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## *Approaches to Field Research*

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One of the main styles of social research used by empirically oriented social scientists is field research; a style of investigation that is also referred to as 'fieldwork', 'qualitative method', 'interpretative research', 'case study method' and 'ethnography'. This approach to social investigation has traditionally been associated with social anthropologists, whose 'field' consisted of a small-scale society where it was possible to do 'research' by living and working among the people. Gulick indicates that:

When the anthropologist is in the field, field work is his total life. He copes with it by using his whole body and personality in the same way that he copes with life when he is not in the field... Life in the field involves the same emotions as life at home: elation, boredom, embarrassment, contentment, anger, joy, anxiety and so on. To these are added, however, the necessity of being continually on the alert (of *not* taking one's surroundings and relationships for granted), and the necessity of learning new routines and cues. These necessities are likely to force a heightened awareness of facets of one's personality of which one had not been aware before. This can be an emotionally devastating experience, but it is by no means inevitably so. (Gulick, 1977, p. 90; emphasis in original)

In this respect, field research is a learning situation in which researchers have to understand their own actions and activities as well as those of the people they are studying. The main instrument of social investigation is the researcher, who has to learn the local language, live among the people and participate in their activities over relatively long periods of time in order to acquire a detailed understanding of the situation under study. Such a strategy has been adopted and adapted by sociologists; especially in studies of education, medicine, deviance, institutions (schools, factories, prisons and hospitals) and rural and urban localities. Yet sociologists have argued that we still lack basic ethnographic data on the social processes involved in many areas of everyday life (cf. Delamont, 1978). Indeed, in the field of deviance, Becker (1963) has remarked that we do not have enough studies where the researcher has been in close contact with those individuals who are studied. Accordingly, he suggests that if the researcher

is to get an accurate and complete account of what deviants do, what their patterns of association are, and so on, he must spend at least some time observing them *in their natural habitat* as they go about their ordinary activities. But this means that the student must, for the time being, keep what are for him unusual hours and penetrate what are for him unknown

and possibly dangerous areas of the society. He may find himself staying up nights and sleeping days, because that is what the people he studies do, and this may be difficult because of his commitments to family and work. Furthermore, the process of gaining the confidence of those one studies may be very time consuming so that months may have to be spent in relatively fruitless attempts to gain access. (Becker, 1963, p. 170; emphasis in original)

These accounts by Gulick and by Becker begin to address the question 'what is field research?' It would appear that field research involves observing and analysing real-life situations, of studying actions and activities as they occur. The field researcher, therefore, relies upon learning firsthand about a people, and a culture. However, if the researcher is to obtain an insider's view of situations, it is vital to maintain an outsider's perspective (cf. Powdermaker, 1966a). Field researchers therefore have to develop self-criticism and self-awareness, if involvement and detachment are to be achieved in social situations. In this respect, researchers maintain membership in the culture in which they were reared while establishing membership in the groups which they are studying; they are socialised into another culture. This has been commented upon by Evans-Pritchard, who remarks:

Perhaps it would be better to say that one lives in two different worlds of thought at the same time, in categories and concepts and values which often cannot easily be reconciled. One becomes a sort of double marginal man, alienated from both worlds. (Evans-Pritchard, 1973, pp. 2–3)

This is the situation for anthropologists studying other cultures and for sociologists studying their own society. The social and cultural diversity that exists within any society means that the researcher has to learn a language and establish a role. The field researcher is, therefore, an outsider; a stranger who lives among the people for the purposes of study (Srinivas, 1979).

The method of social investigation that is most often referred to in field research is participant observation which allows the researcher to work with individuals in their natural settings. However, this emphasis upon observational techniques is somewhat narrow as field researchers may complement their observations by conversations, informal/unstructured interviews, formal interviews, by surveys and by collecting personal documents (written, oral and photographic evidence). These methods can be used in different combinations depending on the focus of the social investigation and the strategies that need to be adopted. Indeed, Schatzman and Strauss (1973) consider that the strategies used in field research depend upon the questions posed with the result that the field researcher becomes a methodological strategist who engages in problem oriented methodology. For them:

Field method is not an exclusive method in the same sense, say that experimentation is. Field method is more like an umbrella of activity beneath which any technique may be used for gaining the desired information, and for processes of thinking about this information. (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p. 14)

Field research involves the activities of the researcher, the influence of the researcher on the researched, the practices and procedures of doing research and the methods of data collection and data analysis. However, various writers have emphasised different aspects of field research; a situation that may be attributed to the trends and developments that have taken place in this area of study.

### **Some Major Approaches to Field Research**

The origins of field research have been identified by Wax (1971) and by Douglas (1976) in the fifth century BC, when 'on the spot' reports were provided of foreign peoples and of the Peloponnesian wars. Wax traces developments in descriptive reporting among the Romans and the traders and ambassadors of the Islamic empires. She considers that the first Europeans to report ethnographic data were missionaries of the Catholic Church and travellers and merchants. However, she maintains that it is essential to look at developments that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when field reports began to be used in academic study.

#### THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH: THE INFLUENCE OF MALINOWSKI

It is usual for nineteenth-century analysis to be seen to have rested on material that was collected by missionaries, travellers and government officials all of whom were unqualified in anthropology. As a consequence, the use of field methods is often regarded as a twentieth-century innovation which can be attributed to Malinowski. Such a position, as Urry (1972) has shown, oversimplifies the situation. In particular, he examines the period 1870–1920, when four editions of the volume *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* were prepared. It is, he argues, the content of these volumes that reveal changing attitudes, fields of interest, materials that were considered to be ethnographic 'facts' and the development of field methods.

