5

Methodology

The fourth component of field research is *methodology*, a term that refers to the larger research design that one follows when engaging in research, rather than just the specific methods used for collecting data. Methodology includes such things as sampling, gaining entrée, resolving ethical concerns, and maintaining relationships in the field. The techniques used to collect the data, such as interviews and observations, fall under what I refer to as methods and are covered in later chapters.

Sampling

Let's pretend that you are interested in studying high school science classes. You have access to four high schools, each with eight science classes. Even if you love science, observing all 32 classes is probably more than you want to undertake. You decide to conduct long-term observations in one class, but which class? How will you decide? To answer questions such as these, field researchers use sampling procedures.

Two major types of sampling are probability sampling and purposeful sampling. You might be familiar with probability sampling, which includes such types as random, systematic, and stratified sampling. These sampling methods are used to select a sample from a larger population in such a way that the sample is representative of the population from which it was drawn. A primary purpose of using probability sampling is to be able to statistically generalize the results from the sample to the population. Probability sampling is usually used when a large sample is desired.

Although probability sampling is primarily associated with quantitative work, field researchers can use probability sampling. A field researcher might, for example, systematically select every fifth person who enters a jewelry store and interview him or her. Fieldwork conducted by a large team of researchers might use probability sampling.

For the most part, field researchers use purposeful sampling or theoretical sampling. The number of cases selected with purposeful sampling is often small: One person, such as a high school principal, might be chosen for an in-depth examination of his daily routine; two locations might be compared, such as health clubs that serve different types of clients; or 22 workers in a meat packing plant might be observed and interviewed (Wolcott, 1994).

The key to purposeful sampling is to select cases for systematic study that are information rich (Patton, 1990). As with probability sampling, there are different types of purposeful sampling. From the array of available options, field researchers select the strategy that meets the purpose and goals of their research. I find Patton's explanations of different types of purposeful sampling particularly informative, so I have modified one of his summary tables and present it in Figure 5.1. The types of sampling he describes can be used for sampling settings or groups, individuals, observation times, documents, other artifacts, and so on.

There is a misconception that field researchers rely on convenience sampling. To the contrary, convenience sampling is the weakest form of sampling and is avoided when possible.

Determining the size of the sample for field research is closer to *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* than it is to a mathematical formula. The sample should not be too small or too large. It should be "just right." Too small of a sample can lead to misleading results. Samples that are too large make in-depth analysis of each case impossible. Someplace in between too small and too large is "just right."

Obviously, this still leaves us with the question, how big should the sample be? This question has no easy answer. When selecting individuals to be interviewed, a good starting point is 20. Then, continue to interview until you have at least five new cases that fail to add anything new to the analysis.

Do not hold too firmly to the notion of 20 as being "just right." In truth, how many cases you select depends upon a host of factors—the purpose of the research, the research questions, the number of participants available, and the time and resources of the researcher (Patton, 1990). The appropriate sample size also is affected by what is being sampled—research sites, times for observing, documents to analyze, and so on.

Extreme or deviant case	Selecting cases that have unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest
Intensity	Selecting information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely
Maximum variation	Selecting cases that are considerably different on the dimensions of interest
Homogeneous	Selecting cases that are similar to each other
Typical case	Selecting cases that are typical, normal, average
Stratified	Selecting cases from different subgroups
Critical case	Selecting cases that have potential for logical generalizations and maximum application of information to other cases
Snowball or chain	Selecting cases from referrals by participants
Criterion	Selecting cases based on them meeting some criterion of interest
Theory-based	Selecting cases that manifest theoretical constructs of interest
Confirming and disconfirming	Selecting cases that have potential for supporting or refuting initial analysis
Opportunistic	Selecting cases that are unexpectedly available
Random	Selecting a relatively small number of cases using a probability sampling procedure
Political	Selecting or avoiding politically sensitive cases
Convenience	Selecting cases that require little effort or forethought
Combination	Selecting cases by mixing purposeful sampling with probability sampling

Figure 5.1 Purposeful Sampling Strategies

SOURCE: From *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Second Edition (pp. 182–183), by M. Q. Patton, 1990, Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Copyright 1994 by Sage Publications, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Gaining Entrée

Remember our friend Herbie Goldfarb from *The Milagro Beanfield War* (Nichols, 1974)? Herbie was excited about being in Milagro, so he assumed the members of the community would be as eager to have him there as he was to be there. As often occurs in field research, however,

this was a false assumption. Herbie might have been more successful in Milagro had he known some of the procedures that successful field researchers use to gain entrée to a setting.

