

ture of the fieldwork, during the entry stage more than at any other time, the observer is also the observed.

What You Say and What You Do

Fieldworkers' actions speak louder than their words. Researchers necessarily plan strategies to present themselves and their function, but participant reactions to statements about the researcher's role are quickly superseded by judgments based on how the person actually behaves.

The relative importance of words versus deeds in establishing credibility is partly a function of the length of time the observer expects to be in a setting. For some direct onlooker observations, the fieldworker may be present in a particular program for only a few hours or a day. The entry problem in such cases is quite different from the situation where the observer expects to be participating in the program over some longer period of time, as anthropologist Rosalie Wax has noted:

All field workers are concerned about explaining their presence and their work to a host of people. "How shall I introduce myself?" they wonder, or, "what shall I say I am doing?" If the field worker plans to do a very rapid and efficient survey, questions like these are extremely important. The manner in which an interviewer introduces himself, the precise words he uses, may mean the difference between a first-rate job and a failure. . . . But if the field worker expects to engage in some variety of participant observation, to develop and maintain long-term relationships, to do a study that involves the enlargement of his own understanding, the best thing he can do is relax and remember that most sensible people do not believe what a stranger tells them. In the long run, his host will judge and trust him, not because of what he says about himself or

about his research, but by the style in which he lives and acts, by the way in which he treats them. In a somewhat shorter run, they will accept or tolerate him because some relative, friend, or person they respect has recommended him to them. (Wax 1971:365)

William Foote Whyte (1984:37-63) has extracted and summarized entry strategies used in a number of groundbreaking sociological studies, including the Lynds' study of Middletown, W. Lloyd Warner's study of Yankee City, Burleigh Gardner's fieldwork in the deep South, Elliot Liebow's hanging around Tally's Corner, Elijah Anderson's fieldwork in a Black neighborhood, Ruth Horowitz's study of a Chicano neighborhood, Robert Cole's work in Japan, and Whyte's own experiences in Cornerville. They each had to adapt their entry strategy to the local setting and they all ended up changing what they had planned to do as they learned from the initial responses to their efforts to gain acceptance. These examples from those who paved the way for modern fieldworkers demonstrate the importance of careful attention to entry and the variety of approaches that are possible. The next section presents a concrete example from an evaluation by Joyce Keller.

AN ENTRY CASE EXAMPLE: THE PART-TIME OBSERVER

Introduction. The previous section contrasted the entry challenges for the one-shot onlooker observer with those of the long-term participant observer, but a great deal of middle ground exists between these extremes. In this section, Joyce Keller, a senior staff member of the Minnesota Center for Social Research at the time, describes her entry into fieldwork as a part-time observer.⁴ Because limitations of time and resources are common in evaluation, many situations call for a part-time observer. Joyce's reflections capture some of the special entry

problems associated with this "now you're here, now you're gone" role.

One word can describe my role, at least initially, in a recent evaluation assignment: ambiguous. I was to be neither a participant observer nor an outsider coming in for a brief but intensive stint. I was to allocate approximately six hours a week for seven months to observing the team development of a group of 23 professionals in an educational setting. At first, the ambiguity was solely on my side: What, really, was I to do? The team, too busy in the beginning with defining their own roles, had little time to consider mine. Later on, as I became accustomed to my task, the team's curiosity about my function began to grow.

In their eyes, I served no useful purpose that they could see. I was in the way a great deal of the time inhibiting their private conversations. On the other hand, they appeared to be concerned about what I was thinking. Some of them—most of them—began to be friendly, to greet me as I came in, to comment when I missed a team meeting. They came to see me as I saw myself: neither really part of the group nor a separate, removed force.

Observing their interaction perhaps six hours a week out of their 40-hour work week obviously meant that I missed a great deal. I needed to develop a sense of when to be present, to choose among group meetings, subgroup meetings, and activities when all the members were to come together. At the same time, I was working on other contracts which limited the amount of adjustable time available. "Flexible" was the way I came to define my weekly schedule; others, not as charitable, would probably have defined it as "shifty."

A hazard that I encountered as I filled my ambiguous, flexible role was that I soon discovered I was not high on the priority list to

be notified in the event of schedule changes. I would have firmly in mind that a subgroup was to meet on Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. in a certain place. I would arrive to find no one there. Later, I would discover that on Monday the meeting had been changed to Wednesday afternoon and no one had been delegated to tell me. At no time did I seriously feel that the changes were planned to exclude me; on the contrary, the members' contrition about their oversight seemed quite genuine. They had simply forgotten me.

Another area of sudden change that caused me difficulty was in policy and procedure. What had seemed to be firm commitments on ways to proceed or tasks to be tackled were being ignored. I came to realize that while a certain amount of this instability was inherent in the program itself, other shifts in direction were outgrowths of planning sessions I had not attended or had not heard the results from after they had occurred. Therefore, keeping current became for me a high-priority activity. Not to do so would have added to my feeling of ambiguity. Also, if I had not operated with a certain degree of self-confidence, I would have felt somehow at fault for coming to a meeting at the wrong time or place or assuming that a certain decision, which the team had previously made, was still valid.

I began my observation of this team in its formative stage. Had I begun after the team was well established, my difficulties would have been greater. Nevertheless, many of the team members were already well acquainted with each other; all had been employees of the same school district over a period of time. They were much better versed in what they had come together to accomplish than I, whose only orientation was reading the proposal which, upon acceptance, had brought them together. I found also that the proposal and the way they

planned to proceed were, in actuality, far from identical.

With my observer role to continue over many months, I realized that I must maintain the difficult position of being impartial. I could not be thought of by the team members as being closely aligned with their leaders, nor could I expect the leaders to talk candidly and openly with me if they believed that I would repeat their confidences to the group members. Reluctantly, for I discovered several team members with whom friendships could easily have developed, I declined invitations to social activities outside of working hours.