The first edition of *Notes and Queries*, prepared in 1874, pointed to the deficiencies of earlier questionnaires that had been prepared for travellers. These questionnaires, it was argued, lacked attention to the detail required by anthropologists. Accordingly, this new volume was prepared so that non-anthropologists could make more precise observations and supply the anthropologist with information. However, in this volume, and in the second and third editions, there was only information on those aspects of social life that had to be observed, but no advice on methods of observation and the collection of data.

The accounts that were provided by travellers, missionaries and administrators raised certain methodological problems. First, they often focused on what, in their terms, was exotic and romantic. Secondly, their accounts were often acquired through interpreters. Finally, as their work was concerned with change, missionaries and administrators tended to produce accounts that reflected the perspectives from which they observed the people. Numerous reports, therefore, concerned savagery and barbarity among the people. Furthermore, the reports were often based on anonymous informants. In these circumstances, Haddon, Seligman and Rivers suggested that anthropologists should bypass these accounts and collect their own data. Accordingly, in 1898 a British

expedition was led by Haddon to the islands of the Torres Strait, where experts were to collect ethnographic material from the people. Meanwhile, in North America, Boas made similar trips to the North-West Coast. As few attempts were made to learn the local language, much time was spent in obtaining and keeping good informants. On these trips anthropologists confronted a series of methodological problems as they had to deal with real people and question them about their lives, avoid bias in their reporting and deal with the problems surrounding the transference of meaning from one culture to another. Indeed, Rivers argued that such expeditions containing groups of experts could interfere with the people's way of life. However, such trips which were poorly funded and short in duration did have the advantage of collecting data firsthand.

In a report to the Carnegie Institute on 'Anthropological work outside America', Rivers argued the case for intensive fieldwork. He considered this involved living with the people and studying their culture, getting to know them and using the vernacular language. In these terms, he argued it was possible to overcome the bias and inaccuracy of survey work and the superficial knowledge provided by missionaries and administrators. In short, he laid emphasis on understanding native terms and native language, obtaining and paying good informants, collecting texts, genealogies and life histories and keeping systematic notes. Some of this advice was incorporated into the fourth edition of *Notes and Queries*, which Urry considers was 'not so much a guide for travellers as a manual of advice for more highly trained observers; a handbook for a new era of anthropological research to be based on more exact methods' (Urry, 1972, pp. 51–2). Malinowski used *Notes and Queries* on his early field trips (Malinowski, 1967, p. 30). Furthermore, Malinowski's position, as outlined in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski, 1922), is very similar to that of Rivers. However, it is Malinowski who is usually credited with being the originator of intensive anthropological field research as *Argonauts* contains a detailed discussion of method (Malinowski, 1922, pp. 4–25), but as we shall see it was more an ideal that Malinowski had, rather than what he actually did.

Malinowski was critical of earlier writers who had not provided sufficient detail about their methods. He considered that ethnographic material was only of value when it was possible to distinguish between direct observation native statements and interpretations, and the inferences of the author. It was vital that some assessment could be made concerning an author's acquaintance with facts and the conditions under which observations were made. It was Malinowski who raised the question about how an ethnographer should work. He considered that ethnographers needed to know the aims of their studies, to live among the natives without other Europeans and to collect data by means of specific methods. In particular, he argued that ethnographers should cut themselves off from other Europeans and live among the natives as this was the only way to gain some appreciation of the social processes involved in everyday life, and to get to know individuals, their customs and their beliefs. Malinowski also considered that studying natives in their natural setting was preferable to using paid informants. This was basic to all field research.

In *Argonauts*, Malinowski also showed that he was aware of some of the problems associated with field research. In particular, the questions surrounding the impact of the observer on the observed and the influence of the observer upon village life were examined. However, these issues were considered unproblematic as Malinowski claimed that the constant presence of the anthropologist ceased to be a disturbing influence upon

tribal life. Indeed, Malinowski advocated participation on the part of the researcher, as he remarked:

in this type of work, it is good for the Ethnographer sometimes to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on. He can take part in the natives' games, he can follow them on their visits and walks, sit down and listen and share in their conversations. (Malinowski, 1922, p. 21)

Such participation, it was argued, allowed the researcher to obtain an understanding of the lives of the people studied.

However, questions can be raised about Malinowski's own research and the extent to which he achieved these ideals. Certainly, his ideas concerning the collection of statistical data, detailed observations and ethnographic statements revolutionised field research, whose ultimate goal he thought should be 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world' (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25; emphasis in original). However, when Malinowski's private diaries were published by his widow in the late 1960s, a different view of the great anthropologist was revealed. Here, we find that Malinowski had much in common with other researchers as his diary records periods of loneliness and boredom, periods when he hated the natives and periods of deep depression. In short, rather than the idealised picture of field research that he presented in the opening pages of *Argonauts*, we are given a clear view of the difficulties involved in doing ethnographic work. Malinowski reveals that there were several problems surrounding data collection as one entry, in common with several others, records:

The rest of day ethnographic work, but it didn't go well. I began 'Kabitam'—copied a few *lagims* and *tabuyors*, and began to ask names: they did not know the names. I asked about *megwa*—they had no *megwa*, no personal *kabitam*, nor any *megwa* used during making of *waga* or gardens. This irritated me, I went away and began to work with Tom and Topola; it didn't go well either. I felt like stopping and reading a novel. (Malinowski, 1967, p. 240; emphasis in original)

