, it might be difficult to obtain informed consent from all parents of children in a school classroom and virtually impossible in a school playground or cafeteria. You should be prepared to persuade an IRB why obtaining informed consent might not be feasible in certain settings and why this will not place people at any risk. It is reasonable to expect researchers to obtain consent from anyone who is a focal point of observations in a quasi-public setting (for example, a teacher in a study of teaching approaches or a student with disabilities in a study of integrated or inclusive classrooms). We do not think that it is ethically required or consistent with the spirit of informed consent to obtain permission from the parents of each and every student who might appear in field notes or with whom you might have fleeting interactions (for example, saying "Good morning"). Assure the IRB that you will not record the names or other identifying information from any person from whom you have not obtained consent (or parent or guardian in the case of children) and that you will not conceal your identity as an observer in the setting. In some settings, it may be important to provide a general notification about the research, so that people in the setting know of the researcher's intentions. For example, one could send an email describing the study to all employees in a small firm, or make a brief announcement about the research at the beginning of a workshop or group meeting. It is important that participants not discover information about the research and then feel that the researcher has been secretive or deceptive. However, you should also look for ways to handle these issues as naturally as possible. There is always a balance to be struck between providing too little and too much information.

Third, as part of the IRB review process, you will be expected to describe the risks to subjects and the steps to be taken to minimize or eliminate these risks. Never claim that there are no risks to subjects; IRBs will not accept this and could interpret it as an indication that you are insensitive to the protection of human subjects. Be explicit about the potential risks and how you

will minimize them. Participant observation can interfere with people's usual activities and routines; so you will conduct yourself in an unobtrusive manner and not interfere with people's everyday activities. Qualitative research might threaten people's privacy and confidentiality; so you will take all steps necessary to eliminate this risk by using pseudonyms and omitting identifying information in your data and written products, maintaining all data in a secure location, and destroying video or audio recordings after they are transcribed and analyzed.

Finally, most IRBs will want to know exactly what questions you will ask or what you will look for during your observations. You can prepare an interview or observation guide that will be used in your research. You will need to explain, however, that in qualitative research the researcher him- or herself is the research instrument, and that an interview or observation guide should be regarded as flexible and open to change as the research proceeds.

It is easy to be cynical about IRBs. Procedures for the protection of human subjects are required by the federal government in the United States and have the potential to be a bureaucratic impediment to free inquiry. However, the IRB has become a fact of life confronting researchers today. Our approach is to try to relate to these boards openly and honestly and, if necessary, to meet with them personally to explain the nature and purposes of our research. The majority of the members of these boards are themselves academics and researchers, and, although they may not understand qualitative research, they are generally sympathetic with the goals of research. If you treat IRB members as though they are the enemy, they just might act that way.

Some qualitative researchers believe that their studies should not be subject to IRB approval, but if you ignore the IRB process, you can place yourself at considerable risk. No one wants to be accused of unethical conduct or violating clearly established procedures for protecting the subjects of research. Further, many universities expect students to submit evidence of IRB approval in completing dissertations and program requirements, and some professional journals require all published articles to have formal IRB approval. Most important, IRBs have the authority to sanction researchers or to suspend their ability to conduct research, and this cannot be appealed to university or institutional officials.

## WRITING PROPOSALS

Students working on theses or dissertations or researchers seeking external funding usually have to prepare formal written proposals reviewing relevant literature, specifying research questions, and describing the research design in detail. This seems foreign to what we have said about the nature of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers often do not know exactly

what questions to ask or how to ask them until they actually begin their research; the literature that will be relevant to any particular study will not be clear until at least some research has been conducted. Yet no one ever had a dissertation proposal approved or a research project funded by simply asserting "I'm a qualitative researcher and will follow a flexible research design; trust me."

Our best advice for people working on theses or dissertations or seeking grants is to conduct some initial research prior to submitting formal proposals. Once you have collected and analyzed some data, you will be in a much better position to specify research questions, identify relevant literature, and present an initial research design. When you prepare your proposal, you can state that you have based your proposal on a pilot study; this might even enhance the credibility of your proposed research. Keep in mind that pilot studies are not exempted from IRB approval, although some university IRBs do not require IRB review of student projects designed to learn research methods.

What exactly you put in a proposal will depend on the standards and conventions associated with your academic program, if you are a student, or your funder, if you are a researcher seeking funds. If you are writing a thesis or dissertation proposal, you should be able to find examples of accepted proposals written by other students in your program. You also can consult books on proposal writing or the qualitative dissertation process (S. K. Biklen & Casella, 2007; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Funders usually specify review criteria for grant proposals and assign points for different criteria (for example, the importance of the research question, the quality of research design, the qualifications of the researcher, and the adequacy of resources); be sure you address each of these and organize your proposal according to the review criteria. Grant proposal reviewers generally are provided with a rating sheet in which they assign points for each criterion. If you do not address an issue under the criterion, you may not receive points for it. Many, if not most, funders have page limitations for grant proposals. As a general rule, the number of pages devoted to criteria in a proposal should be based on the number of points assigned for each (for example, if 20 points out of 100 are assigned to the importance of the research question and the page limitation for the entire proposal is 50 pages, then 10 pages should be devoted to this criterion).

In 2003, the National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsored the "Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research," and a report based on this workshop was published in 2004 (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004). The report summarizes discussions at the workshop and includes papers presented by qualitative researchers there. One section of the report provides recommendations for designing and evaluating qualitative proposals (Ragin et al., 2004, pp. 17–18). Since the NSF is widely respected for funding rigorous research,

it can be helpful to cite the report's recommendations and papers in preparing proposals to both NSF and other funders.

Whether written to satisfy academic requirements or to obtain funding, proposals usually need to address the following issues (also see Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Tracy, 2013).

## Review of Literature

In a qualitative study, you cannot be sure what literature might be relevant to your study until you have completed your research. In Taylor's and Bogdan's research at institutions for people labeled mentally retarded or intellectually disabled, for example, the most useful literature came from research on other types of organizations, including prisons and factories. If you have already conducted some preliminary research, you should be in a better position to identify potentially useful sources of literature.

Students pursuing degrees in professional fields (education, social work, and so on) or researchers applying for funding from specific federal agencies (e.g., the U.S. Department of Education) should be prepared to review literature relevant to these fields or agencies. You should review the conclusions obtained in previous studies, but show the gaps that exist in current knowledge in the field. For instance, in some of Taylor's and Bogdan's funded research, we examined the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities living in the community. In reviewing the literature for grant proposals, we showed how prior research had documented the exclusion and rejection of people with disabilities in society but had not devoted sufficient attention to processes that might lead to accommodations and acceptance. Thus we used the literature review to demonstrate the need for qualitative studies of examples of community acceptance. Similarly, when DeVault began to write about parenting activities in community zoos, she reviewed earlier studies of family time and the work of parenting, but she emphasized that most family researchers have focused their attention on life at home, rather than considering the experiences of families in public places.

The NSF workshop offered this recommendation to researchers developing grant proposals for qualitative studies: "Locate the research in the literature citing existing studies of related phenomena, specifying comparable cases, building on the findings of other researchers, and bringing this research into dialogue with the work of others" (Ragin et al., 2004, p. 17).

## Statement of Research Questions

As suggested previously, your research questions should flow from your literature review, and, specifically, from questions that have not been

satisfactorily answered in previous studies. Be sure to frame your research questions in ways that can be answered through qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are poorly suited for answering questions about the causes of social behavior. Frame your research questions in terms of social processes (how it happens) and understanding the meanings underlying what people say and do.

## Theory and Methodology

Depending on who will review and approve your proposal you will need to say more or less about your theoretical perspective and qualitative methodology in general. If, for example, you are preparing a proposal for a dissertation committee composed of faculty knowledgeable about the qualitative tradition, you will not have to explain the assumptions underlying qualitative research. For readers relatively unsophisticated about qualitative research, you should provide a definition of qualitative methods and their characteristics and explain the theoretical perspective (for example, symbolic interactionism) that will underlie your research.

## Research Design

The first thing you need to explain is that qualitative researchers follow a flexible research design; the design of the research is based on the ongoing data collection and analysis. However, it is useful to provide a general road map of how you will conduct your study. Here are some specifics to address.

1. The procedures you will use: for example, participant observation or open-ended interviewing. Explain what you mean by these methods.
2. Strategies for identifying and obtaining access to settings or informants.
3. The approximate number of settings or people you plan on studying, indicating that this may change once you get into your research. Although this is difficult to specify in advance of a study, reviewers generally want to know the nature and size of your sample. As a general rule, the fewer the number of interviews or observations you plan to conduct with each person or in each setting, the larger your sample needs to be.
4. Data collection and recording procedures. Describe the nature of the data you will collect and your recording methods. Participant observers generally record their data as field notes; interviewers prepare transcripts based on either tape recordings or notes taken during the interviews.

5. Data analysis procedures. Specify your analytical procedures. You may not know in advance exactly how you will analyze the data, but you might indicate your intention to identify and compare themes (following a grounded theory approach); to examine the structures of participants' interview narratives; or to map the activities of those working in a particular setting (as institutional ethnographers often do). You should provide a tentative plan for coding and organizing your data, including the use of any computer software programs.

6. Significance of the research. Be sure to indicate what you hope to accomplish and what you think the study might contribute to the field.

7. Timelines for the completion of the research, including identification of settings or interviewees, data collection, data analysis, and the final writing of the study.

8. It also might be appropriate to include a tentative outline of the completed study. Of course, you don't know in advance what you will find, but it is often useful to indicate how you think you might organize the data you collect. You can also add interest to your proposal by giving it a concisely worded title that conveys what you hope to learn through your study.

## ACCESS TO ORGANIZATIONS

Participant observers usually gain access to organizations by requesting permission from those in charge. These persons are usually referred to as *gatekeepers* (Becker, 1970; Burgess, 1991; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Getting into a setting involves a process of managing your identity and projecting an image of yourself that will maximize your chances of gaining access (Kotarba, 1980). You want to convince gatekeepers that you are a nonthreatening person who will not harm their organization in any way. IRBs may require a letter of support and cooperation from organizations that researchers want to study and might want to know what researchers will say to them to obtain access.

Students are likely to put gatekeepers at ease. Most people expect students to have class assignments or program requirements. The eager student can often attract sympathy and help. Gatekeepers will probably assume that students want to learn concrete facts and tasks from experts.

In many organizations a straightforward approach will work. People are usually surprised at how accessible many organizations are. Bogdan (1972) conducted a study of door-to-door salespersons in two companies. Although these companies trained prospective salespersons in the techniques of calculated misrepresentation, the heads of the branch offices opened their doors to the researcher within minutes of his request to observe. In fact, one of the

branch heads gave permission over the phone after the researcher responded to a come-on in the newspaper to lure trainees into the program.

Not all organizations are studied so easily. The upper echelons of corporations (Dalton, 1964), hospitals (Haas & Shaffir, 1980), and large government agencies are notoriously difficult to infiltrate. Officials at organizations that have been subjected to public criticism or scrutiny, such as psychiatric hospitals and other total institutions, have become increasingly adept at imposing obstacles to being studied. The researcher can expect to get the runaround or to be turned down outright. Prior to his study of door-to-door salespersons, Bogdan tried first to observe a U.S. Air Force firefighter training program. Officials at each of a number of levels wanted to interview him personally. After each interview, they told him that they would have to get written permission from someone else before granting him access. By the time he finally received tentative permission to conduct the study, Bogdan had given up hope and turned to the study of salespersons.

When a straightforward approach does not work, you can use other tactics to gain access to a setting. Many researchers have gotten into organizations by having someone else vouch for them. As Hoffmann (1980) noted, most researchers have friends, relatives, and acquaintances who have contacts within organizations. These people can be enlisted to help win over reluctant gatekeepers. Similarly, a mentor or colleague can write a supportive letter on official letterhead to prospective gatekeepers (Gurney, 1991; J. M. Johnson, 1975).

One of the ironies of observing organizations is that once access has been obtained from gatekeepers, researchers often must disassociate from them (Van Maanen, 1982). Many organizations are characterized by tension, if not conflict, between the upper and lower levels of the hierarchy. If researchers are interested in studying people at the lower levels, they must go out of their way to avoid the appearance of collaborating or siding with gatekeepers or officials. They must also be alert to the possibility that gatekeepers may request reports on what the researchers observe. When negotiating access, most observers are only prepared to provide gatekeepers with a very general report, a report so general that no one can be identified. Some IRBs also will require that investigators describe the steps that they will take to protect the confidentiality of people within an organization.

As should be apparent, there can be a significant lapse of time between the initial attempt to gain access and the beginning of observations. In some cases you will be unable to obtain access to an organization and will have to start all over again somewhere else. Keep this in mind when you design your study. It is not unusual for inexperienced researchers, especially students working on theses and dissertations, to leave insufficient time to gain an entree and complete a study.

## ACCESS TO PUBLIC AND
## QUASI-PUBLIC SETTINGS

Many studies are conducted in public (parks, government buildings, airports, train and bus stations, beaches, street corners, public restrooms, etc.) and semipublic (bars, restaurants, pool halls, theaters, stores, etc.) settings. In these settings, researchers do not ordinarily have to negotiate access with gatekeepers. Anyone can go to these places. Of course, in quasi-public settings—private establishments—the researcher might have to obtain permission from the owner or manager to continue observations.

Although obtaining access to these settings does not present a problem, the participant observer, as a participant versus a passive observer, does have to develop strategies to learn about the setting and to interact with informants. One of the first orders of business is to figure out where to spend time in the setting. If you hang out long enough in the right position, sooner or later something will happen. Prus (1980) recommended that observers situate themselves in high-action spots in public places. In other words, go to where the people are and try to engage someone in casual conversation.

Liebow (1967) described how he met Tally, the key informant in his study of Black street-corner men, while discussing a puppy in the street in front of a carry-out restaurant. Liebow spent 4 hours with Tally that day, drinking coffee and lounging around in the carry-out. After Liebow met Tally, his study blossomed. Before long, Tally was introducing him to others and vouching for him as a friend.

However, if you are going to stay in a single location for a long time, you had better find an acceptable role to play. Although it is acceptable for strangers to engage each other in casual conversation, people suspect the motivations of someone who acts too interested in others or asks too many questions. The participant observer is easily confused with the mugger, voyeur, flirt, or, in certain circles, undercover agent (Karp, 1980). W. F. Whyte (1943, 1955, 1981, 1993) recounted his first efforts at locating an informant in his study of Cornerville. Acting on the advice of a colleague who suggested that he go to a bar, buy a woman a drink, and encourage her to tell him her life history, Whyte found himself in an awkward situation. Whyte (1955) wrote:

> I looked around me again and now noticed a threesome: one man and two women. It occurred to me that here was a maldistribution of females which I might be able to rectify. I approached the group and opened with something like this: "Pardon me. Would you mind if I joined you?" There was a moment of silence while the man stared at me. He then offered to throw me down the stairs. I assured him that this would not be necessary and demonstrated as much by walking right out of there without any assistance. (p. 289)

Some researchers who have conducted successful studies of public and quasi-public settings have adopted an acceptable participant role. In a study of hustlers and criminals, Polsky (1969) spent hours playing pool. According to Polsky, if you want to study criminals, go to where they spend their leisure time and win the trust of a few of them. Laud Humphreys (1975), whose study generated criticism on ethical grounds and would be unlikely to receive IRB approval today, but who has demonstrated enormous sensitivity to the people he studied, played the role of "voyeur-lookout" and "waiter" in a study of impersonal sex in public restrooms.

Although it is not necessary for observers in these settings to introduce themselves as researchers and explain their purposes to people with whom they will have only fleeting contact, they should explain themselves to people with whom they will have a sustained relationship. Identify yourself before people begin to doubt your intentions, especially if they are involved in marginal activities. Thus Liebow explained his intentions to informants after his first or second contact with them, whereas Polsky advised researchers to identify themselves to criminals shortly after meeting them.

## ACCESS TO PRIVATE SETTINGS

The task of the participant observer in gaining access to private settings (homes) and situations (some activities take place in a range of settings) is similar to the interviewer's in locating informants. Settings and individuals must be tracked down; consent for the study must be negotiated with each individual.

In order to protect the privacy of individuals, many IRBs will not approve studies in which researchers ask organizations and others to provide a list of their members or clients or to introduce them to people directly. Rather, they will require that researchers develop a flyer or email describing their studies and provide this to organizations to distribute to their members or clients, giving them ways to contact the researchers if they are interested in participating. IRBs are especially likely to require privacy safeguards when the research focuses on characteristics of people that could be stigmatizing or damaging to their reputations (for example, psychiatric patients or their family members).

One approach in obtaining access to individuals and private settings is the snowball technique: start with one person or a small number of people, win their trust, and ask them to introduce you to others. Polsky (1969) wrote:

> In my experience the most feasible technique for building one's sample is "snowballing"; get an introduction to one criminal who will vouch for you with others, who in turn will vouch for you with still others. (It is of course best to start at the top if possible, that is, with an introduction to the most prestigious person in the group you want to study.) (p. 124)

Researchers planning to use the snowball technique should be prepared to explain this to IRBs and make the case that this is a common recruitment technique in qualitative studies. They also need to demonstrate why this technique will not threaten people's privacy or confidentiality in their particular studies.

There are several places to start. First of all, check with friends, relatives, and personal contacts. People are usually surprised at the number of different persons their personal contacts know. In an experiment conducted with a class of students, Polsky reported that a third of the students found that friends and relatives could arrange a personal introduction to a career criminal.

Second, involve yourself with the community of people you wish to study. For his study of an inner-city ethnic neighborhood in Boston, Gans (1962) moved into the neighborhood and became a member of the community. He made friends with neighbors, used local stores and facilities, and attended public meetings. Through these activities, he eventually received invitations to homes, parties, and informal gatherings in the neighborhood.

Lareau (2001, 2011) and her team of research assistants gained remarkable access to family homes for her study of parenting practices in different social class groups. They spent many hours hanging out with the families who agreed to participate. Lareau and her assistants located families through schools where she was conducting preliminary research. She had sufficient funding to offer a substantial stipend to each family and also brought food to her meetings with the families. She tried to explain her intentions clearly, but even so, when she followed up with the families after the publication of the research, some of them felt betrayed and misrepresented. Lareau's account of her follow-up visits (included in the second edition of her influential book) provides an extraordinarily candid and sobering exploration of the challenges inherent in such close and intimate observation.

A final tactic researchers have used to locate private settings and informants is advertising (Karp, 1996; Kotarba, 1980). Researchers have placed ads in local papers, made appearances on local talk shows, and prepared handouts describing their studies for distribution among local groups. Websites and listservs are another possible source of possible informants; these have become increasingly important for recruitment of research participants as social media and email become more popular means of communication. Email invitations to participate in research are very convenient, but it is easy for potential subjects to ignore or forget about email requests. You may need to follow up by phone or even in person with some groups.

## W H A T   D O   Y O U   T E L L   G A T E K E E P E R S
## A N D   I N F O R M A N T S ?

Explaining your research procedures and interests to gatekeepers and infor-
mants can be a difficult and sensitive task. You need to be truthful about your
general purposes, what participation in a study will entail, and possible risks
and benefits to participants, but you do not need to go into precise details
about your research interests. Of course, you want to avoid misleading par-
ticipants about any aspect of your research. We take this position on both
ethical and pragmatic grounds. If you deliberately misrepresent your inten-
tions, you have to live with the fear and anxiety of getting caught. There is
also the real possibility of having your cover blown and either being booted
out of the setting or shattering your relationship with informants. Apart from
ethical considerations, you do not want hide your identity as a researcher
because of the limitations it can place on you. The overt researcher can tran-
scend the narrow roles people in a setting play and engage in actual research
activities. Further, many people will be more open and willing to share their
perspectives with a researcher than with a coworker or fellow participant.

It is unnecessary to volunteer details concerning your research and the
precision with which notes will be taken. If they knew how closely they were
going to be watched, most people would feel self-conscious in your presence.
In the unlikely case that you are asked about this matter, you can honestly tell
people that you jot down notes afterward or keep a diary.

What exactly you say to people about your research interests should
reflect your research design and purposes. One way we have explained
our research interests is to let people know that we are not necessarily
interested in that particular organization or the specific people there. In all
studies, with the exception of evaluations of organizations, the researcher's
interests are broader than a particular setting and concern the general type of
organization. If you are seeking access to a school, for example, you should
suggest that you are interested in understanding what a school is like, rather
than in the nature of that specific school.

In some studies, however, it is useful to explain to people that you
are interested in them because of their unique or special characteristics.
Researchers in applied fields such as education, social work, and human
services sometimes select settings for study because of their reputations. For
example, many of our students in special education have been interested
in understanding the process of integration or inclusion of students with
disabilities and have sought out schools and teachers with reputations for
successful efforts. Some of our own research (Taylor, Bogdan, & Lutfiyya,
1995) has focused on community agencies that have developed creative

ways of supporting people with disabilities in the community. If people take pride in their efforts or view themselves as unique or innovative, then it makes sense to tell them that you want to study them because they stand out from others. We have always been greeted with open arms by administrators and others in such situations (Bogdan & Taylor, 1994); some agencies have actually lobbied to have us study them.

It is a common experience among field researchers in large organizations for informants to assume that they are there to learn about people at another level. In Taylor's institutional study, attendants naturally assumed that the observer was there to observe the behavior patterns of the "severely and profoundly retarded" and to learn about the intellectually disabled people from attendants. Researchers should not cultivate false impressions, but it is not necessary to repeatedly remind people of their research goals or focus. Douglas (1976) maintained there is no need to correct misunderstandings if they do not place people at any risk, although this might run afoul of IRB requirements.

Some gatekeepers will demand an elaborate explanation and defense of the research. Participant observers can get bogged down in such extended discussions. The standard objections to participant observation include "We have to protect the privacy and confidentiality of our clients"; "We're too busy to answer a bunch of questions"; "You'll interfere with what we're trying to do"; "You won't find much interesting here anyway"; and "Your study doesn't sound scientific."

Anticipate the objections and have your responses ready. We are usually prepared to make certain guarantees to gatekeepers. This is sometimes called the *bargain*. Observers should emphasize the fact that their research will not disrupt the setting. Gatekeepers often assume that research involves questionnaires, structured interviews, clipboards, and other obtrusive methods. In contrast to these approaches, participant observation involves nondisruptive and unobtrusive activities. In fact, it is as important to most researchers to minimize disruption as it is to gatekeepers.

How you respond to questions about your research design should be based on how you size up the people in the organization or setting. Critical questions about the research design usually reflect concerns about the potential findings and how they will be used (Haas & Shaffir, 1980). For instance, gatekeepers at institutions sometimes use client confidentiality and privacy to hide substandard conditions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1980).

In the institutional study, Taylor spent hours defending the integrity of his research to officials at one institution who happened to be trained in psychology and wanted to know about the reliability of his research instruments. It was not until he stumbled upon the phrase *unobtrusive measures* (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966) that the officials finally granted him permission to observe. J. M. Johnson (1975) reported that his fumbling performance explaining his research to a group of social

workers was a key factor in gaining access to a social service agency. The social workers concluded that they had nothing to fear from someone who had such difficulty explaining his aims.

Douglas (1976) advocated "playing the boob" or the "hare-brained academic ploy" when people seem afraid of the research. That is, the researcher tries to convince gatekeepers that the study is so academic and abstract that it could not possibly threaten anyone. Douglas (1976, p. 170) gave an example: "It is especially effective to tell them in some detail how, 'We're doing a phenomenological-ethnomethodological reduction of your natural attitude in order to display and document the invariant interpretative procedures which are constitutive of the transcendental-ego and hence of intersubjective cognition.'"

Douglas provided this advice in a different era, and it is unlikely that such an approach would pass IRB muster today. Even if this approach met IRB requirements, you would have to live for a while with the identity it created. We know one observer who identified himself to informants as an ethnographer. He later heard one person whisper to another, "Don't make any racial jokes in front of that guy. He's an ethnographer."

## COLLECTING DATA ABOUT OBTAINING ACCESS

Detailed field notes should be kept during the process of identifying potential settings and gaining entry. As in later research, notes should be recorded after both face-to-face encounters and telephone conversations. The data collected during this time may prove extremely valuable at a later date. During the getting-in stage of the institutional study, Taylor spent time with the director of the facility. In addition to setting the ground rules, the director offered her perspective on the institution: "Nobody's perfect"; "We are overcrowded"; "We could use more money from the state." After concluding his study of attendants, Taylor analyzed the perspectives of officials. The statements by the director helped him understand how institutional officials try to project a favorable image of them to the outside world.

The process of gaining access to a setting also lends insight into how people relate to one another and how they process others. One good way to learn about the structure and hierarchy of an organization is to be handed around through it. Finally, the notes collected at this time will help the observer later understand how he or she is viewed by people in the organization.

## COVERT RESEARCH

Throughout this chapter we have emphasized overt research, that is, studies in which researchers communicate their research interests to prospective gatekeepers and informants. Yet many successful and important participant

observation studies have been conducted using a covert approach (Festinger, Riecken, & Schacter, 1956; Humphreys, 1975; Rollins, 1985; Rosenhan, 1973; Roy, 1952). Quite apart from pragmatic considerations, there are serious ethical issues raised by covert research, and one cannot assume that this kind of research would be approved by an IRB. At the same time, deception of subjects is often approved by IRBs in psychological experiments, and covert observation research shares characteristics with this form of research. Typically, for deception to be approved by an IRB, investigators must demonstrate that the research could not be conducted in any other way and provide for a debriefing of subjects after the research is conducted.

Quite apart from IRB requirements, ethical decisions necessarily involve one's personal sense of what is right. One must choose among a number of moral alternatives and responsibilities. Rollins (1985) worked as a maid without revealing to employers that she was conducting research on the relations between Black domestics and White employers. She collected quite fascinating data in that way, but she also provided a thoughtful reflection on her struggles to align those deceptions with her own personal sense of moral behavior and of the humanity of all persons, including those she deceived.

Social scientists such as Kai Erikson (1967, p. 368–369; 1995) have taken the position that undercover research and deception jeopardize the goodwill of potential research subjects and the general public on whom researchers depend: "It probably goes without saying that research of this sort is liable to damage the reputation of sociology in the larger society and close off promising areas of research for future investigators." In a similar vein, Warwick (1975) warned that a "public-be-damned" attitude among fieldworkers had already created a societal backlash against social research.

Some researchers have argued that the scientific knowledge gained through research justifies otherwise distasteful practices. Glazer (1972, p. 133) reported that Arthur Vidich justified deceptive assurances about the protection of identities as the price inherent in contributing to knowledge. Denzin (1978) took the position that each researcher should decide on what is ethical behavior. Denzin (1978, p. 331) argued for "the absolute freedom to pursue one's activities as one sees fit." Douglas (1976) characterized society as a dog-eat-dog world. Since lies, evasions, and deceptions are part of everyday social life, according to Douglas, researchers must lie to, evade, and deceive their informants if they are to get the truth.

Still other social scientists subscribe to situation ethics (Humphreys 1975). In other words, the practical social benefits of research may justify deceptive practices. For Rainwater and Pittman (1967), social science research enhances the accountability of public officials. Diamond (1992) posed as a nursing aide in his study of nursing home life. He chose to hide his researcher identity from employers, but he often informed coworkers that he was writing a book. Those decisions reflected his stance in the research; he chose to side with

the low-wage workers providing care and wished to hold their employers accountable for the workers' and residents' difficult working and living conditions. Finally, there are those who categorically condemn the deception of people and advocate a "right not to be researched" (Sagarin, 1973). Thus some social scientists argue that researchers never have a right to harm people and that the only ones who can judge whether research might cause harm, even if that harm only takes the form of exposure of group secrets, are informants themselves (Spradley, 1980).

In matters of ethics, then, researchers must counterbalance their multiple responsibilities to their profession, their university or institutional affiliation, the pursuit of knowledge, the society, their informants, and, ultimately, themselves. IRBs set restrictions on research, but they cannot make ethical decisions for researchers. Just because an IRB has approved a study does not make it ethical.

Our own view is that there are situations in which covert research is both necessary and ethically justified. It depends on what you are studying and what you intend to do with the results. Since powerful groups in our society are the least likely to grant access to researchers, social science research tends to concentrate on the powerless. We have far more studies of workers than corporate executives, poor people than the rich, and criminals than judges (Hertz & Imber, 1993; Nader, 1969). Researchers expose the faults of the powerless while the powerful remain unscathed. To study powerful groups covertly, therefore, may well be warranted morally and ethically. However, we find it difficult to justify outright deception of anyone merely for the sake of completing degree requirements or adding a publication in an obscure journal to a vita.

The American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics acknowledges that there are instances in which covert research can be justified:

> On rare occasions, sociologists may need to conceal their identities in order to undertake research that could not practicably be carried out were they to be known as researchers. Under such circumstances, sociologists undertake the research if it involves no more than minimal risk for the research participants and if they have obtained approval to proceed in this manner from an institutional review board or, in the absence of such boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research. (http://www.asanet.org/images/asa/docs/pdf/CodeofEthics.pdf)

This chapter has dealt with the pre-fieldwork stage of qualitative research. The next chapter shifts to the issues and dilemmas participant observers face in the field: "Now that you're in, what do you do next?"

# Participant Observation:
# In the Field

IN THIS CHAPTER WE consider the fieldwork phase of participant observation. Fieldwork involves three major sets of activities. The first relates to comfortable social interaction—putting people at ease and gaining their acceptance. The second deals with ways to elicit data; that is, field strategies and tactics. The final aspect involves recording data in the form of written field notes. We discuss these and other issues that arise in the field in this chapter.

## ENTERING THE FIELD

Participant observers enter the field with the hope of establishing open relationships with informants (Yin, 2011). They conduct themselves in such a way that they become an unobtrusive part of the scene, people the participants take for granted. Ideally, informants forget that the observer is there to do research. Many of the techniques used in participant observation correspond to everyday rules about inoffensive social interaction; the researcher's behavior is critical in determining whether people cooperate with the research (Shaffir, 1991).

Observers usually remain relatively passive throughout the course of the fieldwork, but especially during the first days in the field (Geer, 1964). Participant observers "feel out the situation," "come on slow," "play it by ear" (J. M. Johnson, 1975), and "learn the ropes" (Geer, 1964; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991). The first days in the field are a period in which observers try to put people at ease, dispelling notions of obtrusive research approaches (e.g., the image of directive questioning by a white-coated scientist); establish their identities as okay persons; and learn how to act appropriately in the setting. What clothes should I wear? Who looks too busy to talk to me? Where can I sit without being in the way? Can I walk around? What can I do to avoid sticking out like a sore thumb? Can I talk to the clients? Who looks approachable?

During the initial period, collecting data is secondary to getting to know the setting and people. Questions are designed to help break the ice. Since some people may ask you what you want to know, it is a good idea to jot down some general questions before you enter the field. Questions such as "Could you give me an overview of this place?" and "How did you come to work here?" are usually good openers. It is also helpful to rehearse a brief, general statement of your research interests and goals (e.g., "I want to find out how things work in this kind of organization").

Different people will probably exhibit different degrees of receptivity to you. Although the gatekeeper may have consented to your study, others may resent your presence (Burgess, 1991). Sue Smith-Cunnien, a former student on the first day of a participant observation study, overheard one person ask another "What's she going to do—stand around and watch us all the time?" As J. M. Johnson (1975) notes, it is not uncommon for observers to find themselves in the middle of a power struggle over their presence. It is important to explain who you are to all people in the setting. In a study of teachers' use of the media, for example, Bogdan and colleagues (Dodge, Bogdan, Brogden, & Lewis, 1974) met with each teacher individually to explain the study and obtain permission to observe in each classroom, even though this access had been granted by administrators. Today, an IRB might require such a procedure or even insist that a researcher prepare a note to be sent to students' parents to let them know about the study.

You should also try to let people know that what they say to you will not be reported to others. Of course, as a researcher you are ethically bound not to violate their confidentiality, and IRBs would typically require this assurance as a condition of approval. On the second observation in Taylor's institutional study (1977, 1987b), one of the attendants asked the researcher, "Did you tell (the director) about the boys here on this ward?" Taylor responded with something like: "No, I didn't even tell him where I was. I don't tell people outside of here about this institution, so why should I tell him about all of you?" In Smith-Cunnien's study, she seized on the opportunity to explain the confidentiality of her research during the following exchange:

Observer:   Would you want to be editor-in-chief next year?
Informant:    Who are you going to tell all of this to anyway?
Observer:   I'm sorry, I should have told you from the start that everything
      you tell me is confidential. I won't be repeating any of this around here.

During the first days in the field, researchers usually feel uncomfortable. Many of us shun unnecessary interaction with strangers. It is natural to feel awkward in a new setting with no definable role to play.

All observers are faced with embarrassing situations in the field. Although it is true, as Shaffir, Stebbins, and Turowetz (1980) wrote, that fieldwork is characterized by feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and frustration, take comfort in the fact that you will feel more comfortable in the setting as the study progresses.

When first entering the field, observers are often overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive. For this reason, we generally advise people to try to limit the amount of time spent in the setting during each observation. An hour is usually enough time. As you become more familiar with a setting and more adept at observation, you can increase the length of time in the setting.

Field research can be especially exciting early in a study. Some observers are inclined to stay in a setting so long that they leave the field drained and filled with so much information that they never record it. Observations are useful only to the extent that they can be remembered and recorded. Do not stay in the field if you will forget much of the data or if you will not have the time to write your field notes.

## NEGOTIATING YOUR ROLE

The conditions of field research—what, when, and whom you observe—must be negotiated continually (Gubrium, 1991). You must strike a balance between conducting your research as you see fit and going along with informants for the sake of rapport.

The first problem you are likely to face is being forced into a role incompatible with conducting research. People often do not understand participant observation, even when it has been explained to them. In many settings, gatekeepers and informants will place observers into roles commonly performed by outsiders. The personnel in schools, mental hospitals, and other institutions often try to force observers into a volunteer role, especially in the case of women and students. Observers might be expected to sign the volunteer book, work with certain clients, and report to the volunteer supervisor. We know one observer who was pushed into a tutoring relationship with a boy in a detention home, despite the fact that he had explained his interests to the institution's director. Similarly, Easterday et al. (1977) reported that female researchers in male-dominated settings often get put in the role of gofer, among others.

There are sometimes advantages to being placed in a familiar role in a setting. Access is more easily obtained; the observer has something to do; people are not as self-conscious in the researcher's presence; and some data are more accessible. We know one observer who, in a study of a charitable organization, was given a volunteer assignment to record information on donors. As a study progresses, however, researchers can lose control of the study and have limitations imposed on collecting data if they are confined to a narrow organizational role. You should be open to taking on suggested roles, but you should also continually assess whether those roles interfere with your ability to conduct the research.

A second problem encountered by field researchers is being told what and when to observe. Practically all people attempt to present themselves in the best possible light to outsiders (Goffman, 1959). Informants will share those aspects of their lives and work in which they are seen in a favorable light and hide, or at least downplay, those in which they are not. Many organizations appoint tour guides to give tours to outsiders. Although these tours are valuable in certain respects, they tend to give a selective view of the setting. For example, at organizations Goffman (1961) referred to as "total institutions" (e.g., prisons, psychiatric facilities), tour guides will often show visitors the best living units and model programs and discourage visitors from seeing other parts of the institution (also see Taylor & Bogdan, 1980).

In many organizations, people also try to structure the times at which observers can visit. Total institutions are notorious for denying visits on weekends, since this is when the least programming occurs and most staff members have days off. Typically, organizational officials and staff will try to limit observers to special events, such as a holiday party or open house.

Women sometimes face special problems in having informants limit their research (Easterday et al., 1977; C. A. B. Warren & Rasmussen, 1977). For example, Easterday et al. noted that older males often act

paternalistically with younger women; in a study of a morgue, a medical examiner attempted to protect a young woman researcher from seeing the bad cases. In gender-segregated settings, on the other hand, it might be easier for women to observe spaces and activities that men cannot access. Racial and ethnic identities also can influence access to settings.

You should try to resist attempts of informants to control your research. Ideally, researchers should select their own places and times to observe. As observers establish some level of rapport, they usually find they can gain access to more places and people. In any case, you should pay attention to how access is handled in a setting, because this can provide insights into the dynamics of power and control.

## ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

Establishing rapport with informants is the goal of every field researcher. It is an exciting and fulfilling feeling when you begin to establish rapport with those you are studying. Rapport is not an easily defined concept. It means many things: communicating a feeling of empathy for informants and having them accept it as sincere; penetrating people's "defenses against the outsider" (Argyris 1952); having people open up about their feelings about the setting and others; being seen as an okay person; breaking through the fronts (Goffman, 1959) people impose in everyday life; sharing in informants' symbolic world, their language, and their perspectives (Denzin, 1978).

Rapport comes slowly in most field research. Even then, it may be tentative and fragile. It is doubtful whether most people completely trust anyone else at all times and under all circumstances. As John Johnson (1975) stated, rapport and trust may wax and wane in the course of fieldwork. With some informants, the researcher may never develop true rapport. Johnson (1975) wrote:

> Near the end of the welfare investigations I finally concluded that it is not a realistic possibility to develop relations of trust as such. This was especially true in a setting that included a radical leftist, a militant women's liberationist, older people, younger people, mods and squares, Republicans, Democrats, third party members, Navy chiefs and commanders, Reserve Army majors, pacifists, conscientious objectors, and so on . . . . During the final months of the field research I gradually developed a notion of "sufficient trust" to replace the earlier presuppositions gained from a reading of the traditional literature. Sufficient trust involves a personal, common-sense judgment about what is accomplishable with a given person. (pp. 141–142)

Similarly, Duneier (1999) believed that he had established rapport with street vendors he had been studying for months, but learned that several of

them were skeptical of his motives when he left a tape recorder running when he was not around. Like Johnson, he drew the lesson that rapport should never be taken for granted.

Although there are no hard-and-fast rules for establishing rapport with informants, a number of general guidelines can be offered.

### Pay Homage to Their Routines

Observers can only establish rapport with informants if they accommodate themselves to informants' routines and ways of doing things. All people like to do things in certain ways and at certain times. Observers must stay out of their hair. Polsky (1969, p. 129) offered advice on how to observe criminals that applies to observing anyone: "If he wants to sit in front of his TV set and drink beer and watch a ball game for a couple of hours, so do you; if he wants to walk the streets or go barhopping, so do you; if he wants to go to the racetrack, so do you; if he indicates (for whatever reason) that it's time for you to get lost, you get lost." We know one observer who, in a study of a hospital, came late to two staff meetings and then asked the physicians, who felt pressed for time themselves, to reschedule the meetings to suit his schedule. Behaving like that is not appreciated by subjects and can lead to being asked to leave the research site.

### Establish What You Have in Common With People

Probably the easiest way to build relationships with people is to establish what you have in common with them. The casual exchange of information is often the vehicle through which observers can break the ice. In Bogdan's study of the unemployed training program, he got to know many of his informants through conversations about fishing, children, sickness, past jobs, and food. In some settings this kind of socializing might be expected. People might find it enjoyable to have the observer around, although in high-pressure professional settings informal socializing might be inappropriate and unwelcome.

In Taylor's study of the Duke family (1995, and Chapter 8), it seemed important for Winnie and Bill, the parents, to establish common interests with him; commonality of interests helped bridge the gap in social status separating Taylor, as a university professor, and the Dukes, a family receiving public assistance and labeled as disabled. Bill tutored Taylor on car mechanics and educated him on the personalities in professional wrestling. Winnie acted toward him as an inexperienced parent and lectured him on child development and child rearing regarding his youngsters. Taylor eagerly accepted Bill's and Winnie's tutorials and advice.

## Help People Out

One of the best ways to begin to gain people's trust is to do favors for them. Researchers should try to find ways to reciprocate with the people they study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). J. M. Johnson (1975) reported that during his fieldwork he served as a driver, reader, luggage porter, babysitter, moneylender, ticket taker at a local conference, note taker, phone receptionist when business was heavy, book reader, book lender, adviser on the purchase of used automobiles, bodyguard for a female worker, letter writer, and messenger, among other things. Bogdan had one student studying an understaffed institutional unit for 40 young children with severe disabilities who was having a terrible time relating to the staff. The attendants were abrupt with him and did their best to ignore him totally. The situation became increasingly uncomfortable until the observer offered to help the two attendants feed the children one day. As he began to feed the first child, the attendants opened up and started to share their concerns and complaints. For the first time, they invited him to join them for a break in the staff lounge.

The Duke family's social network was characterized by mutual support and reciprocal relations among kin and friends. People expected help from family and friends when in need and were prepared to offer support when able. An understanding of the nature of relations within this network was critical for Taylor in establishing a solid relationship with the Dukes. Prior to meeting the Dukes, Taylor had been informed that the family was always on the lookout for donated clothes, old appliances, and junk metal. He used the excuse of having an old television and other appliances to get rid of as a way to meet and visit the Dukes. When he told the family he was writing a book and wanted to include the Dukes in it, they enthusiastically agreed. As Bill put it, "Oh, so we'd be helping you out." Throughout the Duke study, Taylor continued to do favors for the family: lending them money ($20 or so, and sometimes being paid back), giving them rides, being their "lawyer" and helping them with government paperwork, and taking pictures and videotaping at family gatherings.

Trimbur (2009) studied the reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated men who spent time at an urban boxing gym and found a variety of ways to help and thereby build relationships in the setting during four years of fieldwork:

> I assisted them in various boxing-related tasks: I laced gloves, inserted mouth guards, applied grease to headgears and faces and albolene to backs, and tied the laces of cups. I videotaped spars, provided water and spit buckets in-between rounds, and occasionally was allowed to run spars.... When asked, I assisted fighters and trainers with tasks usually associated with the completion of paperwork—obtaining passports, filling out job applications, registering for tournaments, and acquiring driving directions to fights. I did

some GED tutoring and a lot of babysitting for fighters' kids. I worked for the gym on fight-nights . . . . I sometimes helped with tasks associated with the running of the gym. (pp. 263–264)

Trimbur also conducted formal interviews with the men, but she noted that she gained the sharpest insights from conversations that occurred in everyday moments, "talking with them as I wrapped their hands, sat on a bench with them watching a spar, or ate lunch with them after a grueling workout" (p. 264).

## Be Humble

It is important for people to know that the researcher is the type of person to whom they can express themselves without fear of disclosure or being negatively evaluated. They respond best to a person they perceive as humble, who may be more educated than they are but is down to earth and not a know-it-all. Observers frequently become the people with the most knowledge and understanding of what everyone in the setting thinks. Keep this knowledge to yourself. Researchers should be careful not to reveal certain things that informants have said, even if they were not related in private. To display too much knowledge makes the observer threatening and potentially dangerous.

Informants may also be reluctant to express their feelings if the observer acts too knowledgeable. Let people speak freely. You will find that many people hold beliefs that are inaccurate if not patently absurd. There is no need to correct these beliefs. You will only make people self-conscious in your presence.

In some situations, people may say things that the researcher finds offensive. For example, Griffin (1991) noted that people can make sexist or racist remarks in the researcher's presence and that silence can be taken as tacit agreement. How you respond in such situations is not just a research issue; it depends on your personal priorities. You will need to decide whether it is worth jeopardizing rapport with informants by challenging their remarks. Further, will it change their minds if you express disagreement with their opinions?

## Act Interested

It should go without saying that you should act interested in what people have to say. Yet it is sometimes easy to act bored in the field, especially if you find yourself in a situation with someone who monopolizes the conversation about seemingly irrelevant or trivial matters. One of the challenges in qualitative data collection is maintaining two mind-sets: appearing to be interested

in what is happening and assessing how to respond. There are ways to channel a conversation and to subtly avoid people. We cover some of these later in this chapter and in our discussion of interviewing.


## PARTICIPATION

When active involvement in people's activities is essential to acceptance, then by all means participate, but know where to draw the line. In some settings, you may be exposed to morally or legally problematic activities. Van Maanen (1982, p. 114), who witnessed many instances of police brutality, wrote, "Only practical tests will demonstrate one's trustworthiness." He believed that he had to demonstrate trustworthiness by not intervening in activities, even when he found them troubling.

The attendants in Taylor's institutional study often cruelly teased and abused their charges: beat them, threw buckets of water on them, encouraged them to engage in fellatio publicly, encouraged some to hit others, forced them to swallow burning cigarettes, and tied them to beds spread-eagle (the attendants' folk wisdom included ways to do these things without leaving marks). Although the attendants subtly encouraged Taylor to participate in these abuses, they never exerted strong pressures on him to join. However, they did watch him closely for signs of disapproval. For his part, he tried to ignore these acts as best he could.

Fine (1980) reported that he was tested by children in his study of Little League baseball. For example, kids would engage in rowdiness and rough-housing in his presence as a way of sizing him up. Given the difficulties of overcoming generational differences, it was important for Fine to distance himself from an adult role of supervising in order to gain the kids' trust (see also Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). Thorne (1993) described a similar approach in her study of gender relations in elementary schools:

> I avoided positions of authority and rarely intervened in a managerial way, and I went through the days with or near the kids rather than along the paths of teachers and aides. Like others who have done participant-observation with children, I felt a little elated when kids violated rules in my presence, like swearing or openly blowing bubble gum where these acts were forbidden, or swapping stories about recent acts of shoplifting. These incidents reassured me that I had shed at least some of the trappings of adult authority and gained access to kids' more private worlds. (pp. 18–19)

The participant observer walks a thin line between being an active participant (participant as observer) and a passive observer (observer as participant; R. L. Gold, 1958; Junker, 1960). There are clearly times in which it is best not to be accepted as a genuine member of the setting or group.

Where involvement places you in a competitive situation with informants, it is best to withdraw. It is sometimes difficult to set aside your own ego. Like other people, observers have a self-concept to defend and want to be thought of as witty, bright, and sexually attractive. In a study of a newsroom, Rasmussen found that although the "cute young datable guy" approach worked in winning over some female reporters, this approach alienated the male reporters (C. A. B. Warren & Rasmussen, 1977).

You should also avoid acting and talking in ways that do not fit your own personality. For example, although you should dress in such a way as to blend into the setting (if people dress casually, dress casually; if they dress formally, do the same; if people dress in different ways, try to find a neutral form of dress), you should not wear anything in which you feel unnatural or uncomfortable. Similarly, it is wise not to use people's vocabulary and speech patterns until you have mastered them and they come naturally. W. F. Whyte (1955, p. 304) learned this lesson when he was walking down the street with a street-corner group and, entering the spirit of the small talk, let loose with a string of obscenities. Whyte reported what happened: "Doc shook his head and said: 'Bill, you're not supposed to talk like that. That doesn't sound like you.'"

Rapping was a common pastime among trainees in Bogdan's study of a job training program. In contrast to its current meaning, rapping—also called "playing the dirty dozen" and "joking"—referred to a competitive verbal exchange the object of which is to put down another person by the clever use of phrases with double meanings (Hannerz, 1969; Horton, 1967). Bogdan found himself to be the object of trainees' jokes and, after a few days of observation, was encouraged by them to engage in verbal exchanges about his potency as a lover and his capacity as a drinker. Although he gradually began to participate in these exchanges, he soon realized that he lacked the ability to perform well on this level. At first, he saw this inability to rap as a barrier. As the study progressed, however, he found this inability to be an asset. Since he was not adept at rapping, he was not forced into these exchanges, which had become progressively repetitive, and could concentrate on collecting data.

There are also situations in which you want to go out of your way to point out the differences between yourself and informants. Polsky (1969) discussed the tightrope field researchers walk trying to blend into the social scenery without pretending to be something they are not. In studying heroin users, Polsky made a point of wearing short-sleeved shirts, which let any newcomer know that he was not an intravenous drug user.

Any participation that interferes with the researcher's ability to collect data should be avoided. In their rush to be accepted by informants, some observers get drawn into active participation. We know an observer who, on his first day at a school, overheard teachers express a desire to have a sensitivity

training workshop. Since he had led a number of such workshops previously, he immediately offered to help them. He ended up abandoning his research. It is best to give yourself time to consider what kind of participation will not get in the way of your research.

Field researchers also have to guard against being exploited by informants. There is a difference between establishing rapport and being treated as a stooge. Polsky suggested that researchers have to know where to draw the line with informants. Polsky (1969, p. 128) offered this example: "I have heard of one social worker with violent gangs who was so insecure, so unable to 'draw the line' for fear of being put down, that he got flattered into holding and hiding guns that had been used in murders."

No discussion of rapport would be complete without a mention of over-rapport (S. M. Miller, 1952). Conventional wisdom in qualitative research warned of the dangers of joining the groups under study and overidentifying with informants. More recent postmodernist and standpoint perspectives challenge the notion of over-rapport as the last vestige of a naive belief in scientific objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Certainly, the traditional discussions of "going native" had a colonial ring and positioned the researcher as an all-knowing figure above the unwashed masses; most contemporary researchers would avoid such language and the ideas it reflects. Yet the potential problems of over-rapport should not be dismissed out of hand.

As a qualitative researcher, your role is to try to capture how people define their world or construct their reality. What you produce as a qualitative account of people's definitions, constructions, and perspectives has no absolute claim to scientific truth or to being the only version of the ways things are. Given this indisputable fact, however, personal relationships or ideological allegiances should not prevent you from telling the story as you see it and from your point of view (of course, acknowledging that this is your point of view). S. M. Miller's (1952) cautions about being co-opted by friendships in the field to the point of giving up embarrassing lines of inquiry or, worse, confusing people's preferred ways of presenting themselves with truth are well taken. Just as ethnographic texts can and should be subjected to critical inquiry (Atkinson, 1992), so, too, should the perspectives of people under study. When, for example, institutional attendants asserted that their charges "don't get hurt like you and me" (Taylor, 1987b), Taylor needed to distance himself from this perspective in order to understand it as a perspective with profound social implications.

## KEY INFORMANTS

Ideally, participant observers develop close and open relationships with all informants. However, as mentioned previously, rapport and trust come

slowly in field research. The researcher will never develop rapport with some informants.

Field researchers usually try to cultivate close relationships with one or two respected and knowledgeable people in the early stages of the research. These people are called *key informants*. In the folklore of participant observation, key informants are almost heroic figures. A key informant is the researcher's best friend in the field. W. F. Whyte's (1955) Doc and Elliot Liebow's (1967) Tally are notable examples. Carol Stack (1974), a White researcher who conducted a study of a Black community, developed close relations with a number of her informants and dedicated her book *All Our Kin* to her parents and to Ruby Banks, one of the women in her study with whom she had formed an especially close relationship.

Key informants are often the researcher's sponsor in the setting and primary sources of information (Fine, 1980). During the first days in the field especially, observers try to find people who will take them under their wing: show them around, introduce them to others, vouch for them, tell them how to act, and let them know how they are seen by others. W. F. Whyte (1955) recounted Doc's words to him at their first meeting:

> You tell me what you want to see, and we'll arrange it. When you want some information, I'll ask for it, and you listen. When you want to find out their philosophy of life, I'll start an argument and get it for you. If there's something else you want to get, I'll stage an act for you.... You won't have any trouble. You come in as my friend.... There's just one thing to watch out for. Don't spring [treat] people. Don't be too free with your money. (p. 292)

Participant observers also look to key informants to provide them with a deep understanding of the setting. Since field research is limited in time and scope, key informants can give the history of the setting and fill in the researcher on what happens when he or she is not there. Zelditch (1962) called the informant the observer's observer. In some studies, participant observers have used key informants to check out emerging themes, hunches, and working hypotheses. W. F. Whyte reported that Doc became a collaborator in the research by reacting to Whyte's interpretations and offering his own (although subsequent accounts make it clear that Whyte and Doc had a complex relationship). In the same way, Duneier (1999) met Hakim Hasan early in his study of New York City street vendors, and Hasan not only sponsored him in the setting, but also became an insightful partner in developing understandings of the vendors' world.

Although researchers are always on the lookout for good informants and sponsors, it is generally wise to hold back from developing close relationships until you have developed a good feel for the setting. In the initial phase of the research, there is a tendency to latch on to anyone who seems open and friendly in a strange situation. Yet the most outgoing and friendly people in

a setting may be marginal members themselves. It is often difficult to know initially who is or is not respected in a setting. If researchers attach themselves to an unpopular person, they are likely to be regarded by others as an arm or ally of that person.

It is also important to avoid concentrating exclusively on one or a handful of people. Do not assume that all informants share the same perspective or have the same depth of knowledge (Van Maanen, 1991). They seldom do.

In Taylor's institutional study, Bill, the ward charge or supervising attendant, tended to monopolize Taylor's time. He took Taylor on long coffee breaks in the staff room, during which he freely expressed his perspectives on the institution, residents, his supervisors, and life in general. As the study progressed, Bill began to repeat himself, telling the same stories and expressing the same views on every observation session. It was not until Taylor scheduled his visits on Bill's days off that he began to talk at length with other attendants and learn about their perspectives. In his study of the job training program, Bogdan encountered similar problems with a staff member who was particularly friendly. Although it helped to have a sponsor and informant in the setting, the staff member kept him from interacting with other staff and the trainees. Bogdan withdrew from the relationship and only reestablished it after he had gotten to know others.

Close relationships are essential in field research. The right key informant can make or break a study. However, you have to be prepared to stand back from relationships formed early in a study if and when circumstances demand it.

## DIFFICULT FIELD RELATIONS

Fieldwork is characterized by all of the elements of human drama found in social life: conflict, hostility, rivalry, seduction, racial tension, and jealousy. Observers often find themselves in the middle of difficult and sensitive situations in the field.

Age, gender, race, and other features of personal identity can have a powerful influence on how informants react to the observer (C. A. B. Warren & Rasmussen, 1977). Liebow (1967) conducted his study of Black street-corner men as a White researcher. Although he developed strong and friendly relationships with some of his informants, Liebow (1967, p. 248) did not pretend to have overcome the barriers to insider status imposed by race: "In my opinion, this brute fact of color, as they understood it in their experience and I understood in mine, irrevocably and absolutely relegated me to the status of outsider."

In some situations women enjoy certain advantages in conducting field research (Easterday et al., 1977; C. A. B. Warren & Rasmussen, 1977).

Generally, women stand a better chance than men of being accepted as insiders in female-dominated settings. C. A. B. Warren and Rasmussen (1977) also point out that male and female researchers alike can use sexual attraction to gain information, although there are perils in doing this. Female researchers are often confronted with problems in the field that men usually do not face. In the large-scale family study with which Taylor was involved, female interviewers occasionally found themselves to be the objects of husbands' sexual advances and, consequently, wives' jealousy. Easterday et al. (1977) described being hustled as a common problem of young female researchers in male-dominated settings. They recount the following exchange during an interview:

> I was in the midst of industriously questioning the attendant about his job at the morgue and he came back with, "Are you married?"
>
> Observer:    No. How long have you worked here?
> Attendant:    Three years. Do you have a steady boyfriend?
> Observer:    No. Do you find this work difficult?
> Attendant:    No. Do you date?
> Observer:    Yes. Why isn't this work difficult for you?
> Attendant:    You get used to it. What do you do in your spare time?
>
> And so our interview went on for over an hour, each of us working at our separate purposes. I doubt whether either of us got any "usable data." (p. 339)

As Easterday et al. noted, in these situations every encounter can become a balancing act between cordiality and distance.

Gurney (1991) similarly reminded us that female researchers need to recognize that instances of sexism, sexual hustling, and sexual harassment occur in the field, just like anywhere else. Gurney advised female researchers to give some thought to how to respond to hypothetical situations before the fieldwork begins. Gurney's advice was to speak to the person privately first, and then try to find allies in the setting to intervene.

Hostile informants can be just as troublesome as overly attentive ones. In many settings—almost surely in large organizations—observers come across people who seem to resent their very presence. Van Maanen (1982) gave an example of unambiguous (and disturbingly phrased) rejection in his study of the police:

> Sociologists? Shit. You're supposed to know what's going on out there. Christ, you come around here asking questions like we're the fucking problem. Why don't you go study the goddarnn niggers and find out what's wrong with them. They're the fucking problem, not us. I haven't met a sociologist yet who'd make a pimple on a street cop's ass. (pp. 111–112)

In this quote, note that Van Maanen carefully recorded the response, despite its profanity and objectionable language. As a result, he gave the reader a vivid sense not only of his reception in the field, but also the informant's verbal style and intensity of feelings.

J. M. Johnson (1975) used the term *freeze-out* to refer to an informant who expresses an unwillingness to aid the research. In his study of a social service agency, Johnson encountered two freeze-outs out of 13 case workers. What he eventually discovered was that both of the freeze-outs padded their caseloads, meaning that they kept files on people to whom no services were provided.

Although some people may never accept you, do not assume that hostile informants will remain hostile forever. People often soften over time. In Taylor's institutional study, one attendant, Sam, avoided him for over six months. Although other attendants seemed to accept Taylor's presence on the ward, Sam remained very guarded in his presence. Taylor visited the ward one evening when only Sam and one other attendant were on duty. Sam, who was in charge, was sitting in the staff office. Taylor stopped by the office and asked Sam if it was all right for him to hang around for a while. Suddenly, Sam went off on a long monologue on why it was necessary to maintain strict discipline on the ward. He explained why he thought attendants had to hit and scream at the residents. It seems that Sam had not trusted Taylor up until that point. He was afraid that Taylor was some kind of a spy. After that visit, Sam, although never overly friendly, was cordial and appeared at ease.

You should try to provide hostile informants with opportunities to change their minds. Continue to be friendly without pushing them into interaction. Even if you cannot win their acceptance, you might avoid making them your enemies and allowing them to turn others against you. Observers can find themselves torn by conflict and organizational power struggles (Roy, 1965). People on both sides of a controversy may vie for their allegiance. Support for one side may be expected as the quid pro quo, or exchange, for information. J. M. Johnson (1975) found himself being manipulated for information by a supervisor who was trying to build a case against one social worker.

Probably the best way to deal with conflict is to lend a sympathetic ear to both sides. The strategy is to make both sides believe that you are sympathetic to their position without actually taking a side or giving either ammunition. Observers often walk a tightrope and have to be able to sense when they are off balance.

## FORMING RELATIONSHIPS

When you become involved with people in their everyday lives, you sometimes become attached to them. Unlike researchers who use most other methods, participant observers and qualitative interviewers often develop

strong feelings toward their subjects, and subjects often develop feelings toward the researchers. You should be prepared to deal with the feelings, emotions, and attachments that arise in this kind of research (Asher & Fine, 1991; Kleinman, 1991). Kleinman (1996) was surprised to find that emotions played such a large role in the setting she studied. Eventually, she was able not only to manage the interpersonal and emotional dynamics in the field, but also to draw on these dynamics in her analysis.

Researchers who use survey, experimental design, and other methodologies are usually trained to maintain professional distance with research subjects, much like a physician or therapist. This is not possible in many qualitative studies. Qualitative researchers spend time with people in their day-to-day lives and work hard to establish a level of rapport with them, and so cannot always put up barriers to the feelings that come any time people spend a significant amount of time together. You will like some people and dislike others.

It is not necessarily undesirable to form friendships and relationships with people under study. The researcher is first and foremost a human being. In Taylor's study of the Duke family, he liked family members right away and became close with them. Further, like many people studied by qualitative researchers, the Dukes are poor and powerless, and Taylor continued to help the family out when he could, even though this was no longer necessary for establishing rapport or learning about their lives. For example, Taylor helped the family negotiate with the Social Security office on their entitlement benefits, even though he had already learned everything of interest about the functioning of this office. As researchers, we can gain many benefits from being allowed into people's lives. We can earn degrees, publish books, gain tenure, and realize many other advantages. If we can reciprocate in small ways, we probably should—not because research ethics require this, but because this is the way people should act toward each other.

Of course, in many studies, the researcher may not like or respect the people under study. If you are successful as a qualitative researcher, however, you will act as though you do and convince these people that you like them and are interested in them. This can create strong feelings of being false, manipulative, and inauthentic (Taylor, 1991).

## FIELD TACTICS

Establishing and maintaining rapport with informants is an ongoing activity throughout field research. As fieldwork moves beyond the first days in the field, however, observers devote increasing attention to finding ways to broaden their knowledge of settings and informants. Here are some tactics.

Acting Naive

Many observers find that presenting themselves as naive but interested outsiders is an effective way of eliciting data (Lofland, 1971; Sanders, 1980). Sanders (1980, p. 164) noted that presenting him- or herself as an "acceptable incompetent" enables the researcher to ask questions about "what everyone knows." Outsiders are expected to possess a degree of naïveté about a setting. For example, an observer at a school would not be expected to know about educational curricula or standardized testing. In Taylor's institutional study, he developed a strategy to get access to ward records by asking naive questions about activities and events, questions he knew attendants probably could not answer without consulting files.

Being at the Right Place at the Right Time

Perhaps the most effective field tactic to use is placing yourself in situations likely to yield the data in which you are interested. You can tag along, wrangle invitations to go places or see things, show up unexpectedly, or "play both sides against the middle" (J. M. Johnson, 1975). The latter is a variation of the tactic children use to get permission to do things from their parents: imply to both parents that it is okay with the other without specifically saying so, thereby leaving yourself an out if you get caught. At the institution Taylor developed a number of ways to gain information in an unobtrusive manner and stumbled upon others.

He frequently visited the ward late at night, after residents had been sent to bed and when the attendants had the time to engage in long conversations, and at shift changes, when accounts of the day's events and most recent institutional rumors were given to one shift of attendants by another.

On the first day of his study, Taylor hung around with attendants at the conclusion of their shift as they were talking about going out for a drink. By placing himself in this awkward position, he received an invitation to go to a local bar frequented by attendants.

Taylor broke down Sam's resistance by happening to visit the ward on an evening when only Sam and another attendant were working and finding Sam alone in the staff office.

Most observers catch themselves eavesdropping on conversations and peeking at memos and other documents. The subtle eavesdropper sometimes gains important data that would not otherwise have been obtained. Of course, the discovered eavesdropper faces embarrassment (J. M. Johnson, 1975).

Running Errands and Doing Favors

Building rapport in the field and giving something back to informants are not the only reasons to do favors for people or to help them out; these activities can also be effective ways of getting access to information that would not otherwise be available. Throughout Taylor's study of the Duke family, he played the roles of family driver, photographer, and, as Winnie puts it, "lawyer."

In contrast to Bill's broken-down cars and trucks, Taylor always had a vehicle that ran. Bill and Winnie often called upon him for rides to one place or another. One of the most fruitful trips was a visit to Bill's sister's family and his mother's home outside of Capital City, 150 miles or so away. As Bill explained, his truck at the time would never make it to Capital City, and he wanted to visit his family. So, Taylor offered to take him. The Dukes' family relations had been a strong area of interest of Taylor during this study, and the visit to Bill's sister's family and especially his mother filled in important parts of the story.

Early on in the study, Taylor brought a camera along to family events and celebrations. The Dukes, and others in their network, were delighted to get pictures of events such as anniversary or birthday parties. For Taylor, of course, the camera (and later a video recorder) captured details of settings and people that usually go unnoticed in everyday life. Over time, the Dukes started to invite Taylor to events for the explicit purpose of having him take pictures. For example, he was invited to end-of-the-year school events for Cindy and got a glimpse of how teachers related to Cindy and her mother.

Perhaps the most important role Taylor has played with the Dukes, in their eyes, has been that of family "lawyer." Winnie once asked, "Now, are you a lawyer lawyer, or another kind?" As recipients of public assistance in one form or another, the Dukes were literally flooded with often confusing and contradictory forms, letters, and paperwork. Even someone who is literate can have a difficult time deciphering the bureaucratic language contained in correspondence from government agencies and understanding rules and regulations governing entitlement programs. Winnie took care of the family's business with public and other agencies and was often at a total loss to understand much of the paperwork she received. Taylor tried to help Winnie interpret correspondence from agencies, filled out forms for her, maintained copies of past letters and paperwork, and accompanied her on visits to government offices to clarify family members' benefits. From a research perspective, this yielded information about the family's actual income and provided insight into how government programs are experienced by those on the receiving end. Winnie used the term "stupidness" to refer to how government agencies operate. At times this seemed like an apt description.

## You Do Not Have to Let People Know Exactly What You Are Studying

It is usually unwise to let informants know the specific focus of your study, although IRBs will probably require researchers to explain their general interests. In the first place, as Hoffmann (1980) noted, it is sometimes useful to keep the real research questions to oneself to reduce self-consciousness and the perceived threat. Regarding her study of the reorganization of hospital boards of directors, Hoffmann (1980) reported:

> Many of my respondents became reticent when they perceived themselves to be the object of study—that is, when I told them that I was interested in how the old elite system worked. I found, however, that they were prepared to offer their views more freely on "external" topics, such as reorganization policy or problems of the new membership. With respondents who appeared defensive about the old system . . . or who countered direct questions with front work, I presented myself as being interested in the consequences of reorganization or organizational problems rather than in the board as a social group or in board work as an elite social institution. (p. 51)

In the second place, when informants know too much about the research, they are likely either to hide things from the observer or to stage events for his or her benefit. The design of the large-scale family study described earlier called for a series of interviews with the parents and home observations, including observations of the bedtime routines of children. The fieldworkers observed dramatic differences in how some parents acted during the interviews and the prescheduled observations. In most families, children were better dressed and had more toys around on the days of the observations. During evening interviews, the fieldworkers found that in many families there was no bedtime routine per se. Children fell asleep in front of a television sometime after early evening. When the fieldworkers returned to conduct the preannounced bedtime observations, some parents actually staged bedtime routines for them to observe (telling the child to get ready for bed at an early hour, tucking the child in, etc.). By informing parents what they wanted to see, the fieldworkers unwittingly encouraged some parents to fabricate events because they wanted either to look like good parents or to be cooperative and give the researchers what they wanted.

## Aggressive Field Tactics

Early in a study, you conduct yourself in such a way as to minimize so-called *reactive effects* (Webb et al., 1966); your goal is for people to act as naturally as possible in your presence (knowing that you have some effect by virtue of being there). For instance, participant observers do not walk around with clipboards or questionnaires, take notes, or ask a lot of structured questions.

As Jack Douglas (1976) argued, the more controlled the research—the further it departs from natural interaction—the greater the likelihood that one will end up studying the effects of research procedures.

At a later stage of research, knowing enough about the setting to gauge how these tactics affect what people say and do, you can employ obtrusive or more aggressive tactics. Some observers conduct structured interviews toward the end of their research. Altheide (1980) reported that as he was about to exit the field, he became much more aggressive in his questioning, probing sensitive political issues.

### ASKING QUESTIONS

Although participant observers enter the field with broad questions on their minds, they allow themes to emerge before pursuing specific lines of inquiry. Initially, field researchers ask questions in such a way as to enable people to talk about what is on their minds and what is of concern to them without forcing them to respond to the observers' interests, concerns, or preconceptions. The observer's stance should be "I don't know what questions to ask or how to ask them until I have spent some time in the setting."

Early in a study, observers ask nondirective and nonjudgmental questions. Use the phrases with which you usually initiate conversations: "How's it going?" "How do you like it here?" "Can you tell me a little about this place?" These kinds of questions allow people to respond in their own ways and with their own perspectives. Another good way of getting people to talk initially is to wait for something to happen and then ask about it. As discussed earlier, newcomers are expected to be naive and to ask questions about things they have not seen before.

Knowing what not to ask can be just as important as knowing what to ask. Sanders (1980) pointed out that when a researcher is studying people who are engaged in legally questionable activities, inappropriate questions can reasonably be interpreted as an indication that the researcher is an informer. Van Maanen (1982) argued that any form of sustained questioning implies evaluation. In the institutional study, Taylor directly questioned only one attendant about abuse (and this was after a few beers at a bar), even though this was a major focus of the research. The subject was too sensitive and explosive to explore in a straightforward way. This was a risky line of questioning, and the only reason Taylor got away with it was that this particular attendant liked to complain that the others were too harsh with residents (although he engaged in many of the same behaviors as the rest).

We know of one group of observers who, on a tour of a mental hospital, questioned a supervisor about a ward's time-out or isolation rooms: "Are they allowed to go to the bathroom?" "Do they still get meals when

they're in there?" The supervisor was infuriated by the questions and shot back: "What do you think we are here—sadists?"

It is also important to know how to phrase questions. Questions should be phrased in sympathetic terms that support informants' definitions of themselves. One researcher referred to the "funeral business" during her first visit to a funeral home. The funeral director was taken aback. This seemingly innocuous phrase contradicted his view of his work as a profession and not merely a business. Some mistakes are probably inevitable and surmountable. Researchers should note such reactions and learn from them.

The meaning of disability was a major theme in Taylor's study of the Duke family. Bill and Winnie and their two children, as well as many of their kin and friends, had been labeled as mentally retarded or handicapped by schools, human service agencies, and government programs. Yet none of the members of the family seemed to define themselves as mentally retarded or disabled. Winnie referred to her family's "medical problems," and Bill talked about being "on disability" as opposed to being "on welfare." The term "handicapped" was used synonymously with "crippled" and reserved for people with physical disabilities who used wheelchairs. As in other social circles at the time, "retard" and "crazy" were used casually as general epithets by people within the Dukes' social network.

This poses an interesting question: If people do not define themselves as retarded or intellectually disabled or relate to disability labels, how can we learn who has and has not been labeled as being disabled? As an indirect way of learning about whether people had ever been labeled as disabled, Taylor asked questions about people's source of income (specifically, Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability, both disability entitlement programs) and their experience with special education, sheltered workshops, and other disability agencies. By asking these kinds of indirect questions, Taylor charted members of Bill's and Winnie's extended families who had been defined as disabled by one agency or another and then compared these labels with how people defined themselves and each other.

In Taylor's institutional study, it was not uncommon for attendants to restrain inmates with straitjackets or tie residents to benches. Taylor was always careful to ask questions that would not intimidate the attendants or challenge their perspectives: "Does he always give you problems?" "How long do you have to keep him in there?" There is no doubt that if Taylor had asked questions requiring the attendants to justify their actions—"How often do you let them out?" "What's the institution's policy on restraint?"—he would have been suspect and thus kept from insider's candid comments.

Once informants start talking, you can encourage them to say more about topics in which you are interested. Encouraging words, cues, and gestures that indicate your interest are usually sufficient to keep someone

on track: "That's interesting." "Is that right?" "I always wondered about that." Small signs of sympathy demonstrate support and encourage people to continue: "I know what you mean," or "That's rough."

You should ask for clarification of informants' remarks. Do not assume that you understand what people mean. Use phrases like "What do you mean by that?" "I don't follow you exactly," and "Explain that again." You can also restate what informants say and ask them to confirm your understanding.