When I met with the group for the first time, I directed most of my energies to matching names and faces. I would be taking notes at most of the sessions and it was essential that I could record not only what was said but who said it. At the first session everyone, including me, wore a name tag. But within a few days, they were all well acquainted and had discarded their name tags; I was the only one still fumbling for names. While being able to greet each member by name was important, so was knowing something about each one's background. Coffee breaks allowed me to circulate among the group and carry on short conversations with as many as possible to try to fix in my mind who they were and where they came from, which provided insights into why they behaved in the group as they did.

Team members at first expressed a certain amount of enthusiasm for minutes to be taken of their meetings. This enthusiasm was short-lived, for willing volunteers to serve as secretary did not emerge. I was disappointed, for, had minutes been kept of the meetings and had I been able to rely on receiving copies, I would have concentrated solely on observing the interactions and would not have had to keep track of what

they were interacting about. I noted (and ignored) a few passing suggestions that since I was obviously taking notes maybe I could. . . .

I took copious notes before I began to develop a sense of what was or was not important to record. When I relaxed more and aimed for the tone of the meeting my understanding of the group increased. I had to realize that, as a part-time observer, it was impossible for me to understand all of what was said. My decision frequently was to let this portion of the meeting pass or to jot down a reminder to myself to ask clarifying questions later.

Side-stepping sensitive questions from both leaders and team members had to be developed into a fine art. As I became more finely tuned to the interactions, and most became aware that I was, I was frequently queried as to my perceptions of a particular individual or situation. On one occasion, I found a team member jumping into an elevator to ride two floors with me in a direction he didn't want to go so that he could ask me privately what I thought of another team member. My response was, "I think she's a very interesting person," or something equally innocuous, and received from him a highly raised eyebrow, since the woman in question had just behaved in a very peculiar manner at the meeting we had both just attended.

In-depth interviews with each team member began in the fourth month of my observation and was the mechanism which filled in many of the gaps in my understanding. The timing was perfect: I had gained enough familiarity with both personnel and project by that time so that I was knowledgeable, they had come to trust me, and they still cared deeply about the project. (This caring diminished for some as the project year drew to a close without any real hopes

of refunding for a second year.) My interview design was intentionally simple and open-ended. What I wanted most was for them to talk about their experiences in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

The amount of new information diminished throughout the six weeks or so that was required to interview all team members. My own performance unquestionably diminished too as the weeks went on. It was difficult to be animated and interesting as I asked the same questions over and over, devised strategies with which to probe, and recorded perceptions and incidents which I had heard many times before.

Nevertheless, the interviews appear in retrospect to have been a necessary tool of the part-time observer. Bit by bit team members filled in holes in my information and their repeated references to particular situa-

Routinization of Fieldwork: The Dynamics of the Second Stage

What did you learn in your readings today?" asked Master Halcolm. "We learned that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," replied the learners.

"Ah, yes, the importance of beginnings," smiled Halcolm.

"Yet, I am puzzled," said a learner. "Yesterday I read that there are a thousand beginnings for every ending."

"Ah, yes, the importance of seeing a thing through to the end," affirmed Halcolm.

"But which is more important, to begin or end?"

"Two great self-deceptions are asserted by the world's self-congratulators: that the hardest and most important step is the first and that the greatest and most resplendent step is the last."

"While every journey must have a first and last step, my experience is that what ultimately determines the nature and enduring value of the journey are the steps in between. Each step has its own value and importance. Be present for the whole journey, learners that you are. Be present for the whole journey."

—Halcolm

During the second stage, after the fieldworker has established a role and purpose, the focus moves to high-quality data gathering and opportunistic investigation following emergent possibilities and building on what is observed and learned each step along the way. The observer, no longer caught up in adjustments to the newness of the field setting, begins to really *see* what is going on instead of just looking around. As Florence Nightingale said, "Merely looking at the sick is not observing."

Describing the second stage as "routinization of fieldwork" probably overstates the case. In emergent designs and ever-deepening inquiry, the human tendency toward routines yields to the ups and downs of new discoveries, fresh insights, sudden doubts, and ever-present questioning of others—and often of self. Discipline is needed to maintain high-quality, up-to-date field notes. Openness and perseverance are needed to keep exploring, looking deeper, diverging broader, and focusing narrower, always going where the inquiry and data take you. Fieldwork is intellectually challenging at times, mind-numbingly dull at times, and for many, an emotional roller coaster. Appendix 9.1 at the end of Chapter 9, "A Documenter's Perspective," offers the reflections of a participant observer conducting a school evaluation and grappling with changes in fieldwork over time.

One of the things that can happen in the course of fieldwork is the emergence of a strong feeling of connection with the people being studied. As you come to understand the behaviors, ideals, anxieties, and feelings of other people, you may find yourself identifying with their lives, their hopes, and their pain. This sense of identification and connection can be a natural and logical consequence of having established relationships of rapport, trust, and mutuality. For me, that

They howled and leaped and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was the thought of their humanity—like ours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of the first ages—comprehend. And why not? (Conrad 1960:70)

In this passage, Conrad chronicles the possibility of awakening to unexpected realizations and intense emotions in the course of encounters with the unknown and those who are different from us. In many ways, it is our common humanity, whether we are fully aware of it at any given moment or not, that makes fieldwork possible. As human beings, we have the amazing capability to become part of other people's experiences, and through watching and reflecting, we can come to understand something about those experiences.