Here, it is not only the difficulties of data collection, but his relationships with the natives that can be questioned (cf. Wax, 1972). This and other diary entries reveal hatred and dislike of the people. He writes about his work one morning in the following terms:

On this occasion I made one or two coarse jokes, and one *bloody nigger* made a disapproving remark, whereupon I cursed them and was highly irritated. I managed to control myself *on the spot*, but I was terribly vexed by the fact that this *nigger* had dared to speak to me in such a manner. (Malinowski, 1967, p. 272; emphasis in original)

On other occasions the native women are reduced to objects of Malinowski's sexual fantasy, as he remarks:

I met women at the spring, watched how they drew water. One of them very attractive, aroused me sensually. I thought how easily I could have a *connection* with her. (Malinowski, 1967, p. 273; emphasis in original)

Such accounts raise problems about the relationship between the observer and the observed, levels of participation and the influence this has upon data collection and analysis.

While it can be argued that these entries in Malinowski's diary do not provide the kind of detail on field methodology that is given in his research monographs, they do nevertheless provide a detailed, candid account of the researcher in the field during the colonial period. (For critical commentaries on work in this period see Asad, 1973.) Although living among the people, he was aware that he could not join in everything they did. In turn, he could not remain completely separate from Europeans and European culture, as his meetings with missionaries, travellers and traders, and long periods spent reading novels, hint at attempts to get 'outside' the society that he studied. In short, the diary provides episodes from his personal life that can complement his more idealised picture of anthropological field research. Nevertheless, even if Malinowski did not live up to the high standards that he set himself, it is evident that he did 'revolutionise' the work of the anthropologist, for as Urry remarks:

Malinowski's contribution was not only to make clearer the type of information to be collected, but more importantly, he had differentiated between the type of material on the one hand and the methods for their collection on the other. It is this clear differentiation of the modes of collection and the various forms of 'fact' that made Malinowski's contribution to field methods so original. (Urry, 1972, p. 53)

The period of intensive anthropological field research had begun, for Malinowski's style of work was to influence many anthropologists in the twentieth century (Powdermaker, 1966a, pp. 33–45).

### EARLY ENGLISH SOCIAL RESEARCH

Alongside these research developments by early British anthropologists, were developments in social research by those associated with social reform. Crude oversimplification of the work of investigators such as Charles Booth and Sidney and Beatrice Webb see them engaged in survey work and the collection of statistical data. Booth's work goes beyond the narrow definition of a survey. His study *Life and Labour of the People of London* (Booth, 1889–1902) was designed to apply the method of observation, reasoning and verification to the problem of poverty. Indeed, Booth's work was not just survey-based, but involved detailed observation of individual families, for he was aware that many of the descriptions of individuals in books were unrealistic and lacking in colour. Accordingly, Booth decided to gain personal experience of family life in the East End of London by taking up the position of a lodger. He reports:

Of personal knowledge I have not much. I have no doubt that many other men possess twenty or a hundred times as much experience of East End people and their lives. Yet such as it is, what I have witnessed has been enough to throw a strong light on the materials I have used, and, for me, has made the dry bones live. For three separate periods I have taken up quarters, each time for several weeks, where I was not known, and as a lodger have shared the lives of people who would figure in my schedules as belonging to classes C, D and E. Being more or less boarded as well as lodged, I became intimately acquainted with some of those I met, and the lives and habits of many others came naturally under observation. My object, which I trust was a fair one, was never suspected, my position never questioned. The people with whom I lived became, and are still, my friends. (Booth in Keating, 1976, pp. 124–5)

Such an account of exploration in England bears marked resemblance to Malinowski's experiences in the Trobriand Islands. Booth took the role of an observer, who participated with the people he studied; although it is doubtful whether the people with whom he lodged knew of his research intentions. In addition to his own experience of life in the East End of London, Booth also gathered further data from informants. In particular, he reports that thirty-four school attendance officers were questioned for twenty hours about the families with whom they worked. Furthermore, material was also obtained from school teachers, rent collectors and sanitary inspectors, who were able to report on social conditions. Finally, visits were carried out to the East End of London and documentary evidence was used in the course of his study.

Such an account modifies the traditional picture of Booth as a social investigator, who was firmly located in the survey tradition. Indeed, it is evident that some elements of field research were used to complement survey work. Wax (1971) argues that Booth's researchers were the first to combine statistical data with interviewing and participant observation. Quantitative data could, therefore, be supported by qualitative material that Booth and his associates obtained by firsthand observation. Furthermore, it was possible to use different methods of investigation to verify the data obtained. Booth's work did not, therefore, rest upon a single method or a single problem.

However, such work also raises a series of problems concerning the methods that were employed and the data that were obtained. Booth had used a number of investigators in conducting his study which poses the problem of how the data they gathered could be compared. While he provided detailed descriptions of particular individuals and groups, questions can be raised about the extent to which the people selected were representative. Thirdly, the data that were provided by his informants and the data derived from his own observations raise questions concerning the relationship between fact and opinion. Finally, his investigations reflect his class position and his values, which influenced the perspective from which he worked. Nevertheless, Booth's work is of interest to us as an early attempt by a social investigator to apply intensive methods to his own society.

