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FROM GAINING ENTRÉE TO EXITING THE FIELD

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to

- discuss the difficulties of gaining entrée in a setting and provide ways to increase the likelihood of gaining entrée;

- compare the role of a gatekeeper and a key actor;

- articulate the costs and benefits of working closely with a key actor; and

- explain why rapport is important, factors that can hinder or help its development, and ways to increase it.

Once committee or instructor approval of the proposal is obtained, you might feel confident and excited to dive into your fieldwork with gusto. However, upon arrival in the field, the realization can soon follow that you are less ready to overcome all obstacles than you are like Jane Eyre, a character in a novel by Charlotte Bronte (1847), who has just arrived at her job as a governess:

> It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite
> alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection, uncertain whether
> the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many
> impediments from returning to that it has quitted. The charm of adventure
> sweetens that sensation, the glow of pride warms it; but then the throb
> of fear disturbs it; and fear with me became predominant when half-an-hour
> elapsed and still I was alone.

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Fortunately, there are steps that can be taken to make your emotional response in the field less dramatic than Eyre's, but there is no guarantee that fear will not be at least part of your experience for a while. The first step is to seek permission prior to your arrival to conduct your research; unless the site is public, permission is absolutely required. The process of gaining permission to conduct research is referred to as **gaining entrée**. Once in the field, you'll have to build and maintain relationships with individuals, and eventually you'll need to make decisions about how long your fieldwork will continue. Obviously, observations and interactions occur between entering and leaving, but you'll need at least an initial plan for the two critical steps, which will need to be explained in detail in a formal research proposal. I start this chapter with a discussion of gaining entrée.

GAINING ENTRÉE AND GATEKEEPERS

After a site or population is selected, you'll probably need permission to conduct the research, as not all settings are open to everyone; some require that you gain permission before entering. Sites range from open (requiring no permission to enter) to closed (requiring permission to enter), with a gray area in between. Permission is not always easy to obtain. Being denied access to the setting or people of interest can be a deal breaker because in many cases, you should not proceed without it. Except in extremely rare cases, ethical researchers do not sneak into nonpublic settings to conduct covert research.

Gaining entrée is a complicated process, and the particular route you will take to gain entrée affects the rest of the research. 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). Because gatekeepers can dictate when the researcher gets to come and go, whom 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. 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 (1975) aptly describes the process of gaining entrée as a continuing, "progressive series of negotiations rather than a one-shot agreement" (p. 176).

Gaining access is made more difficult if you cannot determine the gatekeeper. Once you know who this person is, you have to find a way to contact him or her. If you can get over these two hurdles, then you can move to the all-important task of actually getting permission. The process is made more complicated by the fact that both formal and informal gatekeepers may be part of the equation. A formal gatekeeper may be a club president, gang leader, or school principal. But club members, gang members, and teachers and students may serve as informal gatekeepers—without their permission, your study will not succeed.

To facilitate gaining entrée, explain who you are and why you are conducting the research. Depending on the setting or group, be prepared to discuss issues of informed consent, confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms, procedures for observing and interviewing, and who has control over the content of the final paper. Sometimes simply

sharing your research questions is sufficient. You might have to reassure the gatekeeper that your goals of wanting to understand the day-to-day interactions in a setting are different from wanting to evaluate or judge the setting or people in it. 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). In some settings, gaining access is extremely difficult but still possible.

Although the practical advice above may be helpful, sometimes hard work, luck, creativity, and persistence also are needed. Becker (2010) gained access by volunteering approximately five hours a week for 3 years at an alternative high school in exchange for being allowed to conduct her research. It took over 5 months for Barley (1990) to be able to begin his research with radiologists and technologists in a hospital setting. He was not aware at the time of requesting entrée that the hospital had been reprimanded a year earlier for not following procedures, a journalist had posed as a researcher and wrote a scathing article about the hospital, and two radiologists had been indicted for selling silver from x-ray film. No wonder the hospital did not welcome him with open arms! Fearing he would never be able to conduct research at the hospital, he decided to observe at a medical school. Learning of his plight, a radiologist at the medical school talked to the hospital administrators on his behalf, and Barley was allowed entrée to the original setting he wanted.

