6304

Chapter 4

Feeling

Introducing Teri and This Chapter

How do I know what I know? I lean towards the intuitive, the personal, the visualization of 'real life' possibilities rather than the logical deconstruction of ideas. Maddeningly 'female' by social design, I am also competitive, ambitious, and prone to homicidal rashes whenever I hear the terms 'biology' and 'destiny' even remotely equated. It is due to this latter predisposition that I spent years primarily valuing the 'objective', the rational, the analytic, and strove to be successful in a world of logic, relegating my 'gut' to the digestion of food rather than ideas. I eventually entered a PhD program and was faced with the anticipatory unpleasantness of a much-dreaded dissertation. I was thus in a somewhat lugubrious state when I first approached Margot and asked her about a possible methodology to suit my thesis. Never mind that she charmed me with her spontaneity and warmth. And never mind (!) that an undercurrent of playfulness and good humor characterized our meetings. We discussed qualitative methodology, a new-fangled (in my eyes) approach to research that enabled the researcher to be creative, exploring new ideas that could take shape via intuition, vision, and personal experience, *and* to be analytical, so as to imbue that experience with meaning. While initially skeptical, on a deeper level, this research struck me as an excellent amalgam of rational 'smarts' and emotional intelligence. The two no longer appeared to be mutually exclusive or even particularly dichotomous. Suffice it to say: I was hooked.

My dissertation was entitled 'The Experience of Being a Female Police Officer' (1989), and it is from this work that many of the examples in this chapter derive. My primary tool was the in-depth interview, but my total involvement in the police world went much deeper. Over a four-year period I developed a network of acquaintances and friendships with many male and female officers. I went on patrol several times, and attended formal and

informal police functions, including retirement parties, weddings, union meetings, and spontaneous get-togethers in police bars. It was for me a novel experience that was exciting and all-encompassing. The process of gathering information in this fashion went beyond the intellectual — my emotions, beliefs, values, and assumptions were continually being exposed, challenged, defined, and refurbished. I began to view qualitative research not only as an excellent tool for investigating the world at large, but as both a passageway and a metaphor for an exploration into self.

As I began to talk to others involved in qualitative research, I learned that complex emotional experiences were common fare. This was, and is, of great interest to me. It is this aspect of qualitative research, the affective component, that I discuss in this chapter.

As qualitative researchers, we have the great good fortune, or perhaps misfortune, depending on one's point of view, to rely on ourselves as the primary research tool. While we may use surveys, questionnaires, or elaborate laboratory equipment to aid us in our research, it is we who are in the field, interviewing, observing, participating in the lives of our research participants. We face the people in our study directly, and must look them squarely in the eye. Occasionally we blink and miss something important. Frequently, however, with time and experience, we develop a sharpened perception and penetrate deeply into the lives we are studying. We note the idiosyncratic and observe the mundane. We attempt to record it all. We are the primary instruments, but we are not cool, automatized instruments. As human beings with warmth and feeling, our pulses resonate with the heartbeat of our research participants. While we try to maintain distance and perspective, we, too, have personal responses to what we see and hear.

What we see and hear may run counter to our experience, beliefs, perhaps even our moral principles. Or we may sympathize, empathize, identify. We may experience love, hate, fear, lust, *angst*. The whole range of emotion is there for the taking. We may discover some dimension of ourselves we like, or be forced to confront certain personal limitations. More than likely, each of us will emerge a slightly different person than the one we were when we began, with not only an increased knowledge of the phenomenon we set out to study, but also increased knowledge of ourselves. As John Forconi wrote, '... the aspect of human life you are about to study will most likely be your own'. This chapter describes people's experience of themselves while doing ethnographic research.

I begin this chapter where many of us begin, by discussing the insecurities, anxieties, and fears that accompany a new undertaking. I then examine the emotional connections that we, as researchers, frequently make when we study in-depth the lives of other human beings. Particular attention is paid to

situations where the researchers' feelings of affection or personal involvement with research participants become 'too close for comfort'. I next explore the opposite phenomenon, that is, feeling 'too far for comfort' because of dislike, philosophical differences, or any number of negative emotions that threaten to interfere with the development of an in-depth understanding of the people whose lives are being studied. Close attention is given to personal assumptions and biases that contribute to negative feelings that researchers, as human beings, maintain. In sections after that I discuss the emotional components involved with doing research in a familiar setting ('making the familiar unfamiliar') and in an unfamiliar setting ('making the unfamiliar familiar'). Finally, I address the fact that qualitative research makes a number of emotional demands on the researcher, and is clearly not for everyone. You, the reader, are invited in to consider carefully, 'Is qualitative research for you?'