One of Booth's social investigators was Beatrice Webb, who claims that her work with Booth was part of her apprenticeship as a social investigator before she began her better-known work in partnership with Sidney Webb. Despite the fact that their social investigations spanned the turn of the century, it is not until the early 1930s that the

Webbs produced a discussion of their methods of social investigation. Their book *Methods of Social Study* (Webb and Webb, 1932) and Beatrice Webb's autobiographical account *My Apprenticeship* (Webb, 1926a) draw on research experience that indicates their use of various research methods rather than mere surveys. They maintain that the routine of social investigation is:

the art of note taking, the methods of personal observation and the interview, the use of documents and literary sources, and the collection and manipulation of statistics—the predominant requirements are patience and persistence in work; precision in the use of words and figures; promptitude of decision in picking out new facts and ignoring what is only 'common form'; a genuine satisfaction in continuing to progress along a previously determined course; above all, that particular form of intellectual curiosity that delights in unravelling complicated details irrespective of their immediate relevance to the main lines of the enquiry. (Webb and Webb, 1932, p. 50)

Such an account indicates that the Webbs wanted the researcher to be acquainted with much more than a series of research techniques. Indeed, they indicate that the researcher needs to pose questions, avoid loaded questions, and overcome bias. In turn, they consider that the researcher should study an institution in whole or in part and not a social problem. This puts them in line with the style of investigation that had been advocated by Malinowski ten years earlier. However, unlike anthropologists, they do not advocate the study of common occurrences which are an essential part of any field study. As far as they are concerned, note taking and data recording are vital as it is through systematic note taking that discovery and data analysis takes place. Finally, they discuss a range of research methods which includes the written word (documents), the spoken word (interviewing) and watching the institution at work (observation and experiment).

The Webbs considered observation an essential element in social research, as they remark: 'An indispensable part of the study of any social institution, wherever this can be obtained, is deliberate and sustained personal observation of its actual operation' (Webb and Webb, 1932, p. 158). Certainly, Beatrice Webb had extensive experience of observational methods not only in her work with Booth, but in her own investigations. In *My Apprenticeship* she reveals how she collected rents in order that she might observe the conditions of tenants in lower-class property, publicise their conditions and provide some remedies. Beatrice Webb discusses this work in the following terms:

About the harmlessness of this intrusion of the relatively well-to-do into the homes of the very poor I had no misgivings; rents had to be collected, and it seemed to me, on balance, advantageous to the tenants of low-class property to have to pay their money to persons of intelligence and goodwill who were able to bring hardships and grievances to the notice of those who had power to mitigate or remedy them. And this occupation was certainly well fitted to form part of my apprenticeship as a social investigator. Unlike philanthropic visiting under the parochial clergy, or detective visiting under a C.O.S. committee, one was not watching



instances of failure in the way of adaptation to this world or the next. What was under observation was the whole of a given section of the population: a group of families spontaneously associated in accordance with the social and economic circumstances of the particular district. From the outset the tenants regarded us, not as visitors of superior social status, still less as investigators, but as part of the normal machinery of their lives, like the school attendance officer or the pawnbroker. (Webb, 1926a, pp. 223–4)

Here, Beatrice Webb used the particular role of rent collector to gain direct access to particular families for the purposes of social investigation. However, her value position and the perspective from which she observed individuals not of her class is apparent.

Nevertheless, observation was crucial to Beatrice Webb's work. In her study of the 'sweating system', she visited tailoring shops, obtained work as a 'plain trouser hand' for the purposes of observation, and interviewed workers, owners and factory inspectors in the wholesale clothing trade. Similarly, in her industrial and trade union studies, it was her observations of trade union branches and trades councils that helped her to formulate her ideas. Observational work provided material for her diary and was vital for providing and clarifying ideas and developing hypotheses (Webb, 1926a, pp. 265–80).

More importantly, the Webbs were aware that observational methods had to be combined with other methods in the course of social investigation. Here again, the similarity with the anthropological approach to field research advocated by Malinowski is evident in the use of systematic note taking and data recording, participation in everyday activities in order to gather data, and combining different methods of social investigation. In short, the work of Charles Booth and Sidney and Beatrice Webb bears some of the hallmarks of field methods that were, in that period of time, being devised by anthropologists working in other societies. Indeed, it has been claimed that social investigations by the early English social reformers have contributed, to some extent, to the development of field methods that have been used by sociologists (cf. Stacey, 1960, p. v).

### THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Turning to America, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is the Chicago School of sociologists that developed an interest in field research and field methods. Here, field methods did not merely include observation and interviewing, as many of the Chicago researchers used documentary evidence, and collected life histories. The emphasis was upon qualitative methods, although the particular mix depended on the problems posed. The formative period of the Chicago School was 1920–30, although its influence upon American sociology has been wide-ranging down to the present day. The Chicago School brought together a number of researchers who were interested in the 'real world', and included Park, Burgess, Cressey, Anderson, Thrasher and Shaw. Probably the most influential member of this group was Robert Park, who as early as 1916 drew up a programme of research for the group (Easthope, 1974).