As fieldwork progresses, the intricate web of human relationships can entangle the participant observer in ways that will create tension between the desire to become more enmeshed in the setting so as to learn more and the need to preserve some distance and perspective. Participant observers carry no immunity to the political dynamics of the settings being observed. Virtually any setting is likely to include subgroups of people who may be in conflict with other subgroups. These factions or cliques may either woo or reject the participant observer, but they are seldom neutral. During her fieldwork interviewing young women in India, Parameswaran (2001) reports efforts by parents and teachers to get her to inform on the women she interviewed or to influence them in a desired direction. She found her-

self in the middle of deep generational divisions between mothers and their daughters, teachers and students, bookstore owners and their clients. She could not risk deeply alienating or completely acquiescing to any of these important and competing groups, for they all affected her access and the ultimate success of her fieldwork.

In evaluations, the evaluator can be caught in the middle of tensions between competing groups and conflicting perspectives. For example, where divisions exist among the staff and/or the participants in a program, and such divisions are common, the evaluator will be invited, often subtly, to align with one subgroup or the other. Indeed, the evaluator may want to become part of a particular subgroup to gain further insight into and understanding of that subgroup. How such an alliance occurs, and how it is interpreted by others, can greatly affect the course of the evaluation.

My experience suggests that it is impractical to expect to have the same kind of relationship—close or distant—with every group or faction. Fieldworkers, human beings with their own personalities and interests, will be naturally attracted to some people more than others. Indeed, to resist those attractions may hinder the observer from acting naturally and becoming more thoroughly integrated into the setting or program. Recognizing this, the observer will be faced with ongoing decisions about personal relationships, group involvement, and how to manage differential associations without losing perspective on what the experience is like for those with whom the fieldworker is less directly involved.

Perhaps the most basic division that will always be experienced in program evaluation is the separation of staff and participants. While the rhetoric of many programs attempts to reduce the distinction between staff and participants, there is almost always

a distinction between those who are paid for their responsibilities in the program (staff) and those who are primarily recipients of what the program has to offer (participants). Sociologically, it makes sense that staff and participants would be differentiated, creating a distance that can evolve into conflict or distrust. Participants will often view the evaluator as no different from the staff or administration, or even the funding sources—virtually any group except the participants. If the evaluator observer is attempting to experience the program as a participant, special effort will be required to make participation real and meaningful and to become accepted, even trusted, by other participants. On the other hand, staff and administrators may be suspicious of the evaluator's relationships with funders or board members.

The point is not to be naïve about the tangled web of relationships the participant observer will experience and to be thoughtful about how fieldwork, data quality, and the overall inquiry are affected by these connections and interrelationships, all of which have to be negotiated.

Lofland (1971) has suggested that participant observers can reduce suspicion and fear about a study by becoming openly aligned with a single broad grouping within a setting while remaining aloof from that grouping's own internal disputes.

Thus, known observers of medical schools have aligned themselves only with the medical students, rather than attempting to participate extensively with both faculty and students. In mental hospitals, known observers have confined themselves largely to mental patients and restricted their participation with staff. To attempt to participate with both, extensively and simultaneously, would probably have generated suspicion about the ob-

servers among people on both sides of those fences. (pp. 96-97)

In contrast to Lofland's advice, in evaluating the wilderness education program I found myself moving back and forth between a full participant role, where I was identified primarily as a participant, and a full staff role, where I was identified primarily with those who carried responsibility for directing the program. During the first field conference, I took on the role of full participant and made as visible as possible my allegiance to fellow participants while maintaining distance from the staff. Over time, however, as my personal relationships with the staff increased, I became more and more aligned with the staff. This coincided with a change of emphasis in the evaluation itself, with the earlier part of the fieldwork being directed at describing the participant experience and the latter part of the fieldwork being aimed at describing the workings of the staff and providing formative feedback.

However, I was always aware of a tension, both within myself and within the group at large, about the extent to which I was a participant or a staff member. I found that as my observational skills became increasingly valued by the program staff I had to more consciously and actively resist their desire to have me take on a more active and explicit staff role. They also made occasional attempts to use me as an informer, trying to seduce me into conversations about particular participants. The ambiguities of my role were never fully resolved. I suspect that such ambiguities were inherent in the situation and are to be expected in many evaluation fieldwork experiences.

Managing field relationships involves a different set of dynamics when the inquiry is collaborative or participatory. Under such designs, where the researcher involves others in the setting in fieldwork, a great deal of

the work consists of facilitating the interactions with co-inquirers, supporting their data collection efforts, ongoing training in observation and interviewing, managing integration of field notes among different participant researchers, and monitoring data quality and consistency. These collaborative management responsibilities will reduce the primary researcher's own time for fieldwork and will affect how others in the settings, those who aren't participatory or collaborative researchers, view the inquiry and the fieldwork director, if that is the role taken on. In some cases, management of the collaborative inquiry effort is done by one of the participants and the trained fieldworker serves primarily as a skills and process trainer and consultant to the group. Clarity about these roles and divisions of labor can make or break collaborative, participatory forms of inquiry. Having shared values about collaboration does not guarantee actually pulling it off. Collaborative inquiry is challenging work, often frustrating, but when it works, the findings will carry the additional credibility of collaborative triangulation, and the results tend to be rewarding for all involved, with enduring insights and new inquiry skills for those involved.

Key Informants

One of the mainstays of much fieldwork is the use of key informants as sources of information about what the observer has not or cannot experience, as well as sources of explanation for events the observer has actually witnessed. *Key informants* are people who are particularly knowledgeable about the inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge—people whose insights can prove particularly useful in helping an observer understand what is happening and why. Selecting key informants must be done carefully to avoid arousing hostility or an-

tagonisms among those who may resent or distrust the special relationships between the fieldworker and the key informant. Indeed, how—and how much—to make visible this relationship involves strategic thinking about how others will react and how their reactions will affect the inquiry. There's no formal announcement that the "position" of key informant is open, or that it's been filled; the key informant is simply that person or those persons with whom the researcher or evaluator is likely to spend considerable time.