The postscript at the end of the chapter contains Margot's thoughts upon its content.

Facing the Fears

It is typical for the researcher to experience a slew of unanticipated, perhaps chaotic or disorganizing emotions during the course of the research. The sheer novelty of the method may create anxiety for those individuals versed in more traditional quantitative methodologies.

> Today in class we discussed the steps of ethnography — gaining entry, developing rapport, and trust, the flow of data ... it sounds like a foreign language. I imagine myself in the middle of some foreign country thousands of miles away and no one speaks English. I am alone ... with no one to talk to. Am I the only one who feels this way? Does anyone else feel like me? Like their native tongue has disappeared and suddenly there's no one to talk to? What about the 'old' words like mom and apple pie, hypotheses, and statistical power? (Rena Smith)

Feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty have been documented by several qualitative researchers (Hughes, 1960; Lofland and Lofland, 1984, pp. 32–3; Shaffir *et al.*, 1980; Zigarmi and Zigarmi, 1980). Every step of the process can provoke some degree of anxiety. Even a task as clearly defined as contacting a gatekeeper, which in some other universe might be viewed as merely a logistical consideration, has its emotional facets. One might be prepared intellectually. A speech has been rehearsed *ad nauseam*. The phone number of the gatekeeper has been written down in five separate places. The phone is waiting to be used. Regardless, the anxiety of the initial contact may delay the

call for days. What if I sound unprofessional? What if I'm being too intrusive? What if they see right through me and discover I don't really know what I'm doing?

Once the researcher has entered into the field, it is common to have moments of unexpected *angst*. Ann Vartanian carefully prepared what looked to be the relatively simple task of asking a 3-year-old child some questions during a brief talk. After her first 'hello', the child immediately responded with, 'I don't like you and I'm going to play that you're not here'. She then ran and hid behind a couch. An unanticipated 'snafu', and Ann experienced a moment of panic. Such moments occur for all of us, and even if the incidents appear trivial or funny in retrospect, at the time they often feel quite important. The ability to embrace them with a sense of humor and presence of mind will help us get through these moments relatively unscathed. It will also provide some of the more interesting anecdotes with which the researcher will undoubtedly amuse colleagues and friends — afterwards! — or develop into one of the 'confessional tales' (Van Maanen, 1988, Ch. 4) which we discuss in Chapter 5 in 'Making the Story'.

Jackie Storm expressed some serious personal fears when embarking on her interviews:

> It brought out all my paranoia. I was plagued with the fear of making a mistake. I thought, 'I'm doing it wrong. I'm missing something. I'm asking the wrong questions'.

I also felt a great deal of anxiety when I began the interview process because I felt very ignorant of the police world that I was investigating. I was afraid that if I appeared overly naive or asked questions that derived from simplistic television stereotypes, the female police officers would not take me seriously and would slough me off with superficial 'by the book' responses. While this may have happened occasionally, by and large the women were available and candid and spoke in depth once rapport was developed. Of course, what I imagined would have been one of my worst nightmares occurred during one of my initial interviews. While describing her sense of alienation from civilians, an interviewee looked me dead in the eye and stated with not a little contempt, 'Hell, I'm sure you can't understand half of what I'm saying.' Confronted on my most sensitive point, knot in pit of stomach, I replied, 'Perhaps not, but I'd like to hear it and learn from you — that's what this project is all about'. That appeared to stave off her immediate sense of alienation, and the interview continued smoothly. It was not as frightening an experience as I anticipated, but such challenges kept my adrenalin flowing throughout the interview process.

Lofland and Lofland (1984) write about certain anxieties that researchers

experience during interviews and participant-observation and talk about the stresses of decep[illegible] [illegible] They [illegible] the point that even when people know they are being studied, they probably have only a very limited understanding about what the researcher is doing. The authors raise possible mental questions researchers might put to themselves:

> Did 'X' remember that I was a researcher when she told me that? And if not, when she does remember, will she be angry or upset?
>
> Is this person I'm interviewing, who seems to be getting restless, about to ask me more about my research aims than I really want to tell right now?
>
> Is the caretaker of this group I'm studying going to notice that my research interests have shifted since I received permission to do the research, and if he does, will he still approve?