Duneier (1999) gained access to sidewalk magazine vendors in Greenwich Village by volunteering to help Marvin, who was one of the vendors. Duneier explains that Marvin

> 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 generally 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.

Gatekeepers sometimes provide conditional access. As an extreme example, before agreeing to participate, police officers Van Maanen (1982) wished to study required him

to pass several tests—not all of which were legal—demonstrating his loyalty and trustworthiness. If the conditions set by the gatekeeper are accepted, then the researcher is ethically bound to keep them.

Liebow's (1994) research provides a good example of how informal gatekeepers set limits on what he could do. Liebow volunteered at a soup kitchen and shelter for women without homes and then decided he wanted to write a book about the women. He first obtained permission from the formal gatekeeper, the shelter director. However, this was only one level of gatekeeping that he needed to address. He knew that informal gatekeepers, specifically key shelter residents, also controlled access. 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)

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.

Then additional limits were set, illustrating that access can be given and withdrawn at any stage. Some women agreed to participate in his research project but then changed their minds, one at an extremely late date in the process. Liebow (1994) 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)

Numerous factors can affect the researcher's chances of gaining access to a setting. Your gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, social class, religion, accent, country of origin, educational level, and other personal characteristics can work for or against you in complicated ways. 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 different characteristics. For example, because Golde (1986) was a woman, she was not accepted in the world of men during her study of the Nahua Indians of Mexico. In addition, the fact that she was unmarried and childless prevented her from being fully accepted by the adult women.

Because so many settings impose unexpected restrictions on the sorts of information one might be able to gather or observe firsthand, being an insider in a setting can avoid some of the problems or limits an outsider might face. Gaining entrée to online settings can be easier if they are clearly public sites without gatekeepers, which can increase access to some populations. For example, Przybylski (2015) needed to contact urban indigenous hip hop artists in the United States and Canada online. She noted that because there were no online gatekeepers preventing access, she was able to complete her research on an otherwise difficult population to reach.

Still, in some cases, informal gatekeepers can pose problems in online environments. For example, the increased number of women playing video games has generated a hostile backlash from some male gamers, making it more difficult for females to conduct research on some types of online gaming, although excellent research by women is being done. Shay (2017), for example, conducted research on a new online gaming group. To gain permission to conduct her research, she attended the group's first meeting. The likelihood of her being allowed to be involved was greatly enhanced by informing the group that she had played role-playing games for 12 years. She was given permission to do the research under the condition that she fully participated.

Online sites also can have formal gatekeepers. If you are conducting virtual field research that includes moderated sites, the moderator first needs to grant permission for you to conduct research and then members of the site do as well. LeBesco (2004) conducted research on a "fat positive" online discussion group and got permission from the moderators and the individuals who took part in the discussions. She writes,

> I gained entree, organizational and individual, to these sites as a researcher, partly, I suspect, because I committed early on to a fat-positive perspective. Part of my introduction, aside from my academic credentials, explained my interest in studying online conversations about fat as stemming from my personal experience of corpulence. (p. 66)

Because of the types of problems discussed here, start the process of gaining entrée as early as you can so that you can begin your work in the field consistent with your proposed or required timeline.

PREPARATIONS

When explaining to students the importance of preparing for the field, I use the example of Herbie Goldfarb, one of the characters in the book *The Milagro Beanfield War* (Nichols, 1974). Herbie arrived in Milagro as a VISTA volunteer without sufficiently preparing for the task: He did not speak Spanish (the language of Milagro); he failed to bring warm clothes because he thought the Southwest would be hot all the time (there are snow-capped mountains in the Southwest); and he had to share a one-room "house" with snakes, skunks, and black widow spiders because he thought living arrangements had been made for him (they had not). In order to avoid becoming a Herbie Goldfarb during your field research, you need to prepare.

Conducting fieldwork in a culture or subculture extremely different from your own requires levels of preparation beyond what this book can cover. However, one suggestion for preparation is worth mentioning. Having a contact person in the place you plan to conduct your fieldwork is priceless. Although you might be brave and adventurous enough simply to show up in a location where you do not speak the language and have made no advance plans, your fieldwork will be exponentially more difficult should you choose this route. Additionally, you may have to have IRB (institutional review board) approval both from your institution and in the country where your research takes place. You might have a long wait for a visa, yet another reason to get started early.

