9 Working with Marginalised, Vulnerable or Privileged Groups

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Introduction

By now you will be well aware that fieldwork in the Third World can present difficult practical, ethical and personal challenges. When the subjects of research are marginalised groups, the challenges look even more foreboding. How should you behave when you are interacting with people who are obviously much poorer than you, or who are minority ethnic groups,[1] lower class women, or children? How will they react to you? We must be sensitive if we are to carry out ethical and worthwhile research involving marginalised peoples. hooks indicates that for too long research on the marginalised has been carried out in an oppressive manner:

> Often this speech about the 'other' annihilates, erases: 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speak subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk. Stop'. (1990:151–152)

Efforts should be made to ensure that our research is not merely a self-serving exercise. This can be achieved in various ways, from nurturing respectful and friendly relationships with our participants, to forms of activism, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another group with whom we have to take special care in our research are the privileged – those who are rich and/or powerful. While some people may feel that research involving the poor is more of an immediate priority in development studies than research targeting the rich, this overlooks the importance of understanding the culture and practices of those occupying powerful positions. It also ignores the value of understanding various social constructions, such as class or ethnicity, from the perspectives of both poorer and wealthier people (Wolf, 1996:37). 'Studying up' is thus now considered a highly credible form of research as it allows us to gain a greater understanding of how differentiation and power are reproduced and used as tools to exacerbate marginalisation of the weak.

While a section of this chapter is thus devoted to researching the elite and powerful, the first four sections will examine special considerations for researchers working with groups whose members are often marginalised or vulnerable, that is, women, children, minority ethnic groups, and the poor. We realise that the groups we have chosen do not cover the gamut of marginalised social groups with whom researchers may come into contact – the physically or mentally disabled and the aged are obvious groups not specifically discussed due to space constraints – but we try to make up for this somewhat by suggesting general principles to apply when working with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (see Box 9.7). In choosing to focus on these groups we also do not wish to suggest that women, children, minority ethnic groups, and the poor are universally oppressed, nor that men, adults, majority ethnic groups and the very rich are universally oppressive. Rather, members of the former social groups are more often in less powerful positions, and thus face reduced opportunities to access resources to improve their well-being.

When working with marginalised or privileged groups which are differently positioned from ourselves,[2] we need to examine carefully our motivations for fieldwork, as discussed in Chapter 6. It has been suggested, for example, that some researchers are merely hopping on a popular bandwagon by choosing to study yet another excluded minority group (Matthews et al., 1998). Wolf (1996) urges that researchers 'need to critically and self-consciously examine their positionality, if only to better understand their role in the global arena or their self-appointed "do-gooder" role' (Wolf, 1996:35). Therefore those of us who are motivated by emotional responses to poverty, human rights abuses and other social injustices need to consider carefully how we present ourselves to the subjects of our study. A danger is that rather than valuing our informants and the knowledge they possess, we pity them if they are marginalised, or, in the case of elites, we mistrust or even despise them. We view our informants not as people who lead multi-dimensional lives – laughing, crying, celebrating, grieving and hoping, just like the rest of us – and who hold information that could increase our understanding of a particular topic, but as people we feel a need to help or that need to be taught something or to be taken down a peg or two. Our attitude towards people who face economic and other hardships should not be so shrouded by pity that we fail to see things of value in those we study. Neither should our attitudes to the elite be clouded by suspicion or anger before we have even met them.

This chapter therefore provides an examination of the importance and concerns associated with both research involving the marginalised and the privileged. Our aim is to help researchers prepare for the challenges of such research so they are able to work in a responsible, sensitive manner and make the most of the opportunities that are available.

Researching women

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, women are not all vulnerable or disadvantaged in relation to other members of society. However, societal structures which vary from culture to culture mean that many women do face specific forms of oppression in their daily lives and are less able, in general, than men to be able to access resources to improve their quality of life. Furthermore, many researchers are aware of the need to consult women, especially because past research efforts so often ignored women or misrepresented them, and such misinformation was often used to inform development policy and practice (Rogers, 1978; Tomm, 1989). However, there are often difficulties associated with research involving women in the Third World. In fact it has been suggested that the sensitivity of ethical issues in development research is often intensified when participants are Third World women (Scheyvens and Leslie, 2000).

Using research to reveal what women are thinking and hoping for can be a process fraught with difficulties. It may, for instance, be very difficult for the researcher to gain access to women, partly because they are often extremely busy, and time to sit and talk may be restricted to the late evenings when it may not be appropriate, or practical, for a researcher to visit women's homes. In addition, women are rarely given roles as official spokespersons for a community thus they are not the first people outsiders are likely to encounter. Women's freedom in public domains may also be constrained, meaning it is unlikely that they will attend community meetings, or, if they do, they will sit quietly at the back and not express opinions or ask questions. The notion that only certain individuals are qualified to speak out in public exists in many Third World contexts. Because women have been consulted so little in the past, there may be genuine surprise and suspicion in the minds of community leaders if a researcher asks to speak to women. If such permission is granted, men may 'loiter' when focus groups or interviews with women are held, at least until they feel comfortable that the issues being discussed are either a) not threatening to them, or b) 'only' women's business.

Even when means are found of talking to women, many may be reluctant to express themselves in front of an outsider due to low self-esteem. As noted by Keesing, a sense of inadequacy can certainly influence what women will tell a researcher about themselves:

> Reflexive autobiography is possible only when subjects believe that their own lives are important enough to deserve recounting, and when social support is provided…. If a people's dominant ideologies, expressions of male political hegemony, define what women know and do as secondary and unimportant, then creating a context where women can and will talk about themselves and their partly separate realms of life and expertise may indeed be difficult. (1985:37)

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that a researcher working with women in a traditional society in Papua New Guinea found that most women preferred interview sessions at night, in contexts where the lighting was dim. Some women

admitted to the researcher that they felt more relaxed under these circumstances than they would during the day as they did not want him to look at their faces or to identify who was talking (Lagisa, 1997).

Development research with women can also be sensitive if it reveals aspects of women's disadvantage. Critical research examining issues such as gender inequities in household decision-making or the impacts of an agricultural extension programme on men and women, for example, can inherently challenge the status quo. If the purpose of such research is made public, it may upset power brokers within a society and others who benefit from women's disadvantaged position.

Difficulties in conducting fieldwork with women should not provide an excuse, however, for researchers to avoid engaging in such research. It is possible to create contexts in which either socially repressed, introverted or less accessible women are willing to open up their private worlds to view (Keesing, 1985). As long as researchers are informed of and sensitive to local socio-cultural contexts, the difficulties discussed above can often be overcome, and women can become very enthusiastic participants (see Box 8.5, Chapter 8):

> For people who do not usually have the opportunity to voice their concerns, research can be very positive and enabling in itself because it can encourage such people to articulate their needs. (Pratt and Loizos, 1992:17)

Even those concurring with the above conclusion may be less certain about the place of men conducting research with women in the Third World. Essentially, should one's sex determine if an individual can carry out research with Third World women? A number of writers suggest benefits arising from same sex researchers and participants, with Oakley (1981) for example arguing that female research participants respond more freely and openly to a female researcher. Similarly, Reinharz (1992:19) suggests that women interviewing women 'is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women'. On a more practical note, Sollis and Moser (1991) suggest that in gender-segregated societies where there is sensitive information to collect about women, it is best to use a female researcher. The example in Box 9.1, and the following quote, lend further support to this viewpoint:

> in many developing countries the world of women is not open to men so that translating the needs and desires of women into research problems and vice versa can best be done by women. (Boesveld, 1986: 46)

But do these authors suggest that there is no place for men in conducting research with Third World women? Indeed, if a man carries out interviews and then interprets the findings which are later published in a report, does this constitute 'men speaking for women?' Is a man able to access women's opinions?