It was Park's idea that the city could become the social laboratory of the social investigator, who could examine human beings and their social behaviour in the city of

Chicago. The style of research that Park expected is revealed in the following statement recorded by Howard Becker, while being taught by Park at Chicago in the 1920s:

You have been told to go grubbing in the library thereby accumulating a mass of notes and a liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routine records based on trivial schedules prepared by tired bureaucrats and filled out by reluctant applicants for aid or fussy do-gooders or indifferent clerks. This is called 'getting your hands dirty in real research'. Those who thus counsel you are wise and honourable; the reasons they offer are of great value. But one thing more is needful; first-hand observation. Go and sit in the lounge of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedown; sit in Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in *real* research. (McKinney, 1966, p. 71; emphasis in original)

Real research was in Park's view based on observation; on walking around the city of Chicago, on watching crowds and listening to individuals. In short, sociology was an activity that could as easily be conducted in the street as in the university; both were at the hub of social research. Many of the studies, therefore, focused upon individuals (*The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923), *The Jack Roller* (Shaw, 1930)); institutions (*The Gang* (Thrasher, 1927), *The Taxi Dance Hall* (Cressey, 1932)); and natural areas (*The Ghetto* (Wirth, 1928), *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh, 1929)).

As far as methods of investigation were concerned, Park considered that an anthropological approach could be used in Chicago, as he remarked:

The same patient methods of observation which anthropologists like Boas and Lowie have expended on the life and study of the life and manners of the North American Indian might be even more fruitfully employed in the investigation of the customs, beliefs, social practices and general conceptions of life prevalent in Little Italy on the Lower North Side in Chicago, or in recording the more sophisticated folkways of the inhabitants of Greenwich Village and the neighbourhood of Washington Square, New York. (Park, 1952, p. 15; originally published in *American Journal of Sociology*, 1916)

He also believed that methods of study could be based on the journalistic tradition of observation and unstructured interviewing and the literary naturalism of Zola, Dreiser and Upton Sinclair. However, Chicago sociologists also used surveys, documentary evidence and statistical data alongside more unstructured material.

Many Chicago School studies utilise a range of methods, although the investigators are unexplicit about their methodology. Indeed, we have only to look at *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923), the first major study published by a member of the Chicago School; here, Anderson tells us:

I found myself engaged in research without the preparation a researcher is supposed to have. I couldn't answer if asked about my 'methods'. In my research efforts, however, I did have two resources that could be put to good use—a capacity for interviewing and a capacity for reporting what I had seen and heard. (Anderson, 1923, pp. xi–xii)

This account provides us with a wider notion of field research, field method and the research process. Furthermore, Anderson explains that his own experience of the hobo way of life derived from his own family background and was used to orientate his studies. He did not consider his work to be based upon participant observation, but rather on watching, listening and talking. In addition, his intensive data collection was complemented by sixty life histories that allowed him to distinguish five types of homeless men.

Thrasher's study of *The Gang* (Thrasher, 1927) is based on a wide range of data that had been collected over a seven-year period from 1,313 gangs. Here, the researcher interviewed the boys, and obtained reports from social workers, policemen and politicians. Twenty-one boys were asked to write life histories of themselves, and in addition newspaper evidence and other unpublished material was gathered. The research report could, therefore, draw on all this material.

Among many of the investigations conducted by members of the Chicago School, traditional field methods in the form of observation and unstructured interviews are complemented by life history documents. The study by Shaw entitled *The Jack Roller* (Shaw, 1930) consists of the life history of one boy, Stanley, whom Shaw knew over a period of six years. The life history consists of the boy's own story written as an autobiography and as a diary, but recorded in the first person in his own words, although it is the researcher who has decided what to select for inclusion in the research report. However, this material, Shaw argues, needs to be supplemented by additional records such as family history, medical and psychiatric records, and court records of arrests, offences and convictions. These help to authenticate the story and provide a reliable interpretation of experience. Such a story, Shaw maintains, highlights the delinquent's view of his world, his interpretation of his role, his culture and his personal situation.

It is evident from these examples that the studies conducted by the Chicago School were not restricted in terms of their methods. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the Chicago School was the wide use of various methods, which combined observational materials with different types of documentary evidence. The result was urban ethnography based on highly detailed descriptive studies of natural areas, institutions and individuals in the city of Chicago (Hannerz, 1980). In short, it is as Fairbrother (1977) indicates, a sociology of the street rather than a sociology of the academic; a sociology that is built upon the experiences of research workers as well as from surveys and documents. This approach was partly based on journalistic methods using an unstructured interview with informants, and partly on an anthropological approach to field research in which observational methods were central.

The work of the Chicago sociologists has been examined by Douglas (1976), who argues that this approach to field research does not reveal the processes among groups in urban society as it is based upon assumptions of a 'little community', where conflict and complexity are missing. In turn, Douglas criticises the low level of analysis of the

Chicago School studies which he maintains reported little more than raw data. In short, he considers that the Chicago sociologists were merely natives disguised as scientists whose reports were only of value to natives. However, it could be argued that these reports are also of value to social scientists. Nevertheless, Park did encourage Chicago researchers to go on to the streets to gather rich, detailed data; an approach that was taken up by sociologists studying urban and rural localities.

## FIELD RESEARCH IN URBAN AND RURAL LOCALITIES

Sociologists who have engaged in studying urban and rural localities have drawn upon field methods that have been developed in sociology and social anthropology. Indeed, a 'community studies' tradition has developed in complex societies. Some writers have claimed that 'communities' are not just objects of study, but are samples of cultures. In this respect, the study of a 'community' becomes a method of social investigation (cf. Bell and Newby, 1972, pp. 54–81).

However, does a community study method mean any more than the mechanics of doing research? Is method equated with the techniques that are used to study the 'community'? Vidich, Bensman and Stein (1964) suggest that we should look at the methodology of 'community studies' rather than community study method. This allows us to critically examine the problems surrounding the concept of 'community' (Stacey, 1969b), the methods used in the studies and the data gathered by the researcher.