Gaining entrée is a complicated process, and the particular route one takes to gain entrée affects the rest of the research. For example, procedures for gaining access depend on the location of your setting and whether you are conducting the research alone or as a member of a team (Burgess, 1991).

As noted previously, not all settings are open to everyone; some require that you gain permission before entering. The individuals who play a key role in granting or denying access are referred to in field research literature as **gatekeepers.** In addition to controlling access, gatekeepers control the flow of interactions within a setting (Burgess, 1991). By thus limiting when the researcher gets to come and go, who he or she talks to and for how long, and what can be observed, they effectively dictate what kinds of data and information are available (Burgess, 1991). Consequently, the gatekeeper can wield a great deal of power over a study's outcomes. Throughout the research process, gaining access is usually negotiated and renegotiated (Burgess, 1991). Johnson aptly describes the process of gaining entrée as a continuing, "progressive series of negotiations rather than a one-shot agreement" (1975, p. 176).

To facilitate gaining entrée, explain who you are and why you are conducting the research. The gatekeeper might need to know who will see your field notes, listen to the tapes from the interviews, and read the final manuscript. Make sure that you talk about issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms. For those of you who will undertake field research for a class project, a letter of introduction from your instructor written on official letterhead might help you in some settings.

That said, although gatekeepers require a reasonable explanation of your research focus, they need not know everything about it. Sometimes simply sharing your research questions sufficiently reassures the gatekeeper. In any case, if this individual does not have a good sense of what you are doing, your chances of being denied access increase greatly. Be prepared to explain how your goals of wanting to understand the day-to-day interactions in a setting are different from wanting to evaluate or judge the setting. Remember that similar information must be provided to both the formal and informal gatekeepers and be aware that each person in your chosen setting is "to a greater or lesser degree a gatekeeper" (Burgess, 1991, p. 48).

Although I provide the above practical advice, access to a setting is sometimes gained simply by a large amount of creativity, luck, and a willingness to seize the moment. A string of events led Duneier (1999) to an opportunity for gaining access to sidewalk magazine vendors in Greenwich Village. Hakim Hasam, a central figure in an earlier book by Duneier, introduced Marvin Martin to him. Duneier explained how through Marvin he gained access to the world of the vendors:

> As he thought about going back to New York, he lamented that his business partner, Ron, was going through a stage of being unreliable. Every time Marvin left the table to place bets at Off-Track Betting, he had to depend on Ron to remain by the table; if Ron was drunk or high, he might abandon the table, and it would be taken by the police.
>
> A thought occurred to me. I could work for Marvin during the coming summer. I would learn a lot more about the sidewalk, if I worked as a vendor myself, than I would by merely observing or doing interviews, and he would have his table covered. So I proposed that I work at this table for three months and give him the money I made. "What will the fellas think when I have a white guy working for me all summer?" he asked. We decided he should just tell them the truth—I was there to do research on a book about the block—and he said he would think about it. (p. 334)

Although it took some time for Duneier to be sufficiently accepted by the other vendors, he at least had a place to be, something to do, and permission to be on the scene from one of the informal gatekeepers on the street.

Numerous other factors can affect the researcher's chances of gaining access to a setting. For example, gender plays a crucial role. Field researchers of the "wrong" gender sometimes are denied access. For example, women may find it more difficult to get permission to study settings that are generally dominated by men, such as professional sports teams. Alternatively, a group dominated by a particular gender may view a researcher of the other gender as a delightful addition to the setting, making it easier for permission to be gained.