Such challenging questions have led to reluctance on the part of many male researchers to directly engage in research with women in Third World contexts. Some have changed their research topics accordingly, or employed female research

assistants to conduct the necessary research with women. In other cases, however, males have effectively carried out research with Third World women on their own. One example is research for a Masters thesis which was conducted in Lihir, Papua New Guinea (PNG), by a male PNG student from a New Zealand university. While the student, Leonard Lagisa, was not from Lihir and thus did not speak the local language or understand all of the people's cultural traditions, he was from the broader New Guinea Islands region in which Lihir is located, and both his society and Lihirian society are matrilineal.

Box 9.1 A male anthropologist tries to research 'intimate issues' in Nepal

'I recently returned from my fourth trip to Nepal's Nubri Valley in my capacity as an anthropologist specialising in demographic processes…. During a more ambitious and infinitely more naïve period of field research I had actually attempted to elicit responses from women regarding their ages at menarche and menopause, familiarity with contraception, and even went so far as to try to prompt them to describe birthing experiences. Those who knew me well remained silent on the issues yet managed to cast a sardonic smile my way indicating a sympathetic tolerance for such brazen and invasive questions. Those who did not know me so well pointed to the door and signified in no uncertain terms that it was time I made use of it.

Things took a dramatic turn for the better last October when I went with Dr Sabra Jones (MD) to Nubri in order to collect more demographic data, and more importantly, to gather detailed information about reproduction and childbearing from women's perspectives… Dr Jones' interviews revealed fascinating insights about the plight of women who spend much of their adult lives either pregnant or nursing newborns, are often afflicted with vaginal infections for which they have few remedies, witness the deaths of too many of their infants and desire to somehow delay or prevent births yet lack the means or knowledge to do so.

One immediate result of this research was that we managed to organise a program in Kathmandu (January 2001) through the NGO SEEDS (www.nepalseeds.org) at which Tibetan and Nepali women doctors provided basic training on how to prevent many of the problems that were uncovered. It was most gratifying to witness field research being translated into positive action within a matter of only a few months.'

Source: Geoff Childs (2001:2) Demography Program, Australian National University

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In Lihir, Lagisa examined women's involvement in decision-making regarding a major mining project which was in its construction phase, and considered the initial impacts of the mining development on women's lives. Most of Lagisa's fieldwork consisted of group interviews, as it would have aroused suspicion had he attempted to talk alone with village women with whom he was not formally

acquainted. Many of the women were quite shy and unused to talking with those from outside their village area; however, they participated actively in these interview sessions, somewhat to the surprise of Lagisa. As he later reflected, this may have been due to the fact that they felt he could help them to overcome some of the disadvantages they were facing (see Box 9.2).

While the example in Box 9.2 may seem to suggest that men can only gain access to female participants if they trade on their status as authority figures, this tells only part of the story in the case of Lagisa's research. He also found that his position as a man helped him to gain insights into local gender relations and male perceptions of females, especially through participant observation. When staying with one family, for example, he witnessed an argument between a woman and her husband which occurred when the wife, an employee of the mining company, came home late. The husband was upset that food was not ready; thus he scolded his wife, saying:

> What sort of work do you people do that you come home this late? Do you remember that we have children to look after? Tell whoever your boss is to remember that some of you are mothers and should come home early to cook for the family. . . if you come home late again I will come and physically abuse you and your boss. (cited in Lagisa, 1997:158–59)

This provided a poignant reminder to Lagisa of the burden of the double day which female employees of the mining company faced, and the ways in which men's attitudes impeded women's development. It is unlikely that the man quoted above would have spoken to his wife in this way, however, had the researcher staying with them been female or from a foreign country.

Box 9.2 Benefits of a man conducting research with women: a PNG mine site example

In hindsight, it appears that the women responded a lot more openly to me than I had thought they would because they saw me as an authority figure, as someone with access to authorities, who could help to alleviate the problems they faced. In this way, being a man may have actually assisted in gathering information.

The thing that struck me most during my interview sessions with them [Lihirian women] was their interest in wanting to know what I would do with the information I was collecting from them. I tried my best to make them understand that my research was strictly educational but I promised them that I would write a special report which I would send to LMC (Lihir Management Corporation) in the hope that they would act upon it. Lihir women were clearly interested in changing their disadvantaged position and they hoped that my research would, in some way, help to achieve this.

Source: Lagisa (1997:104, 106)

Hence, while it has been drawn to our attention that 'Male and female interviewers will not necessarily see or be allowed to see the same social worlds' (Women and Geography Study Group of the Institute of British Geographers, 1984:135), this should not necessarily be interpreted as meaning that men will not be able to conduct effective research with women.[3] Neither should it be assumed that women researchers will be able to build better rapport than men with female participants, or that they will be likely to gather more meaningful data. Being the same sex as one's participants will not necessarily lead to immediate bonds between a researcher and those being researched, as Schenk-Sandbergen (1998) found out when working with women in a complex cultural setting within India. Restricted access to certain domains should certainly not deter men from engaging in sensitive research projects in which consulting women on their ideas, knowledge and experiences is vital. Not only is it possible for male researchers to talk to women in many circumstances, there are likely to be advantages in having male researchers working with Third World women, listening to their ideas and exposing information on gender roles, gender relations, and local interpretations of masculinity.

Clearly there are arenas of difference other than gender, including ethnicity, class, age, marital status and sexual preference, all of which can affect our behaviour in the field, who we are able to access in our research and how openly they respond to us (Crick, 1993).

Researching children and youths

None of the authors involved in this book has conducted research that focused specifically on children. This makes us no different from most people doing research in the Third World where the trend has been to consider children indirectly, if at all: 'Choosing to study children in development is in itself a major challenge to the researcher, for it is often not considered a worthy subject. It is rather a category taken for granted – seen but not heard, acted upon but not with' (Bowden, 1998:282). In this chapter we have identified children as an important, less powerful group in society whose voices deserve to be heard if their interests are to be served. Thus we support the current trend among social researchers which views children as meaningful actors in their own right who can speak for themselves and express multiple ideas and opinions (Valentine, 1999). Below we consider appropriate ways of working with children and youths.

