



RESEARCH AND TRAINING NETWORK

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Ethnographic Field Work: A Workshop Presented to *Women in European Universities, Research and Training Network*¹**Outline:**

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1. Introduction

Ethnographic field work is research conducted in natural social settings, in the contexts in which people pursue their daily lives. Ethnographic fieldworkers seek to enter the worlds of others in order to encounter their activities and concerns, first-hand and up close. Indeed, ethnographers frequently locate the distinctive feature of field work exactly in providing “intimate familiarity” with the daily lives and indigenous meanings of those studied. In this respect ethnography is not primarily a method of detached observation, but one of long-

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term, close, highly participatory and personal immersion in the lives and worlds of others. Thus ethnographers seek to become at least partial “insiders,” using empathetic immersion to experience and understand the daily rounds and everyday meanings of those who live in other social worlds.

In terms of methods, fieldwork is carried out by a collection of research practices involving **participant observation**. In this presentation I will first explore the historical and intellectual origins of sociological ethnography identified with participant observation. I will then consider when and why researchers might want to employ ethnographic methods, i.e., the kinds of questions and issues where ethnographic approaches offer distinctive strengths and insights, as well as concerns for which they are not suited. I will then turn to my primary concern, to provide a brief overview of how ethnographers actually carry out fieldwork. I begin by looking at processes of getting into and using place in order to observe and understand another way of life, then consider two different strategies for asking questions of those studied, a topic that brings us into the domain of qualitative interviewing. I will then consider issues of representation -- of transforming what has been seen, heard and experienced into data in the form of written fieldnotes -- and distinctive ways of analyzing these sorts of data in ways that stay close to observed/experienced phenomena.

Selected readings -- overviews of ethnographic fieldwork:

Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delalmon, Lyn Lofland, and John Lofland (eds.), *Handbook of Ethnography*. (London: Sage, 2001).

Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, “Ethnography and Participant Observation.” Chapter 15 in Denzin and Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

Robert M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Second edition. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2001).

2. The Development of Participant Observation as the Signature Method of Ethnography

Historically ethnography is tied to the development of academic, professionalized anthropology. In the 19th century, particularly in Britain, academic anthropology relied almost entirely upon amateurs -- missionaries, colonial administrators -- to collect artifacts and texts, and to observe and record ceremonies, rituals, and other events in “native” life. The later part of the century, however, saw strong criticism of the methods of “amateur” collectors and short-term, collecting expeditions organized and carried out by academics.

By the early 20th century, anthropological fieldwork began to complement collecting artifacts and texts with sustained study of an area and its people, long-term relations with native translators and informants, and even a growing emphasis on direct observation.

The ideal of fieldwork as sustained participation was advanced by Bronislaw Malinowski in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922 but based on fieldwork conducted in the Trobriand Islands between 1915 and 1918. Malinowski came to isolate himself from the local colonial regime, abandoning the established style of “verandah research” in order to live for six months in a remote village in the midst of native life. Through his later writings based on these observations, Malinowski refocused ethnographic fieldwork toward “living intimately and for a prolonged period of time within a single native community whose language he had mastered” (Wax 1972:7). The 1930s saw growing interest in the approach to fieldwork advocated by Malinowski and his students, and by the 1940s ethnographic fieldwork conducted along these lines had become recognized as the signature method of both American and British anthropology.

The tradition of fieldwork and ethnography in sociology had somewhat different roots, tied to developments in the classic Chicago School under the influence of W. I. Thomas and Robert Park. Thomas and Park advocated the intensive “case study.” While the case study could include going into the field to collect existing documents (newspaper stories, official records from courts, social agencies, and other institutional sources), more emphasis was given to methods that involved direct contact with those studied, particularly the collection of “personal documents,” interviews, and direct observation.

Through the 1920s, personal documents, rather than observation, were seen as the most effective means for getting at the subjective points of view of those studied. Indeed, observation generally played a limited role in the Chicago case study (major exceptions include Nels Anderson’s *The Hobo* (1926), Paul Cressey’s *The Taxi Dance Hall* (1932), and to a degree, Frederic Thrasher’s *The Gang* (1927)). In general, observation was an optional component of the case study approach, valued primarily in allowing the researcher to see for him or herself rather than in providing access to subjective meanings or perspectives. Contact with those studied was typically short-term, situationally specific, and involved little effort to get close on a sustained, everyday basis

In the late 1930s in Chicago sociology the practice of field work couched in terms of the intensive case study began to give way to a model of field

research highlighting direct observation. Chicago field workers began to place greater emphasis on “getting close,” gaining access and establishing rapport in order to conduct observations of naturally occurring interaction.. Increased awareness of the limitations of personal documents coincided with rising interest in face-to-face interaction. Eventually this approach became known as participant observation,² in large part because of the influence of William Foote Whyte’s *Street Corner Society*. While Whyte explicitly used the term “participant observation” only in the lengthy methodological Appendix added to the second edition (1955), his brief discussion of field methods in the 1943 edition did insist that the only way to gain “intimate knowledge of local life” was to “live in Cornerville and participate in the activities of its people”(xv-xvi). He described these activities in detail, focusing on “particular people and ... the particular things they do” rather than “people in general” (xix). *Street Corner Society* is devoid of life history and personal document data; rather Whyte advocated observing interaction as an “objective” method for collecting field data on social structure. Here Whyte was influenced by Harvard social scientists, including Arensberg, Mayo, Roethlisberg and Dickson, who emphasized the primacy of social interaction for the study of communities and organizations.

Participant observation fieldwork in sociology during the 1940s and 50s remained predominantly “naturalistic” in tone: Going to the field required the researcher to participate in local life, such participation affording direct access to events and activities that otherwise would remain undetected or unobservable by outsiders. Thus participant observation initially involved “observation *in situ*” (Hughes 1971:496), getting into some natural setting in order to observe activities and events close up, as they naturally occur. In this view field research was defined by where it occurs (in the field), a style which persists in some contemporary fieldwork in the emphasis on “being there” and on conveying the immediacy and detail of local scenes and activities (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). Moreover, this style of fieldwork could be carried out in a somewhat detached, distanced fashion: the typology of field work roles developed by Gold (1958) and Junker (1960), for example, recognized degrees of involvement,

² The initial meaning of “participant observer” was “a natural insider recruited by the investigator as an informant, not the investigator himself” (Platt 1983:386); thus a sociologist of religion commented in a 1926 article:

The minister can be a “participant observer” in religious experience, and if he reports faithfully what he observes we can build up a body of material on the basis of which theological education can be remade. (Holt 1926:227)

The term was first used in its contemporary sense of entering and participating intensively in local life as a means of understanding that life from the inside by Lohman (1937).

allowing for the possibility of fieldwork as “complete observer” and as “observer as participant”, as well as for more active participation.

Similarly, considerations of methods in early participant-observation field research were often instrumental in tone and character, treating participation more as a means of getting close than as a way of experiencing. Key methodological issues thus included gaining *access* to specific settings, establishing *rapport* with those studied as a way to create and extend such access, and learning to how explain oneself and one’s research concerns in order to “fit in” and minimize the reactive effects of one’s presence. Whyte’s discussion of “Training in Participant Observation” in the Appendix to *Street Corner Society* (299-309), for example, focused on “learning how to conduct myself” in the different relations and situations he encountered in the field -- how to “fit in” to the street corner group, how to engage in informal street banter, how and when to ask questions, the complications of managing relations with two somewhat antagonistic and “fitting in” in order to manage emerging field problems and interpersonal tensions.

A distinctively sociological ethnography began to emerge as fieldworkers moved away from the somewhat detached form of participant observation of the 1950s to place greater emphasis on participation, urging “intimate familiarity,” “immersion,” and becoming an insider in order to experience the daily rounds and everyday meanings of another social world. By mid 1970s participant-observation fieldwork increasingly came to be understood as *an experiential process involving empathetic involvement as a means for grasping local and subjective meanings*. Ethnographers increasingly rejected notions of fieldwork as detached observation in favor of the imagery of fieldwork as a profound, experiential encounter with the lives, behaviors, and thoughts of those from different social worlds. Specifically this involved:

(1) Recognition of fieldwork as a deeply *personal* process. Not only is the fieldworker as person the research instrument; but also this person is changed in the process, as fieldwork is fundamentally a form of resocialization. These changes went hand in hand with ethnographers’ recognition of the “limits of detachment” and rejection of impersonal and distanced models of field relations. In many cases fieldworkers began to question the assumptions of professional distance and careful, non-reactive presence that had marked prior fieldwork practice. This tendency is strikingly evident in the publication of extended accounts of the personal processes and problems arising in fieldwork (e.g., R. Wax 1960; Maybury-Lewis 1965; Powdermaker 1966; Briggs 1970; Johnson 1975). In detailing the relational, personal and emotional aspects of fieldwork, these personal accounts depicted the fieldworker not as “a

self-effacing creature without any reactions other than those of a recording machine,” but rather as “a *human* scientist whose own self and relationships with subjects have become important factors in evaluating his observations” (Nash and Wintrob 1972:527,528).