Conducting fieldwork closer to your home requires less advance preparation but still demands some measure of planning. It can be as simple as making sure you wear appropriate clothing and have all your technological devices fully charged. Even little things can lead to major regrets, so plan accordingly.

A last note about preparation: Field researchers know they must prepare themselves mentally and otherwise for things to go awry. You must be willing to be flexible, to adjust, and to make compromises in your original plans. Be aware that Murphy's Law frequently operates in field research: If something can go wrong, it probably will. Things that can go wrong range from multiple interviewees failing to show up, as was the case with Arnado's (2002) dissertation research on domestic maids in the Philippines, to war breaking out, which made it too dangerous for Macabuac (2005) to do an ethnography for her dissertation as she originally had planned. Field researchers benefit by subscribing to the German expression "Glück im Unglück," which roughly translates to "fortune in misfortune." A good researcher can turn unfortunate events into advantages, as was the case for the researchers just mentioned. Both of them adjusted to their misfortunes and completed excellent research.

I am pointing out some of these small and not so small practical issues because they affect field research in ways they might not affect other types of research. If you get cold or hungry and your feet hurt while you are sitting at your computer running crosstabs with variables from a national dataset, you can simply stop, put on a sweater, grab a snack, and kick off your shoes. The data will still be there, and it will remain unchanged. If, however, you leave the room, the building, the ceremony, or the street when doing observations to get a jacket or because you are hungry and your feet hurt, things will not

be the same when you return, and you will not know what happened in the meantime. Field research is time sensitive—the data unfold in real time. If you are not there as the researcher to see it, gather it, or hear it, it moves on without you. Being prepared will help you be part of the experience.

ARRIVAL IN THE FIELD

Upon arrival in the field, researchers can find themselves in unexpected situations. Venkatesh (2008) conducted research in what he called one of the worst areas in the United States. On his first day of observations, he entered the tall building in the project he had selected for his research, but he didn't get much farther. He found an elevator but could not find the button. He writes,

Then I started looking for the stairwell, but I couldn't find that either.
To my left was a large barrier of some kind, but I was too nervous to
go around it. To my right was a corridor. I decided to go that way,
figuring I'd come across a stairwell or at least a door to knock on.
As I turned, a hand grabbed my shoulder. A young male told me,
"No one lives here." (p. 11)

Things got rapidly worse: Venkatesh was threatened with a knife, and other men discussed whether they should kill him. J. T. was the person, the gatekeeper, who was going to determine his fate. While he waited for J. T., his mind worked in a surprising way. He writes,

Random thoughts entered my mind, but, oddly, none of them
concerned my personal safety: What the hell is Bill Wilson going
to do if he finds out about this? . . . Did every Ph.D. student have to go through this?
Can I go to the bathroom? (p. 17)

This example shows how dissertation research can dominate the lives of graduate students.

Although rarely as dramatic as what Venkatesh encountered, Wax (1971) suggests that smooth early interactions in a setting are not only rare, but also suspect (p. 17). Wax knows from firsthand experience how difficult arrival in a setting can be. For the first 6 weeks she was at a Japanese American relocation camp, and 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" (Wax, 1971, 19).

The following selection from Tanggaad's (2014) field notes describes the stress she felt upon arrival in the field:

I have this feeling of too many eyes upon me. It takes a while to become
a fly on the wall—if ever. Right now [*sic*], I feel much too visible.

> After a short conversation and a cup of coffee, I arrange my laptop in
> the corner. I need to just concentrate a few minutes to write this text,
> reconstructing my first impressions from the short walk down here.
> I have only been here for two hours, but I am already exhausted from
> trying to grasp as much information as possible and from the general
> stresses of the situation. (p. 170)

Sometimes the best way to approach 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 you handle the situation, you should be emotionally ready in case you feel out of place or even worse when you first begin your fieldwork. Such feelings are quite common. Don't let this scare you away from field research, just use it to be prepared to deal with the potential stresses such an endeavor might bring.