Just as your gender can work for or against you in complicated ways as you attempt to enter your research setting, so too can your chances be affected by your race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, social class, or other personal characteristics. As noted above, Marvin, who helped Duneier (1999) get access to the street vendors, worried that the researcher's race might present a problem. Remember, too, that people often react to the intersection of these characteristics. Not only was Duneier White in

a setting predominated by Black men, but also his clothing, speech, and diction were different. Should he have attempted to alter these last three characteristics to fit in? The answer in this case and others is "no." Attempts to more than minimally change one's clothing, speech, or diction are often ineffectual—and potentially insulting.

Arrival in the Field

Upon their arrival in the field, researchers can find themselves in unexpected situations. When I think about some of the situations that have occurred, I am reminded of the line from one of Hunter S. Thompson's books: "Bad craziness, but it never got weird enough for me" (1979). Some of these situations would, in fact, have been "too weird" for me, and I would probably have retreated hastily. However, many field researchers have persevered despite early days of "bad craziness." Indeed, Wax suggests that smooth early interactions in a setting are not only rare, but also suspect (1971, p. 17). Wax certainly knows from firsthand experience how difficult one's arrival in a setting can be. For the first six weeks she was on-site at a Japanese American relocation camp, she felt as though she were losing her mind because no one would talk to her. During the early days of their research, other researchers have described feeling "stupid, clumsy, and less than human" and "full of disorientation, shock, and disequilibrium" (p. 19).

Sometimes the best way to approach one's early days in a setting is with a good sense of humor. When I am in an extremely uncomfortable situation, for example, I try to reassure myself that the experience will someday make an entertaining story at a party. Wax (1971) provides similar advice: "Painful and humiliating experiences are easier to talk about if one does not take them too seriously, and it is less distressing to picture oneself as a clown or figure of fun than as a dolt or a neurotic" (p. 19).

Regardless of how the researcher handles the situation, feeling out of place or even worse is to be expected when one first begins the fieldwork portion of a project. Such feelings are in fact quite common: The very role of field research in unfamiliar settings requires that you take yourself out of your own comfortable world and enter one that is new to you.

The purpose of this section is not to scare you away from field research but to help you appreciate the difficulties of arriving in a setting

so that you can be prepared to deal with the potential stresses such an endeavor might bring. Also, I would mislead you if I pretended that early interactions in a setting are simply experiences to get through so that you can proceed with the business of doing "real" research. In fact, the initial period of immersion in the setting lays the groundwork for the rest of a field research project. Everything that follows is affected by these early interactions, particularly as they hold the potential for introducing to you the actors who will play key roles in your project.

Key Actors

One factor that can help the field researcher move beyond the awkward, and often scary, early days of field research is the assistance of one or more members in the setting. If you can establish **rapport** and procure the cooperation of at least one member of the setting, you have a better chance of proceeding with the types of interactions and observations necessary for a successful project.

Field researchers sometimes refer to the person who rescues and assists them as a **key actor** or key insider, a member of the setting who is willing to act as a guide and assistant. Historically, this person has been called an informant, but many of us prefer to move away from this term because of its negative connotations.

A key actor might be someone the researcher knows prior to undertaking the research or one of the formal or informal gatekeepers with whom a relationship has been developed during the gaining entrée stages of the project. Usually, the key insider is someone the researcher met in the early days of the research who, for often-unknown reasons, is willing to "adopt" the researcher and become her or his mentor and guide.

Interactions with others in the setting are often easier to establish if the key actor makes introductions. This person can help the researcher gain entrée, establish rapport, provide explanations, and perform a host of other useful tasks. The key actor might also tell the researcher when he or she has committed a social faux pas or is in potential danger (Wax, 1971). The key insider helps resocialize the field researcher to the ways of the members in the setting.

Although key actors provide a valuable service, costs also are involved with relying on insiders as your guides. One drawback is that

key actors have their own perspectives, biographies, and agendas that influence what they see, think, and feel. Although important, the perspectives of the insider may run counter to those of most members of the setting. Consequently, the insider's understanding of the setting should be considered only one of many perspectives and not taken as representative of the group as a whole.