As observers acquire knowledge and understanding of a setting, questioning becomes more focused and directive (Denzin, 1978; Spradley, 1980). Once themes and perspectives have emerged, researchers begin to round out their knowledge of a setting and check out information previously gathered.

In participant observation, data analysis is an ongoing activity (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Observers move back and forth between the field and data already collected. What they try to observe and ask about in the field depends on what they think they have learned. It is a good idea to keep a running record of themes to explore and questions to ask (as described later, we use observer's comments in field notes to do this). In DeVault's observations of zoo visitors' activities (DeVault, 2000, and Chapter 9, this volume), she began with a specific question, but developed broader interests after entering the field. As she noticed unexpected aspects of the visit (for example, how parents used strollers and touch to guide children through space), she paid particular attention to behavior that seemed likely to yield analytical insights and wrote detailed notes about it.

After they have developed some working hypotheses, observers round out their knowledge by asking informants to elaborate on subjects mentioned previously and by following up with informants on things mentioned by others. In the institutional study, after talking to several attendants about previous jobs and relatives, Taylor had a hunch that attendants' work careers (previous jobs) and personal social networks (family members and friends who worked at the institution) played a role in shaping their perspectives on work. Over the next couple of months, Taylor made a point of casually asking other attendants what they did before they worked at the institution and whether they had friends and relatives there.

Douglas (1976, p. 147) stressed the importance of checking informants' accounts and stories: "Checking out consists essentially of comparing what one is told by others against what can be experienced or observed more directly, and therefore more reliably, or against more trustworthy accounts." Accounts that the researcher suspects early in the study can be checked out after he or she has a sense of who can and cannot be believed and to what extent. In Duneier's (1999) study of street vendors, he not only cross-checked the stories of different participants but also searched for

independent information that could confirm accounts he had reason to question. Before completing his analysis, he also reviewed tentative findings and interpretations with participants and asked for their reactions.

Most observers also employ more aggressive questioning tactics once they have developed a feel for a setting and informants. Especially toward the end of a study, observers pose devil's advocate questions (Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, Ehrlich, & Sabshin, 1964), confront informants with falsehoods, probe taboo subjects (Altheide, 1980), and ask informants to react to their inter-pretations and conclusions (Strauss et al., 1964). Brinkman and Kvale (2014) described the "confrontational interview" as a tactic to obtain information by confronting or challenging interviewees (p. 363).

The observer who has spent some time in a setting can use knowledge already gained to obtain more information. The idea is to act as if you already know about something to get people to talk about it in depth. Douglas (1976) called this the phased-assertion tactic. Hoffmann (1980) described how she used inside information when people seemed reluctant to talk too freely:

> First, respondents learned that I was "in the know," that I had penetrated through the public veneer to the underlying social reality. Front work was discouraged because they knew that I could distinguish it from backstage information and because it might look as if they were covering something up. Second, the use of insider details possibly acted to reassure reticent informants. I often had the impression that respondents felt relieved by the knowledge that they were not the only persons to make such disclosures, that initial responsibility lay with someone else, and that this person must have had reason to trust me in the first place. (p. 53)

Hoffmann also noted that by dropping inside information the researcher dis-courages informants from going over familiar points and encourages them to make responses relevant to his or her interests.

## LEARNING THE LANGUAGE

An important aspect of participant observation is learning how peo-ple use language (Becker, 1956; Becker & Geer, 1957; Spradley, 1980). Field researchers must start with the premise that words and symbols used in their own worlds may have different meanings in the worlds of their informants. They must also be attuned to and explore the meanings of words with which they are not familiar.

Observers almost always come across new words and symbols. Any group, especially one cut off from the broader society, develops its own special vocabulary. For example, Wallace (1968) provided a glossary of terms

used on skid row: beanery, a cheap restaurant; dead one, a retired hobo; dingbat, the lowest type of tramp; jack, money; slave market, street corner employment office. Similarly, Giallombardo (1966) offered the argot (special language) of a women's prison: bug house, institution for the "mentally insane" or "defective"; butcher, a prison doctor; flagging, an older inmate attempting to involve a younger one in sex.

The vocabulary used in a setting usually provides important clues to how people define situations and classify their world and thus suggests lines of inquiry and questioning. In Bogdan's job training program study, the staff and trainees used special terms to refer to each other that indicated the distrust in the setting. Some of the staff used the phrase "professional trainee" to refer to people who had been involved in other training programs. Some trainees, on the other hand, referred to staff members as "poverty pimps," a phrase that suggested that they were living off of the plight of others.

Certain assumptions may be built into a vocabulary. In Taylor's study of institutions for people defined as mentally retarded or intellectually disabled, for example, mundane activities were referred to as therapy and programming; motivation training and recreation therapy referred to going for walks, coloring, and similar activities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1980).

Some observers are unable to cut through professional jargon and vocabularies. They uncritically accept the assumptions behind professional categories. Terms like *schizoid*, *paranoid*, and *psychotic* have little concrete meaning and are based on psychiatric ideologies rather than scientific knowledge (Szasz, 1970). Likewise, the vocabulary used in many educational settings reflects class and racial bias (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963). Lower-class children who cannot read or are disruptive are labeled *emotionally disturbed*, whereas middle-class children with the same behavior are likely to be called *learning disabled*.

People use a special vocabulary to build lines of action in some settings. Calling a person "profoundly retarded" or "severely handicapped" can be used to keep that person institutionalized. Calling a child "emotionally disturbed" may allow the child to be excluded from school.

You must learn to examine vocabularies as a product of the assumptions and purposes of the users rather than an objective characterization of the people or objects of reference. This applies even to clear-cut words. A person described as *nonambulatory* might be thought of as someone who cannot walk at all. Yet in understaffed nursing homes and institutions the term might be used to refer to people who could walk if they had minimal assistance.

The meaning and significance of people's verbal and nonverbal symbols can only be determined in the context of what they actually do and after an extended period of time. There is a danger of imputing meanings that people

did not intend. Polsky (1969) warned against assuming that a person's vocabulary reflects deep-seated feelings:

> I have seen it seriously argued, for example, that heroin addicts must unconsciously feel guilty about their habit because they refer to heroin by such terms as "shit," "junk," and "garbage." Actually, the use of any such term by a heroin addict indicates, in itself, nothing whatever about his guilt feelings or the lack thereof, but merely that he is using a term for heroin traditional in his group. (pp. 123–124)

Although the words people use lend insight into the meanings they attach to things, it is naive to presume that the intricacies of a social setting or situation can be revealed by vocabulary alone.

DeVault (1990) argued that conventional language might not adequately capture the experiences and realities of women:

> The names of experiences often do not fit for women. For an example that is simple and immediate, consider the difficulties that arise in an attempt to apply the terms "work" and "leisure" to most women's lives. Many of the household activities so prominent in women's lives do not fit comfortably into either category (see e.g., Smith, 1987, p. 68), and many of women's activities, such as family, community, and volunteer work, are best described as "invisible work" (Daniels, 1987). (p. 97)

According to DeVault, researchers who are trying to understand the experience of women, as well as other subordinated groups, must be alert to meanings that are obscured by speech, requiring speakers to translate their realities via the words that are available. DeVault (1990, p. 102) wrote, "As an interviewer who is also a woman—who has also learned to translate—I can listen 'as a woman,' filling in from experience to help me understand the things that are incompletely said." As Polsky (1969) noted, this kind of "filling in" must be provisional, and researchers should be open to revising understandings as they are put into question through further data collection or reflection on the contexts of language use.

## FIELD NOTES

Participant observation depends upon the recording of complete and detailed field notes. You should record field notes after each observation, as well as after more casual contacts with informants such as chance encounters and phone conversations. As noted earlier, field notes should also be recorded during the pre-fieldwork stage of the research.

Since field notes represent the raw data of participant observation, you should strive to write the most complete and comprehensive field

notes possible. This requires a tremendous amount of self-discipline, if not compulsiveness. It is not uncommon for observers to spend four to six hours recording field notes for every hour of observation. Those who want to use qualitative methods because they seem easier than statistics are in for a rude awakening. Anyone who has carried out a participant observation study knows that recording field notes can be drudgery.

Many beginning observers try to cut corners by writing sketchy summaries, omitting details, or postponing recording the notes. "Nothing much happened" is a common rationalization. Yet the observer's frame of mind should be such that everything that occurs in the field is a potentially important source of data. You do not know what is important until you have been in the setting for a while. Even small talk can lend insight into people's perspectives when viewed in context at a later time. A common experience in participant observation is to go back to your initial notes when you begin to analyze your data to look for something you vaguely remember being said or done, only to find that you never wrote the information down. Of course, as you get to know the setting and people and focus your research interests, you can be more selective in what you record. We have found that we can spend half as much time recording notes in the latter stages of fieldwork as in the early ones.

Try to find a mentor or colleague to read your field notes. This is probably the best way to get the motivation to record field notes session after session over a period of time. By virtue of their distance from the dynamics of a setting, readers can also point out emerging themes that escape the observer. Discussing field notes with someone else, at any stage in the research, is also usually a good way to sustain motivation for writing them.

The field notes should include descriptions of people, events, and conversations as well as the observer's actions, feelings, and hunches or working hypotheses. The sequence and duration of events and conversations are noted as precisely as possible. The fabric of the setting is described in detail. In short, the field notes represent an attempt to record on paper everything that can possibly be recalled about the observation. A good rule to remember is that if it is not written down, it never happened.

## HINTS FOR RECALLING WORDS AND ACTIONS

Participant observers must strive for a level of concentration sufficient to enable them to remember most of what they see, hear, feel, smell, and think while in the field (they can also use mechanical recording devices, but these can potentially threaten rapport, as we discuss later). Although precise recall is impossible, most observers are amazed at the accuracy with which they can recall details by virtue of training, experience, and concentration. Some observers use the analogy of a switch to describe the ability they have

developed to remember things; they can turn on the concentration needed to observe and recall. This analogy is a good one, if only for the reason that it sets the tone for the goal of observation skills. Take plenty of time in trying to remember and record what happened during an observation. In order to write notes that captured the scene at the zoo, DeVault found that she had to stop and think carefully in order to find the right words to fit the mental image in her mind.

People vary in the amount they can remember and in the techniques that enable them to recall things. We have found the following techniques useful to aid in recalling details in a broad range of settings.

1. *Pay attention*. The reason most people do not recall all things in every-day life is that they never notice things to begin with. As Spradley (1980) remarked, participant observers must overcome years of selective inattention. Watch; listen; concentrate.

2. *Shift focus from a wide-angle to a narrow-angle lens*. In busy places, observers are usually overwhelmed by the sheer number of activities and conversations occurring at the same time. It is literally impossible to concentrate on, let alone remember, everything that is happening. One especially effective recall technique that can be perfected with practice is to focus on a specific person, interaction, or activity while mentally blocking out all the others.

In Taylor's institutional study, over 70 residents and anywhere from 1 to 10 attendants could be in one large dayroom at a single time. The number of activities occurring simultaneously seemed infinite: several residents rocking on benches, one removing his clothes, another urinating on the floor, two cleaning up feces and urine with a rag and bucket, a handful sitting in front of the television, three lying on the floor, several pacing back and forth, two hugging each other, two in straitjackets; one attendant scolding a resident, two other attendants reading a newspaper, another attendant preparing to dispense tranquilizers and seizure control drugs, and so on.

When first entering the room, Taylor observed with a wide-angle focus for a few minutes, noting the various activities occurring. After that, however, he would shift focus to a single activity or corner of the room, ignoring everything else. By concentrating on specific activities one at a time, Taylor could later reconstruct specific scenes and events; over time, the general picture became complete. DeVault used a similar approach in her study of the zoo, focusing on one group of visitors for a short period of time—perhaps walking near them—and then shifting to another group before her proximity to the first group began to seem odd and uncomfortable.

3. *Look for key words in people's remarks*. Although you should strive for accuracy in your field notes, it is not possible to remember every word that people say. However, you can concentrate on and commit to memory

key words or phrases in every conversation—speech that reveals what is meaningful and important to people.

You will find that certain words and phrases stand out in your mind. In Bogdan's (Bogdan, Brown, & Foster, 1982) study of a hospital neonatal unit, doctors and nurses used special, easy-to-remember terms to refer to infants, for example, "feeders and growers," "nonviable," and "chronics." Other, more familiar words or phrases, such as "very sick baby" and "good baby," although less striking, were easily recalled once the researchers were attuned to how medical staff defined the infants.

4. *Concentrate on the first and last remarks in each conversation*. Conversations usually follow an orderly sequence. A certain question elicits a certain response; one remark provokes another; one topic leads into a related subject. If you can remember how a conversation started, you can often follow it through to the end in your own mind. Even when conversations do not follow a logical or orderly sequence, remarks that come out of nowhere should not be difficult to recall. You should find that the substance of a long monologue, which may confuse the novice observer, is retrievable.

5. *Play back remarks and scenes in your mind*. After you see or hear something, repeat it to yourself mentally. Try to visualize the scene or remark. It is also a good idea to take a break from talking or observing every once in a while during a session to play back in your mind what has already happened. Some observers find it helpful, when sitting down to write notes, to recall the flow of events as a kind of mental film, playing back the observation session.

6. *Leave the setting as soon as you have observed as much as you can remember*. Although this point has been made already, it bears repeating. In a new setting, you probably should not spend more than an hour observing unless something important is happening. As you get to know a setting and learn to remember things, you can spend more time in the field.

7. *Record your field notes as soon as possible after observing*. The longer you wait between observing and recording the data, the more you will forget. Try to schedule your observations in such a way that you will have the time and energy to record your notes. Some researchers jot down reminder notes immediately after an observation and then expand them into full notes soon after.

8. *Draw a diagram of the setting and trace your movements through it*. In a sense, walk through your experience. Doing this is a valuable aid in recalling events and people. A seating chart can similarly be helpful. The diagram or chart will help you in recalling who did what and in remembering less conspicuous people.

9. *Once you have drawn a diagram and traced your own movements, outline specific events and conversations that occurred at each point in time before you record your field notes*. The outline will help you recall additional details and

approximate the sequence in which events occurred. The outline does not have to be elaborate—it only needs to contain key words, scenes, and events that stand out in your mind; the first and last remarks in conversations; and other reminders. The time you take to construct an outline will be well spent in terms of the accuracy and clarity added to your notes.

10. *If there is a time lag between observing and recording the field notes, tape-record a summary or outline of the observation*. One of the institutions Taylor studied was located an hour's drive away. Taylor taped a detailed summary of the observation on the way home. He let conversations and events flow freely from his mind during this time. Later, after arriving home, he transcribed the summary, organizing events according to the sequence in which they occurred. From this summary, Taylor wrote up a detailed account of the day's events. Between observations in his study of impersonal sex in public restrooms, Humphreys (1975) occasionally went to his car to tape-record what he had just observed.

11. *Pick up pieces of lost data after you have recorded your field notes*. Observers often recall things days or even weeks after an observation. Sometimes events and conversations are remembered after the next observation. These pieces of data should be incorporated into the field notes.

## Taping and Taking Notes in the Field

Although most participant observers rely on their memories to record data, some researchers take notes in the field or use recording devices for data collection. Participant observers seem divided on the pros and cons of recording notes and using recording devices in the field. Some researchers take the position that obtrusive recording devices draw unnecessary attention to the observer and disrupt the natural flow of events and conversations in the setting. Douglas (1976, p. 53) wrote, "There is every reason to believe that obtrusive recording devices have fundamental effects in determining what actors think and feel about the researcher (mainly, it makes them terribly suspicious and on guard) and what they do in his presence." Other researchers, especially those interested in conversational analysis, question whether the observer can accurately remember and subsequently record the important details of what happens in the setting (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979).

Recording devices have become much smaller than in the past, and advances in electronic technologies have the potential to change how participant observers operate. For example, many students these days are adept at using mobile phones and other technologies and often find that they can blend into a setting with these devices. Of course, recording people without their consent raises ethical questions.

Our view is that researchers should refrain from taping and taking notes in the field at least until they have developed a feel for the setting and

can understand the effects of recording on informants. In our experience, mechanical recording devices have untoward effects on people. In the large-scale family study, Taylor used a tape recorder during an initial interview with the mother of a young child. In the warm-up prior to the interview, he casually mentioned that he previously lived in her neighborhood and asked her how she liked living there. She proceeded to complain about how many Blacks had recently moved into the neighborhood and how they had taken over the parks and playgrounds. Then came the interview, which included questions on likes and dislikes about the neighborhood. As Taylor questioned the mother with the tape recorder playing, she gave bland responses to questions about what she liked about the neighborhood and what changes had occurred since she had been living there. Never was race mentioned. After the interview had been completed and the tape recorder turned off, the interviewer again struck up a conversation about the neighborhood and again the mother complained about the number of Blacks who had moved there. The conclusion: Few people want to sound like a racist for the record. In other words, it is naive to assume that filming or taping will not alter what some people may say or do.

There are situations and settings in which observers can use recording devices without dramatically altering the research. W. H. Whyte's (1980) excellent photographic study of small urban places demonstrated that a camera can be an effective research tool in public places. DeVault, who became interested in the signs posted throughout the zoo during her fieldwork there, spent one observation session photographing different types of signage. The session provided a much more detailed archive of zoo signs than could have been produced through field notes. Frederick Wiseman and others have produced many insightful documentaries (Friedenberg, 1971), filmed by camera operators who captured an incredible amount of people's private lives (although one is left wondering to what extent the people put on performances for the cameras). In our interviewing, we have found that over a period of time people seem to forget about a tape recorder and speak relatively freely while it is recording.

It is also true that there are some social patterns that cannot be studied and analyzed without audio or video recording devices. Observers are not likely to recall, or even notice, all of the minute details of interactional patterns and conversations sufficient for ethnomethodological analysis and certain other lines of inquiry.

In most symbolic interactionist studies, researchers do not need to rely on mechanical recording devices to collect important data. Through training and experience, researchers can develop sufficient recall of events and conversations necessary to understand people's meanings, perspectives, and definitions. In fact, we believe that the accuracy a tape recorder gains for the experienced observer interested in this level of analysis is overstated.

There are few instances when it is advisable to take notes in the field. Note taking reminds people that they are under constant surveillance and tips them off to areas in which the researcher is interested. As mentioned earlier, in many situations the observer wants to deflect informants' attention from the research concerns. On the other hand, jotting notes can sometimes serve as a reminder that the researcher is in the setting to gather information (Emerson et al., 2011) or offer an opportunity to confirm or renew participants' consent to be studied (Thorne, 1980, p. 290).

One of the times notes can be taken unobtrusively is when other people are also taking notes, as in a classroom or formal meeting. Even in these situations, the researcher should be discreet. Equally important is the possibility that note taking can distract the researcher from the task of close observation.

Some observers go to a private place such as a bathroom to jot down keywords and phrases that will later help them recall events that transpire during long observation sessions. You can buy a small reporter's notebook that will fit easily and inconspicuously into a pocket. If this helps you remember things and can be done unobtrusively, so much the better.

## The Form of the Notes

Everybody develops her or his own way of writing up field notes (Emerson et al., 2011). Sanjek's (1990) collection of reflections on anthropological field notes suggested that they can feel intensely personal. J. E. Jackson's (1990) essay in that volume indicated that writing field notes is "fraught with emotion" (p. 10). Although the form varies from observer to observer, the field notes should be written in such a way as to allow you to retrieve data easily and to code and sort themes or topics. Here are some guidelines to consider (also see Yin, 2011).

1. *Start each set of notes as a separate file with a title page*. The title page should include the date, time, and place of observation; the day and time the notes were recorded; and any other information that might be important (for example, DeVault recorded the weather each time she observed at the zoo). Some observers title each set of notes with a quotation or descriptive phrase. Such titles serve as reminders of the general contents in the event the researcher needs to consult the notes to check on something.

2. *Include a diagram of the setting at the beginning of the notes*. Trace your movements and indicate on which page of your notes each movement is described. This will serve as an easy reference when you want to check specific events. For those who are fortunate enough to have someone read their notes, a diagram provides a useful point of reference for the reader.

3. *Begin new paragraphs often*. When you analyze your data, you will find it helpful if you have used separate paragraphs for every quotation, event,

thought, or topic. Paragraph breaks help to organize the narrative in your notes and serve as a rudimentary first step in analysis.

4. *Use quotation marks to record remarks as often as possible.* In our view, it is not necessary to have a flawless reproduction of what was said. What is important is capturing the meaning and approximate wording of remarks. If you cannot recall the wording, paraphrase: "John said something like—I've got to go home. Bill agreed and John walked out." Strauss et al. (1964) recommended that researchers use quotation marks for exact recall, apostrophes to signify less precision in wording, and no marks to indicate reasonable recall.

5. *Use pseudonyms for the names of people and places.* More than a few participant observers have fretted over what would happen if their data fell into the wrong hands (Humphreys, 1975; J. M. Johnson, 1975; Van Maanen, 1982, 1983). You never know what you might see or hear that would jeopardize the people you are studying if someone else found out. You also do not know whether readers of your notes might have relationships with the people described in your notes. Nothing is lost by using pseudonyms for people and places. In addition to other reasons for using pseudonyms, IRBs might require this.

6. *Make copies of your notes or electronic backups.* Accidents happen. A fire, theft, or hard drive crash—or simply misplacing your field notes or data files—can cause you to lose your data forever. As soon as you record your notes, make hard copies or an electronic backup.

### Observer's Comments

The field notes should include not only descriptions of what occurred in a setting but also a record of the observer's feelings, interpretations, hunches, preconceptions, and future areas of inquiry. These personal comments should be clearly distinguished from descriptive data through the language of the notes (for example, "I wondered if . . . "), the use of parentheses, or the designation "O.C." for "Observer's Comment."

It may be difficult for those trained that research is objective to accept the observer's own feelings and interpretations as an important source of understanding. Yet, as a participant in the setting and a member of the general society and culture, the researcher is likely to share many feelings and perspectives with the people in a setting. Indeed, participant observers must learn to empathize with informants, to experience their experiences vicariously, and to share their sufferings and joys. To distance yourself from personal feelings is to refuse to take the role of the other person and see things from his or her point of view (Blumer, 1969).

What you feel may be what informants feel or may have felt in the past. You should use your own feelings, beliefs, preconceptions, understandings, and

assumptions to develop potential insights into others' perspectives (DeVault, 1990; Kleinman, 1991). By recording these in observer's comments, you identify areas for future investigation and analysis. The following comments are excerpts of field notes in Taylor's institutional study:

> (O.C. I feel quite bored and depressed on the ward tonight. I wonder if this has anything to do with the fact that there are only two attendants working now. With only two attendants on, there are fewer diversions and less bantering. Perhaps this is why the attendants always complain about there not being enough of them. After all, there is never more work here than enough to occupy two attendants' time so it's not the fact that they can't get their work done that bothers them.)
>
> (O.C. Although I don't show it, I tense up when the residents approach me when they are covered with food or excrement. Maybe this is what the attendants feel and why they often treat the residents as lepers.)

In the following excerpt from Bogdan's job training study, he reflected upon one of his first contacts with a trainee after having spent the initial stages of the research with staff:

> I approached the two trainees who were working on assembling the radio. The male trainee looked up. I said, "Hi." He said, "Hi" and went back to doing what he had been doing. I said, "Have you built that [the radio] right from scratch?" (O.C. After I said this I thought that that was a dumb thing to say or perhaps a very revealing thing to say. Thinking back over the phrase, it came across as perhaps condescending. Asking if he had built it right from scratch might imply that I thought he didn't have the ability. He didn't react in that way but maybe that's the way people think of the "hard core" unemployed out at the center. Doing well is treated with surprise rather than as standard procedure. Perhaps rather than expecting that they are going to produce and treating them as if they are going to produce, you treat doing well as a special event.)

Bogdan thus gained a possible insight into how staff members define trainees by reflecting on his own remark.

The participant observer also records emerging ideas and interpretations in the observer's comments. These comments provide a running record of the observer's attempts to understand the setting and can be extremely valuable during the analysis phase of the research. The following comment is taken from the field notes in Taylor's institutional study: "(O.C. Many residents on this ward collect and hoard seemingly insignificant things. This is similar to what Goffman writes about in institutions of this kind. I'll have to start looking into this.)"

Some observers also find it useful to write a brief analytic memo identifying themes and summarizing an observation when they record their field notes.

The research setting and people's activities should be described in the field notes. When writing field notes, you should force yourself to describe the setting and activities in sufficient detail to paint a mental picture of the place and what occurred there. Some researchers strive to write their field notes in such a way as to present narratively what a camera would capture in film.

You should be careful to use descriptive and not evaluative words when you write your field notes. For example, you would not describe a room simply as depressing; rather, you would write something like the following: "The room was relatively dark, with dust and cobwebs in the corners and on the windowsills and chipped paint on the walls." Similarly, you would not say that people were receiving occupational therapy; you would record the activities in descriptive terms: "The three women were sitting at the table. One was caning a chair, while the other two were crayoning in coloring books. The staff member in charge referred to these activities as 'occupational therapy.'" Your own feelings, evaluations, or interpretations should be included in observer's comments. By doing this, you can identify possible areas for investigation or analysis without assuming that everyone sees things exactly the same way that you do. The following excerpt comes from the field notes in Taylor's institutional study:

> A strong smell of feces and urine mixed with antiseptic permeated the air as I entered the smaller dormitory. (O.C. I find the smell to be repulsive, so much so that I immediately want to leave. Yet the attendants do not seem to mind the smell. Some claim to have gotten used to it. Others never mention it. I wonder if this reflects the difference between myself and them or the fact that I am a newcomer to the ward compared to them.)

You should find that a detailed description of the setting and people's positions within it can give you important insights into the nature of participants' activities, interaction patterns, perspectives, and ways of presenting themselves to others. At many total institutions, the front regions—areas visible to outsiders—are arranged to present an appearance of benign, idyllic retreats where residents receive appropriate care and treatment (Goffman, 1961; Taylor, 1977; Taylor & Bogdan, 1980). Thus, the grounds of older institutions are filled with tall trees, meticulously maintained gardens, and stately buildings. The administration building is likely to be an old Victorian or colonial structure with carefully polished woodwork and floors. Institutions sometimes have special rooms set aside for family visits. As Goffman (1961) noted, the furnishings and decor of these rooms more closely approximate outside standards than residents' actual living quarters.

In dramatic contrast to these front regions, institutional back regions, where residents actually live, are designed to facilitate the staff's control

over residents and efficient maintenance of ward order and cleanliness (Taylor, 1977). The following were common features on the institutional wards Taylor studied:

- Locked doors and areas within the ward
- Televisions and stereos located high on the walls out of residents' reach
- Heavy, destruction-proof furniture
- Wire mesh on the windows
- Light switches and temperature controls inaccessible to residents
- Bathrooms lacking toilet paper, soap, towels, and mirrors
- Clothing and personal objects stored in locked rooms
- Staff offices and nursing stations positioned in such a way as to maximize staff surveillance of residents
- Sparse furnishings and decorations (wall paintings, curtains)

Even in newer institutions, furniture and furnishings are designed to be resistant to destruction and staining.

Not all aspects of a setting will be significant. However, you should note and question the meaning of everything you observe.

When you are new to a setting, it is difficult to take everything in at once. Develop a picture of the setting over time. On each visit, concentrate on a new aspect. For example, in a school classroom you might focus on notices on a bulletin board on one visit and decorations on the walls on another. Once you have captured the setting, you should be attuned to changes that occur. These changes may reflect changes in how people see themselves or others. Thus, a change in the seating pattern in a teachers' lunchroom may reflect a change in social relationships in a school.

### Descriptions of People

Like settings and activities, people should be carefully described in the notes. People convey important things about themselves and make assumptions about others on the basis of clothing, hair styles, jewelry, accessories, demeanor, and general appearance. Goffman (1959, 1963, 1971) used the phrase *impression management* to describe how people actively try to influence how others think about them through their looks and actions.

You should note those features of people that lend insight into how they view themselves or want to be viewed by others. What kinds of clothing do they wear—casual or formal dress? Do men have long hair and beards or short haircuts? What is the condition of their teeth and what might this tell you about them? How do people walk? What kind of glasses are they wearing? Are people wearing jewelry? These and other features should be described in the field notes.

People, like settings, should be described in specific and nonevaluative terms. Words like *shy*, *flashy*, *aggressive*, and *fancy* are interpretative, not descriptive words. Your own impressions and assumptions about people based on their appearance should be relegated to observer's comments. The following excerpt comes from the field notes of Bogdan's study of door-to-door salespeople:

> The door leading from the corridor opened and a man paused for a moment and tiptoed in. (O.C. He looked surprised when he opened the door, like he didn't expect to see all the people. His tiptoeing seemed to be an attempt not to cause any excess noise. His carriage was one of "I'm imposing.") He was approximately 5′7″ and had a deep brown suntan. (O.C. It looked like he was tan from working outside.) His skin was leathery. His hair was black and combed back. It had a few streaks of gray and he was slightly bald in front. He was maybe 45 years old. He was thin. His clothes were cleaned and pressed and fit him well. A set of keys was hanging from his belt on a key ring in back. He had on dark brown flannel straight-leg trousers with a light tan stretch belt with the buckle worn on his hip. He had on a dark brown plaid sport shirt with a button down collar. He was wearing well-polished loafers and had on black horn-rimmed glasses.

In many settings, especially organizations, dress and appearance differentiate people according to their position and status. Sometimes the signs of status are obvious; for example, some people wear work clothes or uniforms, whereas others wear dresses or coats and ties; hats and nameplates also may indicate a person's status. In other settings, signs that indicate status are subtle and will strike the observer only after a period of time in the field. One researcher noticed that female employees in an organization carried their handbags with them wherever they went. It took the researcher a while to realize that the women held subordinate positions in the organization and were not provided with lockers. At some total institutions, staff members have heavy key rings hanging from their belts.

### Record Dialogue Accessories

People's gestures, nonverbal communications, tone of voice, and speed of speaking—especially pauses—can help the observer to interpret the meaning of their words (DeVault, 1990). These dialogue accessories might be important for understanding interaction and should be included in the field notes. The following excerpts are examples of the kinds of gestures that might be recorded in your notes:

> Joe loosened his tie and said, "..."

***

As Pete spoke, the sound of his voice got louder and louder and he began pointing his finger at Paul. Paul stepped back and his face turned red.

*** 

Bill raised his eyes to the ceiling as Mike walked past. (O.C. I interpret this as a ridiculing gesture.)

You should also try to capture accents and speech patterns when these might be significant; that is, when they tell something important about the person or how others are likely to view her or him.

### Record Your Own Remarks and Actions

Participant observers should record their own behavior in the field. People's words and actions can only be understood if they are examined in the context in which they are said or done. You, as a participant observer, are part of that context. For instance, you will usually find that comments made in response to a question must be interpreted differently than volunteered remarks or that certain remarks are meaningless when viewed apart from the questions that elicited them. Further, recording and reflecting upon your own actions will help you revise your field tactics or develop new ones.

### Record What You Do Not Understand

Participant observers often hear phrases and conversations that they do not fully understand. Since these comments are difficult to recall precisely, some observers omit them from their field notes. However, even the most incomprehensible remarks may become understandable when viewed in light of later conversations or events. In Taylor's institutional study, attendants made frequent reference to "bung hole," which sometimes sounded like "bungle." Although he didn't understand the word, Taylor included these references in the field notes. It was only later that he learned that *bung holing* was an institutional term for anal intercourse.

There are also remarks the observer overhears that seem inappropriate or out of context. Such data should be recorded as is. Do not try to reconstruct what you heard to make it read better.

## BOUNDARIES OF A STUDY

As noted in the last chapter, the research design is flexible in participant observation and other qualitative research (also see M. Q. Patton, 2014). That is,

qualitative researchers usually start modestly; they enter the field, understand a single setting, and then decide upon other settings to study.

Sooner or later, you will have to set some boundaries for your research in terms of the number and types of settings studied. The selection of additional settings or informants will hinge on what you have learned and your own research interests. In Taylor's institutional study, he could have pursued a large number of different lines of investigation, ranging from attendant training programs to other types of organizations. Because he had developed a strong substantive interest in total institutions, however, he proceeded to study attendants and officials at other institutions for people labeled mentally retarded or intellectually disabled, in today's preferred nomenclature.

It is difficult to set limits on a study. There are always more people and places to study. However, many excellent studies have been conducted that were based on a single setting, whether a classroom, a hospital ward, or a street corner. What is important is that, no matter how many settings you study, you develop an understanding of something that was not understood before.

Many observers prefer to take a break from fieldwork after they have spent some time in a setting. Doing this will allow you time to clear your mind, review and analyze your data, set priorities, develop field strategies and tactics, and decide whether to move on to other areas or settings. A respite from the intensive observation the research requires will also give you a second breath and the endurance needed to continue the study. When you take a break from the field, it will usually be helpful to write an analytic memo (see Chapter 6) summarizing what you have learned to date and outlining possible courses of future data collection.

## LEAVING THE FIELD

Participant observers almost never reach a point when they feel that their studies are complete. There is always one more person to interview, one more loose end to tie up, one more hunch to check out, or one more area to pursue. Yet most field researchers arrive at a stage when the long hours spent in the field yield diminishing returns. Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the phrase *theoretical saturation* to refer to the point in field research at which the data become repetitive and no major new insights are gained. This is the time to leave the field.

Field studies last anywhere from a few months to well over a year. In fact, Bogdan's study of door-to-door salespersons lasted only three weeks. However, he observed daily and focused on a narrow aspect of the sales training program. In the institutional study, Taylor made weekly or biweekly visits to a single ward for approximately one year. During the

last two months, he learned relatively few new things about attendants and institutional life, although he was able to round out his understanding of the setting and confirm many hunches and working hypotheses. After completing his research at this institution, Taylor spent the next couple of years focusing on other institutions. DeVault conducted her fieldwork at the zoo intermittently over a number of years, as she worked on other projects. Although not an intentional part of the research design, she noticed and recorded changes in the zoo's architecture and policies over the years. Taylor's study of the Duke family also lasted several years, although the most intensive data collection happened during the first year of the study.

In most instances researchers should spend at least several months in a setting regardless of the frequency of their visits. It is common for field researchers to develop a deeper understanding of a setting and to reject or revise working hypotheses after the first several months. One often stumbles across some insight that ties everything together only after a prolonged period of time in the field. Sometimes it takes quite a while for informants to let down their guard around the observer.

A common way of leaving the field is "easing out" (Junker, 1960) or "drifting off" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); that is, gradually cutting down on the frequency of visits and letting people know that the research is coming to an end. It is a good idea not to cut off contacts with informants too abruptly, although this is easy to do. B. Miller and Humphreys (1980) pointed out that there are sound reasons for concluding the research on good terms with informants and leaving the door open to future contacts. Thus, they have been able to study people over a long period of time, learning about changes in people's lives and their definitions of themselves. On a more human level, Miller and Humphreys were able to assess the impact of the research on informants by sending out copies of publications and maintaining phone and mail contact.

Leaving the field can be a difficult time personally for participant observers (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991; Snow, 1980; Taylor, 1991). It can mean breaking attachments and sometimes even offending those one has studied, leaving them feeling betrayed and used (Maines, Shaffir, & Turowetz, 1980). Perhaps for this reason, many observers end up staying in the field longer than they need to for the purposes of the research (R. H. Wax, 1971).

It is not uncommon for participant observers to maintain contact with informants after they have concluded their studies. When you become intimately involved with people through this kind of research, you can find it difficult, even undesirable, to sever your personal relationships with them. Even though Taylor had finished conducting intensive and frequent observations of the Duke family, he continued to remain in touch with them for years afterward, as much for personal reasons as anything else.

In those relatively rare instances in which informants actually read a book or article based on studies of them, they might develop deep resentments.

After the publication of *Street Corner Society*, for example, W. F. Whyte's key informant, Doc, apparently became estranged from him and eventually cut off all contact. Although Whyte was at a loss to understand why Doc may have felt alienated from him, Richardson (1992) speculated that Doc resented the fact that he did not share in the fame and fortune Whyte achieved by publishing this classic study.

Ellis (1995a) reflected on the emotional and ethical dilemmas encountered when she returned to Fishneck, a small isolated fishing village on which she had published a qualitative study several years earlier. Like many successful participant observers, Ellis came to be accepted by the Fisher Folk to the point where most had forgotten that she had been conducting a study on their community. After her realist ethnographic book on the Fisher Folk had been published (Ellis, 1986), a sociologist with ties to the community made a point of showing members what they interpreted as unflattering accounts of their lives and lifestyles. Ellis described her dismay when confronted by some of the Fisher Folk regarding her description of such intimate details of their lives as their personal hygiene and sexual experiences. Reflecting on the hurt inadvertently caused by her study, Ellis considered how she will conduct research differently in the future by regarding her informants as a potential audience and reading her texts through their eyes. Lareau (2011) also kept in touch with the families she and her team had observed, and she returned after her book was published to discuss the research. Some participants were quite unhappy with how they were portrayed, and Lareau's report on those follow-up visits, in a second edition of the book, offered some cautionary lessons for fieldworkers. Stacey (1988) provided a nuanced discussion of a dilemma she faced in her ethnography of family life in Silicon Valley during the 1980s. She learned that one of her participants was a closeted lesbian and had to balance her desire to provide an accurate portrait with the participant's desire for privacy. She discussed this and other issues with informants before completing a book based on the research (Stacey, 1990).

As in the case of other aspects of participant observation and qualitative research generally, leaving the field is seldom a cut-and-dried process. It involves reflection, negotiation, and sometimes soul searching.

## T R I A N G U L A T I O N

In the literature on participant observation, the term *triangulation* refers to the combination of methods or sources of data in a single study (Berg & Lune, 2011; Denzin, 1978; R. Patton, 1980). Although field notes based on firsthand experience in a setting provide the key data in participant observation, other methods and approaches can and should be used in conjunction with field-work. Triangulation is often thought of as a way of checking out insights

gleaned from different informants or different sources of data. By drawing on other types and sources of data, observers also gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the setting and people being studied.

Practically all participant observers conduct some form of interviews and analyze written documents during or at the conclusion of their field research. Especially toward the end of the research, after the observer has established relationships with people and has gained insider knowledge, open-ended interviews with informants can be relatively focused and specific. Altheide (1980) reported that as he was about to leave the field, he conducted aggressive interviews, probing areas that were too sensitive to explore earlier in the research. Of course, you can also interview new people toward the end of the study to obtain background information relevant to the research or to check out different people's perspectives.

Written documents such as official reports, memos, correspondence, contracts, salary schedules, files, evaluation forms, and diaries provide a potentially important source of data. As emphasized in later chapters, these documents should be examined not as objective data, but rather to lend insight into organizational processes and the perspectives of the people who write and use them as well as to alert the researcher to fruitful lines of inquiry. Since written documents are sometimes regarded as private or sensitive, it is usually wise to wait until you have been in the field for a while before asking to see them.

Researchers also can analyze historical and public documents to gain a broader perspective on a setting. Newspapers, organizational archives, and local historical societies may be valuable repositories of information. In the training program for the hard-core unemployed, Bogdan analyzed these kinds of data in great depth in his research. He not only reviewed materials relevant to the formation of that particular program, but also researched materials on the local and national history of poverty programs. Through a historical perspective, researchers can view a setting in the context of its past and in relation to other settings.

Another form of triangulation is team research: two or more field-workers studying the same or similar settings (see Becker et al., 1961, 1968; Bogdan, Taylor, de Grandpre, & Haynes, 1974; Geer et al., 1966; Strauss et al., 1964; Taylor et al., 1995). In most team research, the basic techniques of participant observation remain the same, with the exception that field tactics and areas of inquiry are developed in collaboration with others.

Douglas (1976) made a convincing case in favor of team research as an alternative to the traditional Lone Ranger approach in fieldwork. As Douglas noted, the research team can develop an in-depth understanding typical of participant observation while grasping the broader picture by studying different settings or different people within the same setting. Team research also permits a high degree of flexibility in research strategies and tactics.

Since researchers differ in social skills and ability to relate to different people, they can play different roles in the field and study different perspectives. For example, in team research, one observer can be aggressive while another is passive within a setting; male and female researchers will be viewed and reacted to differently and hence can pursue different areas of study. In some studies, it is useful to have a multiethnic team.

As in many cooperative endeavors, it is a good idea to establish clear ground rules regarding each person's responsibilities and to be sure people can work together prior to entering into team research. Haas and Shaffir (1980, p. 250) reported how personal pressures and professional competition led to the destruction of a three-member research team: "Differences of opinion about research roles, methods of collecting and analyzing data, and the publication and authorship of findings created strains among the researchers and threatened the veneer of collegiality." Mountz, Miyaras, Wright, and Bailey (2003) provided a frank and instructive discussion of the challenges their team faced, which were related not only to team members' identities and experiences but also to their methodological perspectives.

Team research also raises the danger of a hired-hand relationship between a research director, often a senior professor, and research assistants, usually graduate students, in which field-workers are reduced to the status of data collectors who have no say in research design and analysis and, therefore, little stake in the research (Roth 1966). People treated as hired hands cannot be expected to put all of their time and energy into research. The only way to avoid a hired hand mentality, as Roth so persuasively argues, is for each researcher to be actively involved in the process of formulating the research questions, deciding on field strategies, and making sense of the data.

## ETHICS IN THE FIELD

In the last chapter we discussed Institutional Review Boards for the Protection of Human Subjects and some of the ethical issues raised by covert research. IRBs focus on informed consent, minimizing risks of research, and protections of confidentiality and privacy. Although these are important matters, participant observation can raise ethical issues that cannot be anticipated prior to entering the field. The IRB process can mislead researchers into thinking that they have resolved any ethical issues prior to starting their research and leave them unprepared for the challenges and dilemmas they might face.

As a research method that involves you in people's day-to-day lives, participant observation reveals both the best and the worst of others and very often places you in unresolvable morally and ethically problematic situations.

Getting into a setting usually involves some sort of bargain: assurances that you will not violate informants' privacy or confidentiality, expose them to harm, or interfere in their activities. Once you are in the field, you try to establish rapport with informants, to gain a certain level of trust and openness, and to be accepted as a nonjudgmental and nonthreatening person. So what do you do when informants engage in acts you consider distasteful, illegal, or immoral?

Published field studies are filled with reports of researchers having witnessed a broad range of illegal and, more important, immoral acts. Van Maanen (1982, 1983) observed police brutality firsthand. J. M. Johnson (1975) observed numerous illegal acts committed by caseworkers in his study of social service agencies. Humphreys (1975), whose research has become synonymous with ethical controversy in many commentators' eyes, was accused of being an accomplice to over 200 acts of fellatio, which was a serious charge at the time.

In the institutional study, Taylor (1987a, 1987b) regularly observed acts of beating, brutality, and abuse of residents by attendants. Complicating the situation, how attendants define and account for abuse was a major focus of the study.

The literature on research ethics generally supports a noninterventionist position in fieldwork. Most researchers owe their loyalty to the pursuit of research goals or to their informants. Any involvement that would interfere with their research or their commitments to informants is to be avoided. We know one observer who, while studying a juvenile gang, witnessed the brutal beating of a young girl by a gang member. The researcher admitted that he had difficulty sleeping that night, but argued, "What could I do? I was just an observer. It wasn't my place to intervene."

After observing illegal behavior, Humphreys, J. M. Johnson, and Van Maanen all stated that they would go to jail before they would violate the confidentiality of informants. Van Maanen went so far as to refuse to turn over subpoenaed materials in a case of alleged police brutality on the dubious legal grounds of research confidentiality. Similar claims were made by Brajuha, who faced jail when he refused to turn over his field notes from a study of a restaurant when the notes were subpoenaed during an arson investigation (see Brajuha & Hallowell, 1986). The most candid accounts of dilemmas in field research were written before IRBs became so prominent and influential in research circles. It is unclear whether researchers do not write openly about the dilemmas they face in the field or whether the IRB process discourages researchers from studying settings and situations in which they might face ethical dilemmas.

Yet researchers are not absolved of moral and ethical responsibility for their actions or inactions merely because they are conducting research. To act or fail to act is to make an ethical and political choice.

The field researcher is also faced with the possibility that his or her presence might encourage people to engage in immoral or illegal activities. Van Maanen strongly suspected that police officers were showing off for his benefit when they beat one suspect. In Taylor's institutional study, attendants frequently teased residents or forced them to do certain things such as swallowing burning cigarettes to amuse themselves, new attendants, and the observer. Even when observers do not provoke certain behavior, a strong case can be made that to do nothing, to stand by passively, is to condone behavior and hence perpetuate it.

In some situations, participant observers are not unlike reporters who wittingly or unwittingly create news events through their presence. An incident involving two camera operators created an uproar in television circles. The camera operators passively filmed a man as he covered himself with flammable liquid and set himself on fire, even though they could have stopped him easily. In fact, it was apparent that the man staged the incident for the cameras. In a television interview shortly afterward, one of the camera operators awkwardly attempted to account for his and his colleague's role in the incident: "It's my job to report what happened." Of course, this is the same rationale used by field-workers to justify nonintervention. The pursuit of the good story, like the pursuit of the good study, it is claimed, excuses otherwise amoral or immoral actions.

So we return to the question, What do you do when you observe people engaging in immoral acts? What do you do when your informants, the people on whom you depend for information and with whom you have worked hard to establish rapport, harm other people or commit illegal acts? Many IRBs now address these possibilities, requiring researchers to inform participants that there might be limits to the promise of confidentiality. For example, some consent requirements might include a statement like "The data will be kept confidential, with the exception of certain information we must report for legal or ethical reasons—for example, if we learned of your intention to harm yourself or others." IRBs also require or recommend that if the researcher expects to witness criminal activity (for example, drug use), the consent procedure should make it clear that although the circumstance is unlikely to arise, the researcher could be subpoenaed to turn data over to authorities, since there is currently no legal foundation in the United States for any "researcher privilege." However, researchers can apply to the Department of Health and Human Services for a certificate of confidentiality, which is intended to protect the confidentiality of research data. Although this safeguard is worth taking in studies where criminal activity is the focus of a study or where participants are especially vulnerable, the legal status of certificates of confidentiality is unresolved.

Despite the development of IRB regulations and requirements, there still is no simple or correct answer to the question of how or when a researcher

should take action after witnessing illegal or immoral behavior. Taylor's (1987a, 1987b) institutional study illustrates this quite well. In that study, Taylor could have intervened directly or reported the attendants to their supervisors when residents were mistreated. That he chose not to do so did not reflect any commitment to uphold the research bargain or to protect the interests of informants. Although Taylor suggested to attendants that he could be trusted with information, he did not make any formal guarantees that he would not report abusive acts. Further, although the research and ethics literature often presents informants' interests as unitary, people in the setting, and perhaps in most settings, had competing interests. Thus the administrators, attendants, and residents each had different interests. Whereas it is possible to take the position that a researcher would not have the right to harm attendants by violating their confidentiality, it could also be argued that residents' interests would be harmed by this cloak of secrecy. Rather, the decision not to do anything in the setting at the time reflected Taylor's own uncertainty about how to deal with the situation and his estimation of the effect of intervention. It would not have done much good.

As Taylor spent time in the setting, he learned that attendants used a number of evasion strategies to conceal their activities from supervisors and outsiders. For example, they placed a resident—a so-called watchdog—by the door to warn of the arrival of visitors, and they were careful not to leave marks when they hit or tied residents. If Taylor had attempted to intervene in their actions or had even expressed outward disapproval, the attendants simply would have treated him as an outsider, closing off opportunities for truly understanding the setting.

An event that occurred toward the conclusion of the research also illustrated the futility of reporting abusive attendants to administrators or others. As a result of a parent's complaint, the state police placed an undercover agent at the institution to pose as an attendant and uncover abuse. This resulted in the arrests of 24 attendants on abuse charges. All of the 24 attendants were suspended amid proclamations by the director of the institution that "there are a few rotten apples in every barrel." Yet not one of these was an attendant in the study, although each of these had mistreated residents in some way. Eventually, the 24 attendants were cleared of abuse charges on the basis of insufficient evidence and reinstated in their jobs. Any attempt by Taylor to blow the whistle on attendants would probably have met the same fate.

None of this should be taken as a justification for turning your back on the suffering of fellow human beings. To the contrary, we believe that researchers have a strong moral obligation to act on the basis of what they observe, even though the choices in the specific situation may be severely limited. Over the course of the institutional study, Taylor came to see abuse and dehumanization as being rooted in the nature of total institutions (Goffman, 1961; Taylor,

1977; Taylor & Bogdan, 1980). Attendant abuse was rampant at the institution. However, the attendants were not sadistic or brutal individuals otherwise. They were not so much bad people as they were good people (or at least people as good as most of us) in a bad place. In a real sense they were dehumanized by the institution just as the residents were. Further, although the attendants might be condemned for blatant physical abuse, professionals at the institution sanctioned and prescribed control measures, such as drugging residents into oblivion and placing them in straitjackets, that were equally abusive and dehumanizing. Attendants are often scapegoats for an abusive system. Little would be served by scapegoating them further.

What you learn through your research and what you do with your findings might at least partially absolve you from the moral responsibility for standing by as people are harmed. It is doubtful whether publishing findings in professional journals can justify participating in immoral actions. However, you can use your findings to try to change the circumstances that lead to abuse.

There is a tradition of qualitative researchers engaging in social action as a result of their studies. Becker was an early leader in the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws; Goffman was a founder of the Committee to End Involuntary Institutionalization; Humphreys was active in the gay rights movement; and Stacey entered public debates about family diversity in the public media. Less than two years after completing his initial study, Taylor led a half dozen television and newspaper reporters through the institution in a widely publicized exposé. Subsequently he was involved in exposés in many other states and served as an expert in deinstitutionalization lawsuits because of his knowledge of institutional conditions and abuse.

Not all researchers will find themselves in the difficult moral and ethical situations we describe in this section. We suspect, though, that these situations occur more commonly than reported by researchers. Before you get too involved in a study, too close to informants, and too sympathetic to their perspectives, it is wise to know where you will draw the line.

As Van Maanen (1983) noted, there are no easy stances to be taken by the observer in field situations. Clearly, there are situations in which researchers can and should intervene on behalf of other people. However, people who cannot tolerate some ambiguity probably should not do fieldwork or should at least have the good sense to know when to get out of certain situations.

As researchers, we recognize the fact that to withdraw from all morally problematic situations would prevent us from understanding and, indeed, changing many things in the world in which we live. In Van Maanen's (1983, p. 279) words, "The hope, of course, is that in the end the truth, when it is depicted fully, will help us all out."

Researchers necessarily make ethical and moral decisions when conducting field research. IRBs and codes of ethics might insist on certain protections for subjects, but they cannot make all ethical and moral decisions for researchers (Webster, Lewis, & Brown, 2013). Researchers must balance their often conflicting obligations to subjects, the pursuit of knowledge, their profession, their universities or other institutions, and the public.

The last two chapters dealt with learning about the world firsthand. In the next chapter we turn to a discussion of learning about the world through secondhand accounts: in-depth interviewing.

# In-Depth Interviewing

IN THE LAST CHAPTER we concentrated on participant observation (ethnography or field research in natural settings). In this chapter we deal with in-depth qualitative interviewing, a research approach that is related to participant observation but different in many ways. After a discussion of the types of interviewing and the strengths and limitations of this method, we discuss specific strategies and tactics for qualitative interviewing.

## THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

As Benney and Hughes (1970) pointed out, the interview is the "favored digging tool" of social researchers (see also Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014; Kvale, 1996). Social scientists rely largely on verbal accounts to learn about social life. When most people hear the term *interviewing*, they think of structured research tools such as attitude surveys, opinion polls, and questionnaires. These interviews are typically administered to a large number of subjects (Benney & Hughes, 1970). People might be asked to rate their feelings along a scale, select the most appropriate answer from among forced-choice responses, or respond to a predetermined set of open-ended questions in their own words. Although these research approaches differ in many respects, they all adopt a standardized format: The researcher has the questions, and the research subject has the answers. In fact, in most structured interviewing each person is supposed to be asked identically worded questions to assure comparable findings. The interviewer serves as a cheerful data collector; the role involves getting people to relax enough to answer the predefined series of questions completely.

In stark contrast to structured interviewing, qualitative interviewing is flexible and dynamic. Qualitative interviewing has been referred to as nondirective, unstructured, nonstandardized, and open-ended interviewing. We use the phrase *in-depth interviewing* to refer to this qualitative research method. By in-depth qualitative interviewing, we mean face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward under-standing informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words. As Seidman (2013) noted, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). The in-depth interview is modeled after a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange. Far from being an impersonal data collector, the interviewer, and not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool. The role entails not merely obtaining answers but learning what questions to ask and how to ask them. As a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviewing has much in common with partic-ipant observation. Like observers, interviewers come on slow initially. They try to establish rapport with informants, ask nondirective questions early in the research, and learn what is important to informants before focusing on the research interests.

The primary difference between participant observation and in-depth interviewing lies in the settings and situations in which the research takes place. Whereas participant observers conduct their studies in natural field situations, interviewers conduct theirs in situations specifically arranged for the purposes of the research. This being said, most qualitative interviews

take place in the subject's physical world. The participant observer gains firsthand knowledge of what people say and do in their everyday lives. The interviewer relies extensively on verbal accounts of how people act and what they feel.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEW STUDIES

Three closely related types of qualitative interview studies can be distinguished. The first is the life history or sociological autobiography. In the life history, the researcher attempts to capture the salient experiences in a person's life and that person's definitions of those experiences. The life history presents people's views on their lives in their own words, much the same as a common autobiography. E. W. Burgess (in Shaw, 1930/1966) explained the importance of life histories: "In the life history is revealed as in no other way the inner life of the person, his moral struggles, his successes and failures in securing his destiny in a world too often at variance with his hopes and ideals" (p. 4).

Becker (1966) noted that life histories provide a touchstone by which to evaluate theories of social life. What distinguishes the life history from popular autobiographies is that the researcher actively solicits the person's experiences and views in repeated interviews and constructs the life history as a final product. Becker (1966) described the role of the researcher in sociological life histories:

> The sociologist who gathers a life history takes steps to ensure that it covers everything we want to know, that no important fact or event is slighted, that what purports to be factual squares with available evidence and that the subject's interpretations are honestly given. The sociologist keeps the subject oriented to the questions sociology is interested in, asks him about events that require amplification, tries to make the story told jibe with matters of official record and with material furnished by others familiar with the person, event, or place being described. He keeps the game honest for us. (p. vi)

The life history has a long tradition in the social sciences and figured prominently in the work of the Chicago school in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s (Shaw, 1930/1966, 1931/1976; Shaw et al., 1938; Sutherland, 1937; see also Angell, 1936, 1945; Frazier, 1978). The tradition has been revived in recent years, in part due to renewed interest in narrative. Life histories have provided an important approach in some feminist anthropological and sociological research (Behar, 1993; Romero, 2011). Much of the discussion in this chapter is based on the life histories of a transgender person (Bogdan, 1974) and two persons labeled mentally retarded at the time interviews were conducted (Bogdan & Taylor 1976, 1994).

The second type of in-depth interviewing is directed toward learning about events and activities that cannot be observed directly. In this type of interviewing, the people being interviewed are informants in the truest sense of the word. They act as observers—eyes and ears in the field—for the researcher. The role of such informants is not simply to reveal their own views, but to describe what happened and how others viewed it. Examples of this kind of interviewing include Erikson's (1976) study of a town's reaction to a natural disaster in West Virginia and Domhoff's (1975) study of power elites. Erikson's research could not have been conducted unless he happened to stumble across a natural disaster—an unlikely occurrence—whereas Domhoff probably would not have been able to gain access to intimate places frequented by the powerful.

The final type of qualitative interviewing is intended to yield a picture of a range of settings, situations, or people. Interviewing is used to study a relatively large number of people in a relatively short period of time compared to what would be required in participant observation research. For instance, several in-depth interviews with 20 teachers could probably be conducted in the same amount of time it would take to conduct a participant observation study of a single classroom. L. B. Rubin's (1976) study of working-class families, based on 100 detailed interviews with husbands and wives, and DeVault's (1991) study of mealtime routines in 30 families are good examples of this type of interviewing.

Although researchers select in-depth interviewing for different purposes, the basic interviewing techniques are similar for these different types of studies. In each case, interviewers try to establish rapport with informants and to develop a detailed understanding of their experiences and perspectives. This chapter describes approaches and strategies for in-depth interviewing as defined here. However, many of the points in the following pages can be applied to any interviewing approach.

## CHOOSING TO INTERVIEW

Every research approach has its strong points and drawbacks. We tend to agree with Becker and Geer (1957) that participant observation provides a yardstick against which to measure data collected through any other method. That is, no other method can provide the depth of understanding that comes from directly observing people and listening to what they have to say at the scene. Yet participant observation is not practical or even possible in all cases. The observer can hardly go back in time to study past events or force entry into all settings and private situations. The studies conducted by Erikson (1976) and Domhoff (1975) mentioned earlier illustrate this point. Further, participant observation requires a commitment of time and effort that is not

always warranted by the additional understanding gained as opposed to other methods. Bogdan and Taylor's life histories of people labeled mentally retarded provide a ready example. Although we might take the position that the best way to construct life histories is to follow people around for a lifetime, it would be foolish to suggest this as an alternative to in-depth interviewing. Thus no method is equally suited for all purposes. The choice of research method should be determined by the research interests, the circumstances of the setting or people to be studied, and practical constraints faced by the researcher. In-depth interviewing seems especially well suited in the following situations.

### The Research Interests Are Relatively Well Defined

Although research interests are necessarily broad and open-ended in qualitative research, the clarity and specificity of researchers' interests vary. For instance, one researcher might be generally interested in schools and teachers, whereas another might be interested in how teachers got into the profession. Interviewing is well suited for studies in which researchers have a relatively clear sense of their interests and the kinds of questions they wish to pursue. In the previously cited example, interviewing would be appropriate for studying how teachers entered the profession but less well suited for pursuing a general and unspecified interest in teachers and schools. Your prior direct experiences and reading of other qualitative studies can help you define your research interests.

### Settings and People Are Not Otherwise Accessible

As noted previously, in-depth interviewing is called for when a researcher wishes to study past events or cannot gain access to a particular type of setting or people. Interviewing can be used to reconstruct past events that cannot be observed by the researcher.

### The Researcher Has Time Constraints

Participant observers sometimes spin their wheels for weeks—even months—at the beginning of the research. It takes time to locate settings, negotiate access, arrange visits, and get to know informants. Although interviewers can face similar problems, studies based on interviewing usually can be completed in a shorter period of time than those based on participant observation. Whereas the participant observer's time can be taken up with waiting for someone to say or do something, the interviewer usually collects data throughout the period spent with informants. The pressure to produce

results in grant-funded studies or to write dissertations can severely limit the length of time the researcher can devote to a study. Interviewing makes the most efficient use of the researcher's limited time. Needless to say, this is not a justification for superficial or shoddy research.

## The Researcher Is Interested in Understanding a Broad Range of People or Settings

In qualitative research, an *N* of 1 can be just as illuminating as a large sample (and very often more so). However, there are instances in which the researcher may want to sacrifice the depth of understanding that comes with focusing intensively on a single setting or person for the breadth that comes with studying a range of places and people.

Interviewing multiple informants lends itself to building general theories about the nature of social phenomena. Analytic induction is one method of constructing theories from qualitative data that requires a sizable number of cases (Robinson, 1951; R. H. Turner, 1953). Through analytic induction, Lindesmith (1968) developed a theory of opiate addiction based on interviews with a large number of opiate users.

It is also important to point out the limitations of interviewing. First, people say and do different things in different situations. Since the interview is a particular kind of situation, you cannot assume that what a person says during an interview is what that person believes or will say or do in other situations. Deutscher (1973) and colleagues (Deutscher et al., 1993) dealt head-on with the difference between people's words and deeds. They were especially critical of attitude and public opinion research in which it is assumed that people have fixed attitudes that determine what they will do in any given situation.

Deutscher et al. (1993) cited a study by Richard LaPiere (1934) to illustrate the difference between what people say and what they do. In the early 1930s LaPiere accompanied a Chinese couple to hotels, auto camps, tourist homes, and restaurants across the United States. Out of 251 establishments, only one refused to accommodate the couple. Six months later, LaPiere sent a questionnaire to each of the establishments asking them if they would accept members of the Chinese race (sic) as guests. Of 128 establishments that replied, only one indicated that it would accept Chinese people! As Deutscher and his colleagues explained, the artificiality of the questionnaire and tightly controlled interview produces unreal responses.

Second, if researchers do not directly observe people in their everyday lives, they will be deprived of the context necessary to understand many of the perspectives in which they are interested. In their comparison of participant observation and interviewing, Becker and Geer (1957) listed a number of shortcomings of interviews that relate to this general point: Interviewers are

likely to misunderstand informants' language since they do not have opportunities to study it in common usage; informants are unwilling or unable to articulate many important things, and only by observing these people in their daily lives can researchers learn about these things; interviewers have to make assumptions about things that could have been observed, and some of the assumptions will be incorrect.

Despite these limitations, few if any researchers would argue for abandoning interviewing as a basic approach for studying social life. Indeed, Mishler (1986), Riessman (2008), and other narrative researchers emphasize that people make sense of themselves and their worlds by telling stories about their experiences. Although one cannot take people's stories at face value, one can learn a great deal about how people experience their worlds by analyzing how they talk about their lives and what they might be doing with words in the interview (Austin, 1975).

Becker and Geer (1957, p. 32) stated that interviewers can benefit from an awareness of the limitations of interviewing and "perhaps improve their batting average by taking account of them." It is precisely because of these limitations that we emphasize the importance of in-depth interviewing, getting to know people well enough to understand what they mean, and creating an atmosphere in which they are likely to talk freely. In addition, we always recommend that researchers spend time with the people they interview in their everyday settings as they go about their day-to-day lives.

## SELECTING INFORMANTS

Like participant observation, qualitative interviewing calls for a flexible research design. Neither the number nor the type of informants needs to be specified beforehand—though these will need to be estimated if a proposal is required. The researcher starts out with a general idea of which people to interview and how to find them, but is willing to change course after the initial interviews.

Those new to qualitative research usually want to know exactly how many people they need to interview to complete a study. This is a difficult question to answer prior to conducting some research. As Kvale (1996) pointed out:

> To the common question, "How many interview subjects do I need?" the answer is simply, "Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know." (p. 101)

The size of the sample in an interviewing study is something that should be determined toward the end of the research and not at the beginning. In general, however, you will find that there is an inverse relationship between the number of informants and the depth to which you interview

each. The greater the number of interviews with each informant, the fewer informants you will need to have enough data to write a research article, dissertation, or monograph.

The strategy of theoretical sampling can be used as a guide for selecting people to interview (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In theoretical sampling, the actual number of cases studied is relatively unimportant. What is important is the potential of each case to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied. After completing interviews with several informants, you consciously vary the type of people interviewed until you have uncovered a broad range of perspectives held by the people in whom you are interested. You would have an idea that you had reached this point when interviews with additional people yield no genuinely new insights.

Although qualitative researchers generally cannot determine the sample size prior to conducting a study, people preparing proposals for dissertations or grants are usually expected to specify the number of informants or settings they intend to study. IRBs might also require this. You should be prepared to indicate your sample size in proposals, adding that this might change as you start collecting and analyzing data.

Informants can be found in a number of ways. As discussed in the chapter on pre-fieldwork, one of the easiest ways to build a pool of informants is snowballing—getting to know some informants and having them introduce you to others. A potential drawback of the snowball technique is that it can limit the diversity of your informants (Cannon, Higginbotham, & Leung, 1988). Therefore you need to be prepared to use a range of different approaches to identifying people. You can locate potential informants through the same sources the participant observer uses to gain access to private settings: checking with friends, relatives, and personal contacts; involving yourself with the community of people you want to study; approaching organizations and agencies; advertising in media sources; and announcements through the Internet. In the study of families of young children with which Taylor was involved, the researchers used a range of techniques to locate the families, including checking birth records; contacting day care centers, neighborhood centers, preschools, churches, and social clubs; distributing handouts at local stores; and, in some neighborhoods, conducting a door-to-door survey (the researchers had identification cards that indicated their affiliation with a university research project). Many researchers now use email and social media to recruit informants. These are convenient modes of communication that are used widely, although some potential informants might not respond to these kinds of contacts.

Life histories are written on the basis of in-depth interviews with one person or a few people. Although all people have one good story to tell—their own—some people have better stories and make better research partners

for the purpose of constructing a life history. Obviously, it is essential that a person have the time to devote to the interviewing. Another important consideration is people's willingness and ability to talk about experiences and articulate feelings. People simply do not have equal ability to provide detailed accounts of what they have been through and what they feel about it. Spradley (1979) also argued that strangers make better informants than friends, relatives, clients, and others with whom one has a prior relationship, although this might not always be the case.

In constructing life histories, the researcher looks for a particular type of person who has had certain experiences. For example, life histories have been written on the experiences of juvenile delinquents (Shaw, 1930/1966, 1931/1976; Shaw et al., 1938), a professional fence (Klockars, 1974, 1977), a transgender person (Bogdan, 1974), a professional thief (Sutherland, 1937), White and Black women working in the southern United States textile industry (Byerly, 1986), a street peddler in a small Mexican village (Behar, 1993), the daughter of a domestic worker who grew up in the home of her mother's employers (Romero, 2011), and persons labeled mentally retarded (Bogdan & Taylor, 1976, 1994). Although you might be interested in studying a certain type of person, keep in mind that people's past experiences may not have had an impact on their lives and current perspectives. What is important to you may not be important to a potential informant. Many youth engage in activities that someone could define as juvenile delinquency. Yet, for most youth, participation in these activities has little to do with how they view themselves. Spradley (1979) suggested that one of the requirements for good informants is thorough enculturation; that is, knowing a culture (or subculture, group, or organization) so well that they no longer think about it.

There are no easy steps to take to find a good informant for a life history. In this kind of research, informants are seldom found; rather, they emerge in the course of one's everyday activities. You just happen to stumble across someone who has an important story to tell and wants to tell it. Of course, the more involved you are in different social circles, the more likely you are to establish the contacts and reputation necessary to find a good informant.

Bogdan and Taylor met Ed Murphy and Pattie Burt (pseudonyms for the subjects of life histories of people labeled mentally retarded) through our involvement with local community groups and human services organizations. Ed was recommended to Bogdan as a guest speaker for a course he was teaching. Ed was articulate in his presentation of his experience of living at an institution and being labeled *mentally retarded* (this was Ed's label; the preferred terminology today is *intellectually disabled*, although this is a social construction as much as *mentally retarded*). In fact, the word *retarded* lost meaning as he spoke. Bogdan kept in touch with Ed after his talk at the course, running into him at a local association. About two years after Bogdan first met him, he approached Ed with the idea of working on his life history.

Taylor met Pattie when she was living at a local institution. When she told him that she wanted desperately to leave the institution, he helped her get out. Taylor introduced her to Bogdan, and she lived with his family for a brief period of time. Taylor and Bogdan saw Pattie frequently over the next 15 months, when she was living in a series of different homes. We began interviewing her shortly after she moved to her own apartment in a nearby town.

Bogdan's life history of Jane Fry, a transgender person, came about in a similar manner. Bogdan met her when she spoke to a class taught by a colleague. Her presentation of life as a transgender person was striking in the insight it provided and the vividness of her description of her experiences. Sometime after that, Bogdan ran into Jane again at a local crisis intervention center where she was volunteering. Through that meeting and several other encounters, he got to know her well enough to ask her about writing her life history.

For interview studies involving a larger group of informants, researchers must determine how important it will be to recruit a diverse group of people to interview and how to seek particular kinds of diversity. In comparative studies, it might be important to recruit different groups of informants. For example, Cannon et al. (1988) set out to compare the work experiences of highly educated women from different racial or ethnic groups and worked to make sure that they had adequate numbers of informants representing each group in which they were interested. In DeVault's (1991) study of household food routines, she wanted to recruit a diverse group of participants and did that by initiating contacts with potential interviewees in different urban neighborhoods. She did not set out to make any particular comparison, but she noticed strong patterns related to the social class locations of the people she interviewed and developed an analysis of class differences in the organization of food routines.

## APPROACHING INFORMANTS

In most in-depth interviewing, you will not know how many interviews to conduct with informants until you actually begin speaking with them. Some people will warm up only gradually; others will have a lot to say and you will want to spend quite a few sessions with them. Life histories usually take anywhere from several sessions to over 25 sessions—and 50 to 100 hours of interviewing. Other kinds of interview studies may involve close analysis of conversations with just a few participants (McCoy, 1995) or of many more interviews (Hays, 1996), especially if there is a team of interviewers.

Since you cannot always tell beforehand exactly how many interviews you will want to conduct, it is advisable to come on slow with informants initially. You might tell them that you would like to set up an interview or two with

them and later discuss your plans more directly. However, your IRB might require that you spell out details of your plans in order to gain the informants' consent to be interviewed. When that is the case, you can still have preliminary discussions with potential informants before beginning the interviews. You might want to indicate to the IRB that you intend to conduct one or multiple interviews in order to maintain some flexibility. Another option would be to propose to your IRB that you prepare two sets of consent forms, one for the initial interviews with each person and one for people with whom you would like to conduct multiple interviews.

Bogdan and Taylor met with Ed Murphy and Jane Fry several times before they raised the possibility of writing their life histories. Interestingly enough, both had thought about writing their autobiographies previously (many people have probably thought about this at some point in their lives). Jane Fry had even attempted to write her life history several years earlier, only to abandon the project after writing a few pages. Ed and Jane were both enthusiastic about the project by the end of Bogdan and Taylor's first serious discussions with them.

It is usually not too difficult to line up people for initial or one-time interviews, as long as they can fit you into their schedules. Most people are willing to talk about themselves. In fact, people are often honored by the prospect of being interviewed for a research project. In the family study, many parents felt honored that they were selected to participate in a university study of child rearing. Of course, it can be very flattering to be asked to tell your life story or to share your views and experiences. When approaching potential informants, Bogdan and Taylor told them that it seemed they had had some interesting experiences or had something important to say and that they wanted sit down with the individuals and talk about their lives some time. If they seemed receptive to the idea, Bogdan and Taylor scheduled the first meeting.

If, after a couple of sessions, you decide that you will want to interview an individual for a number of sessions over time, you should try to clarify any issues that might be on the individual's mind and any possible misunderstandings. Life histories, in particular, are a collaborative endeavor. The tone you want to establish is that of a partnership rather than a researcher–subject relationship (Klockars, 1977). The following issues are those that are most easily misunderstood and hence the most important to raise.