The initial period of immersion in the setting is extremely important. It lays the groundwork for the rest of a field research project. A statement or summary about arriving in the field may need to be in the final paper, particularly if things do not go smoothly. Everything that follows is affected by these early interactions, particularly as they hold the potential for introducing to you the people who will play key roles in your project.

KEY ACTORS

One factor that can help you move beyond the awkward and uncomfortable early days of field research is the assistance of one or more members in the setting. If you can make a quick connection 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. This person is also referred to in the literature as an informant, but some 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 socialize 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 could potentially 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. The example from Duneier's work illustrates how messy things can get associating with a key actor. 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, including Muhammad (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).

If you learn too late that the key actor with whom you have connected actually impedes, rather than helps, ethical issues can arise, as Duneier noted above. Most of us know the pain of trying to disentangle ourselves from a relationship 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. In fact, researchers are sometimes the least powerful persons in a setting because their research depends upon the willingness of others to be part of it. 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, you can keep tabs on whether you are 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, field relationships concerns are ever present.

FIELD RELATIONSHIPS

Unless we live in total isolation, much of our everyday lives is deeply affected by our relationships. Think of different types of relationships you have with friends, roommates, romantic partners, parents, study partners, faculty members, and the guy that delivers your pizza. 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, a variety of relationships also arises in field research and affects 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 (1980) contains the line "Life don't go clickity-clack along a straight-lined track, it comes together, and it comes apart." 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, in some cases, and preferably on ones that are egalitarian and not hierarchical, although this might be more of an ideal than a practical reality. In her field study of the daily lives of two families, Stacey (1991) 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. (p. ix)

Liebow (1994) further illustrates how field researchers conceptualize members in a setting as collaborators, not merely subjects to be conned into cooperating:

> 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. (p. xvi)

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 you to be worthy of the trust, respect, and goodwill of those encountered in the setting. Returning to Venkatesh (2008), he writes about the second time he met J. T., one of the leaders of the group of young men he interacted with: "I felt a strange kind of intimacy with J. T., unlike the bond I'd felt even with good friends. It would have been hard to explain then and is just as hard now, but we had somehow connected in an instant, and deeply" (p. 12).

Still, things can go seriously awry when trying to nurture reciprocal relationships. Vanderstaay's (2005) field relationships became so complex that he worried that his

actions may have contributed to the death of the young man who was the primary focus of his research.

Developing **rapport** with people one encounters during field research is touted as the most important route to having good relationships in the field. Rapport is achieved when trusting relationships between the researcher and participant in a setting are formed. Establishing rapport is often more easily said than done. 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 lot like us. Building rapport with 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 from 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, characteristics such as gender and race of all individuals involved affect relationships and rapport in the field—often in very unpredictable ways. Other features also affect the research process: 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.

Building good field relationships should start with the initial request for entrée into a setting.

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

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FIGURE 6.1

I insist you give me entrée to your den! You can trust me to maintain good field relationships.
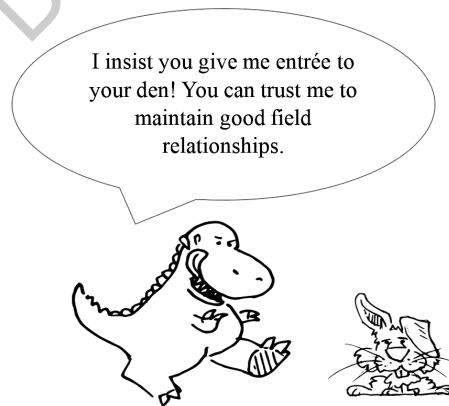
Source: Original art by Chad Seymour

(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)

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).

TIME IN THE FIELD

One of the distinguishing characteristics of field research, particularly ethnographies, is long-term engagement in the field. Now the question is *How long do I need to stay in the field?* I cannot answer this question definitively because of all the factors that affect the fieldwork portion of your research. Your research design and having sufficient information to answer the research question are key to determining the length of time you will need to conduct your fieldwork. Familiarity with the setting, length of time to gain access and develop relationships with key actors, disciplinary expectations, ethical concerns, and your primary form of data collection all have a strong influence on how much time you should spend. When you are drawing fewer and fewer analytic insights from active participation in the setting, you might decide to attempt closure.