Fieldwork methods require engaging in a variety of interactions with those studied, interactions which often produce novel personal and social relations. As a result the fieldworker as person is central to the research process and its findings, and will often be in the research story, not as a contaminating influence, not as a fly on the wall, not as a manipulator, and typically not as the chief subject, but as a person whose interactions and relations often shape at least some of the scenes and events studied. Just as ethnographies tend to present those studied as complex, real people, so too they should often present the ethnographer in full, rounded form, not as a disembodied textual voice or as “researcher” but as an individual with a distinctive personality, preferences and commitments. The deeply personal qualities of the researchers’ relations to subjects are seen not as liabilities but as enhancing an understanding of the lives and concerns of others.

(2) Emphasis on fieldwork immersion as a means for grasping, holistically and intuitively, indigenous meanings and concerns. Ethnographic appreciation of local worlds and concerns was increasingly characterized as a form of *verstehen*, or interpretive understanding, a mode of inquiry leading to “the perception of action as meaningful” (M. Wax 1967:332). Such understanding required grasping holistically “the vast background of shared meanings” through which the social world is organized into socially recognized categories in the first place (M. Wax 1967:326). For the ethnographer

begins “outside” the interaction, confronting behaviors he finds bewildering and inexplicable... the fieldworker finds initially that he does not understand the meanings of the actions of this strange people, and then gradually he comes to be able to categorize peoples (or relationships) and events: e.g., this man who is visiting as a brother-in-law to my host; last week his wife gave mine a gift; today he is expecting some reciprocity (M. Wax 1967:325).

Through resocialization and sharing moments in the lives of others, the field researcher comes "to enter into the matrix of meanings of the researched, to participate in their system of organized activities, and to feel subject to their code of moral regulation" (M. Wax 1980:272-73). Actively participating in another way of life, the ethnographer learns what is required to become a member of that world, to experience events and hence to understand what they mean and portend to others. In this view,

participant observation is not primarily as a way of making observations, but more deeply, a way of empathetically participating in an intimate and sustained fashion, thus providing privileged access to the meanings that infuse the daily lives and activities of those studied

Selected readings -- history of and current approaches to ethnographic fieldwork:

Robert M. Emerson, "Introduction: The Development of Ethnographic Field Research," and "The Face of Contemporary Ethnography," pp. 1-53 in *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. (Waveland: 2001).

Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1922/1984).

Dennison Nash and R. Wintrob, "The Emergence of Self-Consciousness in Ethnography." *Current Anthropology* 13:527-42 (1972).

Jennifer Platt, "The Development of the 'Participant Observation' Method in Sociology: Origin Myth and History." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 19:379-93 (1983).

George W. Stocking, Jr. *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*. (Madison, WS: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

Murray L. Wax, "Tenting with Malinowski." *American Sociological Review* 37:1-13 (1972).

William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943/1955/1981/1993).

3. When and Why to Use (or Not Use) Ethnographic Methods

The choice of particular methods in social science research should be determined by the theoretical and substantive issues of concern. For example, interest in the *frequencies* of certain phenomena, or their *distribution* within and across social groups calls for the use of various quantitative methods. In contrast, qualitative methods generally, and ethnographic methods specifically, are useful in examining different sorts of issues or questions.

Perhaps most critically in the contemporary world, ethnographic approaches allow researchers to make original **discoveries** about social life.³

³ To highlight "discovery" as central possibility of and justification for field methods, of course, assumes a fundamentally *realist* epistemology. Indeed, many contemporary ethnographers, while rejecting straightforwardly positivist versions of "simple realism," coalesce around various forms of "neo-realism" that recognize and appreciate interpretive and

The initial contribution of field methods in the classic Chicago school was to “bring in news” that would spur theoretical creativity and provoke methodological thinking. At the present time, when virtually all areas of social life are claimed by public relations agents and other institutional and group spokespeople, ethnographic methods are distinctively valuable in generating a range of sociological discoveries.

First, in contemporary societies there are many *social worlds* that we know nothing about, or that we think we know but really do not. Ethnographic field work frequently provides new understandings of parts or places of society that have been unknown or mis-known. Classic examples include: Whyte’s *Street Corner Society*, which showed how an Italian-American urban slum was not disorganized and chaotic, but coherently organized and socially integrated, if not in terms recognized or honored in the larger society. And Goffman’s *Asylums* rejects the conventional understanding of mental hospital patient life as disjointed and insane:

"It was then and still is my belief that any group of persons -- prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients -- develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject." (1961:ix-x)

In these ways, ethnographic field work provides understanding of social worlds that were previously unknown or falsely known.

Second, ethnographic approaches are discover often-ignored local or *indigenous meanings*. Contemporary ethnography is distinctively concerned not with situations or events “in themselves,” but with how situations and events are actually understood and given particular meaning by members of the relevant social group or society. Indeed, participant observation is now valued exactly because it puts the researcher in the position to learn what is meaningful to members.

Third, ethnography is a particularly apt way to specify relevant local context. Ethnographic methods seek to appreciate and preserve the local, idiosyncratic qualities of social life exactly by trying capturing and representing local, situational context. Moreover, ethnography assumes that just what context is relevant, or how it is relevant, is something that different people can decide differently; in this respect relevant context is shaped by and expresses the

representational practices without abandoning the core notion of an empirical social world; see Hammersley (2001) and Emerson (2001:39-52).

meanings people assign to events and objects. Hence field work glories in the idiosyncracies of different people and different situations. It is committed to noting, describing and analyzing variations between situations or contexts. In contrast, many social science methods try to standardize, to reduce or even to eliminate context. The aim of the laboratory experiment, for example, is to "control" or eliminate all variation (i.e., context) so that one can look explicitly at the relationship between two specific variables (independent and dependent).

Fourth, ethnographic methods are deeply sensitive to the local *constraints and contingencies* that shape and determine the flow and quality of everyday social life. This ethnographic impulse contrasts with the priority accorded causes, discrete variables, etc., in much sociology. Such local constraints involve: The mundane and routine; the practical, often unappreciated; the special, unique; the fortuitous, chance factors that characterize ordinary social life. In my own work on social control decision-makers, for example, I came to appreciate the practical work-based constraints of having to "manage a caseload" on how particular cases came to be decided. Indeed, Goffman justified intensive participation exactly as a method for getting close to those studied and to the kinds of ordinary events and experiences that mark their lives:

"[Fieldwork is a technique of getting data] by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever. So that you are close to them *while they are responding to what life does to them.*" (1989:125)

Fifth, drawing upon humanism, pragmatism and phenomenology, ethnographic methods provide unique access to *subjectivity* and to *lived experience* in contemporary social life. Varying in scope from broad life-histories to momentary, emotion-rich interactions, good ethnography depicts (among other things) actual people living actual lives in ways that capture and preserve both their unique subjectivities and common human and social experiences. In its concern with getting close to the everyday lives and subjective experiences of people, ethnography specifically attends to the pacing, meanings, contours and constraints that characterize and shape these daily lives.

Finally, ethnographic approaches are useful for discovering new, unappreciated or misappreciated *processes* that have important effects in social life. Field workers typically ask not why something happens, but *how* it happens, committing themselves to describing and analyzing social life as an

unfolding (and hence at least partially indeterminant) sequence of actions and events. The result tends toward depictions of social life as emergent processes, not fixed and static variables.

To reiterate: Choice of method should derive from the issue or question of concern, and ethnographic methods are neither useful nor appropriate for a great many issues or questions. Consider the broad topic of the differential positions and fates of women and men in universities. Obviously ethnography cannot provide data on the distribution of women relative to men within different parts of the university, differential rates of advancement given comparable levels of productivity, etc. Classic participant observation may be difficult to bring to bear on issues of gender differences, as this method works best when conducted in a “natural setting” or when focused on a core activity, conditions which may not characterize differential careers by gender in universities. Furthermore, critical settings and activities for such issues, such as hiring and tenure decisions, may not be accessible for observational study. Under these conditions it may be more fruitful to emphasize qualitative interviewing rather than participant observation as a core ethnographic method, particularly because interviews lend themselves to studying careers over time in ways that observational methods do not.

Selected readings -- distinctive uses and limitations of ethnographic fieldwork:

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw, “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research.” Chapter 1 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961).

Martyn Hammersley, “By What Criteria Should Ethnographic Research Be Judged?” and “The Generalisability of Ethnography,” Chapter 4 and 5 in *What’s Wrong with Ethnography? Methodological Explorations*. (London: Routledge, 1992).

Jack Katz, “Ethnography’s Warrants.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 25:391-423, 1997.

William F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943/1955/1981/1993).