### Your Motives and Intentions

Many people will wonder what you hope to get out of the project. They might even fear that the final product will be used to their disadvantage. If you are a social scientist, your motivation will probably have something to do with contributing knowledge to your field and professional advancement.

You can discuss these things with informants. Although people might not grasp your precise research interests, most will be able to understand educational and academic goals.

You probably will not be clear on whether and where the results of your study will be published. However, you should explain that you will try to have the study published in a book or journal or, in the case of students, as a dissertation or thesis. In very few instances are studies of this kind published commercially. This should be explained also. Finally, although you would not be willing to spend your time on the project unless you thought that something would come of it, you should alert informants to potential difficulties in having the study published.

## Anonymity

It is usually wise to use pseudonyms for people and places in written studies. There are few legitimate research interests served by publishing people's names. The risks are substantial: embarrassment of the informant or others, legal problems, self-aggrandizement, and concealment of important details and information. Although people might want to have their names published for a variety of reasons, you should resist doing so and explain this to them. In Jane Fry's life history, she wanted very much to see her name in print, and Bogdan initially agreed to this. However, as the interviewing progressed, it soon became apparent that this would create numerous problems and both parties agreed to the use of pseudonyms. Of course, if people insist upon having their own names used, this is their decision, since the life histories are about their lives.

## Final Say

One way to gain informants' trust is to tell them that they will have the opportunity to read and comment on drafts of any books or articles prior to publication. Some researchers even guarantee veto power to informants over what is published. Although we are reluctant to give informants final say over the content of written materials, it strengthens the researcher's relationships with informants and the quality of the study to have informants review draft manuscripts.

## Money

Money can corrupt the relationship between the interviewer and informant, turning it into an employer–employee relationship rather than a research partnership. It also raises the specter of encouraging the informant to

fabricate a good story to get some money. Yet many large-scale research projects pay informants for interviews. The family study paid parents nominal fees for participating in interviews. This clearly served as an inducement for some parents to stay involved in the study when they wanted to drop out. However, if people have to be paid to be interviewed, it is questionable whether they will talk candidly about anything of real importance in their lives.

Splitting book royalties with informants is a different matter than paying them for interviews and might be appropriate for life histories. This creates a spirit of partnership in the research endeavor. Since informants usually do not have their names appear in print or receive professional credit, it is reasonable to give them a share of the proceeds from a book, although most academic books do not earn sizable royalties.

Bogdan worked out Jane Fry's royalties for *Being Different* with a lawyer. Like many subjects of life histories, she was poor at the time and received public assistance. To make sure that the royalty payments did not affect her benefits, the lawyer helped set up a special trust fund for her.

### Logistics

Finally, you will have to settle on a rough schedule and a place to meet. The frequency and length of the interviews will depend on your respective schedules. You will usually need at least an hour for an interview. Anything less is too short to explore many topics. In order to preserve the flow of conversations in a life history project, you should try to meet at frequent intervals. It is too difficult to pick up where you left off when you are not interviewing regularly. The length of the overall project will depend on how freely the interviewee speaks and what you hope to cover. Life histories usually take at least a few months to complete. Klockars's (1974) life history of a professional fence took 15 months of weekly or biweekly meetings (Klockars, 1977). You should try to find a private place where you can talk without interruption and where the informant will feel relaxed. Many people feel most comfortable in their own homes and offices. However, in many people's homes it is difficult to talk privately. In the large-scale family study, some parents tried to listen in surreptitiously on their spouses' interviews, an obvious inhibiting factor. DeVault also conducted interviews on food routines in people's homes, for the most part, and doing so meant that she got a sense of the family's circumstances. In Bogdan and Taylor's research with Ed Murphy, they conducted the interviews in their private offices, located in a converted house, after working hours. They interviewed Pattie Burt at her own apartment. Bogdan interviewed Jane Fry in his own office. Nothing prevents the researcher from setting up interviews in a public restaurant or bar as long as privacy is assured, although noise in these settings might interfere with recording.

## UNDERSTANDING THE INTERVIEW
## IN CONTEXT

The interview is a form of social interaction. It involves a face-to-face encounter between two—and sometimes more—persons, each of whom is sizing up the other and constructing the meanings of the other's words, expressions, and gestures. An understanding of the interview as a form of social interaction can help you to be a better interviewer and to make sense out of the data you collect.

In social interaction, we all attempt to manage the impressions others have of us (Goffman, 1967) and we say different things depending upon the person with whom we are speaking. What informants say to interviewers will depend on how they view the interviewers and how they think the interviewers view them.

Interviews are subject to the same fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations, and distortions that characterize other conversations between persons. Benney and Hughes (1956, p. 137) wrote: "Every conversation has its own balance of revelation and concealment of thoughts and intentions."

Even when informants have come to accept and trust interviewers, what they say cannot be taken at face value as indicative of deeply held beliefs and feelings. In social interaction, meanings are not simply communicated, but constructed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) pointed out that, in conventional research, subjects are viewed as "passive vessels of answers." In this view, information and attitudes exist inside of people's heads and can be elicited by asking the right questions in the right way. As Holstein and Gubrium argued, however, knowledge and social meanings are constructed during the interview process. The interviewer participates in the construction of meaning. Paget (1983) referred to the in-depth interview as a "search procedure," where the interviewer and informant work together to reveal aspects of the informant's experience that are of interest to the researcher. Although she emphasized the particular and subjective aspects of in-depth interviewing, she also argued that close analysis of how the conversation unfolds can yield a science of subjective experience.

By virtue of being interviewed, people develop new insights and understandings of their experiences. They may not have thought about or reflected on events in which the interviewer is interested, and even if they have, they interpret things a bit differently each time. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) noted that knowledge is always "knowledge-in-the making." From this perspective, informants are not merely reporters of experience, but narrators. They may tell their stories a bit differently each time and may construct the meanings of events and experiences a bit differently.

Much of human experience cannot be put easily into words (DeVault, 1990). By asking questions and probing for meanings, interviewers encourage

people to articulate things that they have not articulated before. As in other forms of social interaction, interviewers sometimes have to fill in the meanings that people are not able to express themselves. DeVault (1990) wrote:

> My procedure ... involves noticing ambiguity and problems of expression in interview data, then drawing on my own experience in an investigation aimed at filling in what has been incompletely said. The point is not simply to reproduce my own perspective in my analysis; the clues I garner from this kind of introspection are only a beginning and should lead me back to hear respondents in new ways. (p. 104)

The analysis of interviews involves close attention not only to content, but also to gesture, tone, and other aspects of speech that provide clues to the significance of what is said.

## MANAGING THE INTERVIEW SITUATION

The interviewer strives to create an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable talking openly about themselves. In what kinds of situations are people most likely to express their views? In structured interviewing, the interviewer is instructed to act as a disinterested figure; the interview situation is designed to resemble laboratory conditions. Yet, as Deutscher (1973, p. 150) noted, people seldom express their true feelings and views under these circumstances: "Real expressions of attitude or overt behavior rarely occur under conditions of sterility which are deliberately structured for the interview situation."

In qualitative interviewing, the researcher attempts to construct a situation that resembles those in which people naturally talk to each other about important things. The interview is relaxed and conversational, since this is how people normally interact. The interviewer relates to informants on a personal level. Indeed, the relationship that develops over time between the interviewer and informant—whether during a single interview or over the longer span of a life history project—is the key to collecting data.

Certainly, there are differences between the interview situation and those in which people normally interact: interviewers usually hold back from expressing some of their own views; the conversation is understood to be private and confidential; the flow of information is largely, though not exclusively, one-sided; and interviewers communicate a genuine interest in people's views and experiences and usually refrain from disagreeing with them. However, it is by designing the interview along the lines of everyday conversation that the interviewer can learn about what is important to people. In fact, the interviewer has many parallels in everyday life: the good listener, the shoulder to cry on, the confidante.

Like participant observation, in-depth interviewing requires an ability to relate to others on their own terms. There is no simple formula for successful interviewing, but the following points set the tone for the atmosphere the interviewer should try to create.

## Be Nonjudgmental

As informants begin to share more experiences and feelings with the interviewer, they let down their public fronts and reveal parts of themselves they ordinarily might keep hidden. It is common for people to preface or conclude revelations with disclaimers and comments such as "You must think I'm crazy for doing that," and "I can't justify what I did, but . . . ."

An important part of interviewing is being nonjudgmental. Benney and Hughes (1956, p. 140) wrote, "The interview is an understanding between two parties that, in return for allowing the interviewer to direct their communication, the informant is assured that he will not meet with denial, contradiction, competition, or other harassment." In other words, if you want people to open up about their feelings and views, you have to refrain from making negative judgments about them or putting them down.

The best way to avoid the appearance of judging people is to try to accept them for who and what they are and to keep from judging them in your own mind. When you simply cannot do this, you can state your position, but gently.

During the interview, you should go out of your way to reassure people that they are all right in your eyes after they have revealed something personal, embarrassing, or discrediting. Communicate your understanding and empathy: "I know what you mean," "That happened to me once," "I've thought of doing that myself," and "I have a friend who did the same thing." Of course, if people make negative judgments about things they have done in the past, it is appropriate to agree with them, but without condemning their moral character or who they are as persons.

## Let People Talk

In-depth interviewing sometimes requires a great deal of patience. Informants can talk at length about things in which you have no great interest. Especially during initial interviews, you should try to force yourself not to interrupt an informant even though you are not interested in a topic.

You can usually get a person back on track through subtle gestures, such as refraining from nodding your head or taking notes (R. Patton, 1980), and by gently changing the subject during breaks in the conversation: "I'd like to go back to something you said the other day." Over time, informants usually

learn to read your gestures and know enough about your interests to talk about some things and not others.

When people start talking about something important, let the conversation flow. Sympathetic gestures and relevant questions can keep them on a subject.

## Pay Attention

It is easy to let your mind drift during extended interviews. This is especially true when you tape-record sessions and do not have to concentrate on remembering every word. Paying attention means communicating a sincere interest in what informants are saying and knowing when and how to probe and ask the right questions. As Cottle (1973b) so clearly expressed it, paying attention also means being open to seeing things in a new and different way:

> If there is a rule about this form of research it might be reduced to something as simple as pay attention. Pay attention to what the person does and says and feels; pay attention to what is evoked by these conversations and perceptions, particularly when one's mind wanders so very far away; and finally, pay attention to the responses of those who might, through one's work, hear these people. Paying attention implies an openness, not any special or metaphysical kind of openness, but merely a watch on oneself, a self-consciousness, a belief that everything one takes in from the outside and experiences within one's own interior is worthy of consideration and essential for understanding and honoring those whom one encounters. (p. 351)

Weiss (1994) suggested that the interviewer can make a couple of mistakes, such as interrupting the informant or revealing a moment of inattention, and still reestablish a good working relationship with the informant. However, more than a few such mistakes can cause the informant to shut down.

## Be Sensitive

Interviewers always have to be attuned to how their words and gestures affect informants. They sometimes have to play dumb—exhibiting what Kvale (1996, p. 21) referred to as "deliberate naivete"—without being insulting. They must be sympathetic, but not patronizing. They have to know when to probe, but stay away from open wounds. They have to be friendly, but not ingratiating. Being sensitive is an attitude researchers must bring to interviewing and, for that matter, to participant observation. Robert Coles (1971) got to the heart of the matter when he wrote:

> Somehow we all must learn to know one another .... Certainly I ought to say that I myself have been gently and on occasion firmly or sternly reminded how

absurd some of my questions have been, how misleading or smug were the assumptions they convey. The fact is that again and again I have seen a poor, a lowly, an illiterate migrant worker wince a little at something I have said or done, smile a little nervously, glare and pout, wonder a little in his eyes about me and my purposes, and through his grimace let me know the disapproval he surely has felt; and yes, the criticism he also feels, the sober thought-out criticism, perhaps not easily put into words. (p. 29)

## GETTING PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM

The hallmark of in-depth qualitative interviewing is learning how people construct their realities—how they view, define, and experience the world. Presumably, researchers have some general questions to ask prior to starting the interviews. Yet they have to be careful not to push their own agendas too early in the interviewing. By asking structured or forced-choice questions initially, the researcher creates a mind-set in informants about the right or wrong things to say that can make it difficult if not impossible to get at how they really see things.

It is during the early moments of interviewing that the researcher sets the tone of the relationship with the informant. In these initial interviews, the interviewer should come across as someone who is not quite sure which questions will be most relevant to informants' experiences and who is willing to learn from the informants. Coles (1971) eloquently described this frame of reference when he wrote:

> My job...is to bring alive to the extent I possibly can a number of lives... entrusted to a person like me, an outsider, a stranger, a listener, an observer, a doctor, a curious...fellow who one mountaineer described as "always coming back and not seeming to know exactly what he wants to hear or know." (p. 39)

The qualitative interviewer has to find ways of getting people to start to talk about their perspectives and experiences without overly structuring the conversation and defining what the interviewee should say. Kvale (1996, p. 34) explained, "The interviewer leads the subject toward certain themes, but not to certain opinions about these themes."

Unlike the participant observer, the interviewer cannot stand back and wait for people to do something before asking questions. Therefore, you will need to find ways to get the conversation started in the beginning. There are different ways to guide initial interviews: descriptive questioning, solicited narratives, the log-interview approach, the go-along, and personal documents.

## Descriptive Questioning

Probably the best way to start off interviewing informants is by asking open-ended, descriptive questions. Descriptive questions allow people to tell you about things that are important to them and the meanings that they attach to these things. In practically any interviewing, you can come up with a list of descriptive questions that will enable people to talk about topics in which you are interested without structuring exactly what the responses should be. Spradley (1979; see also McCracken, 1988) referred to these as "grand-tour" questions. In most interviews, researchers are interested in what people do, and questions are designed to elicit accounts of those activities.

The following are examples of good descriptive questions:

- "Everyone has a life story. I wonder if you can tell me a bit about your life?" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 60)
- "Can you tell me about...?" (Kvale, 1996, p. 133)
- "If you were to write your autobiography, what would the chapters be?"
- "I'm interested in how people become involved with...Could you tell me about the first time you thought about being a...?"
- "Could you tell about a typical day in your life?"
- "I'd like to know about people who are important to you. Could you start by listing people in your life?"
- "I'd like to know about your job. Would you tell me about the kinds of things you do in your work?"
- "It's been a long time since I was in elementary school. Could you tell me about things you do in school every day?"

In Bogdan and Taylor's life histories with people labeled retarded, they started the interviewing by asking the informants to give them chronologies of the major events in their lives. Pattie Burt listed such events as her birth, her placement in various foster homes, her institutionalization, and renting her own apartments. Ed Murphy listed the deaths of his father, mother, and sister, as well as the places where he lived.

In the interviews with Ed Murphy, Bogdan and Taylor frequently started sessions by having him list events and experiences (sometimes this took an entire session). Since Ed's institutionalization had had a profound effect on his life, Bogdan and Taylor pursued this experience in great depth. For instance, they asked him to outline such things as the wards where he lived at the institution, a typical day on different wards, his friends at the institution, and his work assignments.

DeVault's study of feeding the family was meant to develop an analysis of the work women did to care for family members by constructing and maintaining food routines. She asked people to describe their daily routines

in some detail. Since most interviewees, like others, took their work for granted, she had to ask probing questions to signal the level of detail she wanted. For example, if an interviewee began with a general statement such as "First we have breakfast...," she might have interrupted (gently), to ask for clarification, "So, who gets up first?" She found that as the interviews proceeded, it was easy for people to give very complex accounts of their routines, and they seemed to enjoy doing so. She was also able to elicit accounts of ongoing planning by asking, "What will you do for tonight's meal?" Many informants would reply by referring to a half-formed plan for the day and thinking out loud about how they might fill in the specifics. Weiss (1994) suggested that it is often useful to ask the interviewee, "Can you walk me through that experience?"

As informants mention specific experiences, you can probe for greater detail. It is also a good idea to take note of topics to revisit at a later time.

### Solicited Narratives

Many of the classic life histories in the social sciences have been based on a combination of in-depth interviews and narratives written by informants themselves. Shaw (1930/1966, 1931/1976), Shaw et al. (1938), and Sutherland (1937) made extensive use of this approach in their life histories of delinquents and criminals.

Shaw and colleagues used various techniques to construct life histories of delinquents in the 1930s. Shaw (1930/1966) reported that although the group relied heavily on personal interviews, written documents were preferred as a basis for these life histories. In *The Jack-Roller*, Shaw (1930/1966) first interviewed Stanley, the subject of the life history, to prepare a detailed chronology of his delinquent acts and experiences. Shaw then returned this chronology to Stanley to use as a guide for writing his own story. Shaw (1930/1966, p. 23) wrote that Stanley was instructed "to give a detailed description of each event, the situation in which it occurred, and his personal reactions to the experience." In other life histories, such as *Brothers in Crime* (Shaw et al., 1938), the only instruction Shaw and his collaborators gave their informants was that they were to give a detailed description of their experiences during childhood and adolescence.

Sutherland was somewhat more directive in soliciting the life history *The Professional Thief* (1937). Although he did not describe his approach in detail, he indicated that the bulk of the life history was written by the thief on questions and topics suggested by the researcher. Sutherland then met with the thief for approximately 7 hours a week for 12 weeks to discuss what the thief had written. The final life history included the thief's original narrative, the interview material, minor passages written by Sutherland for editorial reasons, and footnotes based on a broad range of sources including interviews with other thieves and detectives.

In the research that led to *Being Different*, Bogdan asked Jane Fry to write a detailed chronology of her life prior to starting the interviews. He used this chronology as a basis for his interviewing with her. Toward the end of the interviewing, he and Jane went over the chronology point by point to pick up any forgotten items.

Not all people are able or willing to write about their experiences. However, even sketchy outlines and chronologies can be used to guide open-ended, in-depth interviews.

## The Log-Interview Approach

In the log-interview approach, informants keep a running record of their activities for a specified period of time and this is used to provide a basis for in-depth interviews. Zimmerman and Wieder (1977), who referred to this as the "diary-interview method," described specific procedures associated with this approach.

In a study of counterculture lifestyles, Zimmerman and Wieder asked informants to maintain an annotated chronological log of their activities. Informants were instructed to record activities in as much detail as they could, to make entries at least daily, and to address a standard set of questions regarding each activity: Who? What? When? Where? How? Since Zimmerman and Wieder were interested in sexual activities and drug use, they instructed informants to describe these activities specifically.

Zimmerman and Wieder had two researchers review each diary and prepare a set of questions and probes to ask informants based on the narrative. They reported that for every 5 to 10 pages of diary entries, the researchers generated 100 questions that involved 5 hours of interviewing.

Like solicited narratives, the log-interview approach is ill suited for informants who are not adept at recording their activities in writing. As Zimmerman and Wieder pointed out, daily telephone interviews and tape recording can be used as substitutes for having informants maintain written logs.

## The Go-Along

Kusenbach (2003) recommended an approach that she called a "go-along"— similar to a shadowing technique—which she viewed as combining the advantages of participant observation and interviewing. The researcher makes an appointment (as in other interviewing) to accompany the informant on some errand or outing, with the idea that the researcher will interview the individual along the way. Kusenbach developed the technique in a study of neighboring and found that talking with people outside their homes gave her insights that might not have emerged in more conventional interviews.

## Personal and Organizational Documents

Personal and official documents—people's own diaries, letters, pictures, records, calendars, government records and correspondence, case reports, and memorabilia—can be used to guide interviews without imposing a structure on informants. Most people store old documents and records and are willing to show at least some of these to others. If you have at least a general idea of what experiences you want to cover in the interviews, you can ask informants to see documents relating to these experiences before starting the interviews. Later in the interviewing, these materials can spark memories and help people recall old feelings.

Jane Fry kept old letters and other documents and had actually written autobiographical narratives at critical points in her life. She shared those freely with Bogdan. Not only did these documents provide a framework for interviewing, they were eventually incorporated into her life history.

In Taylor's study of the Duke family, he informally interviewed Winnie, the mother, about people and events portrayed in a tattered family photo album she kept. This provided an opportunity to learn about other family members as well as about memorable events in the Duke family's life. Winnie also gave Taylor copies of all letters and forms she received from government agencies.

Institutional ethnographers are often concerned with the organizational documents that structure work processes (databases, case reports, planning documents, and so on), and researchers using this method have developed particular approaches to interviewing that focus on how people activate these texts, use them in their work, and transfer them to others (DeVault & McCoy, 2012; D. E. Smith & Turner, 2014).

In some interviewing research, the interviewer has a good sense of what is on informants' minds prior to starting the interviews. For example, some researchers turn to interviewing after conducting participant observation; some also use their own experiences to guide their research. Becker's (1963) study of jazz musicians stemmed from his own experience in a band. In some of our research we had spent a considerable amount of time with some of our informants before we started to interview them formally. Bogdan had heard Ed Murphy talk about his life in institutions before the idea of writing his life history ever occurred. When researchers have direct experience to build on, they can be somewhat more directive in their initial questioning.

## THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

In multiple-informant studies, most researchers use an interview guide to make sure key topics are explored with a number of informants (Hennink et al., 2011; Kvale, 1996). The interview guide is not a structured schedule or protocol. Rather, it is a list of general areas to be covered with each informant.

In the interview situation the researcher decides how to phrase questions and when to ask them. The interview guide serves solely to remind the interviewer to ask about certain things.

The use of an interview guide presupposes a certain degree of knowledge about the people one intends to study. Thus an interview guide is useful when the researcher has already learned something about informants through fieldwork or preliminary interviews or other direct experience. The interview guide also can be expanded or revised as the researcher conducts additional interviews. As the researcher begins to identify themes in interview data, questions are added to the interview guide so that these areas can be covered with new informants.

An interview guide is especially useful in team research and evaluation or other funded research (R. Patton, 1980). In team research, the guide provides a way of ensuring that all the interviewers are exploring the same general areas with informants. We have used interview guides in research projects that involved short-term, intensive field visits to a number of sites by a half dozen researchers (see Bogdan & Taylor, 1990; Taylor, 1982). In funded research and qualitative evaluation, the interview guide can be used to give sponsors a sense of what the researcher will actually cover with informants. In addition, IRBs will usually want to have an indication of the types of questions you will ask. See Appendix 2 for an aid to developing questions, produced by Peter Ibarra.

Whether or not you use a formal interview guide, it is always a good idea to try to come up with a set of open-ended, descriptive questions prior to an interview. We think of these as conversation starters. Some people might not be able to relate to your initial questions ("Tell me about your life.") or may respond with terse or yes-and-no answers. If you have a set of questions in your mind, you can explore different ways of getting people to talk.

## PROBING

One of the keys to successful interviewing is knowing when and how to probe. The general strategy of qualitative interviewing can be described as follows: ask open-ended, descriptive questions about general topics; wait for people to talk about meaningful experiences in their lives or what is important from their points of view; probe for details and specific descriptions of their experiences and perspectives. Throughout the interviewing, the researcher follows up on topics that have been raised by asking specific questions, encourages the informant to provide details, and constantly presses for clarification of the informant's words.

Although the tone of qualitative interviewing is conversational, probing distinguishes this kind of interviewing from most everyday conversations. In normal conversation, people tend to fill in the gaps in meaning in the

other person's words. Most people share commonsense understandings and taken-for-granted meanings and assume that they know what lies behind the other person's words. As an interviewer, of course, you use this stock of cultural knowledge to conduct the interview and to make sense out of what a person says. However, to be a good interviewer you must sometimes set aside what you think you know. What the other person means may be very different from what you think he or she means. Just as important, because meanings may be taken for granted, you may not be aware of them yourself. By asking the other person to explain what is meant, you try to make explicit what both of you may know but may take for granted and are ordinarily unable to articulate.

Even seemingly objective words can have different cultural meanings. Deutscher (1973) explained:

> When an American truck driver complains to the waitress at the diner about his "warm" beer and "cold" soup, the "warm" liquid may have a temperature of 50°F, while the "cold" one is 75 degrees.... The standard for the same objects may well vary from culture to culture, from nation to nation, from region to region and, for that matter, within any given social unit—between classes, age groups, sexes, or what have you; what is "cold" soup for an adult may be too "hot" to give a child. (p. 191)

Qualitative interviewers have to force themselves to constantly ask informants to clarify and elaborate on what they have said, even at the risk of appearing naive. Spradley (1979) commented that the interviewer has to teach the informants to be good informants by continually encouraging them to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences. It is the detail in people's accounts that allows the researcher to develop insight into their activities and experiences.

During the interview, you should continue to probe for detailed examples and clarification until you are sure of what exactly the informant means. Rephrase what the person said and ask for confirmation; ask the person to provide examples of what he or she means; and tell the person when something is not clear to you. You should also follow up on your informant's remarks until you have a clear picture in your own mind of the people, places, experiences, and feelings in her or his life. Ask specific questions: for example,

- What did the place look like?
- How did you feel then?
- What did you say?
- What were you doing at the time?
- Who else was there?
- What happened after that?
- What were you thinking?

The skillful interviewer comes up with questions that will help jar a person's memory. Many past events lay hidden deep within a person's memory and remote from daily life. Try to think up questions that will bring back some of these memories: for example,

- How does your family describe you at that time?
- Do your parents ever tell stories about how you were when you were growing up?
- What kinds of stories do you tell when you get together with your brothers and sisters?

Just as the participant observer can become more aggressive in the later stages of the research, the interviewer's questioning can become more directive as she or he learns about informants and their perspectives. It is not uncommon to find that informants are unwilling or unable to talk about certain things that are obviously important to them. In Bogdan and Taylor's interviewing with Ed Murphy, for example, he was reluctant to talk in personal terms about being labeled mentally retarded, as he was defined by an institution. Instead, he talked about how the label unfairly stigmatized other people. In order to get Ed to speak about the experience of being labeled retarded, the researchers came up with questions that allowed him to maintain an identity as a normal person: "You're obviously a bright guy, so why do you think you wound up at an institution?" "A lot of kids have problems learning; how did you do in school?" There were also times during the interviewing with Ed Murphy when they confronted him with his tendency to avoid certain topics. They tried to impress upon him the importance of talking about these experiences. When he was reluctant to talk about his family, they told him something like the following: "I think it's important to know about your family life. A lot of families don't know how to deal with disabled children. I think you should try to talk about your feelings and experiences." Although Ed continued to be uncomfortable with some topics, he eventually talked about many of those he had avoided.

Like the participant observer, the interviewer also can use what Douglas (1976) called the phased-assertion tactic and other aggressive questioning techniques. The phased-assertion tactic involves acting as if you are already in the know about something in order to gain more information. Douglas's reasoning was that if the interviewer already knows something about a topic, people will think that it cannot hurt anything to provide more details. Brinkmann and Kvale (2014, p. 363) described the "confrontational interview" approach as a way of obtaining information by challenging and confronting interviewees.

Learning how to probe successfully in qualitative interviewing takes practice at being an active listener and recognizing potentially important themes

when they are mentioned. It is not uncommon for novice interviewers to skip from topic to topic and fail to probe for details on and clarification of an informant's comments. As you become more comfortable conducting interviews, it will become easier to relax and take the time to think before moving on to a new topic. Indeed, sometimes, it is useful to pause and give your interviewee time to think. Silence will sometimes elicit more useful material than a question that the researcher has in mind. Especially if you are new to qualitative interviewing, it is a good idea to have initial interviews transcribed as soon as possible after they are conducted. Review these carefully not only for potential themes but also to assess your own skill at probing. An experienced interviewer can also be helpful in pointing out comments that you should have probed in more depth. Even experienced interviewers often miss such opportunities, but you will become more skilled with practice.

## CROSS-CHECKS

Although qualitative interviewers try to develop an open and honest relationship with informants, they have to be alert to exaggerations and distortions in their informants' stories. As Douglas (1976) pointed out, people hide important facts about themselves in everyday life. Anyone may "lie a bit, cheat a bit," to use Deutscher's (1973, p. 132) words. Further, all people are prone to exaggerating their successes and denying or downplaying their failures.

As emphasized throughout this book, the issue of truth in qualitative research is a complicated one. What the qualitative researcher is interested in is not truth per se, but rather perspectives and personal narratives. Thus, the interviewer tries to elicit a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually view themselves and their experiences. Shaw (1930/1966) explained this quite well in his introduction to *The Jack-Roller:*

> It should be pointed out, also, that the validity and value of the personal document are not dependent upon its objectivity or veracity. It is not expected that the delinquent will necessarily describe his life-situations objectively. On the contrary, it is desired that his story will reflect his own personal attitudes and interpretations. Thus, rationalizations, fabrications, prejudices, exaggerations are quite as valuable as objective descriptions, provided, of course, that these reactions be properly identified and classified. (pp. 2–3)

After writing these words, Shaw quoted W. I. Thomas's (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572) famous dictum, "If men[1] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." In contrast to participant observers, interviewers lack the firsthand knowledge of how people act in their day-to-day lives. This can make it difficult to sort out the difference between purposeful distortions and

gross exaggerations, on the one hand, and genuine perspectives (which are necessarily subjective and biased), on the other.

If you know a person well enough, you can often tell when he or she is evading a subject or putting you on. In in-depth interviewing, you spend enough time with people to read between the lines of their remarks and probe for sufficient details to know whether a story is being consciously fabricated. In his discussion of Shaw's *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career*, Ernest Burgess (in Shaw 1931/1976) argued that the validity of a life history depends on the manner in which it was obtained:

> The validity of the statement of attitudes in the life-history seems, in my judg-ment, to be closely dependent upon the following conditions: (a) a document reported in the words of the person; i.e., a written autobiography or a verbatim record of an oral narrative; (b) a document representing a free, spontaneous, and detailed expression of past experiences, present aspirations, and future plans; (c) a document secured in a favorable situation where the tendencies to deception or prejudice are absent or at a minimum. (p. 240)

The researcher also has the responsibility for imposing cross-checks on the informants' stories. You should examine an informant's statements for consistency between different factual accounts of the same event or experience (Klockars, 1977). In the research with Jane Fry, for example, Bogdan checked Jane's story for inconsistencies. Jane frequently skipped from one topic to another. Since she covered the same events several times over the course of the interviews, Bogdan could compare different versions given at different times. You also should draw on as many different sources of data as possible to check out informants' statements. In the early work of the Chicago school, the researchers regularly compared informants' stories with official records maintained by police and social work agencies. Sutherland (1937) submitted the life history of a professional thief to other professional thieves and detectives to get their views on the veracity of the story. In Bogdan and Taylor's life histories of Ed Murphy and Pattie Burt, they had conducted extensive participant observation at the institutions at which they had lived. In constructing Jane Fry's life history, Bogdan interviewed others who had been through similar experiences. For instance, he questioned a former Navy officer on the accuracy of Jane's account of life in the Navy. In his conclusion to Jane Fry's life story, Bogdan juxtaposed Jane's accounts of experiences with psychiatric records, although his pur-pose was not to check out her story but to compare competing ideologies of being transgender.

Probably the best way to deal with contradictions and internal inconsis-tencies is to raise the issue directly. Gently confront the person with what you believe: "Maybe you could explain something for me. One time you told me this, but what you said another time doesn't go along with that.

I don't understand." Suspected lies and deceptions often turn out to be misunderstandings.

It is also important to point out that inconsistencies in a person's story are not necessarily a source of concern. As Merton and Kendall (1946) noted, people sometimes hold logically contradictory views. Further, because people are in a constant process of constructing their stock of social knowledge and the meaning of their experiences, they can be expected to say, and believe, different things at different times and in different situations (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Postmodern researchers might argue that the stories people tell are of interest, whether or not they are factually accurate. Narrative researchers are often interested in the various ways that people tell stories and they might investigate the layers of meaning that can be seen through inconsistencies and contradictions in interviews (Riessman, 2008).

## RELATIONS WITH INFORMANTS

The interviewer–informant relationship is largely one-sided. Through the relationship, the interviewer has the opportunity to conduct a study and thereby to gain the status and rewards that come with receiving a degree or publishing books or articles. It is unclear what, if anything, informants stand to gain from the relationship, other than the satisfaction that someone thinks their lives and views are important. Although informants have few tangible rewards to gain, they are asked to devote considerable time and energy to the endeavor.

Due to the one-sided nature of the relationship, interviewers often (but not always, since some people welcome an interviewer's undivided attention to their lives, experiences, or perspectives) have to work hard at maintaining informants' motivation in the interviewing. The best way to do this is to relate to informants as people and not merely sources of data.

Since informants are expected to share private and sometimes intimate aspects of themselves during interviews, there has to be some exchange in terms of what researchers say about themselves. It is probably unwise for interviewers to hold back their feelings completely. Obviously, the interviewer should not express an opinion on every subject that comes up, especially during initial interviews. Somewhere between total disclosure and total detachment lies the happy medium that the interviewer should try to meet. The best advice is to be discreet in the interview but to talk about yourself in other situations. Researchers have to decide how they will relate to informants as fellow human beings. Our own view is that we should be willing to relate to informants in terms other than interviewer–informant. Interviewers can serve as errand runners, drivers, babysitters, advocates, and—whether or not they intend to—Rogerian therapists (if you are an

effective interviewer, you are bound to elicit painful memories and feelings, and you have to be prepared to deal with these). In their life history interviewing, Bogdan and Taylor occasionally had lunch or dinner with their informants. This contact strengthened their relationships with the informants, in addition to enabling them to talk with the informants informally and learn about their everyday lives. In the cases of Jane Fry, a transgender person, and Ed Murphy, a man who had been labeled mentally retarded with minor physical disabilities, Bogdan and Taylor learned a lot by just observing how people reacted to them and how they reacted in turn.

In many interviewing projects, the informant is one of society's underdogs (Becker, 1967), powerless by virtue of his or her economic or social status. Researchers, in contrast, are likely to be secure in their status at universities. For this reason, researchers are in a good position to help informants lobby for their rights. When Jane Fry was discriminated against by a community college, Bogdan found a lawyer for her and put her in touch with a mental health rights group.

As with any relationship, tensions can arise between you and your informants. It is not uncommon for rapport to wane during extended projects (J. M. Johnson, 1975). Informants can get tired of answering questions or begin to see the interviewing as an imposition on their lives. You can begin to get impatient when informants are reluctant to address questions or skirt certain topics. Either of you can become bored with the endeavor.

You should try to be sensitive to your informants' low spots and feelings. When you think something is wrong, try to clear the air by expressing your concerns. Sometimes it is a good idea to take a break from the interviewing altogether.

A common problem in large studies is canceled or missed appointments. In the large-scale family study with which Taylor was involved, a sizable number of parents canceled interviews at the last minute or failed to be at home at the agreed-upon time. The research team came up with a set of tactics to prevent cancellations, including phone calls on the day preceding the interviews, appointment cards, buying calendars for some families, arriving an hour early on the scheduled day, and leaving notes expressing bewilderment when families were not home. When parents repeatedly missed appointments, they were asked directly whether they wanted to continue in the study. Although these tactics reduced the number of cancellations, it became obvious that some parents simply did not want to participate in the study but, for whatever reason, were reluctant to say so. There was disagreement within the research team over what to do about these families, with some members arguing that they should be left alone if they did not want to participate and others advocating continued attempts to obtain the data. As it turned out, the study dropped many of these families from the research when continued attempts to schedule appointments failed.

## RECORDING INTERVIEWS

In the chapter on participant observation, we advised researchers to rely on their memories to record data, at least until they had developed a feel for the setting. Recording devices can make people self-conscious.

Although tape-recording or videotaping can alter what people say in the early stages of the research, interviewers can usually get by with taping interviews. In interviewing, informants are acutely aware that the interviewer's agenda is to conduct research. Since the interviewees already know that their words are being weighed, they are less likely to be alarmed by the presence of a recording device. The interviewer often also has an extended period of time in which to get informants to relax and become accustomed to the recorder. In participant observation, researchers interact with a number of people, some of whom never get to know, let alone trust, the observer.

A recording device allows the interviewer to capture more than he or she could by relying on memory. The interviewer's data consist largely, although not exclusively, of words. Unlike participant observers, interviewers cannot sit back for a while and observe during lapses in conversations. It is possible that many of the most important life histories in the social sciences would never have been written without the use of recording devices. Oscar Lewis (1963, p. xii) wrote in his introduction to *The Children of Sanchez*, "The tape recorder, used in taking down the life histories in this book, has made possible the beginning of a new kind of literature of social realism."

Lewis's remarks should not make us lose sight of the fact that most people's memories are better than they suspect. Although we have used recorders in most of our interviewing, we have relied on our memories to record the substance of brief 1-hour interviews. Some researchers, such as Thomas Cottle (1972), regularly conducted interviews without tape recorders.

In her study of dietitians and nutrition educators, DeVault (1995a, 1995b, and Chapter 10, this volume) encountered one immigrant nutrition aide who did not want to be recorded. DeVault took handwritten notes during that interview and then reconstructed the talk as best she could. Later she asked the person to review the transcript, and the woman commented, with some surprise, that the transcript had captured her language and tone quite well. (As with many informants, she may not have expected that the research notes would be so detailed.) Of course, those notes were certainly less accurate in their specifics than the transcripts of recorded interviews, but they were "good enough" (Luttrell, 2000).

Obviously, you should not record interviews if it makes informants ill at ease (Klockars, 1977). Even if informants do not mind the fact that the interviews are being taped, try to minimize the recorder's presence. For example, place it in an inconspicuous place or out of sight. The device should be unobtrusive and sensitive enough to pick up voices without the informants having to speak directly into it.

A few final words of caution: Make sure your equipment is functioning properly before each interview and note the day and time of the interview. In one of our studies, the interviewer forgot to check out the recorder before conducting some of the interviews. When he listened to the tapes later, they were barely audible. His transcriber would not even try to transcribe them, and he ended up spending many hours playing and replaying them to pick up all of the data. In the same vein, you should check your recording immediately after the interview. If the device has failed and you need to prepare notes from memory, it is best to do that as soon as possible.

## GROUP INTERVIEWS

One method that has become increasingly popular in the social sciences and applied research in recent years is group interviewing or focus groups. In this approach, interviewers bring together groups of people to talk about their perspectives and experiences in open-ended discussions. As with in-depth interviewing, the researcher uses a nondirective approach. In group interviewing, as opposed to one-to-one interviewing, the researcher must act as a group facilitator and moderator, managing interactions between members of the group—for example, keeping people from interrupting or arguing with each other, dealing with overly talkative people who would monopolize the conversation, encouraging shy people to contribute, and so on.

Two geographers, Roundtree and Gordon, employed the group interview approach to study how people define geographic space, specifically forests. Initially, Roundtree and Gordon intended to conduct observations in the field: that is, in wooded areas. This plan contained its drawbacks. Since most people go to forests to get away from other people and things, it might be difficult for the researchers to find people willing to be studied. Roundtree and Gordon were also interested in the definitions of people who might never have been in forests. What the researchers decided to do instead of field interviews was to assemble groups of people, show them a set of 10 slides of forest areas, and encourage them to talk about what they had seen. The research was directed toward understanding how different people view and use forest areas.

Cottle (1973a) used free-flowing group discussions in urban areas to examine how young people define their world. Cottle described the approach on which his paper, "The Ghetto Scientists," was based:

> It is difficult to say how many of us were speaking that afternoon in the little park near the hospital. So much was going on, like a colossal basketball game and boys darting after girls, or a pretend fight, that our population kept shifting. Still, there were always four or five young people about ten years old, who joined me on the grass alongside the basketball court and the conversation tumbled along so that we all could follow it and the newcomers could be cued in easily. The girls and boys were speaking about school, their studies, teachers,

parents, and brothers and sisters, although there was an unusual side trip into politics. In times like these I wish I could be totally free to say anything to young people, young black people, in this case. It is not that I am thinking anything particular about them as much as holding back ideas that for one reason or another I feel should remain hidden. Maybe it has to do with the laziness of the day or the fact that none of the young people seem especially eager to latch onto some topic. Maybe it is the way some of us do research; entering poor areas of cities and just speaking with people, letting conversations run on without interpretation or analysis. Maybe too, some of us have a strong desire to know what these people think of us and the work we do.

A more formal approach to group interviews, known as focus groups (Hennink, 2014; Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988), has become especially popular in applied and evaluation research. In marketing and political opinion research, for example, the focus group has become almost as commonplace as large-scale public opinion polls. In contrast to polls, focus groups are designed to explore how and why people make the decisions they do.

Focus groups are designed to use group dynamics to yield insights that might not be accessible without the kind of interaction found in a group (Morgan, 1988, p. 12). As H. J. Rubin and Rubin (1995) wrote:

> In focus groups, the goal is to let people trigger one another, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from the group discussion. (p. 140)

Just as one-to-one interviews must be understood as a form of social interaction, group interviews must be interpreted in terms of group dynamics. Most people cannot be expected to say the same things in a group that they might say to an interviewer in private. Group discussions can also lead to a superficial consensus in which some members defer to those who are most outspoken.

Hennink (2014, pp. 1–2) offered practical advice for conducting focus groups: focus groups should consist of five to 10 people and typically consist of six to eight; sessions usually last between 60 and 90 minutes; participants have similar backgrounds or experiences; and discussions are focused on a single topic or limited number of issues. They also noted that the purpose of focus groups is not for participants to reach consensus on an issue, but to reveal the range of their perspectives.

## THE INTERVIEWER'S JOURNAL

It is a good idea to maintain a detailed journal during your interviewing (Yin, 2011). The interviewer's journal can serve several purposes. In a life

history or multi-interview project, the journal should contain an outline of topics discussed in each interview. This will help you to keep track of what has already been covered in the interviewing and to go back to specific conversations when you want to follow up on something that the informant has said. In Bogdan and Taylor's interviewing with Ed Murphy, they neglected to do this and wasted quite a bit of time listening to tapes and reading transcripts looking for specific things. In single-interview projects, such notes can help you to remember the striking themes or moments in each interview.

The journal takes the place of observer's comments recorded in participant observation field notes. Like the observer, you should make note of emerging themes, interpretations, hunches, and striking gestures and nonverbal expressions essential to understanding the meaning of a person's words. Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 78) recommended that the interviewer act as "an 'ethnographer of the interview,' who records for future analysis not only what is said but the related interactional details of how the interview was accomplished."

The following are examples of the kinds of comments that should be included in the journal:

- "By the faces she was making, I think she was being sarcastic when she talked about her mother. She didn't seem to want to say anything really negative about her mother though."
- "That's the third time she's raised that topic on her own. It must be important to her. I'll have to look into this in the future."
- "I really hit a sensitive nerve when I asked him about why his wife left him. He stiffened right up and made it quite clear that he didn't want to go into this. I don't really trust the story he told me about this."
- "Somehow we were both bored tonight. We just wanted to get the interview over with. Maybe this was because of the topic or maybe we were both tired today."
- "I think I was a bit too aggressive tonight. I wonder if he just said those things to keep me off his back. I'll have to keep this in mind when I go over the conversation."

Notes like this will assist in guiding future interviews and interpreting data at a later time.

Finally, the journal is a good place to keep a record of conversations with informants outside of the interview situation. Ed Murphy often talked at length about important things in his life during breaks in the interviewing and informal contacts with the researchers. Such data are clearly important and should be analyzed along with those collected during the interview.

You should try to force yourself to write journal entries after each contact with informants as well as at other times when you think of something

important to record. Every once in a while, look through your journal to get a sense of what you have covered and what you have learned.

In the past several chapters we have presented the strategies and tactics of the predominant qualitative research methods—participant observation and in-depth interviewing. In the next chapter we present examples of other ways in which qualitative research can be conducted. We shift our focus in the next chapter from a how-to approach to a descriptive one. Our goal is to encourage creativity and innovation in research.

## NOTE

1.  Yet another sic here. If women define situations as real, the same thing applies. To add insult to injury, R. S. Smith (1995) pointed out that the Thomas theorem, or dictum, quoted here was originally published in a book written by both W. I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas. Yet, classic sociology textbooks attributed this famous quote almost exclusively to W. I. Thomas. According to Smith, this error reflected a professional ideology that systematically ignored the contributions of women to sociology.

# Montage: Discovering Methods

In 1966 a team of social scientists published a book entitled *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences*, with which they hoped to "broaden the social scientist's current narrow range of utilized methodologies and to encourage creative and opportunistic exploitation of unique measurement possibilities" (Webb et al., 1966, p. 1).[1] The team went on to write: "Today, the dominant mass of social science research is based upon interviews and questionnaires. We lament this overdependence upon a single, fallible method" (Webb et al., 1966, p. 1).

Although the authors of *Unobtrusive Measures* aligned themselves with quantitative research methods and a positivist worldview, their plea for creativity and innovation should be heeded by qualitative researchers as well. We must guard against the overdependence cited by these researchers; that is, we must be careful not to be boxed in by a limited repertoire of research approaches.

There is considerable interest now in the promise of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in "mixed methods" research (Creswell, 2014), though we believe that few researchers have been able to achieve a true synthesis of the two paradigms. Although it may seem obvious that a study would be improved by combining different kinds of data, with their distinctive advantages and limitations, that simple view neglects the daunting challenges of such an approach. Designing and conducting a high-quality study is a demanding task, and a researcher who sets out to do both quantitative and qualitative research is, in effect, undertaking two studies rather than just one. With that caution in mind, we provide a brief discussion of mixed methods approaches.

R. B. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) cited Webb et al. (1966) and a previous article by Campbell and Fiske (1959) as formalizing the practice of multiple research methods, which they call mixed methods research or mixed research. According to Johnson et al., mixed methods research represents the third major research paradigm, after qualitative and quantitative research. Based on email communications with mixed methods researchers, they identified 19 definitions of this approach and provided a general definition:

> Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (R. B. Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123)

The fact that mixed methods practitioners offered so many different definitions of their approach suggests one key point: It is essential that mixed methods researchers consider how they will combine methods, with an awareness of the foundational assumptions behind the methods they use.

As Frechtling and Sharp (1997) and Lund (2012) noted, mixed methods research is especially popular among evaluation researchers. Large-scale funded research projects are most likely to have the resources to bring together staff with the expertise in each approach and to pay them for the time required to plan and execute fruitful syntheses. Even so, the question of how different methods should be combined remains. In some large-scale quantitative studies of policy issues, open-ended interviews might be conducted primarily to provide illustrative vignettes. This approach strikes us as a rather superficial way of using interview material and an expensive one, given the time and labor required for qualitative interviewing. Usually, such vignettes simply reinforce the points derived from quantitative findings, rather than offering up new and unexpected insights.

London, Schwartz, and Scott (2007) offered thoughtful commentary on the potential for integrating quantitative and qualitative data, based on their work in a large, multi-city evaluation of the United States welfare reforms introduced in the early 1990s. The project, which was coordinated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, involved longitudinal survey and ethnographic data collection with women living in poverty. Eventually those data were combined with experimental studies of different types of welfare-to-work programs that were part of the reforms.

Many of the results from these studies were published as single-method analyses, either qualitative or quantitative. In addition, London et al. (2007) identified several ways that the data were or could be used in combination. First, those conducting ethnographic interviews heard many accounts of serious material hardship, including food insecurity and domestic violence. They made a strong case that survey self-reporting was producing underestimations of these difficulties. Polit, London, and Martinez (2000) pointed out that when survey data classified a woman's household as "food secure," that label might obscure the enormous efforts she was making to provide for her family.

Polit et al. and London et al. also combined qualitative material with experimental evidence for triangulation and to produce more nuanced interpretations of experimental results. For example, several experimental studies were designed to explore the effects of work compared with income supplementation. Qualitative material could be used to confirm some of the results, but the interviews also provided details about the effects of mothers' employment on young children and the stresses that were associated with working and raising children. The mothers' narrative accounts helped to identify the kinds of work and income interventions that most often seemed to benefit their families.

In our view, it is critical that mixed methods projects include qualitative methods experts who are committed to an inductive approach. Qualitative research is time and labor intensive, and its distinctive benefits are realized only when researchers adopt a holistic view of participants' lives and activities in context, allowing participants' own perspectives to take center stage. Integrating that kind of in-depth ethnographic study is quite challenging; however, we do believe that qualitative research has much to contribute to ongoing policy debates and can certainly strengthen policy and evaluation studies.

We do not devote further attention to mixed methods research in this book. Mixed methods researchers can use it to design and implement the qualitative components of their research. Sage publishes the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, which researchers who are interested in this approach might find useful.

We have concentrated thus far in this book on two qualitative research approaches: participant observation and in-depth interviewing, popular tools among social researchers. Moreover, we have adopted a how-to-do-it approach in describing these methods. There is a danger in what we have done. We may have given the impression that subjective under-standing and inductive analysis can only be pursued through tried-and-true methods.

With this thought in mind, we shift our focus in this chapter to a discussion of studies based on innovative or unconventional methods. What is to be learned from these studies is that social scientists must educate themselves on ways to study the social world. We use the term *educate* as opposed to *train* because there is an important difference between the two. As Irwin Deutscher (1973) noted, one can only be trained in something that already exists. To be educated is to learn to create anew. We must constantly create new methods and approaches. We must take to heart the words written by C. Wright Mills (1959) in his conclusion to *The Sociological Imagination*:

> Be a good craftsman [sic]: Avoid a rigid set of procedures. Above all seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual crafts-man, and try to become a craftsman yourself. Let every man be his [sic] own methodologist. (p. 224)

These methods are not necessarily to be copied, but rather emulated. They do not determine the range of possibilities; only our thoughts do. The studies that follow exemplify the notion of researcher-as-innovator. Some have weaknesses; we mention them because of their strengths.

We explored ethical issues in previous chapters and do not discuss the ethical implications of the following approaches. Some of the methods we describe might have difficulty obtaining Institutional Review Board approval today. However, we believe it is useful to know what researchers have done in the past, in part as a way of evaluating changes in the research ethics regime. Some of the studies we discuss provide interesting cases for reflection on ethical issues.

## DISRUPTING THE "COMMONSENSE WORLD OF EVERYDAY LIFE": HAROLD GARFINKEL

One hundred thirty-five people wander into stores and attempt to bargain over the prices of such common items as cigarettes and magazines. Others go out and find unsuspecting partners to play tic-tac-toe: When it is their turn, they casually erase their opponent's mark and move it to another square

before they make their own. One person engages another in conversation and nonchalantly brings his or her face so close to the other's that their noses are almost touching. After all of these activities, the tricksters go home to write detailed notes on their encounters. All of these are strategies described by Harold Garfinkel (1967) in his influential *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Garfinkel seemed to ask himself, "What can be done to make trouble?" By producing confusion, anxiety, bewilderment, and disorganized interaction, he attempted to discover what was otherwise hidden: taken-for-granted rules of social interaction. Garfinkel experimented with other strategies to accomplish this goal.

In one exercise, people were asked to write on one side of a sheet of paper actual conversations they had with a friend or relative. On the other side they wrote what they understood the other person to have meant by each sentence. The relationships between the actual conversations and understood meanings were then examined for what they reveal about what is taken for granted, underlying assumptions, and shared meanings.

In a more provocative exercise, people were told to engage others in conversation and to insist that the others clarify the meanings of commonplace remarks. One person asked one of the experimenters, "How are you?" To this, the experimenter replied, "How am I in regard to what? My health, my finances, my schoolwork, my peace of mind, my...?" The partner, red faced and out of control, shot back, "Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how you are."

Another tactic used by Garfinkel was to ask people to look at an ordinary and familiar scene in their own lives from a stranger's perspective. Thus, undergraduate students were instructed to go to their families' homes and to act like boarders. Through this exercise, people became aware of things they never notice in their everyday lives, such as table manners, greetings, and other subtle conventions. In a slightly different experiment, the emphasis was placed on the reactions of others to students behaving like boarders in their own homes.

Garfinkel created a series of strategies that allowed him to explore those areas of social interaction in which he was interested. He used his experimenters to uncover what was seen but usually unnoticed—the commonsense world of everyday life.

Many of Garfinkel's experiments were designed to teach students about principles of ethnomethodology and did not represent research per se. Activities that are not designed to contribute to knowledge do not meet the definition of research requiring IRB approval. Although an actual study based on Garfinkel's experiments might have difficulty obtaining IRB approval, IRBs generally approve psychological experiments involving deception of subjects on the grounds that deception is necessary to accomplish the goals of

the research. The same could be said about some of Garfinkel's experiments. In research involving deception, IRBs almost always require a debriefing of subjects, explaining why and how they were deceived, afterward.


## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It was probably only a matter of time before qualitative researchers concerned with subjective understanding and the social construction of reality turned this focus inward. In the 1970s, the qualitative literature began to be characterized by first-person accounts of personal dilemmas confronted in the field. J. M. Johnson's *Doing Field Research* (1975) departed from the conventional research methods text by focusing on the writer's own feelings and personal trials in conducting field research. Later, Van Maanen (1982) reported on his personal experiences conducting field research among police on the beat; Taylor (1987a) described the ethical dilemmas involved in the study of institutional attendants; Ellis (1995a) wrote about her emotional and ethical quandaries at causing pain and anger among informants who happened to read her study of life in a fishing village. Edited books (Fenstermaker & Jones, 2011; Garey, Hertz, & Nelson, 2014; Hertz & Imber, 1995; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991; Shaffir et al., 1980) were published on researchers' personal reflections on the research process. Van Maanen (1988) coined the phrase "confessional tales" to refer to this type of ethnographic writing.

In the 1990s, a new genre of qualitative reporting, encouraged by feminist and postmodern theories, emerged in which qualitative researchers wrote about their personal experiences not merely as researchers but as central subjects of their studies. The use of personal experience as background information for studies is probably as old as qualitative research itself. What distinguished this new form of ethnographic writing is that the researcher or author occupies center stage in the study being reported.

Carolyn Ellis (1991a, 1991b, 1995a, 2004, 2008) and colleagues (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Jago, 1996; Ronai, 1995) have made the case for an emotional sociology based on personal narratives of the author's own experiences. In *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness*, Ellis (1995b) told the love story of her relationship with Gene Weinstein, who died after a long and difficult battle with emphysema. Ellis's narrative style was direct, honest, and intimate. She described her innermost feelings as well as the most personal details of her relationship with Weinstein. Informed by sociological interests, but without the analysis and theorizing generally found in qualitative studies, Ellis's text drew the reader inside the experience of loving and finally losing a loved one.

Inspired by Ellis's work, Ronai (1995, 1997) recounted her experiences of having a mother she described as mentally retarded and being sexually

abused by her father. Ronai (1995) used a narrative style she referred to as a layered account:

> A layered account is a postmodern ethnographic reporting technique that embodies a theory of consciousness and a method of reporting in one stroke . . . . The layered account offers an impressionistic sketch, handing readers layers of experience so they may fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of the writer's narrative. The readers reconstruct the subject, thus projecting more of themselves into it, and taking more away from it. (p. 396)

Alternating between recollections of her childhood and her current feelings and interpretations, Ronai told moving stories complete with graphic details of sexual abuse and candid admissions of being embarrassed by her mother. Hers were not sanitized accounts. She was as explicit in describing the actions of her father and mother as she was in presenting her own feelings of guilt and mixed emotions. Ronai advocated for a sociology that would broaden the range of acceptable topics and communication strategies for social science reporting.

David Karp's (1996) *Speaking of Sadness: Depression, Disconnection, and the Meanings of Illness* occupied a middle ground between conventional qualitative research and postmodern ethnography. Karp identified with the symbolic interactionist tradition and based much of his analysis of depression on interviews with 30 people. But there was a twist in his sociological tale. Karp used his own long-term struggle with depression as a point of departure and grounding for his theorizing. Thus his book began:

> In greater or lesser degree I have grappled with depression for almost 20 years. I suppose that even as a child my experience of life was as much characterized by anxiety as by joy and pleasure. And as I look back, there were lots of tip-offs that things weren't right. (p. 3)

Karp did a masterful job of weaving together his personal experiences with the words of his informants. As Karp explained, his purpose as a sociologist was not to attempt to solve the puzzle of what causes depression, but to examine the phenomenology of being depressed—to get inside the minds of those who experience the condition. He did this by exploring the effects of depression on identity, the meanings of medication, relations with families and friends (the most devastating aspect of depression, according to Karp, is that individuals feel disconnected from others at a time when they need human connection the most), and similar topics.

Karp's account of depression was powerful theoretically and emotionally. He left the reader not only with a clearer understanding of the sociological self, as previously described by Blumer, Goffman, and others, but also with a personal grasp of the experience of being chronically depressed. "Someone once described social statistics," wrote Karp (1996, p. 12), "as human beings

with the tears washed away." Karp built solid symbolic interactionist theory and did not attempt to hide the tears.

Following the publication of autoethnographies or personal stories, some sociologists turned to the writing of ethnographic novels (Ellis, 2004), performance narratives (Denzin, 2003), arts-based methods (Lafrenière & Cox, 2013), poetic representations of findings (Richardson, 2002), and other creative work.

## ENTERING A WORLD WITHOUT WORDS

There were three main subjects in the study reported in the book *A World Without Words* (Goode, 1994). Two of them, Christina and Bianca, cannot speak and were born deaf, blind, and profoundly intellectually disabled as a result of prenatal exposure to the German measles during the rubella epidemic of the 1960s. The third was the author, David Goode, a creative sociologist.

So that we do not mislead you by our initial description of the characters, or reinforce the predisposition you might have, this is not an ordinary study about *us* and *them*. To the contrary, as in all good and powerful social science analysis of the outsider, we are confronted with the proposition that they are us. Goode, by sharing the world he entered with Christina and Bianca, brought us close to people easily dismissed as not quite human. (In philosophic debates, Christina and Bianca were the very people some authors argue do not meet the criteria of being human.) In Goode's work, *us* became those who share the researcher's skepticism about professional knowledge and disability labels—who understand that the initial distinction between the subjects and other human beings does not hold. *Them* became those who do not share this insight. While the *N* was tiny, the subject matter was huge—communication, what it meant to have a relationship with another person, and, perhaps most ambitious, what it meant when we say someone is a human being.

The reflective, elaborate, and methodologically explicit case studies of the two children formed the core of Goode's study. Christina, a 9-year-old who lived on a ward of an institution for people with intellectual disabilities since she was 6, was one of the subjects. Goode presented an interpretation of Christina's social construction of her world and documented his methods and reflection in attempting this daunting task. The second subject was Bianca— 13 years old at the time of the study and nicknamed "the slug" by those in the school she attended. The focus was on communication between Bianca and her parents, with whom she had lived since birth. While the two young women were the center of the cases, the institutional staff, professionals, and parents and caretakers were included when their perspectives bore on

understanding ways of constructing Christina and Bianca. We learn what others in the two girls' lives made of them and are brought close to Goode's effort to put together the puzzle for himself and for us.

Goode used multiple research techniques in inventive and creative ways. He tried all kinds of procedures with his wordless subjects—playing guitar, mimicking, jumping, swinging, rocking, wearing eye covers and ear plugs—in attempting to get data that would help him interpret what Christina and Bianca knew and how he might know them. On a number of occasions, Goode spent 24 hours in continuous observation to get a more comprehensive understanding of Christina's life on the ward. He also employed audio- and videotaping. These less conventional research practices were anchored in countless hours of observing the subjects in their everyday activities, interviews with people who knew them, and the author's deep self-reflections in attempting to break from his world and approach theirs. He shared with the reader his struggle with writing his findings, with how to use formal language to tell the story of people who are without words. The meta-tool in his arsenal was ethnomethodology. In the hands of Goode, who came close to stripping it from its jargon, ethnomethodology had strength and stamina and exhibited a brand of humanism that is fresh and inviting.

Part of Goode's study was a consideration of the nature of the understanding between the children who cannot hear, see, or talk and those who can, and the character of the intersubjectivity that was achieved. Goode found communication, but only as the product of people's involvement in intense, long-term interaction. A tremendous amount of communication is not observable to people outside the intimacy of the relationship. Goode explored and explicated the ethnomethodological perspective and research technique as he practiced them and placed these against the nature of other empirical work.

Some qualitative research historians may attempt to abduct this work to make it part of the postmodern moment. They might point to the strong presence of the author as person in the text, the dedication of the author in aligning with and giving voice to his subjects, the reflectivity, the sometimes nonlinear text, and the experimental methods. (They might overlook the fact that Goode referred to his field notes as "scientific data.") Although some might try to make a postmodernist out of Goode, there was no indication in his references or acknowledgments that he was anything but a traditional ethnomethodologist trained by Harold Garfinkel and Melvin Pollner and given guidance and led to subjects by Robert Edgerton.

Goode helps us to understand that just because someone cannot talk does not mean that person has nothing to say, or that, because someone cannot speak and is referred to as deaf, blind, and profoundly retarded, that person is not a social human being. Goode had more to teach us about than rubella

syndrome children. There were lessons here about the craft of qualitative research. Goode taught us that to think deeply about the human condition we need to observe it up close, firsthand. We need to go to places where people have not carried the sociological imagination, fighting the temptation to retreat to safer ground. We have to rigorously and creatively collect data and be open to letting it shape our thinking.

Qualitative researchers are at their best when they produce provocative and groundbreaking ethnographic work like Goode did. Goode's work was a call for others to experiment with new approaches to understanding.


## PERSONAL DOCUMENTS

The use of personal documents has a proud history in social science research, stemming back to the heyday of the Chicago school (Allport, 1942; Dollard, 1935; Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, & Angell, 1945; see also Becker, 1966; Frazier, 1978). Many of the classic life histories in sociology were based largely on personal documents.

The phrase *personal documents* refers to individuals' written first-person accounts of their whole lives or parts of their lives, or their reflections on a specific event or topic. The diary is probably the most revealing and private type of personal document. In an introduction to her famous diary, Anne Frank (1952) wrote, "I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone else before." The diary is an excellent source of data because of its intimacy and self-reflection on the diarist's immediate experiences. S. K. Biklen's (1995) analysis of teachers' diaries from the 19th century provides an example of how such material can be combined with other types of qualitative data.

There are other types of valuable ongoing records. Travelers often maintain logs on their trips. Many professionals and business people keep calendars that contain reflections on events in addition to schedules. Some parents keep ongoing developmental records of the progress of their children. Photo albums and scrapbooks are other important forms of personal documents.

Private letters and emails are good sources of information on specific events and experiences in people's lives. The soldier on the battlefield, the grandparent thousands of miles away from her or his family, the immigrant—all share their sadness and joys through letters. The classic study by W. I. Thomas and Znaniecki (1927), *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, was based largely on letters written to relatives overseas. More recently, Tamboukou (2010) used letters of the artist Gwen John to analyze the significance of personal space in her life and her art (the methods she used are discussed further in Riessman, 2008).

One form of private communication that has received considerable attention in social science research is suicide notes (Douglas, 1967; Jacobs, 1967). These notes are important for understanding not only why people decide to take their lives, but also what they intend to communicate to others by doing so.

As noted in the chapter on in-depth interviewing, solicited narratives have been used extensively in qualitative studies. The research of Shaw (1930/1966, 1931/1976) and colleagues, Sutherland (1937), and others was based on life histories actually written by delinquents and criminals. For a study of the life histories of German refugees, Gordon Allport (1942) ran a competition for the best essay on "My life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933." He received 200 manuscripts averaging 100 pages in length in response. In comparison with other personal documents, solicited narratives yield a relatively small amount of irrelevant and unusable data at the cost of sacrificing spontaneity.

The rise of the Internet and social media sites offers a multitude of new kinds of personal writing (in discussion lists, blogs, social networking sites, etc.), which some sociologists have begun to explore via qualitative research. A few examples include Harrison (2014) on infertility blogs; Hughey (2008), who explored a virtual community of African American fraternity members; and Kurien (2005), who analyzed Internet discussions as part of a broader ethnography of a Hindu student group. These studies raise new ethical questions: Are these cyber spaces public or private? What kind of consent should researchers seek from those producing online posts or interactions? Given the likelihood of increasing interest in such studies, IRBs and other groups have begun to formulate specific ethical guidance for Internet studies (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

Although there are literally millions of personal documents waiting to be found, the researcher will almost always have to search them out imaginatively and aggressively. Libraries, archives maintained by organizations, flea markets, antique shops, and historical societies are good places to start. One way to obtain documents is by placing ads or announcements in newspapers, newsletters, and listservs and other Internet forums. W. I. Thomas and Znaniecki (1927) located letters for their study through newspaper ads. Newspaper editors, columnists, celebrities, and others who receive a large volume of mail may also be willing to share correspondence for research purposes. Finally, friends and acquaintances may be able to provide a supply of documents. Many people would rather put their letters and memorabilia to some useful purpose than burn them or leave them unused. Diaries are sometimes written with the expectation that someone will read them at some future time.

Personal documents are perhaps most valuable when used in conjunction with interviewing and firsthand observation.[2] While acknowledging

their value, Blumer (1969) criticized the exclusive use of personal documents on the grounds that they lend themselves more readily to different interpretations than do other forms of data.

## PICTURING DISABILITY

His studies of picture postcard depictions of early 20th-century asylums (Bogdan & Marshall, 1997) and souvenir antique photographs of people who appeared in circus freak shows (Bogdan, 1988) led Bogdan to begin collecting antique photographs of people who today would be defined as having disabilities. In order to be a successful collector he learned the ins and outs of the collecting world. He bought at antique ephemera and postcard shows and regularly searched eBay listings. He joined collecting clubs and received publications that announced when and where shows and sales were being held and in other ways participated in collecting networks. In addition he learned what search words to use on eBay in order to build his collection. The current words and phrases used by professionals and academics to refer to people with disabilities, such as "developmentally disabled" and "physically disabled," did not work. Words that are now considered prejudicial, such as "handicapped," "deaf and dumb," "crippled," and "feebleminded," were the ones that were successful.

His collection grew. He did not limit his finds to the type of images he collected in his early studies, images of institutionalized people and those who were on public display in sideshows. His collecting included a wide variety of images, such as portraits found on cards that beggars gave to passersby in an effort to obtain contributions. He found pictures of poster children used by charity organizations and images used in advertisements for various products, including those designed for use by people with disabilities. Later in his quest he searched for photographs used to publicize early commercial films such as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. In addition Bogdan built an extensive collection of what he called family or citizen portraits of people with disabilities. In these depictions the images were not produced to solicit contributions or for other ulterior motives. Instead, the photographs were taken to share with friends and relatives and to place in photo albums as keepsakes. Two of Bogdan's students had written dissertations that analyzed disability pictures. In one of these, the images were from eugenics era textbooks. In the other, photographs one would find in art galleries and art photography books and catalogs were the subject of analysis.

Bogdan's collecting put him in touch with other collectors with archives containing pictures of people with disabilities. Syracuse University's library had disability-related holdings as did other university archives. Armed with a scanner, he visited these sites to examine and copy disability imagery.

At first, he informally compared and contrasted the various images looking for similarities and differences. He read extensively about the history of photography, the people who produced disability imagery, and the times and places the photographs were taken. Using this knowledge and these thousands of pictures, he employed a more formal constant comparative grounded theory approach in his analysis. He sorted the photographs according to the historical context and the intentions of those who produced them. For example, charity images—pictures public relations people used to persuade potential donors to give to whatever organization launched the campaign—began to appear in great numbers toward the second third of the 20th century. Begging cards were in circulation earlier than charity campaign images. They were produced by or for the individual beggar to solicit donations directly. The visual appeals in these two genera were quite different, with begging images emphasizing pity and dependence while the charity images emphasized rehabilitation and cures.

The book that Bogdan and his former students produced, *Picturing Disability: Beggar, Freak, Citizen and Other Photographic Rhetoric* (2012; excerpted in Chapter 11, this volume), devoted a chapter to each of nine different genres of disability photographs. Bogdan and his collaborators used the grounded theory/constant comparative method of analysis in writing each chapter. The pictures within each genre were compared and coded according to emerging themes. The chapter based on Bogdan's research in the second part of this book is a modified version of the chapter titled "Citizen Portraits" in *Picturing Disability*. As you will see, various dimensions of this type of depiction are discussed in detail.

Bogdan was not the first to tackle the topic of the representation of people with disabilities in photographs. There were important predecessors. Some of these writers analyzed whether particular disability images were positive or negative, demeaned or maligned people with disabilities, or portrayed them in complimentary ways (Haller, 2010; Hevey, 1992; Millet, 2004; Norden, 1994). Others developed classification schemes of the various ways in which people with disabilities were depicted (Garland-Thomson, 2001). Scholars with a more theoretical deductive bent focused on how the images related to aesthetics, ethics, race, class, gender, and other factors (Chivers & Markotic, 2010; Garland-Thompson, 2002, 2004; Sandell, Dodd, & Garland-Thomson, 2010; Siebers, 2010; Snyder, Brueggemann, & Garland-Thomson, 2002). These approaches were concerned with broad and abstract cultural meanings and used predetermined theoretical lenses that often did not capture the meanings of the images to those who produced them. In addition, all of these researchers examined only a small number of images.

What was different about this project is that Bogdan and his colleagues sorted out hundreds of photographs and used grounded theory, driven by the desire to understand the context within which the pictures were produced

and the perspectives of those who produced the images. Although the study has implications for understanding both negative and positive depictions of people with disability, the purpose was not to judge images as good or bad, but rather to understand the range of disability imagery and to develop a grounded theory of disability portrayals.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOTAPING

Photographs and other visual data can provide an excellent source for qualitative analysis (Allen, 2012; Archer, 1997; Ball & Smith, 1992; S. J. Gold, 1997a, 1997b; Harper, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; E. F. Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012; Suchar, 1997). The pictures people take lend insight into what is important to them and how they view themselves and others. Photographs can be analyzed the same way as any other kind of personal document or archival material. This is not the only way photography enters into qualitative research, however.