The conclusion that collecting more data in the field is not necessary because one is not getting additional information to answer the research question is referred to as **saturation**, or more specifically data saturation. Particularly in the case of interviews, data saturation is associated with sample size. At the point that data saturation is reached, no more interviews are deemed necessary. One problem that occurs if you stop too soon, when the first 10 interviews are finished, for example, you cannot know with certainty, that the next 10 are not going to yield different insights. It is much harder to determine saturation from data collected in the field. In my experience, students stop their fieldwork for factors mentioned above and not because the feel that they have reached a saturation point.

Undergraduates may only have a few days, weeks, or the amount of time they are enrolled in a methods course to be in the field. Students working on their master's thesis usually have fairly tight restrictions too, although longer than undergraduates. Consequently, the information in the table below is geared more toward Ph.D. students. I suggest to graduate students that they plan on at least one year, and then adjust the expected time as they continue to develop their ideas for their dissertations. Throughout this book, I use examples from a small group of ethnographic dissertations, theses, undergraduate papers, and published articles. The time required for the fieldwork for some of these is shown in Table 6.1.

TABLE 6.1 ■ Examples of time in the field		
Researcher	**Observation**	**Time in the Field**
de Ruiter (2008)	patient handling practices	128 hours
Wynn (2006)	walking tour guides	138 hours
Holt (2015)	bondage/sadomasochism activities	150 hours
Gibeau (2008)	childbirth preparation classes	7 months
González, (2005)	Florida International University	8 months
Comfort (2002)	visitors at San Quentin	9 months
Snyder (2012)	high school wrestlers	10 months
Garrett-Peters (2009)	displaced workers	1 year
Copeland (2007)	Mayan neo-authoritarianism	14 months
Poole (2009)	refugee resettlement	15 months
Shay (2015)	online gaming-group	19 months
Fletcher (2010)	guided rafting trips	2 years
Fisher (2007)	a university business school	2 years
Chappell (2005)	recruit training at a police academy	3 years
Becker (2010)	alternative high school	3 years

LEAVING THE FIELD

At some point, you will need to decide that it is time to end the fieldwork portion of your research. Although research related factors, such as those mentioned above, are key considerations, so too are more personal ones. Certainly, you should leave if the participants in the setting no longer want you there. Your safety may be a factor in rare cases. If so, you should leave the field immediately. This is true whether you have just arrived in a setting or have been there for months. Do note that emotional discomfort is part and parcel of field research, so you may have to deal with that and not leave as a result, but don't go beyond the point that it is harmful to your psychological well-being.

Practical matters can influence the decision to leave the field. Simply having no more time to devote to field research is a major reason, particularly for you undergraduates. The wish to graduate by a particular deadline is a common reason to conclude fieldwork for graduate students. Running out of money is another reason field researchers leave the field—a condition that graduate students often experience. Health concerns, homesickness, and family demands can pull you out of the field.

Regardless of what motivated the decision to terminate the fieldwork portion of your research, concern for the relationships formed in the setting should be primary while exiting. Think about not only your needs but also those of the individuals you have met in the setting. By now, you probably have become close friends with several people. Some may have come to depend upon your friendship and advice. One way of caring for these relationships is to discuss and plan your leaving with the participants. Make sure that you have done all the things that you said you would. Consider whether future contact with the participants is appropriate. A frequent reason for contact with the participants after leaving the field is to allow them to respond to a draft of the completed paper. This practice is called a **member check**; more about this later in this guide. When social activism is central to the research, as it often is for research using feminist and critical frameworks, relationships continue long after the fieldwork portion of the research is completed. Although you do not have to bid adieu to everyone, simply disappearing one day is not a good way to handle the exit from the field.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the time in the field varies, fieldwork might not be the best methodology if you want to complete your undergraduate research for a campus competition, thesis, or dissertation quickly. When writing your proposal, do not underestimate the time it will take to prepare for the fieldwork, gain entrée, and establish relationships in the field. If you do, you may miss your deadline or leave before you should—and neither of these is good.