Another disadvantage of working with an insider is that by doing so the researcher runs the risk of isolating himself or herself from some members of the setting. For example, Hakim Hasam, an important key actor in Duneier's (1999) work on street vendors, was well respected by other vendors except Muhammad. Thus, although Hasam was an extremely valuable resource, Duneier had to be "less than sincere" from time to time about his relationship to Hasam if he wanted to have access to all the vendors (p. 336). As a result, Duneier struggled with the recognition that his presentation of self led him into that gray area where fieldwork at times becomes a "morally ambiguous enterprise" (p. 336). The situation for Duneier would have been considerably worse if he had discovered that Hasam was not well liked.

If the researcher learns too late that the key actor with whom he or she has connected actually impeded, rather than helped, the research, ethical issues present an even greater concern. Most of us know the pain of trying to disentangle ourselves from a friendship that is no longer desired. Because of the risks, as well as the benefits, of the participation of key actors, researchers are usually cautious about letting these individuals have too much input into the parameters of the study. At the same time, fieldwork is often a cooperative venture undertaken with participants in a setting, rather than a hierarchical activity with the researcher wielding all power. Thus, as a **member** of the setting, the key actor possesses a perspective that is as important as but not superior to any other. Through careful and continual study of field notes and persistent reflection on the research process as it unfolds, the researcher can keep tabs on whether he or she is unwittingly permitting the key actor to unduly influence the direction of the project.

In addition to gaining entrée, entering a new environment, and finding a key actor, ethical concerns are ever present.

Informed Consent

Chapter 2 of this guide discussed the issue of Institutional Review Board approval, a step that is required for any study focusing on human subjects.

In order to gain such approval, the researcher must have a plan for getting informed consent that the board considers ethical. Sometimes gaining permission from gatekeepers and obtaining informed consent from participants in the setting is the same thing. After all, both formal and informal gatekeepers also can be members in the setting.

Liebow's (1994) research provides a good example of gaining entrée and obtaining informed consent simultaneously from informal gatekeepers. After he retired on disability from 20 years on the job as an anthropologist with the National Institute of Mental Health, Liebow volunteered at a soup kitchen and shelter. Because he thoroughly enjoyed the interactions with the women at the shelter, he decided to undertake a research project. He first obtained permission from the formal gatekeeper, the shelter director. Because Liebow was already known to the shelter director as a competent and respected volunteer, he was able to obtain permission simply by requesting it. However, this was only one level of gatekeeping that he needed to address. He knew that access also was controlled by informal gatekeepers, specifically key shelter residents. He had to obtain permission from these individuals, as well as the rest of the setting's members. Gaining permission from these women was a fairly easy task, but one with strings attached. In the preface of his book, Liebow recounts his experience:

> "Listen," I said at the dinner table one evening, after getting permission to do a study from the shelter director. "I want your permission to take notes. I want to go home at night and write down what I can remember about the things you say and do. Maybe I'll write a book about homeless women." Most of the dozen or so women there nodded their heads or simply shrugged. All except Regina. Her acceptance was conditional. "Only if you promise not to publish before I do," she said. Believing that neither one of us, for different reasons, would ever publish anything in the future, I readily agreed. (p. ix)

For the researcher, this informal agreement over dinner permitted the study to continue, but it carried a prohibition of sorts: It essentially established the rules or ethical guidelines by which Liebow could publish his results. Fortunately, Liebow eventually received Regina's permission to publish; otherwise, according to the ethical standards established in the field, he would have been bound by their earlier agreement.