The camera or video recorder can be useful research tools in the social sciences (Dabbs, 1982; Stasz, 1979). Just as a tape recorder can aid in recording data, film and videotape equipment can capture details that would otherwise be forgotten or go unnoticed. As Dabbs (1982) noted:

> I have two reasons for liking these media. First, they are faithful and patient observers. They remember what they see and they can record steadily for long periods of time. Second, . . . they allow us to expand or compress time and make visible patterns that would otherwise move too slowly or too fast to be seen. (p. 38)

Ethnomethodologists have used electronic recording devices to study the mundane and taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. Ryave and Schenkein (1974) studied the art of walking—how people navigate in public places—by filming 8-minute segments of videotape on a public pavement. Commenting on their use of videotape equipment, Ryave and Schenkein (1974) wrote:

> It is plain enough that the use of videotape affords us the opportunity to review a given instance of the phenomenon innumerable times without relying on a single observation of an essentially transitory phenomenon. In addition, . . . we require intimate study of actual instances of walking and cannot be satisfied with the study of reports on those instances. (p. 266)

David Goode (1992) discovered the competence of Bobby, a man with Down syndrome, by reviewing videotapes of conversations and interactions with him. Bobby was a 50-year-old man living at a boarding home when Goode first met him. As Goode explained, Bobby was defined as

"low functioning," and he left the impression of being quite incompetent. Then one day Goode and his colleagues happened to videotape an interaction between Bobby and twin sisters living at the facility. When Goode later viewed the tapes, his impressions of Bobby changed dramatically. Goode (1992) explained:

> As I watched the videotape repeatedly, an even more radical appreciation of Bobby's abilities to understand and communicate emerged. At the time of the incident and during our initial viewings of the tape, it appeared that many of Bobby's utterances were unintelligible, if not unintelligent. But after watching the tape a number of times, many "unintelligible" utterances began to sound clear to us. While it is true that persons on the tape did not seem to understand Bobby, the same persons repeatedly watching the tape could hear words where formerly they heard mumblings . . . . We began to appreciate the degree to which Bobby's not making sense to us was as much our fault as it was his. (p. 204)

By reviewing other tapes of Bobby, Goode learned that Bobby's competence was situationally determined. Whereas Bobby might seem incompetent interacting with occupational therapists, videotapes of interactions with peers at the boarding home indicated that he acted more competently and was viewed as such by them. Goode (1992, p. 205) wrote, "It did not take long for us to understand that familiarity and intimacy were the key determinants in viewing Bobby as competent to communicate and think." Goode concluded his study by observing that identities—in this instance, the identity of a man defined as severely retarded—are socially generated.

William H. Whyte (1980) used time-lapse photography to study small urban spaces such as parks and plazas.[3] By filming for entire days, Whyte examined what makes people use some spaces and not others. His research showed that time-lapse filming is an especially fruitful research approach.

Photographs and films can also be used as a mode of presenting and illustrating findings. Pictures take the place of words or at least convey something that words cannot. Certainly, for the reader of a qualitative study, pictures give a sense of being there, seeing the setting and people firsthand. There have also been some pieces published in sociological journals such as *Qualitative Sociology* that consist solely of pictures without commentary or analysis (see, for example, J. B. Jackson, 1978). Stasz (1979, p. 36) pointed out that "visual sociologists" can either mimic art, letting the images speak for themselves, or "aim toward the ideals of visual ethnography, where texts would accompany photographs to provide features of description and abstract generalization which cannot be handled by images alone." Harper published studies in which photographs were used for data collection and analysis and to illustrate findings—for example, a case study of a machinist working in

a small, rural community (Harper, 1987) and an analysis of everyday food practices among Italian families (Harper & Faccioli, 2009).

Dabbs (1982) described studies by Ziller and colleagues (Ziller & Lewis, 1981; Ziller & Smith, 1977) that demonstrated yet another way in which photography can be creatively used to study people's perspectives. In one study, Ziller and Lewis (1981) gave people cameras and asked them to take pictures that told who they were. The researchers found that students with high grade averages produced more photographs in which books were prominently displayed, whereas juvenile delinquents took more pictures of people and fewer of school and home. In another study, Ziller and Smith (1977) found that when asked to describe their university, new students brought back pictures of buildings and students who had been attending the university longer turned in photos of people.

Many researchers have combined videotaping or photography with interviewing. In a study of school-based outdoor education programs, E. F. Smith et al. (2012) asked students to take photos of what a camp was like for them, without further direction. After the camp was over, each of the students was interviewed and asked a series of questions about the pictures, including why they chose to take each of them.

PhotoVoice is a method used to have people represent their lives, experiences, and situations through photos or videos. Developed by Wang and Burris (1994, 1997), it was intended to be used by marginalized persons, especially those in underdeveloped countries, to influence policy makers to change their living situations (also see http://www.photovoice.org/; Wang, 1999). It also has been used by researchers in urban communities (Ducre, 2012) and as a participatory action research method (Lorenz & Kolb, 2009). Often, PhotoVoice researchers work with participants to organize exhibitions that present the photographic work to other community members and policy makers (Frohmann, 2005). Luttrell's (2013) longitudinal work with fifth and sixth graders, most of whom participated in a follow-up video study in their high-school years (Luttrell, Restler, & Fontaine, 2012), provides an especially rich example of the potential of studies based on the PhotoVoice approach. She not only asked the young people to produce images, but also spent time with them in their school and neighborhood, and conducted extensive interviews and focus group discussions of the images.

Photographers, artists, and others have long produced media forms rich in sociological understanding. Frederick Wiseman's films *Titticut Follies*, *High School*, *Hospital*, and others, got beneath the surfaces of places we often visit but may not really see. The photos of Diane Arbus (1972) and the photographic essays of institutions for the "mentally retarded" by Blatt and Kaplan (1966/1974) and Blatt, Ozolins, and McNally (1980) were notable for portraying the human condition.

## OFFICIAL RECORDS AND PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

There is, for all practical purposes, an unlimited number of official and public documents, records, and materials available as sources of data (Hill, 1993). These include organizational documents, newspaper articles, agency records, government reports, court transcripts, and a host of other materials.

Of course, researchers have analyzed official records and statistics almost since the beginning of the social sciences. Durkheim's (1951) classic study of suicide was a notable case in point. There have been countless studies of crime based on police records and suicide based on coroner's reports. However, the qualitative researcher brings a different perspective to reports and documents than has been common in the social sciences.

The qualitative researcher analyzes official and public documents to learn about the people who write and maintain them. Like personal documents, these materials lend insight into the perspectives, assumptions, concerns, and activities of those who produce them. Kitsuse and Cicourel (1963) pointed out that official statistics tell us about organizational processes rather than the criminals, deviants, or others on whom such records are kept. Similarly, Garfinkel (1967) argued that organizational records are produced for the purpose of documenting satisfactory performance of the organization's responsibilities toward its clients. Concerning psychiatric records, Garfinkel (1967) wrote, "In our view the contents of clinic folders are assembled with regard for the possibility that the relationship may have to be portrayed as having been in accord with expectations of sanctionable performances by clinicians and patients" (p. 198).

In slightly different veins, Douglas (1967, 1971) examined commonsense understandings of why people kill themselves by analyzing coroner's records. Taylor and Bogdan (1980) examined the official goals and formal structures of total institutions for people with intellectual disabilities through interviews with institutional officials and an analysis of institutional documents. In contrast to the rational view of formal organizations, Taylor and Bogdan argued that organizational goals and structures serve an important symbolic function by providing legitimating myths to justify the existence of an organization. They showed how institutional brochures, program descriptions, and policies must be interpreted not as describing the operation of the institutions, but in terms of presenting a preferred image of institutions and managing the impressions of external publics upon whom they depend for their existence.

The institutional ethnography approach is based on a related view of organizational documents, and other texts, as key elements in the organization of people's activities in organizations. Institutional ethnographers generally use interviews and participant observation to understand the flow of

activity in a setting of interest, but are alert to the significance of documents. For example, they might be interested in how teachers refer to curricular guidelines in their planning meetings (N. Jackson, 1995), how the activities of community-based organizations are influenced by reporting requirements (Grahame, 1998; Ng, 1996), how physicians align their practices with care pathways (Mykhalovskiy, 2001), how college administrators read and act upon budget information (McCoy, 1998), or how musicians coordinate their performances with reference to a musical score (L. D. Warren, 2014). They also investigate the role of documents in people's activities outside of formal organizations, as in McCoy's (1995) study of people discussing wedding photographs (and see Luken & Vaughan, 2006). Although institutional ethnographers often develop analyses that reveal the significance of documents, the approach is meant to investigate documents-in-use. Ethnographic methods are employed to explore how people use documents and the consequences of activating documents (D. E. Smith, 2005). Smith and others (D.E. Smith and Turner, 2014) have developed a variety of strategies for investigating documents in use in social settings.

Popular media forms, such as newspapers, magazines, television, movies, radio, and the Internet, provide another important source of data. For example, researchers have studied societal stereotypes of the mentally ill in comic strips (Scheff, 1966); images of people with disabilities in newspapers, books, and movies (D. Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Kriegel, 1987; Longmore, 1985; Zola, 1992); and portrayals of sex roles in children's books. Some researchers combine such analyses with interviews, in order to gather the perspectives of the producers and viewers of images, as in Lutz and Collins's (1993) study of the imagery in the popular magazine *National Geographic*.

Many official records and public documents are readily available to researchers, and the availability of documents is increasing with the growth of online archives. Public libraries, organizational archives, and historical societies are good sources for these kinds of materials. Police and agency records are usually accessible through the same means by which participant observers gain entree into these settings. Many government reports and documents are considered public information and are available under the Freedom of Information Act. Adler (1990) provided a step-by-step guide on how information can be obtained through this law. Noakes (1995) discussed ways in which FBI files can be obtained through Freedom of Information requests. As Noakes pointed out, the more specific you can be in identifying the information in which you are interested, the more likely it is that you will obtain documents through this process.

The qualitative analysis of official documents opens up many new sources of understanding. Materials that are thought to be useless by those looking for objective facts are valuable to the qualitative researcher precisely because of their subjective nature.

## HISTORICAL AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

In its early years, sociology was practically indistinguishable from history (Tilly, 2001). Grand theorists such as Durkheim (1893/1997), Marx (1867/1992), and Weber (1922/1968) sought to explain the development of political, economic, and religious systems. Over time, sociologists and historians developed different interests and areas of study. Historians tend to specialize in analyzing societies in terms of time and place; sociologists study social structures and processes across different eras and cultures (Tilly, 2001).

Historical sociology can be done in different ways. Some sociologists use historical facts to illustrate concepts and theories developed a priori. In contrast, other sociologists employ the same analytical tools used in qualitative methods to develop insights and theories inductively. We are concerned with this latter type of theorizing in this section.

Archival research is useful in analyzing and understanding specific social institutions. Platt (1969) looked at definitions of juvenile delinquency around the early 1900s by reviewing official reports of charitable organizations, government reports, and other historical documents; and Ferguson (1992) analyzed constructions of people defined as idiots—the most severely intellectually disabled—in official state reports and institutional documents around the turn of the twentieth century. Bogdan (1988) studied freak shows during their heyday in the period from approximately 1840 to 1940, when they fell out of favor. Taylor (2009) examined the experiences of World War II conscientious objectors who conducted alternative public service at state mental hospitals and training schools and led a national movement to improve institution conditions.

Bogdan began his freak show study by searching archives in the major depositories of circus and carnival memorabilia with the intention of writing biographies of the people who were on exhibit. In the back of his mind was a project that would document the exhibits' degradation at the hands of able-bodied exploiters.

As Bogdan began going through these collections, he was surprised to be deluged with photographic images of exhibits as well as elaborate booklets describing the lives of the exhibits and providing other details about their careers. He found out that the freaks supplemented their incomes and publicized their appearances by selling booklets as mementos and that the most complete record of who was exhibited could be found in such merchandise.

At first Bogdan looked at the pictures and the pamphlets to learn about the people being exhibited. The pictures were extremely stylized, with the people dressed in divergent ways, from evening attire (tuxedos and frilly formal dresses) to loin cloths and alien costumes. The booklets told, in detail,

of the extraordinary lives the exhibits lived. Some were depicted as royalty from Europe, others as cannibals or savages. Looking for the truth about the lives of the exhibits in the material, Bogdan found the pictures and pamphlets unbelievable. What was going on? What was he to make out of the strange data?

Seeking a perspective from which to understand the material before him, Bogdan located candid memoirs and diaries of people who were in the circus and carnival business. He tracked down some old-timers who had worked the shows and interviewed them. In addition, he read what he could find on the culture of the amusement world. He learned that people in the world of popular entertainment, the world of which freak shows were a part, had a strained relationship with the rest of society. They saw themselves as outsiders and felt antagonism toward those they defined as being "not with it"—people who led ordinary lives outside the amusement world. These people were referred to as "townies," "suckers," and "rubes." Among circus and carnival folks it was perfectly all right to dupe the suckers; they had it coming. Shortchanging, rigged games of chance, picking pockets, and misrepresentation were all part of the show. Freak show publicity reflected that. The pictures and pamphlets that Bogdan was studying were not accurate representations of the people on exhibit. They were exaggerated and fabricated presentations designed to trick patrons, to get them to step right up. Thus the Wild Men from Borneo, who were claimed to have been captured in Asia, were really dwarfs from Ohio. General Tom Thumb, supposedly born in England, was really the son of a poor carpenter and a barmaid and was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

When Bogdan understood the context of the production of the publicity photographs and booklets, he deserted the idea of writing biographies of the exhibits and began focusing on the patterns of presenting the exhibits to the public. In the book that emerged from the research, Bogdan (1988) offered a history of freak shows and the amusement culture and discussed the various modes of presenting freaks to the public. Two modes dominated: the aggrandized mode, in which the exhibit was presented as having exalted status, and the exotic mode, where the freak was presented as some strange species of human being from the nonwestern world. In the book Bogdan emphasized that the study of the freaks is not properly directed toward the people who appeared on stage, but toward the stylized presentations that were developed in promoting these people. In addition, he pointed out that the people on stage did not define themselves as freaks in any derogatory sense of the term. They saw themselves as show people. They looked down on the people in the audience, not because they had to come to gawk, but because they were gullible townies. The book ended with an examination of how people who are different are presented to the public today in such formats as charity campaigns, medical discussion, and the like.

Taylor's study of World War II conscientious objectors, or COs, started when a colleague showed him a monograph titled *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* edited by Wright (1947). The monograph contained graphic accounts of institutional abuse and neglect and was published by a group named the National Mental Health Foundation. Although Taylor had studied the history of state institutions for people with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities in America and written about public exposés of these institutions, he was only vaguely familiar with exposés of state mental hospitals and training schools in the 1940s. He had never heard of the National Mental Health Foundation, even though *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* listed a series of prominent national sponsors and supporters, including Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of deceased President FDR; Walter Reuther, labor leader; and Henry Luce, founder of *Time* magazine. The monograph only mentioned in passing that the accounts had been written by COs. Taylor was intrigued that he and colleagues knowledgeable about the history of institutions were unfamiliar with or only vaguely aware of this history.

Historical researchers distinguish between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are documents or artifacts created during the time under study and can include reports, letters, photos, newsletters, diaries, and similar materials. Secondary sources are secondhand accounts by people attempting to analyze and interpret an activity or event. Some sociologists and others write historical accounts based solely on secondary sources, but primary sources are generally considered essential for sound historical research.

Taylor first searched for secondary sources on World War II COs. He found several books that described the Civilian Public Service, which was established to oversee nonmilitary service conducted by COs who were conscientiously opposed to participation in the military based on religious training and beliefs. Although these books had little to say about COs assigned to state institutions, they helped Taylor understand the religious backgrounds of the COs and the organizations that worked hard to convince the government to permit religious objectors to perform alternative service. Just as important, these secondary sources cited primary sources and listed repositories of archival materials on the World War II COs. Archival researchers can use the same snowball technique employed by participant observers and interviewers: study documents to identify other potentially fruitful sources. One document leads to others, which lead to others, which lead to others. Through this process, Taylor identified two other books that focused on specific aspects of the work of COs at state institutions.

Three major historical peace churches—the Society of Friends (Quakers), the Mennonite Church, and the Church of the Brethren—were the driving forces behind the establishment of the Civilian Public Service and sponsored and paid the living expenses of over 12,000 COs representing over

200 religions. Through secondary sources and web searches, Taylor learned that each of these religions maintained extensive archives that contained rich materials on the World War II COs: the Swarthmore College Peace Collection in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania; the Brethren Historical Library and Archives in Elgin, Illinois; and the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Archives in Goshen, Indiana. Taylor made three visits to Swarthmore and multiple day visits to Elgin and Goshen.

During his first visit to Swarthmore, Taylor learned about conducting archival research the hard way. Like many other archives, Swarthmore has an online inventory or catalog containing a listing of its main collections (for example, Civilian Public Service Papers). Taylor spent too little time studying the inventory prior to his visit and wasted valuable time trying to decide what he wanted to see while he was there. You need to do as much work as you can prior to a visit so that you can concentrate on reviewing archival materials while you are there. He also found that archivists generally are very familiar with their collections and may have cataloged them to begin with. An in-depth interview with the archivist at the beginning of a visit is a very worthwhile use of time.

Each of the archives had an abundance of relevant materials: photos, newsletters, institution write-ups, correspondence, reports, and journals. Taylor made the novice mistake of studying and taking notes on interesting materials on his initial visit to Swarthmore. On later visits to Swarthmore and other archives, he went through materials quickly and identified ones to photocopy or scan, waiting to study them until he got home. Over time, Taylor depended on scanning materials, rather than photocopying them, since this was quicker and tended to provide a more complete and readable document. He also learned to scan photos at high resolution to meet publishers' standards. For every scan, Taylor made a copy on both his hard drive and a thumb drive. Bring your own computer and scanner with you. None of the archives Taylor visited had equipment available for the use of researchers.

Every archive has its own cataloging system, but they generally follow the same general format: name of archive, name or number of collection, box number, and file name or number. The Brethren archives were on microfilm, and Taylor always recorded the reel number. As with any citation, it is important to record these accurately and completely to enable anyone else to find the actual document if referenced in a publication based on the research.

Finally, all archives have rules and expectations regarding their collections and rules for handling them. If you are a serious researcher, you will eventually need archivists or curators to do you favors (supplying a missing citation, rescanning a photo for you at a later time), especially if you plan on publishing your work. It is important to demonstrate that you respect their rules and the importance of their documents. Do not bring briefcases, backpacks, and

other parcels into the archives (some prohibit these), use pencils and not pens to record anything (pens can leave smudges), and bring plastic gloves to handle materials in order to prevent skin oils from getting on documents, which will ultimately lead to their deterioration.

If you plan on publishing photos in a publication, most archives will not give you permission to use them. Photographs are owned by the photographer, unless the photographer has given explicit consent for the archive to grant permission for use. For many photographs, the photographer was not recorded and is unknown. Archives will generally authorize use of a photograph in a publication, stopping short of giving permission. Most publishers will accept this. Taylor included 45 photos found in archives in his book on the COs.

Reviewing secondary sources and Quaker, Mennonite, and Brethren archives, a picture of COs' work at state institutions and their reactions to institutional conditions began to emerge. As Hill (1993, p. 6) noted, the archival researcher, like the observer or interviewer, must constantly ask the question, "What is going on here?" This question is answered through an inductive process in which insights and understandings are deepened as one analyzes additional materials over time. The archival researcher also seeks to find and compare different sources to verify and refine initial hunches.

Throughout his research, Taylor kept track of references to other potentially important documents and major figures in the COs' experiences at institutions and subsequent reform efforts. He located a surprisingly large number of unpublished reports and monographs through his university library's interlibrary loan service. Many sources mentioned media exposés of institutional conditions in which COs were involved, as well as their reform efforts during and after the war. Commercial enterprises sell used copies of major magazines, and Taylor was able to obtain original copies of national exposés reported in *Life* magazine and *Reader's Digest*. Some of the archives contained copies of stories published in local newspapers. Taylor found other stories by contacting libraries in the cities or towns in which institutions were located. Through a web search, he identified a genealogical researcher in Philadelphia who was able to find and copy stories published in newspaper archives in that city for a modest fee.

The Internet is becoming an invaluable tool for archival research. Taylor found *Time* magazine articles related to his research interests on the online *Time* magazine archives (http://www.time.com/time/archive/). Articles can be located by entering a search term or phrase and the range of dates to be searched. Figures and organizations such as Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) were referred to in various historical sources. Through web searches, Taylor learned that Roosevelt's and the ACLU's correspondence were available on microfilm and cataloged on websites. Using the catalogs, he obtained microfilm reels of correspondence

during certain time periods through interlibrary loan and found copies of letters written about the COs.

One disadvantage of historical research is that researchers often have to rely exclusively on written documents. Just because something is written down does not mean that it is true. Authors of documents have their own purposes when they record them. Since researchers may not be able to interview them and probe for details, they may not be able to judge the credibility of sources.

Through web searches on conscientious objectors, Taylor found a 1996 directory of COs who conducted alternative service as part of the Civilian Public Service (CPS) during World War II published by an organization that had served as a liaison between the federal Selective Service and the peace churches. The directory listed the CPS units where men had served, their dates of their service, and their most recent addresses, if known. Taylor was especially interested in men who had served at Philadelphia State Hospital, and by going through the approximately 12,000 names in the directory, he was able to develop a list of men who were assigned to this unit. He wrote a letter to these men describing his interests and included a form on which they could indicate that they were willing to be interviewed and their contact information along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Although many of the letters were returned, stamped with addresses unknown, nearly 20 men or their family members responded.

Taylor conducted nine face-to-face interviews and nine phone interviews with former COs or their widows. Prior to interviewing any of these people, Taylor wrote his IRB explaining that these would be oral histories and confirming that the interviews would not require IRB approval. His rationale was that the interviews would not be anonymous and that they would be directed toward obtaining accounts of a specific historical time. He obtained written confirmation from the IRB that the interviews did not require approval. Through the interviews Taylor obtained rich details concerning the COs' work at institutions and their reactions to the conditions there. He was able to confirm some of his conclusions and, in some cases, refine or reject some of the assumptions he had made. Just as important as the interviews, three COs and two family members loaned Taylor some personal papers and documents from the time of their service. For example, CO Warren Sawyer wrote approximately two to three letters home per month during his years in the CPS and gave these to Taylor. Taylor made photocopies of the documents, saving one set for himself and donating the other set to archives at Swarthmore or the Mennonite Collection, depending on the religious affiliation of the men.

Especially if you know the city and state where someone lives or has lived recently, it is not a difficult task to find information about him or her. Taylor was especially interested in reaching four leaders of the effort to

reform institutions at Philadelphia State Hospital. His letters to these men were returned unopened. However, through yellow pages on the Internet and people-find services that charge for access to public records, Taylor was able to find out about two of these men through the cities named in the CPS directory. He located the obituary of one of these men and was informed by the widow of the other that her husband had died.

Although not as useful as personal interviews, oral histories of former COs housed at the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College in Kansas were obtained by Taylor. That archive contained taped interviews of former COs and Mennonite leaders during the World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War eras. Through his archival research, Taylor had kept a record of the names of COs mentioned in documents and was able to identify 11 with whom interviews had been conducted. The archivist at the Mennonite Library and Archives transferred taped interviews to CDs in exchange for a small donation from Taylor.

Taylor's book *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors* (2009; excerpted in Chapter 12, this volume) provided a detailed account of the motivations of the COs, their work at institutions, their reactions to institutional conditions, and their efforts to reform institutions through the establishment of a national mental health organization. In contrast to other books and articles on World War II COs written by people who were former COs or associated with religions and organizations that supported them, Taylor documented the COs' failures as well as successes and the tensions between some of them. For a National Public Radio story that aired in 2010 (http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122017757), he put reporter Joe Shapiro in contact with five former Philadelphia State Hospital COs who were interviewed for the story.

In this chapter we have highlighted innovative approaches to the study of social life. The spirit of the studies described here is captured by Nobel Prize–winning scientist P. W. Bridgeman (quoted in Dalton, 1964, p. 60): "There is no scientific method as such . . . . The most vital feature of the scientist's procedure has been merely to do the utmost with his mind, no holds barred."

In the preceding chapters we have discussed a broad range of ways to collect qualitative data. In the next chapter we devote attention to data analysis in qualitative research.

### NOTES

1.   This book has been revised and published as *Nonreactive Measures in the Social Sciences* by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, Sechrest, and Grove (1981).

2.  This is because of what Denzin (1978) referred to as the reality-distance problem. In analyzing personal documents, the researcher is several times removed from the phenomenon in which he or she is interested. Of course, there are many instances in which it is impossible to analyze documents in conjunction with face-to-face research approaches.
3.  Whyte also produced a film entitled *The Social Life of Small Urban Places* (1980), which was shown on public television.

# Working With Data: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

IN THE PREVIOUS chapters we discussed a variety of ways to collect qualitative data, including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, written documents, and a number of creative approaches. In this chapter we turn to a discussion of how qualitative researchers can make sense of and analyze data. We describe strategies and techniques that we have used and that you may find helpful in getting the most out of the data you have collected. We begin with a discussion of the different types of qualitative studies.

## NARRATIVES: DESCRIPTIVE AND THEORETICAL STUDIES

All writing, including social science reporting, is a form of narrative. As Richardson (1990b, pp. 20–21) wrote:

> Narrative is everywhere, present in myth, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, painting, dance, stained glass windows, cinema, social histories, fairy tales, novels, science schema, comic strips, conversation, journal articles.

Both social scientists and novelists use literary devices such as metaphors to tell the story, or narrative, they wish to communicate to readers.

Although any piece of social science writing is a narrative, we can distinguish between descriptive studies, which resemble what people usually associate with literary writing, and theoretical or conceptual studies. Of course, any good qualitative study, no matter how theoretical, contains rich descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words, their artifacts, and their observable activities. In participant observation studies, researchers try to convey a sense of being there and experiencing settings firsthand. Similarly, in studies based on in-depth interviewing, researchers attempt to give readers a feeling of walking in the informants' shoes—understanding their inner experiences and seeing things from their points of view (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, qualitative research should provide thick description of social life (Geertz, 1983; Miles et al., 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). As Emerson (1983, p. 24) wrote, "Thick descriptions present in close detail the context and meanings of events and scenes that are relevant to those involved in them."

Descriptive studies are communicated through the data; theoretical studies are communicated through concepts illustrated by data. The ethnography is probably the most well-known form of descriptive study. In ethnographies, researchers try to paint a picture of what people say and how they act in their everyday lives. Descriptive ethnographies are marked by minimal interpretation and conceptualization. The researcher tells the story not through concepts but through descriptions of events. Although researchers in descriptive studies may try to lead readers to certain conclusions by virtue of what they choose to report and how they report it, readers are free to come to their own interpretations and draw their own generalizations. Of course, ethnographers do develop ideas about the significance of their descriptive narratives, primarily in their introductory and concluding comments.

In sociology, the classic studies of the Chicago school provide some of the clearest examples of descriptive ethnography. While motivated by a keen interest in social problems, the Chicago school researchers sought to describe in graphic terms the fabric of urban life. N. Anderson's *The Hobo* (1923) is a notable case in point. Building on his own experiences as a hobo or itinerant worker, participant observation (before the approach was even called that), and documents, Anderson described the hobo way of life as experienced by hobos themselves: their language, favorite haunts, customs, pursuits, personalities, and ballads and songs.

Life histories, as produced by members of the Chicago school and other researchers, represent one of the purest forms of descriptive studies. In the life history, the person tells her or his story in her or his own words. As Shaw (1930/1966) explained, with reference to his work with a delinquent youth, "The unique feature of such documents is that they are recorded in the first person, in the boy's own words, and not translated into the language of the person investigating the case" (p. 1).

Life histories do not write themselves. The researcher as recorder and editor has a heavy hand in their production. In all studies, researchers present and order the data according to what they think is important. Specifically, in life histories they decide on what to include and exclude, edit the raw data, add connecting passages between remarks, and place the story in some kind of sequence. Further, in conducting their studies, researchers make decisions about what to observe, ask about, and record that determine what they are able to describe and how they describe it.

Some qualitative sociologists are experimenting with new forms of narrative. The qualitative autoethnography described in the last chapter is one example. Here researchers tell their own personal stories and try to create in readers subjective understanding of their own experiences and emotions (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). By doing so, they blur the lines between research subject and researcher. Drama (Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Richardson & Lockridge, 1991) and poetic representations (Richardson, 1992; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) are additions to the range of qualitative writing. Richardson, who devoted considerable attention to the narrative production of social science, described poetry not only as a method of representing human experience but also as a device for making visible the researcher's role in constructing knowledge. Although some qualitative researchers (Schwalbe, 1995, 1996) question the contribution of drama and poetry to social science knowledge, a review of qualitative sociology journals demonstrates the growing popularity of alternative forms of social science narrative.

Most qualitative studies are directed toward building theory or extending knowledge of general social processes. The purpose of theoretical studies is the understanding or explanation of features of social life beyond the particular people and settings studied. In these studies, researchers actively interpret and point out what is important to their audience. They use descriptive data to illustrate their concepts and theoretical claims and to convince readers that what the researcher says is true.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) distinguished between two types of theory—substantive and formal (see Chapter 2, this volume). The first relates to a concrete area of inquiry; for instance, schools, prisons, juvenile delinquency, and patient care. Formal theory refers to a conceptual area of inquiry, such as stigma, formal organizations, socialization, and deviance, which have relevance across various topics. In qualitative research, most studies have focused on a single substantive area.

## BUILDING THEORY

Since the publication of Glaser and Strauss's influential book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), qualitative researchers have discussed whether

the purpose of theoretical studies should be to develop or verify social theory, or both (see, for example, Charmaz, 1983, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Emerson, 1983; Katz, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser and Strauss argued that qualitative and other social science researchers should direct their attention to developing or generating social theory and concepts (see also Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978). Their grounded theory approach is designed to enable researchers to do just that. Other researchers, writing from a more positivistic stance, take the position that qualitative research, just like quantitative studies, can and should be used to develop and verify or test propositions about the nature of social life. The procedure of analytic induction has been the principal means by which qualitative researchers have attempted to do this (D. R. Cressey, 1953; Katz, 1983; Lindesmith, 1947; Robinson, 1951; R. H. Turner, 1953; Znaniecki, 1934). Although we question whether qualitative methods lend themselves to verification and hypothesis testing, we find the logic behind both grounded theory and analytic induction useful in analyzing qualitative data. In any case, many descriptive studies offer robust findings about particular settings and groups.

The grounded theory approach is a method for discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses, and propositions directly from data rather than from a priori assumptions, other research, or existing theoretical frameworks. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued in the 1960s, when quantitative studies were dominant, that social scientists overemphasized testing and verifying theories and neglected the more important activity of generating sociological theory:

> Description, ethnography, fact-finding, verification (call them what you will) are all done well by professionals in other fields and by laymen in various investigatory agencies. But these people cannot generate sociological theory from their work. Only sociologists are trained to want it, to look for it, and to generate it. (pp. 6–7)

Glaser and Strauss proposed two major strategies for developing grounded theory. The first was the constant comparative method, in which the researcher simultaneously codes and analyzes data in order to develop concepts. By continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationships to one another, and integrates them into a coherent theory.

The second strategy proposed by Glaser and Strauss was theoretical sampling, which was described earlier in this book. In theoretical sampling, the researcher selects new cases to study according to their potential for helping to expand on or refine the concepts and theory that have already been developed (also see Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data collection and analysis proceed together. By studying different substantive areas, the researcher can expand a substantive theory into a formal one. Glaser and Strauss explained

how their grounded theory of the relationship between nurses' estimation of the social value of dying patients and their care of patients can be elevated to a theory of how professionals give service to clients on the basis of social value.

Figure 6.1 summarizes our version of the grounded theory approach.

In generating grounded theory, researchers do not seek to prove their theories but merely to demonstrate plausible support for these theories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that key criteria in evaluating theories are whether they "fit" and "work":

> By "fit" we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by "work" we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and able to explain the behavior under study. (p. 3)

Ultimately, for Glaser and Strauss, readers must judge the credibility of qualitative studies. The analytic techniques that Glaser and Strauss developed—especially coding and constant comparison—are useful in most types of qualitative studies, even those that are not oriented toward developing grounded theory of the sort that Glaser and Strauss had in mind.

Analytic induction was developed as a procedure for verifying theories and propositions based on qualitative data. As formulated by Znaniecki in 1934, analytic induction was designed to identify universal propositions and causal laws. Znaniecki contrasted analytic induction with enumerative induction, which provided mere correlations and could not account
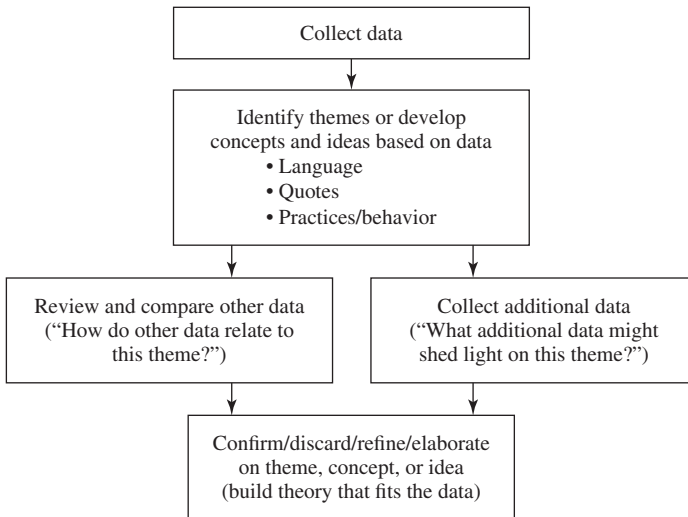


**Figure 6.1** One version of the grounded theory approach.

for exceptions to statistical relationships. The procedure was refined by Lindesmith (1947) and D. R. Cressey (1950, 1953) in their respective studies of opiate addiction and embezzlers and was used by Howard Becker (1963) in his classic study of marijuana users. Katz (1983) characterized analytic induction, which he referred to as analytic research, as a rigorous qualitative method for arriving at a perfect fit between the data and explanations of social phenomena.

The steps involved in analytic induction are relatively simple and straightforward (see D. R. Cressey, 1950; Denzin, 1978; Katz, 1983):

1. Develop a rough definition of the phenomenon to be explained.
2. Formulate a hypothesis to explain that phenomenon (this can be based on the data, other research, or the researcher's insight and intuition).
3. Study one case to see the fit between the case and the hypothesis.
4. If the hypothesis does not explain the case, either reformulate the hypothesis or redefine the phenomenon.
5. Actively search for negative cases to disprove the hypothesis.
6. When negative cases are encountered, reformulate the hypothesis or redefine the phenomenon.
7. Proceed until the hypothesis has been adequately tested (according to some researchers, until a universal relationship has been established) by examining a broad range of cases.

Figure 6.2 summarizes the steps involved in analytic induction.

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**ANALYTIC INDUCTION**

1. Develop a rough definition of the phenomenon.

2. Formulate a hypothesis to explain the phenomenon.

3. Study one case to see the fit between that case and the phenomenon.

4. If the hypothesis does not explain the case, reformulate the hypothesis or redefine the phenomenon.

5. Search for negative cases to disprove the hypothesis.

6. When negative cases are encountered, reformulate the hypothesis or redefine the phenomenon.

7. Proceed until the hypothesis has been tested by examining a broad range of cases.

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**Figure 6.2**   Steps in analytic induction.

Using this approach, D. R. Cressey (1953) arrived at the following explanation of trust violators (a revised formulation of embezzlers):

> Trusted persons become trust violators when they conceive of themselves as having a financial problem which is non-sharable, are aware that this problem can be secretly resolved by violation of the position of financial trust, and are able to apply to their own conduct in that situation verbalizations which enable them to adjust their conceptions of themselves as trusted persons with their conceptions of themselves as users of the entrusted funds or property. (p. 30)

Analytic induction was criticized for failing to live up to the claims of its early proponents as a method for establishing causal laws and universals (Robinson, 1951; R. H. Turner, 1953). R. H. Turner (1953) suggested that analytic induction is fundamentally a method of producing definitions of social phenomena; hence, explanations based on analytic induction may be circular.

However, the basic logic underlying analytic induction can be useful in qualitative data analysis. By directing attention to negative cases, analytic induction forces researchers to refine and qualify theories and propositions. Researchers may find fruitful explanations of phenomena other than those they set out to investigate. Katz (1983) argued:

> The test is not whether a final state of perfect explanation has been achieved but the distance that has been traveled over negative cases and through consequent qualifications from an initial state of knowledge. Analytic induction's quest for perfect explanation, or "universals," should be understood as a strategy for research rather than as the ultimate measure of the method. (p. 133)

In contrast to the grounded theory approach, analytic induction also helps researchers address the question of generalizability of their findings. If researchers can demonstrate that they have examined a sufficiently broad range of instances of a phenomenon and have specifically looked for negative cases, they can assert stronger claims regarding the general nature of what they have found.

Our approach is directed toward developing an in-depth understanding of the settings or people under study or, to put it another way, providing a sociological account of what happened and how. This approach has many parallels with the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Insights are grounded in and developed from the data themselves, and the task of providing an account that is faithful to the data is paramount. In contrast to Glaser and Strauss, however, we are less concerned with developing concepts and theories than with understanding the settings or people on their own terms. We do this through both description and theory. Thus sociological concepts and insights are used to illuminate features of the settings or people under study and to aid understanding. Further, our approach probably places greater emphasis on analyzing negative cases and the context in which data

are collected than does the approach of Glaser and Strauss, although our method stops short of imposing the systematic search for generalizations and universals entailed in analytic induction.

## WORKING WITH DATA

All researchers develop their own ways of analyzing qualitative data. In this section we describe some ways to make sense of descriptive data gathered through qualitative research methods.

Data analysis is probably the most difficult aspect of qualitative research to teach or communicate to others. Many people who are new to the methodology are capable of establishing rapport in the field, asking questions, and recording data, but get stuck when it comes to analyzing their data. They study books devoted to qualitative data analysis and still have no idea how to make sense of the data they have collected. Having read Glaser and Strauss (1967), they worry about such matters as the difference between a category and a property. They want to know the simple and clear-cut procedures that will enable them to interpret their data. They spend countless hours coding and recoding their data, but come no closer to developing an understanding of the people or settings they have studied.

The reason why so many people find qualitative data analysis so difficult is that it is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical process; it is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing. Even Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 251), who devoted an entire book to analytic strategies, pointed out, "The root sources of all significant theorizing is [sic] the sensitive insights of the observer himself." Recognizing that this formulation gave the impression of a somewhat mystical process, Strauss (1987) published a later book that included transcripts from coding and analysis sessions he conducted with students and colleagues. In addition, Charmaz (2006, 2014) wrote extensively on the analytic techniques of grounded theory researchers, and Clarke (2005) has formulated a more contemporary version of the approach that incorporates attention to the discourses of social worlds.

Not all good field researchers are up to the task of significant theorizing, and no one can be trained to have sensitive insights. For many people, the ability to analyze qualitative data comes with experience, especially if they are working with a mentor who helps them learn to see patterns or themes in data by pointing these out. Perhaps the best way to learn inductive analysis is by reading qualitative studies and articles to see how other researchers have made sense out of their data. So, study many examples of qualitative research—not to find theoretical frameworks to impose on your data, but to learn how others interpret and use data. From classics to more contemporary studies, books such as *Street Corner Society* (W. F. Whyte, 1943, 1993);

*The Urban Villagers* (Gans, 1962); *Tally's Corner* (Liebow, 1967); *Tomorrow's Tomorrow* (Ladner, 1971); *Outsiders in a Hearing World* (Higgins, 1980); *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 1983); *Gender Play* (Thorne, 1993); *Having Epilepsy* (Schneider & Conrad, 1983); *Streetwise* (E. Anderson, 1990); *Feeding the Family* (DeVault, 1991); *Making Gray Gold* (Diamond, 1992); *Speaking of Sadness* (Karp, 1996); *Unequal Childhoods* (Lareau, 2001); *Children of Global Migration* (Parreñas, 2005); and *Longing and Belonging* (Pugh, 2009) are examples of insightful, clearly written studies. *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* and *Qualitative Sociology* are good resources for finding qualitative studies, and *Qualitative Inquiry* publishes postmodern and creative qualitative works.

Because qualitative data analysis is an intuitive and inductive process, most qualitative researchers analyze and code their own data. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research usually lacks a division of labor between data collectors and coders—although it can be useful to work as a team. Data analysis is a dynamic and creative process. Throughout analysis, researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied and to continually refine their interpretations. Researchers also draw on their firsthand experience with settings, informants, or documents to interpret their data.

Data analysis, as we see it, entails certain distinct activities. The first and most important one is ongoing discovery—identifying themes and developing concepts and propositions. It is perhaps misleading to have a separate chapter on working with data, since data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Kvale (1996, p. 176) referred to what he called the "1,000-page question" often asked by qualitative researchers: "How shall I find a method to analyze the 1,000 pages of interview transcripts I have collected?" As Kvale argued, the question is posed too late. If you have collected 1,000 (or fewer) pages of data and not conducted any analysis, you will be in trouble.

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis go hand in hand. Throughout participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and other qualitative research, researchers are constantly theorizing and trying to make sense of their data. They keep track of emerging themes and ideas, read through their field notes or transcripts, and develop concepts and propositions to begin to interpret their data. As their studies progress, they begin to focus their research interests, ask directive questions, check out informants' stories, and follow up on leads and hunches. In many instances researchers hold off on selecting additional settings, people, or documents for study until they have conducted some initial data analysis. Both grounded theory's strategy of theoretical sampling and analytic induction's search for negative cases require this. Similarly, institutional ethnographies often begin with an exploration of some group's experience. Analysis of the puzzles inherent

in those experiences may then lead to additional data collection oriented to exploring the extra-local activities that shape the group's situation (DeVault & McCoy, 2012).

The second activity, which typically occurs after the data have been collected, entails coding the data and refining one's understanding of the subject matter. Many of the steps outlined later, such as coding, occur after the data have been collected.

Some researchers prefer to distance themselves from the research prior to engaging in coding and intensive analysis. Practical considerations can also force the researcher to postpone analysis. For example, people sometimes underestimate the amount of time for taped interviews to be transcribed. When researchers transcribe the data themselves, the process often produces many insights along the way. Note any ideas that are generated during transcription. Note taking at this point may add a bit of time to the transcription, but it can provide a good start on coding and analysis.

It is a good idea to begin coding as soon as possible after you have completed the fieldwork or collected the data. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to go back to informants to clarify any points or tie up loose ends. Some researchers maintain casual contact with informants throughout data analysis and even after the data have been analyzed and the study is written (see Gallmeier, 1991; B. Miller & Humphreys, 1980). Researchers may also have informants read draft reports as a check on interpretations (Douglas, 1976; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The final activity involves scrutinizing the emerging analysis and attempting to discount findings (Deutscher et al., 1993)—understanding the data in the context in which they were collected.

### Discovery

In qualitative studies, researchers gradually make sense of what they are studying by combining insight and intuition with an intimate familiarity with the data. As noted earlier, this is often a difficult process. Most people inexperienced in qualitative research have difficulty recognizing patterns in their data. You must learn to look for themes by examining your data in as many ways as possible. There is no simple formula for identifying themes and developing concepts, but the following suggestions, which are summarized in Figure 6.3, should get you on the right track.

*Read and Reread Your Data*
Collect all field notes, transcripts, documents, and other materials and read through them carefully. Then read through them some more. By the time you are ready to engage in intensive analysis, you should know your data inside and out.

---

**DEVELOPING THEMES AND CONCEPTS**

1. Read and reread your data.
2. Keep track of hunches, interpretations, and ideas.
3. Look for themes that occur frequently.
4. Construct typologies.
5. Develop concepts and theoretical propositions.
6. Read the literature.
7. Develop charts, diagrams, and figures.
8. Write analytical memos.

---

**Figure 6.3**   Developing themes and concepts.

As suggested in the chapter on fieldwork, it is always a good idea to have someone else read through your data. An outside reader can sometimes notice subtle aspects that elude the researcher.

In teaching qualitative analysis, DeVault sometimes asked students to look closely at a small amount of data (one or two paragraphs of field notes or transcriptions); she encouraged them to go slowly, considering each word and phrase and asking what might be said about it. Most of the ideas generated in this way will be abandoned, and the technique cannot be applied to all of the data, but the exercise encouraged the kind of close attention to detail that is needed in reading data.

*Keep Track of Hunches, Interpretations, and Ideas*
You should record any important idea that comes to you as you read through and think about your data. Keep a notebook or have a file folder handy for scribbled notes taken when an idea strikes you. Of course, if you prefer, you can keep a folder or create a document on your computer for this. In participant observation, researchers sometimes use observer's comments to note ideas and record interpretations. As you read through your data, you can also make notations in the margins.

*Look for Themes That Occur Frequently*
You must force yourself to search through your data for emerging themes or patterns: conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs (Spradley, 1980). Do not be afraid to identify tentative themes. Just do not develop a stake in any particular idea until you have had a chance to hold it up to the entire body of data and check it out.

Some patterns will stand out in your data. In Taylor's institutional study, physical restraints, pay, cleaning the ward, medications, and programming were frequent conversation topics. The attendants' vocabulary included phrases such as "low grade," "working boy," and "tripping time." These kinds of terms associated with a setting are always worth a close look. They provide insight into how the members of the setting are thinking.

Other patterns will not be so apparent. You will have to look for deeper meanings. In an epigraph to his book *Stigma*, Goffman (1963) quoted a fictitious letter that is rich in sociological understanding and compassionate in human terms. This letter can be used to demonstrate how themes can be identified in data:

> Dear Miss Lonelyhearts—
>
> I am sixteen years old now and I don't know what to do and would appreciate it if you could tell me what to do. When I was a little girl it was not so bad because I got used to the kids on the block making fun of me, but now I would like to have boy friends like the other girls and go out on Saturday nites, but no boy will take me because I was born without a nose—although I am a good dancer and have a nice shape and my father buys me pretty clothes.
>
> I sit and look at myself all day and cry. I have a big hole in the middle of my face that scares people even myself so I can't blame the boys for not wanting to take me out. My mother loves me, but she crys terrible when she looks at me.
>
> What did I do to deserve such a terrible bad fate? Even if I did do some bad things I didn't do any before I was a year old and I was born this way. I asked Papa and he says he doesn't know, but that maybe I did something in the other world before I was born or that maybe I was being punished for his sins. I don't believe that because he is a very nice man. Ought I commit suicide?
>
> Sincerely yours,
> *Desperate*

Quite a few themes may be seen here. The first is despair. "Desperate" said she looked at herself and cried and asked whether she should commit suicide; the signature itself reflects this state of mind. The next theme relates to trying to find an explanation for her situation. "What did I do," she asked, "to deserve such a terrible bad fate?" She went on to speculate about what she did in "the other world" and her father's sins. A third theme, which is somewhat more subtle, has to do with the meanings of physical stigma at different times in a person's life. "It was not so bad" when she was a little girl, but now that she had reached adolescence, when other girls have boyfriends and go out on Saturday nights, it was unbearable. Another theme relates to how Desperate's other qualities did not overcome the fact that she did not have a nose. That she may be a good dancer, have a nice shape, and wear pretty clothes did not get her any dates.

*Construct Typologies*

Typologies, or classification schemes, can be useful aids in identifying themes and developing concepts and theory. One kind of typology relates to how people classify others and objects in their lives. Taylor constructed a typology of how attendants classify residents by listing the terms used by the attendants to refer to their charges: "hyperactives," "fighters," "spastics," "pukers," "runaways," "pests," "dining room boys," "working boys," and "pets."

The other kind of typology is based on the researcher's own classification scheme. In Taylor's institutional study, attendants frequently talked about the need to control residents. By examining themes in his data in light of this concept, Taylor used the phrase *control measures* to refer to the various ways attendants attempted to control residents' behavior: constant supervision of residents, restrictions on residents' freedom of movement, limiting residents' access to objects and possessions, physical restraining devices, drugging, offering residents rewards and privileges, physical force, work duty, and others.

By developing typologies, you begin to make conceptual linkages between seemingly different phenomena. This, in turn, helps you to develop an analytical narrative and build theory.

*Develop Concepts and Theoretical Propositions*

It is through concepts, accounts, and propositions that the researcher moves from description to interpretation and theory. Concepts are abstract ideas generalized from observational, interview, or other data. In qualitative research, concepts are sensitizing instruments (Blumer, 1969; Bruyn, 1966). Sensitizing concepts, according to Blumer (1969, p. 148), provide a "general sense of reference" and suggest "directions along which to look." Blumer proceeded to explain that sensitizing concepts are communicated by "exposition which yields a meaningful picture, abetted by apt illustrations which enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one's own experience." Concepts are used to illuminate social processes and phenomena that are not readily apparent through descriptions of specific instances. Stigma is a powerful example of a sensitizing concept. When we think of stigma as a blot on one's moral character, and not merely an abnormality, we are better able to understand what a person like Desperate, quoted by Goffman (1963), experienced and to relate her experiences to those of others.

Developing concepts is an intuitive process. It can be learned but not formally taught. However, here are some places to start. First, look for words and phrases in informants' own vocabularies that capture the meaning of what they say or do. Concepts from informants are sometimes referred to as emic or concrete concepts: "The concrete concept is derived indigenously

from the culture studied; it takes its meaning solely from that culture and not from the scientist's definition of it" (Bruyn, 1966, p. 39). For example, in Taylor's study of the Duke family, people talked about themselves as being "on disability," but not as being disabled. By carefully analyzing how people used this language in different contexts, Taylor discovered that being "on disability" was contrasted with being "on welfare." It referred to the source of one's government check, but did not bring with it a potentially stigmatizing identity as a disabled or so-called mentally retarded person.

Second, as you note a theme in your data, compare statements and acts with one another to see whether there is a concept or parallel that unites them. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 106) pointed out that this comparison can usually be made from memory. In Taylor's study, attendants took precautions to avoid getting caught violating institutional rules. For example, they placed a watchdog at the door to warn them of the arrival of supervisors or visitors and they hit residents in such a way as not to leave marks. Taylor came up with the concept of evasion strategies to refer to these activities. Once he developed this concept, he noticed that other activities, such as fudging records, were related to these strategies.

Third, as you identify different themes, look for underlying similarities between them. When you can relate the themes in this manner, see whether there is an idea or concept that conveys how they are similar. Thus, Goffman's (1959, 1961) concept of fronts applied equally to themes related to how institutional officials maintained grounds and how they managed media relations.

A proposition is a general statement grounded in the data. The statement "Attendants use evasion strategies to avoid getting caught violating institutional rules" is a proposition. Whereas concepts may or may not fit, propositions are either right or wrong. Although researchers may offer data to support propositions, it may not be possible for them to be able to prove them. Readers will usually find propositions compelling when they seem consistent with findings from other research, provide new insights that are useful in other contexts, or offer promising leads for further study.

Like concepts, propositions are developed by poring over the data. By studying themes, constructing typologies, and relating different pieces of data to each other, the researcher gradually comes up with accounts of how things happen in a setting and sometimes with generalizations that may be relevant beyond the particular setting. Taylor came up with the proposition that attendants define residents according to whether the residents help or hinder the attendant's own custodial work. Whereas teachers might view people with intellectual disabilities in terms of their learning characteristics or physicians might view them according to their medical etiologies (for example, Down syndrome, organic brain damage, fragile X syndrome), attendants' definitions of residents reflected their concern with ward order and cleanliness.

This proposition was derived from attendants' own typology of residents. By looking at attendants' terms for and comments about residents, Taylor discovered that attendants classified residents according to broad categories related to their practical, day-to-day concerns: control problems (residents who got into trouble); custodial problems (those who created cleanup work); supervisory problems (those who required constant surveillance); authority problems (those who resisted attendants' authority and control); special processing (those who required special treatment and work); helpers (those who did attendants' work for them); and pets and no problems (those who did not cause any problems or kept attendants entertained).

Figure 6.4 summarizes how Taylor moved from a listing of terms attendants used to a typology and then to a proposition about how attendants define residents. Of course, this figure captures the end product of Taylor's theorizing. The process began with Taylor paying attention to attendants' language and asking the question "What do these terms have in common?" Early on in his study, Taylor came up with the following hunch: "Attendants define residents according to the problems they create for them." Yet this did not adequately capture all of the data. Helpers stood out as an exception, and, by examining such negative cases, Taylor refined the proposition to more accurately portray attendants' perspectives.

*Read the Literature*

One principle of the classic grounded theory approach is that qualitative researchers should begin their studies with minimal commitment to a priori assumptions and theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, some contemporary approaches to qualitative research, such as Michael Burawoy's (Burawoy et al., 2000) global ethnography, are expressly intended to contribute to existing theory. Although some contemporary researchers prefer to formulate research problems with reference to existing theory, it is still essential that qualitative researchers remain open to information that comes from the field. The chief advantage of qualitative research lies in its open and flexible character, and an overreliance on theory can easily close off important insights. Toward the latter stages of your research, you will be ready to return to the literature and to search for additional literature that bears on the developing findings.

Other studies often provide fruitful concepts and propositions that will help you interpret your data. It is not uncommon to find that the best insights come from studies of a totally different substantive area. For instance, in Taylor's study of the Duke family, some of the most useful literature came not from disability studies but from research on support networks among poor African American mothers (see, for example, Stack, 1974).

You should be careful not to force your data into someone else's framework. If concepts fit your data, do not be afraid to borrow them. If they do

| Words attendants use to refer to residents | Analysis: Attendants' typology of residents | Analysis: Proposition |
|---|---|---|
| "Troublemaker"<br>"Biter"<br>"Fighter"<br>"Working boy"<br>"Pet"<br>"Runaway"<br>"Puker"<br>"Digger"<br>"Smart Aleck"<br>"Working Girl"<br>"Low grade"<br>"Choker"<br>"Wise Guy"<br>"Self-Abuser"<br>"Cripple"<br>"Head-banger"<br>"Aggressive"<br>"Bucket Boy"<br>"Soiler"<br>"Helper"<br>"School Boy"<br>"Vegetable"<br>"No Problem"<br>"P.C." ("privileged character") | *Control problems*<br>"Troublemaker"<br>"Aggressive"<br>"Fighter"<br><br>*Custodial problems*<br>"Low grade"<br>"Soiler"<br>"Cripple"<br>"Vegetable"<br>"Puker"<br><br>*Authority problems*<br>"Wise Guy"<br>"Smart Alek"<br><br>*Supervision problems*<br>"Runaway"<br>"Head-Banger"<br>"Self-Abuser"<br>"Biter"<br>"Choker"<br>"Digger"<br><br>*Special processing*<br>"School Boy"<br><br>*No Problems*<br>"Pet"<br>"P.C."<br>"No Problem"<br><br>*Helpers*<br>"Working Boy"<br>"Working Girl"<br>"Helper"<br>"Bucket Boy" | Attendants define residents according to whether they help or hinder their custodial (cleaning and control) work |

**Figure 6.4**   Analysis: Constructing a typology and forming a proposition: Example from a study of institutional attendants.

not, forget about them. Remember that it may be appropriate and useful to extend and revise ideas gleaned from the literature.

How you interpret your data depends on your theoretical assumptions. It is important to expose yourself to theoretical frameworks during the intensive analysis stage of the research. Symbolic interactionism leads

to looking for social perspectives, meanings, and definitions. Thus, the symbolic interactionist is interested in questions such as the following:

- How do people define themselves, others, their settings, and their activities?
- How do people's definitions and perspectives develop and change?
- What is the fit between different perspectives held by different people?
- What is the fit between people's perspectives and their activities?
- How do people deal with the discrepancy between their perspectives and activities?

Institutional ethnographers are interested in the ways that people's perspectives in one setting are shaped by what's happening elsewhere. Questions such as the following may be in the forefront for institutional ethnographers (McCoy, 2006):

- What are these people doing?
- How do these activities connect people across settings?
- Are people producing, using, or responding to texts of any kind?
- What activities are made visible in the text, and what else is going on?

Researchers engaged in narrative analysis may be watching for stories as they read their data—either the large stories contained in an entire interview or small stories used to make a specific point or overheard during participant observation. Riessman (2008) discussed several ways that narrative researchers work with data, but they will usually be asking questions related to narrative shape as they pursue their analyses:

- How does the story begin?
- What are the key parts of the story, and which are emphasized by the narrator?
- Are there signals of emotion in the telling?
- How does the story end? What seems to be the moral of the story?
- What does the speaker seem to be doing by telling the story?

Although most researchers align themselves with a specific theoretical framework, it is common to borrow from diverse frameworks to make sense of data. This point underscores the importance and value of reading widely and studying many examples of qualitative research. No qualitative research approach provides a neat, standardized procedure for data analysis. So beginning researchers should feel free to borrow and combine techniques. With additional experience the researcher will become more adept at knowing and explaining the approach taken and providing explanations of different analytic techniques.

*Develop Charts, Diagrams, and Figures to Highlight Patterns in the Data*

Charts, diagrams, and figures can serve as useful aids in exploring patterns in your data (Spradley, 1980). Sketch out potential relationships between different slices of data and see whether this helps you come up with new understandings.

In their study of staff-to-parent communication on hospital neonatal units, Bogdan, Brown, and Foster (1982) developed the diagram shown in Figure 6.5 to depict the staff's conceptual scheme of patients. Words in quotes referred to those consistently used on the units. Those without quotes were the researchers' phrases and represented categories that the staff members did not have words for but that were evident by the way they talked (e.g., "This kind of infant") and acted. Although staff members classified infants according to their chances for survival within minutes of their arrival on the units, phrases such as "You can never really tell" dominate their communication with parents.

Early in Taylor's study of the Duke family, he noticed that Bill and Winnie made new friends easily and sometimes became close friends, even best friends, with others in a matter of weeks. Before long, however, they invariably had a falling-out with these friends and became distanced
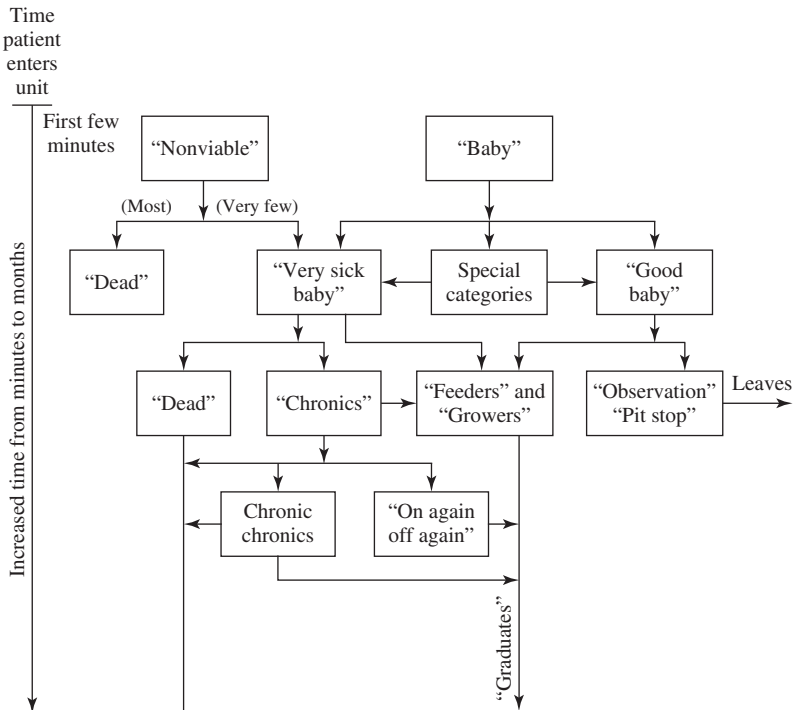


**Figure 6.5**   Analytical diagram: The staff's classification of infants on a neonatal unit.

from them. A snapshot of Bill and Winnie's social relations left the impression of a succession of short-term, superficial relationships, as has been reported by other researchers among poor people (see, for example, Liebow, 1967). But this would be misleading, because sooner or later the same people showed up again at the Dukes' home, and Bill and Winnie became friendly with them again. The same pattern seemed to repeat itself over and over again.

To try to make sense of the Dukes' social relations, Taylor charted their relationships with family members and friends with whom they had appeared to be the closest at one time or another over a period of several years. Using concentric circles to approximate closeness and distance, Taylor came up with diagrams such as the one contained in Figure 6.6. This depicted Bill and Winnie's relationship with Lisa and Gary, a couple with three children, whom they had known for a number of years. Around the time Taylor first met the Dukes, Lisa and Gary were evicted from their home, and the Dukes took them in. For a while, the two families did everything together, but then Bill and Winnie had an argument with Lisa and Gary and Bill threw them out of their home. A month later, Bill and Winnie became close to Lisa and Gary again, only to have another falling-out the following month. As shown in Figure 6.6, this pattern continued for years.
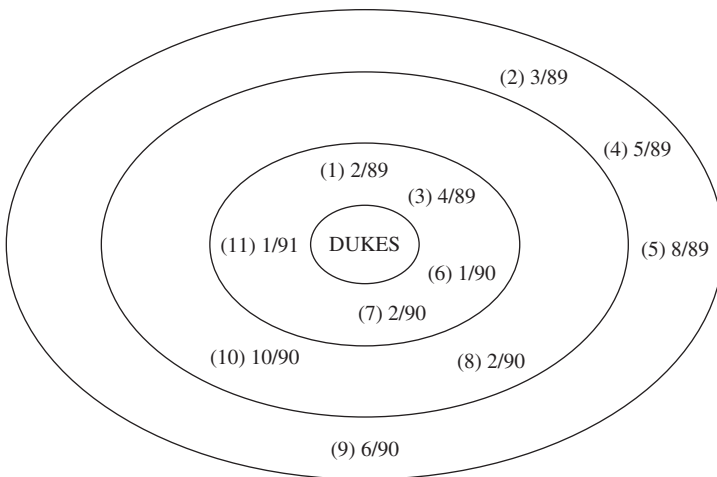


**Figure 6.6**   Analytic diagram: The ebb and flow of relations—
Lisa and Gary in the Dukes' network.

Proximity to the middle circle indicates closeness to the Duke family. The numbers/
dates refer to the closeness to or distance from the Dukes of Lisa and Gary
(another family) at different points in time.

On the basis of his analysis, Taylor came to understand social relations within the Dukes' social network in terms of an ebb and flow between closeness and hostility. Relations were characterized by mutual support (for example, taking in homeless people, lending money, doing favors) at one point in time, but bitter feuds (arguments, banishing people from one's home, reporting people to child abuse agencies) at another. Taylor theorized that mutual support and feuds were merely two sides of the same coin and reflected the tenuous social and economic status of the Dukes and other members of their social network.

Institutional ethnographers may use mapping techniques of various kinds to organize or present data—some of these techniques are illustrated in the work of S. M. Turner (1995, 2001, 2006), Pence (2001), and others (D. E. Smith and Turner 2014). Since institutional ethnographies are expressly designed to explore the social relations that organize activities across different sites, maps can be helpful at any stage of the research. In the early stages, these rough diagrams help to guide the investigation. As the researcher learns more, the maps can be refined to include more detail and specificity. Researchers who adopt the social worlds and actor-network approaches (Clarke, 2005), which have grown from grounded theory, also use diagrams to sketch out the groups, activities, and settings of interest in their projects.

*Write Analytical Memos*

Throughout the course of your study, you should stand back from your data and write analytic memos on what you think you are learning (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Saldaña, 2011). Charmaz (1983) described a process of writing, sorting, and integrating memos for developing grounded theories. Emerson et al. (2011) provided tips for memo writing and examples from research conducted by their students. You can write memos that specify the codes you are using, attempt to summarize all of the major findings of your study, or comment on specific aspects of your study. Memo writing also provides an opportunity for you to think about what additional data you want to collect. If you have written memos throughout the course of your study, you may find these helpful when you sit down to write your study. In some cases, entire sections of your study will have already been written. Many researchers also use memos to comment on their own involvement in the research settings or their feelings about the setting. This type of memo provides a way of processing such material and can deepen the researcher's understanding of the influence of personal relationships in the setting, and the lens through which he or she has interpreted the data.

Memo writing is especially useful in any kind of team or collaborative research. Memos help keep researchers on top of what their team members are learning and thinking.

Coding

In qualitative research, coding is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2011). The coding process involves bringing together and analyzing all the data bearing on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions. It provides a way of storing data so that they are easily retrieved as the researcher works out analysis and later presents them, with appropriate supporting material. What were initially general insights, vague ideas, and hunches are refined, expanded, discarded, or fully developed during coding. Following Strauss (1987), we distinguish between two types of coding. Open coding begins early and is employed to generate ideas about how to proceed with data analysis. Once you have formulated some ideas about the major concepts and propositions you wish to develop, focused coding is used to refine those ideas, locate all the data that bear on each piece of data, and make sure the findings are robust. Here are some strategies that should help you get started on more focused coding of your data. These are summarized in Figure 6.7.

*Develop a Story Line*
We have always found it helpful to develop a story line to guide theorizing and analysis. The story line is the analytic thread that unites and integrates the major themes in a study. It is an answer to the question "What is this a study of?"

Perhaps the best way to develop the story line is to come up with a sentence, short paragraph, or phrase that describes your study in general terms.

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*TWO TYPES OF CODING*

**OPEN CODING:**

1.   Read and reread the data, noting possible themes.
2.   Consider various ways of labeling and organizing bits of data.
3.   Make preliminary decisions about lines of analysis to pursue.

**FOCUSED CODING**

1.   Develop a story line
2.   List all major themes, typologies, concepts, and propositions.
3.   Develop codes.
4.   Sort your data into codes.
5.   Compare the data and refine your analysis.

**Figure 6.7**   Steps in coding.

The titles and subtitles of qualitative studies sometimes do this. For instance, the title *Making the Grade: The Academic Side of College Life* (Becker et al., 1968) told us about the importance of grades to students; the title *Cloak of Competence: Stigma in the Lives of the Mentally Retarded* (Edgerton, 1967) communicated the idea that people labeled mentally retarded try to avoid stigma; *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (Thorne, 1993) captured Thorne's interest in the social construction of gender on school playgrounds; *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders: Homeless in San Francisco* (Gowan, 2010) pointed to the differing orientations of homeless people; *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience* (Karkazis, 2008) examined the controversies over the medical treatment of intersexuality.

Your coding scheme should be based on what you want to write—the theory or sociological story you want to communicate. Many people start coding data without any idea of what story they want to tell. As a result, the coding scheme may lack coherence, and the researchers may waste their time systematically coding data they will never use. When they do try to start writing, they may be at a total loss on how to make disparate pieces fit together. Once you have done some preliminary open coding, you should try to develop a story line that can guide further analysis. Of course, any story line must always be open to revision.

A story line will help you decide what concepts and themes you want to communicate in your study and how your data should be organized and coded. It is useful to think about coding in terms of writing a book (which many people will be trying to do literally). Decide on the major focus of the book, or what we have called the story line. Then, on the basis of the themes you have identified and your analytic memos, decide on what chapters should be in the book, keeping in mind that each chapter must relate to the story line. This will give you the basic structure for your coding scheme.

*List All Major Themes, Typologies, Concepts, and Propositions*
On the basis of your ongoing analysis, list the major themes in your data as well as your own ideas. Be as specific as possible. Some themes will be specific, and some ideas or concepts will be fully developed. Others will be tentative and vaguely formulated. For example, you might find recurring conversation topics that seem important, although you might not fully understand their meaning or significance.

After you have listed themes, see how they relate to your story line and where they fit into your hypothetical chapter outline. You will probably find that some themes overlap or relate conceptually and that you will be able to collapse them under broader headings. Some themes will not relate to your story line; these can be set aside, although sometimes you may find their relevance later, as you develop the analysis. Others may seem relevant even

though you are not sure where exactly they fit; you will want to code and analyze these.

At this point in your analysis, you will have a master list of coding categories. The number of coding categories will depend on the amount of data you have and the complexity of your analysis. In his job training study, Bogdan coded his data according to approximately 150 categories. Taylor used roughly 50 categories in his study of institutional attendants. His coding scheme included well-developed propositions ("Attendants discount IQ as an indicator of intelligence") and topics of conversation (what attendants say about programming). Figure 6.8 lists the initial coding categories for Taylor's study of the Duke family.

*Code Your Data*

Coding can be done in different ways, but it usually involves assigning a symbol or number to each coding category. Go through all field notes, transcripts, documents, and other materials indicating which data fit under which coding categories. Code both direct statements and indirect observations. For example, under the theme of control in his institutional study, Taylor coded both attendants' comments ("You gotta control them or they'll end up running this place") and his own observations (attendants tying residents in bed at night).

As you code your data, refine the coding scheme; add, collapse, expand, and redefine the coding categories. The cardinal rule of coding in qualitative analysis is to make the codes fit the data and not vice versa. Record any refinements in your master list of coding of categories.

You will notice that some pieces of data fit into two or more coding categories. These should be coded according to all relevant categories.

You should code both positive and negative incidents related to a theme or coding category. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), using a statistical metaphor, wrote:

> Any given finding usually has exceptions. The temptation is to smooth them over, ignore them, or explain them away. But the outlier is your friend . . . It not only tests the generality of the finding but also protects you against self-selecting biases, and may help you build a better explanation. (p. 301)

The search for the exceptional case or negative example can help you refine your interpretations. Two related examples from Taylor's institutional study illustrate this.

In analyzing the proposition that attendants discount IQ as an indicator of intelligence, Taylor found both supportive ("You can't trust IQ") and nonsupportive ("You can't teach him that much because his IQ is too low") statements. This led to a deeper understanding and more sophisticated interpretation of attendants' perspectives: attendants distrust professional

| Lifestyle | Relations With Family and Friends |
|---|---|
| *Housing* | |
|   &bull; Housing moves | *Perspectives on Family and Friends* |
|   &bull; Evictions | |
| | *Family Gatherings* |
| *Housekeeping* | |
| | *Relations* |
| *Income* | |
| | *Favors* |
| *Work* |   &bull; Taking people in |
|   &bull; Winnie's jobs |   &bull; Debts to others |
| *Family Purchases/Spending* | *Feuds/Arguments* |
|   &bull; Bill's vehicles |   &bull; Reporting others to agencies |
|   &bull; Sammy's vehicles |   &bull; Bill's reports of others sabotaging his vehicles |
| *Family's Charitable Giving* | |
| | Social Services and Government Programs |
| *Leisure/Hobbies* | |
| | *SSI and Social Security* |
| *Family Pets* | |
| | *Welfare* |
| *Child Rearing* | |
| | *"Children's Division"* |
| Disability | |
| | *Food Banks* |
| *Disability Terms (e.g., "on disability," "retard," "crippled," "medical problems")* | *Disability Programs* |
| | *School* |
| *Disability Labels From Agencies* | |
| | *Neighborhood Groups* |
| *Winnie's and Bill's Perspectives on Their Children* | |

**Figure 6.8**   Analysis: Initial coding categories in the study of the Duke family.

techniques such as IQ testing, but they may refer to these techniques to justify their own actions.

Attendants viewed residents as severely limited in their potential for learning. "These here are all low grades" and "You can't teach them nothing" were typical comments. In reviewing his data, Taylor came across a number of statements that countered this proposition. One attendant, who usually denigrated residents' intelligence, commented on one occasion, "Yeah, they're dumb like a fox," implying that residents were smarter than they looked. Exploring the meaning of these statements, Taylor concluded that attendants described residents as "smarter than they look" when it came to scolding or punishing them. They were saying that residents "know better" than to cause problems and should be punished for their behavior. These statements were made to account for or justify attendants' treatment of residents. What initially appeared to be a contradiction was resolved through the analytic distinction between perspectives—how people view their world—and accounts—how people justify their actions to themselves and others. Although attendants might have genuinely viewed residents as severely limited intellectually, they expressed an opposite view when it was expedient to do so.