4. Doing Ethnographic Field Work

Doing ethnographic field work by means of participant observation involves four distinctive research activities:

- A. gaining access to situations of interest; i.e., “getting into place”
- B. taking advantage of the opportunities that place provides in order to:
 - watch/observe situations and activities as they unfold and develop
 - listen to what those present say and mean on different occasions
 - ask specific questions about what you have seen and heard
- C. writing detailed accounts of what you have seen, heard, and learning; i.e., producing a detailed corpus of fieldnotes
- D. analyzing this fieldnote corpus in ways that try to capture the local phenomena and indigenous meanings, and that are derived from or “grounded” in these fieldnote accounts

A. Access: Getting Into Place

Participant-observation fieldwork begins with the process of “getting into place,” that is, getting close to those studied “while they are responding to what life does to them” (Goffman, 2001). In this respect fieldwork is intrinsically social in character: “the interaction is the method; the ethnographer is the research instrument” (Cassell 1980:36). Specifically, “getting into place” -- more a continuing series of negotiations rather than a one-shot agreement to entree -- puts the fieldworker in the presence of the ongoing social life to be observed and recorded.

Getting into place, or achieving access, has usually been analyzed in terms of the *fieldwork roles* ethnographers try to establish with those studied. Some different ways of thinking about such fieldwork roles:

(1) how active or passive one is as a participant in activities:

Gold: observer/participant continuum (complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, complete participant)

Schatzman and Strauss: modes of participating/observing:

1. watching from outside
2. passive presence
3. limited interaction
4. active control
5. observer as participant

(2a) overt vs. covert research roles:

overt fieldwork = identified researcher

a dance involving immersion and distance

covert fieldwork = researcher identity and research purposes are not revealed to those studied

Advantages: Ethnographers may adopt a covert role in order to gain access to settings which would exclude an openly identified researcher. Covert fieldwork can help penetrate the various fronts, lies, and evasions that groups put up to keep outsiders, including fieldworkers, from learning the truth. Covert field roles may help minimize reactive effects and circumvent likely efforts to hide important matters from observers. The fieldworker will be treated as just another member in the setting, so that any effects from one's presence or behavior may be regarded as "natural" for this setting.

Key to process: how the fieldworker manages to "pass"

Moral issues: the ethics of hidden research

(2b) shift from overt/covert to whether or not those studied know they are being studied:

Schwartz and Jacobs' table:

		how researcher participates	
		making observations	norm, natural participation
who others think	scientist	1	2
the res. is	bona fide member	3	4

1 and 2 highlight the power of the fieldworker to define his/her self to others; minimizes the effect of the field on the fwkr.

In recent years, ethnographers have become increasingly uneasy with the sometimes overly rational and impersonal accounts of field relations as fieldwork "roles." Snow et al. (1986) propose a flexible understanding of roles as products of emergent, interactionally-specific negotiations, distinguishing the structural or generic dimension of roles from their "derived" or locally achieved features. The former provides only a general "skeletal-like frame" for organizing field relations; the latter include the more variable, situationally-specific processes through which actual relations are created and maintained (380-81). Identifying three derived roles from their own research -- the controlled skeptic, the ardent activist, and the buddy-researcher -- Snow et al. examine the differential "informational yields" of each for three primary

categories of field data: reports of direct experience, observation, and members' narrations.

Simultaneously, with growing awareness of fieldwork as experience-based learning, fieldwork is increasingly thought of not in terms of roles but as *socialization*. Thus, Wax talks about getting into place as a means of entering "the matrix of meanings of the researched", hence feeling "subject to their code of moral regulation." And Goffman, somewhat more cynically, talks about "subjecting yourself ... to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals." These and other approaches highlight ongoing field relations and encounters as occasions for teaching or instructing the researcher/outsider to the local ways of some group or setting - i.e., you are constantly being taught, not only what to do and how to do it, but also and more basically, what things mean = what objects, persons and events are to others - what you may be taught = learn to appreciate:

(a) the culture of the local group, what Gary Fine has called a group idioculture (idio = own) - Fine's example: nicknames (and status) on little league team, particularly as these change over time:

(b) how to interpret/understand particular events (see "Ethnographic Analyses and Members' Meanings," below)

(c) what is considered important to witness, remember, etc.

This emphasis on experience and socialization has led to increased interest in a different approach to fieldwork, one in which the researcher assumes in good faith a naturally occurring membership role (see Adler and Adler 1987). Here as fieldworker you actually become an active, "real" member of the group or activity you are studying. Two major variations:

-- those who study a group/activity they are already in or familiar with (e.g., Hayano does fieldwork on poker games he already participated in as a regular)

-- those who learn and become qualified to perform activities they previously were unfamiliar with (e.g., Wacquant goes to ghetto gym and begins to train and learn to box)

Selected readings -- getting in:

Patricia A. and Peter Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987).

Erving Goffman, "On Fieldwork." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18:123-32 (1989).

Raymond L. Gold, "Roles in Sociological Field Observations." *Social Forces* 36:217-23 (1958).

John and Lyn H. Lofland. "Getting In." *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Third edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995).

Leonard Schatzman Anselm L. Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

Howard Schwartz and Jerry Jacobs, *Qualitative Sociology: A Method to the Madness*. (New York: Free Press, 1979).

David A. Snow, Robert D. Benford and Leon Anderson, "Fieldwork Roles and Information Yield: A Comparison of Alternative Settings and Roles." *Urban Life* 14:377-408 (1986).

B. "Deep Hanging Out": Using/Exploiting Place.

i. Fieldwork Relations

As "getting into place" is a continuing process, it necessarily overlaps with "using" or "exploiting" place. Geertz has aptly termed this process "deep hanging out": The ethnographer engages in mundane interactions and ongoing social relations that bring her into recurring contact with the daily events, activities and concerns of a specific group of people. These interactions and relations shape and transform the ethnographer's theoretical and substantive concerns with local social life in a variety of ways.

(1) Fieldwork relations determine what events you get to see and what things people will tell you.

Place -- the relations established with those studied -- determines both what the fieldworker will observe and be told. For in field work, as in all social life, what you come to know is a product of how you come to know. In this respect, what sorts of relationships you form with others, how you interact with them, how they interact with you, comprise the core of fieldwork methods. Thus, both the general relationships you form with others, and the specific interactions that make up the "stuff" of these relationships, shape what you come to know and understand in doing field work. Thus field relations generate distinctive sorts of fieldwork *data*: "The role assumed by the observer largely determines where he can go, what he can do, whom he can interact with, what he can inquire about, what he can see and what he can be told" (McCall and Simmons 1969:29).

-- some events will not occur before you if you are unknown to others present, or are known in certain ways:

Laud Humphreys and tearoom sex

Berreman's experiences with two different "informants" in India: high caste Hindu hides meat-eating and boozing among villagers; these activities come out with Muslim outsider

-- people will tell you different things, depending upon your relation with them - for example, as newcomers, you are often somewhat suspect, and you will not be let in on a lot of the office dirt and gossip that is apt to abound - people don't yet know how you'll fit in to the various factions and cliques that exist, or where your loyalties are - eventually they will probably begin to talk about such things, a fact which signals a certain sort of relationship has come about

(2) Fieldwork relations are linked to the deeper experience you have, and both the rels and the experience shape the deeper level consciousness you develop about that setting and its events.

Participating in field interactions and relations provides deeper intuitive appreciation of others' social worlds, shaping how the fieldworker experiences and understands local ways of life." Participant observation entails immersion in the daily rounds and ordinary interactions of the social world under study. This sort of prolonged, intensive immersion provides a "deep familiarity" with others' social worlds, a profound empathic appreciation enabling the fieldworker to absorb a feel for the local "tissue of events." Such strong subjective engagement leads to deep understanding of the life concerns and circumstances of those studied. As a result, as Goffman suggests, the fieldworker may not only come to experience the humor of those studied, but also "to engage in the same body rhythms ... as the people around you."

Two examples:

a. Barrie Thorne's study of the Vietnam War draft resistance: focus on high status, [male] risk-taking and charismatic leadership; only in retrospect came to appreciate the less valued "invisible work" of women participants.

b. Linda Shaw's experiences at Beverlywood: Initially formed relations and interacted with members as therapeutic assistants or TAs. Features/limits:

- staff-like relations
- intermediary to core staff
- drugs, underlife alluded to

Some time later Linda moved in and lived on the facility; if not quite just another resident, she was at least regarded as something other than a staff member. What this opened up:

- drugs, parties
- exchange

- loneliness, boredom
- a different kind of talk about staff: feelings of being patronized, ignored or diminished

(3) *fw rels provide or lead to certain kinds of more specific interpretations, analytic framings or understandings*

- Berreman's field research in highly stratified, caste-organized social world provides one examples - another: Estroff's research on ex-mental patients in the community reported in *Making It Crazy* - done thru an outpatient program, where E assumed a staff-like role and had most of her contacts with these patients in and thru this program - accounts and descriptions came to be centered on and around this program; little appreciation of life of these people as it occurred outside and independently of this program -

ii. Social and Personal Characteristics in Fieldwork

The fieldworker's *social and personal characteristics*, as understood by and as relevant to those studied, matter in ethnographic research. Such characteristics, including not only racial/ethnic identity, gender and age, but also "sexual status, ...socioeconomic background, appearance, abilities, goals" (Johnson 1975:91), fundamentally affect how those studied define, evaluate, and react to the researcher, and hence the kinds of interactions and relations that develop.