Guidelines for researching children and young people in Box 9.3 provide some pointers regarding ways to ensure research minimises harm and maximises benefits to them, including suggestions as to how involvement in the research can be made more fun and interesting for our participants. Any potential benefits from the research should be made clear from the outset. Perhaps the most important guideline for those conducting research with children to abide by is to allow sufficient time to build trust and rapport. This can be achieved through repeated visits in which the research proposal is carefully explained, before any actual data collec-

tion goes ahead. In some cases it may be appropriate to establish on-going relationships with the children or young people, whether by writing occasional letters or re-visiting them for research or just out of interest. This will help to overcome a serious concern identified by Matthews et al. (1998:316), that is, that sometimes research with children has turned into 'a "raid", whereby the investigator moves in, plunders the results, swiftly moves out and in this process, the children are denigrated to little more than tokens'. It is also suggested that researchers should pay particular attention to accessing the views of less confident or less articulate children, particularly girls (Gordon, 1998; Matthews and Tucker, 2000:300). Researchers overcame this problem in Nepal by encouraging girls to sing songs, which helped to make them more comfortable and gave the researchers insights into girls' present perceptions and future goals (Johnson et al. 1995, cited in Gordon, 1998:67). Using visual methods may also prove a valuable means of encouraging child-led participation in research, as Young and Barrett (2001) discovered when conducting research with street children in Kampala.

Box 9.3 Guidelines for research involving children and youths

• Clearly explain the purpose of the research to children and young people in terms they can understand, and what their participation will involve. Also inform their parents or guardians and, where appropriate, the wider community.

• Allow sufficient time to build rapport with young participants – this is vital if you wish to develop their confidence and encourage active participation from them.

• Give children and young people the chance to opt into the research without pressure from parents or friends. Assure them that they can withdraw from the research at any time.

• Find ways of enabling children and young people to exert some control over the research e.g. giving them control of the tape recorder during interviews so they can turn it off if they feel uncomfortable.

• Assure the children and young people's privacy and confidentiality and their right to remain anonymous in the research.

• Ensure that participation in the research is enriching and mutually beneficial for yourself and your participants. This can be achieved through use of child-friendly research methods which are more rewarding and less intimidating than conventional questionnaires or interviews, such as making posters, drawing, story writing, keeping oral or written diaries, or role play. It is important to utilise methods appropriate to the group one is working with, however, as not all children will be comfortable holding a pen or crayon in a drawing or writing exercise, for example.

• During long research sessions such as workshops, provide recreational activities such as singing or dancing, to rejuvenate children's energies.

• Show respect for all children and young people involved in your research by taking their views seriously.

• Consider appropriate ways of providing feedback and inform all participants as to when feedback will be provided.

• Show appreciation for young people's participation but do not raise unrealistic expectations among participants.

• Provide acknowledgement of young people's involvement in your research.

Source: Based on Haque (1998:77-78); Matthews and Tucker (2000:300, 302-308); Robson (2001:137, 138)

Matthews et al. (1998) urge us to ensure that our research involving children and young people does not misrepresent them, and neither should it be embarrassing, harmful or intrusive. While such a statement is easy to agree with in theory, Robson found that her research, which was intended to reveal the difficulties facing young people caring for sick relatives in Zimbabwe, was seen by some to be very harmful (Box 9.4). In retrospect, she believes the research was still of value, but we do not know if the carers would share her view.

Box 9.4 Emotional research with young carers in Zimbabwe

In 1997 Elspeth Robson conducted research on young people involved in caring for sick relatives – many with HIV/AIDS-related illnesses – in Zimbabwe. She engaged a Zimbabwean woman researcher to carry out interviews with nine participants who were between the ages of 15 and 17. Robson later became concerned about this research, however, because participants became distressed during the interviews: 'For the young carers in Zimbabwe, telling their story was at considerable emotional cost to them, to their family members present and also to the interviewer' (Robson 2001: 136). One participant, for example, had watched her mother, whom she had cared for, die only one month previously. Thus the interviewer later described the interviews as 'unfair' and 'cruel', which led Robson to reflect carefully on the research process.

Eventually she concluded that the research was still valuable in highlighting the voices of young carers from Zimbabwe and could lead to positive interventions in the future. She also felt that the research was not as harmful as it had been suggested for several reasons: 1) some young carers withdrew from the interviews because of distress, thus expressing their agency and exerting control over the interview process; 2) 'tears are a form of "voice" that should be listened to' (Robson, 2001:137); and 3) it can be therapeutic for young people to talk to a supportive adult about something which has caused them grief.

Source: Robson (2001)

When the research subjects are children, it is also very likely that the researcher could be viewed with suspicion and seen as a threat to the safety of those they are studying. Thus Matthews and Tucker (2000:301) make the important point that if you are carrying out research on children in public spaces, you must inform authorities beforehand and carry identification and copies of any research permission documentation with you.

Some researchers are now utilising children to conduct research. Heyer (1992), for example, employed school children as research assistants in her work in Kenya, asking them to keep time budget diaries of their own households and those of their neighbours. While this can be a way of teaching research skills to children and helping them to understand how information can be collected and processed in order to aid our understanding of important issues, Heyer does not mention how the children could have benefited from involvement in her research, and she completely ignores ethical issues associated with employing, or 'using' children. Save the Children Fund adopted a rather different approach in Vietnam where they planned to train street children to conduct research with children in their own community. They hoped to empower children through raising their skill levels and through recognition from adults about children's ability to conduct research (Theis, 1998:85).

Despite the depth and breadth of ethical issues concerning research with young people, if we exclude them from research we may marginalise them further: 'If we do not allow children to participate, there is a price to be paid. Not only are we denying ourselves the benefit of their uniquely different experiences and perspectives, we may actually be having a negative effect on their well-being' (Ivan-Smith, 1998:262). Ivan-Smith (1998) cites the example of water projects which ignore children's role in water collection, thus siting a new water source in a place that is dangerous for them or providing heavy equipment which is difficult for them to use. There is definitely a need then for more sensitive, well-thought out research with children and young people in Third World settings, because '…children need allies…and vulnerable, invisible, poor, minority children…in the global South desperately need allies with long-term commitment in both academic and political worlds' (Robson, 2001:140).

Researching minority ethnic groups [4]

Anthropologists, in particular, have a long history of conducting research with minority ethnic groups. Other social scientists have often found that their interest in topics such as the creation of national parks, cultural tourism or the impacts of logging or mining has brought them directly into contact with these groups. In the past it was assumed that those hailing from Western academic institutions had a 'right' to engage in such cross-cultural study. The power relations inherent in this research were not considered important enough to warrant comment. Now the increasing political awareness of minority ethnic groups, combined with a good

deal of self-reflection on the part of academics (as discussed in Chapter 1) has led to important changes in the ways in which such research is carried out.

Many indigenous groups, in particular, remain wary of outside researchers because their historical experiences have been framed by imperialism, their knowledge colonised for the benefit of Western science (Smith, 1999:19). Most of us are familiar with the term 'research problem', but Smith turns the meaning of this term around to suggest that to indigenous peoples, research is the problem:

> indigenous peoples are deeply cynical about the capacity, motives or methodologies of Western research to deliver any benefits to indigenous peoples….Because of such deep cynicism there are expectations by indigenous communities that researchers will actually 'spell out' in detail the likely benefits of any research. (1999:117-8)

As Chapter 1 asserted, too often researchers have been preoccupied with their own agendas and have offered little that is of benefit to those they are researching: research has been a one-way process of extraction of information. A researcher may have received the government's permission to conduct research, but not that of the community they plan to work with (see Box 8.6, Chapter 8), and they may have given the community no opportunity to influence the questions being asked or the way in which the research is conducted (see also Chapter 5). Because of such concerns some governments have put in place specific rules about working with ethnic groups within their borders. Box 9.5 provides a summary of regulations regarding research in the Pacific Island country of Vanuatu, which is home to around 180,000 people speaking 105 distinct languages, a testimony to the country's ethnic diversity (Stanley, 2000:791). Note particularly the need to gain the permission of the community, not just the central government, and the pro-active role taken by the Vanuatu National Cultural Council in terms of initiating research ventures, encouraging training of and research by indigenous people, and ensuring that communities get tangible benefits from research, not just a copy of the completed thesis or an academic paper.