In qualitative data analysis, most researchers are not concerned with the reliability of their coding procedures as commonly thought of in quantitative research. A coding scheme can be thought of as a personal filing system. Place data in the coding category, or file folder to continue the analogy, along with related data in which you see conceptual similarities. Coding is intended to help you develop insights and generate theoretical understandings, not to produce frequency counts to prove your hypotheses. As Katz (1983) pointed out, the utility and reliability of your coding scheme will be tested when you write up your findings. If you have difficulty incorporating data into the written findings, you will need to reconsider your assessment of the data and perhaps adjust your developing findings.

*Sort the Data Into the Coding Categories*
Sorting data is a non-interpretative, mechanical operation (Drass, 1980). Here the researcher assembles all the data coded according to each category. Before the advent of computers, qualitative researchers did this manually, which usually entailed cutting up an extra set of field notes, transcripts, or other materials and placing data relating to each coding category in a separate file folder or manila envelope. Some researchers still prefer to sort their data this way.

Today, of course, now that practically every researcher has a computer, software programs for coding qualitative data—generally known as computer-assisted, or aided, qualitative data analysis software or CAQDAS (Silverman, 2013)—have become increasingly popular. Software programs

for qualitative analysis include NVivo (a product of QSR International), HyperResearch (Researchware), and ATLAS.ti. Recent developments include the web-based coding system Dedoose, which allows for convenient access to coded data and may be especially useful for team projects, since members can access the coding platform from different locations. Some companies also offer transcription software, which facilitates transcription using keystrokes to stop and start digital recordings. The websites associated with these products provide up-to-date information and usually offer demonstration versions of the programs. There are certain to be new developments in this area, which will afford new possibilities for storing, processing, and retrieving qualitative data. Still, each researcher will need to assess the value of computer-based coding systems, as measured against the time needed to learn the system, enter data in an appropriate format, and so on. For small projects, such as those that students conduct in classes, computer assistance may not be needed.

For those who need a place to start with computerized data analysis, the University of Surrey's CAQDAS Networking Project (http://www .surrey.ac.uk/sociology/research/researchcentres/caqdas/about/index.htm) provides a range of resources on qualitative analysis software and has developed working papers comparing various popular programs according to system requirements, functions, ease of use, and other factors (also see Silver & Lewins, 2014).

As Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) pointed out, the question "What's the best program?" has no answer in the abstract. The answer depends on how comfortable you are with computers and what you want to use the software to do. Creswell (2012, pp. 201–203) described eight ways in which computer software programs can be used in qualitative data analysis: storing and organizing data; locating text or image segments associated with a code or scheme; locating common passages that relate to two or more codes; making comparisons among codes; helping the researcher conceptualize different levels of abstraction; providing a visual picture of codes or themes; writing memos and storing them as codes; and creating a template for coding data. Minimally, if you are using software for data analysis, you will want to be able to code and retrieve words, sentences, paragraphs, and segments of data. When you code qualitative data, whether manually or through computer software, you not only code quotes and observations but include the context (for example, your questions in addition to the informant's answers) as well. It is also useful to know what set of field notes or transcripts data came from; you should select software with this in mind. Software also exists that can enable you to develop and test propositions and conduct frequency counts.

It is easy to become enamored with computer-aided data analysis. Researchers with a quantitative orientation may be especially likely to use software in an attempt to make qualitative research appear more scientific.

However, adopting a computerized system can impose a foreign mind-set on qualitative reasoning. Word processing software can make writing easier and more efficient, but it cannot make you a better writer. Computer software can serve as a useful mechanical clerk (Drass, 1980), but there is no substitute for the researcher's insight and intuition in theorizing and interpreting data.

In his study of the Duke family, Taylor used a different approach than either cutting up field notes or coding with computer software. Having identified the major themes in his study to date, he went through each set of field notes and briefly, in a short phrase, noted data potentially bearing on themes (Notes #6 "threw out Lisa and Greg"; Notes #40 "Winnie helped mother move"). Then, for each theme, he recorded these brief notations found through his field notes. Thus, under the theme disability, Taylor had numerous pages with notations such as the following:

- #5 Bill-SSI-seizures—can't work but can drive a car
- #6 Bill, his sister, and brother institutionalized
- #7 Cindy's book, "Your handicap"
- "Medical conditions"
- Winnie—sheltered workshop
- Bill—"probation"
- #11 Bill—"on disability"

Though time-consuming, this indexing process helped Taylor commit to memory data relating to major themes. In writing about the Duke family, he also found it easier to work with a smaller number of pages with brief summary statements than with a mass of verbatim quotations and observations.

DeVault has used various methods of organizing data in her research. Although she conducted thematic coding for her interview study of feeding the family (1991)—using the scissors-and-sort method of gathering data on each theme—she also grouped the interviewees into rough social class categories and kept track of whether and how thematic codes varied across social class. In her studies of dietitians and nutrition educators (1995a and Chapter 10, this volume), she supplemented thematic coding with timelines that illustrated the career histories of the participants and showed how their careers were situated in time and, therefore, within the development of their professional field.

The only hard-and-fast rules of coding are do what helps you theorize and respect the nature of the data.

*Compare the Data and Refine Your Analysis*
Coding and sorting your data enables you to analyze together all data relevant to a theme, concept, or proposition. This is where Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method comes into play. By comparing different pieces of data you refine and tighten up your ideas and gradually move to a

higher level of conceptualization. To take a simple example, you move from quotes and observations such as "John said, 'You have to let them know who's boss'" and "Attendants keep possessions and objects locked away in a storage room to keep them from residents" to analytic propositions such as "Maintaining ward order and control is a pervasive concern among attendants." Since this is an inductive and intuitive process, there are no simple procedures or techniques for this kind of analysis. You might find it helpful to ask yourself questions like "What do these quotes or observations have in common?" "What's going on here?" "What does this tell me about how people view their world?" "How do these themes relate to each other?" To the extent that you have written analytic memos and recorded ideas throughout your study, your task should be much easier here.

By analyzing your data in this fashion, you will likely find that some themes that were once vague and obscure will be clearly illuminated. Other concepts or ideas will not fit the data, and some propositions will not hold up. You should be prepared to discard these and develop new ones to accommodate the data.

There are no guidelines in qualitative research for determining how many instances are necessary to support a conclusion or interpretation. This is always a judgment call. The best insights sometimes come from a small amount of data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that a single incident is sufficient for developing a conceptual category for grounded theory.

How you integrate data analysis and writing is a matter of personal preference. Some people prefer to conduct all of their coding, sorting, and analysis before they begin writing a single sentence. Others wait to analyze data until they are ready to write a specific section or chapter. In either case, researchers always refine their ideas when they attempt to put them in writing.

### DISCOUNTING DATA

The final activity in qualitative analysis is what Deutscher (1973) and Mills (1940) called discounting the data—interpreting data in the context in which they were collected. As Deutscher (1973) pointed out, all data are potentially valuable if we know how to assess their credibility:

> We do, of course, routinely discount history or biography according to what we know about the author . . . . We do not discard reports merely because of biases or flaws of one sort or another. If we did, there would be no history. It is all presented by men who have some sort of stake in the matters of which they write, who are located somewhere in their own society (and tend to see the world from that perspective), and whose work is more or less open to methodological criticism. This same observation can be made of all discourse, including social science research reports. (p. 5)

All data must be discounted in this sense. You have to look at how the data were collected in order to understand them. You do not discard anything. You just interpret the data differently depending on the context.

As a check on their analysis and interpretations, Becker et al. (1968) and Becker et al. (1961) systematically compared their data and provided statistical breakdowns according to such factors as volunteered versus directed statements or whether people made a statement alone or in the company of others (Becker, 1958). This approach perhaps reflected the era in which they conducted their research (DeVault, 2007). In the 1950s and 1960s especially, qualitative research was strongly influenced by positivist concepts of validity and reliability, and many researchers tried to justify qualitative studies according to standards associated with quantitative research. Today, few qualitative researchers would attempt to validate their interpretations through quasi-statistics. Proof is illusive in qualitative research.

Although we believe that it is important to examine data in the context of how they were collected, an informal review should be sufficient for most researchers. There are different questions to ask about how your data were collected. These are summarized in Figure 6.9.

*Solicited or Unsolicited Statements?*

Although qualitative researchers usually try to let people talk about what is on their minds, they are never totally passive. They ask certain kinds of questions and follow up on certain topics. By doing so, they solicit data that may not have emerged otherwise.

You should look at whether people say different things in response to your questions than they do when talking spontaneously. Of course, you would not throw out statements simply because you elicited them. A good qualitative researcher sometimes gets people to talk about things they would

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**DISCOUNTING**

- Solicited or unsolicited statements?
- What was your role in the setting?
  - Who was there?
  - Direct or indirect data?
  - Who said and did what?
- Did you conduct member checks?
- What was your perspective going into the study?
  - How has it changed?
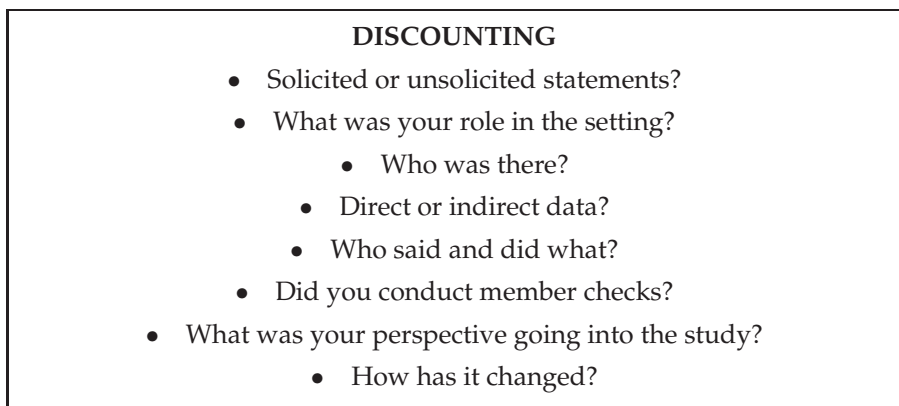
**Figure 6.9**   Discounting data—Understanding in context: Questions to ask.

otherwise keep hidden or never think to mention. Further, as DeVault (1990) noted, people are often unable to articulate some of their experiences and feelings, and the researcher must help them come up with the words. If you find that people say different things in response to direct questions than they do otherwise, then this becomes a matter for further reflection and deeper interpretation. A response to a direct question means something, but you cannot necessarily take it at face value. For example, the one time Taylor asked an attendant directly about abuse on his ward he roundly condemned it; yet this attendant routinely engaged in acts that could be defined as abusive. People may make certain statements because they represent what they believe is the right thing to say, or they may think about certain acts differently in the abstract than in specific situations.

*What Was Your Role in the Setting?*

Most participant observers try to minimize their effects on the people they are studying until they have grasped a basic understanding of the settings. In the chapter on fieldwork we urged observers to come on slow during the early stages of the research. As we noted in that chapter, participant observers almost always influence the settings they study.

Especially during the first days in the field, informants may be cautious in what they say and do. They may even try to put on an act for the observer. Attendants admitted to Taylor that they did many things differently when he first started to visit the ward. One attendant explained how they reacted to outsiders:

> We usually know when someone's comin'—an hour or so beforehand. They let us know when someone's comin' so we can put some clothes on 'em—make sure they're not bare-assed or jerkin' off when someone comes up here. I had some visitors up here today . . . . They asked me a bunch of questions. I answered 'em, but I wasn't gonna overdo it. You know? I wasn't gonna tell 'em everything.

It is important to try to understand your effects on a setting. As Emerson (1981, p. 365) wrote, the participant observer must try "to become sensitive to and perceptive of how one is perceived and treated by others." One way to do this is to look at how people reacted to you at different times in the research. In his institutional study, Taylor noticed that attendants reacted differently to him at different points in his study. Most initially seemed guarded in his presence but over time openly said and did things that they ordinarily hid from supervisors and other outsiders. By comparing data collected at different points in the research, the researcher is better equipped to examine how informants' reactions to his or her presence may have influenced what they said and did.

Some researchers make this kind of observation an important aspect of their analyses. For example, when Krieger (1985) found that she was having

difficulty coding data from a study of a lesbian community, she realized that her friendships with some participants were making it difficult for her to develop an analysis. She then made detailed notes on her prior relationship or knowledge of each participant, her feelings about the interview encounter, and how she felt about the participant in the aftermath of the interview. With those observations in mind (and having diffused some of her own emotional responses), she found that she was better able to develop an analysis of the community and its dynamics. Presser (2005), a female researcher who interviewed male prisoners convicted of violent crimes, recounted how she came to a practice of strong reflexivity, which involved considering not only the micro-dynamics of the interview encounters, but also reflections on the context—the men's imprisonment—that allowed her to conduct the interviews. Feminist researchers such as Krieger and Presser—reacting to the male biases they perceived in mainstream social science before the 1970s (and which still remained in some work)—led the way in developing a literature on researcher reflexivity (Hertz, 1997). Although early qualitative researchers did not always discuss these kinds of dynamics explicitly, in the contemporary context it is important to acknowledge the researcher's identity and social location and how these have influenced the research.

*Who Was There?*

Just as an observer can influence what informants say or do, so, too, can other people in a setting. For example, teachers may say something among themselves that they would not say to their principal. You should be alert to differences between what people say and do when they are alone and when others are around. This may help you understand apparent discrepancies in your data.

*Direct or Indirect Data?*

When you analyze your data, you code both direct statements and indirect data bearing on a theme, interpretation, or proposition. The more you have to read into your data to draw inferences based on indirect data, the less sure you can be about whether you have gotten things right (Becker & Geer, 1957). Needless to say, a keen insight based on indirect inference can be worth much more than a commonsense conclusion.

*Who Said and Did What?*

There is a danger of generalizing about a group of people on the basis of what one or a few of them say or do. Some participant observers are so strongly drawn to key informants, or so dependent on such informants for information, that they end up with a selective view of a setting. One talkative person can produce reams of data that appear throughout the field notes or transcripts. When that is the case, the analysis will not be as compelling as it is when the data come from many different participants.

For this reason, you should pay attention to the sources of the data on which you base your interpretations. Key informants can provide you with critical insights, but you need to distinguish between perspectives held by one person with those shared in common among members of a setting. When you write your study, it is usually good to inform readers as to who said and did what (e.g., one informant, some people, most informants, and so on).

It may sometimes be appropriate to make extensive use of a single participant's story, but you will need to provide a rationale for doing this and interpret the material in relation to the participant's location in the setting. For example, DeVault conducted a narrative analysis of the experiences of a single Black nutritionist (see Chapter 10), in order to identify some of the distinctive aspects of her career in a predominantly White field of work.

*Did You Conduct Member Checks?*

Some qualitative researchers use formal member checks to refine their interpretations and establish the credibility of their studies (Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997). Through member checks, informants can be asked not only to comment on the researcher's interpretations but to review draft case studies as well. Lincoln and Guba even recommended that researchers assemble a panel of informants to discuss draft reports at the conclusion of a research project. Writing in a different vein, some researchers, such as Richardson (1990b), advocated for new forms of collaborative research in which researchers relinquish their claim to authority as all-knowing purveyors of objective truth.

Any interpretation of a social scene will be richer if you have induced members of that scene to comment on and react to it. Even if people reject the interpretation, this can enhance your understanding of their perspectives. Though this falls short of being an ethical requirement, it also seems appropriate to provide people with an opportunity to react to what has been written about them as a matter of fairness (Manning, 1997).

Yet it is not always practical or desirable to solicit formal reviews of interpretations and findings (Bloor, 1983). In many qualitative studies, researchers penetrate the fronts (Goffman, 1959) people use to project a favorable image of themselves. Taylor analyzed the accounts attendants used to make practices that were illegal or distasteful appear morally justifiable to themselves and others. Not only would confronting attendants with this interpretation have shattered the researcher's relationships with them, it would have provoked considerable discomfort and anxiety among them. Further, Taylor's interpretations might have been dismissed in the same manner as the views of officials and professionals: "They don't know what it's really like." In some studies the researchers and subjects do not simply have different interpretations of particular views or practices; they have different worldviews.

Even when the researcher is sympathetic with the perspectives of informants, it may not warrant asking the informants to comment on the researcher's interpretations. A central focus of Taylor's Duke family study was on the meanings of disability within their social network. People had been disproportionately labeled as disabled or mentally retarded; yet they constructed identities of themselves and family members and friends as normal, nondisabled persons. They thereby avoided the social stigma associated with being defined as mentally retarded, in particular, and created a positive social status for themselves. How deeply people held onto these positive identities was unknown and was probably a matter that should have been left unexplored. To have confronted the Duke family with how they were viewed in the wider society—even assuming that the sociological concept of stigma could have been explained to them—would have challenged how they preferred to see themselves and threatened to shake the foundations of their identities.

As with other aspects of qualitative research, the advisability of member checks can only be determined in the context of the specific situation in which a study is conducted.

*What Was Your Own Perspective Going Into the Study and How Has It Changed?*
What you see and report as findings depends on who you are and how you see the world. Findings do not exist independently of the consciousness of the observer. All observations are filtered through the researcher's selective lens. This is not to suggest that findings are solely social artifacts or products of the researcher's imagination. Just because data are never self-explanatory does not mean that anything goes. Within the researcher's theoretical perspective, stock of cultural knowledge, and particular vantage point, findings can more or less accurately reflect the nature of the world. As Richardson (1990b, p. 27) wrote, "Because all knowledge is partial and situated, it does not mean that there is no knowledge or that situated knowledge is bad."

In traditional research, bias is to be avoided at all costs. It is assumed that researchers can conduct studies with no values, commitments, theoretical perspectives, or worldviews. In our view this is impossible.

Rather than act as though you have no point of view, it is better to own up to your perspective and examine your findings in this light. We occasionally read studies in which researchers have an obvious ax to grind—pet theories to impose on their data or values commitments that prevent them from reporting, or even seeing, things that do not fit with what they believed. We also sometimes come across studies in which researchers simply confirm what they thought before they even started their studies. If you do not learn something that challenges your previously held beliefs when you do qualitative research, then you have probably done it in the wrong way.

An understanding of your findings requires some understanding of your own perspectives, logic, and assumptions. This is one of the reasons we advise researchers to record their own feelings and assumptions in observer's comments or a journal throughout their studies. Critical self-reflection is essential in this kind of research.

Mentors or colleagues usually can be helpful in challenging your findings or interpretations and helping to keep you honest.

## CONSTRUCTING LIFE HISTORIES

We discuss life histories separately here, because they call for a somewhat different approach to organizing data. The life history contains a description of the important events and experiences in a person's life or some major part of it in his or her own words. In constructing life histories, analysis is a process of editing and putting the story together in such a way that it captures the person's own feelings, views, and perspectives.

As a social science document, the life history should be constructed to illuminate the socially significant features of the person's life. The concept of career (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1961; Hughes, 1937) probably provides the most fruitful way of doing this. The term *career*, broadly conceived, refers to the sequence of social positions people occupy throughout their lives and the changing definitions of themselves and their world they hold at various stages of that sequence. The concept directs our attention to the fact that people's definitions of themselves and others are not unique or idiosyncratic, but rather follow a standard and orderly pattern according to the situations in which people find themselves (Goffman, 1961). In putting together life histories, Bogdan and Taylor tried to identify the critical stages and periods in people's lives that shaped their definitions and perspectives. Thus, they could show how the meaning of being labeled mentally retarded or intellectually disabled changes as people move through infancy, early childhood, secondary age, and adulthood.

In the life history of Jane Fry, Bogdan organized her story around her career as a transgender person—that is, the chronology of experiences related to the development of her social identity as being transgender. The story, which came from an era that did not make room for a transgender identity, covered her family life, high school years, life in the navy, marriage to a woman, institutionalization as a mental patient, new life as a woman, and reflections on the future.

All analysis in qualitative research starts with becoming intimately familiar with the data, and life histories are no exception. Read through all transcripts, notes, documents, and other data. Identify the major stages, events, and experiences in the person's life. The life history is constructed by coding

and sorting the data according to these stages. Each stage becomes a chapter or section in the life history.

You might not be able to incorporate all of the data into the life history. Some stories and topics will not be relevant to your research interests and can be set aside. However, you should try to include all of your data that could change any interpretation of the person's life and experiences (Frazier, 1978). You should include details that will give a sense of knowing the person directly, even if some of those details may not bear directly on your research interests.

The final step in assembling the life history is editing the subject's accounts of his or her experiences to produce a coherent document. Since people vary in their ability to express themselves clearly, different stories will require different amounts of editing. In Bogdan and Taylor's interviewing of people labeled retarded, Ed Murphy was much more prone to engage in small talk and going off on tangents than was Pattie Burt, and hence Ed's story required much more editing.

As a rule, you should make the life history readable without putting words in the person's mouth or changing the meaning of his or her words. You can omit repetitious phrases and words, but you should include the person's characteristic speech patterns, grammatical constructions, and mispronunciations (if you have the life history published, you will have to be firm with copyeditors in this regard). You may have to add connecting passages and phrases to make the person's words understandable. Your questions will sometimes have to be incorporated into the person's answers. For example, the question "When was the first time you heard about the state school?" and the answer "It was about a week before I was sent there" can be combined to form the statement, "The first time I heard about the state school was about a week before I was sent there." Decisions about these kinds of editing are judgment calls, and there are no hard and fast rules, but there are some discussions of these issues in the literature (see DeVault, 1990, for example, on editing nonstandard language).

In most life histories, the researcher's own comments are typically relegated to the introduction or conclusion. In sociological or scholarly life histories, researchers should inform readers of the significance of the study and what can be learned from it. Some researchers, such as Sutherland (1937), used footnotes to comment on or interpret their informants' words.

The preceding chapters have dealt with the logic and procedures of qualitative research methods—designing studies, collecting data, and data analysis. After researchers have collected and made sense of their data, they must decide how to present their findings and understandings to others. Part Two of this book is intended to aid the researcher in this endeavor. Chapter 7 provides some general guidance on writing and publishing qualitative studies, and Chapters 8 through 12 contain examples based on some of our qualitative research.

# WRITING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: SELECTED STUDIES

# Writing and Publishing Qualitative Studies

THIS CHAPTER DEALS with the culmination of the research process: writing books, articles, research reports, or dissertations based on qualitative studies. The purpose of research is not only to increase your own understanding of social life, but also to share that understanding with others.

Since the mid-1980s, qualitative researchers have devoted attention to the writing process. Some researchers, such as Becker (2007), Wolcott (2009), and Emerson et al. (2011), have written useful books that demystify and personalize the writing of qualitative studies. We draw on some of the lessons to be learned from these books in this chapter.

Other researchers have focused on the production of qualitative texts as literary narratives. In her 1990 book *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* and subsequent writings (Richardson, 1992, 1994, 1996; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), Richardson turned the social constructionist perspective inward to examine how researchers use the same literary devices (for example, metaphor and synecdoche) as writers of other forms of narrative. Richardson (1990b, p. 9) stated, "Writing is not simply a true representation of an objective reality, out there, waiting to be seen. Instead, through literary and rhetorical devices, writing creates a particular view of reality." According to Richardson, researchers do not merely report findings,

but transform field notes, documents, interview transcripts, and other data into a form of prose (also see McCloskey, 1990).

Inspired by Richardson and postmodernist and feminist approaches, qualitative researchers have been experimenting with new forms of writing ethnography and qualitative research. Ellis's emotional sociology and autoethnography (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008; Ellis, 1991a, 1991b, 2004, 2008; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992), Ronai's (1994, 1997) layered ethnographic account, and Richardson's (1996b, 2002) poetry represent examples. These writing formats build upon the heightened reflexivity of contemporary qualitative research. They also raise new questions about how to assess and use research results presented in these ways (DeVault, 1997).

What Van Maanen (1988) called "realist tales"—researcher accounts of social and cultural practices and perspectives—continue to be the most common form of qualitative writing. Much of our own writing falls into this category, and many of the suggestions contained in this and other chapters are designed to help people prepare this form of narrative. However, realist tales no longer constitute a monopoly in qualitative writing. "Confessional tales" and "impressionist tales," again to use Van Maanen's terminology, appear with greater frequency in the qualitative literature.

That there are new forms of reporting research and reflecting on social life is a healthy sign for the qualitative enterprise. No single form of writing should be associated with the qualitative way. Even studies designed to paint an accurate picture of the social life of a group of people can benefit from increased sensitivity to the researcher's role in conducting the study and producing the final narrative product.

Here we offer some guidelines we use in writing qualitative studies and some lessons we have learned about the writing process. In presenting these, we have one version of qualitative writing in mind; it is not the only one.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD TELL YOUR READERS

As a qualitative researcher, in contrast to a fiction writer, poet, or creative writer, you owe it to your readers to explain how you collected and interpreted your data. Deutscher's (1973; also see Deutscher et al., 1993) notion of discounting, described in the last chapter, is relevant not only to analysis but to the writing process as well. Provide enough information about how your research was conducted to enable readers to discount your account or to understand it in the context of how it was produced. Many people tend to gloss over the specifics of their methodology. When we read their studies, we have no way of knowing whether their interpretations came from cultural knowledge, prior theoretical frameworks, direct personal experience, or actual fieldwork or interviewing. Hence, we do not know how to judge the credibility of their accounts.

The controversy surrounding the popular writings of Carlos Castaneda (1968, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1977) and his dissertation in anthropology (1973) in the 1970s raised some interesting questions about the production of qualitative reports. Castaneda's entertaining and in many ways insightful writings on the relative nature of reality were supposedly based on his mystical journeys with the Yaqui Indian sorcerer, Don Juan. The foreword to one of the later books (Castaneda, 1987, vii) read, "My books are a true account of a teaching method that Don Juan, a Mexican Indian sorcerer, used in order to help me understand the sorcerers' world." Writer, psychologist, and self-taught anthropologist Richard de Mille (1976, 1980), joined by others, made a convincing case that Castaneda's account was a hoax. By identifying internal inconsistencies in Castaneda's books, comparing his writings to those in philosophy and religion, and examining factual inaccuracies in his stories, de Mille concluded that what Castaneda passed off as ethnographic fieldwork was actually fiction based on library research. Castaneda was never inclined to defend his work and ignored requests to show field notes and other documentation to his skeptics.

Does it matter whether Castaneda's writings were grounded in fieldwork or were the product of a creative imagination? A strict postmodern stance might lead to the conclusion that it does not. If both fact and fiction are simply different forms of narrative, with neither having a superior claim to truth, then it would seem irrelevant to ask how Castaneda wrote his accounts. After all, Castaneda taught important lessons about the nature of reality and knowledge systems.

Yet readers have a right to know what is simply a good story, full of sociological insights, and what is an attempt to capture a way of life more or less accurately. If we know what Castaneda (or any other writer) based his accounts on, then we will be in a better position to interpret the accounts. For example, assume that Castaneda's writings were works of fiction. Reading them conveys a clearer and more personal understanding of certain variants of European philosophy than can be achieved by wading through the original writings themselves. However, if we are informed about what Castaneda was trying to do, then we will not read his books for an understanding of Yaqui Indian belief systems or the sorcerers' knowledge of the hallucinogenic effects of different desert plants or herbs. Both fiction and traditional ethnographic reporting can be valuable, as long as we know which is which.

Although few researchers consciously fabricate their studies, it is true, as Douglas (1976, p. xiii) argued, that most or perhaps all qualitative accounts are laundered: "authors choose to leave certain important parts of the context out, certain details about what really happened, how they got their data or failed to do so." The trend toward candid reporting of experiences in the field started by J. M. Johnson (1975) and represented by what Van Maanen (1988) referred to as confessional tales was a welcome development in qualitative

research. Probably no researcher will reveal to readers everything about what happened in the course of research, but the more told, the better.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and others (Manning, 1997) proposed formal schemes for evaluating the authenticity and trustworthiness of qualitative studies. These are useful in raising some questions that can be asked about how a researcher arrived at his or her conclusions, although, as Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) noted, there are no agreed-upon canons or heuristics for evaluating a qualitative study. Each reader must necessarily judge the credibility of a qualitative study for her- or himself.

We can outline some of the information we like to have when we read a study based on qualitative methods. We find this information useful in discounting studies, to use Deutscher's (1973) term. It is not that we dismiss studies that fail to report this information; many outstanding studies have been written that provide little information about how they were conducted. However, we sometimes evaluate a study differently depending on what the researcher did in the field. For example, we tend to have more confidence in the interpretations reached by an interviewer who conducted multiple interviews with people over an extended period of time than those of a researcher who conducted one-shot interviews.

We usually look for the following information in books, monographs, and dissertations based on participant observation or qualitative interviewing. In shorter pieces and journal articles, space limitations preclude covering all of these points, at least in detail (certainly, we have not always provided all of this information in articles we have written).

*Methodology*. You should inform readers of the general methodology (participant observation, in-depth interviewing, personal documents) and specific procedures (field notes constructed from memory, audio- or videotaping) used in your study. We also like to see researchers locate their work in existing literature on qualitative research. Especially in applied fields, qualitative research has become popular in recent years, and many people are using the phrase in a way that has little in common with any published literature on the methodology. For instance, open-ended questions in a structured survey or questionnaire are sometimes referred to as producing qualitative data.

*Theoretical perspective*. Do you intend your study to be descriptive in nature, or has it been guided by and is it expected to contribute to a particular theoretical perspective (symbolic interactionism, critical ethnography, feminist theory, ethnomethodology, etc.)?

*Time and length of study*. You should tell readers how much time you spent in the field and over what time frame.

*Nature and number of informants and settings*. What kinds of settings did you study? How many? How specifically would you describe your informants?

*Research design*. How did you identify and select settings, informants, or documents to study? Did you use a strategy such as theoretical sampling? Did you know informants or settings beforehand?

*Your own frame of mind*. What was your original purpose? How did this change over time? What assumptions and allegiances did you bring into the study?

*Your relationship with people*. You should try to stand back from your study and describe your relationship with informants and how they saw you. Why should the reader have confidence that people acted naturally in your presence?

*Your identity*. Your gender, race, sexuality, and other personal characteristics necessarily shape how you view things and how others see you.

*Your analysis*. How did you analyze your data? What checks did you place on your interpretations? Did informants review drafts of your study? What did they say?

Reviewers of qualitative studies submitted for publication can use these same guidelines to evaluate manuscripts and provide recommendations to journal editors or associate editors (some journal editors assign one or more associate editors to coordinate the review of manuscripts within their areas of expertise). However, these guidelines are designed solely to judge the credibility of qualitative studies based on how they were conducted. They do not address whether a study contributes to new understanding or knowledge.

## SOME TIPS ON WRITING

Some have joked that to be a social scientist is to be a poor writer (Cowley, 1956). Many important ideas are obscured and many trivial ones made to sound profound through jargon and excessive verbiage (Mills, 1959).

The ability to write clearly and concisely is an important skill. Like many of the other skills discussed in this book, it is learned through practice, discipline, and exposure to exemplary works. There are no quick and easy ways to become a good writer.

Writing is a deeply personal matter. As Richards (in Becker, 2007) noted, it is not uncommon for people who have not had much experience publishing their work to get stuck when they try to write or to feel personally vulnerable about showing their writing to others. Writing can be a high-risk operation. If you experience any of these feelings, understand that other people do also.

Most people find it difficult to write at times. Even experienced and much published writers can have problems getting started on new projects. For every person who can turn out a quick first draft, at least one other person is what Wolcott (2009) referred to as a "bleeder." Further, we all have our own rituals and procrastination devices (Becker, 2007) to avoid getting down to the task of writing.

With these thoughts in mind, we offer some suggestions you might find useful when you try to write.

## Experiment With Different Ways of Writing

As Becker (2007) argued, there is no one best way to write. This is a matter of personal preference. Writers often prefer to write from a detailed outline containing major and subordinate points (Wolcott, 2009). As noted in the last chapter, we let writing guide our analysis. We decide on the central story line (what Wolcott [2009] called "the problem problem") and then think in terms of chapters, or major sections, that relate to it. Richardson (1994) also developed the idea that writing can be a "method of inquiry" in itself, since it allows the researcher to try out and think through lines of analysis.

Some researchers follow what Becker (2007) and Wolcott (2009) referred to as "free-writing." The idea is to get something—anything—down on paper. Express your ideas freely; you can always edit later. Becker (2007) advised:

> Once you know that writing a sentence down won't hurt you, know it because you have tried it, you can do what I usually ask people to try: write whatever comes into your head, as fast as you can type, without references to outlines, notes, data, books or other aids. The object is to find out what you would like to say, what all your earlier work on the topic or project has already led you to believe....
>
> If you write this way, you usually find out, by the time you get to the end of your draft, what you have in mind. Your last paragraph reveals to you what the introduction ought to contain, and you can go back and put it in and then make the minor changes in other paragraphs your new-found focus requires. (pp. 54–55)

In addition to this style of free-writing, Becker recommended that you take notes on what you have written, putting each idea on a file card. Then sort the cards into piles according to which seem to go together. For each pile, put a card on top that summarizes what the cards appear to have in common. Through this process an outline may emerge to guide your writing. Of course, the process also can be done electronically (for example, using the copy and paste functions to sort and re-sort ideas into broader conceptual categories).

## Decide What Audience You Wish to Reach and Adjust Your Style and Content Accordingly

It is useful to have a specific audience or type of reader in mind when you write. One writes differently for qualitative researchers, a general social

science audience, professionals in applied fields, and so on. If you are writing a dissertation, you certainly have to take into account the preferences and interests of committee members. Try to put yourself in the role of the readers: "Will they understand and appreciate what I am saying?"

Richardson (1990b) used the term *encoding* to refer to the rhetorical function of locating writing in a particular genre (for example, popular, academic, moral, or political). Richardson (1990b, p. 32) wrote, "Audiences have expectations regarding 'their' texts. Overall organization, code words, title, authorial designation, metaphors, images, and so on serve as signposts to potential readers." There has been much discussion recently about the multiple audiences for social science research, and some sociologists have developed the idea of practicing a public sociology with significance beyond the scholarly community (Clawson et al., 2007). Some researchers are oriented primarily to other scholars as their audience, while others may wish to write for the public media, policy makers, activists, or general readers.

By writing for your audience, you should not skew your findings to please readers. It is true, as C. A. B. Warren (1980) argued, however, that researchers take into account the anticipated reactions of colleagues, friends, journal editors, informants, and others when they prepare research reports and that this influences the body of knowledge we call science.

## Decide on Your Persona

As Becker (2007, p. 33) pointed out, "everyone writes as someone, affects a character, adopts a persona who does the talking for them." Most researchers are not conscious or explicit about the personae they adopt in their writing. They assume that as researchers they should write classy prose and adopt an objective, formal, and authoritative stance (for example, "This researcher concludes..." "It was found..."). This is only one of many options; the interest in the social construction of social science narratives (Richardson, 1990b) directed attention to the importance of being more conscious about persona and opened up new possibilities for experimenting with different styles of narrative reporting. Examples of different personae provided by Becker include experiential authority and intimate knowledge (details about the researcher's observations and role in the field) as well as Becker's (2007, pp. 36–37) preferred character—the Will Rogers, plain folks persona: "Shucks, you'd of thought the same as me if you'd just been there to see what I seen. It's just that I had the time or took the trouble to be there, and you didn't or couldn't, but let me tell you about it." Fine and Martin (1990) showed how Goffman's *Asylums* was colored by sarcasm, satire, and irony and how the author took on the persona of a partisan on the side of mental patients.

## Let Your Readers Know Where You Are Going

In your final drafts, help your readers by telling them your purpose early in your writing and explain how each topic relates to this along the way. In every chapter or major section, start with a summary of what you intend to cover. At the end of each section, provide a transition to the next topic. Do not simply repeat or belabor the same points—use these guideposts to give narrative shape to your text.

## Be Concise and Direct

Use short sentences, direct words, and the active voice as much as possible. For specific rules on clear writing, skim Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* (1999), a short reference work that has aided generations of scholars.

Social scientists have been accused of being boring writers and using complicated words when there are simple ones available. Malcolm Cowley (1956, pp. 42–43) brought home this point with the following example:

> A child says "Do it again," a teacher says "Repeat the exercise," but the sociologist says "It was determined to replicate the investigation." Instead of saying two things are alike or similar, as a layman would do, the sociologist describes them as being either isomorphic or homologous . . . .
>
> A sociologist never cuts anything in half or divides it into two like a layman. Instead he dichotomizes it, bifurcates it, subjects it to a process of binary fission, or restructures it in a dyadic conformation—around polar foci.

As you review drafts, constantly ask yourself whether you can use simpler, more commonly understood words to communicate your ideas.

## Ground Your Writing in Specific Examples

Qualitative research should yield rich descriptions. Illustrative quotations and descriptions convey a deep understanding of what settings and people are like and provide support for your interpretations. Your account should be filled with clear examples.

## Edit Early Drafts Carefully

Few people can write a polished draft the first time around. After you write a draft of an article or chapter, let it sit for a while to gain some distance. Then go back to the draft and eliminate unnecessary words, sentences, phrases, and paragraphs. Wolcott (2009) explained that he sometimes went through drafts in mechanical fashion and tried to eliminate one unnecessary word in every sentence and one unnecessary sentence on every page. He paid special

attention to unnecessary qualifiers (for example, *very*, *rather*, *really*, *pretty*) that many people use out of habit. Becker (2007, p. 5) advised going through drafts word by word, asking, "Does this need to be here? If not, I'm taking it out."

### Have Colleagues or Friends Read and Comment on Your Writing

Even if someone is not familiar with your field, she or he can critique your writing in regard to clarity and logic. A good reader is someone who is not afraid to provide you with critical comments (accept them) and gets around to reading your work within a few weeks. When a friendly reader raises questions about your draft, you should consider those questions carefully. Often, you may gain new insights and see how to make your argument clearer.

## COMMON MISTAKES IN WRITING FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

Having read countless student research reports and dissertations as well as articles submitted for journal publication, we have come across the same mistakes or errors repeated time and time again. In this section we identify some common mistakes that you would be wise to avoid. Any knowledgeable reader will be able to identify classic works in which these mistakes are made. Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963), for example, did not follow all of the guidelines offered in this section. If you are a creative theorist capable of breaking new ground and establishing a new genre, then you do not need to follow conventions to begin with, but if you are going to try something new or different, you had better be very good at it.

### Letting Quotes Make Your Points

Do not use quotes to make your points. The following is an example of what you should avoid: "The following quotes illustrate the teachers' perspectives . . . ." When you quote without providing an interpretation, readers are led to believe that you are incapable of analysis. Make the point and then use a quote or description to illustrate it.

### Overuse of Colorful Quotes or Examples

Avoid using the same quote or description over and over again. In general, any specific quote should be used once and only once. Repeating quotes or examples can leave the impression that your data are thin. If your point is a strong one, you should have plenty of data to support it.

## Changing Quotes

Unless you are writing a life history, which readers will know is constructed as a readable narrative, do not revise or edit quotes. Quotes help bring people to life. More important, revising or editing quotes can change their meanings. Field notes and transcripts are already subject to many possible distortions; do not introduce any more. If you believe that it is absolutely necessary to clarify a quote or put it into context, you can put your own comments in parentheses. When you omit words in a quote, use ellipses (. . .).

## Insufficient Quotes

Although we have already made the point that qualitative research accounts should be filled with quotes and rich descriptions, this bears repeating. Quotes and descriptions help readers understand how you have reached your conclusions and interpretations.

## Lengthy Quotes and Data Overkill

Most people become enamored with their own data and try to squeeze as many quotes as possible into their writing. If you include frequent lengthy quotes in your writing, most readers will stop reading them or become confused about what point you are trying to illustrate. Quotes should be concise, succinct, and crisp. Quotes should usually be no longer than several sentences. Use series of quotes sparingly.

## Quoting Your Observer's Comments

Do not quote your observer's comments from field notes unless you are the focus of the discussion (for example, an article on dilemmas in the field). Your hunches at the time you recorded data do not validate the points you are trying to make when you write. You may want to discuss these ideas, but you will have developed them more fully by the time your write your paper.

## Quantitative Language Lapses

Do not use results for findings; the term *results* conjures up images of an experiment. Instead of referring to subjects or respondents, refer to informants, or better yet, people, students, parents, and so on.

## Overstatement

Avoid sweeping generalizations based on your study. We all tend to believe that we have discovered universal truths through our research. It is fine to believe this; just do not claim it. Qualitative methods are best suited for developing insights and understandings that apply to a particular group of people at a particular point in time, and are not well suited to reaching generalizations about a broader population. Feel free to suggest or point to general lessons, but be modest in doing this. Understatement adds to the credibility of your study. Overstatement detracts from it.

## Orphan Findings and Royalty

All findings are somebody's findings. When you write any research piece, you are presenting your findings, your interpretations, and your conclusions. Do not be afraid to use "I" and "my." Instead of saying, "It was found," say "I found." Do not use the royal we if you are writing as a single author.

## Cheap Literary Devices

Rhetorical questions and exclamation points can be effective devices for making or drawing attention to major points. If you overuse them, however, they lose their power and begin to appear to be a substitute for explaining your point.

## Failing to Acknowledge the Contributions of Others

When you write anything, be sure to acknowledge the direct or indirect contributions of others. Specific ideas taken from anyone else, whether published or not, should be credited to that person in the text of your report or a footnote. A general acknowledgment should be included to thank others for their indirect contributions to your research. Err on the side of being generous, rather than stingy, in your acknowledgments (Wolcott 2009).

## Moral Superiority

It is easy to adopt a tone of moral superiority when writing about other people's perspectives and practices. All people have illusions about themselves and can be made to look foolish. Be gentle and sensitive in your portrayal of people. Avoid gratuitous moral judgments about individuals.

## PUBLISHING QUALITATIVE STUDIES

Getting your work published usually requires a major commitment of time and energy. If you are not willing to make this commitment, you are unlikely to publish your work. Publishing requires persistence and self-confidence. It is not an activity for people with weak egos. All authors have their work rejected at one time or another. Successful scholars learn to manage the emotions associated with rejection and take lessons for future submissions from the comments they receive.

A small number of qualitative studies end up being published as books. If you think that your study has the potential to be published as a book (a good way to determine this is by having someone who has published a book evaluate your work), the first step is to research potential publishers to see which ones might be interested in your work. Many academic publishers (the University of California Press, Temple University Press, the University of Chicago Press, Teachers College Press, Syracuse University Press) are receptive to qualitative studies. Both academic and commercial publishers sometimes sponsor series in specialty areas such as gender, race, or disability. The more you know about publishers, the better your chance of finding one that might be willing to publish your book. If possible, try to get the name of a contact at a publishing company. Publishers receive a large number of unsolicited manuscripts and proposals, and it helps to be able to send something to a specific person. If you know someone who has published a book through a specific publisher, that person is a good contact. You can also check the acknowledgments in recently published books; most authors thank their editors. Many publishers have display booths at professional conferences, and you can usually make contacts this way.

Once you have identified potential publishers, develop a brief book proposal, also called a prospectus. It is usually not worth sending an entire manuscript to publishers; they will not read it. The prospectus should provide a brief overview of the book, an autobiographical statement, a table of contents, a list of competing books already published and a description of how your book is different, and a description of the potential audience or market for your book. No publisher can afford to publish a book that will not sell, so this last item is especially important. Most publishers are especially interested in books that can be used as college texts or supplemental reading in courses. Specify the kinds of courses in which your book might be used. Many publishers also require authors to complete their own questionnaires and want to receive a sample chapter.

It is usually easier to publish an article in a professional or research journal than a book. Again, you need to do your research. In addition to sociological and anthropological journals, a growing number of applied and interdisciplinary journals in areas such as education, management, disability

studies, gender studies, health, and social work are open to articles based on qualitative research. Skim articles published in journals in the past year or two to see whether any qualitative articles have been published; if not, then it is probably not worth your time to submit to these journals.

Since it is generally considered unethical to submit the same manuscript to more than one journal at the same time, you will need to decide where to submit your study first. (If your manuscript is rejected by a journal, then you can submit it to another.) All journals include their editorial policy, or information for contributors. Pay careful attention to this. It will tell you such things as page limitations (do not exceed these), whether the journal uses an electronic submission system, the number of copies to submit if it requires hard copies of manuscripts, and the preferred publication style of the journal (for example, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, American Psychological Association's *Publication Manual*). Manuscripts are seldom rejected solely on the basis of failure to use the recommended style. However, if your manuscript represents a substantial departure from the preferred style, this creates an unfavorable impression on the part of an editor or reviewers. It looks as though you have not taken the time to know the journal's requirements or, perhaps, as though you are submitting a manuscript that has been rejected by another journal. Some journals require authors to pay a submission fee to offset the costs of publishing the journal and will not consider manuscripts for publication unless this is paid in advance.

Publication decisions in professional and research journals are based on the peer review process. Editors of many journals conduct a preliminary review of manuscripts to see if they are a good fit with the journal. If the editor determines that it is worth having reviewers evaluate the manuscript, she or he, or in some journals an associate editor, selects two to five persons with knowledge or expertise in areas addressed by a manuscript to review it and provide a publication recommendation as well as comments for the author. Anyone who has had experience with journals knows that the peer review process is not infallible. Reviewers often disagree in their evaluations of manuscripts, and editors sometimes reject quality submissions.

You can maximize your chances of having a manuscript accepted for publication by anticipating the kinds of persons who might serve as peer reviewers or referees and by writing your manuscript in such a way as to guide editors in selecting the right reviewers. Journals publish a list of regular reviewers who serve on editorial boards or as consulting editors. In addition, most journals use guest reviewers to supplement their regular reviewers.

Journal editors are busy people who usually perform this role on top of their other responsibilities and do not have the time to read a manuscript carefully before all reviews are completed. Reviewers are typically selected on the basis of a quick skimming of a manuscript—often only the title, abstract, and

possibly the reference list at the end. Editors look first to their regular review-ers or editorial board and secondarily to persons who have published related research in their own journals or related ones (journal editors generally keep on top of research published in the field).

This is where you can potentially influence the selection of reviewers. If you have familiarized yourself with the editorial board and with people who have published recent articles related to your own, you can use code words—what Richardson (1990b) called "encoding"—in your title and abstract, and list references that are likely to guide an editor to certain kinds of reviewers. You want your manuscript to be reviewed by those who will give it the most favorable reading. If your study is qualitative, you usually want to highlight this in your title and abstract and include plenty of references to related qualitative work. Never directly suggest potential reviewers to editors; these persons will probably be excluded.

If you can anticipate the kinds of reviewers who will evaluate your manuscript, you can also take this into account in the literature you review or cite in your study. Editors and reviewers expect authors to be aware of related research and will sometimes base rejections on a failure to relate a study to the literature. If reviewers have published in the area addressed by your manuscript, you can be sure that they will look for references to their own work.

Generally, journal editors furnish one of four editorial decisions based on reviewers' recommendations (although reviewers usually provide com-ments to authors, most journals have them furnish their recommendations directly and confidentially to the editor): accept; accept with revisions; do not accept, invite revision and resubmission; and reject or do not accept. Few manuscripts are accepted as submitted, and reject is the most common decision in most journals. If your manuscript is not accepted and you are not invited to resubmit it, go to another journal and start all over. Most editors will not accept a resubmission of a rejected article.

An accept with revisions decision means that your manuscript will be accepted for publication with relatively minor changes or revisions. The editor will usually make the final decision on publication him- or herself. A do not accept, invite revision and resubmission decision means that the reviewers have raised some substantive concerns or questions about your manuscript and that the editor is open to seeing whether you can address them. If you submit a revised manuscript, the editor will probably send it back to the original reviewers, and perhaps one or two new reviewers, for their final publication recommendations. The editor might or might not tell you explicitly how a revised manuscript will be handled. Wording such as "major concerns" or "substantive revisions" generally indicates that a revised manuscript will be sent out for another round of reviews.

If you are fortunate, the editor will summarize the major areas for revision. Some editors do, and some do not. If the editor does not provide you with

specific guidance for revisions, you will have to depend on the reviewers' comments and suggestions. Since reviewers often give inconsistent advice, it can be a difficult task to know which recommendations to follow. You do not necessarily have to follow all of the reviewers' suggestions, but you certainly do need to address each of the concerns raised—either in the way suggested by the reviewers or in some other way, perhaps more consistent with your goals and approach.

Both an accept with revisions and a do not accept, invite revision and resubmission decision should be interpreted as expressing a positive interest in your work. Many authors, especially those who are new at trying to get their work published, are discouraged when reviewers provide critical comments about their studies and their manuscripts are not immediately accepted. In the better journals in the social sciences and applied fields, only 10% to 20% of manuscripts are accepted (or accepted with revisions) during the initial review process and well over 50% are rejected outright. So an invitation to revise and resubmit your manuscript is a sign of encouragement. If you can possibly address the reviewers' concerns, you should put the effort into making the revisions.

In evaluating revised manuscripts, both editors and reviewers look to see whether authors have made a conscientious effort to address concerns and recommendations from the initial review process. Be responsive and attend to all of the recommended changes in some way. A cover letter summarizing revisions will demonstrate your responsiveness to recommendations made previously and will be helpful to the editor and reviewers. Most editors will listen to a compelling rationale for not making recommended changes. However, do not use your cover letter to argue with the editor or reviewers or to question the review process. Any decent journal receives more quality manuscripts than there is space to publish; in most cases, you need the journal more than the editor needs your work.

Some of what we consider our best work has been rejected by publishers and journals before we found anyone interested in publishing it. Even if your book or article is rejected, use comments and suggestions to make it better. Then submit it elsewhere. Publishers and editors are not perfect. They may make mistakes, and a rejection sometimes means nothing more than a poor fit between your manuscript and the interests of a publisher or editor.

## SELECTED STUDIES

Chapters 8 through 12 contain articles we have written that are based on the methods described in this book. We offer these as examples of some of the many ways in which qualitative studies can be presented.

Chapter 8, "'You're Not a Retard, You're Just Wise': Disability, Social Identity, and Family Networks," is based on Taylor's participant observation

study of the Duke family, referred to in this book. This chapter reports on how the meaning of disability is constructed by the Dukes and others in their social network.

Chapter 9, "Producing Family Time: Practices of Leisure Activity Beyond the Home," is based on DeVault's study of families in two community zoos. It is based on a method of unobtrusive or naturalistic observation, combined with very brief on-site interviews.

Chapter 10, "Ethnicity and Expertise: Racial-Ethnic Knowledge in Sociological Research," is based on DeVault's interview research on the careers of dietitians and nutrition educators. In this article, she applies a narrative analysis approach to a single interview with an African American dietitian, in order to illuminate some of the dynamics of race in a predominantly White field of work.

Chapter 11, "Citizen Portraits: Photos of People With Disabilities as Personal Keepsakes," is an excerpt from Bogdan's latest book on visual sociology. Bogdan's methodology is described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 12, "'They Asked for a Hard Job': WWII Conscientious Objectors on the Front Lines," is an edited version of a chapter in Taylor's 2009 study of World War II conscientious objectors (COs) who performed public service at state mental hospitals and training schools as an alternative to serving in the military. The chapter describes the conditions the COs found at the institutions at which they were placed. Taylor's study is based on archival research and oral histories, as described in Chapter 5.

After presenting these studies, we include appendixes containing participant observation field notes and an aid for the construction of an interview guide, as well as a reference list for Chapters 1 to 7.

# CHAPTER 8

# "You're Not a Retard, You're Just Wise": Disability, Social Identity, and Family Networks[1]

## Steven J. Taylor

THIS IS A study of the social meaning of disability and construction of social identity in a family I will refer to as the Dukes.[2] The immediate family consists of four members—Bill and Winnie and their two children, Sammy and Cindy—but has grown since I started my study to include Cindy's husband and her four young children. The Dukes are part of a much larger network of extended family members and friends. I have been following the Duke family and many of their kin and friends for the past 10 years.

At first glance, the Dukes and their kin remind one of the Kallikaks (Goddard, 1912), the Jukes (Dugdale, 1910), or one of the other notorious families studied during the eugenics period as representing the hereditary transmission of feeblemindedness, disability, social pathology, and pauperism.[3] Bill, Winnie, and their two children have all been diagnosed as mentally retarded or disabled by schools and human service agencies and a sizable number of their kin and friends have been similarly diagnosed. Mental retardation, physical disabilities, mental illness or emotional disturbance, speech impediments, epilepsy, and miscellaneous medical problems are common among Bill's and Winnie's brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins, in-laws, and friends. With few exceptions, kin and friends are poor or living at the edge of poverty. Many have had encounters with child abuse agencies and other agents of social control.

As a sociologist interested in disability, I was immediately drawn to the Duke family. How would disability be constructed in a family in which each of the members as well as numerous friends and kin had been defined as disabled, handicapped, or retarded?

From a sociological or anthropological perspective, disability can be viewed as a social construct (Whyte & Ingstad, 1995). Like other forms of social deviance, what we call disabilities—mental retardation, mental illness, Alzheimer's disease, blindness, deafness, mobility impairments—are not objective conditions, but concepts that exist in the minds of people who attach those labels to others (Bogdan & Taylor, 1994; L. J. Davis, 1997; Gubrium, 1986; Langness & Levine, 1986; Mercer, 1973; Murphy, 1990).

Disability can serve as a master status (Becker, 1963; Schur, 1971) and can carry with it a stigma. A stigma is not merely a difference, but a characteristic that deeply discredits a person's moral character (Bogdan & Taylor, 1994; Goffman, 1963; Langness & Levine, 1986; Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan, & Nuttbrock, 1997). Numerous studies have demonstrated how people with disabilities are stigmatized and rejected by society (Bogdan & Taylor, 1994; Braginsky & Braginsky, 1971; Coleman, 1997; F. Davis, 1974; Edgerton, 1993; Estroff, 1981; Goffman, 1963; Higgins, 1980; Scheff, 1966; Schneider & Conrad, 1983; Scott, 1969). Being labeled as disabled can have a profound impact on a person's identity. Goffman (1963, p. 5) argued that people with demonstrable stigma are seen as "not quite human" and "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one." In his classic study of stigma among people labeled mentally retarded, Edgerton (1993, p. 132) wrote, "The label of mental retardation not only serves as a humiliating, frustrating, and discrediting stigma in the conduct of one's life in the community, but it also serves to lower one's self-esteem to such a nadir of worthlessness that the life of the person is scarcely worth living."

Sociologists and anthropologists have devoted considerable attention to the different ways in which people with disabilities and similar discrediting characteristics react to the stigma associated with their conditions. Goffman (1963) examined how stigmatized persons manage their identities, and others have continued this line of analysis (Angrosino, 1992, 1998). F. Davis (1961) and Edgerton (1993) reported that disabled people engage in "deviance disavowal," "denial," and "passing" in order to cope with their stigma. In a study of "the social construction of unreality," Pollner and McDonald-Wikler (1985) went so far as to suggest that a family who believed in the competence of their child with severe disabilities was "delusional." Writing in a somewhat different vein, Herman and Musolf (1998) described a ritualistic culture of resistance among ex-psychiatric patients in which they actively reject the moral identities imposed by their rejecters.

This brings us back to the Duke family. How do they manage the stigma associated with their various disabilities? Do they attempt to pass as

"normals" or do they resist oppression through a discourse of struggle? The longer I have known the Duke family, the more convinced I am that these are not meaningful questions to ask about them. Their world is not constructed in opposition to prevailing notions of stigma, nor is it reproductive of that, but is a world that collaboratively belongs to the Dukes themselves.

As I will argue in this chapter, the Dukes, as a family, have constructed a life world in which disability is not stigmatizing or problematic for their identities. The Dukes have a shared construction of reality (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990; Hess & Handel, 1995; Reiss, 1981) that acts as a buffer against abstract cultural meanings attached to disability.

Before examining how the Dukes experience disability and construct their identities, I introduce the family and describe my study.

## THE DUKE FAMILY

Bill and Winnie Duke live just outside of Central City, a medium-size city in the Northeast. Bill and Winnie have lived in and around Central City since they were married over 25 years ago.

### BILL

Bill, 50, describes himself as a "graduate of Empire State School," a state institution originally founded in 1894 as "Empire State Custodial Asylum for Unteachable Idiots." Born in a small rural community outside of Capital City, Bill was placed at the institution as an adolescent.

Bill was put on "probation" and lived for a period of time in a halfway house in Central City, approximately 150 miles from his family's home. He was officially discharged from the institution in 1971.

Bill is "on disability" and receives government Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Shortly after his release from the institution, he held several short-term jobs, but has not worked in a regular, tax-paying job since the mid-1970s.

Bill takes prescription medications for seizures, diarrhea, headaches, and nerves. He has also said on various occasions that doctors have told him that he suffers from life-threatening brain tumors and lung cancer (since Bill has survived his supposedly terminal medical conditions and no longer mentions them, it is unclear whether he fully understands what doctors tell him).

### WINNIE

Winnie, 48, runs the household, manages the family's finances, and negotiates relations with schools, government programs, and human service workers.

Winnie acts very much like a typical wife and mother and performs the work associated with women in American families (DeVault, 1991). Winnie was born and raised in Central City. She dropped out of school early to help raise her brother and stepbrothers and stepsisters, but can read well and prides herself both on her memory and math skills.

Winnie has a speech impediment, which makes her very difficult to understand until one has known her for a while. She also has a host of medical problems. By her account, she had convulsions until she was nine years old and has arthritis, heart problems, and a "club foot."

When I first met the Dukes, Winnie was on public assistance or welfare, but was subsequently deemed eligible for SSI. She also previously received spouse's benefits from Bill's Social Security. She is eligible for vocational rehabilitation because she has "a disability which results in a substantial handicap to employment," according to her Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan, and has participated in numerous job training programs. She has worked twice at a large sheltered workshop for the disabled, Federated Industries of Central City. She took these jobs under the threat of losing her welfare benefits. Her last placement there in the early 1990s ended when Federated ran out of work and laid off most of its clients.

## Sammy

Sammy, 27, was born with cerebral palsy, which is not currently noticeable, a cleft palate, and heart problems. According to Winnie, he has had over 90 operations for hearing, heart, and other problems. As an infant, he had a tracheotomy and was fed through a tube in his stomach. Winnie proudly recalls how she learned to handle his "trach." Sammy has a severe speech impediment and is extremely difficult to understand when he talks.

Sammy dropped out of school at age 16. He was enrolled in a special education program for students with multiple disabilities, and specifically mental retardation and hearing impairments. He receives SSI. Winnie is the representative payee for Sammy's SSI; that is, Sammy's check comes in Winnie's name, and she must periodically report how the funds are spent.

Sammy has never held a regular job, although he worked for a very brief period of time at a garage where his father worked for a month or so under the table.

Since reaching adulthood, Sammy has lived off and on with his parents, one of his other relatives, or one of his girlfriends. Whether or not he is living with Winnie and Bill, he has frequent contact with them. Sammy currently lives with his parents, though he says that he is looking for an apartment of his own.

## CINDY

Cindy, 23, has epilepsy and receives SSI. Prior to dropping out of school at age 17, she was enrolled in an intensive special education class and her federally mandated Individual Education Plan (IEP) indicated that she is "mentally retarded–mild." Both Bill and Winnie were proud of how Cindy was doing in school and disappointed when she dropped out.

One summer while she was in high school, Cindy was placed at the Federated Industries sheltered workshop as part of a job training program. Through her school program, she had volunteer job placements at fast food restaurants and a human service agency.

Cindy has a worker who is funded through the state office of mental retardation and developmental disabilities. This worker introduced me to the family.

Cindy speaks very clearly, but seems to have difficulty reading. Cindy has always been shy among strangers, but is becoming less so as she grows older.

Since I started studying the Duke family, Cindy has changed from a girl to a young adult, wife, and mother. When Cindy was about 17, Bill and Winnie started to worry that she was becoming sexually active. Their fears were not unfounded. She became pregnant, broke up with her boyfriend, and then married a 26-year-old man, Vinnie, shortly afterward. Cindy's first baby, Mikey, was born in spring 1993, and she has since had three additional babies. After the birth of her last child, Cindy agreed to a sterilization procedure.

Cindy's husband, Vinnie, is an extremely large man who underwent weight reduction surgery in 1996. He is loud, domineering, and opinionated. According to Winnie and Bill, Vinnie has a bad temper and tends to "blow up"; he is receiving counseling to control his temper. Vinnie briefly held a job as a security guard, but does not currently work. Vinnie is proud of his Italian heritage and moved to Central City from New York City.

Cindy's and Vinnie's four children, all boys, are enrolled in an early intervention special education program.

Cindy, Vinnie, and their four children have lived off and on with the Dukes, but currently have their own apartment. They live in an urban neighborhood in Central City. Vinnie's parents, who followed him to Central City from New York, live in the apartment above them.

## THE DUKE HOUSEHOLD

The Dukes moved to their current apartment in a subsidized housing project outside of Central City in 1997. This is their 11th home in the past 12 years. During this time, they have lived in three different urban neighborhoods

(including the one where Cindy and Vinnie live) and two mobile homes in an outlying community, in addition to their current home.

Household arrangements are usually the same in most of the Dukes' homes. The master bedroom is reserved for one of their boarders or Cindy, her husband, and babies. Sammy also has his own bedroom; Winnie and Bill sleep in their own room, if a bedroom is left over, or in the living room.

As the Dukes settle into each new home, it slowly begins to resemble their former homes. Floors are strewn with litter, cigarette butts, cat or dog food bowls, and sometimes machine and car parts. The ever-changing living room is furnished with two or three sofas, an easy chair or two, coffee and side tables, and lamps. Just about all of the furniture comes from someone else's trash.

The old furniture stands in sharp contrast to the new television and VCR leased from rent-to-own companies. Stacks of papers are on top of the tables; a dozen prescription pill bottles are on top of the VCR. The walls are covered with brightly colored paintings and tapestries of Christ, a matador, and Elvis Presley. Knick-knack shelves are crammed full of figurines, salt and pepper shakers, religious figures, and other objects.

The Dukes' household is usually larger than their immediate family. Winnie's brother John lived with the family for over 2 years and as many as 10 additional adults and four children have stayed with them for weeks or even months at a time.

## Social Relations Among Kin and Friends

Both Bill and Winnie come from large families. Bill was one of nine children. He has three older sisters, a younger brother, and four younger sisters; he can name 29 nieces and nephews and nine great-nieces and great-nephews on his side of the family. Bill's father died a number of years ago, but his mother still lives outside of Capital City.

Winnie has three brothers, five stepbrothers, and three stepsisters, but it is only when explaining her family that she distinguishes between full and step siblings. She can count 24 nieces and nephews and six great-nieces and great-nephews. Winnie's mother died when she was young, and her father married her current stepmother. Her father died a number of years ago.

Bill and Winnie not only come from sizable extended families, but also have a large and ever-expanding network of friends and acquaintances. The Dukes make friends easily and bring friends of friends, family of friends, and friends of family into their immediate social network.

Social relations within the Duke network are characterized by mutual support, on the one hand, and arguments and feuds, on the other. The Dukes' close kinship ties stand in contrast to both the conventional view of upwardly mobile American families (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988) and recent accounts of the weakening of extended family ties among poor families

(Rochelle, 1997). Like female-headed families described by Stack (1974) and Hertz and Ferguson (1997), the Dukes and their kin and friends depend upon each other for help and assistance; mutual support networks are a means of coping with their marginal economic and social status. The Dukes as well as their relatives and friends take in homeless family members and friends, lend people food or money, and help each other out in other ways.

People within the Dukes' network also regularly complain about and argue with each other or become embroiled in all-out feuds. At any point in time, someone in the network is fighting with someone else. Hardly a month goes by when Bill and Winnie are not involved in a dispute with relatives or friends. Once an argument begins, other family members and friends are likely to be drawn into it.

Feuds can be emotionally charged and vehement, but seldom last long. People can be bitter enemies one day and friendly to each other the next. For example, when I first met the Dukes, Lisa and Gary and their three children were staying with them since they were homeless. Bill and Winnie grew tired of Lisa and Gary and threw them out of their house. Within months, however, Lisa and Gary were once again close friends of the Dukes and frequent visitors to their home. Then another argument erupted, followed by reconciliation a short time later. The Dukes are similarly very close to Bill's sister Betty and her family, but feud with them at least every several months.

## THE STUDY

When I first heard about the Duke family, I was interested in meeting them. Cindy's family support worker, Mary, had casually told me about the family and how each member had a disability. In particular, Bill's reported description of himself as a "graduate of Empire State School" fascinated me. My dissertation was based on an ethnographic study of a ward at Empire State School (Taylor, 1977, 1987), and I had previously conducted life histories with former residents of Empire (Bogdan & Taylor, 1976, 1994). Everything I knew based on my previous research led me to believe that people would avoid volunteering information about having lived at an institution for the mentally retarded. The longer this study has gone on, the more I have appreciated Gubrium and Holstein's (1990) notion of "listening in order to see."

Mary regularly collected used clothes, old appliances, and household items for the Dukes. I had an old portable TV and some electric heaters and asked Mary if she would arrange for me to drop them off at the Dukes. She agreed to do so, and I met the Duke family in February 1989. I have been studying the Dukes ever since that time.

From 1989 to the beginning of 1992, I recorded approximately 100 sets of field notes comprising over 1,200 pages. Since that time, though visiting

the Dukes less frequently, I have continued to maintain regular contact with them. In recent years, I have visited them four or five times a year and speak with them on the phone monthly, if not more often.

Early in my study, I told the Dukes that I was writing a book on families and wanted them to be in it. Bill and Winnie took the idea of a book very seriously and asked Sammy and Cindy if it was okay with them to be part of the book. By the end of this visit, it was clear that Winnie and Bill were thrilled and proud of the idea of being part of a book.

News that I was writing a book spread rapidly through the Duke network. Bill and Winnie proudly told family members and friends about the book, and people occasionally gave me advice about what I should write about.

My relationship with the Duke family has evolved over time. I was initially identified through my relationship with Mary and as a teacher or professor who was writing a book. I next became the family's "lawyer." I started helping family members interpret and fill out the confusing and cumbersome paperwork they receive from Social Security, welfare, and other government offices. Then one day Winnie received a copy of Cindy's Individual Education Plan along with a list of organizations to call if parents wanted to dispute the contents of the IEP. My center's name was listed on the form. Winnie was impressed.

From there on out, Winnie and Bill referred to me as their lawyer and came to me for advice on everything ranging from Social Security, SSI, and welfare to educational programs, evictions, insurance, and a will for Bill. On numerous occasions, I accompanied Winnie and Bill to the Social Security office to try to help straighten out problems with their benefits. Before long, they started referring other family members and friends to me for advice.

Today, the Dukes introduce me to others as a "friend of the family" or as their "lawyer friend." I am invited to all family gatherings, and the Dukes are disappointed if I cannot come. I also serve as the family photographer and am often called upon by the Dukes to take pictures of family gatherings and other important events.

My study has followed the traditional participant observation mold (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998): hanging out with people and doing whatever they happen to be doing. I have never formally interviewed the Dukes, but rather, ask questions that seem appropriate at the time.

Especially in the beginning of my study, most of my observations occurred in the Dukes' home. As my study continued, I spent increasing amounts of time with the Dukes outside of their home, visiting kin or friends, attending professional wrestling matches with Bill and Sammy, running errands, and accompanying Winnie to Cindy's middle school graduation. I also drove Bill and Sammy for a daylong visit to his relatives outside of Capital City.

The Dukes have never made me feel unwelcome. Winnie and Bill are open and honest people and readily volunteer information about themselves and

their family that most people would hide. I know more about the intimate details of the Dukes' lives than about most of my closest friends and relatives.

This is a study that so far has a beginning, but no end. At the present time, I cannot foresee cutting off contact with the family, both because I enjoy them and because I want to see how their lives will continue to unfold. Even if I did not want to maintain a relationship with the family, they would probably continue to contact me for advice or assistance.

## DISABILITY LABELS AND FAMILY CONSTRUCTIONS

Although Bill, Winnie, Sammy, and Cindy, as well as many of their kin and friends, have been labeled as disabled or might be considered disreputable in other ways, they do not attach the same meanings to disability labels as found in the broader society. Within the Duke family and, to a large extent within their broader social network, disability labels are interpreted in non-stigmatizing ways. They are largely successful in insulating themselves from the messages received from programs, agencies, and schools.

Standing between the individuals in the Duke family and the broader culture are the family itself and the larger social network of which they are a part. Families help members interpret their social experiences. As Reiss (1981) noted:

> The contemporary family cannot be viewed … as simply a component of large social organizations: neighborhood, city, socioeconomic class, or culture. Families are bounded social groups with their own internal dynamics. Much of what a family does arises from within itself and is not simply a passive reflection of social processes around it. (p. 171)

Because so many members of the Duke family and extended network have been defined as disabled, retarded, or handicapped, there is a repertoire of nonstigmatizing meanings of disability labels available to individuals. Hess and Handel (1995) pointed out that socialization within families is largely a matter of continuity of tradition, ideology, and behavior from generation to generation.

Bill, Winnie, Sammy, and Cindy are bombarded by messages that they are handicapped, disabled, mentally retarded, and incompetent. They have been officially defined and treated as disabled by institutions, government programs, human service agencies, and schools.

The disability labels of Bill, Winnie, Sammy, and Cindy are listed on plans, forms, and correspondence the family receives. "Mentally retarded," "disabled," and "handicapped" appear frequently on government paper-work; teachers and government officials have referred to Cindy's and

Sammy's "mental problems" and "mental retardation" in discussions with Winnie. Their labels are not a matter of things said behind their backs, but are thrown up to their faces.

Like Bill, Winnie, Sammy, and Cindy, many of the Dukes' kin and friends have been defined as disabled or been saddled with other stigmatizing labels. By spending time with the Duke family, I have learned about how people within the network have been defined by government programs, human service agencies, and schools. I have never asked directly whether any family member or friend has a disability or has been labeled as disabled. Any information I have about this has come up casually. My knowledge of people's labels is indirect; so it is undoubtedly incomplete and underrepresents the number of people who have been defined as having some form of disability or socially stigmatizing characteristic.

Ever since the publication of the Kallikaks and the Jukes studies, disability has been linked to other forms of social deviance and pathology. Many of Bill's and Winnie's family members and friends have potentially disreputable and stigmatizing characteristics.

Many of the Dukes' kin and friends have been labeled and processed as disabled, mentally retarded, or mentally ill by government programs, institutions, psychiatric clinics, schools, and human service agencies. At least 7 of Bill and Winnie's 19 siblings, and both of Bill's parents, have been officially tagged with a disability label. People receive SSI disability benefits and have been institutionalized, have worked at sheltered workshops, and have been treated for psychiatric problems. References to special education and the "Committee on the Handicapped" or "Committee on Special Education" are common in discussions of children's school programs.