Conducting research in which all members participate voluntarily through informed consent is easier to accomplish in theory than in practice. First, informed consent is not static: Once permission is given it can

be withdrawn at any time, and the ethical researcher has no choice but to honor the request of a member who no longer wishes to participate. Liebow's (1994) work provides an example of this. Some women agreed to participate in his research project, but then withdrew their permission, one at an extremely late date in the process. He writes,

> Originally, I had asked three homeless women and the director of a shelter to write comments on the manuscript. One of the women, after reading a draft of the manuscript, and for reasons not clear to me, angrily decided she did not want to be in the book at all. She did agree to allow herself to be quoted (but not described) in a couple of places. All other references to her were deleted at her request. Similarly, in the second year one of the more distinctive and more troubled women told me she wanted nothing to do with me or anything I might write. . . . We had gotten along well until the day she saw me in earnest conversation with a woman who had become her enemy. On the theory that "the friend of my enemy is my enemy," she refused to talk to me thereafter (as she had refused to talk to some of the women as well). Also, from that day on, to her I was no longer "Elliot" but "Idiot," as in "Here comes Idiot again to seduce all the women." (p. xvii)

Another difficulty inherent in informed consent is that the researcher might find it impossible to inform everyone who enters a setting that a study is in progress. Van Maanen's (1982) work capably illustrates the difficulties and implications of not informing everyone in a setting. Whereas all of the officers in Van Maanen's study of the police were informed of his role as observer, their agreement to participate fully in the project was granted only after they felt he had passed several tests—not all of which were legal—demonstrating his loyalty and trustworthiness. However, Van Maanen did not extend informed consent to the citizens he encountered. Since he dressed as a plainclothes police officer, most citizens assumed he was a member of the police force, yet "at no time was a citizen ever let in on the partial charade" (p. 113).

Partly because of his agreements with the police officers, Van Maanen decided not to inform the citizens he encountered while "on the job." In defense of this decision, he argued that once he obtained police consent to act as a participant observer, then he had an obligation to participate. Thus, Van Maanen had to back up or assist police officers acting in the line of duty. He writes,

> It is also worth noting that the height of moral duplicity would be to create this sort of partnership impression among the people one studies

> and then refuse to act in line with the implicit bargain such an impression conveys. For me to pose as a friend of the police and then not back them up on a potentially risky adventure, an adventure they may well have undertaken only because of the additional safety they believed my presence provided, would be to violate the very premises of ethnographic research and the importance human relationships play in its enactment. (p. 114)

As researchers we end up on shaky ground when we start making decisions about when informed consent is important. At the same time, the dynamics of field research are such that the researcher often has to make this decision many times during field research. Some Institutional Review Boards require you to explain your informed consent procedures for both the regular participants in the setting and those who might not be but enter it nonetheless.

Field Relationships

Unless we live in total isolation, much of our everyday lives are deeply affected by our relationships. If I asked you to talk about your college experiences, for example, no doubt you would spend a lot of time discussing your relationships with others. Your relationships are probably the most wonderful and sometimes the most painful components of your college life. Daily you engage in relationships of varying degrees and types. You might have a close romantic relationship with a significant other. Probably you have some formal and fairly distant relationships with some of the university's faculty and staff. You have informal, positive relationships with other students. Sometimes your relationships might be negative, as with an ex-roommate. You might have relationships that serve an explicit function, such as when you work with others on a class project. No doubt the dynamics of your many relationships occasionally change and greatly affect how you perceive the quality of your day-to-day life.

Just as your relationships are deeply embedded in your college experiences, relationships similarly affect the field research process. Participating in relationships with members of the setting provides the basis for the interpretive process considered so central to field research. These relationships supply the foundation for what field researchers come to know in the setting. Formation of relationships begins as early as the moment you try to gain entrée to a setting.

A song by the artist Ferron contains the line "Life don't go clickity-clack along a straight-lined track, it comes together, and it comes apart" (1980). This description captures the unexpected and decidedly nonlinear nature of field research, including the relationships the researcher establishes with the participants. The life of the field researcher and the lives of those in the setting under study repeatedly come together and come apart—not fully merging, yet never fully independent.