Box 9.5 Summary of regulations regarding research in Vanuatu

Evaluation
All research proposals must receive the approval of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council and the local community. An explanation of the proposed research project to the local community by the researcher and/or the Cultural Centre is a prerequisite to the local community giving approval.

Encouragement of ni-Vanuatu performed research
With a view to maximising opportunities for ni-Vanuatu (the indigenous people of Vanuatu) to conduct research it is the responsibility of the National Cultural Council to: a) initiate research ventures to be undertaken by ni-Vanuatu, including cooperative ventures with expatriates; b) ensure input by ni-Vanuatu into all research projects; and c) ensure that a

research proposal received from a foreign national does not conflict with research undertaken by a ni-Vanuatu, which will involve identifying the possible research aspirations of ni-Vanuatu scholars in training.

Training
There must be maximum involvement of indigenous scholars, students and members of the community in research, full recognition of their collaboration, and training to enable their further contribution to country and community. The National Cultural Council may nominate individuals to be involved in research and/or trained.

Benefit to the local community
All research projects will include a cultural product of *immediate benefit and use* to the local community. Such products could include booklets of kastom information, photo albums of visual records, simple educational booklets for use in schools…programs for the revitalisation of particular kastom skills in the community, training workshops in cultural documentation, etc.

Accessibility of products of research
The researcher will be responsible for the translation of a publication in a language…used in education in the local community…. Researchers are also required to submit an interim report of not less than 2000 words no later than 6 months after the research period has ended giving a reasonable précis of their work. This should be in one of the national languages and in 'layman's terms' so as to be of general use to all citizens.

Benefit to the nation
Having a trained person working at a local community level is an opportunity from which the nation can gain significant benefit, and the National Cultural Council, the Cultural Centre or the national government may therefore request the researcher to perform certain services additional to their research work. For instance, researchers could provide assistance to government by [doing] … health surveys, [or providing] information on the viability of certain development projects.

Source: *see* http://arts.anu.edu.au/arcworld/vks/contre.htm *for a copy of the full Vanuatu Cultural Research Policy*

Concerns about outsiders dominating research projects have led to the call that more research on ethnic minorities or indigenous groups should be conducted by members of the groups concerned. As Smith explains with relation to New Zealand Maori:

Increasingly…there have been demands by indigenous communities for research to be undertaken exclusively by indigenous researchers. It is thought that Maori people need to take greater control over the questions they want to address, and invest more energy and commitment into the education and empowering of Maori people as researchers. (1999:178)

There is a specific need for more research by indigenous researchers in cases whereby ethnic groups have been misrepresented in past research by foreigners. This was part of Amadiume's (1993) motivation for going home to do research in Eastern Nigeria on Igbo women.[5] However, in addition to the fact that shared ethnicity will not necessarily make researchers 'insiders' when they conduct research (see Narayan, 1998), there can be significant constraints to research being conducted by indigenous researchers. As Hau'ofa explains, limited funding has undermined a good deal of indigenous research in the Pacific region:

> because of the intense interest in and preoccupation with material development, and the consequent emphasis on practical and applied studies, there is a danger that thorough ethnographical and ethnological research by indigenous anthropologists in Tonga and in much of the South Pacific may be postponed for a long time to come. Under these circumstances, in-depth cultural and social investigation will continue to be in the hands of foreign universities and academics. (1982:215)

One possible way around this is to encourage more collaborative research, particularly where Western researchers can gain access to grants to support fieldwork carried out with indigenous researchers. Such collaboration can also be important in terms of mentoring indigenous research assistants. A collection of works by indigenous anthropologists in 1982 suggested that there is value in work done by both indigenous researchers and foreign researchers, thus exposing '…the superficiality of the belief that the cure for the excesses of colonial anthropology lies in its replacement by indigenous anthropology' (Madan, 1982:16).

It is clearly important that research which gives voice to the interests and concerns of minority ethnic groups and indigenous peoples is carried out, especially where these groups still face political repression or subversion of their rights. However, researchers must be very sensitive and aware of the politics of such research because otherwise they may endanger themselves and/or the groups they are studying.[6]

Some ethnic minorities and indigenous groups have decided to give an unequivocal 'no' to outside requests to conduct research. The most well-known example of this in New Zealand is Te Kohanga Reo National Trust, which is the administrative body for a large number of Maori 'language nests' for pre-school education (Smith, 1999:178). In such cases, we must respect the wishes of the group concerned, just as contemporary ethical guidelines insist that we instruct our research participants that they have the right to withdraw from participation in our research at any time.

Researching the poor

The majority of researchers conducting fieldwork on development-related topics will come into contact with people who are much poorer than ourselves and who have difficulty in sustaining even a basic livelihood. Yet there seems to be very little

in the literature either on the practical challenges of conducting sensitive research with the poor, or on how we might prepare ourselves for the emotional shock of coming into contact with extreme poverty. This applies both to Western researchers and to Third World students from middle or upper class roots who have not been directly exposed to various forms deprivation or oppression before. Walcott rightly observes that during our university education we are protected from some of the harsher realities of life: 'All those statistics we read – poverty, illness, accidents, violence, abuse – may suddenly materialise for a fieldworker whose most traumatic experience to date had been a ticket for speeding' (Walcott, 1995:93). Chapter 6 presents some useful advice in this regard under a section entitled 'Preparing for discomfort and depression', while Chapter 7 provides guidelines for recognising and dealing with the culture shock which may ensue in such circumstances.

A particularly challenging issue to address is how should we respond if our fieldwork brings us into contact with people who are struggling to meet even their basic survival needs. Here we are not talking about gift giving as an expression of gratitude (as discussed in Chapter 10), but whether we should provide assistance for humanitarian reasons to people who are destitute. When Henry (one of the authors of this chapter) conducted PhD fieldwork in Bangladesh, his subjects were poor village households who were already participating in programs initiated by local development agencies. Because these organisations were attempting to instil in program participants a sense of self-reliance, it would have been inappropriate for Henry to offer material assistance. Instead, he felt it was best to write reports informing these organisations of his findings and making recommendations that he believed were practical. However, encounters with severe poverty, such as that described in Box 9.6 can be a difficult experience and it would be wrong to suggest the search for an appropriate response is an easy task.

Box 9.6 Twenty-five times the price for two eggs

On one occasion, Henry's interpreter was very moved by the impoverished state of one household they visited. As a Bangladeshi national who had participated in similar village level studies before, poverty for the interpreter was not an unusual sight, indicating just how extreme the hardship this household faced was. The household owned a few ducks and the sale of eggs provided one of its sole sources of cash income. The interpreter offered to buy two eggs and paid about 25 times the usual price for them. The following day an elderly couple, hearing of this incident, approached the interpreter for a loan.