In addition to their disability labels, many of the Dukes' relatives and friends are chronically poor and receive welfare. As Katz (1983) noted, welfare is stigmatizing and casts in doubt a person's moral fiber. For people who are able to work, it is disreputable to be on the public dole. As is also common among poor people and parents with disabilities (Taylor, 1995), a number of the families in the Duke network have been involved with child protection agencies and other agents of social control.

Perhaps the most striking example of how agencies have defined members of the Dukes' social network can be found in Bill's records from Empire State School. Figure 8.1 contains a copy of a "Case Summary and Abstract" contained in his records. As evidenced by this document, Bill's family was characterized as thoroughly disreputable. This summary also demonstrates how the labeling of one family member can maximize the possibility of other family members being labeled. Bill's diagnosis referred to "cultural-familial mental retardation," and references to "subcultural" and "environmental" retardation are scattered throughout his records.

Yet the Dukes, along with their friends and kin, attach social meanings to such labels that leave their social identities unscathed.

**William Duke, Jr.**
**Date of Admission** (1963) **Date of summary** (1963) A White male, age 15, single and Protestant, admitted . . . on a "Court Certification of Mental Defectives."

**FAMILY HISTORY:**
**Father**, William Duke, Sr., born (1920), went to 5th grade in school. He is mentally retarded with an IQ 77. He is deteriorated, possibly due to alcoholism. He does not work, does not show any motivation, and shows a depressive reaction.

**Mother**, Nancy Shenandoah Duke, born (1923), has been diagnosed as a "schizophrenic character who has not become blatantly psychotic." She has a full-scale IQ of 70.

**Siblings**: Pamela, born (1944). Iris, born (1945), went through 4th grade with an IQ just below 70, but her potential is well in the average range. She is in the defective range; diagnosis may be simply schizophrenia. *Joseph, born (15), in 4th grade, IQ 58, no motivation, and fear of adult authority. *Elizabeth (Betty), born (1952), in 3rd grade, IQ 61, schizophrenic reaction, preoccupied with male and female bodies, has a tremendous fear of men. Melanie, born (1956); Jean, born 1957, Sandra, born (1961). *Joseph and Elizabeth (Betty) were admitted to Empire State School with William.

**PERSONAL HISTORY:**
William attained the 6th grade in school . . . . He has no meaningful identification; passive aggressive personality. It was felt that he might benefit from a controlled setting such as Empire State School. The home environment is extremely poor, and there is evidence of alcoholism, incest, prostitution, pediculosis, and lack of proper nutrition and supervision.*

**Figure 8.1**    Empire State School case summary and abstract.

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*A few notes of explanation on the characterization of the home environment are in order here. First of all, for those who wondered, "Pediculosis" is not quite as bad as it sounds. It refers to lice infestation. Second, other entries in Bill's record state that incest within the family was investigated more thoroughly at a later time: "The mother had no recollection of an instance of incest, however (social worker) found out from the case workers that there was only one instance when an older sister had accused William of molesting her. The father of the patient was never involved." Third, according to Bill, his mother traded sexual favors to male friends for alcohol, but no other information on alleged prostitution in the family is available from Bill or his records.

**REASON FOR ADMISSION:**
Because of William's inability to benefit from school, and the deplorable home situation, placement in Empire State School was recommended.

**PHYSICAL EXAMINATION:**
A white male, age 15 years, height 5'6", weight 128 lbs., fairly well nourished and developed. Physical findings well within normal limits. Speech, gait, hearing, and sight normal.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION:**
William Duke, Jr. is a 15-year-old adolescent male, who obtained a mental age of 7 years, 10 months and an IQ of 57, as measured by the Stanford-Binet Form L-M. He was polite, quiet, and cooperative, although manifestations of anxiety were present.

**PSYCHIATRIC EXAMINATION:**
William is a rather attractive, friendly-looking boy, who tries to cooperate with examiner. He is fairly well oriented as to time, place, and person. He knows his address and all the names in his family. He has some knowledge in writing and reading; however, is poor in arithmetic. He does not know exactly why he is here and would rather be home. However, he accepted his being here at an institution. He wants to learn a trade and be a mechanic. His memory is poor. He likes it here and gets along well on the wards. He enjoys all the activities, likes TV and movies.

**DIAGNOSIS:**
Mental Deficiency.

1. Familial.
2. 81-Cultural-familial mental retardation.

Excerpt of Bill's records at Empire State School**

**Figure 8.1** (*Continued*).

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**Specific dates and the names of places have been omitted from this excerpt.

## "On Disability" and "On Welfare"

Receiving Social Security Disability benefits or SSI is viewed as being "on disability." Receiving Public Assistance is being "on welfare." Bill, Sammy, and Cindy have been "on disability" since I started studying the family; Winnie was on welfare when I first met her, but was subsequently successful in obtaining SSI. Being "on disability" and "on welfare" simply refer to the check one receives in the mail and the office where one goes to negotiate benefits. Cindy calls the mail carrier "the man who brings our checks." People prefer being on disability to being on welfare because there are fewer expectations and higher benefits. Welfare pressures people to find jobs; Social Security and SSI leave them alone in this regard.

According to Bill, he is on disability because his doctor says that he is unable to work, but he does not think twice about going "junking" (collecting recyclable materials and objects from the garbage) or working under the table at a garage. He is perplexed that his doctor says he can drive a car but cannot work:

> Last time I went to my doctor he said I couldn't work because I have seizures. Now that's something I can't understand. I can't work, but it's OK to drive a car. If you can't work, you shouldn't be able to drive a car.

Winnie was initially unsuccessful in her initial attempts to receive SSI and believed that she had been treated unfairly by not being found eligible. She kept reapplying and was eventually deemed eligible.

Although Sammy had been receiving SSI since he was a young child, he was turned down for Social Security Childhood Disability benefits (for which he was potentially eligible because Bill worked for a brief period of time). I went with Winnie to the Social Security office to question this determination. The following extended exchange between a Social Security worker and Winnie illustrates a clash in worldviews over the meaning of *disability*. Trying to be helpful in establishing Sammy's eligibility, the Social Security worker probed for information that would demonstrate his mental retardation. By contrast, Winnie focused on Sammy's medical problems.

> Worker: "In Metro City, they said he wasn't eligible for Social Security Childhood Disability because he's not disabled enough, but then they didn't do anything about his SSI. I don't know why they did that. You're eligible for either both or neither. I'm going to have to send this back to them."
>
> The worker flips through some files: "This letter from a Dr. Pruka. Now he says Sammy is not capable of managing his money. That should be enough right there for him to be eligible. Well I'm going to send this back to Metro City and you should hear from them. If they say he's not eligible, come back in here right

away . . . . I don't make these decisions myself, but I think you'd win on appeal. But I'm going to send this back to them."

The worker takes out a form: "Now I need to get a statement from you . . . . Now, what's his disability?"

Winnie: "Well, he was born with medical problems."

Worker: "What kind of medical problems?"

Winnie: "He has asthma and he had a hole in his heart when he was born and a cleft palate. And he has holes in his ear drums. Well, the one side was fixed."

Worker: "Which?"

Winnie: "The left, but he still has a hole in his right ear drum. The doctor said if it gets worse he'll need an operation."

Worker: "Does he have a speech impediment?"

Winnie: "Yea."

Worker: "What else?"

Winnie: "He had a tracheostomy when he was born and he had C.P. on his one side."

Worker: "He had what?"

Winnie: "C.P. Cerebral Palsy."

Worker: "Does he have any medical restrictions?"

Winnie: "He can't go swimming. He used to be a good swimmer too. He has to sleep on three pillows or he could stop breathing. He can't lift anything heavier than 50 or 60 pounds. Oh, and he can't have any dust around, or oil, or grease . . . "

Worker: "Can he take care of his personal hygiene?"

Winnie: "Oh, yea. He can take care of himself. Sometimes you might have to check after he shaves because he might miss a place."

Worker: "Can he drive?"

Winnie: "Oh, yea, but he won't go for his learner's permit. We've tried to take him, but he just panics. He just won't go."

Worker: "Can he cook?"

Winnie: "Oh, yea. He cooked veal cutlets and macaroni the other night. He cooks good spaghetti. But like he can't cook a main course."

Worker: "Can he manage his own money? Like if you gave him his SSI check could he manage it?"

Winnie: "No, he'd spend it all right away."

Worker: "Can he go grocery shopping? Say you gave him $40 to go to the store and gave him a list. Could he go shopping?"

Winnie: "You don't know what he might come back with."

Worker: "Can he take the bus on his own?"

Winnie: "Oh, no, he gets lost. Him and Cindy can't take a bus anywhere. They just get lost. He can't find his way around."

Worker shows the completed form to Winnie: "Okay, sign right here." The worker gets up and goes to a computer about eight feet away. Another worker is there.

Worker: "I can't believe they said he wasn't eligible for Childhood Disability, but didn't do anything about his SSI. He's mentally retarded and a doctor says he can't manage his money. What else do they need to know? I can't believe them."

Worker comes back: "I'll send this back to them and see what they do. See, when they review these cases everything has to fall into a range. But in a case like Samuel's, IQ may not mean that much. You need more information. He has some mental problems. His brain doesn't function right."

Winnie nods, but she doesn't seem to be following him.

The worker proceeds to review Bill's and Cindy's cases. He asks about Cindy, "Now, is she in school?"

Winnie: "Yea, she's an A-1 student. Last year she had all 90s. She's going to graduate from high school."

Worker: "We don't have a record of that. We'll have to get a letter from the school."

For dependent people in the Duke network, being on disability makes it attractive for kin and friends to take them in. Gossip in the network has it that Betty and Charles obtained legal custody of Kathy, their niece, because she receives SSI and that they "keep her down" so that they can continue to receive benefits.

Neither being on disability nor being on welfare is stigmatizing among the Dukes' family and friends. People talk freely about their problems with the Social Security and welfare bureaucracies and buy things on credit from each other with a promise to pay off their debts when their checks come. People are somewhat aware that being on welfare is looked down upon in some sectors of society. For example, Lisa and Gary said they were evicted because a new landlord did not like "people on welfare." But this social judgment is not internalized.

## "Handicapped" or "Crippled"

These terms are used to refer to people with physical disabilities and especially those who use wheelchairs. Bill's niece Kathy has spina bifida and is referred to as "handicapped" and another niece in Capital City is referred to as "crippled, like Kathy." Kathy is probably the most popular child within the

entire network and is included in all family events. When Kathy had surgery on her hips, she was visited by a large number of both Bill's and Winnie's relatives. Kathy is labeled moderately retarded in school, but her retardation has never been mentioned by anyone within the network.

When Kathy's younger sister Sharon was living with Betty and Charles, she wrote an essay for school titled, "What it is like to have a handycap sister":

> Kathy is my sister. She cannot walk But she is very smart at home and at school...everyone loves her so much and so do we We live with my aunt & uncle We love it there They are good to use We all help Kathy My aunt & uncle get her up in the morning for school. They put on her braces dress really pretty She is very special to use and a joy to are lives We really love having her around... Right now my aunt is trying to get her to use the tolite so she can get out of Pampers and wear regular paints like use and she likes that ideal Kathy likes jest about every thing that we do with her and that makes use real happy and that is what it is lake to me to have Kathy for a sister I love her so much and with all my heart.
>
> **Sharon Duke**

Sharon wrote about her "handycap sister," but her Aunt Betty and Uncle Charles, her father (Joey), and many of her relatives have also been labeled as handicapped.

On only one occasion has Winnie or Bill referred to Sammy or Cindy as "handicapped," and this was in the context of discussing "medical problems":

> Out of all the nieces and nephews on my side, Sammy and Cindy are the only ones who are handicapped, who have medical problems. Them and one grandchild. Then on Bill's side, only two of them have medical problems.

## "Medical Problems"

According to Winnie, all four members of the Duke family have "medical problems":

> Cindy has medical problems. She has epileptic seizures.... Sammy had medical problems when he was born. Bill has medical problems. He has seizures. And I have medical problems. We all have medical problems.

Winnie explained that she and Bill were aware of each other's problems when they got married:

> When Bill and me got married, we knew all about each other's problems. I knew he had seizures and I knew he had been at Empire. He knew I had seizures and medical problems and that I was a cleft palate person and had speech problems and a clubfoot.

In the following exchange, Bill and Winnie discussed Sammy's medical problems at birth:

> Bill: "We could tell you a lot about Sammy. He had a lot of medical problems when he was born. He had a trach tube and a tube in his stomach."
>
> Winnie: "My mother said we couldn't do it, but we did."
>
> Bill: "Sammy was our pride. I mean, Cindy's our pride too, but he was born first. Boy, I'll tell you. That was hard. It was real hard. But I'd do it all over again if I had to."

Winnie was discussing her and Bill's families one day. She repeated her statements that out of all of their nieces and nephews, only Sammy, Cindy, the two nieces with physical disabilities, and her great-nephew who is hearing impaired have "medical problems." She added, "Everyone else is healthy and normal." Yet a significant number of the nieces and nephews have been placed in special education classes.

Having medical problems is not something to conceal or to be ashamed of. Winnie volunteers this information to outsiders making their first visits to the home. "Medical problems" seems to represent a non-stigmatizing way of interpreting the messages received from the outside world. In the same way that a person's identity is generally not affected by having high blood pressure, allergies, or high cholesterol, the construct of "medical problems" avoids stains on a person's moral character.

Institutionalization

As Edgerton (1993) noted, institutionalization is itself stigmatizing and a biographical fact that people with mental retardation try to hide. The "cure" (being institutionalized) is worse than the "disease" (having an intellectual disability).

When Bill discusses his institutional experience, he talks as though Empire State School were a reform school, rather than an institution for the intellectually disabled. According to Bill, Empire helped him "get my head together," and he is proud that he worked his way off "probation." Bill described his history:

> I was in Empire State School before I was married. I don't mind talking about that. I'm proud of it. I was there 22 years.[4] Now I'm celebrating my 18th anniversary. I have a nice family and I'm doing OK.

On another occasion, Bill commented that it would "straighten out" Sammy and Cindy if they were sent to institutions:

> Bill points to Sammy: "Now it's too bad they don't have places like Empire today. I'll tell you if you went to Empire you wouldn't have the problems you

have. I'll tell you. It was hard. You had to work hard scrubbing the floors. Then if you did something they beat you with a stick or put your head in the toilet."

He points to Cindy: "If we put you in a place like Mercy [State Hospital] that would straighten you out."

According to Bill's records at Empire, he, his sister Betty, and his brother Joey were placed at the institution because of the "deplorable" home situation; several of his sisters were placed in foster care for the same reason. Yet within Bill's family, the reasons for his institutionalization are not so clear. At times, Bill and his family members attribute his institutionalization to his seizures. Bill, however, sometimes claims that his seizures were caused by the institution.

> Bill: "I lived at Empire 22 years."
>
> Winnie: "His parents couldn't hack it because he had seizures."
>
> Bill: "I liked it there. I'm sorry they closed it. I'd go back there in a second. You didn't have to worry about rent, electricity, or food, or clothes. Everything was taken care of for you . . . . I'm proud I was at Empire . . . . I made it out on my own. When I was there I had an EEG . . . . Back then they stuck needles in your head . . . . That's why I have problems now. They sent me to Mercy [State Hospital] for four months because of my seizures."

Bill's mother shares his account of his experiences at Empire. She stated that he never had any problems before going to Empire. Pointing to Sammy, Joey (Bill's brother, who was also institutionalized), and boyfriend Homer, she explained, "Before he went to Empire, he was as normal as him or him or anybody."

Within Bill's extended family, there are different versions of who was responsible for his having been institutionalized at Empire State School. Bill reported that two of his sisters claimed responsibility and he asked me to help him obtain his discharge papers to find out the truth:

> The reason I want my discharge papers is that Pam and Iris both say they put me in Empire. They didn't put me there. My parents did. After everything she's done, I still love my mother. She's still my mother. On the discharge papers it'll say who put me there.

Bill is not the least bit ashamed of having been institutionalized and volunteers this information to friends and acquaintances. By contrast, his sister Betty does not like to talk about living at Empire. Bill acknowledges that some people hold it against people who have lived at an institution and says that for this reason he had difficulty finding a job after he was discharged.

"Committee on the Handicapped," "Committee on Special Education," "IEP Class"

Just as Bill avoids the stigma associated with institutionalization, people within the Dukes' social network of extended family and friends do not attach negative meanings to placement in special education or early childhood intervention programs. Euphemisms (for example, "Option I," "Option II," "Option III," "Option IV") are typically used by schools to refer to special education programs for students with mental retardation or developmental delays. Yet procedures and paperwork associated with these programs make it clear that they are designed for students with disabilities. Special education classification and placement decisions are made by the Committee on Special Education or what Winnie has referred to as the Committee on the Handicapped (its former official title). Students receiving special education services have a written IEP.

When Winnie and Bill as well as their friends and kin talk about children being placed in special education programs, they do so in a way as to define what might be considered serious disabilities as minor problems in learning or motivation. Cindy and Vinnie's children leave the impression of being significantly delayed in intellectual, social, and speech development. When their two oldest children were placed in an intensive early childhood education program, Vinnie explained:

> They say Mikey and Joey have learning disabilities so Mikey goes to an IEP program. A speech and language teacher comes here one day a week, but she's going to start coming two days a week. I think that's good. If they're in an IEP class when they're young, then maybe they can be in a regular class by second grade. Like with Cindy, she started out in a regular class and then went into an IEP class. If Mikey's in an IEP program now, he can learn to read and learn some study habits.

Thus, Vinnie at once defined his wife's and his children's intellectual deficits as a matter of such things as developing study habits, much the same way parents might explain their children's enrollment in Head Start programs.

"Emotionally Disturbed," "Slow Learner"

Winnie has used the phrases "emotionally disturbed" and "slow learner" to describe several of her nephews and this corresponds to how they have been labeled by schools or other agencies. Winnie casually remarked that Betty and Charles's son Chet was "emotionally disturbed" after he was admitted to a psychiatric center for a brief stay. When Joey's 10-year-old son B. J. was having behavior problems at school and home ("shitting his pants"), Winnie commented, "I think it's a medical problem. I think he's emotionally disturbed.

He's doing it for the attention." Finally, Winnie has characterized John's son Michael as "emotionally disturbed" and a "slow learner" in school.

## "Retard," "Retarded," "Moron," "Crazy," "Weird," "Dumb," and "Stupid"

As in other parts of society, "retard," "retarded," "moron," "crazy," "weird," "dumb," and "stupid" are used as general epithets and do not necessarily refer to intellectual deficits. People casually call each other these names. Bill often calls Sammy and Cindy stupid and dumb when they avoid doing something he has told them to do or when they irritate him:

> Bill turns the TV from a program to the VCR. Sammy complains, "Don't turn that. I'm watching it." Bill replies, "Stupid, that's almost over."
>
> Cindy says something about riding Sammy's bike. Bill says, angrily, "Stupid, there's bikes downstairs. Get one of them."

When he is angry with family or friends, he also refers to them as stupid. Both Bill and Winnie characterize his family as crazy and weird. Bill told me the following story:

> Bill: "I'll tell you, my family's crazy. They're all crazy. How's your stomach?"
>
> Me: "Okay, I guess."
>
> Bill: "I mean, do you have a weak stomach?"
>
> Me: "No, go ahead."
>
> Bill: "My sister Pam . . . . Well, she used to make macaroni salad, with cucumbers and everything. It was real good. This one time I was over at her house and she asked me if I wanted some macaroni salad and I said, 'Sure. Yea.' Well. She gave me a dish and I went to take a bite and I looked down and there were maggots in it. I said, 'Pam, there's maggots in there!' She took the macaroni and ate it, maggots and all. I'll tell you. She's crazy."

Although Bill often calls Sammy and Cindy dumb and stupid, both he and Winnie also communicate to their children that they are not mentally deficient. Bill proudly showed me a TV that Sammy had worked on:

> Everybody says Sammy's dumb, right? They all say he's dumb. Want to see something? [Bill points to a TV in Sammy's room.] I found that in the trash and brought it home. Sammy took the tube out and put another one in it from another TV I had. [Bill turns on the TV.] Look at that. Everybody says he's stupid, but look at that. He's not dumb.

The title of this paper is a quote from Bill. One day when I was visiting the home, Bill was prodding Cindy to sweep the floor. Avoiding the job, Cindy

would sweep for a minute or two and then sit down. After being scolded repeatedly by Bill, she laughed and said, "I'm a retard." This is when Bill said, "You're not a retard, you're just wise." Cindy responded, "I'll be a retard if I don't do my homework." Bill's casual response, "You're not a retard, you're just wise," redefined her behavior in terms of being a smart aleck and, hence, was normalizing. However, this exchange and other instances when Cindy called herself stupid indicate that she was aware of how she had been labeled at school and this was problematic for her.

The Dukes simply do not internalize disability labels as a master status and, for this reason, avoid the stigma and spoiled identities associated with them. They do not attempt to pass as normal; they see themselves as normal.

## SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Bill and Winnie, along with their kin and friends, define themselves and others in terms of personal characteristics and social relationships—not disability labels. As Garfinkel (1967) and Goode (1994) pointed out, identities are socially generated and dependent on the social organization surrounding people. Commenting specifically on families, Hess and Handel (1995) argued that family members develop images of each other based on their interpersonal relationships:

> Living together, the individuals in a family each develop an image of what the other members are like. This image comprises the emotional meaning and significance which the other has for the member holding it. The concept of image is a mediating concept. Its reference extends into the personality and out into the interpersonal relationship. (p. 6)

The Dukes' kin and friends can be identified as disabled or disreputable in the context of schools, government programs, and human service agencies, but have untainted identities, or images, within the family and social network.

Bill and Winnie describe themselves in terms of their family roles, interests, and skills. For both of them, their family relationships, gender roles, and responsibilities are especially important in the construction of identity. Bill is a husband, father, grandfather, uncle (who is looked up to by some of his nieces and nephews), son, and brother, and Winnie is a wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, daughter, and sister. Bill expresses pride about having a family, and Winnie prides herself on her child-rearing knowledge and skills. Winnie never passes up a chance to give me advice on raising my own children (6 and

8 years old) and will scold me if she thinks I am doing something wrong. Both Winnie and Bill like to remind me that I am a "newlywed" compared to them. Their anniversary, Mother's Day, and Father's Day are special holidays for Bill and Winnie and provide an opportunity to celebrate their status as marriage partners and parents.

Bill identifies himself as a "wrestlin' freak" and a fixer of old cars, televisions, and appliances. As noted previously, Bill's cars enable him to see himself as a contributing member of the household. He's the family driver and earns money junking, even though he is "on disability." Winnie presents herself as a "knick-knack freak" and makes frequent reference to her math ability and memory of dates and phone numbers.

Bill and Winnie define Sammy and Cindy as normal and typical children. When they talk about their children, they sound just like any other parents. Despite "medical problems" when the children were young, Winnie brags that Sammy was "bottle broke and potty-trained" by 1 year of age and Cindy by a year and a half. When their children were younger, Bill and Winnie described them as typical teenagers and complained about their teenage behavior. Winnie often sighed and said things like, "Teenagers!" or "Do you want a teenager, Steve?"

For both Bill and Winnie, it is important for Sammy to follow in his father's footsteps by collecting and working on cars and appliances. They encouraged Sammy to buy old cars and prodded him for years to get his learner's permit, which he avoided doing. Sammy's purchase of his first car was an event marked by all of the family. Bill and Winnie are proud of Sammy's mechanical ability and sometimes point out that he is even better than Bill at fixing things. When Sammy put a new filter on his old Monte Carlo, Bill commented, "Samuel fixed it himself. I'm proud of him." Winnie explained, "If you hang around here long enough, Sammy will teach you everything you need to know to work on a motorcycle."

When it comes to their children, Bill and Winnie have a way of turning labeling and stigmatizing experiences upside down and inside out. Their definitions of their children stand in stark contrast to how they have been defined by schools, government programs, and agencies. Winnie reports that Sammy was an "A-1 student" prior to dropping out. When I asked what Sammy wants to be, Winnie answered, "A mechanic. Maybe an artist."

When she was a full-time special education student, Cindy received constant reminders of her identity as being disabled or mentally retarded. Her IEP mentioned her mental retardation, and Winnie attended what she called "Committee on the Handicapped" meetings on Cindy's behalf. Everything about Cindy's school program told her that she was handicapped and mentally retarded. She took a special education bus to and from school and had always been placed in a self-contained special education class. As her comments "I'm a retard" and "I'm stupid" indicated, Cindy was not oblivious to the messages she received from school and she had to struggle

to maintain an identity as a normal teenager. However, Bill and Winnie constructed an image of Cindy being a normal teenager.

Winnie boasted to family members and friends about Cindy's school achievements. One year, Cindy was awarded certificates of attendance and merit for participation in her special education program, and Winnie talked about her "making the honor roll." On the last day of class that year, Cindy's teacher gave out class awards. Cindy received one for community service and one for student council (three members of her special education class were among the 60 or 70 members of the school's student council). On the way home after Cindy's last day of class, Winnie commented, "That kid's bright. She'll graduate from high school."

According to Winnie, Cindy continued to shine in school the following year. Cindy was graded in one subject and received a 95 on her report card. Winnie stated, "She's making all 95s this year . . . . She'll graduate in a few years. She wants to be a teacher or maybe a nurse."

One day while I was visiting the Dukes, Cindy showed me a book her teacher had given her from the school library. The title was *Your Handicap: Don't Let It Handicap You* and it was obviously written to help special education students adjust to their disabilities. Commenting on the book, Bill said to Cindy:

> Cindy, you should read that book. You're going to be a parent some day and you could have a handicapped child. When I was at Empire there was this kid there with his head out to here (motions a very large head). He had tumors and his head just grew. He was a pretty nice kid too. *You* should know about handicaps so you're prepared if you have a handicapped child.

Juxtaposed with messages Cindy received from school that she was disabled were messages from her family that she was a normal teenager.

For many, if not most, parents, marriage and child rearing would be out of the question for children with Sammy's and Cindy's limitations. For Winnie and Bill, raising a family is regarded as a natural part of growing up for Cindy and Sammy. Both Winnie and Bill are proud grandparents of Cindy's four children, and expect Sammy to get married soon.

In Bill and Winnie's eyes, family members and friends have personal identities unstained by the labels imposed by formal organizations. For family members, kinship creates strong social bonds and forms the basis for social identities. "Mother," "brother," "sister," "niece," "nephew," and so on are master statuses that control how people are defined.

Winnie and Bill's definitions of family members and friends are not always positive, but they are based on their firsthand knowledge of them. Disabilities and negative characteristics can be acknowledged without becoming a master status.

Figure 8.2 contrasts how many of the Dukes' kin and friends have been defined and processed by formal agencies with their identities within the social network, as seen by Winnie and Bill.

| PERSON | RELATION TO THE DUKE FAMILY | IDENTITY AS CONSTRUCTED BY OFFICIAL AGENCIES | IDENTITY AS CONSTRUCTED BY THE DUKES |
|---|---|---|---|
| William, Sr. | Bill's father | "Mentally retarded"; alleged alcoholic; worked for the County road system in exchange for welfare. | Deceased. Bill got along great with him. |
| Nancy | Bill's mother | "Schizophrenic character who has not become blatantly psychotic"; low IQ; reputed alcoholic and prostitute; "home broken by County's efforts." | Bill did not get along with her when he was young, but, "After everything she's done, she's still my mother." Sometimes drinks too much. |
| Homer | Bill's mother's live-in male friend; formerly married to Bill's sister, Iris | Arrested twice for Driving While Intoxicated (DWI). | According to Bill, "I'm not calling him Dad. He's just my friend, not my Dad." |
| Iris | Bill's sister | Borderline IQ; receives welfare; investigated for child abuse. | Borrows things from Bill and Winnie. |
| Joey | Bill's brother | "Mentally retarded"; institutionalized at Empire State School; arrested for DWI. | "He's a nice kid, but drinks too much"; mean when he gets drunk; taught Bill about cars; has a steady job as a gravedigger. |

**Figure 8.2**   Identities in the Dukes' extended family.

| Person | Relation to the Duke Family | Identity as Constructed by Official Agencies | Identity as Constructed by the Dukes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Betty | Bill's sister | "Mentally retarded"; "schizophrenic reaction"; institutionalized at Empire State School; receives welfare; investigated for child abuse. | "Competitive" with and "jealous" of Winnie and Bill; sometimes helps out Bill and Winnie. |
| Charles | Bill's brother-in-law; Betty's husband | Worked at a sheltered workshop. | Cheats Bill in car deals. |
| Vicky | Bill's sister | "Mentally retarded"; schizophrenic. | Bill's sister. |
| Sharon | Bill's niece; Joey's daughter | Placed in special education resource room. | "Fools around" with boys. |
| R.B. | Bill's nephew; Joey's son | Placed in special education; received psychiatric counseling. | Doesn't get "enough love"; "Shitting his pants . . . for attention." |
| Kathy | Bill's niece; Joey's daughter | "Moderately retarded"; "physically handicapped"; "spina bifida"; uses a wheelchair; receives SSI; placed in special education. | Bill's "favorite niece"; "handicapped"; "crippled." |
| Donnie | Bill's nephew; Iris's son | Placed in special education. | Nephew. |
| Huey | Bill's nephew | Three convictions for DWI. | Freeloader; drinks too much; has sabotaged Bill's cars. |

**Figure 8.2**   (*Continued*).

| Person | Relation to the Duke Family | Identity as Constructed by Official Agencies | Identity as Constructed by the Dukes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chet | Bill's nephew; Betty's son | Placed in special education; received psychiatric counseling; briefly institutionalized at psychiatric center. | Causes fights and problems. |
| Victoria | Bill's niece; Jean's daughter | "Physically handicapped"; "spina bifida." | "Handicapped" or "crippled" "just like Kathy." |
| Butch | Winnie's brother | Rejected by military on medical grounds ("F"). | "Biker"; works as a garbage man. |
| John | Winnie's brother | "Mental problems"; received psychiatric care. | Has always been quiet; has a steady job; boarder at the Dukes' for several years. |
| Ray | Winnie's brother | Receives SSI because of disability; worked at a sheltered workshop. | Freeloader. |
| Tommy | Winnie's brother | Has seizures. | Bill and Winnie do favors for him, but he does not help them out. |
| Louis | Winnie's brother | Convicted rapist; released from jail in 1990. | According to Winnie, he's a "contractor," and according to Bill, "a mean sucker." |
| Michael | Winnie's nephew | Placed in special education. | "Immature." |

**Figure 8.2**   (*Continued*).

| Person | Relation to the Duke Family | Identity as Constructed by Official Agencies | Identity as Constructed by the Dukes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Earl | Winnie's cousin | Received welfare; accused of child abuse. | "Nobody else can talk when Earl's here"; steals things; helps Bill with cars. |
| Elizabeth | Earl's wife | Receives SSI because of disability. | "Lazy"; doesn't help clean when staying with the Dukes. |
| Lisa | Considered "family"; "in-law" of Winnie's brother Butch in his first marriage. | Receives welfare; investigated for child abuse. | "Sociable"; always "reporting everybody"; takes advantage of the Dukes. |
| David | Lisa's son | Placed in special education; received psychiatric counseling. | "Acts young" for his age. |
| Gary | Lisa's son | Placed in special education. | "Pest"; makes too much noise. |

**Figure 8.2**   (*Continued*).

In short, within the Duke network, people's social identities are dependent upon their relationships with each other and not on the judgments of formal organizations or the society at large. As Bogdan and Taylor (1987, 1989) and Taylor and Bogdan (1989) pointed out, the definition of a person is to be found in the relationship between the definer and the defined, and is not determined by the abstract meanings attached to the group of which the person is a part.

## CONCLUSION

In the Duke family and broader network of extended family members and friends, people with obvious disabilities are not stigmatized, rejected, or necessarily viewed as disabled. Even when people's disabilities are recognized, as in the case of the "handicapped," these disabilities do not

represent a master status that controls interactions with them. That people can maintain positive identities while being subjected to labeling at the hands of government programs, human service agencies, and schools is no easy accomplishment. The Duke family experience shows that small worlds can exist that do not simply reproduce the broader social contexts in which they are embedded.

Four related factors seem to account for the Dukes' ability to avoid the stigma and stained identities associated with disability. First, the family stands between individual members and programs or agencies and provides a ready set of meanings and interpretations of their experiences. Reiss (1981) described how families help members organize their experiences of situations in everyday life. According to Reiss, the family permits individuals to "select, highlight, and transform essential aspects of their experience and delete the rest" (p. 203). Culture, including the cultural meanings associated with disability and imparted by agencies, is interpreted in the context of the family's stock of shared knowledge and understandings.

Second, in the case of the Dukes, their family life world is shared and reinforced by an extensive network of kin and friends. Their extended social network appears to be much more influential than in the nuclear families described in much of the literature on family worlds (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990; Hess & Handel, 1995; Reiss, 1981). Within the Dukes' social network, households are not necessarily identical with nuclear families and are often comprised of members of different families. Further, households and families within the network have a high degree of contact with one another.

Many members of the Dukes' extended network have some form of disability or potentially stigmatizing characteristic, although their labels vary widely. Since people are surrounded by others who have been similarly labeled by agencies and programs, it is not unusual to have been defined as disabled.

Third, related to their roles within a family, none of the Dukes or members of the network are full-time clients of human service agencies. Institutions and community residential facilities engulf people in a separate subculture that provides them with scarce opportunities to define themselves as anything other than disabled (Bercovici, 1983; Bogdan & Taylor, 1994; Edgerton, 1986). Bill's and Cindy's experiences are instructive in this regard. For Bill the passage of time since being institutionalized has undoubtedly enabled him to establish a positive identity. In a follow-up study of *The Cloak of Competence*, Edgerton and Bercovici (1976) found that ex-institutional residents' concern with stigma and passing became far less evident over time. Of all of the members of the Duke family and perhaps the network, Cindy seemed to struggle the most with an identity as a disabled or retarded person while she was in school. This suggests that the more enmeshed one is in disability programs—in Cindy's case, full-time special education

classes—the more one has to contend with a negative identity. Returning to the sample of people studied originally by Edgerton in 1960–1961, Edgerton, Bollinger, and Herr (1984) raised a poignant question: "To what extent the growing independence and optimism of these people is due to the fact that they had not received services as mentally retarded persons after their deinstitutionalization is a question that may deserve attention" (p. 351).

Finally, competence is a relative concept (Goode, 1994). Although the Dukes and other members of their network may not perform well on standardized tests, in school programs, or in traditional jobs in the mainstream marketplace, they are competent to meet the demands of day-to-day life as they experience it. Bill knows not only the best junking routes, but also where to sell junk at the best price. Winnie knows where to turn for help when food is scarce. Sammy learned about junk cars from his father. Cindy's IEP in her special education program listed "Increase community awareness" as an annual goal; yet she was very aware and competent to function in stores and other settings within her immediate neighborhood.

Literacy and verbal agility are not requisite survival skills in the daily lives of the Dukes and other members of their social network. People within the network, therefore, are not defined based on such characteristics.

Of course, I cannot claim that the Dukes are representative of most people with disabilities or families, and I believe that they are not. As Miles and Huberman (1994), using a statistical metaphor to refer to exceptions, wrote, "the outlier is your friend" (p. 269). The important question is not whether the Duke family is typical or representative. The question is whether their experience can inform current theories about family life and the meaning of disability in society.

So what might we learn from outliers such as the Dukes? Theories about disability seem to take stigma for granted and proceed to examine how people manage it—whether through passing, denial, or resistance. Although these theories might be helpful in understanding street encounters, the circumstances of people enmeshed in human service systems, or abstract cultural meanings attached to disability, they do not necessarily account for the experiences of people embedded in different family worlds. Culture is experienced, to a large extent, through face-to-face social groups, and especially through those groupings we refer to as families.

## NOTES

1. Reprinted, with revisions, from S. J. Taylor, "'You're Not a Retard, You're Just Wise': Disability, Social Identity, and Family Networks," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 29*(1), 58–92 (2000), with permission of the author. The original study was conducted with support through a subcontract to the Center on Human Policy, Syracuse

University, from the University of Minnesota for the Research and Training Center on Community Living, funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.

2. All family names in this article are pseudonyms.

3. Although the eugenics movement is commonly associated with psychology and psychometricians who sought to demonstrate the link between low intelligence and other forms of social pathology (Gould, 1981), the assumptions underlying this movement were widely shared by sociologists and students of social problems at the time. In a leading text, *Society and Its Problems*, published in 1920, Dow associated feeblemindedness with crime, pauperism, and prostitution and characterized the feebleminded as representing one of the major social problems of American society.

4. Bill often says that he lived at Empire for 22 years. His records indicate that he was placed there at age 15 and discharged at the age of 22.

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# Producing Family Time: Practices of Leisure Activity Beyond the Home[1]

## Marjorie L. DeVault

T HIS CHAPTER PRESENTS my analysis of an occasional, local, and apparently rather trivial activity—the family outing to the zoo—but I want to suggest that it can be read as part of a larger story, about the changing character of middle- and working-class family life. Part of this large story revolves around time—how much time parents can and do spend with families (Hochschild, 1997), for example; who is overworked and why (Schor, 1992); and how to provide for the quality time that most Americans believe is so crucial for children's development (Daly, 1998). Policy makers take up these questions in the context of an emergent discourse of work/family (or sometimes work/life) issues. Such developments are signals of a large social transformation in the organization of work and family life—arising in large part from the establishment of middle-class wives and mothers as relatively permanent members of the labor force. As in the early industrial period, this large change is accompanied by uncertainties and anxieties about the reproduction of future generations, and it motivates attempts to develop a model (or models) for family life that fits with a restructuring economy. Research on the time bind in contemporary family life (Hochschild, 1997)—and widespread discussion of it—points toward larger areas of concern: How will ordinary people sustain those experiences that make up family life as so many have known it in the industrial period? What do the middle classes want to preserve, and why? Not, apparently, starched and pressed collars, home-baked cookies, or even (but much more

controversially) child care at home. What, then, will come to be defined as essential to family life—and for whom?

The research I report on here is concerned with some of the things that parents do with the family time they have with children, and—in a very preliminary way—with how their practices are shaped by larger social structures, not only by work hours, schedules, and pressures, but also by the organization of the public spaces that family members might inhabit together and a discourse of family life that swirls around those spaces. Though I can only sketch in these larger contexts and their consequences at this point, my intention is to identify some openings for connecting this ethnography of a local setting to broader political–economic relations (as outlined in Smith [1987] and DeVault [1999, Chapter 3]).

I need to begin by pointing out that the notion of the family outing is a concept with a class and cultural bias built into it. I do not mean that only middle-class families go to the zoo; in fact, the zoo appears to be one of the more democratic spaces in which families gather. What I mean is that the idea of the outing calls up a particular image of family life, an image that minimizes collective economic support and emphasizes a terrain of consciously constructed emotional expression (and discipline)—the modern view of marriage and family life. Many North Americans seek this mode of family experience, work extremely hard to achieve it, and derive intense pleasures from their sense of family connectedness. This model of family life is also encouraged and enforced by public discourses of family life, through advice directed to mothers, references to quality time, public images of family, and the activities of social workers and other family educators. For example, a social worker tells me that when she taught "parenting skills" she regularly "prescribed" an outing to the zoo. She went on to say, however, that few of her low-income clients were able to comply with the advice; such an outing requires substantial resources (transportation, entrance fees, money for snacks and souvenirs) and, perhaps more important, a good deal of time and energy for planning and execution. This kind of explicit instruction is less common than a more general imperative for parents to attend to children's development, conveyed through focused advice literature and disseminated even more widely through various media. For example, nearly every city newspaper publishes a calendar of events, many identified as especially appropriate for children or families, and in most cities of any size, one finds monthly publications directed specifically toward parents and offering a smorgasbord of sites, services, and products for producing family time. Thus, an outing to the zoo is the kind of activity that has come to be seen—by experts and those parents oriented to expert discourse—as fundamental to satisfactory family life, even though in practice many family groups cannot accomplish such activities routinely, or do not wish to.

My reference to this kind of family outing as an accomplishment signals the theoretical foundations of my approach. My intention is to analyze family ethnomethodologically, as a distinctive social configuration that is continually brought into being through people's activities, interactions, and interpretations, situated within powerful discourses of family life (DeVault, 1991; Griffith & Smith, 1987; Gubrium & Holstein, 1990). Such an approach recognizes biological, economic, and legal connections as critical resources for constituting family relationships, but it also implies that these connections are mobilized and given meaning only through interactive interpretive processes. A social sense of the primordial character of family experience is held in place, like other social realities, through collective practices of sense-making (Garfinkel, 1967) that establish the routine grounds of shared experience. Thus, family relations are sustained through the social practices of many actors in a multitude of social settings. The largely invisible work practices of mothers, fathers, and other caretakers are central to the constitution of family; but so are the practices of social workers (like the one I referred to earlier), teachers, employers, and others. The family outing, then, is constituted not only by its central actors—parents, children, and other participants such as relatives and friends—but also by those who produce its context: the social workers, educators, journalists, and others who write about family life, and also the planners, administrators, and entrepreneurs who create and maintain sites for family recreation. In the analysis that follows, I focus on the work practices of adults who conduct family outings with children, but I attempt to pursue the analysis of those practices in a way that keeps their contexts in view.[2]

This kind of analysis depends on a "generous" definition of work (Smith, 1987) and builds on the work of scholars who have brought into view the various kinds of work that contribute to the day-to-day construction of family life. In addition to wage work that supports the household economically, unpaid family work at home includes not just child care and basic sustenance but less visible effort such as coordination and planning, emotion and kin work, and the production of intimacy and sociability (e.g., Carrington, 1999;[3] DeVault, 1991; Di Leonardo, 1987; Hochschild, 1983). Some scholars have recognized that the work that produces family extends beyond the household into public settings such as schools, courtrooms, and health care institutions (Gubrium & Holstein, 1990; Smith & Griffith, 1990), though Gubrium and Holstein note that these public faces of family life have been relatively neglected by family scholars. The small body of research that does consider family work outside the home has focused on family members' (usually obligatory) participation in the formal organizations, such as workplace and school, that govern contemporary life. The emergent discourse of work/family concerns, however, suggests an increasing awareness of the links across ostensible boundaries between homes and other organizations.

Many fewer scholars have considered the constitution of family through voluntary, collective leisure activity in public, the kind of activity I refer to here as a family outing. Sociologists of leisure tend to focus on the individual (Olszewska & Roberts, 1989; Wimbush & Talbot, 1988), despite the fact that those living with children spend much of their leisure time in family groupings of various sorts. This pattern no doubt reflects the fact that for parents (and especially mothers), such outings must be considered an ambiguous mix of leisure and work. Some studies show that middle-class (and perhaps other) parents—again, especially mothers—devote considerable effort and thought to such activity (Daly, 1998; Seery, 1996). And Jack Katz (1996), in a study of laughter in a hall of funny mirrors in France, suggests that it is the family grouping and its constitution (highlighted in a distorted reflection) that has the social power to bring participants to the moment of laughter. Parents themselves do not necessarily think of such activities as work and may not even think of them as efforts requiring any distinctive label. *Outing* is my term; those I've talked with rarely name such activity, or do so much less formally. However, they do speak of "getting out," "doing things," and wanting children to "see all kinds of things."

While there are many possible destinations for family outings, the zoo provides a particularly rich example. It is a loosely structured site, organized and managed in the contemporary moment for multiple purposes (recreational, educational, and environmental), but still bearing the traces of a colonialist history of exploration and conquest (Mullen & Marvin, 1999; Ritvo, 1987). It is a site that is strongly associated with familial experience, perhaps because it offers varying pleasures to people of all ages. It is also a site that is methodologically convenient, since it brings together many family groups, each constructing its own version of the activity given the resources and restrictions of a particular zoo.

## METHODS AND DATA

The core of my analysis describes, on the basis of naturalistic observation (Adler & Adler, 1994), how family activities at the zoo are conducted, with a focus on parents' practices of coordinating the experience. Drawing on a tradition of sociological study of public life (Gardner, 1995; Goffman, 1971; Lofland, 1973), I consider how family groups move into and through the zoo, what they can be seen doing while there, and how they manage their activity as one group among many. The observational data are supplemented by informal interviews conducted at the zoo, and some data drawn from another interview study concerned more broadly with the conduct of various outings.

I collected observational data with help from several assistants.[4] Our procedure was relatively simple: In sessions of 1–2 hours, we walked around the

zoo, mingling with other visitors and watching them carefully. Observations were relatively unstructured, but focused on the movement of groups through the setting and how movement is coordinated, the group members' talk with one another about what they see, and their interpretations of zoo exhibits. At the end of an observation session, we jotted brief notes to preserve the outlines of what we had seen. Later (but as soon as possible), we wrote much more detailed accounts, recording as much as we could remember about the composition, conduct, and conversation of the groups we had observed. This procedure meant that we appeared to be zoo visitors ourselves; in fact our conduct was shaped by our research purposes. We generally tried to follow a particular group through several exhibits, standing near enough to see and hear their activity and moving from one exhibit to the next at about the same speed. Sometimes, we stationed ourselves for an extended period at an exhibit that was especially popular, watching groups flow past. Most of these observations were conducted at two relatively modest zoos in two Northeastern cities, one small and one large; although both zoos drew some visitors from surrounding communities, neither was the kind of major regional zoo that often serves as a prominent tourist attraction. We have made observations at a few smaller and larger community zoos in other cities, as opportunities arise, and I have observed occasionally at other animal venues (e.g., an aquarium, a demonstration farm).

After completing about 50 hours of unobtrusive observation, I obtained permission to do more systematic data collection at the big-city zoo. During several days of observation, I watched while family groups viewed various exhibits and took verbatim notes on their conversation. Though not as complete as tape recordings would be, these notes provide more reliable detail than notes taken from memory about the talk occurring among family members. In addition, I conducted informal interviews of about 10 minutes or so with 25 visitor groups resting at the picnic area. In these conversations, I inquired about the relationships among those who composed the visiting group, and asked several general questions about their experiences (beginning with "What brought you to the zoo today?" and following up with questions such as "What have you done during your visit?" "Do you come to the zoo often?" "Did you have any kind of plan when you arrived?").

## FINDINGS

Our observation procedure did not involve any overt attempt to determine whether a group was "actually" a family. Most of the groups we watched were family-like groups of adults and children together. However, we also made notes about adult couples, lone visitors, and occasional groups that seemed obviously not to be families (one such case, for example, was a group

of seven or eight girls of about the same age, supervised by an adult woman and wearing name tags of some sort; another was a group of six adults who appeared to have developmental disabilities, shepherded through the zoo by two adults without obvious disabilities). My use of scare quotes earlier (in "'actually' a family") signals the problematic character of this judgment: Even if we had perfect knowledge of the people we saw, what criteria would make them family or not? I have not adopted the standard methodological procedure in family studies, whereby the analyst decides, however thoughtfully, on some definition for a family—based perhaps on biological or legal connections, perhaps on members' self-definitions—and includes only those groups that fit the selected model: Such procedures seem to ensure that some of the diversity of family experience will be lost. My procedure here carries the opposite risk: that I may include in the analysis some groups that others would not identify as family. But this ambiguity seems to me more consistent with people's actual experiences of social relationships than with the often false sense of precision that is produced by more standardized research techniques. I do not mean to dismiss the question of who is family too glibly—if I knew more, I would provide more detailed stories about the groups I observed—nor to imply that any zoo-visiting group becomes family. However, I ask the reader to accept some uncertainty about the matter as one of the costs of looking at family activity naturalistically in a public setting.

I conducted informal interviews partly in order to address this question, and the interview data confirm that the zoo is populated primarily by groupings that would be considered family by almost any definition, although many of these groupings diverge from the nuclear family model consisting of parents and their children alone. Of the 25 groups I interviewed (on Saturday and Sunday afternoons), about half fit this parent-and-child family form. Most others were groups of parents and children with extended family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents), or groups made up of several families (or several parts of families) together. Only four of the groups I spoke with consisted of adults alone, and only two were made up of individuals without any family ties; two groups of adult visitors without children were based on sibling relationships.

Some groups that don't look much like the idealized family at the zoo in fact would count as actual or legal families. For example, two women together turn out to be a mother and daughter: The daughter, 28 years old, uses a wheelchair and, as they tell the story, depends heavily on her mother for mobility. They've come to the zoo for a treat before she endures another in a series of painful surgeries.

Other groups that look unproblematically familial turn out to be something else: for example, a woman and young boy are simply friends. The extended interviews I've conducted with parents suggest that groups in

these kinds of settings sometimes include children's friends as well as the immediate family. These kinds of observations point to a unit of social organization that seems to have a robust reality though it is rarely noticed as a distinctive form: We might call it a "familial grouping."[5] It is a unit that is brought into being when adults travel to public settings with children in their charge; adults in these groupings have the authority and responsibilities of parents and adopt many parental practices, though they are not actually or legally parents to all the children in the group.

In this analysis, I focus on the observable practices through which adults and children in such groupings jointly accomplish their time at the zoo.[6] Parents (or other adult companions) use the zoo as one of many sites that situate children within a public world, a world of objects known in common. At the same time, practices of family recreation constitute the particular family grouping as a significant one, with its own unique experiences of such public space. I begin by examining what appears to be a fundamental lesson of the zoo visit: the development of a shared orientation to a viewable non-human landscape. I first analyze parents' and children's practices, and then examine the zoo as an ensemble of exhibits and texts that constitute a shared landscape. In the third part of the analysis, I return to the practices of family members to show how the boundedness and uniqueness of a particular family group is preserved within such settings.

## The Coordination of Looking

The core activity of a zoo visit is viewing the animals, as presented in their enclosures. Some live in rows of small, simple cages; many, now, are presented in larger pens, designed to simulate their natural habitats. Directions for viewing are provided by signs posted near the exhibits; these identify the species on view, usually providing as well some information about the species, or, less often, about individual animals.

I was struck, when I began the fieldwork, by the simplicity (one might even say banality) of most talk among zoo visitors, which was primarily concerned with the work of seeing. While it might seem a simple matter for a family group to stand at an enclosure and see the animals it contains, a close look at their activity reveals that they work assiduously at this accomplishment. Much of the talk among groups consists of announcements and directives. For example:

> There were a few small groups standing at low fences by the ponds, commenting briefly on the birds. One child announced, "A flamingo, a flamingo!" Elsewhere, I heard a father note, "It's a toucan." Others were just locating the birds, with comments like, "There's one," or "Look at that."

This excerpt illustrates both generic pointing talk ("Look!" "There!") and species naming ("*Lions!*"). These simple exchanges among family members coordinate and comment on their joint looking. Their talk ensures that they look together. Sometimes, seeing is more challenging, and family members work together to accomplish the viewing of each exhibit. For example:

> The boy spotted the snowy owl before his father did, and pointed it out. It was behind some shrubbery, and the dad suggested they move to the other side of the cage for a better view.

This kind of coordinated looking is characteristic of virtually all zoo-visiting groups, whether they are families or not. Within these family groupings, however, it can be seen as one of the myriad ways that parents socialize children by locating them within a larger public world. It contributes to the child's stock of social knowledge and gives a sense of shared practice and of participation in a social ritual. As in most childhood activity, there is an intensity behind the pleasure of both children and their parents, and focused work aimed at achieving appropriate forms of participation.

The development of appropriate looking as a skill can be seen most clearly in the activities of the youngest zoo visitors, guided by their adult companions, as they learn how to view the exhibits. We saw many couples touring the zoo with infants, positioning their children in order to direct their gaze appropriately. Sometimes infants were transported in strollers, and positioning was accomplished through the orientation of the stroller; other parents lifted infants up to the exhibits, holding them close to ensure an appropriate view. Talk can reinforce these positional strategies, even when children are quite young, as in the following example:

> A White man holds a toddler. He's soft-spoken, and rarely initiates talk to the child, but always responds. The child is surprisingly verbal, but only in single syllables:
> "Buh."
> "Yes, that's a bird."
> "Moh."
> "That's right, there's another one." (I thought he'd said monkey, but his dad knew.)
> "Wah."
> "Yes, there's some water."
> "Eee."
> "Yes, the bird is eating."
> "Moh."
> "Yes, there are some more birds." And after a moment's silence: "Look, there's a monkey."

As children become more independent, they begin to look on their own. The activities of toddlers, however, sometimes reveal that they have not yet learned to attend to all the cues that direct viewing at the zoo. While more mature visitors know that exhibits are contained within the zoo's enclosures, and look there for viewable contents, very young children may seem equally fascinated by more mundane features of the environment. They stoop down to pick up rocks from the pathway or fondle interesting paving stones; they study and ask about guardrails and enclosures, maintenance areas and equipment, and so on. Parents' responses (and nonresponses) give clues about the significance of such features, as in the following exchange:

> A man with two boys, one about 10 and the other in a stroller, walk past an unlabeled pond.
> The older boy asks: "What's in there?"
> "Oh, it's just a pond, I think."
> "But what's in it?"
> "I don't know [a pause], turtles, probably, something like that."

Learning to look properly in this environment (as in any situation) means coming to understand that some features deserve attention, while others are just there—essential but to be treated as meaningless. (The child learns, for example, to see the animal, but not the cage.) Thoroughly socialized viewers rarely exhibit such lapses, and in the occasional cases when they do, their embarrassment underlines the felt wrongness of undisciplined viewing. For example, in one wooded area of the zoo—a large enclosure for deer—squirrels frolic on a bird feeder. We saw a grandmother fall behind the rest of her family because she was watching the squirrels; as she turned to catch up with them, she muttered to herself, "I shouldn't be looking at squirrels—I can see them any time."

Such responses reveal not only an awareness of the boundaries of appropriate viewing, but also some consciousness of the zoo visit as public activity, subject to evaluations by other visitors. Parents responding to children in these situations can often be seen providing remedial displays (Goffman, 1971). In these situations, performance takes over momentarily, revealing the potential tensions between family experience and the requirements of public activity. For example:

> A boy asks his father about a recess in the wall, rather than the exhibit; the man glances around self-consciously as he shrugs off the question.
>   Parents are disciplining their kids for climbing on some rocks; one boy begins a tantrum and his parents exchange looks with the observers.

Consciously or not, this behavior seems concerned with doing zoo visiting properly. It also points to the way that this kind of activity is in a peculiar way simultaneously private and public. I will return to this idea later.

The Zoo as an Ensemble of Texts

Interpretive signs provide information about zoo exhibits. These aids nearly always indicate species names and habitats, sometimes supplemented with information about notable features of a species or its behavior. Some signs control behavior, usually through gentle prohibitions ("Please do not toss coins into the wetland. They could harm the animals." Or, on the stalls of the farm animals: "We bite."); a few give credit for exhibits to corporate sponsors. All this textual material exists as a possible resource for use in visitors' interaction with the exhibits and with one another. Given the increasing commitment of modern zoos to environmental education, and their considerable sophistication in the design of exhibit space and interpretation, one might expect to see visitors studying these informational placards carefully, in order to glean full educational value from the exhibit. In fact, signs are used, for the most part, in simple, direct ways, to reinforce and make meaningful the proper gaze discussed earlier.

> Father:  "We're not seeing the hornbill."
>
> Mother (or maybe it was the daughter):  "Yes, there it is."
>
> Father (studying the placard):  "No, it has a very large beak."
>
> Mother:  "Yes, look, it's up there."
>
> Father:  "Oh yes, so it is. Well, look at that."

Often, parents seem to use signs to produce authoritative talk with their children—typically, to announce a species name or, less frequently, to provide some fact about the animals on display. For example, one sign labeled a group of ring-tailed lemurs:

> As families approach this exhibit, much of their talk deals with identification: kids frequently refer to the animals as raccoons and parents usually correct them. "No, it's not a raccoon. It looks like a raccoon, but it's something else."

These didactic moments tend to be brief and relatively thin, however. For example, as one family group moved on to the ruffed lemur, a father announced:

> This is another kind of lemur. They're just like the lemurs we saw before, except they're different.

Signs, and the phrases they provide, often seem to operate as a kind of pivot around which collective conversation turns, rather than as fully processed, meaningful information. These kinds of talk organize a collective experience, even if they do not produce the kind of nature education their designers might have imagined. For example, at one enclosure a group of

small animals are identified most prominently by an unusual characteristic: they are labeled as "barking deer." Many viewers read this phrase aloud, and I overheard one group in which an entire conversation went something like this:

> A mother, announcing: "Barking deer. Hmmm."
> Another adult woman, with the group, sounding very surprised and interested: "Barking deer?"
> The mother again, sort of shaking her head with wonder, and confirming her original comment: "Barking deer."
> And finally, one of the boys with them, about 6, kind of sing-songing, to no one in particular: "Barking deer, barking deer."

Some parents add information to that contained in the official signage, often drawing on texts from outside the zoo. For example:

> The sign at the falcon's cage is titled "WHOOSH," and many of the people who approached the cage while I stood there read out "Whoosh" as they arrived. A couple of parents read off the sign to their children, "This is the fastest animal on earth." One person, drawing on a local news story, commented (I think to another adult), "That's like at the MONY tower." A few minutes later, a parent developed a more elaborate version of this comment for a child: "There are very few of these in the world, and do you know where two of them are? They're living at the MONY tower downtown. That's right, they came there and they made their nest right on the tower."

These kinds of practices—dependent on parents' (usually) more sophisticated literacy—produce distinctive, hierarchical relations of knowledge/ authority within these family groups. Parents use information gleaned from texts to instruct children; thus, in most cases they appear, naturally, to know more than their children. In a few cases, however, children are the ones who use signs more skillfully. Occasionally, for example, we've observed interactions in which children seem to be interpreting signs for non-English-speaking parents.

Animals have a pervasive presence in many North American children's lives, and animal texts beyond the zoo are important anchors for the zoo experience; indeed, some parents report that they bring children to the zoo so that they can see the "real animals" they have read and talked about. Animals are standard, ubiquitous characters in children's stories, and they provide material for very early cultural learning (dogs go "bow-wow"; ducks go "quack"). Soft stuffed-animal dolls are popular toys, and animal characters speak to children from the TV screen. Disney texts sometimes serve as reference points from outside the zoo, as when a mother summarizes: "So you saw Timon [the meercat]—you can tell [her] you saw Timon. And you saw the Lion King,

too!" Such references seem more common at the smaller-city zoo, where concessions are provided through an on-site Burger King, with Disney-themed logos and souvenir cups (on themed environments, see Gottdiener, 1997).

Some family groups seem to use the zoo in more sustained and focused ways, drawing on interpretive signs in ways closer to their designers' intentions. In my informal interviews at the big-city zoo, for example, I talked with several groups of parents and children for whom animal study was a sustained hobby of sorts. These children collected animal books at home, prided themselves on their knowledge of animal life and habits, came to the zoo more frequently than others, and seemed concerned with more complex links between sights at the zoo and a wider field of knowledge. These activities required parental support, of course, and were sometimes presented as joint interests of adults and children. But most of these parents spoke about them on behalf of their children, with language pointing to (and constructing) children's individual interests and concerns ("He's interested in animals"; "She wants to be an animal doctor").

Featured exhibits at the zoo—whose signage focuses on the lives of individual animals with eventful life stories—provide rich sites for such sustained study. At the big-city zoo, for example, signs identify individual gorillas, explicate their family relationships, and point to incidents that have viewable consequences (as when a young gorilla cuts its arm). Zoo educators, animal keepers, or volunteers are frequently stationed near these exhibits during peak weekend hours; they model sustained attention to individual animals and provide for occasional visitors the kind of information that accumulates with sustained study. These textual and organizational resources provide for varying degrees of orientation to individual animals in these special exhibits. For the youngest and casually involved visitors, such an orientation may simply involve locating "the baby" or noticing that the young gorilla "has a boo-boo." Older children who take an interest may pick up quickly from volunteers the kind of surveillance that treats the gorillas as social groups with patterns of interaction.

I interviewed one family grouping, a mother and two daughters, who had made a regular routine of gorilla study: They come to the zoo three or four times a month and spend much of their time watching these animals. The older daughter, 11 years old, began to explain; her sister, only 1 year old, then recited the gorillas' names. When I turned to their mother, she chimed in, "Oh, I like the gorillas," and added, "My kids have no choice; this is the only pet they're going to get." But even more casual and sporadic visitors can develop a feel for sustained observation, as when I watched two adults wait patiently while a teenaged girl tracked a pair of playful adolescent gorillas from one exhibit window to another, returning periodically to report on their activities to her parents and a zoo volunteer stationed at the exhibit.

These kinds of involvement appear to develop primarily around exhibits featured by particular zoos, usually exhibits of animals with some social life that can serve as a narrative resource for interpretive material. While the gorillas are the centerpiece of the large-city zoo's featured tropical forest exhibit, the smaller-city zoo features a collection of elephants and an elephant breeding program whose successes have been prominently featured in local media. Thus, some parents and children arrive to view this kind of exhibit with considerable background knowledge gleaned from textual materials outside the zoo.

## The Construction of Family Space in Public

However they use the resources of the setting, family groups must coordinate their movement around the zoo, from one exhibit to another. They move from place to place not as autonomous individuals but in amoeba-like collective formations. The practices of moving together, like those of looking together, vary with the ages of children in family groups. Infants and toddlers are often carried or ride in strollers, so that parents can rely on such equipment to keep children nearby and position them in front of viewable sights. As children get older and begin to move about independently, they tend to circulate around adult and older child members of their groups. A common pattern we observed involved a parent or parents walking relatively slowly and directly from one place to another, while young children buzzed around them, like little satellites. Sometimes family members hold hands as they walk along, but it is much more common for the group simply to maintain proximity, using talk or eye contact to monitor the positions of others. For example, parents can usually be observed watching children and often call to those who stray too far away. Children, often running ahead of the rest of their group or lingering behind, reluctant to leave an attractive exhibit, look back or ahead from time to time, making sure they have not lost the rest of the group. Occasionally, we see parents making explicit rules about positioning. For example:

> I look back and see another group approaching from the front gate, kids in the lead. Dad, raising his voice: "Now here's the rule. You can only run so far ahead. We have to be able to see you."

Much more frequently, members seem to rely on unspoken or at least firmly established expectations that need no reiteration. Though unspoken, the mutual monitoring involved is obvious, as when a mother focuses her gaze on a young child 20 feet away, shifting position slightly as the child moves so that she is always in view; or when a young boy, absorbed in an

exhibit, looks up to see his parents walking on and follows as if tied to them by an invisible string.

These practices mark families as groups, so that as they move about the zoo, they recognize each other's boundaries. Like individuals on a crowded public street, who notice each other just enough to avoid collision, they display a collective awareness of other groups, respect the territories of other groups, and expect to enjoy the same respect themselves. Over and over, we could see groups arriving at an exhibit area and positioning themselves in a cluster, so as to maintain their proximity. They often seek an open area, so as to stake their claim to a relatively private space. (Like understandings of properly viewable exhibits, these practices develop with age and experience: thus, parents monitor the behavior of children, directing them to open areas and positioning them in ways that respect boundaries the youngest children may not yet notice.) Members of these groups attempt not to breach the boundaries of other groups, and they engage in subtly signaled apologies when boundaries are disrupted, as we did in the following example:

> As we left the building, I noted how we encountered another group coming in. We were walking two by two, and they were four or five people spread out in a row. There was that awkward kind of moment, where our group was pointed right into the middle of theirs. Everyone hesitated just a moment, I think, and then they spread apart slightly, and we walked through the middle of their line. There was just a bit of eye contact, as if they were giving permission and we were acknowledging that.

Conversation at the zoo occurs almost entirely within rather than across such family boundaries. Although various groups are in close proximity and can easily hear conversation in other groups, each group constructs its own realm of talk and practices a version of "civil inattention" (Goffman, 1971) with respect to other groups. Thus, each group creates a sphere that has a private character even in this often densely crowded public setting. Katz (1996) noted similar behaviors in the fun house, where bystanders watched patiently while family groups looked into the funny mirrors, standing aside and never participating in the group's collective laughter.

These practices are most striking in the situations where privacy is most difficult to sustain. Every zoo seems to produce a few especially crowded sites, where many viewing families cluster around the most popular exhibits. In these areas, family group boundaries loosen and become more permeable (though they don't dissolve completely). Thus:

> Four large, adult elephants came parading out with a baby elephant wandering around at their feet. As soon as she was visible, the crowd unanimously "Ahhh!"ed. I could hear a number of women in the crowd say, "Isn't she adorable?"

Even within these crowds, however, one finds family groups (or some-times subgroups, since larger families are more likely to become segmented in these crowded settings) constructing smaller private conversations within the brouhaha of the larger crowd. For example:

> One of the bears was pacing, and a mother and son (about 10 years old) were discussing its behavior. The woman said that the bear was confused and that that was why he was pacing. The son started giggling and repeated the "confusing" part, while his mother laughed. A few others in the crowd then began commenting on the same "confused bear."

Information flows easily across groups in these crowded settings, and this example illustrates how family conversations in these settings are sometimes enhanced by information obtained from observing other groups. But these hearings rarely produce interactions across groups.

> The lion male was roaming around the cage, putting on an interesting show for the crowd, and there was quite a crush near the glass. Some boys were debating whether the lion could see them, and I noticed a young girl listening intently to their speculations and asking her parent, "Can they see us?"

Strikingly, as in this example, when a member hears something interesting in another group, any comment on that hearing is nearly always contained within the hearer's family. The child asks, not the commenter, but her own mother if the lion can really see them; a father overhears and then tells his own child that the raccoon-like animal is a lemur.

Only two kinds of moments seem likely to stimulate brief talk among apparently unacquainted adults; both could be seen as moments of departure from an idealized zoo visiting routine. When children misbehave, or cry long and loudly, parents often exchange sympathetic glances and sometimes offer reassuring remarks (e.g., a mother whose child has been screaming for several minutes, grimacing at another mother nearby: "Having a bad day." And the response: "I know what that's like. I've had plenty of bad days myself."). In addition, boundaries appear vulnerable in the face of animal displays of sexuality and mess. When children comment on animals' sexual organs or display interest in prominent turds, adult visitors almost always glance nervously around, grimacing or giggling uncomfortably with adults in nearby groups. (Sometimes adults simply ignore their children's comments about these displays, another indication that these exhibits don't fit well with adult conceptions of proper viewing. And sometimes they carry on adult conversations, as when two couples exchanged remarks about a pregnant lemur—"Whoa, is she pregnant!" "Oh my god, look at that!"—without inviting children to respond.)

From time to time, I have tested the strength of the family boundaries on talk by offering conversational overtures to parents in nearby family group-ings. Typically, parents respond to an initial conversational offering, briefly (the zoo is a friendly place, after all), but decline to pursue talk beyond a one-time exchange; in response to a follow-up remark, they nod politely and turn away, attending assiduously to their children and signaling to me that our conversation should end. This conversational pattern means that the col-lective activity of looking/watching is contained in family groups—members do not usually speak about exhibits to those in neighboring groups—and therefore what's seen at the zoo is constructed as the family's experience.

## DISCUSSION: FAMILY AS SOCIALLY ORGANIZED PRACTICE

This analysis provides a view of family-as-it-happens, a view of activity that is quite familiar but almost entirely taken for granted. Conceptually, I have tried to illustrate an ethnomethodologically based approach to family stud-ies that focuses on activity and interpretation. Rather than treating family as an objective entity, defined from outside, this approach treats family as dis-cursively organized practice, a mode of action rather than a state of being.[7] The value of such an approach lies in its ability to capture the fluidity and diversity of family life as it actually occurs in the world, beginning with the sites where family is happening, rather than with notions of family form that are more durable in scholarship than in the world (Smith, 1993).

These data provide one example of how small groups of individuals actively constitute themselves as family. I do not mean that people go to the zoo with this explicit intention; they are simply doing something that families often do (perhaps something that they think is good for families to do, along the lines of spending quality time together). What's important, analytically, is that they are engaged in a kind of standard practice of family life. Zoo visiting produces a distinctive kind of family experience: It locates a group as one among many, doing something understood as properly familial. It orients group members, collectively, toward a larger world of nature, and thus positions children within a shared world of nature and human activity. It is conducted in public, and yet its character reinforces the enclosed and at least quasi-private quality of family experience.

I would suggest that this kind of activity conveys relatively unnoticed but profound social messages. Though the zoo visit may be experienced by par-ticipants in myriad ways—with pleasure, boredom, or indifference; as simple fun, nature education, or a difficult ordeal; and so on—its core activities vir-tually always involve family members in practices that define and reinforce a series of significant boundaries: between humans and animals, between

properly viewable and insignificant sights, and between family and others. My analysis of family activity at the zoo brings into view a kind of parental work that pervades everyday life, situating very young children within a world-known-in-common—a foundation for the related work of "developing the child" (Noble, cited in Smith, 1987). This kind of work pervades life with children. In contemporary, highly stratified societies, it is discursively organized in increasingly elaborate ways.

Zoos are usually publicly supported, relatively accessible spaces for the broad mass of urban families. Still, not every family goes to the zoo. Participation in this kind of activity is organized in part by money and time. One must find time for a zoo visit and arrange transportation to the site. In addition, the zoos studied here charge admission, a fee that seems nominal to some and prohibitive to others (though the big-city zoo has a free hour once a month—a considerably diminished version of the free day that has been traditional at many urban museums). Participation is also organized culturally: While the zoo is widely seen as an especially appropriate place for spending family time, it is no doubt located differently in the repertoires of different family groups, and within a wider field of cultural experiences that are understood hierarchically (some families might choose a more commercial attraction or a more natural wildlife sanctuary). The local parenting magazines I mentioned in the introduction contain not only calendars of family activities, but also an array of advertisements that reveal an increasing variety of commercial spaces for family activities, including new suburban spaces that seem directed at more affluent parents and children. Participation is also organized through residential geographies, including the recreational facilities available in various locations and the continuing economic and racial/ethnic segregation of U.S. cities. For example, the two zoos in which most of these data were collected are both located in multiethnic cities, but they contrast in interesting ways that reveal the racialized structures of public settings in the United States. One zoo is located in a section of the city recognized as mostly White, and zoo visitors are nearly all White. The other is located on the edge of a predominantly Black neighborhood in a large, older urban park. Here visitors are a more visibly diverse group. This zoo appears to be more accessible and comfortable for racial/ethnic minority visitors, and perhaps also less comfortable for Whites accustomed to homogeneous settings: Zoo staff allude to this dynamic with references to "suburban" visitors who may be anxious about an "urban experience."