When Lyn Lofland was observing public waiting rooms, she was always vaguely fearful that someone would challenge her continued and repeated presence. On only one occasion was she discovered — in an airport — and even though the official who discovered she was doing research had no objection to her remaining, she was so uncomfortable that she left almost at once and never returned (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, p. 33).

While analyzing and writing about data, inexperienced and seasoned researchers alike may feel the fear of committing ideas to paper, or any number of anxieties that can contribute to writer's block. I was overwhelmed by the sheer size of my log — 1700 pages of interview transcripts alone. Picking and choosing, deciding which ideas to elaborate upon and which to discard, these are difficult decisions. While one may have a support group and others with whom to check the data, ultimately these decisions belong to the researcher alone. The responsibility of making them may be anxiety-provoking and even create a sense of loneliness. Once the research is completed, there is, of course, the gratification that the product is one's own creation. The pathway leading to that finale, however, is not always without its emotional pebbles and potholes.

One of the students in our class, Jackie Storm, spoke early on about how necessary it is to accept the inevitability of emotional insecurities when conducting qualitative research, for first-timers and old-timers alike:

> Learn to live with your fears and insecurities. They are part of the process. Make a note of your paranoia. Write it down in your log; use it as a source of information. You are here to observe what is going on, and your own personal thoughts and feelings are one part of the total picture. To deny our feelings would be to shut out one large chunk of reality.

Confronting fears means facing insecurity, terror of gatekeepers, interview and field malaise — and the list continues. Are students and practitioners of qualitative research particularly xenophobic or faint-of-heart? I doubt it. I strongly suspect that such anxiety exists in doing other kinds of research as well. But qualitative researchers in particular are encouraged to be aware of feelings, biases and personal peccadilloes and to scrutinize closely. We are highly conscious of our personal relationship to our research. Because of this, we must acknowledge and accept the emotional aspect as part and parcel of the method. In the larger sense, we strive to harness this aspect to become more aware, more able, more insightful.

Emotional Connections

> In a case study research, the researcher needs to cross into the subject's personal life to experience what it is like to be the other person.... Researchers whose self-awareness tells them that they are uncomfortable with closeness should not use case study methodology. They must ask, 'How comfortable am I with intimacy and closeness?' (Barbara Gagliardi)

It is natural to develop feelings toward one's research participants. Much of qualitative research involves prolonged engagement in the lives of other human beings, going beyond the superficial mask of public impression and entering a highly personal realm of private thoughts, secret passions. The researcher who is a keen observer and astute interviewer will inevitably be privy to many of the generally undisclosed vulnerabilities, heartaches, fantasies, and joys of the participants. It makes sense, then, that emotional responses such as closeness, identification, sympathy, and warmth would be spontaneously elicited in the researcher. This was a disconcerting experience for many of the students in our class, and one with which they needed to grapple. These students expected research to be a wholly intellectual endeavor, a cognitive kingdom where emotional detachment reigns supreme. They had accepted 'the canonization of objectivity and detachment of prevailing convention' (Munhall, 1988). Some were embarrassed to admit that they had any feelings at all for their participants; emotions were de facto unscientific, contaminating, taboo.

It is the belief of the authors of this book that feelings of intimacy and warmth toward one's research participants are not only natural but in general represent a positive phenomenon. The task of successfully stepping into the shoes of another person is greatly facilitated by feelings of sympathy, compassion, and what Carl Rogers termed unconditional acceptance (Meador and Rogers, 1979) for that person. It is clear, however, that one must attempt to

strike a balance between the [illegible] and the pursuit of a distanced, non-judgmental stance. Much has been written (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Cowles, 1988; Glazer, 1980) on this subject. Glazer comments:

> A researcher must become deeply involved with his material and allow it to absorb him while remaining emotionally vital enough to step back and perceive the contours of the data. It is a rigorous, affective exercise demanding emotional reserves and critical perceptiveness. (p. 29)