Source: Henry Scheyvens, doctoral research in Bangladesh, 1998-1999

How appropriate was the interpreter's action? We would not like to be the judge. Some argue against charity. Certainly, we would not wish to undermine the efforts of committed development organisations to build self-reliance among the poor. Wilson provides the following sound advice on how we should respond to people who are destitute:

> Fieldworkers should know the destitutes in the community studied as part of understanding the economy and society of the area. On the basis of such knowledge, fieldworkers can then make appropriate contributions to their welfare, in the same manner as other members of the society do, including, for example, giving transport to a clinic, a listening ear and an occasional gift of food or clothing. Such aid should be given quietly, but not necessarily secretly, and in the manner deemed appropriate in that society. (1992:194-5)

Wilson's quote suggests that even if charity is inappropriate, in some instances you may be able to offer practical services (see Chapter 8 on 'Reciprocity'). Razavi (1992) found she could provide practical assistance during the duration of her fieldwork by transporting locals in her car, while Lewis (1991:62) had access to a photocopier and was able to give out maps of village plots that were normally not accessible to locals.

In terms of data collection, there are a number of other issues you should consider when researching the poor. The data you seek, you may not find. Poor households may be forced into activities that are frowned upon within their societies and may hide these from the researcher. Lewis (1991:57-8), for example, examined the practice of kutia in which a poor farmer takes a loan from a rice mill owner to buy rice for husking at the mill, but he found that his informants were reluctant to reveal whether they had taken loans from informal moneylenders. The village rice mill owner was happy to discuss these loans, however.

Those undertaking social surveys will have to familiarise themselves with indicators relevant to local contexts, which will in turn depend upon having a good understanding of what matters to one's respondents or informants. In the US, weekly household income may be a good gauge of socio-economic status. In villages in Pakistan, however, how many times the household enjoys fish or chicken each week – or month – may be a better indicator. Reading studies that have been undertaken in the country or specific area you are conducting research in by government agencies, research bodies, NGOs and other institutions, should provide direction on what are useful indicators. In addition, sensitivity is needed in many instances when asking questions about income. Firstly, sources of income are likely to be so erratic for people living from day to day that asking them to estimate how much they earn daily or weekly may be inappropriate, and for agricultural day labourers there is also the problem of seasonality. Secondly, asking about a poor person's meagre income may simply reinforce their feelings of ineptitude as providers for their families.

This section concludes with Box 9.7, which provides principles regarding research with marginalised groups in general. These principles draw attention to the way in which research is conducted, the respect accorded to the participants, and

the benefits of the research for them.[7] Importantly, appropriate means of disseminating the research findings should be of concern to all researchers working with marginalised groups.

Box 9.7 Principles regarding research with marginalised groups

• The research must be based on respect for the knowledge, skills and experience of people in the group being studied.

• Marginalised groups are active subjects rather than passive objects of the research.

• The research questions should be centred around issues of interest and concern to the group being studied.

• The researcher's participation with the marginalised group should be characterised by committed involvement rather than impartial detachment.

• Research findings should be shared with the marginalised group in a means deemed appropriate by the group, e.g. public meeting; workshop allowing for discussion, feedback and modification of findings; summary sheet; report; not necessarily a thesis or academic papers.

• There should be positive outcomes of the research for the marginalised group, and any anticipated negative outcomes should be eliminated if possible.

Source: adapted from Hall (1992) cited in Martin (2000:193-4)

Researching the elite and powerful

There is a large gap in the literature that investigates the elite and powerful in developing societies. In terms of methodological writings the overriding focus has been on scenarios where the researcher is more powerful than the researched. In a groundbreaking special issue of Geoforum, Cormode and Hughes (1999:299) argue that the lack of attention accorded to elites can be attributed to at least two factors. First, researchers of development often hold a political commitment to working with the less privileged in society. Second, gaining access to elite groups is often difficult, and this is amplified when the data being sought is qualitative. Past studies of the elite, focused in particular on business managers, have tended to be quantitative in nature and provided less access restrictions (Healy and Rawlinson, 1993). Given the increasingly complex nature of the global space-economy, and the shift to post-positivist epistemologies required to capture this complexity, researchers have

argued the need for richer, ultimately more ethnographic, interpretations of the motivations and rationale of the elite (Herod, 1999; Hertz and Imber, 1993; Schoenburger, 1991). It is crucial then that we have an understanding of the practical and methodological issues relevant to such research.

The relative silence of development studies with respect to researching the elite represents a significant challenge for the subject. But why should we be motivated to study the elite? At least four linked points can be offered.

1. The gap between the elite and the non-elite is getting wider in global society, and arguably some elements of the elite increasingly determine social and economic outcomes as their relative power increases (Cormode and Hughes, 1999). Understanding what drives the elite is thus essential.

2. Given the above, there has been a divergence of elite and non-elite opinion with respect to the implications of development in practice, in particular in the context of the impacts of neoliberalism, free trade and globalisation (Mullings, 1999).

3. Elite networks are increasingly glocally constituted. That is to say that local elites often now operate in both global and local spaces and that the separation of the two is problematic. Understanding local outcomes in developing areas requires an understanding of how elites act as vessels of global scale processes and imperatives and how power relations in given territories influence outcomes on the ground.

4. Linked to point 3, and influenced by dependency/structuralist worldviews, it can be argued that the elite and non-elite are two sides of the same coin. For coherent representations we need to understand both sides. It may be that any given project will require the gathering of data from both the elite and the non-elite. Or it may be, and this is perhaps more likely with student research, that the focus will remain in one of these two camps – to be later integrated into an increasingly bi-focal literature.

But what do we mean by 'elite'? This is a definition which is fraught with difficulty. Herod defines the 'foreign elite' in the context of his work as 'foreign nationals who hold positions of power within organizations such as corporations, governments, or, in the case of my own research, trade unions' (1999: 313). He does not intend this to be a catch-all definition however and it is hardly adequate for our purposes here. Herod is referring to what we understand in the West as the 'elite'. But what of socio-cultural systems of which Westerners have little understanding? For example, a traditional Fijian chief can hardly be defined as having any influence over global networks in the way Herod's definition suggests. Such chiefs are demonstrably part of the elite within the context of their own societies however and wield enormous power (and arguably are important transmitters of global processes). It may be necessary then to distinguish between global, glocal and local elites, and each of these raises different methodological questions.

The above differentiation is further complicated by the fact that the researcher's perception of what constitutes a member of the elite is heavily contingent upon the various axes of their own identity. For example, the researcher's status as a Western, middle class, male doctoral candidate may in the eyes of male, middle class and educated interviewees put the researcher in a closer social space to themselves than an uneducated, female, Third World national. A final complication is that qualitative research is a social process whereby power relations are fluid across space and time, thus the relative position of the researcher and interviewee will change, sometimes in the course of one interview. All of the preceding demonstrates that the 'elite' is in no way a fixed entity.