Key informants must be trained or developed in their role, not in a formal sense, but because they will be more valuable if they understand the purpose and focus of the inquiry, the issues and questions under investigation, and the kinds of information that are needed and most valuable. Anthropologists Pelto and Pelto (1978) made this point in reflecting on their own fieldwork:

We noticed that humans differ in their willingness as well as their capabilities for verbally expressing cultural information. Consequently, the anthropologist usually finds that only a small number of individuals in any community are good key informants. Some of the capabilities of key informants are systematically developed by the field workers, as they train the informants to conceptualize cultural data in the frame of reference employed by anthropologists. . . . The key informant gradually learns the rules of behavior in a role vis-à-vis the interviewer-anthropologist. (p. 72)

The danger in cultivating and using key informants is that the researcher comes to rely on them too much and loses sight of the fact that their perspectives are necessarily limited, selective, and biased. Data from informants represent perceptions, not truths. Information obtained from key informants

should be clearly specified as such in the field notes so that the researcher's observations and those of the informants do not become confounded. This may seem like an obvious point, and it is, but over weeks and months of fieldwork it can become difficult to decipher what information came from what sources unless the fieldworker has a routine system for documenting sources and uses that system with great discipline, thoroughness, and care.

Key informants can be particularly helpful in learning about subgroups to which the observer does not or cannot have direct access. During the second year of the wilderness education program, one informal group, mostly women, dubbed themselves the "turtles" to set themselves apart from participants, mostly men, who had more experience in the wilderness and wanted to hike at a fast pace, climb the highest peaks, or otherwise demonstrate their prowess—a group they called somewhat disparagingly the "truckers" (trucks being unwelcome in the wilderness). Having had a full year of the wilderness experiences the first year of the program, I didn't qualify to become an intimate part of the turtles. I therefore established an informant relationship with one of

the turtles, who willingly kept me informed about the details of what went on in that group. Without that key informant relationship, I would have missed some very important information about the kinds of experiences the turtle participants were having and the significance of the project to them.

While being part of any setting necessarily involves personal choices about social relationships and political choices about group alliances, the emphasis on making strategic decisions in the field should not be interpreted as suggesting that the conduct of qualitative research in naturalistic settings is an ever-exciting game of chess in which players and pieces are manipulated to accomplish some ultimate goal. Fieldwork certainly involves times of both exhilaration and frustration, but the dominant motifs in fieldwork are hard work, long hours to both do observations and keep up-to-date with field notes, enormous discipline, attention to details, and concentration on the mundane and day-to-day. The routinization of fieldwork is a time of concentrated effort and immersion in gathering data. Alas, let the truth be told: **The gathering of field data involves very little glory and an abundance of nose-to-the-grindstone drudgery.**

Bringing Fieldwork to a Close

Well, I've gotten to the end of the subject—of the page—of your patience and my time.

—Alice B. Toklas in a letter to Elizabeth Hansen, 1949

In traditional scholarly fieldwork within anthropology and sociology, it can be difficult to predict how long fieldwork will last. The major determinant of the length of the fieldwork is the investigator's own resources, interests, and needs. Evaluation and action research typically have quite spe-

formants, hosts, and sponsors in the setting who helped with entrée and may have supported ongoing fieldwork, helping solve problems and smooth over difficulties. In collaborative research, relationships with coresearchers will have deepened. In any extended involvement within a setting, friendships and alliances are formed. As fieldwork comes to an end, an exit or disengagement strategy is needed. While a great deal of attention has traditionally been paid to entering the field, much less attention has been given to the disengagement process, what Snow (1980) has called the "neglected problem in participant observation research."

One side of the coin is disengagement. The other side is reentry back to one's life after extended fieldwork or an all-consuming project. When I went to do graduate research in Tanzania, our team received a lot of support and preparation for entry, much of it aimed at avoiding culture shock. But when we returned home, we were given no preparation for what it would be like to return to America's highly commercial, materialistic, and fast-moving culture after months in an agrarian, community-oriented, slower-moving environment. The culture shock hit coming home, not going to Africa.

Interpersonal, cross-cultural, disengagement, and reentry issues all deserve attention as fieldwork comes to a close. Relationships with people change and evolve from entry, through the middle days, and into the end of fieldwork. So does the fieldworker's relationship with the data and engagement in the inquiry process. That changed engagement in the inquiry process is what I want to focus on here.

As you near completion of data gathering, having become fairly knowledgeable about the setting being observed, more and more attention can be shifted to fine-tuning and confirming observed patterns. Possible interpretations of and explanations for what

was observed show up more in the field notes. Some of these explanations have been offered by others; some occur directly to the observer. In short, analysis and interpretation will have begun even before the observer has left the field.

Chapter 9 discusses analysis strategies at length. At this point, I simply want to recognize the fact that data gathering and analysis flow together in fieldwork, for there is usually no definite, fully anticipated point at which data collection stops and analysis begins. One process flows into the other. As the observer gains confidence in the quality and meaningfulness of the data, sophisticated about the setting under study, and aware that the end draws near, additional data collection becomes increasingly selective and strategic.

As fieldwork draws to a close, the researcher is increasingly concerned with *verification* of already-collected data and less concerned with generating new inquiry leads. While in naturalistic inquiry one avoids imposing preconceived analytical categories on the data, as fieldwork comes to an end, experience with the setting will usually have led to thinking about prominent themes and dimensions that organize what has been experienced and observed. These emergent ideas, themes, concepts, and dimensions—generated inductively through fieldwork—can also now be deepened, further examined, and verified during the closure period in the field.