Glazer refers to the concept of 'compassionate analysis, in which the researcher's emotions are intertwined with those studied' (p. 31). This phenomenon, 'in combination with a researcher's determination to understand, often results in rare analytical insights' (p. 31). The authors of this book agree with the goal of attempting to balance 'compassionate analysis' with the 'determination to understand'. The process of striking such a balance can be difficult, however. Many researchers, and that includes us, occasionally feel too intimate or develop an exaggerated sense of kinship with our research participants. On the other hand, many times we feel distanced, dismayed, and even repulsed by our research participants. Both of these stances not only threaten to contaminate the findings, but to interfere with the researchers' personal lives as well. To feel close to, or even a bit removed from, a participant can be used to advantage; to feel too close for comfort, or too far, can be a dismaying experience. The next two sections take up those two sides of the same coin.

Too Close for Comfort

> I was interviewing a homosexual man about his lifestyle. While mentioning the importance of 'beauty' in his life, Sam added that he often thought that the reason he did not have a lover was because he was not good looking enough to attract a man. I was very touched by this statement for two reasons. First, Sam looked and sounded very sincere, which made me empathize with him. Second, his statement seemed very familiar. It was as if he were speaking my mind. I, too, had often felt that I was not beautiful enough to be loved by a man. Feeling sad and sorry for Sam, I tried to protect his feelings or somehow make him feel better. So I looked at him and told him that he was not alone in feeling the way he did; that others felt the same way at different periods in their lives. But what I really had in mind was: 'Don't worry, Sam. I'm in the same boat'. Needless to say, by sympathizing and identifying with Sam, my mind was transported to the times when *I* had felt like Sam did. Given that my mind could not be at two places simultaneously, chances are that I missed parts of Sam's comments in the meantime. (Flora Keshishian)

Flora's identification with her research participant's sense of not being 'beautiful enough' may have interfered with her ability to be a good listener, and may have ultimately distorted the data. Fortunately, she had the perceptiveness and courage to divulge these issues to her support group. She was able to explore these concerns and minimize their interference with the data. The emotional experience of working through these issues was intense. During the discussion of her feelings, the entire support group identified with her concerns about not being attractive to others. This led to an illuminating conversation about personal fears and detoured to related issues about the insecurities we were all experiencing concerning whether our research participants liked us. What began as a detour became a source of liberation. Having aired our anxieties, several of us felt freer to relate to participants more openly and directly. Sharing 'shameful' secrets often renders them benign, especially when trusted others are discovered to be carrying around the same secrets. It was not a major revelation to discover that we all had feelings. Rather, the revelation came in the common assumption that it was terribly *wrong* to have such feelings. We had gone to tremendous lengths to deny those emotions rather than acknowledge them and work them through.

During our research, some of us discovered that we had become so identified with our projects that it began to intrude significantly on our personal lives. I will cite an example from personal experience. The concept of 'going native' has been discussed in the literature (e.g., Lofland and Lofland, 1984, pp. 34–5). I found that the more involved I became with my research, the more I began to create a parallel existence, albeit without realizing it at the time. Prior to my research, my stereotypes of police officers were fairly harsh — cops were brutal, unintelligent, heavy drinking, and macho. They did not inhabit a world with which I wanted to be the least connected. During my research, as I became more involved with their world and they began to 'humanize' in my mind, they no longer resembled these worst caricatures. They also became less distant and exotic. I became less fascinated and more comfortable with them. Their world became for me a regular one, a way to make a living, like any other. In fact, one woman officer called me 'an honorary cop', and the husband of a friend made me a card-carrying member of the union.

My involvement took on other forms also. At a certain point in the interviews, many women officers were expressing the theme of loneliness. During that time I wrote a letter to a friend of mine in which I stated:

> For some people, dissertation brings up anxiety, panic, a sense of being found out as a fraud. For me, too, to some extent. But it has *really* brought up wellsprings of incredible loneliness such as I have never felt. Day in, day out, isolated, not connected to anyone in a meaningful fashion.

Now that was not entirely true. I had friends and family, a dissertation support group, and a committee, all of whom I could go to for comfort and support. What was really happening, I believe, is that I was co-opting the experience of these women. Like medical students' disease, I was taking their symptoms and making them my own. Further, I decided at the time that the way to assuage the loneliness and to connect with people was to get a job. I had stopped working for a while to work full-time on my dissertation. What job did I apply for? A psychologist at the police department! It seemed to make perfect sense to me. I knew the population and was comfortable with them. The next few months of applying for the job were spent in interviews, sending transcripts, having references checked and cross-checked, and knowing that former employers were being contacted. After several months, I was offered the job.