But why all this fuss? Is there anything inherently different about researching the elite? Echoing McDowell (1992, 1998), Cormode and Hughes suggest that a researcher studying the elite is often, 'a supplicant, dependent of the cooperation of a relatively small number of people with specialised knowledge, and neither a potential emancipator or oppressor' (1999:299). Further, they argue that:

> Researching 'the powerful' presents very different methodological and ethical challenges from studying 'down'. The characteristics of those studied, the power relations between them and the researcher, and the politics of the research process differ considerably between elite and non-elite research. (1999:299)

Herod (1999) agues that, in the case of researching 'foreign elites', methodology is complicated by two factors. First, there are problems of transcultural communication and misunderstanding which need to be considered (it could be argued that this is the case for 'foreign' research in general). Second, it may be particularly difficult to access foreign elite institutions where the organization is relatively unknown to the researcher. In general then there are two sets of overlapping issues which are specific to researching elites; 1) practical issues; 2) issues of positionality.

Practical issues in elite research

Gaining access to the elite, be it representatives of a corporation or Fijian chiefs for that matter, can be particularly problematic. Why should such people, for whom it is often said 'time is money', grant an audience to a student or any other researcher? There is perhaps a feeling in business circles that academics are somewhat, well, 'academic' (in the sense that everything is hypothetical), and that exchange with them is likely to produce little of practical use. This can be turned to the researcher's advantage, as being perceived as non-threatening can help win access to information that might otherwise be considered sensitive.

The lack of seriousness which interviewees may accord an encounter can often lead to last minute cancellations and many interruptions during the interview process (Mullings, 1999). Pursuing personal interaction under such circumstances can be frustrating. It is very important that personal contact is made however. Warwick (one of the authors of this chapter) constructed a questionnaire for thirty

multinational fruit export companies as part of his PhD research and sent it out by post. He received three replies, two of which said that the companies could not help! When these companies were approached again through telephone calls and informal drop-ins virtually all of them agreed to grant personal interviews (see also Chapter 5, 'Establishing contacts'). This was undoubtedly assisted by being extremely nice to secretaries – an important skill worth cultivating. Not only did access rates improve, the quality of the data was far richer through the utilisation of open-ended interviews which retained some of the closed ended attributes of the original questionnaire. It is essential when negotiating access to strike a balance between impersonal and personal interaction.

The use of networks is an important way of achieving access and gaining the cooperation of interviewee. Herod (1999) suggests that using a flow chart, which traces all of the individuals who put you in contact with other individuals in different institutions, can be very useful. A very good way of starting an interview is to say 'I was given your name by…'. Likewise, some contacts may 'phone ahead' for you. This will help establish your legitimacy, reduce the perceived threat, and may also please the interviewee in that it is implied that they are recognised within their relevant networks. This is particularly useful in societies where personal links are paramount. In many Pacific Island nations for example without explicit names you would be very unlikely to gain access. Meanwhile in Chile, the age-old system of *pitutos*, which constitute networks of semi-formal contacts that interact reciprocally, must be understood for the researcher to operate effectively. Warwick found that the only way to gain access to local civil servants in the countryside was to quote the name of a friend who worked for the Ministry of Agriculture in Santiago who had an established system of *pitutos* across the country. This is in no way intended to say that 'developed' countries do not operate like this – of course they do – but it is important to understand how these networks operate in the context of your particular country of study.

A final practical issue is that, just like non-elites, the participants in research may wish to see copies of the work you finally do. You will have total power of the final writing up of your work. If you are somebody who becomes critical of the elite within the context of a particular study, this may present a problem. It is possible to be selective with what you choose to feed back to the groups you worked with, but this is not advisable. We have already argued that the world is becoming smaller and if this doesn't catch-up with you it may make access for others in the future difficult. It is best to be as critical as you feel you should be based on the evidence you have before you (see the section on 'Advocacy and activism' below).

Positionality in elite research

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, it is important to examine our positionality in relation to our research subjects, but we should be aware that notions of 'insider' and 'outsider' are more accurately understood as existing on a sliding scale or continuum, rather than being seen as binary opposites. With respect to elite

research, most authors agree that the problems of self-positioning are considerable, however, how they should be dealt with is contested.

In the context of foreign elite research Herod (1999) argues that being an 'outsider' and playing up this aspect of one's identity can actually work in the favour of the researcher. As a foreigner doing research in Eastern Europe he was surprised by the seriousness with which he was taken. In particular, the fact that he had come from many miles away (the USA) combined with the notion held among the interviewees that he was a 'foreign expert' acted in his favour. 'Outsiderness' he argues was perceived in this particular situation as non-threatening and even encouraged small talk. Furthermore, as an outsider he felt more comfortable asking for things to be clearly explained and in this way was able to maintain a crucial critical distance. Warwick found similar things in working with the elite in Chile. The fact that somebody from an academic institution in the Western world should be interested in particular individuals and their opinions was often considered flattering. When asking fruit companies about their operations and relationship to small farmers, he would often play up his ignorance and ask flattering questions such as, 'how do you explain your enormous success in securing good supply?', or 'what is it about Chilean companies that has allowed this export miracle to take place?'. Naturally whether such tactics solicit faithful responses and not exaggerated boasts is uncertain, but it certainly stimulated flowing responses.

In the context of elite research in Jamaica, Mullings (1999) takes a different stance to Herod. She argues that with the central goal of encouraging participation the optimal strategy was to attempt to occupy 'shared positional spaces'. Towards this end she argues that it is good to present yourself to elites as a temporary insider – someone who knows the ropes of the particular issue under concern and is therefore an intellectual equal. She also argues, that as a black, female, US resident researcher in Jamaica, it was advantageous to put various aspects of her identity to the fore at given times. There can be little doubt that your gender, race, nationality and sexuality has the potential to influence the research process to the extent that you make these things visible and how they are perceived by the interviewee. Ultimately Mullings argues for cultivating insiderness for elite research:

> recognising that the information that we as researchers receive will always be partial makes our claims circumspect and our stance more reflexive. This is a consideration that is particularly important for researchers whose identities rest upon axes that are not only different, but in many circumstances may be disempowering. Identifying aspects of difference which may stultify dialog and seeking spaces where some level of trust can be established, to me, is the only way that researchers can gather information that is reliable (1999:349).

A central issue then is how we represent ourselves to gain access and information (see Chapter 8, 'Truth and deception'). Of critical importance perhaps is striking a balance between being an insider and an outsider and cultivating the ability to represent oneself according to the situation. You must be able to move

up and down the sliding scale of intimacy as Herod (1999) calls it. Is this tantamount to deception? In the sense that one puts particular axes of identity on display at a certain time to achieve self-interested goals, perhaps so. However, who does not alter their speech register, their appearance, and their behaviour in different social situations?

Moving up and down power structures presents particularly salient problems. In many cases, as noted earlier in this section work will involve interviewing both the elite and non-elite. How do you scale hierarchies successfully and ethically? Working with the elite in this context presents a particular problem, often such groups may actually be able to prevent access to the non-elite if they are not satisfied what you are doing is in their interests. The researcher has to remain flexible and learn to improvise where necessary in this respect. Recognising that one's positionality is inevitably and necessarily ever-changing, and learning to cultivate shifts where this is required is perhaps the first step in being able to negotiate these tricky problems satisfactorily.

Advocacy and activism

Research with marginalised or privileged groups, as discussed above, is often driven by a concern for matters of social justice. How to take the next step – to use one's research to actively promote change – is a matter to which we now turn.