In recent years the "fit" between the social characteristics of researcher and researched (or lack thereof) has typically been framed in terms of *insider vs. outsider* fieldwork roles. These roles are linked with the existence or absence of "trust" and "rapport" between ethnographer and those studied. But closer consideration makes it evident that a fieldworker can be simultaneously insider and outsider within and across collectivities, and both trusted by some and distrusted by others.

For example, establishing close, trusting ties with some people will inevitably generate distance and distrust with others; Fantasia's new-found rapport with the strike community, for example, prevented him from talking to employers and strikebreakers (1988:251). These outcomes often follow the lines of cliques and factions within the group studied, as the Adlers suggest in the following incident from their fieldwork on drug dealing (P. A. Adler 1985):

when we accepted one of our key informants into our house to live for several months, our relationship with him became much more intimate. However, this alienated his ex-wife, another one of our key informants,

who was involved with a different but overlapping set of associates in her own right. (Adler and Alder 1987:42)

Furthermore, even within a single relationship trust is never absolute and unconditional. Warren and Rasmussen's (1977) fieldwork on massage parlors provides a revealing example. "A youthful, divorced, and attractive male," Rasmussen was soon able to develop close relations with some female masseuses (thereby threatening many male parlor owners, customers, and intimates of the masseuses), even becoming the boyfriend of one of the former. Yet his close, even intimate rapport with the masseuses *both generated access to some sorts of data and restricted access* to others. Defining him as a "boyfriend," for example, "(t)he women in the parlor were somewhat reluctant to tell the whole truth about their sexual involvements" (354). For "boyfriends" were not told everything (or sometimes even anything) about these sexual activities (see also Douglas 1976). Thus, even (or perhaps, especially) romantic intimacy will not open the doors to total, "magical" trust.

Furthermore, the very project of doing fieldwork may dissolve with too much rapport -- the classic danger of "going native." For those studied may sometimes try to incorporate the fieldworker into their social worlds and routine rounds of activities, but on their own terms, seeking to convert researcher to member. In this sense continued "participant observation" requires regular efforts to sustain distance, efforts evident in the interactional strategies fieldworkers rely upon to stay on the edges of unfolding social scenes (rather than being drawn into their midsts as a central actor). Indeed, "the field" as a site of both participation and observation must be understood as a jointly accomplished activity, one dependent upon the willingness of those studied to allow the fieldworker to be physically present but socially marginal (Pollner and Emerson 2001).

In general, ethnographers balance outsider distance with experienced insider moments of closeness, trust and rapport with those they study. Such close relations do not dissolve all restraints on revealing secrets, but rather establish different patterns for conveying and withholding information. Being an insider and gaining trust provide relationally situated, and hence inevitably partial, access to some secrets, to some but not all aspects of the lives and concerns of others. In field relations as in everyday life, we never learn all the secrets of others, just as we can never be sure that we are "fully trusted and accepted" (Duneier). For all social relations are patterned and regulated in specific ways, and there is "no time out" from these relationally-specific patterns and regulations, no totally free, transcendent position from which to study social life. Under these circumstances accounts of field relations should move beyond

dramatic examples of gaining trust and simple insider/outsider dichotomies to examine in detail both “the social location of the ethnographer and informants” and the actual negotiations of difference between them (Zavella 1996:140-41). The fieldworker should self-consciously and analytically attend to the interplay of social similarities and differences in field relations, tracing in detail, as Duneier insists, the specific ways in which “a different social position can have a serious effect on one’s work” (354).

Selected readings -- exploiting place:

Gerald D. Berreman, *Behind Many Masks*. Monograph No. 4, Chicago: Society for Applied Anthropology (1962).

Mitchell Duneier, “On the Evolution of *Sidewalk*.” Chapter 7 in Robert M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Second edition. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2001).

Robert M. Emerson and Melvin Pollner, “Constructing Participant/Observation Relations.” Chapter 11 in Robert M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Second edition. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2001).

Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

Dorrine K. Kondo, “How the Problem of “Crafting Selves” Emerged.” Chapter 8 in Robert M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Second edition. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2001).

John and Lyn H. Lofland. “Getting Along.” Chapter 4 in *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Third edition. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995).

Carol A. B. Warren and Paul K. Rasmussen, “Sex and Gender in Field Research.” *Urban Life* 6:349-70 (1977).

Patricia Zavella, “Feminist Insider Dilemmas: Constructing Ethnic Identity with ‘Chicana’ Informants.” Pp. 138-69 in D. L. Wolfe (ed.), *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).

C. Asking Questions and Qualitative Interviewing

Ethnographic research is never simply a matter of observation; the fieldworker must not only listen to what those studied say, but also ask questions of them about what is going on, about what they are doing, about what an observed event or overheard statement means, etc. In this sense, ethnography necessarily involves *interviewing* those studied. Such interviews, however, do

not follow the logic and stimulus-response structure of quantitative interviews, but rather involve distinctively qualitative ways of asking questions. Most notably, compared to survey research, ethnographers characteristically do not rely on pre-fixed, standardized questions. Rather qualitative interviews tend to vary in content and format, to be situationally focused, to follow up leads and topics that emerge rather than to rely on a predetermined sequence of questions, and to be carried out in a range of different styles or modes depending upon what “works” with a particular respondent (Mishler). Concerned with getting at meaning using flexible procedures rather than fixed, pre-determined questions, qualitative interviews do not rely on standardized content, format, or phrasing. Practically, this leads to a key difference in procedure: In qualitative interviews different people will be asked different questions. Indeed, in many instances the ethnographer interviews without a list of fixed questions. As Hammersley and Atkinson note: "Ethnographers do not decide beforehand the questions they want to ask, though they may enter the interview with a list of issues to be covered."

We can note that there are two distinct types of interviewing situations in ethnographic research. At one extreme, interviewing may occur as part of the researcher's participation in and observation of the daily rounds and lives of others. i.e., the researcher does not relate to those studied as interviewer, but as some sort of participant, asking the kinds of questions about what is happening that participants ask, generally focused on what is happening in the here and now. This form of interviewing is termed *field-based interviewing*. At the other extreme, ethnographers can conduct interviews independently of long-term, participant-observation, locating a sample of people to talk with by one means or another. In this research mode, interviews provide the primary or even sole source of data about settings and people. Where the relationship between researcher and other is solely that of interviewer-interviewee, the procedure *stand-alone interviewing*.

In what follows I will not explicitly take up procedures for doing stand-alone qualitative interviews (also known as unstructured, depth or life-history interviews) per se. There is a large literature on the uses and procedures for doing these kinds of interviews (a particularly good recent treatment is Robert Weiss's *Learning from Strangers*; see also relevant chapters in Gubrium et al, *Handbook of Qualitative Interviewing* (Sage, forthcoming), and a variety of impressive studies that are deeply ethnographic in character but which rely heavily if not exclusively upon stand-alone interviewing (e.g., Vaughan, *Uncoupling*; Devault, *Feeding the Family*). Stand-alone interviews share many

procedures and assumptions with field-based interviews, such that many of the comments below apply to both.⁴

i. Field-Based Interviewing

In field-based interviewing, ethnographers usually ask questions for the following purposes:

a. background questioning

-- to introduce yourself and your research to regulars in the setting; to build contacts, begin to establish rapport

-- to collect certain basic demographic (age, training, job responsibilities) and attitudinal data (e.g., what do you think of X?)

(here there are advantages in asking some questions of everyone; but you still may be more interested in person's unique backgrounds and perspectives)

b. fill-me-in questioning

as a researcher you cannot be in the setting all the time; or even if you are there a lot of the time, you won't directly see everything that happens, and will have to ask others to fill you in on things that have taken place when you were elsewhere - "staff reports" at shift transitions as naturally occurring instance of this -

c. situated or reactive questioning

in ethnographic field research, most interviewing is reactive to witnessed events or talk - e.g., you have witnessed an event, and what you seek to do is after the event is to get a member of the setting to talk to you about what "really happened", about what was important or significant about the events that just took place, etc.