Lo and behold, by that time I was no longer involved in the theme of loneliness, and consequently I myself was not feeling all that lonely or disconnected. I began to question: why are you joining this system? I was literally jolted out of bed one morning with a case of cold sweats accompanied by the indisputable realization: 'It's not your world!' Subsequently, I turned down the job. Most of my friends and family were puzzled. Why did I turn down the job after having put all this time and energy into the application procedure? To me it was clear. I knew that I had to separate myself and my life from the life of my research participants. I had entered their world and lost sight of my own.

Another dilemma created by feeling extremely close to one's research participants is that the researcher may discover facets of the persons being studied that the researcher would prefer not to see, facets that must be dealt with nonetheless. I felt this when I saw that some of the women police officers whom I had grown to like were overtly, unapologetically racist. Ann expressed the dismay and sadness she felt upon discovering the tedium that predominated her research participant's emotional life:

> One of the sad discoveries of my study with Chuck was that fighting boredom was a central feature of his life. Chuck bored easily, and the computer, video games, and barf parties were some of his weapons in his war on boredom.
>
> One incident in this war occurred when Chuck was on a computer hobbyist bulletin boards, which allowed him to disguise, if he wished, any or all attributes about himself. One of the entertainments Chuck created for himself was to become a female stepsister he named Tina. Tina was a hot number — all leather and lace, with mascara down to her nose; her look, according to Chuck, was 'I'm ready for action'. Chuck interacted with many people on the board as Tina. He went so far as to set up 'dates with guys', for which Tina would not appear. Chuck knew things had gone too far,

> however, when one young man arrived at his home asking for Tina. [illegible]
> Tina abruptly left town to ply her trade in some unnamed banana republic. The thrill for Chuck came from the sense of being the author of a play. He said that Tina was his creation, and he enjoyed manipulating people's responses to her.
>
> Chuck lived in an upper-middle SES home. He was in a program for the gifted and talented. He attended some of the best private schools in the community. His parents were active in school and community activities that involved their children. Yet his life was boring to him. Chuck was not a poverty child, he was not disadvantaged in ways I could fathom, yet during the study he seemed cut adrift, rootless. He appeared to spend much time distracting himself from the burden of creating a meaningful existence. The great characteristic of Chuck's life during the study was its pervasive emptiness. The institutions organized to help children find direction in life had failed him. Chuck, when I last spoke with him, had not found a center that would hold.
>
> It was very difficult for me to acknowledge this in writing. The trust shared with Chuck and his family, and the affection I have for the young man himself, made it painful to commit this reality to print. It was only through the help of my support group and my faculty advisor that I was able to say what I knew.

In the last two examples, both Ann and I liked our participants and were disturbed by what we saw as their negative sides or limitations. Simply put, we did not like our findings, and we both had trouble committing these findings to paper for different reasons. Ann did not wish to see Chuck's unhappiness because it created pain for her, and she worked hard, psychologically, to deny that whole part of his experience. My dilemma was slightly different. While I readily acknowledged the racism I saw in some of my interviewees, I questioned whether I would be betraying the trust of those women who had poured out their hearts so candidly if I were to disclose this facet of their experience on paper. On the other hand, I seriously wondered if it were my job to be the guardian of the darker sides, such as I interpreted them, that were spoken into the tape recorder, discussed 'on the record'. I struggled relentlessly with my impulse to portray the women consistently in the most flattering light possible. The battle to describe the women's total experiences, without advocating for them, was an extremely difficult one. To present honestly their experience, in all its facets, became an act of courage.

Many of our students had experiences similar to Ann's and mine. They discussed these issues in their support groups. Ann and I both talked at length with our support groups and our dissertation committees. I showed transcripts of the interviews to my group and committee to get independent confirmation of the data. I shared the transcripts with the relevant inter-

expressed satisfaction that the transcripts were accurate, I began the process of examining my own exaggerated or misplaced fears. I saw how I was projecting my own value system onto these women. I also discovered that I was idealizing my participants, and not only wanted to protect their image to others but my own illusions as well.