Kobayashi (1994:78), writing about her research with the Japanese-Canadian community said, 'I am deeply convinced that no social scholarship is independent of political action, and I am personally committed to acknowledging my research as political and to using it most effectively for social change'. It is not the norm to find such strong convictions espoused by academics, although the recent publication of a text devoted to emancipatory research (Truman et al., 2000) suggests this is perhaps becoming more common. There are several bodies of thought which have contributed to the development of emancipatory research, the key ones being humanistic psychology, critical theory, feminist theories, and poststructuralism (Humphries et al., 2000). The field of development studies has been particularly influenced by Paolo Freire's (1972) work which suggests that research should be an empowering process for participants, an opportunity for education and a stimulus for social action (Humphries et al., 2000:7). This accords with the point made in Chapter 6, that many researchers of development issues are motivated at least in part by their moral conscience. They want not just to better understand the world, but to enable people to improve their living conditions and overcome inequalities.

If as a researcher you are motivated by a desire to conduct emancipatory research, which may involve advocating on behalf of disadvantaged peoples or challenging those abusing positions of power, there are issues you should consider. Advocacy will require effort outside that directed towards attaining academic qualifications but the personal gains can be very rewarding, in particular, giving you the sense that you are able to 'make a difference'. Yet your enthusiasm for 'changing the world' may need to be tempered if you are to carry out effective research.

> Contributing to social change involves deliberate attempts at mobilising opinion in a particular direction. If the conclusions, however, are predetermined by the activist's own predilections and ideas, without taking into account the situation, perceptions, and wishes of those on whose behalf we seek to help bring about change, we can easily end up either being irrelevant, pompous imposters or authoritarian manipulators. (Kishwar, 1998:293)

For those wanting to become involved in advocacy, their research itself is not a form of activism but a means by which they can gain greater knowledge to be better advocates. There are types of research, however, which are a form of activism that students should at least be aware of. Action-based research, involving the researcher intervening in the community being studied and observing the changes that take place, is one example. Many of the rural development models that are now implemented in Bangladesh were based on this approach. The two-tier rural cooperative system, for example, emerged from experiments that date back to the 1960s by researchers led by the late Professor Akhter Hameed Khan at the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (Hye, 1993). The well-known Grameen Bank model of micro-credit delivery emerged from experiments by Professor Muhammad Yunus and his students dating from the second half of the 1970s (Counts, 1996).

Participatory research is another method of inquiry in which the research process is a form of activism (Chambers, 1997). Under this approach participants play a role in the collection and analysis of data, and on the basis of their findings engage in action to transform society (Cohen-Mitchell, 2000:146).[8] Thus researchers who adopt a participatory stance inherently take on responsibilities with regards to their research:

> Supporting or enabling participation in the strongest sense becomes a political act through establishing partnerships between the researcher and the researched, whereby ownership, empowerment and responsibility for accountability are shared throughout the research process. [Thus] PR [participatory research] can play an important role in fostering or stimulating community activism at both the individual and collective levels. (Dockery, 2000:95)

Cohen-Mitchell's research with disabled women in El Salvador led to collective action when the women she was interviewing on an individual basis expressed a keen interest in meeting as a group: 'they saw a support group as a place to share and solve problems, and also do community outreach to identify and incorporate other disabled women…' (Cohen-Mitchell, 2000: 163).

Researchers choosing to conduct action-oriented or participatory research need to be led by practical considerations, not just by their ideals. For example, you need to ensure you have time and resources to do advocacy or activist work, or to take a participatory approach to research, if this is secondary to your agenda of writing your thesis. In addition, in the case of both types of research, strong institutional support in the study country is usually necessary. Also, while local involvement can have benefits for our research, it may also result in pitfalls. Some of these might

be foreseen and avoided. Megaw's account of his research in Ghana is illuminating (Box 9.8).

If you are considering advocating on behalf of your informants you will need to address the issue of representation (see Chapter 11 on 'Writing and represent-ing'). The question of 'who speaks for whom?' is often raised in relation to cross-cultural studies and needs to be treated carefully (see the quote by hooks (1990) in the introduction to this chapter). Women in the Third World, for example, have queried whether women in the West can represent their interests if they have never experienced double or even triple oppression based on gender, class and ethnicity. It is not necessary to experience the struggles of another group, however, to sym-pathise with their plight. It is the task of the researcher to interpret these struggles in the peculiar social and political context that has given rise to them; not to super-impose inappropriate conceptual frameworks drawn from their own experiences and societies. Interestingly, the poor or otherwise marginalised groups who have no effective voice in their societies do not seem to be as concerned as academics are with the issue of representation. If you are in a position to bring their concerns to the attention of decision-makers, then with the exception of politically sensitive sit-uations when this could lead to further oppression, they most likely will wish you to do so. An extreme post-modernist viewpoint becomes an easy excuse for not engaging in advocacy.

Box 9.8 The pitfalls of being an activist

After several weeks of ethnic conflict in northern Ghana, Megaw was asked by the leader of a small indigenous NGO to assist with relief and rehabilitation. Later he attended and even chaired meetings held between a consortium of Western NGOs and the local NGO. This activism had mixed consequences for his research. Megaw's direct involvement with the NGO placed him in a good position to observe the evolving relationship between Western and indigenous NGOs. However, as the leader of the NGO wished him to advocate on the organisation's behalf, he attempted to hide its shortcomings.

Megaw was also asked to run trivial errands because of his access to a 4-wheel drive vehicle that interfered with his research. Eventually, he decided to distance himself from the NGO. Factionalism within the NGO community was creating problems and being aligned so closely with one NGO restricted him from moving freely between different organisations.

Source: Based on Adams and Megaw (1997)

More conventional research can also be both a means to gain a greater under-standing of the injustices being examined and a medium to give voice to those suf-fering these injustices. Applied research, that is, research intended to bring about a change in policy, has a long history in the social sciences. One of the earliest applied

studies, by Booth and his colleagues, described the conditions of working class families in London using a combination of ethnographic and survey research. According to Wax (1971:25) it 'stirred the contemporary social conscience' and played a part in the passing of the Old Age Pension Act of 1908.

Researchers may be in a position to advocate by disseminating research findings through various channels. Writing reports for development organisations is one possibility, which is further discussed in Chapter 10. This will require work that in no way directly contributes to your qualifications or career; hence you may be tempted to keep putting this off. However, if your findings are to have any impact, the sooner you report on them the better. Postgraduate students should tell their supervisors that they are writing a report and ask them to allow for this when judging the progress that is being made on writing up. Writing reports for non-academic institutions requires special skills. The report should be free of jargon, succinct and make at most a few clearly argued points, supported with sufficient data from your fieldwork. If you are advising a change in policy or practice, then consider carefully how to do so in a constructive fashion. You are not merely engaging in academic debate. Any criticism could be taken very personally, though sometimes this may be impossible to avoid. You may also find an opportunity to give an oral presentation, for example, at a village meeting or at the office of organisation that has assisted you. Such opportunities can be invaluable for providing feedback on your data and analysis.