Except with certain portions of background interviewing, there is often no point in asking the same questions of everyone - indeed, it may not even be

⁴ But there are also areas of significant difference between stand-alone and field-based interviewing as developed below: (1) In the former it is often more difficult to get a respondent to provide the desired level of fine detail, although you can explicitly press for such detail. In field-based interviews, detail is often routinely accessed by invoking known- or observed-in-common events. (2) It can be difficult to get at the open, evolving character of events with the stand-alone interviewing (even with a longitudinal design); the respondent often tells his or her story, knowing how it's all going to turn out, what is important or significant, what is insignificant, etc. Assuming that the researcher uses a more continuous process of asking questions at each points as events unfold, it is easier in field-based interviewing to preserve the indeterminant, contingent character of events.

possible to ask the same questions of everyone; the specific relation that you have with someone will shape what you can ask and exactly how -

Furthermore: Ethnographers do not "restrict themselves to a single mode of questioning." - e.g., may be either nondirective (broad, open-ended, designed to trigger interviewee into talking about a particular area or topic) or directive (specific; confrontational) -

decisions about who to interview (i.e., sampling) follows a different logic - everyone in a particular setting, or involved in key events - or: theoretical sampling, as per Glaser and Strauss - e.g.: in research on the use and interpretation of prior record, it turns out that probation officers doing investigations in order to write sentencing report are key figures, since they are the ones that produce one authoritative version of a defendant's prior record -

Ethnographers treat interviews as interaction: while Mishler emphasizes the necessity to appreciate interviews as discourse, I would expand this claim to insist on viewing interviews as interaction - the difference is just this: discourse treats the interview as completed talk, as a transcript; interaction views it as an emerging interactional event, its form not yet complete or determined -

here, Hammersley and Atkinson talk about interviews as participant observation: i.e., the interview represents a distinct setting or occasion with its own organization - one key: the latent identities which the participants invoke and attribute to one another -

-- dating survey assignment: the problematics of framing interaction/asking questions as "an interview"

-- judge R in SM court: "This guy is real slime. [slight pause] Slime is not the right word." [slight pause] It's just that he's a car dealer."

who can ask whom about what?

Platt and interviewing one's peers -

Carol and Rasmussen on talk on sexual intimacy:

-- interviews as data-gathering vs. interviews as perspective-eliciting:

we can treat what people tell as information, in this way focusing on what these interview accounts tell us about the phenomena to which they refer; and/or, we can treat them as accounts that tell us about those who produced them; i.e., as indications of *perspective* - former involves questions of truth and falsity; latter involves analysis of accounts/beliefs as social phenomena -

unsolicited and solicited accounts: this distinction is not that critical, since the former may be just as oriented to the presence and nature of the researcher as the latter - rather:

"All accounts must be interpreted in terms of the context in which they were produced. ... The aim is not to gather 'pure' data that are free from potential bias. There is no such thing. Rather, the goal must be to discover the correct manner of interpreting whatever data we have. ... minimizing the influence of the researcher is not the only, or always even a prime, consideration. Assuming we understand how the presence of the researcher shaped the data, we can interpret the latter accordingly and it may provide important insights... " (112)

Selected readings -- field and stand-alone interviewing:

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, "Insider Accounts: Listening and Asking Questions." Chapter 5 in *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Second edition. (London: Routledge, 1995).

Elliot G. Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Schatzman, Leonard, and Anselm L. Strauss. "Strategy for Listening." Chapter 4 in *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

Whyte, William F. "Interviewing in Field Research." Chapter 27 in Richard N. Adams and Jack J. Preiss (eds.), *Human Organization Research: Field Relations and Techniques*. (Homewood, IL; Dorsey Press, 1960).

D. Writing/Producing Fieldnotes

Ethnographic field research is not simply going to the field, but also and more critically, generating of written accounts of what is seen and experienced in the field. As Clifford (1986) and others insisted, the ethnographer "translates experience into text," continually and successively writing accounts "re-presenting" moments and slices of ongoing social life to various readers.

The initial -- and to some extent primary -- way ethnographers translate experience into text is by *writing fieldnotes*. Writing fieldnotes is not a straightforward putting on paper what has been observed, but more deeply and fundamentally, a partial, selective and purposed re-presentation of these ways of life gleaned through the researcher's efforts to get physically and socially close. Doing ethnography, then, is not simply a matter of "grasping what's there through close participation," but rather of actively interpreting ongoing social

life and transforming those experiences and interpretations into texts that can be made available to others as representations of “what’s there.”

Ethnographic writing, particularly writing fieldnotes, has gained close attention with the turn away from simple realist assumptions -- e.g., that social reality is composed of fixed objects with invariant meanings, that observation is a straightforward matter of simply looking at and recording objects possessing such fixed and transparent meaning. Increasingly questioning these realist assumptions, ethnographers began to understand reality as complex, allowing multiple interpretations, shifting in meaning depending upon the researcher’s theoretical concerns and orienting questions. Describing this sort of reality is not a mechanical process of just “writing down” what is out there, of using language to mirror social reality. Indeed, a key ethnographic task -- assembling richly textured *descriptions* of other social worlds -- became a deeply complicated process. In particular, “observation” could only occur through specific lenses, and “description” involved complex and problematic processes of understanding and interpretation filtered through these lenses. These lenses were provided not only by the ethnographer’s theoretical commitments and by the cultural categories used to observe, order, and describe events, but also by how the ethnographer attended to what was to be observed and described. In this *reflexive turn*, ethnographers began to recognize that social reality is at least in part a product of an investigator’s efforts to apprehend and describe it; reality and representation are related *reflexively*, each shaping and hence constituting the other. Reflexive approaches thus view social reality as constructed or accomplished exactly by efforts to capture and represent it rather than as something that is simply “there.”

These developments not only highlighted the significance of fieldnotes as first, immediate renderings/translations of observations and experience into texts, but also directed attention to distinctive qualities of fieldnotes as more or less “on the spot,” *authored representations of ongoing social life*. As such, fieldnotes inevitably reduce the welter and confusion of lived reality, translating or rendering into written form the lived complexities of others’ worlds and the fieldworker’s lived experience of those worlds. Hence fieldnotes are inevitably selective, never providing a “complete” record. Fieldnotes are necessarily partial and incomplete in that they recount only the fleeting moments the fieldworker was able to observe, make some sense of, and reconstruct at some later point. And finally, fieldnotes are inevitably selective in terms of which observations are written up: The ethnographer writes about some incidents, those that seem “interesting” or “significant,” often leaving out matters that do not.

Fieldnotes are also selective in what they do include, since they inevitably *present or frame* the events and objects written about in particular ways, hence “missing” other ways that events might have been presented or framed. To cite but one example: An event may be described from an “end-point” or in “real-time” (Emerson et al. 1995:60-63). In the former understandings obtained later on, at some “end point” involving complete (or at least greater) knowledge, are used to describe what was observed earlier on. Thus one might write about a skid-row scene by describing a “line” of homeless men waiting to get a “sleep ticket” entitling one to spend that night inside a local mission (60-61). A real-time description of this scene, in contrast, would describe this scene as it came to make sense to the writer-observer: the realization that this collection of poor men sitting, laying and standing around on a downtown sidewalk, are in fact “in line;” then learning that their purpose for waiting was to get a bed for the night, etc. Real-time descriptions thus preserve incomplete or even inaccurate meanings that ultimately came to be discarded, but that guided or provided meaning at earlier moments.

In addition to their selectivity, fieldnotes are characterized by a distinctive way of writing. They are produced more or less contemporaneously with the events, experiences and interactions they recount; thus they are written incrementally, set-by-set, without any sustained logic or underlying principle and on the assumption that not everything included will ultimately be useful for a larger/finished project.⁵ Thus, fieldnotes are not written in accord with some tightly pre-specified plan or for some specifically envisioned, ultimate use. Rather, composed day-by-day, open-endedly, with changing and new directions, fieldnotes are an expression of the ethnographer’s deepening local knowledge, emerging sensitivities, and evolving substantive concerns and theoretical insights. Fieldnotes are therefore unruly or “messy,” changing form and style without attention to consistency or coherence; they have the “loose,” shifting quality of working, preliminary, and transitory, rather than final or fixed, texts.

Fieldnotes are also written as personal documents; the insights of immersion, trust, and deeply personal and emotional experience do not speak for themselves, but must be translated into textual form. For example, fieldnotes include the fieldworker’s own emotional reactions to events in the field, at least in part on the assumption that such reactions may mirror the reactions of others in that setting and hence provide important analytic leads. Ellis (1991) in

⁵ Actual fieldnotes thus include accounts of many incidents and phenomena that the ethnographers never does follow up on or use in any finished report; in this way they allow the researcher to remain open to the unexpected and the unhypothesized, and hence to the possibilities of new substantive or theoretical discoveries.

particular urges writing emotionally evocative fieldnotes in order to facilitate reconstruction of features of a setting or scene at some later point in time. Including these personal reactions and sensitivities also ensures that the ethnographer does not write himself out of the text but remains visible as both social actor and embodied inquirer, thus enhancing “authorial responsibility.” In addition, by focusing attention on emotions as aspects of social life worthy of attention in their own right, evocative fieldnotes may capture complexities of process and experience that would elude descriptions of behaviors obtained by direct observation or interview questions alone (Ellis 1991).