A related conflict — that of feeling overprotective of the privacy of research participants — may also become particularly apparent when a researcher feels very close to the participants. Even when strict ethical standards are maintained, the researcher may have difficulty judging the appropriate place to draw the line between reporting fully and deeply, and invading privacy. This conflict can become especially evident on occasions when an interviewee reveals very intimate or sensitive information. During my interviews with female officers, several women disclosed deeply personal experiences, such as being involved in extramarital affairs, or having been raped or abused as a child. These disclosures frequently shed light on their experience of being police officers by supplying the 'missing piece' as to why they chose this career over all others. However, the spontaneity and lack of guile with which some of these women revealed such intimate details frequently made me suspect that they did not realize how much they were exposing — defenses down, trust established. I wondered whether they would really wish this to become public property, regardless of the fact that it was discussed 'on the record'. I was also fully conscious of my belief that their candor was at least partially due to the rapport I had worked so strenuously to develop with them. This carefully cultivated rapport, the painstakingly executed efforts to help interviewees feel 'natural' and to overcome the potentially stultifying effect of the ever-present tape recorder, began to feel like a cynical manipulation. 'Don't censor', I would request *ad infinitum*. Eventually, they wouldn't, and I was taken aback by the amount and depth of their disclosures. I also felt like a heel. I would wonder if I were taking advantage of a basic human loneliness, the desire to 'confess' to a relative stranger, the wish for absolution. I was powerless to absolve, though I began to want to, experiencing paradoxical but simultaneous feelings of grandiosity and impotence. My role became that of intimate acquaintance. I wanted to jump in and soothe wounds, but I needed to step back and observe. I found this conflict to be very powerful and very disturbing, and discussed it at length not only with professional colleagues, but with personal friends. I, too, needed to self-disclose and be absolved.

In her article on doing qualitative research on sensitive topics, Kathleen Cowles (1988, p. 163) discusses her experience of interviewing family survivors of murder victims. She addresses the many strong emotions she felt, such as *angst*, self-doubts, and tremendous sadness. Her coping strategies included

expressing some of these emotions to the interviewees and having a network of trusted colleagues with whom she could debrief. Along with recording emotions in one's field log, these have been found to be effective means of dealing with intense, close personal feelings toward one's participants. Cowles comments that while she prepared by immersing herself in the literature in order to anticipate the emotions of her participants, no amount of preparation could have fully readied her to embrace the quality and intensity of each individual experience.

Another price to pay when one feels very close to research participants is the difficulty of separating from them. Leaving the field after a prescribed time or certain number of interviews may make research sense, but it may also feel like an artificial, sometimes cruel, cutting off. I experienced separation anxiety when parting from several of my research participants. Frequently, I handled it by suggesting we get together for lunch at a future date, but, as may be expected, that most often did not materialize. I did sometimes meet on a social basis with some participants after my research was finished, but it became clear that our lives were extremely different and we eventually drifted apart. Stretching out the relationship was in part a way for me to avoid dealing with my own pangs of separation as well as a way to cope with my ambivalent feelings about having 'used' for research purposes people whom I had grown to like. In my mind, I had confused the boundaries between professional and personal relationships. Saying goodbye felt akin to throwing away new friends, and this was difficult to do. The women themselves appeared to have a clear sense of the professional nature of our relationship and seemed to be satisfied at its completion, with an occasional follow-up telephone call. I eventually grew more comfortable with 'clean breaks'.

Diane experienced the pain of separation from a research participant with whom she had grown to feel quite close:

> I had been told before Woody entered second grade that he requested me because he heard I hugged. So presto, right there, instant bias! Then I had a home visit with him one Saturday, a routine visit which I do with all my students. One visit, however, was not enough for Woody, and he began to call me at home. He was persistent and he got through when others found me impossible to reach by phone. He had much to tell me and there was no ending the conversation if I didn't invent a reason to get off. I decided to visit him again and his mother approved. Thus, we began our Saturday odysseys.
>
> Woody's house was an estate of great magnitude. His parents were not there when I was. He seemed to be alone most of the time. Where were the children to play with? When did he interact with other human beings? Was he lonely? I was lonely being with him there. There was a live-in maid who frequently brought me tea to