Despite such social divisions, ideas about the family outing manifest a characteristic feature of public imagery and discourse about families—its tendency to represent family experience in homogenized ways that obscure social differences and inequalities (DeVault, 1991; Rapp, 1982). Realms of family life—as lived by some—typically appear as terrains of choice and autonomy, where members of the society share aspirations and equally

participate in fundamental human experiences of connection, responsibility, and pleasure—any parent, this illusion suggests, can enjoy taking a child to the zoo.

It has been important to bring into view the invisible work parents (and especially mothers) do to produce and sustain family life. However, a potential pitfall in focusing on parental work practice is that such effects can appear to depend on effort alone. Indeed, family education directed at parents considered "at risk" often seems to rely on such illusions, as in the social worker's comment quoted at the beginning of this chapter. My intention here is to locate an extended parental work process within the complex of structures and institutions beyond the home: to bring into view the workplaces, as it were, that shape the efforts of parents in various ways.

We can see in this analysis that public spaces are often populated by clusters of individuals connected through family ties. Their public activity is organized strongly by their orientations to the ostensibly private experiences of family. Similarly, as family members move in and out of their residences, their experiences are organized not only by family ties, but also by the contexts in which they live. The work of developing the child extends outward into the social world that surrounds each household, as parents and children venture into yards and streets, offices and shops, parks and museums. The worlds surrounding particular households are quite different, however—sometimes rich and welcoming for parents and children, sometimes bleak and dangerous—and so are parents' capacities to move with their children beyond local settings. Thus, some children easily gain a sense of knowledge, comfort, and mastery in a wider world, while others live in social worlds that are considerably more constricted.

I began by noting that the family day at the zoo appears to be a fleeting moment of pleasurable frivolity, but it has, in fact, a larger significance. Like any slice of social reality, it is not only local and immediate, but also part of the structural and systemic relations of the wider society. My largest aim in this study is to illustrate how these small moments of family life can be opened up to connect with larger political economic concerns. I mean to show that a family outing to the zoo is produced through collective activity in the broadest sense, as family members engage in constant interplay with other realms of activity that constitute the structural features of contemporary life: the shared economic and cultural circumstances of household members, public facilities and their differential accessibility, industries of education and entertainment, and the professions that produce knowledge about parenting and family life. People practice family—artfully, creatively, with intention—in local settings, in more diverse groups than family scholars may acknowledge. And their intentions and craft are formed within material and discursive contexts that shape and channel those efforts in ways that family scholars have yet to fully recognize and explore.

## NOTES

1. Reprinted, with revisions, from M. L. DeVault, "Producing Family Time: Practices of Leisure Activity Beyond the Home," *Qualitative Sociology, 23*(4), 485–503, ©2000, Human Sciences Press, Inc., with kind permission of Springer Science+Business Media.

2. My attention to context reflects the institutional ethnography approach recommended by Smith (1987), which allows analysis of how local activities and settings are coordinated through linkages to ruling institutions. (See also Campbell, 1998; DeVault, 1999, Chapter 3; Grahame, 1998.)

3. Carrington's recent addition to this literature is especially interesting; it shows how some gay and lesbian couples, barred from legal marriage, work to produce home and family through a range of elaborated domestic pursuits.

4. My thanks for fieldwork and early discussions of the project to Sarah Pitcher, John B. Thomas, and Andrew Roth-Wells.

5. Thanks to Rosanna Hertz for a conversation in which we discovered this grouping.

6. I do not consider preparatory activities, transportation to the zoo, or the ways that parents and children later share their zoo experiences in talk and activity elsewhere—although all of these are certainly important in the construction of these experiences.

7. The word *family*, I would argue, should be an adjective rather than noun.

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# Ethnicity and Expertise: Racial-Ethnic Knowledge in Sociological Research[1]

MARJORIE L. DEVAULT

SCIENCE, IN ITS traditional construction, aims for abstract knowledge—timeless and universal—and the science-based professions draw their legitimacy from an abstract and impersonal notion of expertise. The objectivity of science has, however, been challenged in recent years, partly through the introduction of outsider's voices whose claims provide new perspectives on knowledge previously taken as unproblematic (see Harding, 1991). These critics assert that social position matters in the constitution and application of scientific knowledge; their writings are generating increasing interest in the significance for scientific work of the structured inequalities of racial-ethnic positions and cultures,[2] as well as those associated with gender, sexuality, and social class (Fausto-Sterling & English, 1987; Gould, 1981; Haraway, 1989; and for social science, Collins, 1990; Ladner, 1973; Stanfield, 1994). In this chapter, I join this chorus of challenge to the traditional view of science, arguing that attention to racial-ethnic dimensions of social organization will produce a more complete and accurate science. I pursue this claim through attention to racial-ethnic dynamics in the analysis of interviews I conducted and reflection on strategies I used as a European American researcher to understand the situation of interviewees of African descent. The examples I will discuss also illustrate some of the ways that race and ethnicity are significant in the science-based field of community nutrition work.

The literature on qualitative research methods has been much concerned with questions about the effects of researchers' identities on their studies:

Classic fieldwork discussions often consider the advantages and disadvantages of insider and outsider status with respect to the group under study (e.g., Hughes, 1984; Merton, 1972; Wax, 1979; Zinn, 1979). More recently, as research on gender issues has become increasingly race and class sensitive, feminist researchers have addressed similar issues, considering how the cross-cutting ties of gender and other oppressions work to facilitate or obstruct qualitative research (e.g., DeVault, 1990; Edwards, 1990; Oakley, 1981; Riessman, 1987); however, the fieldwork tradition—like American culture more generally—has been relatively silent on the significance of race-ethnicity in the analysis of data. The idea of eschewing preconceived hypotheses reinforces this lack of attention to ethnicity. Anselm Strauss (1987), for example, writes that a "traditional variable" such as race must "earn [its] way into the grounded theory" (p. 32). I mean to identify a problem with taking Strauss's guideline too literally.

This analysis arises at the intersection of these two strands in my training as a sociologist. On the one hand, my research is driven by a commitment to making visible the oppressions of race, class, and gender; on the other, by the qualitative methodologist's dictum, that we must allow our findings to emerge from the data. Strauss and others following the conventional fieldwork wisdom seem to suggest that race and ethnicity will be readily apparent, if they are relevant in a research situation. I will argue instead that race-ethnicity is often relevant, even when it does not appear explicitly, on the surface of everyday talk. Talk is often full of oblique references and resonances that could make race and ethnicity relevant. Listeners who have the requisite interpretive competences can hear and understand meanings located in social contexts where race and ethnicity (like gender) virtually always matter. Others may simply miss some part of an informant's meaning.

Discussions focused on insider/outsider identities—especially the earlier ones—are concerned primarily with "access" to the research setting or "rapport" once there, and they seem to assume that the researcher's identity mediates access and rapport (or doesn't) in a relatively direct way.[3] In this analysis, I argue that achieving access and rapport is only a beginning. I will argue that researchers should treat questions of racial-ethnic positioning as integral to the developing analysis in a qualitative study and that hearing race and ethnicity in our talk with informants requires active attention and analysis rather than passive listening and recording. This approach is consistent with an interactionist perspective influenced by ethnomethodological studies—a perspective that aims to treat gender and race-ethnicity as ever present, though often unacknowledged, dimensions of the terrain on which social relations unfold—and with more recent methodological discussions based on such assumptions (e.g., Chase, 1995; Riessman, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Catherine Kohler Riessman (1987), for example, arguing that "gender is not enough," provides a compelling illustration of how easily racial-ethnic

dynamics can be missed in interview studies and suggests that in feminist research, "[cultural] barriers to understanding are particularly consequential, for they reproduce within the scientific enterprise class and cultural divisions between women that feminists have tried so hard to diminish" (p. 173); however, she also points out that many cross-cultural conversations are at least partially successful and that close analysis of interview data provides a "second chance" (p. 191) for making meaning. Rosalind Edwards (1990), too, suggests that understanding and acknowledging differences in racial-ethnic positioning will construct a more productive basis for interviewing across racial-ethnic groups than will asserting a disingenuous claim to commonality. The analysis that follows is meant to extend these insights.

## METHOD

The data discussed here come from a larger project concerned with the social organization of knowledge and work in dietetics and nutritional counseling. This predominantly female field of work includes hospital dietitians; community and public health nutritionists; and professionals who work in settings such as corporations, government agencies, health clubs, and the media. In the larger study, I am concerned with how fields of work and authority are constructed and how gender is implicated in these constructions (see DeVault, 1995). This professional group has been relatively unstudied by sociologists of work; it is interesting both because the field is more diverse and less firmly subordinated than most predominantly female professions, and also because of the social and cultural significance of food and nutrition policy.

The study is based on fieldwork I began in 1981 and have carried on in several waves since then in three different cities and a variety of settings. My method, based on Dorothy Smith's conception of an "institutional ethnography" (1987), involves using interviews with practitioner-informants to learn about their field of work and about the social relations they are drawn into through their training and the organization of their daily activity. Dorothy Smith and others use the term *institutional ethnography* to refer to an investigation that explores the embeddedness of particular actors in a "ruling apparatus" or "regime" (G. Smith, 1990) that coordinates their activity. The aim of research is to understand and disclose the social relations of the ruling regime (or, as George Smith [1990, p. 636] puts it, "how people's activities are reflexively/recursively knitted together into particular forms of social organization"). In my study, the individual nutritionists I interviewed are not, as individuals, the focus of interest; rather, I am concerned with illuminating the organizing contexts that shape their activity—the positions constructed for them as professionals and the opportunities and constraints those positions provide.

Typically, the work of a particular setting depends in various ways on the invisibility of some activities that are nonetheless essential to it. In order to make visible these unacknowledged activities, this research strategy begins with close attention to the people who work in particular settings: The idea is that their knowledge and practices should serve as a point of entry for analyses that look beyond official, ideological accounts of what happens in the setting. This type of research is institutional because it examines coordinative processes that emanate from sites beyond local settings, situating local courses of action within broader administrative discourses (in this study, the abstractions of scientific professionalism). The research is ethnographic because of its commitment to investigation and description of these organizing relations, as they intersect with people's activities in particular local settings; Dorothy Smith describes this aspect of the method as a commitment to showing "how it works" (D. Smith, 1987, p. 160).

Institutional ethnographies can be based on various types of data, and a single investigation often draws material from more than one source. One requirement, however, is some kind of investigation that reveals the perspectives of practitioners in the setting in considerable detail. In this study, I have used a version of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) to uncover practitioners' experiences and perspectives. Narrative analysis in sociology has developed from the insight that people often make sense of their lives (in interviews as well as everyday life) by telling and interpreting stories. This insight suggests that interview researchers might usefully attend more carefully to the coherent narratives produced in interviews that traditional methods of analysis are likely to obscure (as when they are cut apart to illustrate themes that appear across interviews [Mishler, 1986]). Studies in the narrative mode are usually based on groups of interviews, like more traditional interview studies, but analyses develop from close readings of a smaller number of individual accounts, which are studied in depth in order to preserve their internal integrity.

In order to produce narratives for analysis in this study, I conducted interviews with 35 food and nutrition practitioners.[4] I asked each to tell me "the story of your career," and I urged them to give detailed accounts of their increasing knowledge of the field and the decisions they made over the years about training, certification, and work. Here, I work primarily with a single narrative—that of an African American woman, Janetta Thompson,[5] a registered dietitian who worked in an urban WIC program.[6] Although I do not analyze extended excerpts from interviews with other participants, I read Thompson's interview against the background of data from the larger study; thus, I refer to general features of interviews with European American nutritionists and more specifically to the stories of two other professionals of African descent who were part of the larger sample.

## A N A L Y S I S

Janetta Thompson's account of her professional history begins, in some ways, much like those of the European American nutritionists I interviewed; issues of race and ethnicity appear gradually and more explicitly as our talk proceeds. As this interview ended, I remarked that, while I had heard some of the same things from other community nutritionists, I had not talked much about race with anyone else. Unsurprised, Thompson responded, "Because you don't have that many people like me in the field."

Her comment states a well-known fact about her field (which is approximately 89% White [American Dietetic Association, 1991]), but it also invites reflection about that fact, in its suggestion that the underrepresentation of "people like her" has consequences for understandings of the field. Her comment also identifies a methodological problem I faced—although informants like her are particularly important for a thorough analysis of the field, it is likely to be more difficult to find and interview them than it is to interview European American professionals. Of the several refusals to my requests for interviews, all but one came from women of color. I respected the reasons (as I understood them) for their reluctance: They were overburdened with work, usually in communities with far more needs than resources, and their responses revealed some skepticism about my purposes and my competence to write about their experiences. I realized early on that I would have to recruit these informants with particular care (as suggested by Cannon, Higginbotham, & Leung, 1988; Edwards, 1990). In this context, my use of narrative analysis is in part a response to the challenge of learning as much as possible from a single woman's story. The point here is not that I could not or should not interview more women of color, but rather that it may be unnecessary and even exploitative to refrain from analysis until the researcher feels she has a large enough sample of accounts from those in underrepresented groups. (Indeed, African American feminists suggest that they are called on to do far more than their fair share of explaining to others; see Rushin's "The Bridge Poem" [1981]). I would not want this argument to be taken as a proviso against including many individuals from underrepresented groups in informant groups, but rather as a suggestion for an alternative approach to sampling issues, and especially as a challenge to the notion that adequate samples are always large and relatively homogeneous. (For discussion of a different approach to these issues, linked to a more survey-based logic and therefore more appropriate for some research questions, see Cannon et al. [1988].)

In the analysis that follows, I discuss several excerpts from my conversation with Janetta Thompson. I use a transcription convention adapted from Paget (1983): The end of each line marks a brief pause in the speaker's talk. A hyphen signals a briefer hesitation within a line, and ellipses indicate that I have omitted some material from the transcript. My intention is to give the

reader a sense of the cadence of our talk and to encourage attention to the development of meaning over time. Presenting the interview material in this form requires more space than the conventional format; it is meant to signal for readers the significance of Janetta Thompson's account. I hope it conveys, and also produces in the reader, a sense of respectful attention to her words and to the interview as our mutual search for the meanings of her experience (cf. Paget, 1983).

### Recruitment: "You Don't Have That Many People Like Me in the Field"

Here are some excerpts from the beginning of Thompson's career history, as she starts to tell her story:

> When I got into the field, back then,
> I had never considered nutrition as an option.
> In fact, when I considered what I would do in high school,
> you know, when I thought of nutritionists, dietitians, I thought of the school
>    lunch-room lady.
> I didn't know what nutrition was, so far as the field was concerned.
> When I was in college I majored in chemistry,
> and then I was going to go-
> you know, not quite into medicine, because I really wasn't that interested in that,
> but research and such . . . .
> My last semester of college I realized I didn't want to go into chemistry, for
> sure . . . .
> So I started going on informational interviews,
> my last semester of college, and
> talked to people who used chemistry in other ways,
> than just in a lab, you know.
> And I wanted to go into health.
> So I checked with folks who were in environmental health,
> forensic chemistry- and such and such.

Some features of this account repeat themes found in the stories of other nutritionists. For example, Thompson's description of her orientation toward the field is quite typical and describes a confluence of motives that often leads to nutrition: She is interested in science, but that interest is tempered by a desire for contact with people in her work and for opportunities to be of service to others. This construction of a career choice seems related to gender, more typical of young women's thinking than young men's. In the stories of other dietitians and nutritionists, there was evidence of quite explicit gender channeling. Many of the White women I interviewed reported choosing nutrition work earlier than Thompson, before they entered college or at the

point of declaring a major. Many were steered toward the field by relatives: They were pointed toward professions and instructed—quite directly in many cases—that some professions were for men and some for women. Thompson's choices were shaped in somewhat different ways.

For Janetta Thompson, finding nutrition was fortuitous. As she continues, she tells a story of coincidence:

> Then I, um
> [pause]
> a woman at the school said she knew someone who worked in a community
>    health center.
> And I got really excited about that, because I wanted to work- in a,
> sort of like an inner-city kind of thing.
> That's where I'm from, [Eastern City],
> and I wanted to work with people who were like me, in a sense.
> So I went on an interview at the [Westside] clinic, in [the city].
> And- it was nice, you know,
> everyone knew each other there, and knew their patients.
> And
> I was just so excited, and
> the woman,
> she happened to be in the WIC program.
> And I- had never heard of WIC before, I had never,
> you know, but anyway—
> But I was just so excited!
> So I went back to school, and
> about two days later, I got a phone call from [someone else],
> at the [Southside] health center in [another neighborhood].
> And she said they had an opening for a nutrition assistant, and would I be
>    interested in applying? And I said, "Sure!"

Two aspects of this excerpt deserve close attention. First, it contains talk that circles around race, though without making it an explicit topic. Thompson speaks of wanting to work "in a, sort of like an inner-city kind of thing," and goes on to explain that this means working with "people who were like me." Without securing a fixed meaning for these words, she provides a clue to the significance, for her, of the community health setting. She was "really excited about that" and her repetition of the phrase "just so excited" reinforces her point. It is important also to note her hesitations, as she marks time while thinking how to say these things, in this context, and especially to me, a relatively unknown White woman, and a professional, as she is, though in a different field. At this point in the interview, we have spoken face to face for no more than 5 minutes. It is perhaps too early in our conversation for race comfortably to become an explicit topic.

This excerpt can also be analyzed to uncover the organization of coincidence in the story. In Thompson's subjective experience, and in her telling of the story, the visit to the health center and the invitation to apply for a job are fortuitous, but there is certainly more than chance at work here, and to show what it is, one must look beyond her account. What Janetta Thompson encounters as she begins to look for work is an organization that embodies a philosophy of community health care, an organization that is part of a network with a particular history. Her recruitment into nutrition work depends on this expression of the field and its fit with her interests and commitments. This kind of encounter figures in the stories of other nutritionists as well: A substantial group, especially a few years earlier, entered the field because of their developing political commitments, sometimes even growing out of work in radical organizations such as Black Panther kitchens or clinics. In Thompson's story, there is no doubt an additional dynamic in the organization of coincidence, although she does not mention it herself: Thompson's cultural and ethnic history gives her a kind of expertise that will allow her to work effectively in a multiethnic community setting; the organization needs the knowledge and skill that comes with her background.

Janetta Thompson enters the field as an assistant; it will be several years before she decides that she wants to be a nutritionist, and several more years before she is able to obtain professional credentials that match the work she has begun to do. When she eventually reaches the point of certification, she is blocked by the supervisor of her internship. Eventually, she files a successful affirmative action complaint; even so, she must make other arrangements to obtain her certification. Almost 10 years after entering the field, she becomes a registered dietitian.

As I talked with Thompson, I realized that if I were going to include the perspectives of nutrition workers from a range of racial-ethnic communities, I would have to extend the scope of my sample—and my understanding of the field—beyond the formally credentialed nutritionists who work in community settings. Through Thompson's sponsorship, then, I interviewed two Caribbean women who worked in nearby program sites, one as a clinic administrative worker and the other as an assistant who does direct counseling in the WIC program. Their stories of entry confirm and deepen the analysis that I have begun to develop from Thompson's story.

Both began their accounts, like most of the others I interviewed, by telling of initial interests in science and food. One had earned an associate's degree, in her country, in home economics (she began in agriculture, but like many U.S. women, she was steered toward the field considered more gender appropriate), and she had worked for 10 years as an extension agent. After she came to the United States, she worked in an insurance office. She came to nutrition work through her experience as a WIC participant, when her husband was laid off and they needed assistance. She told of trying to hide her skills

("I thought you had to be kind of ignorant of nutrition to be on the program . . . . So I was going in and trying to act like I didn't know anything about nutrition."), and, with hindsight, she laughed about being "discovered" by a counselor who encouraged her to apply for a job in the program. Eventually, this woman completed a bachelor's degree, though not in nutrition, and moved into a WIC administrative position. When she told of inquiring about a nutrition degree, her story was one of discouragement and rebuff: She was "turned off" when the best-known program in the city was unresponsive to her need for a loan and told her "only negative things."

Another woman came to the United States with an interest in nursing, and began work here in a factory. She trained as a nurse's aide and worked as a home health worker for many years. She considered going to school for nursing, but decided against it: Although she'd enjoyed her work, and especially her brief training in nutrition, she was discouraged by a friend's tale of investing in a college degree and then repeatedly failing the nursing registration exam. When she decided she needed more money, she trained as a secretary, and then—fortuitously—heard about an opening for a nutrition assistant in a community setting where her cultural background would be an asset. When I interviewed her, she had been doing the job for several years, providing direct counseling for participants with no special nutritional problems, and she had been engaged in several special projects: At her own program site, she had rewritten diet guidelines for participants from her native country, and she was also serving on a state task force organized to produce training materials incorporating more ethnically specific nutrition information.

There are two things to notice about these three career stories, taken as a group. First, there is a pattern in what is easy and what is difficult for these three women to achieve. They are fortuitously slotted into positions that appeal to them, located in communities they care about and involving work they believe in. In all of these cases, the job finds them; they are recruited by WIC staff, and they all tell stories of recruitment as welcome coincidence. What is difficult, once they enter the field, is to achieve the credentialed status that would allow full participation and professional status. They are mentored into a range of lower-level positions and then blocked from advancement by the formal credential-based organization of these work settings. The mentoring they receive is quite different from that which appears in the stories of White women who entered the field in more conventional ways and accumulated credentials more quickly and easily.[7] While these three women's stories should not be taken to represent the experiences of all women of color entering professional fields, they certainly suggest one dynamic of recruitment that would help to explain a racial-ethnic pattern of representation common in all professions, the progressive whitening of the ranks as we look upward in professional hierarchies.

Near the end of our conversation, I ask Thompson about her placement in community nutrition. I explain that I had been wondering, as I got ready for this interview, whether she chose to work in public health, or whether there is some channeling process that places people of color there more often than in other areas. I comment that it is clear by this point in our conversation that she has chosen her work, but that I am still wondering about the general question. She responds:

> I *chose*.
> You know why I chose this?
> I figured,
> you know, I wanted to go into the health care field, it's true.
> But I think,
> why should people
> from the outside
> always be the ones coming in
> for Black people?
> Why can't
> some of us- stay?
> You know, why can't we as nurses, doctors, nutritionists—
> I mean, at that time I wasn't thinking about nutritionists, but, psychologists—
> why can't we be here?
> Why do we have to import so many folks?
> You know,
> who- may or may not,
> I mean, they may really- be sincere about it,
> but they may not really- know the nuances,
> you know?

In this excerpt, Thompson is willing to speak more explicitly about race than before. She discusses her concern about professionals from outside who work in the Black community, but the rather tentative character of her speech (her slight hesitations as she characterizes these professionals: "You know, who- may or may not, I mean, . . .") and the qualification she adds ("They may really- be sincere about it") indicate that she speaks with an awareness of the difficulties of talking about race and ethnicity—an awareness of entering what Susan Chase (1995) labels a realm of "unsettled discourse." Thompson constructs the competence she is concerned with here as a matter of knowing the nuances.

This suggestive phrase raises questions: What does it mean to "know the nuances" of community work? And how does such knowledge appear in the constitution of professional expertise or professional training? Thompson's reference to knowing the nuances suggests a kind of working knowledge

that contrasts rather sharply with the textbook account of ethnicity in this profession. In most professional materials, as in North American discourse more generally, European whiteness is taken as the norm. The core knowledge base of nutrition counseling is typically presented as free of ethnic marking; special chapters or articles deal with the dietary patterns of racial-ethnic "others" as deviations from this norm, noting modifications of standard practice that these differences require; thus, although ethnicity may be acknowledged as relevant to practice, it is treated as a factor to add and stir in relation to the abstract principles of scientific nutrition.

By contrast, Thompson gives an account of a more grounded practice: She insists on the complex specificity of racial-ethnic differences and explains that learning about and responding to these differences is an ongoing process. When she discusses her clients' backgrounds, she emphasizes specificity: "So far as culture is concerned . . . instead of lumping—you can't lump all Caribbeans together." And a bit later: "Even among Hispanics. People from Puerto Rico eat very differently from people from Cuba, and so on." She provides examples, showing how simple translation is inadequate: Foods have different names in different islands, for instance. I ask her to talk about how she learns the significance of these differences, and how she trains staff. Here, too, her answer is about a learning process, and she begins with a specific illustration from a workshop they organized in her program, where paraprofessionals from the local ethnic community brought food to share with other counselors:

> And we had
> the food!
> Right there, so we could see it.
> You know, I used to think,
> when they said they had bread in the—
> no, they had soup in the morning—
> I thought it was like, chicken noodle soup, you know, wet.
> No, it's not chicken noodle soup.
> But a woman said, "No, you put bread in it."
> So I thought, "Oh, it's like French toast?"
> She said, "No," you know.
> So I learn from- clients,
> one on one,
> my staff, who are- you know, multiethnic,
> um,
> reading,
> listening, you know,
> and asking questions, and,
> and
> clients,
> a lot of them say, "Oh, I'll cook you this dish."

They never do [laughing].
Even though, sometimes, we do go
over to someone's house, you know- and eat, or whatever.
Because they insist, you know.
But, um
[pause]
I don't know, just-
[DeVault: Staying open to stuff, it sounds like. And looking for it, wherever]
And asking questions, if you're confused,
instead of letting something go . . . .
I don't know, I'm not perfect.
And I learn so much, but there are so many gaps,
and I sometimes feel frustrated, you know?

A final excerpt from this interview shows what I believe is another aspect of knowing the nuances, by pointing to Janetta Thompson's commitments—to those aspects of her work she cares deeply about. This excerpt also suggests how these concerns can fade from view in the discourses of the profession. While working as a nutrition assistant, Thompson started course work toward a master's degree (a route toward certification for those without a college major in dietetics). She knew she wanted to stay in a community setting, and she concentrated on community nutrition. Telling this part of her story, she explains in more detail her special interests in the field at that time:

And I figured,
since I worked with people who were from all- over the world,
I would- sort of specialize in
that too.
Because I used to get upset when,
even when I hadn't finished my degree,
I would have people from Haiti, or whatever,
being told about a diabetic diet.
And it was very inappropriate,
the way they were told to eat,
they were given a list of American foods,
and told,
"OK, you should eat less rice, you get to eat bread, blah-blah-blah."
And they may not have liked bread, but they loved rice.
So why can't they eat more rice and,
you know, the exchanges, and things like that.
So I used to get very angry.
I wouldn't show my
client that I was angry, but I would get *very* angry.

In order to explain, she presents a narrative from her professional experience. The account is framed by her emotion; it starts with getting "upset" and ends by announcing that she was "very angry" (though she didn't show it). These quite explicit markers of feeling emphasize the importance of this account; it tells what she cares about.

This excerpt also reveals how little space there is in the profession, as formally constituted, for the expression of Thompson's concerns and competences. Most obviously, she mentions the suppression of her anger, but more subtle effects of the organization of nutrition work can be seen in how this telling works: Thompson explains that she will "specialize in- ..." At this point, there is a very brief pause in her speech. She stops, and thinks how to say what she means, because what she wants to do in her field is not neatly packaged as a specialty. She has introduced her concern, explaining just before that she has worked with people from all over the world, and she goes on to say it is "that" that she cares about. But the profession does not provide a ready term for the work she wants to do; thus, she tells about it through a series of stories like the one excerpted here.

## DISCUSSION

My discussion takes up implications of this analysis for nutrition practitioners and also for qualitative researchers.

### ETHNICITY AND EXPERTISE IN NUTRITIONAL SCIENCE

Darlene Clark Hine (1989) argues that "all professions look different when viewed from the black woman's angle" (p. x), and her history of African American women's participation in nursing, *Black Women in White*, provides compelling evidence for that assertion. Hine documents a long tradition of women's health care work in and for Black communities, a history of exclusion from White institutions, and the development of an extensive network of parallel institutions for Blacks. She discusses Black nurses' strategies for gaining access to the profession, and their debates about integration and separatism. She reveals a rich history that has been virtually invisible in official accounts of nursing and distinctive experiences that are still largely unacknowledged. My analysis here represents one response to her charge that race and ethnicity should be part of the analysis of any women's profession, even if the field appears predominantly White. In this analysis of Janetta Thompson's narrative of her career, I have begun to see the outlines of an analysis that attends to the racial-ethnic dimensions of professional work in dietetics and public health nutrition.

Dietitians and nutritionists work with food, and food is strongly connected to culture—and, therefore, to race and ethnicity. These professionals are certainly aware of these connections, yet their history is an inauspicious one: The standard story from outside the profession emphasizes the attempt to impose a bland Anglo-American diet on a succession of immigrant populations (Levenstein, 1988; Shapiro, 1986). Further, this story is often told in ways that present nutritionists as rather ridiculous, oppressively moralizing dispensers of authoritative knowledge. My analysis has examined this kind of issue from a somewhat different angle. I have suggested that working within the frame of professionalism makes it difficult to attend adequately to the cultures of race and ethnicity and tends to hide the ways in which at least some nutrition professionals (like Janetta Thompson) work with a sensitivity to culture and ethnicity. Further, I have suggested that women with knowledge of ethnic communities are often recruited into subordinate positions, where they do essential work without gaining access to the benefits of full professional status. (Although the workers discussed here shared a cultural background that seems to contribute to their perspectives on these issues, several of the White public health nutritionists I interviewed shared these kinds of concerns and commitments, although they were expressed in different ways. The dynamics of their somewhat different locations remain as topics for further analysis.)

To the extent that nutritional counseling is conceived as a traditional profession, it must find its base and its legitimacy in knowledge conceived as abstract and impersonal. Within this frame, the local particularities of phenomena arising from race and ethnicity are construed as extra kinds of information that might modify or specify more general kinds of knowledge. In practice—on the job and in the actual operation of nutrition policy and programs—race and ethnicity are immediate, apparent, and strongly consequential. Clients come to nutritional counseling with attitudes and beliefs toward food and eating that are intimately linked with their ethnic backgrounds. Knowledge about ethnicity—especially local and particular knowledge of ethnic communities—is essential to the conduct of the work. Such knowledge enters the community health setting in several ways, partly through the creation of paraprofessional roles and the knowledge and commitments of professionals like Janetta Thompson (see also Gilkes, 1982).

This argument suggests that a science determined to ignore culture and ethnicity is flawed and that science-based knowledge and practices will produce more robust truths when they incorporate knowledge of the cultural contexts of human life. Such a claim is troubling for many, and perhaps risky given the linked histories of science and racism. When scientists have attended to racial-ethnic differences, their work has often reified racial categories and bolstered claims of essential differences among racial-ethnic groups. On the other hand, abstract science has often been a powerful

weapon in struggles against prejudice and racism, a weapon that many are loath to discard. Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg (1993) sees this dilemma in the context of overlapping cultural discourses of "essentialist racism," "color-blindness" (which she analyzes as color- and power-evasiveness), and "race cognizance," an attitude that insists on taking account of the autonomy of different cultural groups and the social structural inequalities that organize group relations. In Frankenberg's scheme, the color-blind discourse can be seen as a formulation that is usefully critical of earlier essentialist understandings of race-ethnicity, but one that achieves that usefulness by obscuring the dynamics of group differences related to culture and power. Iris Marion Young (1990), in an analysis especially relevant to this study, argues that the hierarchical organization of professional work relies on a "myth of merit" that insists on the irrelevance of racial-ethnic differences. The problem with such a color-blind formulation of merit-based standards is that it ignores the political process through which work skills and qualifications are defined and organized into a hierarchical system.

My analysis of nutrition work begins to reveal such a hierarchy of knowledge and positions. Within the profession as a whole, the abstract science of a hospital model competes with the more socially grounded public health perspective that informs community nutrition.[8] Within the public health sphere, too, knowledge of particular ethnic patterns is typically construed as social rather than scientific. Some kinds of knowledge are privileged, as expertise; some are viewed as subordinate, useful but extra; and some kinds of knowledge are discounted and exploited without acknowledgment, even though they are essential to the day-to-day work of the setting. Such a view of racial-ethnic competences as outside the core of professional expertise supports the construction of a system in which racial-ethnic "others" are concentrated in subordinate paraprofessional categories. As in nursing (Glazer, 1991), the hierarchy of professional positions appears fair because of its basis in training and credentials, while racial-ethnic (and social class) hierarchies are reproduced through systemic inequalities in access to top positions.

In presenting this critique of conventional practice in dietetics and nutrition, I wish to state clearly that I do not mean to undertake this analysis as a distanced observer, passing judgment on a flawed profession from a position of moral superiority. I do not mean to single out food and nutrition fields as uniquely vulnerable to the critique offered here; there are certainly related problems in most of the sciences, and especially in the health care professions. Further, I am interested in the dilemmas of food and nutrition professionals in part because they mirror and illuminate the challenges facing sociologists as we remake our field in the current moment. Indeed, my primary message is for sociologists conducting qualitative research, and the methodological implications of my analysis will be discussed in the next section.

## ETHNICITY AND EXPERTISE IN SOCIOLOGICAL METHOD

I have relied on close analysis of an interview with an African American nutritionist to disclose aspects of the racial-ethnic organization of her professional field. I have suggested that the racialized context organizing her career was only occasionally made an explicit topic in our conversation, even though its influence is pervasive. This absence in explicit talk is only partly a matter of rapport with the interviewee. I do believe that this interview shows evidence of increasing confidence and trust, so that we talk more explicitly about race near the end of the interview. The main point, however, is that talk is often shaped by racial-ethnic dimensions of social organization without bearing explicit marks of that influence. The lesson for the qualitative researcher, I believe, is that analyses will often be strengthened by an attentive and knowledgeable search for the effects of racial-ethnic constructions and inequalities in the lives of those we study.

The conventional wisdom of the qualitative tradition directs the researcher to enter the field with few expectations or assumptions and to build analyses on themes that arise from subjects in the field. Of course, operating as a blank slate has always been impossible, and the commitments of many qualitative researchers working in this tradition have sometimes produced quite sensitive analyses of the processes underlying racial-ethnic inequalities (e.g., Anderson, 1978; Ladner, 1972; Liebow, 1967; Rollins, 1985; Stack, 1974; Wellman, 1977; and Zavella, 1987, to list only a few). The problem with the conventional wisdom, in my view, is that it makes attention to such inequalities optional, and leaves unacknowledged the awareness and knowledge that make such analyses possible. Within the field of research methods (as in nutrition work), professional expertise is constituted abstractly, in terms of neutral techniques for analysis; it does not necessarily include the kind of knowledge that would help researchers identify and understand the effects of a racialized social context.[9]

In making the analysis presented here, I have relied on a broadly ethnomethodological understanding of conversational interaction to make sense of the interview as a jointly constructed verbal encounter, as well as drawing insights from the accounts of cultural outsiders who have written about the vicissitudes of speaking in various cultural contexts. I have assumed, for example, that conversation is always located: We always speak to and for particular partners or audiences in particular moments. In addition, I rely on the idea that speakers in any oppressed or marginalized cultural group learn distinctive skills that tailor speech for different cultural contexts (see hooks, 1989, especially Chapters 1–2, 11, 22–33; and Jordan, 1985). With other insiders, one can assume certain kinds of understanding that cannot be taken for granted elsewhere. When speaking with outsiders, then, one is often deciding (though the term implies too much deliberateness) whether

to make difference an issue. If ethnicity is not made explicit, for example, outsider listeners may miss its significance entirely; when it is, there are other difficulties, including vulnerability to various kinds of challenge ("prove it") and misunderstandings that speakers no doubt often judge not worth it. In some situations, leaving truths unspoken may be understood as a kind of resistance to outsiders' unwelcome intrusions.

When I interview an African American nutritionist, she is certainly making these kinds of choices as she constructs her account. She makes judgments about what I can and cannot understand and about the wisdom of making race visible.[10] One important influence here, I think, is a general presumption in much everyday talk that race and ethnicity are irrelevant, that these differences should not matter. This presumption may have particular force when the topic is professional life, a terrain where the official story claims that knowledge and merit transcend ethnic and cultural differences (Young, 1990). The conceptual frames of professional work organization make space for race and ethnicity, but only in rather circumscribed forms and spaces.

These observations suggest questions for the researcher: With respect to the interview analyzed here, for example, do I know enough—about the nuances—to understand and interpret Janetta Thompson's account? How did my knowledge—and perhaps more importantly my ignorance—shape our interaction and then my reading of the interview data produced in our encounter? I view my interview with Thompson as a relatively successful one, in which we were able to talk in ways that were useful, for me at least. I think it helped our unfolding interaction that we were both young professional women. We were able to laugh and nod as we spoke about the importance of mentors, for example, and about our conflicts and discomforts with them. I think, also, that as the interview went forward—as I displayed an openness to what she said and some degree of understanding—Thompson became increasingly willing to talk explicitly about race as an aspect of her career story. But, of course, she would no doubt tell somewhat different stories to different interviewers. I cannot know for sure how those stories would have been told, but I can analyze the story we produced with an awareness of the positions from which we both spoke. In pursuing such an analysis, as well as in conducting the interview, I will be most successful if I consider carefully what knowledge I need for a rich and robust interpretation and how my access to that knowledge is either facilitated or limited by my own particular location and history. I should consider not only how Thompson's story might have differed had she told it to a Black interviewer, but perhaps more importantly how I can find and analyze race and ethnicity in the stories of the White nutritionists I interviewed, many of whom never spoke about it explicitly. As I know more, I see this absence more clearly and it calls out for further analytic attention.

Both of the analytic approaches I have adopted here—institutional ethnography and narrative analysis—depart from the most common approach to qualitative analysis, the constant comparative method of grounded theory analysis. While grounded theory analysts are typically interested in social processes abstracted from particular contexts, the methods I have used here are attentive to the coherence of individual courses of action in local settings. The generalizability of the analysis comes not from the claim that actions and experiences are similar across settings, but from a focus on the social relations that organize those local settings and action within them. These methods may be especially useful in addressing issues related to racial-ethnic positioning, since they allow consideration of an actor in context rather than only as representative of a social category. Rather than searching for generalizable differences among categorical groups, the aim is to understand how a member of such a group is caught up in the social relations of her context. While it is necessary to recognize that the particular experiences produced by these social relations may vary, we can be confident that analyses will have general significance if the focus is on the relations producing varied experiences, rather than on the experience itself. In this analysis, for instance, my claim is not that all, or even most, African American nutritionists will share Janetta Thompson's route to professional work in an inner-city clinic. Instead, I mean to expose the conditions that surround her choices at crucial moments and the contexts that organize her daily practice on the job. This kind of analysis is, in Dorothy Smith's (1987) words, "open 'at the other end,' where it is tied into the extended relations of the political economy" (p. 170): While I have begun to reveal one aspect of the professional regime in nutrition work, my argument about that regime opens further questions, pointing my analysis in the larger study (and, of course, other investigators) toward consideration of how other individuals, in the same or somewhat different ethnic-cultural positions, enter and negotiate the same set of social relations.

My aim here is not to make pronouncements about appropriate methods of interviewing and analysis, but to invite deeper and more thoughtful reflection on these issues as they arise in the analysis of qualitative data. I mean to challenge the ostensibly passive stance toward our data that has been traditional in qualitative research and to encourage more vigorous, sustained analysis of the structured organizing effects of ethnicity and gender in the stories we are told.

I wish to close with two suggestions for interview research sensitive to the play of race-ethnicity. First, I recommend careful and detailed analysis of talk, understood as jointly constructed interaction unfolding through time. This kind of analysis, drawing from recent perspectives on narrative and conversation, can move the researcher beyond questions of access and rapport as these are typically conceived. It provides a method for developing a particular kind of "meaning in context" (Mishler, 1986), a grounded and

particular analysis of interview encounters that take place within racialized social institutions. My second recommendation is for what I would label a light- rather than heavy-handed approach to the interpretation of interview data. I have treated the transcript of my interview with Janetta Thompson as a text to be presented gently, even somewhat tentatively. Her words were spoken to me in a moment when we came together; I grasped, at the time, at least some of what she meant, and I have worked at deepening that understanding through sustained attention to her interview and by investigating the context that has shaped her story and its telling. I put forward an argument, but since my argument focuses on how cultural differences complicate interpretation, it would be self-negating if it claimed a final, objective truth. My call for tentativeness should not be taken as weakening my analysis. Instead, as Collins (1990, pp. 236–237) suggests, the acknowledgment of locatedness and partiality in this kind of analysis can move it toward a stronger and more credible kind of truth.

## NOTES

1. Reprinted, with revisions, from M. L. DeVault, "Ethnicity and Expertise: Racial-Ethnic Knowledge in Sociological Research," *Gender and Society, 9*(5), 612–631 (1995), with permission of Sage Publications, Inc. doi:10.1177/089124395009005007

2. I rely on a view of race-ethnicity that sees both as socially constructed, though materially consequential, categories of social differentiation (Frankenberg, 1993; Nagel, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1986). While there are clearly good reasons to distinguish differences labeled "ethnic" and "racial" for some purposes, I want to avoid drawing a sharp distinction here. While I mean to work primarily with a notion of "race-ethnicity" (Amott & Matthaei, 1991; Glenn, 1987), I prefer *ethnicity* as the umbrella term since it suggests sociocultural rather than fixed and essential differences.

3. Actually, this feature of the early discussions may be largely an effect of an older research tradition that follows positivist natural science models more closely. Such models construe issues of method as quite separate from findings; therefore, access and rapport are matters usually disposed of in introductory comments and kept out of the analysis.

4. These informants range in occupational status from a few paraprofessional workers in community clinics to a few university nutrition faculty. Because of my interest in activism and policy work within the profession, I emphasized, and oversampled, practitioners in the community nutrition area. About a quarter of the interviewees worked in hospital settings, by far the most common place of work for dietitians.

Slightly less than half worked in community health settings, including WIC programs, programs providing food for elderly citizens, and county and community clinics. The remainder worked as private consultants, in corporations or food industry organizations, or in universities. Although none of the interviewees worked in food service management (another typical work site) at the time of the interviews, many had done this work earlier in their careers. Almost all had undergraduate, and some graduate, degrees in nutrition, and most were certified by the American Dietetic Association as registered dietitians. Ethnically, all but four interviewees were White, and the White women who identified ethnically were of European descent (German, Irish, Italian). In addition to the three women of African descent who are discussed in this article, there was one Asian American interviewee who had come to the United States as a college student.

5. The names used here are pseudonyms.

6. The WIC program (Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children) is a major U.S. government nutrition program that provides food subsidies and nutrition education for low-income women who are pregnant and for their infants and children.

7. At the other end of the spectrum, in what is admittedly an unusual case, one White woman reported that she had dropped out of her degree program just before she was certified in order to make a "political statement." Within a year, one of her teachers sought her out at the hospital where she was working as a diet technician (the hospital equivalent of a nutrition assistant) and asked her quite sternly, "What are you doing?" After "a couple uncomfortable conversations," they worked out an informal arrangement that allowed her to complete the work necessary for certification.

8. All of the community nutritionists I talked to shared with Janetta Thompson some awareness of the cultural dimension of their work. At a minimum, they spoke of the ethnic composition of their client groups and the need to tailor services. Many spoke of the importance of bilingualism and a knowledge of different cultures. A few talked, much as Thompson did, about the politics of working as White, Euro-American professionals in African American and immigrant communities.

9. One might also suggest that, as in nutrition work, researchers in privileged groups have often relied on those from other racial-ethnic groups to bring such insights into the research community, a strategy that exploits the racial-ethnic knowledge of others rather than seeking such knowledge for oneself.

10. See Collins (1990, p. 208) on knowledge and wisdom.

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# Citizen Portraits: Photos of People With Disabilities as Personal Keepsakes[1]

## Robert Bogdan

Here I examine historical photographs in which people we would now say have disabilities are pictured (Figure 11.1). I am not the first researcher to tackle the representation of people with disabilities in photographs. There have been important predecessors. Some of these writers instruct us about whether particular images are positive or negative, whether they demean or in other ways malign people with disabilities, or whether they portray them in complimentary ways (Haller, 2010; Hevey, 1992; Millet, 2004; Norden, 1994). Others develop classification schemes of the various ways people with disabilities are depicted—"wondrous," "sentimental," "exotic," "realistic" (Garland-Thomson, 2001). Scholars with a theoretical bent focus on how the images relate to aesthetics, ethics, race, class, gender, and other oppressed groups (Chivers & Markotic, 2010; Garland-Thompson, 2002, 2004; Sandell, Dodd, & Garland-Thomson, 2010; Siebers, 2010; Snyder, Brueggemann, & Garland-Thomson, 2002). These latter approaches are concerned with broad and abstract cultural meanings and tend to use predetermined theoretical lenses that most often do not capture the meanings of the images to those who originally produced and used them.[2] It is important that the study of images of people with disabilities not stop with the pictures, but include the historical and cultural circumstances of those people who created and consumed them.[3] Here I look at photographs produced for private use by and for people with disabilities

**Figure 11.1** Young man with cerebral palsy with family. Ca. 1890. Cabinet card.

and their families, friends, and other close associates. They were taken to be personal keepsakes.

All photographs, be they of people with disabilities or other subjects, contain visual rhetoric, patterns of conventions that have distinct styles that cast the subject in particular ways. I look at how the subjects are posed, what props are used, others included in the picture, the background, and other dimensions of the setting of the shoot. How the subjects are dressed, their facial expressions, their posture, the lighting and angles employed, the printing of the picture, and other such details contribute to photographic variation I examine (Bogdan, 1988; Elks, 1992; Knoll, 1987). No single doctrine for photographing disabled people existed. Rather, different sets of guidelines were typical of different social arrangements and purposes. I call these patterns genres.

Most people who study visual representation of people with disabilities focus on a small number of images within a limited range of subject areas (Hevey, 2006; Garland-Thomson, 2004; Millet, 2004).[4] I have examined

thousands of images from a wide variety of sources. I have been collecting historical photographs of people with disabilities since 1985 (Bogdan, 1988). I look for images at antique shops, flea markets, eBay, and postcard shows and peruse other venues to expand my collection. Besides using the images from my collection, I have visited many private collectors as well as public archives. For practical reasons I have focused my collecting and searching on photographs taken in the United States from the 1860s into the 1970s.

In most genres of photographs of people with disabilities, the person with the disability and his or her physical or mental condition are central to the composition. This holds for freak show handouts, begging cards, charity publicity, clinical portraits, art photography, institutional propaganda, as well as advertising. In addition to the deliberate and flagrant display of disability there are other aspects of visual rhetoric at work in these disability genres. I have written about them elsewhere (Bogdan, 2012). Here I look at photographs that include people with disability in which disability photographic conventions are not employed or, if they are, do not dominate the image. By that I mean that people with disabilities are photographed as ordinary members of the community—regular citizens and family members. The rhetorical devices of family, friend, and other typical membership standings trump disability conventions.

When I say people with disabilities are photographed as typical people are I do not mean to imply that their disabilities are concealed from the viewer. The impairment is visible but is not featured or foremost. As in Figure 11.1, wheelchairs, missing limbs, braces, and other indicators of disability are taken for granted in member photography.

The images I examine here were produced as personal mementos to be placed in family albums, scrapbooks, and other special places where private and cherished memorabilia were safely stored. The photographers were both professionals and amateurs. Some of the images were arranged and produced for the person with the disability, and others by friends and family. Although some of the images were shared, even sent through the mail, they were distributed privately to intimates. They were not produced for commercial public relations, to solicit money, to sell, or for personal or organizational gain as were the photographs in most disability genres.

Figure 11.1 is an example of what I am getting at. It shows family members who, in the late 1800s, had their picture taken at a local photographer's studio. The way the subjects were arranged, their clothing, the bicycle, the backdrop, and how the son with cerebral palsy in the wheelchair was included all echo family visual rhetoric, not disability conventions. This is the sort of photography that I examine in this chapter.

Since the late 1960s there has been a progressive movement among professionals, parents, and people with disabilities and their advocates to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in normal life.[5] This movement has

produced a type of photography of its own where people with disabilities are posed as "normal."[6] Most of these are produced by social service agencies but socially conscious businesses incorporate people with disabilities who are posed as normal into their ads as well. These images are designed to present people with disabilities in the most complimentary way. While some of this self-conscious production of normal images resembles those I discuss here, as you will see they are different. The images here are natural and flow unselfconsciously from the ordinary circumstances of people involved. It was people's regular connection with family, friends, and fellow workers that created these pictures, not people in a human service and human rights social movement self-consciously creating inclusion.

How do regular pictures taken within the frame of ordinary people, family, friends, workers, citizens look compared to the disability conventions of other genera—freak show handouts, begging cards, clinical photographs, and others? When people are pictured in ordinary ways, they are in everyday settings—homes, gardens, public parks, stores, photo studios, at work, and at play. They are also often pictured with people and animals with whom they have loving or close relationships—friends, family, fellow workers, and pets. In addition, inanimate objects that the subjects care about and that are part of their commonplace nondisabled identity are part of the composition. Their apparel, grooming, and personal appearance are the same or similar to that of other citizens and family members. They dress in regular ways. Lastly, their facial expressions, position in the photographs, and other dimensions of the picture suggest they and others pictured are comfortable being part of the composition—they belong.

## SETTINGS

Pictures taken within the conventions of ordinary people photography are shot in locations such as inside homes, in front of homes, on the porch, in backyards, and in other domestic locations. When taken away from home they are in work environments, public places, and other common locations. Photographers' studios are also sites of ordinary people's photography. Whether it is an amateur or professional photographer, the convention is to show the person in a typical, pleasant environment, one that promotes both disabled and nondisabled people's belonging.

### Domestic Locations

Figure 11.2 is an example of a person with a disability taken inside his home. The boy, who has Down syndrome, was sitting in a window seat. Note the décor—the patterned cushions, lace curtains, and the potted plant. The

**Figure 11.2**   Child with Down Syndrome. Ca. 1910. Photo postcard.

spot where the photo was taken provides a positive impression of both the dwelling and the subject. Given the location and the pose, the photograph could have been taken of anyone, not just a person with a disability. Contrast this picture with those that might be taken in institutions or in clinical photography.

The next illustration shows a man sitting at his desk (Figure 11.3). The wallpaper, curtain, oil lamp, rug, and pictures hanging on the wall all conveyed the message of a person's personal, intimate, and comfortable space. The picture conveyed the impression of a man at home, at his own desk, who happened to use a wheelchair.

In Figure 11.4, a young man with a developmental disability is shown on the porch of his family's home. The picture was likely taken by a relative who was an amateur photographer. The subject was sitting in a rocker

**Figure 11.3**   Man in wheelchair at desk. Ca. 1908. Photo postcard.

surrounded by plants, common props used in photography at the time. The wooden screen door and the clapboards in the background along with the bucket plant containers conveyed normal life. The inconsequential setting contributed to the image's ordinariness.

WORK SETTINGS

Another location where people normally spend their time and are photographed is at work. In Figure 11.5 a man in his 40s was in a wheelchair in

**Figure 11.4**  Developmentally disabled young man on porch. Ca. 1907. Photo postcard.



**Figure 11.5**  Man in office. Ca. 1910. Photo postcard.

his office surrounded by typical office furnishings. An open safe was on his right, the shelves behind him were filled with file holders and drawers, and he had pulled back from his desk for the purposes of the photo shot, giving the sense that he belongs. His officemate was at a desk toward the back. His work environment was what defines the situation, not his disability.

Group pictures of workers standing outside their factories, offices, shops, and other vocational locations are a common photographic subject. In some establishments such pictures were taken yearly. Figure 11.6 is a good example of a work group photo. Given the high quality of the image, it was probably taken by a professional photographer. The setting was outside a shoe store in an unnamed Midwest town. The sales staff was lined up on the street while the owner of the establishment was on the left, one step above the others. As we might expect for an owner, the man, who has crutches and only one leg, was holding the ropes that control the awning, and was better dressed than his employees. His position on the sidewalk, one step up, set him apart not as a person with a disability but as the person in charge.

The last example of a person with a disability photographed in an ordinary work setting is of a musician (Figure 11.7). The man on the left had an arm that was not fully formed. Rather than his disability being central to the photograph, as it was in freak show and begging photographs, the person here was pictured as part of an instrumental group. He was pictured not as a human wonder; he was shown as an ordinary person doing an ordinary thing.



**Figure 11.6**    Group picture of workers with boss with a disability. Ca. 1911. Photo postcard.

**Figure 11.7** Band with one player with deformed limb. Ca. 1914. Photo postcard. Joel Wayne, Pop's Postcard Coll.

SCHOOLS AND CIVIC SETTINGS

Regular schools, social agencies, and community facilities such as libraries and churches are additional places where people with disabilities appear in normal photos. Unlike institutional pictures in which people with disabilities were clustered together in segregated settings and dressed in uniforms, these photographs presented the person with the disability as simply one of a group, a group of nondisabled peers. Sometimes, such as the class picture with the young man on the far left in Figure 11.8, the placement of the youngster with the disability was dictated by the physical aspects of the setting. Here the staircase required his placement in the bottom row.

**Figure 11.8**    Boy in wheelchair in class picture. Ca. 1912.

## Studio Portraits

Photo studios were places frequented by the general citizenry and by people with disabilities as well. The illustration that leads off this chapter (Figure 11.1) plus Figure 11.9 provide examples of studio portraits of people with cerebral palsy in wheelchairs. The decorative backdrop and the props in Figure 11.9 may seem unusual, but they were normal in photo studio pictures of the time. The subjects in the photographs were photographed in the same way as other citizens were.

Figure 11.10 is another studio portrait. This one is of a teenage girl with a disability and a companion who is probably a family member or friend. Notice the seaside scenery in the back. Such backdrops were common in photo studios of photographers who specialized in resort tourist trade. The two pictured were likely vacationing in a coastal town, a place where people without disabilities frequented, too.

## Apparel

If you review all the illustrations in this chapter you will see that people with disabilities appear in more or less the same attire and grooming as anyone else. This is quite different from other disability photographs. For example, in clinical photographs either white gowns or nudity were common. In institutional photographs people with disabilities were in uniform. In family and

**Figure 11.9**   Studio portrait of young man with cerebral palsy. Ca. 1889. Cabinet photo.

citizen pictures taken when people know they are going to be photographed, they dressed for the occasion. That meant dressing up, or, if not wearing your best, at least being sure to dress in conventional clothes that were clean and neat.

For many, the trip to the photo studio was a formal occasion. For middle-class men that meant wearing a suit and tie. The man in Figure 11.11 follows those conventions as he faced the camera head on. Notice how his hair was neatly combed. In addition he wore a lapel pin. Although that pin was too small to inspect closely, it probably identified him as a member of a particular church, civic, or Masonic organization. The fact that he was a double amputee is evident but not the focus of the portrait.

**Figure 11.10**   Girl in wheelchair with companion in studio with seaside backdrop. Ca. 1910. Photo postcard.

Photographic Companions

An important dimension of picturing people within normal conventions is the presence of other people with whom the person has meaningful relationships: fellow workers, family and friends, and other loved ones. You can see this dimension of normality in many of the illustrations I have already discussed, but there are many more to examine.

The most common group portraits are of people with family members. Figure 11.12 resembles the first picture in this chapter. Both were studio portraits consisting of a family group surrounding a disabled family member. The child with a disability, likely cerebral palsy, sat on his father's lap. He was surrounded by his mother and father and two siblings. This is clearly a photograph with many elements of a typical family portrait rather than a picture of a disabled person.

Although this picture was dominated by family visual rhetoric, there were two elements that violated those conventions. The disabled son's footwear, the white knitted booties, and the fact that he was sitting on his father's lap were not typical of what a boy of his age would wear or how he would be posed for a family picture. Like the presence of wheelchairs, braces, and other visual indicators of disability, these elements violated typical photographic

**Figure 11.11**   Studio portrait of amputee. Ca. 1907. Photo postcard. B. Nelson Coll.

code. But their presence was not so intrusive as to change this picture's place in the category of a typically family photograph.

In the next photo postcard (Figure 11.13), one that was probably taken by an amateur photographer, a mother and father and their two children were grouped outside their home in a rather formal and solemn pose. They were dressed up for the occasion and carried two kitchen chairs outside for the parents to sit on. The child on the left had Down syndrome. She was photographed, as were the others, as simply a part of the family.

Duet images are also part of family photography—sisters with sisters, brothers with brothers. Figure 11.14 captured a younger sister hugging her older sibling who had a developmental disability.

Photographs also reveal couple relationships, people with disabilities in romantic partnerships with people without disabilities. The next illustration

**Figure 11.12**  Family portrait. Ca. 1910. Photo postcard.



**Figure 11.13**  Family outside their home. Ca. 1908. Photo postcard.

**Figure 11.14**   Sisters. Ca. 1900. Cabinet card.

(Figure 11.15) shows a middle-aged person in a wheelchair with a person we can assume from the pose and body language was either her husband or boyfriend. See how they looked each other in the eye, a body language suggesting intimacy. From their facial expressions you get the impression that they genuinely cared for each other. They were photographed the way a typical couple would be photographed. The person's disability was incidental to the composition.

PETS

It is not just human loved ones that typical people appear with in photographs. During the first third of the 20th century and continuing to a

**Figure 11.15**   Romantic encounter. Ca. 1910. Photo postcard.

lesser extent later, people had their pictures taken with pets, mostly dogs but occasionally cats and other animals (Arluke & Bogdan, 2010). Pets with their owners were a regular part of photography. In Figure 11.16 a well-dressed young woman sat on the porch of her home. Her leg braces were inconspicuously visible where her long skirt ends. She reached out touching the dog either to pet it or to ensure that it did not run away before the shutter opened.

ORDINARY OBJECTS

In addition to living beings—family, friends, and pets—within the conventions of normal photography people are photographed with objects that are meaningful to their identity. Things such as books, toys and play things, cars, and spinning wheels regularly appeared in the historical photographs. For people who were employed, objects associated with their occupations—tools and equipment—were included.

**Figure 11.16**   Teenager in braces with her dog. Ca. 1910. Photo postcard.
B. Nelson Coll.

An example of the presence of objects as part of the typical visual rhetoric is Figure 11.17. In it we see a young woman with a disability sitting in a decorative rattan wheelchair and photographed as any person would be, with a musical instrument, a violin. There were freak photos of people performing with musical instruments, but they were presented as human wonders rather than as normal students of an instrument as this image suggested.

Although the next illustration may be offensive to some because of the presence of a dead animal, I include it because it epitomizes normal photographic conventions. It was very common for hunters in the first third of the 20th century (and beyond) to be pictured with their dead prey. Some of these photographs featured women, but the great majority were male poses, a symbol of male culture and manliness. In Figure 11.18 a person of small stature stood holding a gun next to the buck he just shot.

**Figure 11.17** Young woman in wheelchair with violin. Ca. 1909. Photo postcard. Don and Newly Preziosi Coll.



**Figure 11.18** Dwarf with dead deer. Photo postcard. 1915.

## HIDING DISABILITY

In the images I have reviewed so far, the disability was apparent; no attempts were made to hide the person's missing limbs, wheelchairs, braces, or other indicators of impairment. But what about pictures where the person conceals his or her condition? How do we know that some family pictures do not have a person hiding a disability?[7] What about conditions such as deafness, mental illness, intellectual disability, and others where the nature of the disability may not be apparent? How should they fit into our analysis of visual disability rhetoric?

I do not have answers to these questions but I do have an example that brought the issue to my attention. The case in point was a picture of a brother and sister in front at the steps of their home (Figure 11.19). They both had toys. He held a bugle and a drum, and she had her hands on a doll carriage filled with dolls. Neither child appeared to have a disability.



**Figure 11.19**   Brother and sister in front of their home. 1909. Photo postcard.

**Figure 11.20**   Brother and sister who were shown in Figure 11.19, 4 years later. Ca. 1913. Photo postcard.

In the next photo postcard we see the same youngsters a few years later (Figure 11.20). They were still in front of their home and she still had a carriage with her dolls, but he was not holding toys. Careful inspection shows that the boy did not have a right arm. In addition, he had either a cleft palate or a demonstrable scar on his upper lip. It appears that in the first photograph he successfully and purposefully hid his disabilities with his toys, while in the second he unselfconsciously revealed them. Should we think of hiding a disability as a normal part of family visual rhetoric?

## CONCLUSIONS

I end with a photograph of a mother with her two children taken in a photo studio (Figure 11.21). It has all the elements of a typical family photo. The dress, the people, the location, the body language—the props were all there. The child on the left appeared to have Down syndrome but that may be a misdiagnosis. She might just have had some of the physical characteristics we associate with that condition but not the condition itself.[8] If she did have a disability, the picture is a wonderful illustration of how the visual significance of a disability was muted when a photograph was taken using normal family photographic conventions. If the child did not have the condition, it is a good
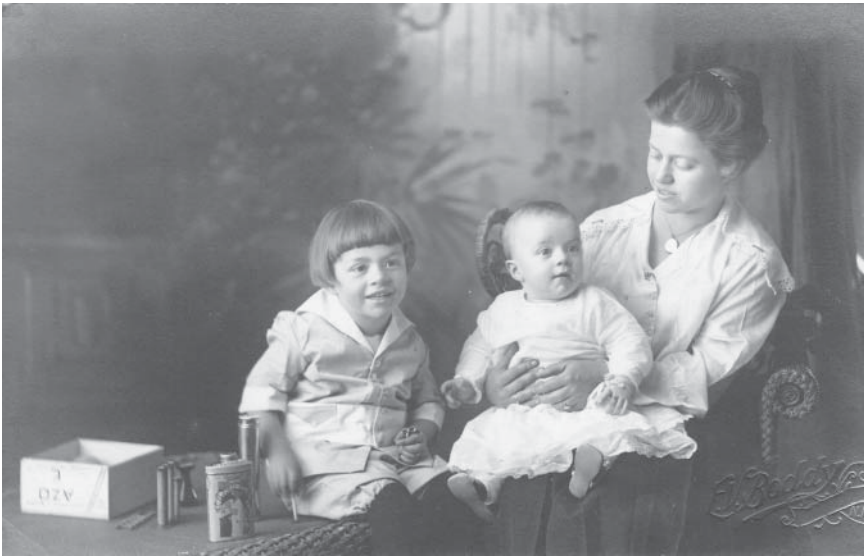
**Figure 11.21**  Mother with children. Ca. 1909. Photo postcard.

illustration of a photo using family conventions. Either way it points out the power of photographic context in setting the scene and in leading the viewer to an interpretation of a person's characteristics.

## N O T E S

1.  This chapter is a modified version of a chapter that appeared in Bogdan (2012). It is used here with permission of Syracuse University Press. All but four of the illustrations in the article are from the author's collection. For the four that are not their source is indicated in the caption.
2.  Some of these writings favor postmodern and critical theories. My analysis is based on social constructionism and related works that pay attention to context, meaning, and agency.
3.  Norden's work (1994) on movie depictions of people with disabilities is the one example where the historical and cultural context of picture production is an important part of the analysis.
4.  Norden's book, *Cinema of Isolation* (1994), is completely devoted to motion picture depictions of people with physical disabilities. He is the only author I have encountered whose writing is based on the study of thousands of examples.

5. These ideas and policies were related to the concept of normalization (Wolfensberger, 1972), providing the conditions which allowed people with disability access to all aspects of a typical life, including housing, dress, and human relationships.
6. See Pietropaolo (2010) for an example.
7. This is quite different than with begging cards when we are not sure whether the person pictured has one or is only feigning a disability.
8. When I bought this postcard written on the back in pencil was the phrase "Down's syndrome," but I am not sure who wrote that or that the diagnosis is accurate.

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# CHAPTER 12

# "They Asked for a Hard Job": World War II Conscientious Objectors on the Front Lines

Steven J. Taylor

Durning World War II, approximately 12,000 conscientious objectors (COs) performed alternative public service as part of the Civilian Public Service (CPS) overseen by the Selective Service. Although the men came from over 100 religions, CPS units were sponsored and supported by a relatively small number of religious groups, primarily the Mennonite Central Committee, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Brethren Service Committee. Initially, COs were assigned to work camps supervised by the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and other such agencies. In 1942, the Selective Service approved the establishment of CPS units at state mental hospitals and training schools for people with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities. Over 3,000 COs eventually worked at these state institutions.

The state institutions were terribly overcrowded and understaffed, and many of the regular attendants treated patients brutally. Appalled by the institutional conditions and abuse of patients, COs at some of the institutions brought complaints to public officials, community leaders, and the press. Widely reported media exposés flared up at mental hospitals in Iowa, New York, Ohio, Virginia, and elsewhere. COs at Philadelphia State Hospital developed an ambitious plan to lead a national movement to reform state mental hospitals and training schools. Their efforts resulted in major exposés published in *Life* magazine and *Reader's Digest*, which attracted the attention

of national political figures and civic leaders. After the end of the war, the Philadelphia State Hospital COs established the National Mental Health Foundation (NMHF) to advocate for institutional reforms and to educate the public about mental health and mental retardation. In 1950, the NMHF merged with more established mental health and psychiatric organizations to found a new national mental health association. The new association quickly abandoned the effort to reform state institutions and directed its attention to other issues.

Steven J. Taylor's *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors* (2009), which is discussed in Chapter 5, told the story of these World War II COs. Based on interviews with former COs and an extensive review of archival documents, the book traced the history of the CPS, the experiences of COs at the state institutions, the efforts of COs to bring public attention to dehumanizing conditions and the brutal treatment of patients at the state institutions, and the formation and demise of the COs' national reform organization. The following is an abridged chapter of this book.[1] It describes the working conditions of the COs at state institutions based on firsthand accounts.

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Frank Olmstead was field work director of the War Resisters League, which represented radical opponents of the draft, and a frequent critic of the Civilian Public Service and the church committees administering camps and units. He had visited many CPS work camps and written a critical report in November 1942 describing the dissatisfaction of CPS men and questioning the meaningfulness of the work at the camps (Bennett, 2003). Olmstead then spent several weeks visiting mental hospital units to see if the work there was more significant. He spent a week working as an attendant at the first institution he visited and wrote an article that was published in *Fellowship* in November 1943 based on his time there (Olmstead, 1943).

On Olmstead's first day at the mental hospital, he was given a quick tour of the building where inmates who were incontinent were housed and then led into a locked ward: "First there was the odor. Outdoors it had been decidedly disagreeable; inside the front door it had become nauseating, but when we stepped into that room the unadulterated stench was overpowering" (Olmstead, 1943, p. 192). Two attendants were on the ward. One of the attendants told Olmstead that the institution was short-staffed and asked him if he would mind being left alone in charge for a while. Right after the two attendants left, Olmstead reflected on the scene in front of him: "I have been in storms at sea, in train wrecks, and in Moscow during the Bolshevik revolution, but I have never had quite the feeling that I had when I turned from that locked door to face three hundred insane incontinents" (Olmstead, 1943, p. 192). Olmstead went on to describe observations during his time at

the mental hospital: mass nudity, filth, herding. He wrote about the pacifist techniques used by the COs, contrasting these with how regular attendants treated the patients under their charge, and speculated on whether they would make a lasting difference at the institutions.

The title of Olmstead's article was "They Asked for a Hard Job."

Soon after the establishment of the first CPS mental hospital unit by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) at Williamsburg, Virginia, in June 1942, mental hospital units were opened by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) at Staunton, Virginia; the Brethren Service Committee (BSC) at Sykesville, Maryland; and the AFSC at Philadelphia in August (National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors, 1996). Before the end of the CPS, there would be 43 units at state mental hospitals and one mental health unit at a Veterans Hospital at Lyons, New Jersey. Most of these units were administered by the MCC, the AFSC, or the BSC, although the Disciples of Christ, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, and the Methodist Commission on World Peace would administer one each. The first CPS unit at a training school for people with intellectual disabilities—the "mentally defective," "feebleminded," or "mentally deficient"—was opened by the MCC at Vineland, New Jersey, in April 1943. Eventually, there were 14 CPS units at state training schools for the feebleminded, in addition to Vineland, a private institution. The AFSC administered five, the MCC five, and the BSC three, with the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors (ACCO) and the American Baptist Home Mission Society administering one each. Throughout the CPS, the phrases *mental hospital program* and *mental hospital units* generally referred to units at both mental hospitals and training schools. (Figure 12.1 shows some of the buildings and grounds of the Philadelphia State Hospital, "Byberry.")

After the opening of the first mental hospital units, word of the program spread among mental hospital and training school superintendents who were facing critical staff shortages during the war. Superintendents or state officials typically requested CPS units from the church committees. After a church committee was selected to administer the unit, church organizations requested Selective Service approval.

Announcements of openings at mental hospitals and training schools were sent to CPS camps. Some superintendents tried to recruit COs directly. In July 1943, E. L. Hooper, MD, superintendent of Dayton State Hospital, wrote Vernon Stinebaugh, assistant director and educational director of the BSC camp in Walhalla, Michigan, informing him that his hospital had just been approved for a CPS unit. Hooper said that he had requested 10 men and briefly described his institution: "I may say that the Dayton State Hospital is caring for approximately 1800 mental patients, is located in a beautiful setting within the corporate limits of Dayton and we fear no contradiction in saying that it compares favorably with the other institutions of this and

**Figure 12.1** Philadelphia State Hospital ("Byberry"). Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

other states" (Hooper, 1943). In some cases, superintendents even visited work camps to attract and interview CPS men. For example, Dr. Charles Zeller of Philadelphia State Hospital went personally to the AFSC camp at Coshocton, Ohio, to recruit the first group of COs who would work at the institution (Sawyer, 2007).

Especially after the units had been in operation for a while, camp administrators representing the church committees often developed descriptions of the units and working and living conditions there. One fancy brochure titled "25 Men Needed at Lyons" was used to recruit COs to the Veterans Hospital unit administered by the BSC in New Jersey ("25 Men Needed at Lyons," n.d.). The brochure described the unit and was candid in describing the living and working conditions:

> The hospital administration has now decided to house all men in the attendants' building, four men to a room, using double-deckers. Selective Service has approved this. There has been considerable objection on the part of some men, but the majority are willing to accept the crowded conditions. The building is modern, fireproof and newly renovated, and despite the inconvenience should result in great unity of the group.

F. Nelson Underwood, assistant director of the BSC unit in Augusta, Maine, wrote a detailed, five-page paper, "Information for Men in CPS Camps Concerning the CPS Unit, Augusta State Hospital, Augusta, Maine" (Underwood, 1943). The paper started with a description of Augusta, Maine,

and the state hospital's superintendent, Dr. Forrest C. Tyson: "Dr. Tyson is not a C.O., but he has no aversion to conscientious objectors as such. He has here a job that needs to be done, a task that cannot wait." The paper went on to describe CPS men's living conditions, including lodging and opportunities for work for wives, working conditions (hours and time off), the kinds of work ("this work is often hard and dirty"), and types of jobs, openings for women, maintenance and allowance, compensation and medical care, vacations and leaves, education and recreation, and transportation to Augusta.