If you are advocating a change in development policy or practice, there may be a temptation to overplay data that supports your views and understate data that does not. Our arguments will be all the more persuasive if they are based on a rigorous investigation rather than if we are only willing to see those facts that concur with our views. Wilson (1992:182) argues that a good researcher is not the most vocal and eloquent advocate for a particular cause, but a person who wishes to get to the 'bottom of things'. And in 'getting to the bottom of things' we must be prepared to listen carefully to the multiple, often contradictory voices of those we are studying:

> We should not assume that because we subscribe to an ideology that we believe is in the best interests of the people whose lives we are looking into, or because we genuinely believe we have their interests at heart, this will automatically give us greater insight into their situation, or that our perceptions are necessarily superior to their own regarding the possible solutions to their problems. (Kishwar, 1998:310)

Kishwar (1998) suggests that if our research merely confirms our preconceptions about a particular development issue and fails to unearth any surprising or contradictory information, there was really no point in doing fieldwork.

The possibility of acting on someone's behalf in your study area may also exist but needs thorough thinking through. To remain neutral during the duration of fieldwork on every issue that concerns us may be extremely trying and even inappropriate. Yet, in our desire not to offend anyone we may be overly concerned to always portray ourselves in a non-threatening fashion. You should not expect to be

friends with everyone. Wilson (1992:189) makes the valid point that living in another society does not mean we should suspend our own moral code. In one instance he felt compelled to remonstrate with a woman who, among other deprivations, was making her elderly father sleep outside. On another occasion his field assistants went to 'rough up' a man who had abandoned his partially blind wife and their baby to slow starvation.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the difficulties, and rewards, which can stem from research involving marginalised and/or privileged groups. The ethical and practical constraints associated with conducting research on these groups should not provide us with an excuse to avoid such research, rather, this should force us to reflect carefully on our motivations for research, to conduct our research in a sensitive manner, and to ensure that our research will have beneficial outcomes – particularly for those who are marginalised.

Some commentators are now starting to suggest that participation in the research process can, in itself, be an empowering experience for research participants, especially those who face significant social disadvantage (Humphries et al., 2000). Acker et al. (1991) posit that interviews can raise some women's consciousness, leading to their emancipation. And when poor people are aware that the researcher has travelled from afar specifically to speak with them, not just those of higher social status in their communities, it can add to their sense of self-esteem (Scheyvens and Leslie, 2000). Cotterill (1992) also asserts that research can be therapeutic, and Opie (1992) claims that this is especially true if interviewers encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and to understand how the system which disadvantages them can be challenged. England (1994:85) also supports this viewpoint on the basis that, '. . . many of the women whom I have interviewed told me that they found the exercise quite cathartic and that it enabled them to reflect on and re-evaluate their life experiences'. Thus it appears that research projects which seek to elicit and project previously silenced voices can be empowering for participants (Pratt and Loizos, 1992).

This chapter has also argued that those interested in emancipatory research should not shy away from research focusing on or involving elite groups. If we do not understand the motivations or actions of this group we will never devise strategies for dismantling privilege and building more equitable societies: 'Understanding global inequalities is a key stage in the process of overcoming them' (Taylor, 1992:20).

Recommended reading

Boyden, J. and Ennew, J. (1997) *Children in Focus: A Manual for Participatory Research with Children* Radda Barnen, Swedish Save the Children, Stockholm.

Development Fieldwork

This manual provides excellent practical advice and case studies on appropriate research with children in Third World settings.

Geoforum (1999) Volume 30(4).
This special issue is devoted to concerns associated with elite research.

Humphries, B., Mertens, D.M. and Truman, C. (2000) Arguments for an 'emancipatory' research paradigm. In C. Truman, D.M. Mertens and B. Humphries (eds) *Research and Inequality* UCL Press, London, pp.3-23.
A useful starting point for those wanting to ensure their research has emancipatory potential.

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography (1993) Volume 22. Special Issue: Fieldwork in Elite Settings.
Another very useful special edition of a journal devoted to elite research, containing a number of articles pertinent to research on development issues.

Smith, L.T. (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* Zed, London.
Written by a Maori woman, this book provides insights into appropriate methodologies for engaging in research with indigenous people, and stresses the importance of indigenous people conducting their own research.

Wolf, D.L. (1996) Situating feminist dilemmas in fieldwork. In D.L.Wolf (ed.) *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork* Westview Press, Boulder, pp. 1-55.
Wolf's opening chapter of her edited book provides a comprehensive examination of ethical issues associated with feminist fieldwork, many of which apply to cross-cultural research with women.

Young, L. and Barrett, H. (2001) Adapting visual methods: action research with Kampala street children. *Area* 33(2): 141-52.
Provides interesting examples of ways to facilitate child-led participation in research using visual methods, and also reflects on ethical issues involved in research with children from an excluded group.

Notes

1. 'The marginalised' in this chapter is a term used to embrace groups which have been socially constructed such that they lack access to power, resources and privileges in society in relation to other groups.

2. It is increasingly recognised by all but the most dogmatic positivist that we come to research and writing from a particular position – the axes of our identity leave an imprint on the construction, organisation and execution of the academic process. In considering the nature of positionality, and the methodological problems it raises, researchers have often been conceived as 'insiders' or 'outsiders'. The 'insider-outsider' binary is not helpful. After all, to argue that insiders or outsiders should be better placed to conduct research with certain groups falls into the positivist trap of assuming that there is 'truth out there' waiting to be discovered by those with the most appropriate culture and identity and that representations of certain voices are closer to 'reality'. Rather we all sit on continuum between the 'insider' and 'outsider' extremes and shift endlessly as the contexts and individuals are reconstituted along this sliding scale.

3. The reverse scenario, women researching men, need also not be problematic. When Ravazi carried out research in her home country of Iran, she found that it was not so difficult to

enter the realms of males in a sex-segregated society as many would anticipate. Ravazi suggests that the view that a female will not be able to research males in such settings '…ignores a subtle relationship between gender and other variables. Factors such as class and outsider status can interact positively with gender, thus reducing its constraining influence on the researcher's accessibility and freedom' (Ravazi, 1992:158).

4. The term 'minority ethnic groups' does not necessarily refer to numerical minorities, rather, it is used more broadly to include ethnic groups which are politically, socially and/or economically marginalised. Thus while ethnic Fijians in Fiji are not in any numerical sense a minority, they may be considered somewhat economically marginalised in relation to Indo-Fijians and Fijians of European heritage. In some cases, minority groups may make up a larger proportion of the population than the ruling group. Indigenous peoples in many countries – both Western and Third World – also fall within the category of 'minority ethnic groups'.

5. Note, however, that international students conducting home-based research are often not members of ethnic minorities or indigenous groups, in which case they may be seen just as much as 'outsiders' as foreign researchers.

6. The section on 'Truth and deception' in Chapter 8 provides further insights into this issue.

7. With respect to the fourth point, 'the researcher's participation…should be characterised by committed involvement', not all readers may agree: being a temporary 'insider' could, for example, be regarded as patronizing.

8. Participatory research should not necessarily be equated with PRA techniques, as discussed in Chapter 4. We are referring here to an approach to research, whereas most of the criticisms levelled at PRA in Chapter 4 were referring to arbitrary use of the techniques or tools used by PRA advocates, often without attention to the overarching philosophy behind PRA. See www.goshen.edu/soan/soan96p.htm for many links to websites with information on participatory research.

LEAVING THE FIELD