> [illegible] food for Woody. He was bony and pallid in appearance. Did he get the right kinds of food to eat? I worried. I wasn't his mother, but I wanted to be at times.
>
> We spent most of our time together in the miles of wooded areas beyond the main house. We explored. He showed me his inventions in the woods which he conceived in rich detail and tall-tale style. There was the 'dog grave' near a creek, the 'cabin' where a foundation had been laid and then abandoned, the giants stalked him, and he entwined many cultural facts with fantasies about places he had visited around the world. The 'you know what?' was endless as we wandered beyond the boundaries of his estate. I was highly anxious about trespassing and ticks. But I listened intently to his stories and believed in his wood creatures.
>
> Back at the mansion we spent time in his darkened bedroom where three six-foot wooden soldiers stood by his bed and on each side of his computer. Whenever Woody's eyes happened to land there, it seemed that all other activities were cancelled and the creatures in his computer games took over with Woody yanking and pushing his joy stick.
>
> At such moments I felt a bit jealous that I could not hold his attention as readily as the computer characters he was busy knocking over. I felt lonely. Now Woody had playmates, robot ones, and I yearned to give him real ones. Was it my own needs calling out? Loneliness from my own childhood? Was Woody the little brother I had loved as a child? I often pondered such thoughts when Woody was deep into a new score on his computer screen.
>
> The computer games came and went and he grabbed my hand to explore the many rooms in the huge house, even locked rooms. He shared and I cared in roles that went beyond the researcher/teacher.
>
> The research on children's play styles was completed. The school year ended and I had to let go. This was a year ago. I still miss him.

It is a common experience that we, our students, and other researchers have had to wrestle with feelings of identification and overidentification with our participants. Learning to define and create boundaries between 'close' and 'too close' is often difficult. Learning to disengage emotionally when necessary can be even more difficult. We found that discussing these issues openly, among sympathetic colleagues, is a highly effective way of coping with such emotions.

Too Far for Comfort

The previous section focused on researchers' experiences of closeness with their participants. Researchers do not always feel positive emotions toward

their participants, however. They may dislike, disrespect, pity, or even be repulsed by the people they study or situations they encounter in the course of their work. Rather than being too close for comfort, in these situations it might be said that the researcher is too far for comfort.

Iris Kaplan observed a tennis instructor about whom she stated:

> Bill is entertaining. He is funny. He makes the kids laugh. He seems to 'talk at' the kids. He seems to crave an audience. He seems to want to be funny. He looks at me often during class to see my reactions. I feel sorry for him.

Iris appears to have experienced her research participant as vaguely pathetic. Julie Wollman-Bonilla observed a teacher in a classroom setting and soon came to agree with the opinions of the students that the teacher 'is a witch'. Melissa Rose, who also observed a classroom setting, began to feel like 'a prisoner' trapped by a teacher whose teaching style was woefully tedious. And Laura Wilson became incensed at a music professor she observed whose pedagogical style was authoritarian and one-sided:

> The metaphor for this class became the missionary converting the pagans ... control and lack of freedom to explore. All decisions were handed down from above.... I was angry! ... I was *forced* to listen to a lot of Kurt Weill. I felt as though I was part of a captive audience and could not move. I probably like Weill even less now than I did before.

These beginning researchers sometimes found it difficult not to act on such negative feelings. Julie Wollman-Bonilla felt that the teacher she observed so greatly undermined the children's confidence and self-respect that on at least one occasion she shared her disagreement about the teacher's tactics with one of the students. Julie realized that this was a mistake, however, because it signalled her willingness to be co-opted by the students. She stated that:

> I realized it would make them question their trust in me. If, for example, I took a student's side in one instance, how could that student feel safe that I would not take the teacher's side another time and betray his or her confidence?

Not only would she be undermining trust in the long run, but as she stated further, 'I realized that ... the quality of my data depended on my commitment to description, not change'.

The impulse to take sides is a natural one. Barring compelling circum-

stances such as averting gross emotional or physical harm, however, it is not acceptable to most of us to enter into the field to attempt to influence [illegible] participants. A neutral stance is preferable during data collection, although it is often an effort to rise above our own non-neutrality. However, the decision to take invasive action usually depends on the context of the situation, so it would be impossible to make an across-the-board rule here.