Fieldnotes often make heavy use of stories or narrative. On the one hand, those studied frequently organize and report their experience in some narrative form, in large part because “people experience and interpret their lives in relationship to time,” and “time is made human” by means of temporally ordered narratives (Richardson 1990). Fieldworkers receive, elicit and write up a variety of different sorts of members’ stories, including narratives of *everyday life and routines* (as in response to such questions as “what happened at work today”), *autobiography* (a telling of one’s story which “gives meaning to the past from the point of view of the present and the future”), and *biography* (a narrative constructing and linking “key events” in the life of another)

On the other hand, ethnographers themselves frequently construct their fieldnotes in the form of a narrative. Ethnographers often think about and organize observations into units as “events,” such units having “an apparent ‘wholeness’” that make them “good modes of entry into fieldnotes” (Lederman). Frequently fieldnote narratives appear as *episodes* -- one- or two-paragraph accounts depicting an incident as one continuous action or interaction), but ethnographers may also construct longer, more sustained fieldnote tales -- loosely structured strings of action chunks linked together by the ethnographer (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995, Chapter 4). Fieldnote tales usually have a mundane, everyday quality, rarely moving to the dramatic or even clearcut outcomes typical of artfully crafted narratives. But fieldnote narratives are also essentially open-ended and revisable in character:

The cohesion of fieldnote tales ... is temporary and conditional: ethnographers’ understandings of recounted events may change as fieldwork continues. In the light of further observation of related activities and reappearing characters, the ethnographer may reassess connections and disjunctions between episodes... (He) may begin to see earlier tales differently than when he wrote them. He may reexamine the implicit connections, the gaps he did not understand, and the endings he inferred... (Emerson et al. 1995:98)

By way of example, consider the following extended fieldnote tale (from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, pp. 91-93):

(a) As we were driving, Alisha was telling Sam about women officers in another department. "I can't believe what some of the women and the women trainees have done and I hate it cause it's always the women that do the stupidest things. And that's what gives a bad name to the women officers. So---"

"You know what the problem is, don't ya?" Sam says. "Women think on the wrong side of the brain."

"What?"

"They think out of the wrong side of their brain."

"Or is it because we don't have a penis to think from?" Alisha burst out laughing.

"NOOOO!"

"Is that what you think, Sam?"

"No. I'll probably tell my wife that. She'll get a kick out of it." We pulled down an alley and passed a Hispanic guy about twenty. "That guy was stealing those tires that were down here."

"The kid's bike ones?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe."

"Um, sure. They were back there and they're not there no more."

"I don't know."

"They were there last night, pieces to a bicycle."

"Oh. Should we go get 'em?"

"No they've been there forever."

(b) We pulled out of the alley and were waiting to make a right hand turn. "I'm gonna stop that." I looked up and there was a white jeep without its lights on. We zoomed ahead and got behind the car. The car got in the turning lane as did we. After the light changed and we were proceeding through the intersection, Sam flipped on the lights. The jeep pulled into a gas station. ... Sam walked up to the car and Alisha walked up and flashed her flashlight in the windows. She walked back and stood next to me. The people in the gas station all watched us. The girl (Caucasian) got out of her car, walked to the back and looked at her taillights. Sam spoke to her and then walked back to the car. We got in and Sam said that her headlights were on but not her taillights. He let her off with a warning.

(c) We decided to go to 7-11 to get coffee. We walked in and the lady clerk knew Sam and Alisha. She gave them these big cups and Sam went and filled them with coffee. I walked over and didn't see any of the cups like they had so I

just grabbed the largest coffee cup they had and filled mine up. Alisha was looking down the aisle with all the medicines. I told her she should get Tums for her stomach. Sam came over and made some comment. Alisha replied that she had a tough stomach and she didn't need anything. Sam got a Mounds candy bar. We each paid and then went back to the car and started driving around again. As we were driving, Sam rolled down his window and pretended to throw his candy wrapper out the window. "You didn't?" Alisha asked. With a big smile on his face, Sam said, "no," and showed her the wrapper. Alisha went on to explain that she had a real thing for not littering, especially when they were working. "I think we need to be examples. What does it look like if somebody sees a candy wrapper fly out the window of a cop car?"

(d) As we were driving through a residential area we heard, "Crack! Crack!" I immediately thought, fireworks? In retrospect that seems like such a dumb thought, but having never heard gunshots except at a range, I guess I'm not used to assuming something is gunshots. Sam said something about a car I hadn't seen and it having only one taillight. He floored the car, the engine raced and we flew down the street. Alisha threw her coffee out the window and both she and Sam pulled their guns out. "Get ready to duck if I tell you" she told me. She then called in that we would be out in the area on possible gunshots. "That fucker split." We flew down the street. At one point we came up on a car coming towards us and we met the car as it was driving through a narrow spot with cars parked on each side of the road. Sam locked up the brakes, the tires squealed and somehow we made it through. Sam floored it once again and once again we were flying down the street. We hit a bump and I flew out of my seat. I heard the things in the trunk bang on the top of the trunk. "I want to find that car Alisha!" "Did you see the people in it?"

"No. They were just hauling ass and it's got a fuckin' taillight that's out and I don't even know what kind of car it is." We drove around for a while and then gave up the search. "Damn. I want a felony tonight. We have to find a felony tonight, Alisha. I want to point my gun at someone. Where are all the felons? That was a pretty close call there."

"Yeah. But I trust your driving Sam. I had to throw my coffee out though. Maybe we should go see if it's still there." [Sam teases Alisha for having to throw her coffee out the window.]

"How was I supposed to get my gun out and hold my coffee?"

I did it and I was driving."

"That's because Sam, you're such a stud."

"I kept mine." I said jokingly and they laughed.

"So you're talking to me about not littering and you go and throw your coffee cup out the window."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, I did realize my mistake afterwards, and I requested that you go back so I could retrieve my coffee."

"No you said, 'Go back and get my COFFEE!' is what you said." We all laugh.

"But the coffee had to be in a cup in order for me to get it."

"Would you do some police work and run this plate?" (It was a little surprising how fast the atmosphere had transformed. From total intensity to care-free joking in minutes.)

(e) Sam began to follow an old beat up American car. He sped up and told Alisha to call it in for wants and warrants. As he pulled in closer, I saw that the registration said 1991 [it's now January 1993]. "Come on. Come back Code 36 Charles." Sam said, hoping the plate would come back with felony wants on it. The plate came back all clear, expired reg. The car made a left off of the main street and as we turned to follow, Sam flipped on the lights. The driver was a black male. Alisha shined her flashlight in the back seat and Sam walked up to the driver's window. The driver handed Sam his license and registration. Sam spoke with the man for a minute and then walked back to the car. As he got in he said, "That's a responsible father. I'm not going to write up a responsible father. He had his kids' immunization records in his glove box. That's not our crack dealer."

"Just cause someone's a father doesn't mean he doesn't deal."

"That's not what I meant. Fathers can be drug dealers, but responsible fathers aren't drug dealers."

In this fieldnote tale, as two patrol officers drive around, they react to events observed outside the car and to topics raised in talk within the car. The episodes reveal their now-teasing, now-supportive work relationship. The tale also conveys the tenor of routine police patrol work---ongoing ordinary talk, endless driving, occasional breaks---punctuated by moments of excitement during a chase which, in turn, dissipate as the officers slip back into normal work activities. Clearly the quick shifts interest the writer, who comments in an aside how suddenly the officers turn from tense excitement to informal joking.

In conclusion, most polished ethnographic monographs are assembled from and incorporate various forms of fieldnotes. Written day after day, without an predetermined plan or structure, fieldnotes build up into a corpus having no necessary coherence or consistency; this corpus may well contain brief accounts of unrelated incidents, different snippets of members' talk, accounts of the fieldworker's interactions and feelings, and close-to-the-ground descriptions of and reflections on matters just witnessed or overheard. But this diversely written record provides a wealth of material for developing, specifying and elaborating descriptions and analyses of other social worlds.

Selected readings -- writing fieldnotes:

James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority." *Representations* 1: 118-46 (1983).

James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory." Pp. 98-121 in J. Clifford & G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Carolyn Ellis, "Sociological Introspection and Emotional Experience." *Symbolic Interaction* 14:23-50 (1991).

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Laura Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

Roger Sanjek (ed.), *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

E. Analyzing Qualitative Data

Ethnographers approach the analysis of field data in a variety of different ways, including the development of generic concepts, the use of analytic induction, and a commitment to grounded theory. But underlying most of these seemingly disparate approaches are a number of deeper assumptions and sensitivities about what ethnographic analysis is and how it should be conducted.