Guba (1978) has described fieldwork as moving back and forth between the discovery mode and the verification mode like a wave. The ebb and flow of research involves moving in and out of periods when the investigator is open to new inputs, generative data, and opportunistic sampling to periods when the investigator is testing out hunches, fine-tuning conceptualization, sifting ideas, and verifying explanations.

When fieldwork has gone well the observer grows increasingly confident that things make sense and begins to believe in the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967), commenting on grounded theory as an outcome of fieldwork, have described the feelings that the traditional field observer has as fieldwork moves to a close, data-based patterns have emerged, and the whole takes shape:

The continual intermeshing of data collection and analysis has direct bearing on how the research is brought to a close. When the researcher is convinced that his conceptual framework forms a systematic theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the matter studied, that it is couched in a form possible for others to use in studying a similar area, and that he can publish his results with confidence, then he has neared the end of his research. . . .

Why does the researcher trust what he knows? . . . They are his perceptions, his personal experiences, and his own hard-won analyses. A field worker knows that he knows, not only because he has been in the field and because he has carefully discovered and generated hypotheses, but also because "in his bones" he feels the worth of his final analysis. He has been living with partial analyses for many months, testing them each step of the way, until he has built this theory. What is more, if he has participated in the social life of the subject, then he has been living by his analyses, testing them not only by observation and interview but also by daily living. (pp. 224-25)

This representation of bringing a grounded theory inquiry to a close represents the scholarly inquiry ideal. In the "contracted deliverables" world of program evaluation, with limited time and resources, and reporting schedules that may not permit as much fieldwork as is desirable, the evalu-

ator may have to bring the fieldwork to a close before that state of real confidence has fully emerged. Nevertheless, I find that there is a kind of Parkinson's law in fieldwork: As time runs out, the investigator feels more and more the pressure of making sense out of things, and some form of order does indeed begin to emerge from the observations. This is a time to celebrate emergent understandings even while retaining the critical eye of the skeptic, especially useful in questioning one's own confident conclusions.

Evaluation Feedback

In doing fieldwork for program evaluation, in contrast to theory-oriented scholarly field research, the evaluator observer must be concerned about providing feedback, making judgments, and generating recommendations. Thus, as the fieldwork draws to a close, the evaluator observer must begin to consider what feedback is to be given to whom and how.

Giving feedback can be part of the verification process in fieldwork. My own preference is to provide the participants and staff with descriptions and analysis, verbally and informally, and to include their reactions as part of the data. Part of the reciprocity of fieldwork can be an agreement to provide participants with descriptive information about what has been observed. I find that participants and staff are hungry for such information and fascinated by it. I also find that I learn a great deal from their reactions to my descriptions and analyses. Of course, it's neither possible nor wise to report everything one has observed. Moreover, the informal feedback that occurs at or near the end of fieldwork will be different from the findings that are reported formally based on the more systematic and rigorous analysis that must go on once the evaluator leaves the

field. But that formal, systematic analysis will take more time, so while one is still in the field it is possible to share at least some findings and to learn from the reactions of those who hear those findings.

Timing feedback in formative evaluations can be challenging. When the purpose is to offer recommendations to improve the program, the program staff will usually be anxious to get that information "ASAP" (as soon as possible). The evaluator observer may even feel pressured to report findings prematurely, before having confidence in the patterns that seem to be emerging. I experienced this problem throughout the evaluation of the wilderness education program. During the first year, we met with the staff at the end of each field conference program (the three 10-day field conferences were spread out over a year) to discuss what we had observed and to share interpretations about those observations. At the very first feedback session, the staff reaction was, "I wish you'd told us that in the middle of the week, when we could have done something about it. Why'd you hold back? We could have used what you've learned to change the program right then and there."

I tried to explain that the implications of what I observed had only become clear to me an hour or two before our meeting when my coevaluator and I had sat down with our field notes, looked them over, and discussed their significance together. Despite this explanation, which struck me as altogether reasonable and persuasive and struck the staff as altogether disingenuous, from that moment forth a lingering distrust hung over the evaluation as staff periodically joked about when we'd get around to telling them what we'd learned next time. Throughout the three years of the project, the issue of timing feedback surfaced several times a year. As they came increasingly to value our feedback, they wanted it to come earlier and ear-

lier during each field conference. During the second field conference in the second year, when a number of factors had combined to make the program quite different from what the staff had hoped for, the end-of-the-conference evaluation feedback session generated an unusual amount of frustration from the staff because my analyses of what had happened had not been shared earlier. Again, I found some distrust of my insistence that those interpretations had emerged later rather than sooner as the patterns became clear to me.

Evaluators who provide formative feedback on an ongoing basis need to be conscientious in resisting pressures to share findings and interpretations before they have confidence about what they have observed and sorted out important patterns—not certainty, but at least some degree of confidence. The evaluator is caught in a dilemma: Reporting patterns before they are clearly established may lead program staff to intervene inappropriately, withholding feedback too long may mean that dysfunctional patterns become so entrenched that they are difficult, if not impossible, to change.

No ideal balance has ever emerged for me between continuing observations and providing feedback. Timing feedback is a matter of judgment and strategy, and it depends on the nature of the evaluator's relationship with program staff and the nature of the feedback, especially the balance between what staff will perceive as negative and positive feedback. When in doubt, and where the relationship between the evaluator and program staff has not stabilized into one of long-term trust, I counsel evaluator observers to err on the side of less feedback rather than more. As often happens in social relationships, negative feedback that was wrong is long remembered and often recounted. On the other hand, it may be a measure of the success of the feedback that program

staff so fully adopt it that they make it their own and cease to credit the insights of the evaluator.