CPS men with specific qualities were sometimes recruited for the training schools and mental hospitals. Ralph Delk, the assistant director at Mansfield State Training School, sent a letter to the BSC on the "type of man for replacement at Mansfield" (Delk, 1944). The letter described the qualifications the training school's chief supervisor was looking for:

> A mature man at least 24 or 25 years of age, and one who can handle men. They would prefer a man of good physical build—approximately 6 feet tall and one who would weigh around 180 lbs. The supervisors are asking for this type of man as they want to place him in the Boys' Custodial Building where discipline problems are the greatest. They feel a man of large build has a psychological advantage over a small man in discipline. The boys in BCB, as the building is commonly called are mainly morons and trouble makers here. The building also houses epileptics, who by nature are of a disposition to be hard to discipline at times. This man should also be willing to follow the orders and instructions of the doctors, supervisors and charge attendants without too many questions asked. He should be able to cooperate well in most all situations.

CPS men also learned about mental hospital and training school units through word of mouth and newsletters written by men in the units. Harold ("Hal") Barton recalled how he wound up in Philadelphia: "I recall reading an issue of the Unit# 49, Philadelphia State Hospital, paper in which the statement was made by one of the CPS-men that if additional help had been available 'George would not have died last night.' The thrust of my aspirations was to be life-giving and not taking and I believe it was that phrase that caused me to request assignment to the hospital 'where the need was greatest,' then considered to be either Philadelphia State Hospital (Byberry) or the Williamsburg State Hospital (Virginia)" (Barton, 1965).

COs had various motivations for applying for transfers to mental hospitals and training schools. Some, like Hal Barton, felt that they could address a pressing human need by working at an institution. Others found work at the camps to be meaningless or boring and wanted to be involved in more socially significant work. Quaker Warren Sawyer recalled being at the Buck Creek National Park Service camp in North Carolina: "I was extremely frustrated there. I preferred to be working with people" (Sawyer, 2007). Still other men applied to transfer to mental hospitals or training

schools for reasons unrelated to work at those units. Men's families could move to the cities or towns where the institutions were located, and many wives could easily find employment there. For men who had worked at camps in remote rural areas, the training school and mental hospital units also would enable them to return to living a semblance of a normal life. John Hostetler, a Mennonite, had entered the CPS from West Liberty, Ohio, and had worked at Soil Conservation Service camps in Wells Tannery, Pennsylvania, and Downey, Ohio. Transferring to the Greystone Park mental hospital in New Jersey represented "one step back into society again to live" (Hostetler, 1977). John Bartholomew, who entered the CPS as a Methodist and later became a Quaker, had accumulated a number of college credits prior to being sent to CPS camps in Kane, Pennsylvania, and Elkton, Oregon. He wanted to transfer to Byberry "to get back into civilization" and to obtain some experience and eventually pursue his education (J. Bartholomew, 2007).

Quite apart from the nature of the work itself, the mental hospital units differed from the work camps in one major way: payment of the expenses for CPS men and overhead. In the work camps, the church committees paid approximately $30 to $35 per month for room, board, and maintenance of the men, including a fee of $1.50 to $3.50 for men's personal expenses. The mental hospitals and training schools paid all of these expenses, in addition to the administrative costs of the church committees for the units. The monthly personal maintenance fee was initially $2.50 per month and was later increased to $10 to $15 per month. Out of this latter sum, men at some institutions were expected to pay for their standard white uniforms. The difference between the normal payment for institutional staff and the costs for the CPS men and unit administration was eventually turned over to the U.S. Treasury.

Mental hospitals and training schools were expected to pay for men's medical care and emergency dental care, expenses that the church committees paid for in the work camps. Some even covered worker's compensation.

By April 1, 1944, there were 1,863 men serving in CPS hospital units, including 115 in general hospitals ("Civilian Public Service Hospital Units," 1944). Mental hospital and training school units had between 15 and 95 COs, with Greystone Park State Hospital in New Jersey and Norristown and Philadelphia (Byberry) state hospitals in Pennsylvania having the highest number, 95 men. The population of men in CPS mental hospital and training school units grew throughout 1944 and reached its peak in 1945 (French, 1945). Byberry would eventually have approximately 135 COs working there. In September 1945, there were over 1,000 men in MCC mental hospital and training school units alone, and by the end of 1945, 1,500 men had served in these Mennonite units (Gingerich, 1949).

The religious composition of men in CPS mental hospital units paralleled that of the work camps: MCC units had mostly Mennonites; BSC units

**Figure 12.2**   CO pouring drinks for patients during a meal, state hospital, Marlboro, New Jersey. Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Archives.

were typically split between Brethren and non-Brethren; AFSC units had a minority of Friends.

Most men assigned to the mental hospital and training school units served as attendants and worked directly on the wards with patients, although some also worked as cooks, lab technicians, farm supervisors, therapists, social workers, teachers, physicians, psychologists, engineers, and in other roles. Figure 12.2 shows a CO at work, serving patients during a meal. At the MCC units at Mt. Pleasant State Hospital and Cleveland State Hospital in 1945, 29 out of 33 and 30 out of 45 COs worked as attendants, respectively (Mishler, 1945). At the BSC unit in Marion, Virginia, in 1945, 23 of the 37 men worked as attendants, while 19 of the 30 men at the BSC Mansfield unit were attendants ("Civilian Public Service Unit 109," 1945). The MCC unit at Tiffin State Institute in Ohio was an exception to other CPS units in that none of the 20 men there worked as attendants ("CPS Unit 147," 1945). All of them did maintenance or farm work at the institution.

The COs who worked as attendants were the ones who did the really hard jobs.

The mental hospital and training school units were administered by an institutional superintendent, who reported to the Selective Service regarding the CPS men, and an assistant director or unit leader, who was responsible to the church committee sponsoring the unit. The superintendent had authority over the men's work, and the assistant director ostensibly was in charge of the men's educational and religious experiences and their nonwork hours.

The institutional superintendents had far greater authority over CPS men than the technical supervisors in the work camps. Mental hospital and training school superintendents set the number of hours the men worked, and some expected COs to work long hours, without any form of compensation. Since COs were expected to live on the grounds, they were under the constant scrutiny of the superintendents and other officials.

Superintendents varied greatly in the degree to which they exercised authority and control over the lives of the CPS men. Reform-minded super-intendents such as Charles Zeller at Byberry, John Ross at Poughkeepsie (Hudson River State Hospital), and E. H. Crawfis at Cleveland State Hospital, when the unit was under the MCC, seemed to appreciate the sincerity and commitment of the COs and their nonviolent handling of patients and gave them relatively free rein in their off-duty hours. Ross was accused of favoring COs when he fired four regular attendants accused of abuse by some COs at the hospital, and this was probably true. Zeller left it to the CO assistant director to handle many Selective Service directives issued to superintendents. Crawfis let MCC assistant director Paul L. Goering supervise the CPS men and put Goering's desk in the same office as the regular supervisor (Goering, 1975). Goering did not concern himself with COs' off-duty hours, and this was apparently satisfactory to Crawfis.

Other superintendents tended to run their institutions with an iron fist and kept COs under tight control. Dr. C. C. Atherton was the superintendent of Southern Wisconsin Colony and Training School, which housed an MCC unit. According to the assistant director, Arthur Weaver, COs were frequently called into Atherton's office for discipline (Weaver, 1945). Two men were pun-ished with a loss of 7 days' furlough for visiting in their quarters while they were off duty. Weaver explained what happened on another occasion:

> The Superintendent visited a ward without advance notice and found one of the fellows sitting in a chair. The patients were in bed and the work was completed for the night. The CPS man, not knowing who the visitor was, did not rise to his feet when the charge attendant stood up. The Superintendent ordered the fel-low to his feet with a command to rise in the presence of his superior officer. The fellow then explained that in his two months of service in the institution he had never been given the opportunity to see or meet his "superior officer" and there-fore did not know who his superior officer was. The scolding that followed was tempered by this fact but the incident was illustrative of the relationship which existed between the Superintendent and the members of the unit throughout the entire history of the unit.

The assistant directors at CPS hospital units communicated confidentially with their respective church committees on a regular basis. They prepared frequent reports on the units, addressing relations with superintendents and staff, unit morale, public relations, and any problems experienced within

the unit. Representatives of the church committees gave them guidance on running the units and advised them on how to handle difficult situations. Assistant directors and the units themselves communicated with each other on CPS matters. Many of the letters were marked "Confidential: For CPS Men Only."

For the church committees, the CPS program had an explicit educational and religious mission. CPS men were accepted into AFSC, BSC, MCC, and other church-sponsored committees not merely to perform jobs—some meaningful and some not—but to confirm their commitment to religious principles or pacifist beliefs. Outside speakers appeared regularly at CPS camps and units.

Superintendents at state mental hospitals and training schools were used to having control over everything that occurred on the institutions' grounds. Some treated COs at their institutions accordingly, and some assistant directors of CPS units accepted this. What a number of superintendents would learn was that they could not always control COs at their institutions.

Relations between the COs, as conscientious objectors, and the others at the institutions and the people in the communities in which the institutions were located had their ups and downs. The superintendents of the mental hospitals and training schools had requested the COs and were generally tolerant of the COs' beliefs. Some were concerned about public relations and did not want anything to happen that would stir up opposition to the COs. Prior to the establishment of the MCC unit at Mt. Pleasant State Hospital, John M. Moseman visited the institution and reported on the superintendent's attitude: "The Superintendent takes a very cautious attitude regarding any possible public reaction to the presence of conscientious objectors in the state institution" (Moseman, 1943).

The initial reactions of other staff at the mental hospitals and training schools ranged from indifference to hostility. Many attendants and other employees did not agree with or even understand the views of the COs, but were willing to work with them. A description of the American Baptist Home Missions Society unit at Eastern Shore State Hospital read: "Other employees are not in sympathy with the conscientious objector's stand, but they are cooperative and friendly" ("CPS Unit #74," 1945). A report from the assistant director of the BSC unit at Norwich State Hospital indicated that relations with other staff and the community were quite good: "The relations with other employees and with the community have been very good at Norwich. Of course there are many who are bitter and can not hide the fact, but it is surprising how well accepted we are" (Harkey, 1945).

Some staff at the institutions wanted nothing to do with the COs. At Augusta State Hospital, relations between the COs and regular employees

were generally good, but an incident occurred with a drunken worker at the institution:

> Thomas has been working in the kitchen temporarily; and some weeks ago one of the painters came in at noon, rather drunk, and proceeded to make a nuisance of himself. Among other things, he objected to being served at the counter by a CO.... This man had worked here over twenty years; and his "gang," the painters, the engineers, etc. have entertained some antipathy towards the C.O.'s from the beginning it seems. (Underwood, 1945)

When controversies arose at the hospitals or training schools or COs reported substandard conditions or incidents of abuse by regular attendants, relations with other employees soured quickly. This happened at Cleveland State Hospital, Mt. Pleasant State Hospital, Hudson River State Hospital, and elsewhere. The COs were sometimes able to restore positive relations and sometimes were not.

At a small number of institutions, some patients challenged the conscientious objectors or even ridiculed them, although they might have been put up to this by hostile employees. At Vineland Training School, COs on the MCC unit had some problems being accepted by the patients: "At first we experienced some very definite opposition from the children. This situation was aggravated by propaganda purposefully distributed by certain employees" ("Description of C.P.S. Unit #92," 1945). A history of the MCC unit at Western State Hospital in Virginia described what happened when COs first arrived at the institution: "Soon a crowd of patients and on-lookers had gathered to see the new curiosities. We heard remarks of, 'slackers,' 'draft dodger,' 'yellow bellies,' and from one of the wards, 'I just dare you to come up on this ward and work you conscientious objector, you! Do you object to work too?'" (G. L. C., 1945). Any resentment of or opposition to the COs by patients dissipated almost as soon as they started working.

Community relations for the CPS mental hospital units were generally good. Many local churches of various faiths invited the COs to their services, and local ministers occasionally visited the units. Every now and then, an incident occurred involving community members and COs. At Southern Wisconsin Colony and Training School in Union Grove, the director of the MCC unit did not exactly receive an open-arms welcome from a prominent local citizen: "Early in the history of the unit, the director, John Ewert, was called to the private office of the banker of Union Grove and told that the people of Union Grove did not like CO's [sic] and did not want to see them on the streets and even suggested that the irritated citizens might resort to a neck-tie party" (Weaver, 1945). Neil Hartman recalled taking a bus to and from Byberry: "Since we were young it was obvious we were COs. People behind us would talk about seeing the yellow streak down our backs.

A couple times we got off the bus and other people got off and stepped on our heels which was very irritating" (Hartman, 2007). Most people in Philadelphia were tolerant, remembered Ward Miles, but "you had to watch out for some bus drivers who might come over the curb to try to hit you" (Miles, 2007).

COs were invariably drawn into any public controversy surrounding an institution. State and local chapters of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars were always looking for evidence that COs were being coddled, as in the case of men who lived with their wives, and tried to arouse public indignation whenever they could.

The mental hospitals and training schools operated as self-contained communities, with their own powerhouses, kitchens, laundries, farms and dairies, administrative offices, and medical facilities and laboratories as well as residence buildings and therapeutic, recreational, or educational facilities. Mt. Pleasant State Hospital in Iowa was typical of the institutions: "The institution generates it's [sic] own power, has it's [sic] own bakery, a laundry, a carpenter shop, paint shop, machine shop, fire department, telephone system, greenhouse, gardens, and farms" (Mishler, 1945). The concept of "total institutions," developed by sociologist Erving Goffman (1961, p. xiii) to describe a broad range of seemingly different types of organizations, captured the essence of the state hospitals and schools: "A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (see, for example, Figure 12.3). Self-reliant and isolated, total institutions developed their own routines and rhythms of life. Both staff and patients could be said to be institutionalized.

The institutions at which CPS units were established varied greatly in size. Byberry, or Philadelphia State Hospital, was one of the largest, if not the largest, with approximately 6,100 patients (American Friends Service Committee, 1944). Eastern Shore State Hospital in Maryland, with 500 patients, and Vineland Training School, with 550 patients, were among the smallest ("Description of C.P.S. #92," 1945; "Eastern Shore State Hospital, CPS Unit #74," 1945). Most mental hospitals and training schools ranged in size from around 1,000 to roughly 5,000 patients.

CPS men were required by the Selective Service to live on the grounds of the mental hospitals and training schools, although exceptions were granted and some men broke the rules, with or without the knowledge of assistant directors and superintendents. It was not uncommon for non-CPS hospital and training school staff to live at the institutions. Superintendents usually had their own, often lavish, houses complete with patient domestic workers. Physicians and nurses often had their residences. So did attendants. Free or cut-rate room and board were offered to attendants to off-set low wages

**Figure 12.3**   COs taking patients for a walk, Cleveland State Hospital. Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Archives.

generally ranging between $50 and $100 per month. Staff residences were separated by gender, with separate buildings for men and women employees.

Most COs were housed in staff residences or converted patient buildings or cottages. The living quarters were usually a step up from the generally old, drafty, and cold barracks at CPS work camps. Men at Hudson River State Hospital, Norwich State Hospital, Mansfield State Training School, Eastern Shore State Hospital, Harrisburg State Hospital, and other institutions lived in single or double rooms.

At other mental hospitals and training schools men lived in dormitories or a combination of single or double rooms and dormitories (Underwood, 1945). The CPS unit at Tiffin State Institute in Ohio was given two cottages that had space for sleeping quarters, a kitchen, a dining room, a reading room, and an enclosed porch ("CPS Unit 147," 1945). At Byberry, the CPS men lived in dormitories in former patient cottages. Men slept in bunkbeds, pushed closely together with about 18 inches between them (Miles, 2007; Stark, 2007). A separate cramped room was set aside for lockers containing their personal possessions.

Institutions that had residences for staff or CPS men usually also provided at least some housing for married COs whose wives worked there (Augusta, Byberry, Cleveland, Eastern Shore, Ypsilanti, and others). When housing was offered to married couples, it was usually, but not always, located in separate residences or women's staff housing.

At some institutions, housing for the COs was woefully inadequate. During the first year of operation of the CPS unit at Southern Wisconsin

Colony and Training School, many men and even some of their wives had quarters on patient wards (Weaver, 1945). Late in the second year, a frame cottage was built to house 10 married couples and 11 single men. When 19 CPS men arrived at Western State Hospital in Staunton, Virginia, in August 1942, there was no housing for them. Men slept on the wards on which they worked. Emory Layman, one of the COs in the unit, described his first night at the institution:

> My room was used as the attendant's office for supplies and patients' medicines. It was a long, narrow room with two beds and one window. A whiskey patient who worked on the ward had the other bed at the window. I had no privacy at all and there was practically no place to put any of my belongings except for a very crude wardrobe; therefore I didn't unpack.
>
> I shall never forget that first night. The door to my room was to be left open to the ward so the night attendant could come in for supplies, etc. I found the patients very annoying—most of them being locked, of course—but their noise carried to my room all too easily. My bed was next to an old built-in open wardrobe, where old suits of patients were stored, with only a curtain for a door. Soon after I was settled in bed the rats began to stir, one running over my pillow. I was wondering whether to go to sleep and not mind the rats or to get up, when I felt a few bits [sic] and then it dawned on me that there were bed-bugs at hand. I got out of bed and dressed. The night attendant didn't know what to do so I sat up with him until the night watchman came through the ward at two or three o'clock in the morning. He put me in a room that had a mattress on the floor, but there were no bed-bugs and I finally got a little sleep. That was my first day. (G. L. C., 1945)

CPS men ate their meals at employee cafeterias, sometimes among themselves and sometimes with other staff, depending on the degree to which they had been accepted. Food was described as being from poor to good. Meals usually did not include fresh fruit and vegetables, were lacking in variety, and were starchy. At their best, meals were described as "institutional" ("Description of Unit #71," 1945).

CPS men working as attendants were assigned exclusively to male buildings and wards. The mental hospitals and training schools were separated by gender. Men and women—or boys and girls, if the institution held minors—lived in separate buildings, which were staffed by members of the same gender. At most institutions, one could draw an imaginary line down the middle for men's and women's buildings. This reflected a long-standing institutional practice of separating men and women to prevent the possibility of sexual relations (Wolfensberger, 1975). At some institutions the only buildings or wards not separated by gender were wards for people who were physically ill.

Mental hospitals maintained different male and female buildings for different types of patients or for different purposes. The buildings might have

had official names such as male/female "infirmary ward," male/female "disturbed ward," male/female "receiving ward," male/female "convalescent ward," male/female "continued care" ward, and "physically ill ward" (CPS Unit 63, "Anniversary Review," 1945). Names commonly used by institutional staff and CPS men to refer to buildings included: admissions; incontinents or untidy patients; violent or dangerous patients or punishment wards; senile patients; worker patients; infirmaries, including non-ambulatory patients confined to bed; and sometimes alcoholics and tubercular patients. It was not unusual for people with different conditions to be mixed in together, however.

Training schools usually had separate wards for "high grades" and "low grades"—or "morons," "imbeciles," and "idiots"—and children and adults, as well as males and females. Southern Wisconsin Colony and Training School had wards for "small morons, imbeciles age 8 to 16," "large morons, workers," "babies, sick, crippled, small imbeciles and idiots," and "large morons, large idiots, and punishment cases," with separate wards for males and females (Weaver, 1945). A single building housed male and female tubercular patients.

Each building or ward at the institutions had a charge attendant and sometimes an assistant charge attendant. The charge attendant was usually called the charge, and this title was used at institutions well into the 1970s (Taylor, 1977). As the name implies, the charge supervised the ward and directed the work of other attendants. Some CPS men eventually served as charges, especially when wards or buildings were staffed mostly or solely by CPS men.

Working hours at CPS mental hospital and training school units varied widely. Men assigned to work as cooks, lab technicians, farm foremen, and similar positions usually worked 8 hours per day, 5, 5$\frac{1}{2}$, or 6 days per week. For CPS men working as attendants, schedules and work hours depended on the individual mental hospital or training school. At most institutions, men worked 8- to 12-hour shifts, 6 or 7 days a week. Men often rotated shifts.

COs worked excessively long hours at some institutions. During the first year of the MCC unit at Western State Hospital in Virginia, men worked 75 to 84 hours per week, although the hours were reduced to 60 and then 54 per week in later years (G. L. C., 1945). In 1945, COs at an AFSC unit at Eastern State Hospital at Williamsburg, Virginia, rebelled against a 79-hour work week imposed by the superintendent, Dr. Barrett (French, 1945). Five men refused to work, and four new arrivals "went out and got drunk and were not there to handle their wards."

The vast majority of CPS men knew next to nothing about mental hospitals and training schools before arriving at the institutions. The institutions themselves usually did little to help them adjust to their new jobs. Men often received nothing more than a welcome or a quick tour of the building or unit

to which they had been assigned. One of the original groups of COs assigned to Southern Wisconsin Colony and Training School explained:

> We were given a key and commanded to report at a certain ward building. No instructions of any kind were given in advance. Months later we received the hospital rules. We learned by making mistakes and being corrected in militant fashion. We took advise [sic] from patients and occasionally a word from a charge attendant whose methods we were not always willing to take. It is not exaggerated to say we lived in fear. (Weaver, 1945)

COs at the MCC unit at Virginia's Western State Hospital had bad living quarters, bad food, bad working conditions—and no orientation or training—when they arrived in August 1942. Emory Layman wrote, "The day we arrived we were placed on various jobs over the institution within an hour after our arrival. Most of us going on wards, my lot being an untidy one . . . . No instruction was given on how to handle the mental patients or what to expect or who to contact in case we wanted advise [sic]" (G. L. C., 1945).

Ralph Delk (1945) described the training offered to employees at Mansfield State Training School as of August 1945:

> Training here consists of the supervisor giving a new attendant his keys and telling him to keep his eyes open and keep things clean and the patients well taken care of—see that they have clothes on and don't get rough with them. From there on the program is one of 'learn by experience' and if something is done wrong the attendant catches 'hell.' After so much hell some of them leave.

Norwich State Hospital initiated a "Program of Attendant Instruction for Conscientious Objectors" in August 1943 (Norwich State Hospital, 1943). The training program involved a 3-month course taught by the superintendent, the clinical director, the director of nursing, the assistant director of nursing in charge of education, the director of psychological laboratories, and the head occupational therapist. The written curriculum for the course noted that members of the hospital staff had faculty appointments at Yale University, Wesleyan University, and the University of Connecticut. COs received 60 hours of theoretical work on topics such as the etiology of psychiatric disorders and the social problems associated with mental illness and 588 hours of practical work on men's wards and in clinical services. Yet, by October 16, 1943, the assistant director at Norwich reported that training was no longer being provided to new CPS arrivals:

> The first group of men to arrive were given training in the work of an attendant, but the recent scattered arrivals have had no such training. An effort is being made to get the men included in some of the training given to student nurses. The hospital has a reputation for its educational standards, but it is limited at present by the personnel shortage. Much can be learned through experience. (Harkey, 1943, p. 1)

At Byberry, some training was offered to the COs, but not necessarily when they first arrived at the mental hospital. Hal Barton recalled in a September 5, 1966, account of his time at Byberry:

> I came to the mental hospital about as ignorant of the whole field of mental illness as anyone could be. It was over a month before I received an orientation or training course planned by the hospital for new employees. All CPS-men took the course but it was not unusual for regular employees to avoid the training for many months or sometimes years . . . . The attitudes and methods used had to be gleaned from fellow-CPSers who had already had a few months of ward experience or from regular attendants. Sometimes the attitudes and methods of the two groups seemed at opposite poles and this was a bit confusing for the newcomer. (Barton, 1966)

The mental hospitals and training schools did not always offer training to CPS men, and even when they did, the training often came after the men had started their work at the institutions. More important, it was difficult to see how any of the training that was provided would help the COs in their jobs on the wards. Theories about mental illness and the need for prevention of insanity and mental deficiency had little, if anything, to do with the realities of the mental hospitals and training schools. Even information about current therapies and treatment approaches would be almost impossible to apply at the institutions. As Hal Barton explained, "We were presented with the latest insights into the nature, the care, the treatment of mental illness. Our instruction was on a high and idealistic level. The contrast between the ideal and the practical day-to-day ward situation was so striking as to be upsetting to say the least" (Barton, 1966).

No amount of training could have prepared the COs for what most would see, hear, and smell when they first stepped onto the wards of the mental hospitals and training schools. Conditions on the wards stood in stark contrast to the stately exteriors of the buildings and manicured grounds of the institutions. COs often were shocked and depressed by the wards. Paul L. Goering recalled his first impression of Howard State Hospital in Rhode Island: "My initial reaction was one of shock. I didn't realize and couldn't believe that these conditions would exist in our country" (Goering, 1975). John Bartholomew remembered his reaction to Byberry, "I was very depressed at first to think that the government treated human beings like that" (J. Bartholomew, 2007). Charlie Lord felt a similar way when he first showed up at Byberry: "The buildings looked good. When I got inside I was shocked" (Lord, 2007). Many years later, the stench of some of the buildings stood out in the minds of some Byberry COs.

The institutions were terribly overcrowded and understaffed. Most had many more patients than their official capacities, and these capacities would have made them overcrowded by today's standards for residential facilities. Mt. Pleasant State Hospital had a capacity of 1,100 patients, but housed 1,600;

Southern Wisconsin Colony and Training School was built to house 545 patients, but had 800; Hudson River State Hospital had a certified capacity of 4,131 patients and held over 5,000 ("Hudson River State Hospital," 1945; Mishler, 1945; Weaver, 1945). These statistics do not adequately capture the degree of overcrowding on some of the wards at the institutions. At Byberry, over 300 patients in some of the buildings spent their days in rooms approximately 40 feet by 70 feet, while at Mansfield State Training School as many as 105 to 110 patients were crowded into rooms 30 feet by 25 feet (Delk, 1945; Sawyer, 2007).

The mental hospitals and training schools had severe labor shortages. Hudson River State Hospital had over 250 attendant vacancies alone (Shank, 1945). To care for 1,600 patients, Mt. Pleasant had 66 attendants, compared to a normal complement of 125 (Moseman, 1943). Byberry had 110 vacancies out of 179 positions for male attendants and one paid attendant on duty each shift for 144 patients at the 6,100-patient mental hospital (Zeller, 1943). Even after COs arrived at the institutions, wards were extremely short staffed: often one attendant for 105 to 110 patients at Mansfield (Delk, 1945). Soon after COs started working at Byberry, there were usually one to three or four attendants for over 350 patients in the "violent" building (Barton, 1966). When the CPS unit was at its peak in number of COs, there were usually six or seven attendants during the early day shift and five attendants on the 2:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. shift in that building (Sawyer, 1945).

The attendants' jobs primarily involved keeping the wards clean and orderly and the patients from injuring themselves or others. A description of one building at Hudson River State Hospital provided a candid appraisal of the COs' efforts: "Our efforts were concentrated on giving better and kinder treatment to the patients and to keep the ward as clean as possible under the circumstances" (Linscheid, n.d.). The description did not try to hide the COs' frustration: "I'm sure we all chafed under this necessity of giving only custodial care and we were all keenly aware of the improvements that could be instituted with more attendant help, more supplies and better facilities." An information sheet on Augusta State Hospital described the attendants' work: "This work is often hard and even dirty and is seldom glamorous. There is much of changing of soiled clothing and bedding, and bathing and shaving and feeding of persons who are likely to be revolting at first sight" (Underwood, 1943).

Most attendants had little time to provide any kind of therapy, training, or even recreation to patients. A group of COs at Howard State Hospital who called themselves the Committee for Improvement of Patient Care described conditions on the wards: "On wards, for instance, where 250 patients are cared for by three or four, often two, day attendants, and one night attendant, it is easy to visualize the breakdown of routine which must inevitably occur . . . . The few attendants whose duty it is to care for these patients cannot possibly give individual attention to 250 patients" (Committee for

Improvement of Daily Care, n.d.). Hal Barton characterized the attendant's job at Byberry: "The routines of housekeeping, feeding and medication for the patients took almost all we could give to the job. The hours were long and the work sufficiently exhausting, physically and mentally, that during these first few months there seemed little time for anything but the ward duty, eating and sleeping" (Barton, 1966). A small number of attendants assisted in providing shock therapy to the few patients who received it at some mental hospitals.

The conditions at some mental hospitals and training schools were worse than others, but none had good conditions. Paul L. Goering was a CO at the MCC unit at Howard, Rhode Island, before moving to Cleveland State Hospital to become assistant director of the MCC unit there (Goering, 1975). Cleveland had a reputation of being one of the worst mental hospitals, and Howard was probably one of the better ones. Both were depressing. Goering described Howard:

> They were modern buildings with modern equipment. The concepts of treatment were not very modern. They certainly didn't have the staff to carry them out. So there seemed to be very little treatment. It was custodial care. This was the depressing thing . . . . We were not encouraged and in some cases not allowed to take initiatives to do things for the patients. The charge man where I worked lined the chairs up around the perimeter of the room and wanted it quiet . . . . He didn't like it when I brought a radio in and got patients to sing. He said, "You're stirring them up. Don't do that." Of course, I'd do it when he was off, when he was away and he didn't like it that I'd do those things.

Goering had this to say about Cleveland State Hospital:

> In Cleveland, the physical setting was very poor . . . . There was nothing modern about it. We were fighting cockroaches, and cleanliness was a thing. And filth. We had incontinent patients . . . . But I have to say the boredom and the feeling of oppression and depression was very overwhelming. You'd have to struggle as a worker not to succumb to all of this yourself.

Conditions at Byberry were thoroughly documented by COs at the AFSC unit there. A and B Buildings on the men's side of Byberry were the worst at the institution (see Figure 12.4), and many COs worked there. At times, they were staffed exclusively by COs. Each building housed roughly 325 to 350 patients. A Building was known as the building for incontinents ("incontinents are patients who do not control their excretory functions"):

> Of the 350 patients in "A" Building, about 250 are classed as this type. One result is to make the building a dirty place. You can expect to see feces in wards, or the dining hall at any time . . . . Naturally also, the incontinent's [sic] beds are soiled night after night, the day room floor is dirtied, and despite constant efforts and improvements, a certain aroma lingers in the atmosphere. (Untitled report, 1944)

**Figure 12.4**   Patients in A Building, Philadelphia State Hospital. Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

Most of the patients in A building spent their days in a large 40 feet by 70 feet barren dayroom. The dayroom sometimes had a couple wooden benches. Most of the patients were forced to lie or sit on the floor or walk aimlessly around the room. Clothing, bed linens, and cleaning materials were in short supply in A Building. Most patients were usually naked. On cold winter nights, many patients slept on rubber mattresses, with only a sheet to cover them. Sometimes there were not enough sheets to go around.

Head lice and especially crab lice were commonplace among A Building patients. On August, 23, 1943, attendants found 35 cases among the dayroom patients (Stevenson & Marsh, 1943). The patients' heads were shaven on a regular basis.

B Building was the "violent" ward at Byberry. It also was used as a "punishment" ward for patients who tried to escape from the institution, got into fights with other patients, or had what one CO called "sex irregularities" (Greenleaf, 1944). The ward had one large dayroom for patients, a small hydrotherapy room with tubs for six or so patients when equipment was working and enough attendants were present, and a "restraint" room where 15 to 30 patients were kept tied or strapped in bed. These latter patients were even fed in bed. In 1944, two to four attendants were usually on duty during the day shift ending at 2:00 p.m., with fewer staff during other hours (FB,

1944). The number of attendants had increased by 1945, when additional COs had been sent to Byberry.

"Violent" was an apt description for B Building. Gangs formed in B Building, and fights were common. In his letters home, Warren Sawyer referred to the "gore story" of the week and many of the stories came from B Building: "Two weeks ago a patient was killed in B. Bldg. by another patient when he was struck over the head with a broom handle" (Sawyer, 1944).

It was not unusual for patients in B Building to have weapons. Years later, John Bartholomew recalled a patient in B Building who continued to free himself from being strapped in bed (J. Bartholomew, 2007). The patient had cut the straps with a piece of a razor blade hidden in his anus. Sawyer wrote home about a weapons search in B Building at the time:

> This week in B Building, the slaughterhouse pen, a complete search was made of the building for knives and razors etc. Such articles were found in beds, inside mattresses, razor blades hidden in anises (don't know about that spelling) pieces of blades hidden in mouths, a hack saw hidden in a mattress and a couple of knives. These weapons are found everywhere. (Sawyer, 1945)

B Building was chronically short in the supply of clothes, linens, and cleaning materials. The shortage of restraining cuffs and sheets was a common complaint among the CO attendants.

B Building was a difficult place at which to work. COs were frequently injured by patients: "Three of our fellows have had tough times of it in B Bldg. One man got all scratched up in the face and arms"; "A couple of our men have received some good stiff blows this past week from various patients"; "One of the new men came in yesterday with a big bandage wrapped around his head and his glasses smashed to nothing. One of the patients took a leg off his bed and knocked him over the head with it" (Sawyer, 1944, 1945). Hal Barton (1966) was hospitalized after being injured by a patient in B Building.

Their work as attendants was stressful to many of the COs. The conditions at the institutions were often depressing and shocking. The deplorable conditions as well as the brutality of many of the regular attendants would lead COs to form a national movement to reform the institutions. Yet, decades later, similar conditions could be found at America's mental hospitals and training schools for people with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities (Blatt & Kaplan, 1966; Goffman, 1961; Rothman & Rothman, 2005; Taylor, 1977).

N O T E

1. Taylor (2009, pp. 174–212), reprinted here with the permission of Syracuse University Press. National Public Radio aired a story based on this book in December 2009 (see Shapiro, 2009: http://www.npr.org /templates/story/story.php?storyId=122017757).

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# Closing Remarks

Oᴜʀ ᴘᴜʀᴘᴏsᴇ ɪɴ ᴛʜɪs ʙᴏᴏᴋ has been to introduce qualitative research as an approach to phenomenological understanding. Any book can take you only so far; it is up to you to carry on.

Not everyone can excel in the research approach we have described. Early practitioners suggested that marginal persons, ones caught between two cultures, might have the greatest potential to become good qualitative researchers, since they possess the detachment from societal norms and assumptions this kind of research requires. In our experience, people with a diverse range of backgrounds and interests have become successful qualitative researchers. Yet all who do well have had an ability to relate to others on their own terms. They have also shared a passion about what they do. It excites them to be out in the world and to develop an understanding of different settings and people. For some, research becomes part of life, part of living. Research methods can be dull and unexciting, however, if they are learned in a classroom or studied behind a desk. Qualitative research is a craft that can only be learned and appreciated through experience. It requires skills and a devotion that must be developed and nurtured in the real world.

Many, if not most, people who pursue studies in the social sciences and applied fields are not lured to these studies by the kind of work that often appears in academic journals and publications. Although the culture of the university makes it difficult to admit, many students come with a desire to understand their world and to make it better. These do-gooders, along with the idealistic types, are often intimidated by the academic world. This situation must change if the social sciences are to play important roles in the university and the society.

Throughout this book we have described qualitative methodology as an approach to gaining basic social science knowledge and understanding. This is not the only way in which this methodology can be used.

There is a long tradition of action research linked to qualitative studies in the social sciences (Madge, 1953; Stringer, 1996). Indeed, the Chicago school researchers, led by Robert Park, sought to change conditions in urban slums through their incisive field reports and studies (Hughes, 1971). On the basis of Taylor and Bogdan's research at state institutions for the so-called mentally retarded or intellectually disabled, they have prepared in-depth descriptive reports of institutional abuse and neglect for federal courts, the popular media, policy makers, and organizations composed of people with disabilities and their families. DeVault has studied the gendered nature of family life, in which the work of women is taken for granted and invisible, in an attempt to contribute to the questioning of gender roles that has been central to feminist activism.

Howard Becker (1966–1967) argued that researchers cannot avoid taking sides in their studies. Research is never values free (Gouldner, 1968, 1970; Mills, 1959). When we get close to people, especially those whom society considers inferior or deviant, we develop a deep empathy with them. We learn that official views of morality present only one side of the picture. Becker took the position that we should side with society's underdogs, those who do not have a forum for their views. By presenting such people's views, we provide a balance to official versions of reality.

Becker's argument fell squarely in line with C. Wright Mills's call to action, expressed in his classic book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). For Mills (1959), the role of the sociologist, and hence the qualitative researcher, is to help people translate their "personal troubles" into "public issues":

> Whether or not they are aware of them, men in a mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues . . . . It is the political task of the social scientist . . . continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. (p. 187)

Writing decades later, Richardson (1990b) continued the tradition of advocating the activist stance endorsed by Becker, Mills, and the Chicago school researchers and Creswell (2012) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) emphasized the social justice tradition in qualitative research. According to Richardson (1990b), the researcher is in an ideal position to help people tell their collective stories:

> People who belong to a particular category can develop a consciousness of kind and can galvanize other category members through the telling of the collective story. People do not even have to know each other for the social identification to take hold. By emotionally binding together people who have had the same experiences, whether in touch with each other or not, the collective story overcomes

some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life. It provides a sociological community, the linking of separate individuals into a shared consciousness. Once linked, the possibility for social action on behalf of the collective is present, and, therewith, the possibility of societal transformation. (p. 26)

Richardson's words resonate with areas of scholarly inquiry that did not exist when the first edition of this book was published: feminist research and gender studies; African American, Latino, and other ethnic studies; LGBT studies; disability studies; and others representing groups of people who have been marginalized in society. These areas have pushed qualitative research to move beyond advocating for what Becker called society's underdogs to move marginalized persons to the center of inquiry.

Qualitative studies have been conducted since the beginning of what we now call the social sciences. Yet up until the past couple of decades, those who have practiced qualitative research have been few. This has changed, and interest in qualitative research continues to grow. We have reached a point where we now have many schools of thought and practice within the qualitative tradition.

We conclude by repeating a call, issued roughly 40 years ago in the first edition of this book, to go to the people—for students of society to immerse themselves in everyday life and to contribute new insights and understandings. So much more remains to be learned, and many are needed to carry out the work.

# Field Notes

T<small>HIS APPENDIX CONTAINS</small> examples of two sets of field notes. The first set is an excerpt from DeVault's study of family visits to the zoo. This study is reported in Chapter 9. The second set comes from Taylor's study of the Duke family, which is reported in Chapter 8. Taylor used the same title for both this set of field notes and the article reported in Chapter 8. Often the titles of qualitative articles and books are quotes that researchers recorded during their fieldwork. The phrase "You're not a retard, you're just wise" in these field notes aided Taylor's theorizing about the meaning of disability labels among members of the Dukes' family and social network. These edited field notes are approximately half the length of the notes Taylor originally recorded. Observations and conversations that turned out not to be significant after the analysis in this study have been eliminated from these notes.

### FIELD NOTE EXCERPT

M<small>ARJORIE</small> L. D<small>E</small>V<small>AULT</small>

*Introduction*

These notes provide one example of "naturalistic" observation in a public space (Adler & Adler, 1994). They were recorded by DeVault for her project on family visits to the zoo (see Chapter 9). These few pages represent 10 to 15 minutes of observation, excerpted from a longer session of about 60 minutes. The notes reflect several issues that had come to the fore in previous

observations, including the management of children's emotions and parents' use of equipment such as strollers, wagons, backpacks, and so forth.

The researcher spent a good deal of time reflecting on the conceptual issues of studying family groups naturalistically—how does one know that a group of adults and children are really a family? Eventually, she gave herself permission to label those she saw as mothers or fathers, when that seemed likely—but noted that she would need to address those issues when writing up the research. She also tried to record carefully the likely ethnic identities of those she encountered, even though she realized that visual identification might not be accurate. (Note, however, that although she identifies almost all of the parents' ethnicities, she leaves the children unmarked. One can label that omission a mistake, but upon reflection it can also serve as a powerful reminder of an aspect of family ideology: the assumption of racial homogeneity.)

By the time she took these notes, DeVault was convinced that the most interesting thing she was seeing was children's induction or socialization into collective practices of seeing. She had learned that many parents reported bringing children to the zoo so that they could see "the real animal." The O.C., or observer's comment, at the end of this excerpt summarized what she felt at the time was an exciting insight and a nice extension of the general idea of learning to see and experience "the real animal."

*Notes*
**Field notes from the zoo. A Sunday morning.**
. . . Around the corner, the petting area is open, with sheep and goats in a little fenced-in barnyard area. I stop and lean on the fence for a while, watching. (O.C. I seem to be able to just stand here without attracting undue notice.) There are two volunteers (teen boys, one looks Black and one White) stationed at the gate next to me. As people walk by, one of them asks, "Would you like to come in?" Then they instruct people to leave their strollers by the gate (often adding, "We'll watch it for you"), and say, "Don't feed them." If anyone is carrying a bottle or can, they tell them not to put it down on the ground, as the animals might grab or poke at it. (O.C. There's a rote, artificial character to these exchanges; the young men speak quickly so they're a little hard to understand, but they seem to me to be sincere, just a bit awkward.) Whenever a group leaves the area, one of them says, "Thank you for coming." (O.C. I have the impression that they're working assiduously at doing what they've been told. They always include all of these instructions, generally with a little pause in between, so that listeners appear to keep thinking the exchange is over and then looking a little surprised at the next utterance. But even though some of the visitors look a bit confused, they respond politely, nodding and following instructions. In between visitors the guys chat a bit. The White boy says he's going to leave early—something about needing to be home.

The Black boy asks, "Can't you get here on the bus?" and he says no, he has to drive. During the time I stand here, there's always at least one stroller sitting near them in this entrance area, and often two.

Inside the enclosure, there's an African American girl—about 10 or 12—standing against the fence, just watching. A few minutes later I figured out that she's another volunteer. She came up to the guys at the gate and tried to get their attention, by calling, "Hello-o." They ignored her, so she repeated several times, with increasing annoyance, "Hello-o. Hello-o. Hello-O!" Finally, they noticed her and she said, "__ wants me to go . . . " apparently referring to a zoo worker who was faintly visible inside the barn. I didn't hear their reply; a few minutes later, this zoo worker (a White woman) came over and asked if they could "handle things" for a while—I guess while the girl did something else. She added, "We're only open another 25 minutes (till noon, I notice). Then we'll go to lunch."

There's also an African American woman in the enclosure, late 20s or 30s, wearing a Walkman radio with headphones, who is studying the sheep intently. She moves on to the goats, then comes back and leans down tentatively to pet the sheep.

The African American mother and girl from the pig stall come into the enclosure (leaving their stroller by the gate), and walk around looking at the animals. The girl looks a bit shy, and I don't see her touch any of the animals.

The parents with the screaming child come in too (he's still crying), take a quick tour around the area, and then leave. They sort of go through the motions, stopping at each animal, pointing the crying child toward it, and speaking to him—with no apparent response—and then moving on. They're looking rather grim as they put him back into the stroller and head off; he's still screaming.

A White man carries a little boy, about 2, over to the sheep, and sets him down nearby. The boy doesn't seem very interested at first, and sort of picks at the straw lying on the ground. His dad pets the sheep, and says, "See the sheep? Want to pet the sheep?" Eventually, the boy gets the idea and begins to pet the sheep himself. Once that happens, the man sets up for a photograph. He moves away, squats down to aim, and takes a couple of shots while his son gently touches the sheep.

There are several other groups in the enclosure, and most of them have toddlers. It seems that all the kids are petting the sheep and goats, and all the parents are taking pictures of this activity. There are also a couple of parents with infants in their arms, who approach the animals and then hold their babies down close, sort of "flying" them in parallel to the ground, so that the kids' hands touch the animals. One White couple is posing their 3- to 4-year-old next to a goat. He's standing there looking proud, reaching a hand over to the goat's back. Dad is squatting down with the camera and mom is standing over to the side, supervising. He says something and she adjusts the

boy's hat. (I guess to avoid a shadow on his face.) Then dad says something else and the boy takes his hat off and holds it out to his side. Mom steps up and takes it from him. (O.C. I'm struck by the way he self-consciously holds his pose, remaining in position, hand on goat, and thrusts the hat out into space, as if he expects it to disappear magically—and in fact, his mom does make that happen.)

The Asian-looking man I'd seen before enters the enclosure with his little son; the woman watches from outside. Dad and son walk around looking at the animals and petting some of them. After a few minutes, the woman pushes the stroller over, leaves it by the gate, and goes in to join them. (O.C. I notice how quickly she does this, pausing just to pick up her purse that was lying in the empty stroller. It's considerably less of an operation to park an empty stroller than to stop and remove a child passenger.) She takes a picture of the man and boy by a goat. It's lying down, they're squatting down behind it, and the boy has his hand on the goat's back.

A White couple with two kids come in. He leads the older girl (about 6) into the enclosure, and she lifts the baby out of the stroller. The baby looks surprised and reaches back toward the stroller as if surprised to be leaving it there. She carries the baby over to join the others near the sheep. She squats down and sets the baby on its feet; it can barely stand, but she holds it there and then holds its hand out toward the sheep to make a petting motion.

(O.C.: It strikes me that we're seeing here several different age-associated versions of learning to pet the animals. These parents have the activity in mind and their aim is to get the kids to "complete the task"—and often, to document its completion with a photograph.)

## EDITED FIELD NOTES

Steven J. Taylor

*Field Notes #12*
"You're not a retard, you're just wise"
Steve Taylor
Observation: Winnie and Bill's Home
Time: 3:15–5:40
Date: Thursday, May 18
Notes Recorded: May 19

**Memo**
I am still doing P.O.—participant observation—here and am glad that I am. I have to force myself to be patient and not rush into more formal interviewing, although I still want to do this. It is important to go with the flow, try to

blend into the woodwork, and get a sense of what things are like naturally in the home. In terms of gathering basic information—for example, specifics on Winnie's brothers and sisters—P.O. is very inefficient. It takes a long time to get just a little bit of information and it is impossible to remember all of the specific things that are said to me. But through P.O. I learn things that would be impossible to get in any other way: how people naturally act in the home and how they see themselves and each other.

The title of these notes—"You're not a retard, you're just wise"—is an example of the kind of thing that I would only get hanging out at the home. This is what Bill said to Cindy after she said in a joking kind of way, "I'm a retard." And then she said, "I'll be a retard if I don't do my homework." I need to ponder this interaction and interpret it in light of other data. But I think I stumbled upon something centrally important today about the meaning of labels and stigma. Here's how I'm making sense of it now: In terms of this social network, stigma is what you feel when you come into contact with the outside world, but it is not necessarily something you carry around inside of you. Cindy is labelled "retarded" and has been called a "retard." Yet within the family and network, this is not how she views herself or is viewed by others. The fact that she could joke about this and then Bill could turn it around and normalize her behavior by saying in effect that she was acting like a wise ass (the clear meaning of his comment, said the way a parent might scold an adolescent) indicates to me that she doesn't feel stigma within the home and family.

Many other interesting things happened during this observation.

I get a chuckle out of all the talk about spring cleaning. The place is as dirty as ever, although it's possible that the upstairs has been cleaned. Tom is still living there and Bill and Winnie seem to feel comfortable with him, especially since he contributes money and food stamps to the household. Since we spent so much time watching TV, I had the opportunity to concentrate on what the living room looks like and also to play back in my mind things that I saw or heard. I would estimate that at least half of the time I was there, nothing was happening except passive TV watching. This is why I was able to stay almost two and one-half hours and not feel totally overwhelmed.

It's a good use of my time to jot down these hunches as I go, but I'd better get on with the notes.

**Notes**

I drive to Winnie's and Bill's, pull up across the street, park, get out of my car, and cross the busy street. I notice two cars in the driveway. One is the blue station wagon Bill has had for a while; the other is a blue Pontiac LeMans that is new here. The front door is open. I walk up the two steps and come into the living room.

I see Donnie, the nephew, on the sofa on the left; Bill on the sofa on the right; and Cindy and Sammy. The stereo is playing. I say, "Hi, how you doing? [To Bill] I thought you'd be fishing today." Bill says, "No, I've been too busy today to go fishing."

Bill gets up and says, "I got a new car. Come on." We go outside to the Pontiac. The front of the car is resting on a stack of old tires.

Bill says, "I just bought it from a guy for two and a quarter. He was ready to start taking out the windshield and junk it and I told him to sell it to me." I say, "It looks like it's in great shape." He says, "Yeah, the body's in great shape."

Bill goes to the driver's side, leans in the window, puts the key in the ignition, turns it, and the car starts right up. I say, "Boy that sounds good." Bill says, "Yeah," and then turns it off.

He says, "I've got to fix the brakes on it before I drive it. I'll drive my other one until I get this one fixed." He also mentioned something about work that needs to be done on the other car. I ask, "What year is this?" Bill says, "78. [Looking at sticker] No, let me see, 79."

Bill gets a tire iron from the back of the car and says, "I'll show you what's wrong with the brakes." The tire iron is one of those that's crossed, with four wrenches. I say, "That's a nice tire iron. That makes it a lot easier." Bill says, "I paid a lot when I bought it, but it's worth it."

Bill takes the tire off and points to the brakes and shows how they are worn. "I won't drive it until I fix the brakes. I'm not going to take a chance on getting into an accident with my family. I could feel it pulling when I drove home." He puts the tire back on.

Then Bill says something about the engine, pops the hood, and shows it to me. He closes the hood and then points to the front of the car. He says, "That's all plastic. If you run into anything that wouldn't hold up."

I ask, "You know a lot about cars. Where did you learn it all?" Bill answers, "From my father, my brother. Just working on them."

I ask Bill, "Where's Tom today? He's been here the last couple times I was here." Bill says, "He's working today. Welfare makes him work 12 days a month. He gets paid $34. His mother just had a stroke and fell and hit the side of her head. She's in the hospital." I say, "That's too bad."

I say, "Tom seems like a nice guy." Bill says, "Yeah he is. I don't mind helping him out letting him stay here. We can use the help too. He gives us food stamps. He just gave Winnie $50 and then he gave her another $25. He helps me work on the cars too." I say, "You don't mind helping people out if they appreciate it." Bill says, "Yeah."

Bill says, "I'll let you know when me and Tommy are going to pull an engine if you want to see that." I say, "Sure. I'd like to see that."

I say, "By the way, do you ever see Lisa and Gary anymore?"

Bill answers, "I guess they had a falling out with Betty and Charles. They don't want to see nothing of them. They stopped by here for about 5 minutes last night, but we don't want to have anything to do with them."

Bill and I wander back to the front door.

Bill says, "The landlord is putting a whole new electrical system in and he's digging that up too [points to a septic tank vent in the front yard]. He was over here this morning. He's getting a back hoe in here to dig that up. The drain is backing up on us. Winnie went over there this morning and told him unless he fixed this place up she was going to report him to the Board of Health. He said he's been out of town and didn't know anything about it. He said, 'No problem. I'll fix the place up.' I'm glad. I like this place. I didn't want to have to move. I want to fix up this yard."

I say, "So you have a septic system here, huh? That's unusual for the city." Bill says, "Yeah, it's clogged up [says something about how they're going to dig it up]. He told me not to lift any engines from that tree until he gets it fixed." I say, "Yeah, it could probably cave in, right?" He says, "Yeah, right over there, it's probably rotted away."

Many cigarette butts and scraps of paper are scattered in front of the house. Bike parts are in the front yard.

I ask something about fishing and then say, "I guess it's too hot to go fishing on a day like this." (O.C. It is a beautiful, warm day.) Bill says, "No, you can still catch some fish. The guy I go with is getting old and his arm was hurting so we didn't go."

Bill continues, "I've been too busy to go fishing anyway. I want to work on this car and I've been helping Winnie out with the spring cleaning. I've been trying to get Cindy off her ass to help but she's too lazy."

Bill calls in the house, "Cindy, I want you to sweep that floor. I already told your mother you did it, so you'd better do it before she gets home." Cindy doesn't do anything.

About a minute later, Bill says, "Cindy, sweep that floor!"

Sammy comes out with part of a bike frame and a can of spray paint. Bill says, "Don't spray that around the car. Do that down in the basement." Sammy leaves and comes back a minute later. "The can broke." The bike part is painted a bright red. Donnie is there and says, "That's the same color as a fire engine."

Bill calls in the house, "Cindy, I told you to sweep that floor. Right now."

While we are standing outside, the stereo is turned up, playing country music.

I hear Cindy yell from inside the house, "Dad, tell Donnie he'd better stop it or else!" Bill says, "Cut it out, Donnie."

Cindy comes to the front door. She is holding a very large glass filled with a blue liquid. Bill says "What's that?" Cindy says, "Blueberry Kool-Aid." Bill

says, "Let me try some." He takes a sip and says something to the effect that it tastes terrible. He offers me some. "Want to try it?" I say, "No thanks."

Babe the dog is by the door. I say, "It looks like Babe's expecting any time." Bill says, "Yeah, I was going to give her a bath yesterday, but I decided not to because she's pregnant."

Bill says to me, "Want to come in?" I say, "Sure." We go back into the house.

As we enter, Bill says to Cindy, "Clean off those sofas so he can sit down." Bill goes over to a sofa—the one on the right, picks up a pile of clothes and moves it to the other sofa. Cindy picks up some notebooks and other books and places them on the coffee table by the sofa where I am. He also clears off a seat on the far sofa where he ends up sitting. I say to Cindy, "Is that your homework, huh?" She says, "Yeah."

Bill turns on the TV.

Bill says, "Cindy, I told you I want this floor swept. I told your mother you already did it so you'd better get it done." Bill takes a broom. "Here sweep it like this."

Cindy takes the broom and sweeps a little bit.

Bill says, "Oh, I've got something to show you." He leaves the room. Cindy sits down in the chair and sweeps the floor from there. She says, laughing, "I'll sweep the floor sitting down." I say, "Sure, and we'll pick the chair up and carry you around so you can sweep the whole floor."

Bill comes back in holding a CB radio. He hands it to me, "I just bought this. I got this, an antenna and a mount for $137. I'll tell you, if you ever want a CB, go to Radio Shack."

I look at it. I say, "This really looks like a good CB. Have you tried it out yet?" He says, "Yea, I like to listen to the truckers and people talking. I really like on the thruway. [To Sammy] How many times have we used it. Two right?" We talk a bit about CB's. I notice different buttons on it. I ask, "Now what are these for?" Bill says, "You can program it to get certain stations. I have to take it in and have them do it. I don't know how to program it."

Bill says, "One of Winnie's brothers offered me $25 for it. It cost $137 and he offered me $25. Can you believe that?"

I hold the CB looking at it and admiring it for about 5 minutes. Then I hand it over toward Bill. Cindy is between us.

Bill says, "Cindy, take it from him. Be careful with it. Don't drop it. It's not even a month old." She takes it and hands it to Bill.

Bill says, "Sammy, take this and put it on top of the refrigerator." He gives it to Sammy and Sammy leaves.

Bill says, "Cindy, sweep this floor. Come on. Your mother's going to kick your ass when she gets home." Cindy doesn't do anything.

Between the time I arrive and 4:30, Bill tells Cindy to sweep the floor at least 15 times. Several times she makes a half-hearted effort. (O.C. It's interesting

how Bill and Winnie will threaten the kids, but never do anything when the kids don't pay attention.)

We are sitting and watching TV. First, *Alvin and the Chipmunks* cartoon is on. Then *Duck Tales*, another cartoon. Then *Batman*. Then *Leave It to Beaver*. While we are watching there is relatively little conversation. During commercials I ask Bill questions. Otherwise I just sit back and observe. (O.C. I'm struck by what a nice day it is outside, but we're here inside. Also, while Bill talks about how busy he's been, he's not doing anything.)

Since we are hanging out, I get the chance to observe the room. The room is still very dirty. The floor has a lot of dog hair, scraps of paper, and other stuff. Each of the sofas is covered at least partially with a bedspread. Piles of clothes, newspapers, a phone book, and other things are on the sofas. All three of the tables in the room are covered with things. There is more than I can begin to note. For example, on the table across from me I notice three coffee cups, an empty cigarette pack, an empty milk carton, and other stuff. The guinea pig (O.C. I called it a hamster last week) is in a small aquarium on top of the stereo. It is larger than last week and really looks squeezed in. The picture of Betty's family that I noticed before is now hung in the doorway leading to the next room. The two table lamps look in pretty good shape and are matching. There's a plate with food, mostly bread, on the bench. A new knickknack bookcase, full of knickknacks, is in the room. New curtains, white with flowers, are on the window. Familiar pictures and knickknacks are on the wall. Two large, 2- to 3-feet-high statues are by the stereo speakers. One is of St. Francis and one is the Virgin Mary. A large ceramic cat is on one of the stereo speakers. (O.C. I can't believe how this room changes all of the time. I really have to pay attention to note the changes in the room. The curtains looked different, and when I got home I compared them to pictures I have, which confirmed that they were new.)

Bill is wearing light-colored blue jeans, which are dirty; a flannel shirt with a jersey underneath; a belt; and black work boots. His hair and beard are growing back.

Sammy is wearing jeans, tennis shoes with white socks, and a jersey. When he is standing he sometimes pulls his jersey up exposing his stomach. He has long blond hair. A hair brush is stuck into his back pocket.

Donnie is wearing jeans and a rock star jersey. He is heavy, and has short light hair and freckles. His stomach is often hanging out beneath his jersey.

Cindy is barefoot and has extremely dirty feet, with dirt caked around her toenails. She is wearing a T-shirt and blue jeans.

Bill and I smoke cigarettes. While *Alvin* is on, the TV shows a banner with writing on it. I remember the words *senior* and then *Alvin*. Cindy tries to read it, but doesn't get it all. Bill says, "No that says 'Alvin,'" but he leaves out the "senior."

I ask Bill, "So you think you'll be going to Capital City soon?" He says, "Yeah, I have to go there to pick up my birth certificate. I have a check waiting for me but I can't get it without my birth certificate." I say, "You have to go all the way there? You'd think they could mail it." He says, "No, I have to go pick it up."

TV watching.

Bill gets up and goes over by the door. Donnie says or does something to Cindy. Cindy says, "Stop it, Donnie!" Bill gives Donnie a soft cuff on the back of the head, "Cut it out, Donnie." Bill sitting again.

Cindy says to Sammy, "I know who stole your bike. Robert and Paul." Sammy says, "That's not true. Robert's my friend. Paul's that asshole's friend." There's other talk about bikes. (O.C. Sammy is still hard for me to understand, especially from across the room.)

Donnie has a pocket knife and is playing with it. Bill says, "Donnie, put that knife away. You can't play with it here. Your mother will be getting home from work in a half hour. You can leave in a little while."

TV watching.

Bill says to Donnie, "Okay, you can go home now." Donnie says, "Bye, Uncle Bill," and leaves. He does not say good-bye to anyone else. Bill goes outside with him. I see Donnie ride his bike down the street.

TV watching. Commercial. I ask Bill, "Donnie's your nephew, right?" He says, "Yea." I say, "Your sister's kid, right?" He says, "Yeah, my sister Iris."

I ask, "That's the sister who's moving to Capital City, right?" Bill says, "No, Iris and Don are staying here. They got it worked out with their landlord. They owe him $289 and they can't pay it, but they worked it out. They're going to pay him $100 one week, $100 the next week, and then $89. He said, 'Fine, you can stay then.'"

Bill says to Cindy, again (O.C. This has been constant), "Cindy, I want you to sweep that floor now. Come on." She takes the broom and goes over by the door and starts sweeping. She sweeps a dust cloud of dirt, dog hair, and debris toward me. (O.C. Gasp. It really is filthy.) Bill says, "Cindy, sweep it all this way [pointing to the next room]." Before long she is sitting on the floor.

TV watching—*Duck Tales*. Everyone seems to pay attention to this, laughing at the cartoon.

Bill says again, "Cindy, I told you. I want this floor cleaned."

Cindy gets up and takes the broom and starts sweeping. She says, "I'm a retard." (O.C. She says this in a joking way, acting silly just as when she was sweeping sitting down earlier.) Bill says, "You're not a retard, you're just wise." (O.C. This is said as in "wise ass" or "smart aleck.") Cindy says, "I'll be a retard if I don't do my homework." She sweeps another minute and then stops.

TV watching—*Batman*.

I look out the door and see Winnie coming down the street, walking on this side of the road on the road itself. (O.C. I want to try to capture what one sees here.) Winnie is wearing purple pants and a yellow T-shirt. She is pushing a black baby carriage.

She is very pigeon-toed and walks a bit bent over with her hips sticking out. Her walk looks labored as she places one leg in front of the other. (O.C. She looks very conspicuous and would strike one as being disabled in some way.)

I watch as Winnie comes in the door. It is a bit after 4:30. Winnie comes in, looking very tired, and says, "Hi, Steve." I say, "Hi, Winnie, how are you?" She says, "Tired!" She comes over to the sofa to the left and plops down.

Winnie starts talking to Bill. Because she is across the room and apparently tired, I can't understand her as well as usual, but she seems to be talking about Betty and Charles and Gary and Lisa. She tells Bill tells something about a broken engine block on Betty and Charles's car. She also says something about Lisa and Gary and money. She also says, "Kathy was wearing shorts and showing off her sexy legs." (O.C. The nature of her conversation is that of reporting on what's going on at Betty's.)

She looks over to the stereo speakers, "What's that?" Bill gets up, "That's blueberry Kool-Aid. Try some." He takes it and gives her some and she makes a face. He then gives some to Sammy. Then he says, "Cindy, go get some more." She leaves the room and comes back with more.

Sammy takes it and goes outside. Cindy does too. They're yelling at each other, playing. I can't see them from where I am sitting. Cindy comes running into the house. Bill says, "I think she got him." Sammy comes in, a bit wet. Bill says, "She did." There's some chasing around between Cindy and Sammy. Winnie says to me, "Steve, would you like two kids?"

Cindy comes in but runs back outside. Winnie yells, "Cindy get in here." Bill laughs pointing out the door. Cindy comes back in and the back of her pants are dirty.

Cindy runs out again. She comes back a minute or two later and goes over to Winnie. She holds up the bottom of her foot to show a cut. Winnie says, "Go clean it off." Cindy goes into the next room and comes back with a wet towel. She sits in the chair and wraps the towel around one of her filthy feet.

More TV watching.

A commercial comes on. Sammy, who is sitting on the sofa by Winnie, looks at me and says, "What did you say?" I had said nothing. I say, "I didn't say anything." Bill laughs and says, "He didn't say anything! Now he's hearing things."

Winnie says to me, "Did you get your wife something for Mother's Day?" I say, "Mother's Day? I didn't buy her anything. She's not my mother." (Joking tone.) Winnie says, "She's a woman. Mother's Day is for women." I say, "No,

it's not. It's just for mothers. What about Father's Day? I think she should buy me something for Father's Day."

TV watching as *Leave It to Beaver* comes on.

*Leave It to Beaver* is about Beaver doing well on a test, being shunned by friends, and his parents looking at a special school for him. Sammy, Cindy, and Bill have an exchange about this, with Sammy saying, "What did Beaver do?" and Bill saying, "He was smart," and Cindy saying, "He got a 100 on a test."

Sammy has his bike part. The wheels from the bike are on the sofa. Bill says to Winnie, "He ran out of money so he didn't finish painting it." Winnie says to Sammy, "What happened to your change from the cans and bottles?" Sammy says, "I spent it all."

Winnie a little later says, "I had some money yesterday, but I spent it all." Winnie says, "The party's all set for June 10. We're celebrating Babe's [the dog] puppies and a surprise. I can't tell you what it is because it's a surprise."

Winnie asks me, "Steve, do you like wrestlin'?" I say, "Sure, but I haven't gone in a long time." Winnie says, "There's a big match at the War Memorial on June 26." Bill says, "I'm going to that one no matter what. I'll walk there if I have to."

Somebody says, "Dean's here." Bill gets up and goes outside. He comes back a couple minutes later. Winnie asks, "Are you going fishing?" Bill says, "No, not today, maybe tomorrow. Dean says he's going out to get drunk. He's already half pie-eyed. He stopped at a bar for one beer and had a lot more. I'm not riding with him." Bill leaves the room and comes right back, "I'm not riding with anybody's who's drunk." Winnie says, "I don't blame you." Bill goes out the door again.

Sammy has two wrenches and is using them to take brackets off of the bike part he painted. He is muttering and seems upset, saying, "Fuckin', fuck, fuck. I'm throwing this out." He gets up, walks to the door, and throws the bike part out toward the street.

He comes back and says, "I'm going to steal a bike. I know where one is. I'm going to steal it." (O.C. He says this like a frustrated child.)

Cindy says something to the effect that Sammy can have her bike, and she'll borrow it when she needs it.

Sammy says, "I'm stealing that bike." Winnie says, "Go ahead and you'll end up in jail." (Not being able to resist) I say, "Yeah, we'll all visit you in jail, Sammy." Sammy looks at me and says, in a semi-sarcastic, but not mean or defiant tone, "Thanks." I say, "Tom seems like a nice guy." Winnie says, "Yeah, he is. He helps Bill out with his cars. His mother's in the hospital. She had a stroke and fell and hit the side of her face. She was alone in her apartment and nobody could get an answer on the phone. So they got a key from her landlord and found her and took her to the hospital."

I ask, "How do you know Tom anyway?" Winnie says, "I've known him for a long time. Let's see, about 18 years."

I say, "You sure do have a lot of family and friends, Winnie." She says, "Yeah, I have a lot of friends. I'm still friends with my best friend when I was growing up. I see her all the time. We've been friends since I was one month old. I know her husband, her three children, and her brothers and sisters."

Quiet for a while. I say to Winnie, "You look tired today, Winnie." She says, "I'm always tired."

I look out and see Tom walking down the street toward the house. He first goes over to where Dean is parked and then comes in the house. I say, "Hi, Tom," and he says, "Hi."

He goes through the room and into the next and I hear the bathroom door close. He comes out a minute later.

He sits down in the living room where Bill had been sitting.

Winnie says, "So how was your day?" He says, "I spent it at the hospital with my mother. My brother showed up, too. My sister from Northville is coming down. You've met her haven't you?" Winnie says, "Yeah."

Bill is outside the house now. Dean apparently has gone. Tom goes outside.

As we get to the door, I say, "Maybe I'll see what these guys are doing before I go." I step outside. Bill and Tom are on the other side of the car, sitting on the ground.

I stand by Bill and Tom. They are talking about the brake: "Shoe . . . caliper . . . . Now how does that come off." Bill yells into the house, "Winnie, get me my Allen wrenches."

Tom says to Bill, "My mother can't move anything on her left side." Bill doesn't respond and talks about the brakes. (O.C. So much for social-emotional support in the network.)

I say to Tom, "Yeah, I hear your mother's in the hospital." He says, "Yeah, she should be released Monday. They're still doing tests though. They injected blue dye into her and they're running some other tests."

About two minutes after Bill called to her, Winnie comes back with a small one. Bill and Tom say, "That's too small." Bill tries it, but it is too small. Bill says, "Send Cindy up to Betty's and Charles' to borrow one from them. She'd better hurry. They'll be going junking at 6:00." Winnie yells, "Cindy, Cindy." Cindy does not appear. Either Winnie volunteers to go up or Bill asks her to. I say, "Well, I'd better be going now. I'll see you. Good luck, guys."

I cross the street and get in my car. Tom has gone over and sat on the front steps. I get back out of my car and walk over to Tom.

I yell, "Hey, Tom, ask Winnie if she wants a ride over." He yells back, "Just a second," and turns to the house. Just then Cindy comes out, gets on her bike, and starts riding. Winnie appears and yells, "Cindy's going." I wave, get back in my car, and drive away.

# Interview Guide Template[1]

### Peter Ibarra

T HIS TEMPLATE PROVIDES a brainstorming tool that will help you formulate interview questions to explore many aspects of your interviewee's experiences. It encourages you to focus on activities (or "doings")—that's what will be easiest for your interviewee to talk about.

## HOW TO USE THE TEMPLATE

First, consider *your participant* and *what that participant does* that you believe will make him or her a useful informant on issues related to your general research questions. Generally speaking, participants with more extensive experience will have more stories and thoughts about the doing; so select your informants with care.

Then compose a sequence of *questions that are designed to elicit talk about various aspects of the doing*. The suggestions below are meant to help you think about what those aspects might be; you should edit and adapt these topics and formulate them into questions that will fit the person you plan to interview and the activities that are of interest to you.

**Background Topics**

Personal Background (Optional):

- Tell me about yourself: probe for family history, childhood circumstances, current situation, and so on, to help place your informant's involvement with the "doing" in an illuminating context.

Pre-History:

- How informant became involved with the doing.
- What attracted informant to the doing.
- What informant heard/knew about the doing beforehand.

Immediate Context:

- What was going on in informant's life at time of initial involvement?
- Probe for how involvement fit into broader themes and issues in informant's life.

**The Doing Itself**

Definition of the Doing:

- What it entails.
- How it works.
- What are its most important features or demands (emotional, practical, social)?

Learning Curve:

- Recollections of initial experiences with doing.
- How informant learned to do the doing.
- Trial and error process.
- Feedback received during learning process.

Variations in the Doing:

- Difficult or complicated cases or situations vs. easy or straightforward ones.
  - Examples?
- Have informant compare his or her own approach with that taken by others.
- Categories of doers (e.g., newbies, pros, high status, good/bad, etc.).
  - Characteristics of these and informant's perspectives on.
- If the doing involves managing of or working with others:
  - Probe for what managing of or working with consists of.
  - Identify informant's categories of "others."
- Changes in informant's approach over time:
- Workable and unworkable approaches(e.g. approaches that "backfire" vs. those that are reliable).
- Conflicts, disagreements, or tensions over or around the doing.

The Highs and Lows of the Doing:

- Aspects that are most enjoyable.
  - Payoffs.

- Aspects that are least enjoyable.
  - Stories showing emotions associated with the doing.
- Risks or dangers associated with the doing.
  - Horror stories: informant's own or heard/seen.
  - Doings gone bad; doings "saved."
- Techniques for managing the risks or dangers.

Fluctuations or Seasonality:

- Cyclical or rhythmical character of the doing (i.e., predictable decreases and increases in volume, intensity, involvement).

Ceremonial or Ritualistic Aspects of the Doing (Demeanor, Reciprocity, Respect).

**Distanced Perspectives on the Doing**

- Others' (e.g., kin; intimates) reactions to informant's involvement.
  - Advice/warnings/concerns expressed.
- Thoughts about sticking with the activity or giving it up.
- Changes in life, outlook, or relations with others because of involvement.
  - Doors closed/opened.
- Advice to others who might take up the doing.

N O T E

1. This interview guide template was developed by Professor Peter R. Ibarra, University of Illinois at Chicago. Used with permission.

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