Analysis as Craft: Most ethnographers approach theorizing not as an intimidatingly formal, high-science endeavor but as a pragmatic craft. Becker (1998) in particular views qualitative theorizing as a form of "sociological shop floor practice" moved forward by various "tricks" -- that is, "ways of thinking" that allow the fieldworker "to turn things around, to see things differently, in order to create new problems for research, new possibilities for comparing cases and inventing new categories, and the like" (7).

Minimizing Use of Received Theory: In order to be able to make new findings about the social world, ethnographers emphasize developing theoretical propositions after immersion in the field. This stance in turn depends on minimizing or avoiding premature commitment to any theory, *a priori* concept, or system for classifying field data. Thus, grounded theorists Glaser and Strauss (1967) contend that preconceived theories truncate empirical inquiry "either by forcing data into preconceived conceptual categories, or by inducing an

infatuation for verification of extant theories” (Layder 1982:104). The fieldworker should therefore enter a research setting as nearly *tabula rosa* as possible “without any preconceived theory that dictates ... relevancies in concepts and hypotheses” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:33). Similar concerns underlie Becker’s (1998:123) recommendation to avoid using an established conceptual category to define an empirical observation as a “case.” For in asserting that what we are studying is a case of x, we are led to assume “that everything that is important about the case is contained in what we know about the category”; as a result “we don’t see and investigate those aspects of our case that weren’t in the description of the category we started with” (123-4).

“Intimate Familiarity” and Grounded Theorizing: Most ethnographers insist that theorizing build on “intimate familiarity” (Blumer 1969) with and stay grounded in the setting or events under study. Theory is grounded when it grows out of, and is directly relevant to, activities occurring in the setting under study. Ethnographic theory tends to be grounded in another sense: By staying close to what the people observed actually say and do, by representing their routines and dramas in something like their own terms. Thus on the one hand ethnographers tend to avoid grand, abstract theorizing, elaborating experience-near and eschewing experience-far concepts. On the other hand, ethnographers try not to reduce lived human experience to presumably more fundamental, “deeper,” beneath-the-surface processes, whether these be biological, genetic, or psychological.

Flexible Procedures and Simultaneous Data-Collection and Analysis: Fieldwork inquiry is adaptive and flexible, as researchers modify and fit their procedures to the exigencies of the settings in which they work and to the changing directions of their analyses of those settings. Fieldworkers thus constantly move from observation and analysis to conceptual refining and reframing and then back to seek new forms of data relevant to their emerging theoretical concerns and categories. As Becker has characterized this process (1998:211-12):

analysts in this style typically assemble all the data that bear on a given topic and see what statement they can make that will take account of all that material, what generalizations best encompasses what is there. If some of the data do not support a generalization, the analyst tries to reframe the generalization, complicating it to take account of the stubborn fact; alternatively, the analyst tries to create a new class of phenomena that differs from the one the datum was originally assigned to, which can have its own explanatory generalization.

In this way ethnographic analysis involves not strict induction (if such is possible), but rather “retroduction” (Blumer 1979; Katz 1983) -- a moving back and forth between observations and theory, modifying original theoretical statements to fit observations and seeking observations relevant to the emerging theory that is “simultaneously deductive and inductive” (Lofland 1976:66).

Constant Comparison: Qualitative analysis keys on and seeks to maximize comparisons. The calls by analytic induction to pursue “negative cases” and by grounded theory to follow the “constant comparative method” both place thorough-going comparison at the center of efforts to generate theory from ethnographic data. Prus locates the key to the identification of generic social processes in making comparisons of “parallel activities across contexts” (1996:164): “By drawing comparisons and contrasts across settings, we not only arrive at a richer understanding of each setting, but of similar processes across a range of settings.”

Readers and Warrants: Ethnographic texts are not immaculately conceived writings but constructed accounts subject to the concerns and interpretations of readers (Altheide and Johnson 1994). This recognition -- a deep and sustained concern with actual, likely and/or envisioned audiences -- underlies recent emphasis on the *relevance* of ethnographic accounts as a criterion for assessing their validity (Hammersley 1992:72-77). It also drives growing self-consciousness about ethnographic writing -- how it assumes and appeals to particular audiences, how it engages their interest and enters their intellectual discourse.

i. Beginning “Grounded” Ethnographic Analysis

Specifically, how do ethnographers actually go about developing “grounded,” context-sensitive analyses? While a variety of different approaches are used (see Emerson, “Approaches to Ethnographic Analysis,” pp. 285-95 in *Contemporary Field Research*, 2E), here I want to focus on the initial stages of a “grounded theory” approach involving the close reading and initial coding of fieldnote and interview data.

Ethnographic analysis involves looking closely and systematically at what has been observed and recorded in order to identify some more general patterns, regularities, categories. To do so in ways that stay close to the distinctive meanings and concerns of the social life we have been observing, we turn directly to our data, beginning to read through what we have observed and collected line by line and beginning to create a series of unconnected, data-

centered codes. This sort of process has been termed *open coding* (Strauss: "the unrestricted coding of data ... aimed at producing [provisional] concepts and their dimensions") or *initial coding* (Charmaz: "looking for leads, ideas, and issues **in** the data themselves").

Coding in qualitative research in this way does not mean the same thing as coding in quantitative research: In the latter we fit questionnaire responses and other data into already established categories in order to determine the frequencies of events within those categories. In qualitative coding we are creating, elaborating and refining analytic categories that derive from and that advance the interpretation of the data. The key lies in developing -- changing, modifying -- analytic categories. (Of course, quant. res involves similar sorts of category creation and refinement, typically at the pre-test stage; but it does not term this "coding".) This means that unlike quantitative coding, where a response has to be placed within one and only one category, qualitative coding places no limit to the number and varieties of codes that may be placed on any piece of data.

Within qualitative research, grounded theorists have been most concerned with explicitly developing procedures for coding data. Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, proposed procedures for systematically coding qualitative data in order to develop a series of theoretical propositions. For Strauss, coding is aimed at "the discovery and naming of [analytic] categories". Coding, he insists, is a way of opening up inquiry; it begins with a line by line reading of field notes (or interviews), which itself involves a conceptual stepping back from the data and the immediate field experience to try to trace out as many analytic implications as possible. Since coding starts from and focuses on the field data (although it also draws upon the analyst's broader life experiences and technical proof readings), it is in fact the key both to developing theory and to keeping it "grounded."

Grounded theory represented a significant change to earlier approaches to coding qualitative data. Most prior approaches had viewed coding as putting labels on bits and pieces of the data so that data that "goes together" could be collected in one place and systematically reviewed. i.e., in this approach sorting data provided the core coding process. In grounded theory coding, of course, there is still concern with sorting data; Charmaz, for example, writes that coding "is simply the process of categorizing and sorting data". But in earlier approaches you sorted first, and then analyzed; in grounded theory your interest in categories is not with cutting out segments of the data to put them with other like segments, but with developing an analytic framework. Here sorting (organizing) can occur, but it is subordinated to developing and refining

analyses; sorting is thus more a by-product of the coding process than the end of that process.

The following procedures are recommended in order to code qualitative data:

- a. Systematically read fieldnotes as a data set.
- b. In so doing ask questions of the following sort to come up with codes:
 - What are people doing?**
 - What are they trying to accomplish?**
 - How, exactly, do they do this?**
 - What specific means and or strategies do they use?**
 - How do members talk about, characterize and understand what is going on?**
 - What assumptions are they making?**
 - What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?**
 - Why did I include them?**

Mechanically, you can simply write analytic codings in the margins of your data set, as in the following fieldnote from an Alzheimer's disease support group:

<p>trouble: memory loss; bad driving dr does not "help" - asks advice pressures dr med test --> no results</p>	<p>Lucie says her husband is in good health but his symptoms include memory loss and poor and dangerous driving. The doctor does nothing to stop him from driving. She asks, "What does everyone else think?" Some other members say, "Change doctors." Lucie explains the doctor is a friend of the family. Her son has stressed to the doctor that his father's fam driving is dangerous and they could be legally involved. The doctor has done a catscan but there is no direction from that.</p>
<p>don't rely on dr cger to DMV</p>	<p>Pat, the group leader, recommends, "Take it into your own hands." She suggests that Lucie go to the DMV. Lou says she thinks there is a new law that states anyone with a mental deficiency, including Alzheimer's disease, is not supposed to drive. Lucie says, "But I don't have a name on it -- that's what hinders action. I am so frustrated."</p>
<p>no med dx</p>	

advice:	Vie says, "Isn't it important for the doctor to tell him not
coalition w/ dr	to drive?" Lucie says, "Why won't he do that? Maybe he's too close and he doesn't want to get involved."
practical	Lou: "What about Nicholson? He's a geriatric psychiatrist." Others suggest
remedy	that she hide the car keys. Joey says, "You need to lie to
deception	him". Lucie says, "I must say I have been doing that." Joey
proposed remedy	says, "We all have." ... Lucie says in terms of the car keys,
will not work	he knows there is a second set. Another woman says she talked
"talking to"	with her husband and he doesn't drive anymore. "I've done this. It is not working." Someone says, "You need a good diagnosis from a medical doctor." Lucie: "That's what I think." Others in the group agree.