Once feedback is given, the role of the evaluator changes. Those to whom the feedback was presented are likely to become much more conscious of how their behavior and language are being observed. Thus, added to the usual effect of the fieldworker on the setting being observed, this feedback dimension of fieldwork increases the impact of the evaluator observer on the setting in which he or she is involved.

Though this problem of reactivity is accentuated in evaluation, it exists in any observational inquiry. As the researcher prepares to leave the field, and people react to that imminent departure, the impact of the researcher's presence on the setting may become visible in new ways. Because those effects have been of such major concern to people who engage in naturalistic inquiry, the final section in this chapter considers this question of how the observer affects what is observed.

■ The Observer and What Is Observed: Unity and Separation

The question of how the observer affects what is observed has natural as well as social science dimensions. The Heisenberg uncertainty principle states that the instruments used to measure velocity and position of an electron alter the accuracy of measurement. When the scientist measures the position of an electron, its velocity is changed, and when velocity is measured, it becomes difficult to capture precisely the electron's position. The process of observing affects what is observed. These are real effects, not just errors of perception or mea-

surement. The physical world can be altered by the intrusion of the observer. How much more, then, are social worlds changed by the intrusion of fieldworkers?

The effects of observation vary depending on the nature of the observation, the type of setting being studied, the personality and procedures of the observer, and a host of unanticipated conditions. Nor is it simply in fieldwork involving naturalistic inquiry that scientific observers affect what is observed. Experimentalists, survey researchers, cost-benefit analysts, and psychologists who administer standardized tests all affect the situations into which they introduce data collection procedures. The issue is not whether or not such effects occur; rather, the issue is how to monitor those effects and take them into consideration when interpreting data.

A strength of naturalistic inquiry is that the observer is sufficiently a part of the situation to be able to understand personally what is happening. Fieldworkers are called on to inquire into and be reflective about how their inquiry intrudes and how those intrusions affect findings. But that's not always easy. Consider the case of anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon, who did fieldwork for a quarter century among the isolated and primitive Yanomami Indians who lived deep in the rain forest at the borders of Venezuela and Brazil. He studied mortality rates by dispensing steel goods, including axes, as a way of persuading people to give him the names of their dead relatives in violation of tribal taboos. Brian Ferguson, another anthropologist knowledgeable about the Yanomami, believes that Chagnon's fieldwork destabilized relationships among villages, promoted warfare, and introduced disease. Chagnon denies these charges but acknowledges extracting tribal secrets by giving informants gifts like beads and fishhooks, capitalizing on animosities between individuals, and bribing children for

information when their elders were not around. He gave away machetes in exchange for blood samples for his genealogical studies. The long-term effects of his fieldwork have become a matter of spirited debate and controversy within anthropology (Geertz 2001; Tierney 2000a, 2000b).

At the other end of the intrusion continuum we find those qualitative designs where "intrusions" are intentionally designed because the qualitative inquiry is framed as an intended form of desired intervention. This is the case, for example, with collaborative and participatory forms of inquiry in which those people in the setting who become coresearchers are expected to be affected by participation in the inquiry. The processes of participation and collaboration can be designed and facilitated to have an impact on participants and collaborators quite beyond whatever findings they may generate by working together. In the process of participating in an evaluation, participants are exposed to and have the opportunity to learn the logic of research and the discipline of data-based reasoning. Skills are acquired in problem identification, criteria specification, and data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Acquisition of research skills and ways of thinking can have a longer-term impact than the use of findings from a particular evaluation study. This "learning from the process" as an outcome of participatory and collaborative inquiry experiences is called *process use* in contrast to findings use (Patton 1997a: Chapter 5, 1998, 1999c).

While it is not possible to know precisely how collaboration will affect coresearchers or to fully anticipate how an observer will affect the setting observer, both cases illustrate the need to be thoughtful about the interconnections between observers and observed. It is possible, however, when designing the study and making decisions about the ob-

server's degree of participation in the setting, the visibility and openness of fieldwork, and the duration of fieldwork (see Exhibit 6.1 earlier in this chapter) to anticipate certain of the situations that may arise and to establish strategies for how those situations will be handled. For example, I have been involved as a participant observer-evaluator in a number of professional development programs where participants were expected to exercise increasing control over the curriculum as the program evolved. Had I fully participated in such participatory decision making, I could have influenced the direction of the program. Anticipating that problem and reviewing the implications with program staff, in each case I decided not to participate actively in participant-led decision making to the full extent I might have had I not been involved in the role of evaluator observer. The participatory and empowering philosophy of these programs called for each participant to articulate interests and help make happen those things that he or she wanted to have happen. In my role as evaluator observer, I had to reduce the extent to which I acted out that philosophy so as to limit my impact on the direction of the group. I aimed my involvement at a level where I would not appear withdrawn from the process, yet at the same time attempted to minimize my influence, especially where the group was divided on priorities.

Another example comes from evaluation of a community leadership program mentioned previously in this chapter. As a three-person team of participant observers, we participated fully in small-group leadership exercises. When the groups in which we participated were using concepts inappropriately or doing the exercise wrong, we went along with what participants said and did without making corrections. Had we really been *only* participants—and not participant evaluators—we would have offered

corrections and solutions. Thus, our roles made us more passive than we tended naturally to be in order not to dominate the small groups. We had anticipated this possibility in the design stage prior to fieldwork and had agreed on this strategy at that time.

The role and impact of the evaluator observer can change over the course of fieldwork. Early in the wilderness program, I kept a low profile during participant-led planning discussions. Later in the program, particularly during the final field conference of the second year, I became more engaged in discussions about the future direction of the project.