The methodology that is used to study localities is of interest here as it has direct links to earlier developments in field research. There are links back to Robert Park and the Chicago School of sociologists, and in particular to Park's idea that the researcher should tramp the streets, observe people and listen to what is said. Certainly, this advice has been taken by some investigators in Britain, such as Rex and Moore (1967), who in studying Sparkbrook based their approach very much on the Chicago tradition, and by Bell (1977), who comments that while working in Banbury he saw himself as a latter-day Robert Park. A further link goes beyond Park to the anthropological tradition, where field researchers took as their unit of study small-scale territorial communities.

It is usual for the researcher engaged in the study of a locality to go and live among the people. Certainly, this was the situation in the first and second studies of Banbury (Stacey, 1960; Stacey *et al.*, 1975), where the researchers lived in different sectors of the town; a situation that facilitated a study of neighbouring. When researchers live in a locality, they share some of the experiences of the inhabitants, as for example in Pons's study of *Stanleyville* (Pons, 1969), where he became a member of a mock-formal association that met to brew and drink beer. Such situations bring the research into close contact with those who are studied and may give colour, depth and richness to the research report. However, Miller has argued that such close involvement with individuals raises the danger of over-involvement with informants (Miller, 1952). When studying localities, it is usual for the researcher to fit in with the ongoing patterns of interaction by establishing a series of roles that have to be communicated to the people. This occurred in Pons's study, when he took the roles of photographer and local letter-writer to avoid being allocated to the standard European roles of 'missionary', 'trader', or 'administrator'.

Although participant observation is the principal method of investigation that is used to study urban and rural localities, several other research techniques have been used. In the classic research reports on *Middletown* (Lynd and Lynd, 1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (Lynd and Lynd, 1937) five different techniques of data collection are identified. Much of the data was collected using observational methods while the researchers lived in Middletown. Secondly, documentary evidence was gathered in the form of census data, records and yearbooks. Thirdly, statistical sources in the form of work records were used. Fourthly, interviews both formal and informal were conducted and finally, questionnaires were sent out to local experts, and members of clubs and associations whom the Lynds had contacted. Similarly, if we turn to other studies, we find that a variety of methods are used. In Pons's study of Stanleyville (now Kisangani) (Pons, 1969) participant observation was the main method of study, but this was complemented by interviews, letters and diaries. In Gans's study of Levittown (Gans, 1967) participant observation was used together with a questionnaire. Furthermore, in the first and second studies of Banbury (Stacey, 1960; Stacey *et al.*, 1975) the observational work conducted by the teams of researchers was complemented by a sample survey and the collection of documentary materials. In these studies field research involved a variety of research strategies. However, central to the research process were the researchers themselves, who played a variety of roles to gain wide experience of the social setting.

Such a situation allows us to assess some of the problems that are involved in conducting field research in urban and rural localities. First, there is the question of access. How does the researcher gain access to individuals and groups? In some cases, with small groups, access has been gained through informants. Whyte (1955) gained access to the inhabitants of his slum district through 'Doc'; while Pons (1969) gained access to the inhabitants of Avenue 21 through a number of key informants. On a larger scale, when the Nuffield Foundation awarded a grant for the second Banbury study, they insisted that the researchers should obtain permission for the research to be done. The result was that the presence of a research team in the town was communicated to the people of Banbury at a public meeting and through announcements in the local press. However, access still remained problematic, for it is debatable whether access can be negotiated with 25,000 people. A second problem associated with field research in a locality concerns the role of the researcher. Certainly, according to Bell's account of the Banbury study (Bell, 1977), there was the problem of what role to take and what to do, as he considers that there was a danger of being too involved with particular members of the town. Frankenberg (1957) reports that in his study of Pentreduwaith, he participated in meetings and took the role of assistant secretary to the local football club. Gans (1967) also reports that he was a participant in his Levittown research and that his level of participation in the neighbourhood assisted data collection. Such participation can open up some areas for investigation, while simultaneously closing off others (cf. Harrell-Bond, 1976). Further problems arise when data are collected in an unsystematic way. Questions can be raised about the validity of the data and the completeness of the research report.

Various attempts have been made to overcome some of these problems. First, research teams can gather data from different perspectives as is shown by the first and second studies of Banbury. In the second Banbury study each team member 'joined' a different political party to study local politics in the town. Secondly, the use of male and female

researchers means that the activities of men and women can be systematically investigated by members of those categories. Finally, the use of a team of researchers means that some check can be made on individual investigators and the quality of their observations. A further attempt at overcoming some of the problems associated with data collection in localities has been made through the restudy. This approach was used by the Lynds to study Middletown a second time (Lynd and Lynd, 1937); and by Gallaher (1961), who conducted a second study of Plainville, a town that had originally been studied by West (1945), and by Lewis (1951), who conducted a second study of Tepoztlán which Redfield (1930) had studied. In Britain, Stacey conducted a second study of Banbury, a town where she had initially done research in the period 1948–51 (Stacey, 1960). However, as Stacey reports (Stacey *et al.*, 1975), researchers engaged in restudies confront problems associated with data comparability, changes in the research team, in the discipline of sociology and in the area studied. Nevertheless, despite the problems that researchers have encountered in using field methods in studying localities, they have still used this approach when working in other substantive areas. Indeed, as Goffman remarks:

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. (Goffman, 1968, p. 7)

### **Doing Field Research**

Field research has undergone a number of developments in the twentieth century. However, the question that still confronts researchers is ‘how do you do field research?’ The difficulty of this question even for acknowledged experts was revealed by Evans-Pritchard when he remarked:

When I was a serious young student in London I thought I would try to get a few tips from experienced field workers before setting out for central Africa. I first sought advice from Westermarck. All I got from him was ‘don’t converse with an informant for more than twenty minutes because if you aren’t bored by that time he will be.’ Very good advice, even if somewhat inadequate. I sought instruction from Haddon, a man foremost in field-research. He told me that it was really all quite simple; one should always behave as a gentleman. Also very good advice. My teacher Seligman told me to take ten grains of quinine every night and to keep off women. The famous Egyptologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, just told me not to bother about drinking dirty water as one soon became immune to it. Finally, I asked Malinowski and was told not to be a bloody fool. (Evans-Pritchard, 1973, p. 1)

Perhaps this supports Paul Radin's point that nobody really knows how to go about field research. Indeed, field research depends upon the researcher, the researched, the problems posed, the methods of investigation that are used and the data that are gathered. Even when this has been said, it is still difficult to provide a specific guide to those about to do field research because as Freilich remarks:

No specific techniques exist to help the young ethnographer transform a group of hostile natives into friendly informants; no specific and operationally useful rules exist for translating raw data into information that is meaningful for anthropological analysis; and no specific techniques exist for drawing productive generalizations from such information. (Freilich, 197b, p. 15)

Sociologists have also indicated that field research is fraught with difficulties for the researcher. As Hughes has commented:

the observer, in greater or less degree, is caught up in the very web of social interaction which he observes, analyzes and reports. Even if he observes through a peephole, he plays a role: that of spy. And when he reports his observations made thus he becomes a kind of informer. If he observes in the role of a member of the group, he may be considered a traitor the moment he reports. Even the historian, who works upon documents, gets caught in a role problem when he reports, unless there is no person alive who might identify himself with the people or social group concerned. The hatred occasionally visited upon the debunking historian is visited almost daily upon the person who reports on the behavior of people he has lived among; and it is not so much the writing of the report, as the very act of thinking in such objective terms that disturbs the people observed. It is a violation of apparently shared secrets and sentiments. (Hughes, 1960, p. xii)

These writers indicate that field research raises difficult questions concerning validity, reliability and the ethics and politics of doing research. However, no recipe can be provided on how to do field research, for it is more than a series of methods that can be applied to a range of problems. Field research involves the researcher in a relationship with those who are studied; it is a social process in which the researcher plays a major part. Material has been selected for this book not because it provides a definitive account of how to do field research, but because experienced field researchers demonstrate how they have handled various dimensions of the research process. Some of the researchers provide discussions of methodology, while others discuss research procedures and research experiences. The accounts are, therefore, resource guides that indicate ways in which field problems have been handled and, in turn, provoke questions about the conduct of field research today.

### Suggestions for Further Reading

This chapter has taken up a number of themes and has assumed some knowledge of social research. The following references are intended to provide the reader with an opportunity to fill gaps in knowledge and gain familiarity with the material. The list has been restricted as more detailed suggestions for reading, together with commentary on individual books, is provided after the first chapter in all the other sections of this book.

#### ON SOCIAL RESEARCH

A range of basic British and American texts and readers that discuss social research are:

- Bulmer, M. (1977) (ed.), *Sociological Research Methods* (London: Macmillan).  
 Denzin, N.K. (1970), *The Research Act* (Chicago: Aldine).  
 Moser, C. and Kalton, G. (1971), *Survey Methods in Social Investigation* (2nd edn) (London: Heinemann).  
 Selltitz, C., Wrightsman, L.S. and Cook, S.W. (1976), *Research Methods in Social Relations* (3rd edn) (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston).  
 Shipman, M. (1981), *The Limitations of Social Research* (2nd edn) (London: Longman).  
 Stacey, M. (1969), *Methods of Social Research* (Oxford: Pergamon).

For a tape-recorded discussion of the processes involved in social research:

- Stacey, M. and Burgess, R. (1979), *'The research process'* (Oxford: Sussex Publications), taped discussion.

For further detailed references on aspects of social research methods, see the course bibliographies that have been collected in:

- Burgess, R. (1979) (ed.), *Teaching Research Methodology to Postgraduates: a Survey of Courses in the U.K.* (Coventry: University of Warwick).  
 Wakeford, J. (1979) (ed.), *Research Methods Syllabuses in Sociology Departments in the U.K.* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster).

#### REFLECTIONS ON DOING RESEARCH

A series of texts in which the editors have invited researchers to 'come clean' about studies they have conducted; many of the accounts can be read alongside the empirical work to which they relate:

- Bell, C. and Encel, S. (1978) (eds), *Inside the Whale* (Oxford: Pergamon).  
 Bell, C. and Newby, H. (1977) (eds), *Doing Sociological Research* (London: Allen & Unwin).  
 Golde, P. (1970) (ed.), *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences* (Chicago: Aldine).  
 Habenstein, R.W. (1970) (ed.), *Pathways to Data* (Chicago: Aldine).  
 Hammond, P. (1964) (ed.), *Sociologists at Work* (New York: Basic Books).  
 Rynkiewich, M. and Spradley, J. (1976) (eds), *Ethics and Anthropology: Dilemmas in Fieldwork* (New York: Wiley).  
 Shipman, M. (1976) (ed.), *The Organization and Impact of Social Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).  
 Spindler, G.D. (1970) (ed.), *Being an Anthropologist: Fieldwork in Eleven Cultures* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston).  
 Srinivas, M.N., Shah, A.M. and Ramaswamy, E.A. (1979) (eds), *The Fieldworker and the Field: Problems and Challenges in Sociological Investigation* (Delhi: OUP).