These codings locate and begin to name a set of loosely related (or even unrelated) issues:

- driving by Alzheimer's patients may be dangerous; family caregivers may have to actively manage those who insist on continuing to drive;
- medical diagnoses may play a critical role in caregivers' efforts to manage patient activities;
- caregivers may experience frustration with doctors who fail to be sensitive to and support family concerns;
- support group members may suggest ways of getting around obstacles presented by doctors;
- support group members may recommend various practical remedies that will prevent the person with Alzheimer's from driving.

Coding should give you some ideas about possible wider analytic themes - any code could become a theme if you elaborate it and link it to a number of different notes or observations - you can easily come up with a lot of codes, and hence potential themes; your problem is to decide which themes to select --

- >
- what seems important to people in your setting?
- what seems important to you?
- what do you have a lot of stuff on?
- what can be linked with other stuff that you have?

Okay, by way of a final example, read and consider the analytic/coding possibilities of the first segment of the extended fieldnote previously presented.

(a) As we were driving, Alisha was telling Sam about women officers in another department. "I can't believe what some of the women and the women trainees have done and I hate it cause it's always the women that do the stupidest things. And that's what gives a bad name to the women officers. So---"

"You know what the problem is, don't ya?" Sam says. "Women think on the wrong side of the brain."

"What?"

"They think out of the wrong side of their brain."

"Or is it because we don't have a penis to think from?" Alisha burst out laughing.

"NOOO!"

"Is that what you think, Sam?"

"No. I'll probably tell my wife that. She'll get a kick out of it." We pulled down an alley and passed a Hispanic guy about twenty. "That guy was stealing those tires that were down here."

"The kid's bike ones?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe."

"Um, sure. They were back there and they're not there no more."

"I don't know."

"They were there last night, pieces to a bicycle."

"Oh. Should we go get 'em?"

"No they've been there forever."

ii. Ethnographic Analysis and Members' Meanings

Many ethnographers place primacy on grounding analysis in the experience of the people studied, on understanding their worlds as they live them, and on making bridges to theoretical analysis in ways that preserve subjects' own sense of their situations and the personal colors and innovations through which they shape their conduct. One key here is attending to and building analyses on indigenous or members' meanings. This is no easy matter: Increased sensitivity to the ways in which members understand, define, and categorize their worlds may well produce conflicts with efforts to tighten theorizing; for example, theoretical relevance may demand use of analytic categories at odds with those salient to members. Ethnographers will regularly have to respect these conflicting pressures, to achieve somehow a balance, in

Geertz's (1973:27) words, "between setting down the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and stating, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social life as such."

Geertz has written about the process of developing analyses that reflect and incorporate "the native's point of view," contrasting "experience-near" approaches to conceptualization with standard "experience-far" approaches. Here he parallels the established anthropological distinction between *emic* descriptions that use categories from within that culture that would be used or recognized by its members, and *etic* descriptions -- descriptive accounts based on concepts that come from outside the culture studied. What is central here is the aim of experience-near or emic approaches to preserve indigenous meaning by not framing accounts/descriptions in terms of what something is not; the latter involves the implicit or explicit use of a meaning, standard, category, from one setting or culture to characterize what another setting or culture is like. Consider the seemingly straightforward descriptive claim, "the Thai are noisy in temple" (Moerman 1969:464). This statement may simply mean that "the Thai I saw in temple were noisier than Methodists are supposed to be in church"; if so, it frames Thai behavior in temples against an external criterion, almost caricaturing rather than describing that behavior on its own terms. To establish the claim that the Thai are noisy in temple, Moerman argues, requires the development of intracultural contrasts, that is, comparison of the noise (and other aspects of social behavior) in this setting with the noise in other locally comparable situations (among the Thai, for example, dispute hearings, village meetings, and casual conversations). Thus, the observer is led to a comparison of public behaviors in different settings in Thai society, and to contrasting organizational and interactional patterns found within them. Thus the goal is to ground descriptions on distinctions consistently drawn from within the culture being described rather than from an outside culture.

Qualitative accounts may also simply ignore members' meanings entirely in favor of a priori analytic categories; for example, using a received concept like "alienation" in studies of "deviant" groups. And indigenous meanings may be dismissed by invoking official criteria, rules or understandings to describe and analyze events in a specific setting. For example, police action on the streets may be described and analyzed in terms of official regulations for the use of force, the question becoming when and where they conform to or violate these regulations (see, for example, Reiss's (1968) study of police "brutality"). Through such a procedure the analyst, in effect, assumes the position of an authoritative judge of appropriate or competent action. (Compare this to Hunt's (1985) analysis of police understandings and use of "normal force.")

Finally, members' meanings may be treated *ironically*; i.e., not so much directly ignored as treated as hypocritical, contradictory or fallacious.

Example: Berger's (1981) ethnography of rural hippie communes - temptation to use observed communal hippie behavior to discredit, second-guess or ironicize their professed beliefs - rather he seeks to set behavior and belief into some sort of connection, asking how it is that a behavior that might be seen one way -- have one meaning --in fact is seen another way by these specific actors - e.g.: chain saws seen not as technology but as "tools" - "ideological work" refers to just those processes whereby connections are made, meanings established and sustained -

There are a variety of concrete devices for getting at, capturing and preserving indigenous meanings in ethnographic fieldwork:

1. *Attend to members' informal terms* (often slang); e.g., Becker on the importance of "crocks" (patients who complain of medical problems which cannot be found or diagnosed) in medical school training -- contrast between crocks vs. "interesting cases" as a way of analyzing med students' "clinical experience perspective" - among department store salespersons, one hears talk of "snakes" = co-workers who "steal" one's customers and hence sales commission

2. *Attend to members' typologies*

Dave Jackson: "outside"/"inside" on skid row
or more elaborate: Spradley on "kinds of tramps"

3. *Attend to naturally occurring members' descriptions:*

how they describe a setting, an incident, a person (on some specific occasion to specific others) - consider the following fieldnote describing the involuntary hospitalization of a mental patient by a psychiatric emergency team:

In the process of rehospitalizing a chronic patient who had a reputation for getting violent, a struggle developed between the patient, Judy, and two ambulance attendants. Judy yelled, "You motherfuckers, you're hurting me!" as one of the attendants pushed her down on the bed while the other tried to get leather cuffs on her arms behind her back. As this went on Ted watched from the living room, commenting to the researcher: "This is enough to make you turn in your ACLU card." He then commented to the other team member, "It's too messy," referring to the struggle to subdue the patient. ("Dirty Work Designations")

4. *Attend to members' evaluations/categorizations*

Consider the following characterization of psychiatric emergency team work:

Barry -- guy with leather visor; he is apathetic about Pet. He finds it unrewarding and not gratifying; prefers to do therapy in the office. Disillusioned with LA and planning on going back to Boston. ... At one point during the morning Art comments to us: "Barry says we're the shit detail. ... We get the garbage of the police department, the garbage of DPSS, the garbage of ? He says anything that anyone else won't or can't handle we get." (Unpublished field notes, 1973)

5. *Attend to members' explanations/theories*

Wieder has emphasized how the "convict code" is routinely used to explain events and action in a half-way house for former inmates::

[At a Monday night group] a resident has suggested that a baseball team be formed. He was then asked by the group leader (the program director) to organize the team himself. He answered, "You know I can't organize a baseball team." The program director nodded, and the matter was settled. Using my ethnography of the code as a scheme of interpretation, I heard him say, "You know that the code forbids me to participate in your program in that way, and you know that I'm not going to violate the code. So why ask me?" (Wieder, "Telling the Convict Code.")

Two final caveats: First, it is not sufficient simply to identify members' categories as static cognitive constructs; rather, ethnographers seek to examine and document how members actually use or apply those categories in ongoing interactions. See, for example, how the member category of "snake" is actually invoked and justified in particular circumstances (Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, pp. 131-33; ethnographically, then, attention shifts to process, to "snaking" rather than to "snakes."

Second, getting at indigenous meanings is not simply or even primarily a matter of asking members, and taking over their answers as accounts of what events mean to them. Such a notion assumes that "members' meanings" are simply another sort of "fact", existing prior to and independently of an ethnographer's interest in and concern with depicting such meanings. That is, an ethnographic account of "indigenous meanings" is something constructed by the ethnographer, an interpretation of others' realities assembled by the researcher.

Selected readings -- grounded approaches to analyzing qualitative data:

Howard S. Becker, *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Kathy Charmaz, "The Grounded Theory Method: An Explication and Interpretation." In *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings*, ed. R. M. Emerson. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983).

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, "Pursuing Members' Meanings" and "Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing." Chapters 5 and 6 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).