Reporting on the relationship between the observer and the observed, then, and the ways in which the observer may have affected the phenomenon observed becomes part of the methodological discussion in published fieldwork reports and evaluation studies. In that methodological discussion (or the methods chapter of a dissertation), the observer presents data about the effects of fieldwork on the setting and people therein and also the observer's perspective on what has occurred. As Patricia Carini (1975) has explained, such a discussion acknowledges that findings inevitably are influenced by the observer's point of view during naturalistic inquiry:

The observer has a point of view that is central to the datum and it is in the articulation—in the revelation of his point of view—that the datum of inquiry is assumed to emerge. In effect the observer is here construed as one moment of the datum and as such the fabric of his thought is inextricably woven into the datum as he is assumed to be constituent of its meaning. From this assumption it is possible to consider the relationship of the observer to the phenomenon under inquiry. Relatedness can be stated in many ways: opposition, identity, proximity, interpenetration, isolation, to name

only a few. All imply that the way in which a person construes his relationship to the phenomenal world is a function of his *point of view* about it. That is, relationship is not a given nor an absolute, but depends upon a personal perspective. It is also true that perspective can shift, the only necessity of a person's humanity being that he takes some stance in relationship to the events about him. (pp. 8-9)

Carini is here articulating the interdependence between the observer and what is observed. Prior to data collection, the fieldworker plans and strategizes about the hoped-for and expected nature of that interdependence. But things don't always unfold as planned, so observers must make some effort to observe themselves observing—and record the effects of their observations on the people observed and, no less important, reflect on changes they've experienced from having been in the setting. This means being able to balance observation with reflection and manage the tension between engagement and detachment.

Bruyn (1966), in his classic work on participant observation, articulated a basic premise of participant observation: the "role of the participant observer requires both detachment and personal involvement" (p. 14). To be sure, there is both tension and ambiguity in this premise. How it plays out in any given situation will depend on both the observer and the phenomenon being observed.

Thus, we may observe at the outset that while the traditional role of the scientist is that of a neutral observer who remains unmoved, unchanged, and untouched in his examination of phenomena, the role of the participant observer requires sharing the sentiments of people in social situations; as a consequence he himself is changed as well as changing to some degree the situation in which he is a participant.

part. . . . The effects are reciprocal for observer and observed. The participant observer seeks, on the one hand, to take advantage of the changes due to his presence in the group by recording these changes as part of his study, and on the other hand, to reduce the changes to a minimum by the manner in which he enters into the life of the group. (Bruyn 1966:14)

Whether one is engaged in participant observation or onlooker observation, what happens in the setting being observed will, to some extent, be dependent on the role assumed by the observer. Likewise, the nature of the data collected will, to some extent, be dependent on the role and perspective of the observer. And just as the presence of the observer can affect people observed, so too the observer can be affected.

The Personal Experience of Fieldwork

The intersection of social science procedures with individual capabilities and situational variation is what makes fieldwork a highly personal experience. At the end of her book *Doing Fieldwork*, Rosalie Wax (1971) reflected on how fieldwork changed her:

A colleague has suggested that I reflect on the extent to which I was changed as a person by doing field work. I reflected and the result astonished me. For what I realized was that I had not been greatly changed by the things I suffered, enjoyed or endured; nor was I greatly changed by the things I did (though they strengthened my confidence in myself). What changed me irrevocably and beyond repair were the things *learned*. More specifically, these irrevocable changes involved replacing mythical or ideological assumptions with the correct (though often painful) facts of the situation. (p. 363)

Fieldwork is not for everyone. Some, like Henry James, will find that "innocent and infinite are the pleasures of observation." Others will find observational research anything but pleasurable. Some students have described their experiences to me as tedious, frightening, boring, and "a waste of time," while others have experienced challenge, exhilaration, personal learning, and intellectual insight. More than once the same student has experienced both the tedium and the exhilaration, the fright and the growth, the boredom and the insight. Whatever the adjectives used to describe any particular individual's fieldwork, of this much we are assured: The experience of observing provides the observer with both experience and observations, the interconnection being cemented by reflection. No less an authority than William Shakespeare gives us this assurance.

Armado: "How hast thou purchased this experience?"

Moth: "By my penny of observation."

—*Love's Labour's Lost*

A Part of and Apart From the World Observed

The personal, perspective-dependent nature of observations can be understood as both a strength and a weakness, a strength in that personal involvement permits firsthand experience and understanding, and a weakness in that personal involvement introduces selective perception. In the deep engagement of naturalistic inquiry lies both its risks and its benefits. Reflection on that engagement, from inside and outside the phenomenon of interest, crowns fieldwork with reflexivity and makes the observer the

CHANCE DISCOVERY OR THE RESULT OF CAREFUL, DISCIPLINED OBSERVATION?

In 1949, an obscure Australian psychiatrist, John F. J. Cade, noticed that the urine of his manic patients was highly toxic to guinea pigs, and he began looking for the toxic chemical, which he suspected was uric acid.

He began experimenting with lithium urate, not because of any psychiatric properties of lithium, but because lithium urate was the most soluble salt of uric acid. To Cade's surprise, far from being toxic, the salt protected guinea pigs against the urine of manics, and it also sedated the animals, effects Cade found were due to the lithium. He immediately tried other lithium salts on himself and, when they proved safe, on ten hospitalized manic patients, all of whom recovered, some almost miraculously.

Cade's discovery is often characterized as serendipitous.... [However], the discovery of lithium as an antimanic agent resulted from one man's curiosity and powers of observation and deduction. (Kramer 1993:44)

observed—even if only by oneself. So we repeat Halcolm's refrain that opened this chapter:

Go out into the world. Live among the peoples of the world as they live. Learn their language. Participate in their rituals and routines. Taste of the world. Smell it. Watch and listen. Touch and be touched. Write down what you see and hear, how they think and how you feel.

Enter into the world. Observe and wonder. Experience and reflect. To understand a world you must become part of that world while at the same time remaining separate, a part of and apart from.