Field research hinges on personal relationships, preferably ones that are egalitarian and not hierarchical. In her field study of the daily lives of two families, Judith Stacey illustrates this precept:

> Choosing my next major research project, I was eager for a "hands-on" engagement in the field. Unschooled in fieldwork research as I was, I did not anticipate the depth or the complexity of the emotional experiences I was about to undergo. My heart, much more than my hands, has been engaged with the people portrayed in this book who so generously agreed to subject their families to my impertinent sociological scrutiny. (1991, p. ix)

Those who have written about field research almost always have acknowledged the importance of field relationships. Even the earliest textbooks on the subject usually include a section on developing rapport with those in the field. The writers of these early texts told us that if we can get along with the participants in the setting and establish trust, they would invariably open up and provide us with a wealth of information that we might not have gotten without the initial establishing of this rapport. Although it is most assuredly more complex than this early view, current advice to field researchers still emphasizes the central need to establish relationships with those in the setting.

As noted in earlier chapters, the issue of trust in field research is not unidirectional. The field researcher strives for trusting relationships that are reciprocal. Therefore, the onus is placed on the researcher to be worthy of the trust, respect, and goodwill of those encountered in the setting. When he undertook his study of homeless women, for example, Liebow (1994) was keenly aware of the importance of reciprocity. He writes,

> It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this kind of familiarity. It is essential, I believe, in this kind of study—a participation observer kind of study—that relationships be as symmetrical as possible, that there be a quid pro quo; the women needed to know as much about me as I knew about them. (p. xii)

Several of the women even got to know his daughters.

Liebow further illustrates how many field researchers now conceptualize members in a setting as collaborators, not merely subjects to be conned into cooperating. He continues,

> I think of Betty and Louise and many of the other women as friends. As a friend, I owe them friendship. Perhaps I also owe them something because I have so much and they have so little, but I do not feel under any special obligation to them as research subjects. Indeed, I do not think of them as "research subjects." Since they knew what I was trying to do and allowed me to do it, they could just as well be considered collaborators in what might fairly be seen as a cooperative enterprise. (1994, p. xvi)

Once again I turn to the example provided by Duneier's (1999) study of street vendors. His relationships became so strong with these men and women that after the study ended he co-taught a seminar at the University of California, Santa Barbara with Hakim Hasam, assisted by Alice Morin and Marvin Martin, all of whom were vendors.

Developing such rapport is an important first step toward laying the foundation for a productive and satisfying working relationship. It would be nice if at this point I provided you with a neat list of things you could follow to help you achieve rapport with the participants in the setting. Alas, this is not possible. What works in one setting might backfire in another; what works for one of you will not work for others in your class.

Why is it so difficult to provide instructions for developing rapport? Developing rapport requires the same skills you use for making friends, but when we seek new friends we often gravitate toward those who are a bit like us—perhaps they share our interests in music or film, or they are from the same geographical region. Building rapport with potential participants in the field is more complex because they may be considerably different from you; they may be suspicious of your presence; they may be unpleasant to the point of being disgusting; they may use verbal and nonverbal language different than yours; they may be incredibly brilliant, beautiful, talented, and well known; and they may range from boring to fascinating. Your particular configuration of personality styles also will influence your efforts to engage with the potential participants in your research. Further, the status characteristics of all individuals involved affect relationships and rapport in the field—often in very unpredictable ways. Consequently, it is difficult to give specific directions for building rapport.

Honesty, openness, friendliness, and a willingness to get along are usually the best qualities to exhibit when you first undertake contact

with participants in the field, and with time most people will respond positively to genuine concern and interest in them (Neuman, 1991, p. 349). However, remember that building rapport is a process that requires constant attention. Neuman warns us that "rapport is easier to lose once it has been built up than to gain in the first place" (p. 349).