Vidich, A.J., Bensman, J. and Stein, M.R. (1964) (eds), *Reflections On Community Studies* (New York: Harper & Row).

## ON FIELD RESEARCH

The basic texts and sets of readings reflect American writing in sociology and anthropology.

### *Texts*

- Douglas, J.D. (1976), *Investigative Social Research* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage).  
Johnson, J.M. (1975), *Doing Field Research* (New York: The Free Press).  
Lofland, J. (1971), *Analyzing Social Settings* (New York: Wadsworth).  
Schatzman, L. and Strauss, A.L. (1973), *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall).  
Wax, R. (1971), *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).  
Williams, T.R. (1967), *Field Methods in the Study of Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

### *Readers*

- Becker, H.S. (1970) (ed.), *Sociological Work* (New York: Transaction Books).  
Filstead, W.J. (1970) (ed.), *Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World* (Chicago: Markham).  
McCall, G.J. and Simmons, J.L. (1969) (eds), *Issues in Participant Observation: a Text and Reader* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley).  
Sjoberg, G. (1967) (ed.), *Ethics, Politics and Social Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH: THE INFLUENCE OF MALINOWSKI

For a discussion of the research tradition developed by Malinowski, there is no substitute for his monographs and diary.

- Malinowski, B. (1922), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).  
Malinowski, B. (1929), *The Sexual Life of Savages* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).  
Malinowski, B. (1935), *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (London: Allen & Unwin).  
Malinowski, B. (1948), *Magic, Science and Religion* (Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press).  
Malinowski, B. (1967), *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

For commentary, see:

- Firth, R. (1957) (ed.), *Man and Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).  
Kuper, A. (1973), *Anthropology and Anthropologists: British School, 1922–1972*, (London: Allen Lane).  
Urry, J. (1972), 'Notes and queries on anthropology and the development of field notes in British anthropology, 1870–1920', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1972, pp. 45–57.  
Wax, M. (1972), 'Tenting with Malinowski', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 1–13.

## EARLY ENGLISH SOCIAL RESEARCH

The material produced by the Webbs is most relevant here:

- Webb, B. (1926), *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, Green).  
 Webb, B. (1948), *Our Partnership* (London: Longmans, Green).  
 Webb, S. and Webb, B. (1894), *History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longman).  
 Webb, S. and Webb, B. (1897), *Industrial Democracy* (London: Longman).  
 Webb, S. and Webb, B. (1898), *Problems of Modern Industry* (London: Longman).  
 Webb, S. and Webb, B. (1932), *Methods of Social Study* (London: Longmans, Green).

### THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

The research tradition developed by the Chicago sociologists can be examined by carefully reading the monographs produced by members of the Chicago School:

- Anderson, N. (1923), *The Hobo: the Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).  
 Cressey, P.G. (1932), *The Taxi-Dance Hall: a Sociological Study in Commercial Recreation and City Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).  
 Shaw, C. (1930), *The Jack Roller: a Delinquent Boy's Own Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); reprinted with an introduction by Becker (1966).  
 Thrasher, F. (1927), *The Gang* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).  
 Zorbaugh, H.W. (1929), *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

### FIELD RESEARCH IN URBAN AND RURAL LOCALITIES

There are a number of articles that discuss methodology and provide a useful background to the studies.

#### *Methodology*

- Arensberg, C.M. and Kimball, S.T. (1965), *Culture and Community* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch).  
 Banton, M. (1966) (ed.), *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies* (London: Tavistock) (see the essays by Mitchell, 1966, and by Frankenberg, 1966).  
 Bell, C. and Newby, H. (1972), *Community Studies* (London: Allen & Unwin).  
 Kluckhohn, F.R. (1940), 'The participant observer technique in small communities', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 331–43.  
 Stacey, M. (1969), 'The myth of community studies', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 134–47.

#### *Empirical studies*

##### *In Britain*

- Dennis, N., Henriques, F. and Slaughter, C. (1956), *Coal is Our Life* (London: Methuen).  
 Frankenberg, R. (1957), *Village on the Border* (London: Cohen & West).  
 Littlejohn, J. (1963), *Westrigg* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).  
 Stacey, M. (1960), *Tradition and Change: a Study of Banbury* (Oxford: OUP).  
 Stacey, M., Batstone, E., Bell, C. and Murcott, A. (1975), *Power, Persistence and Change: a Second Study of Banbury* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).  
 Williams, W.M. (1956), *The Sociology of an English Village: Gosforth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

*In America*

Gans, H.J. (1962), *The Urban Villagers* (New York: The Free Press).

Gans, H.J. (1967), *The Levittowners* (London: Allen Lane).

Liebow, E. (1967), *Tally's Corner: a Study of Negro Street Corner Men* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown).

Lynd, R.S. and Lynd, H.M. (1929), *Middletown: a Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch).

Lynd, R.S. and Lynd, H.M. (1937), *Middletown in Transition* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch).

Whyte, W.F. (1955), *Street Corner Soaety* (2nd edn) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).