Go then, and return to tell what you see and hear, what you learn, and what you come to understand.

Summary Guidelines for Fieldwork

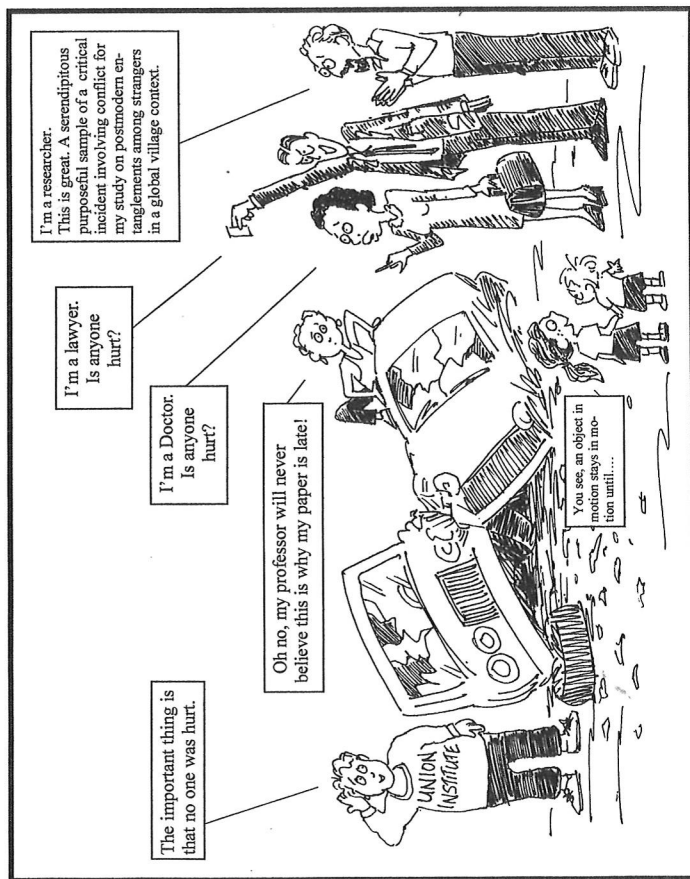
A reader who came to this chapter looking for specific fieldwork rules and clear procedures would surely be disappointed. Looking back over this chapter, the major theme seems to be, **What you do depends on the situation, the nature of the inquiry,**

the characteristics of the setting, and the skills, interests, needs, and point of view that you, as observer, bring to your engagement. Yet, the conduct of observational research is not without direction. Exhibit 6.6 offers a modest list of 10 guidelines for fieldwork (not, please notice, commandments, just guidelines) by way of reviewing some of the major issues discussed in this chapter. Beyond these seemingly simple but deceptively complex prescriptions, the point remains that what you do depends on a great number of situational variables, your own capabilities, and careful judgment informed by the strategic themes for qualitative inquiry presented in the first chapter (Exhibit 2.1).

Having considered the guidelines and strategic themes for naturalistic field-based research, and after the situational constraints on and variations in the conduct of fieldwork have been properly recognized and taken into account in the design, there remains only the core commitment of qualitative inquiry to reaffirm. That core commitment was articulated by Nobel laureate Nicholas Tinbergen in his 1975 acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in physiology

EXHIBIT 6.6 Summary Guidelines for Fieldwork

1. Design the fieldwork to be clear about the role of the observer (degree of participation); the tension between insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives; degree and nature of collaboration with coresearchers; disclosure and explanation of the observer's role to others; duration of observations (short vs. long); and focus of observation (narrow vs. broad). (See Exhibit 6.1.)
2. Be descriptive in taking field notes. Strive for thick, deep, and rich description.
3. Stay open. Gather a variety of information from different perspectives. Be opportunistic in following leads and sampling purposefully to deepen understanding. Allow the design to emerge flexibly as new understandings open up new paths of inquiry.
4. Cross-validate and triangulate by gathering different kinds of data: observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, recordings, and photographs. Use multiple and mixed methods.
5. Use quotations; represent people in their own terms. Capture participants' views of their experiences in their own words.
6. Select key informants wisely and use them carefully. Draw on the wisdom of their informed perspectives, but keep in mind that their perspectives are selective.
7. Be aware of and strategic about the different stages of fieldwork.
 - a. Build trust and rapport at the entry stage. Remember that the observer is also being observed and evaluated.
 - b. Attend to relationships throughout fieldwork and the ways in which relationships change over the course of fieldwork, including relationships with hosts, sponsors within the setting, and coresearchers in collaborative and participatory research.
 - c. Stay alert and disciplined during the more routine, middle phase of fieldwork.
 - d. Focus on pulling together a useful synthesis as fieldwork draws to a close. Move from generating possibilities to verifying emergent patterns and confirming themes.
 - e. Be disciplined and conscientious in taking detailed field notes at all stages of fieldwork.
 - f. In evaluations and action research, provide formative feedback as part of the verification process of fieldwork. Time that feedback carefully. Observe its impact.
8. Be as involved as possible in experiencing the setting as fully as is appropriate and manageable while maintaining an analytical perspective grounded in the purpose of the fieldwork.
9. Separate description from interpretation and judgment.
10. Be reflective and reflexive. Include in your field notes and reports your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Consider and report how your observations may have affected the observed as well as how you may have been affected by what and how you've participated and observed. Ponder and report the origins and implications of your own perspective.



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Between-Chapters Interlude

Constructivist *Rashomon* heaven: Multiple and diverse perspectives

and medicine: "*watching* and *wondering*." Tinbergen explained that it was by watching and wondering that he had, despite being behaviors, he was able to make a major medical and scientific contribution. His research methodology: "*watching* and *wondering*."

Notes

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