Now let's turn to what your activities will be after gaining entrée and before leaving. From the beginning to the end of your fieldwork, you will be observing and interacting with people in the field; these are the *sine qua non* of field research. Procedures for collecting detailed observations are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Highlights

- Gaining entrée is negotiated and renegotiated throughout the research process.

- Formal and informal gatekeepers control access to a setting and the availability of data within the setting.

- Key actors serve an important function in facilitating the research, but there are costs and benefits of working closely with them.

- Arrival in a field is often filled with stress, fear, mistakes, and insecurities.

- Trusting, reciprocal relationships are features of good field research and should be consider when entering and exiting the field.

Exercises

1. Pretend that your research goal is to understand the experiences of employees at the funeral home directed by Mr. Harold Burkhart. The eight employees engage in a range of activities, such as transporting bodies to the home, embalming the deceased, helping families plan funerals, and directing where families sit during services and at the grave site. You need permission to conduct your research. The formal gatekeeper requires a letter before he will decide whether he will grant you entrée. He wants to know, in detail, what type of research you plan to conduct, what your research question is, what activities you want to observe, what you plan to do to get the permission of the employees to participate, how you will or will not identify yourself and get permission from family members of the deceased, how you will respond if some employees do not want to take part in your research, how long you plan to stay, what your exit strategy might be, and if you have any particular concerns about the research. You might have to justify several of your answers because he will decide whether to grant you entrée solely on the details in your letter. Base your answers on what you have learned thus far and not just the information in this chapter. You should write your answers in the form of a formal letter. It should be sufficiently detailed to be at least two pages.

2. Some field researchers strive for nonhierarchical relationships with participants, and deep friendships can develop, as explained in this chapter. Researchers who adhere to some paradigms view the researcher and participants as partners in the research. Do you think there are any circumstances when it is appropriate for a field researcher to engage in a romantic relationship with a participant in the field? If the researcher was a regular member in the setting prior to the research, would that make a difference in whether a romance is acceptable? Would romantic attachments be appropriate if they started after the fieldwork portion of the research is completed? Defend your answers.

3. Go alone to a place that is radically different from places you have gone before and where you know no one in the setting. Where you go cannot be a variation of similar places you have been before. Restaurants, for example, do not meet the criteria for this exercise, nor do places with large crowds such as football games. In contrast, events such as a square dance, walking garden tour, or meeting of a local political party would be OK. A Web search for events being held in your area might yield ideas. This is not research, so you will not have to get formal informed consent or IRB approval, but you might need to explain your presence to formal and informal gatekeepers. Spend at least 20 minutes at the site. You must talk to at least five people, which can include gatekeepers if any. Describe where you went, with whom you spoke, what you said or did to initiate contact with them, and at least part of the conversations you had with others. Then explain how you felt about entering the field, approaching strangers, and participating in activities if you did.

4. Continue building the research proposal that you completed for previous chapters. Add how you would address issues discussed in this chapter.

Online and Recommended Reading

Online at study.sagepub.com/Bailey3e

Bondy, C. (2012). How did I get here? The social process of accessing field sites. *Qualitative Research*, 13, 578–590.

Cunliffe, A., & Alcadipani, R. (2016). The politics of access in fieldwork: Immersion, backstage dramas, and deception. *Organizational Research Metho*ds,19, 535–561.

Monahan, T., & Fisher, J. (2015). Strategies for obtaining access to secretive or guarded organizations, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 44*, 709–736.

Recommended Additional Reading

Alcadipani, R., & Hodgson, D. (2009). By any means necessary? Ethnographic access, ethics and the critical researcher. *Tamara Journal of Critical Organisation Inquiry*, 7, 127–146.

Blix, S., & Wettergren, Å. (2015). The emotional labour of gaining and maintaining access to the field. *Qualitative Research*, 15, 688–704.

Reeves, C. (2010). A difficult negotiation: Fieldwork relations with gatekeepers. *Qualitative Research*, 10, 315–331.

Reich, J. (2015). Old methods and new technologies: Social media and shifts in power in qualitative research. *Ethnography*, 16, 394–415.