Other features of one's biography also will affect the research process. One's physical attractiveness, neatness habits, standards of time, communication skills, physical health, table manners, hair color and style, level of expertise, musical taste, and abilities are just a few of the many potential factors that affect field relationships in complex and often unknown ways. For example, Liebow (1994) shares with his readers some of the personal characteristics he thinks might have shaped his interactions with the homeless women he studied. He writes,

> It is difficult to be precise about how I was perceived by the women. I am 6'1" and weigh about 175 pounds. I had a lot of white hair but was otherwise nondescript. I dressed casually, often in corduroy pants, shirt, and cardigan. The fact that I was Jewish did not seem to matter much one way or another so far as I could tell. . . . Most of the women probably liked having me around. Male companionship was generally in short supply and the women often made a fuss about the few male volunteers. . . . The fact that I had written a book that was available at the library (three or four women took the trouble to read it) enhanced my legitimacy in their eyes. (p. x)

Although the goal of field research is to understand the everyday lives of those in a setting, this understanding is a negotiated process, affected by the interactions between the researcher and the members. The status characteristics and other personal characteristics of all involved influence the nature of the interactions. The inevitable personal and emotional reactions between the researcher and the members in the setting shape the character of the transactions and their interpretations (Emerson, 1988, p. 176).

In addition to topics discussed thus far—sampling, gaining entrée, resolving ethical concerns, arriving in the field, and nurturing field relationships—researchers have to decide whether their methodology will include triangulation, the topic to which I now turn.

Triangulation

Triangulation comes in many colors and is central to ensuring the quality of field research. Using multiple methods for data collection is a form of

triangulation, as is the involvement of multiple researchers. Data from multiple sources of information can be triangulated. It is especially important to collect data from respondents who occupy different social locations or are likely to have divergent views. For example, in Chenault's (2004) research on the public housing community, she interviewed multiple members of the resident council, as well as representatives of the housing authority and HUD officials; observed and interacted with members of the resident council; and performed a content analysis of HUD documents. Observing different people at different times in different places is another form of triangulation. Approaching problems using different theoretical frames and analyzing the data using more than one technique are also ways of engaging in triangulation. It is usually reassuring when triangulation leads to corroborating evidence, although it is not the kiss of death where this is not the case (Creswell, 1998, p. 202).

Although I am a fan of triangulation and recommend using as many types of triangulation as possible, I caution against rejecting data and conclusions just because triangulation identified inconsistencies. What might ultimately lead to more insight into a setting is understanding why different participants give different accounts, different types of data lead to different conclusions, and multiple researchers disagree with each other. Triangulation is useful in field research for verification, but using it to try to determine what finding is "the truth" runs counter to some paradigmatic assumptions that underpin qualitative research.

One of several common methods that can generate data for triangulation is observation. Procedures for collecting detailed observations are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Highlights

1. Gaining entrée is negotiated and renegotiated throughout the research process.
2. Key actors are individuals who act as guides or mentors to the field researcher.
3. Formal and informal gatekeepers control access to a setting and the availability of data within the setting.
4. Arrival in a field setting is often filled with stress, fear, mistakes, and insecurities.
5. Although informed consent is a goal of most field researchers, actually getting informed consent from everyone encountered in the field is problematic.

6. Trusting, reciprocal relationships are the basis of good field research.
7. Multiple researchers, multiple data sources, multiple data types, and multiple theoretical approaches are all forms of triangulation.
8. Triangulation is important for ensuring the quality of the research.

Exercises

1. Assume that you are interested in conducting an in-depth study of servers and customers in restaurants and that you would like to conduct your research in two restaurants that serve considerably different clientele. Develop an appropriate research question for your study. Then using a purposive sampling strategy, select two restaurants within driving distance. What strategy did you use? Why was it appropriate for your research? What restaurants did you select? Explain why you ultimately selected the two you did.

2. Pretend that you want to conduct research to understand the day-to-day interactions in a funeral home. Discuss the procedures that you could use to gain the permission of the gatekeeper(s).

3. Some field researchers strive for nonhierarchical relationships with participants, and deep friendships can develop. Do you think there are any circumstances when it is appropriate for a researcher to engage in a romantic relationship with a participant in the field? Would romantic attachments be appropriate after the fieldwork portion of the research is completed? Defend your answers.

4. Select a setting of interest to you. Write approximately two pages describing procedures you can use for observing and interacting in this setting that include at least two types of triangulation.