To dislike excessively or feel alienated from a research participant can potentially distort one's data as much as if one overidentified with the participants. Nonetheless, it is a very common experience. Indeed, because negative emotions arose so frequently in our work and in that of others, we examined how researchers handled such situations. We found that for several support groups, a particularly useful strategy was to look at many aspects of the disliked person's personality, search for motives for the offensive behavior, and examine the context in which the person functioned. While the process did not guarantee answers, it generally resulted in helping people to conceptualize a multi-dimensional person, and enabled them to be more open to the many aspects of that person's experience. In the process, the support group members discovered and were able to liberate certain of their own suppressed emotions that had previously interfered with the development of sympathy or rapport for their research participants.

Another common finding upon examining the phenomenon of negative emotions was that our research participants were acting in some way counter to their own values. In fact, this is often true whether or not we like the participants. In the previous vignettes about our work, both Ann and I became acutely aware that we were disturbed by certain of our findings because we were making judgments based on our personal and philosophical biases. Biases are impossible to escape; we all have them. It is our responsibility as qualitative researchers to attempt to understand and come to terms with them as honestly and completely as we can, so as not to distort the data.

Self-Awareness

> Once a little girl was sitting and drawing with some crayons. Her father happened by and asked her what she was drawing. 'I am drawing a picture of God', she announced. 'God?' said her father in wonder and a bit of disbelief. 'You know what God looks like?' 'Sure', replied the girl as she held up her drawing. 'That's what God looks like!'
>
> Was that picture of God a reality to that little girl? You bet it was. If an ethnographer were to study a child's understanding of God, he or she would have to see God through the eyes of children like that little girl, despite any personal theology or lack thereof. (Steve Rosman)

Learning to see through the eyes of others in order to understand and accurately describe their experience is a very complex task. A useful concept here might be that of 'empathic understanding' (Meador and Rogers, 1979), which Carl Rogers employed in therapy settings to describe the process of understanding a client's phenomenal world. He stated:

> Understanding the phenomenal world of the client requires more of the therapist than merely understanding the client's words. The therapist attempts to 'get into the shoes' of his client, to 'get under his skin.' He not only listens to the client's words, but he immerses himself in his world. (p. 152)

Achieving empathic understanding is crucial for the therapist who wants to comprehend the client's experience with a minimum of distortion or bias. Likewise, in ethnographic research, the investigator wants to understand the minds and hearts of the research participants in as total and unadulterated a way as possible. To do so, s/he must attempt to recognize personal prejudices, stereotypes, myths, assumptions, and other thoughts or feelings that may cloud or distort the perception of other people's experiences. I do not believe that we lose subjectivity, for human perception is by nature and definition subjective. I do believe that by recognizing and acknowledging our own myths and prejudices, we can more effectively put them in their place. I also believe that greater self-knowledge can help us to separate our thoughts and feelings from those of our research participants, to be less judgmental, and to appreciate experiences that deviate greatly from our own. Confronting oneself and one's biases was one of the most difficult and thought-provoking aspects of being a qualitative researcher for many students. Here follows a small sampling of their experience:

> I am a storyteller. For several weeks I observed the story hour of a nearby library. The librarian who conducted these story hours conveyed the stories by holding a book at arm's length, open toward the children, and reading from the book. She would glance at the book and gather a line or two of its text in her mind and turn to the children and recite what she remembered. This approach galled me no end. As a storyteller, I have worked hard to learn the stories I tell so that I can present them with a bit of drama and movement. Now here I was observing a person whose style represented the antithesis of my own. Yet, my task as an ethnographer was to be the instrument which recorded what happened during the story hours I observed.... I had to confront my biases and personal feelings so as to put them aside. (Steve Rosman)

> I had to learn a lot about myself and figure out how much I was interfering with my research. Was I really seeing how my colleague

> taught, or was I reflecting on my own teaching? I had to learn to use and rely on my good [illegible] eliminate, my bad ones. Just as I found out what I liked and didn't like in life (while healing from an illness), my study helped me see what I liked and didn't like about teaching and about myself as a teacher. My study became a ... barometer. (Ronna Ziegel)

> I had ideas about what good nursing is as opposed to bad and, finally, I have very definite ideas about what is right and wrong, ethical and unethical nursing practice. Again, how could I possibly presume to be an unbiased researcher? Thankfully, I didn't. I knew I was biased and had to learn how to observe, understand, and not make judgments. My questions changed constantly and I learned that I was not in the field to 'prove' anything. (Joanna Landau)

> I had to unload myself of a lot of unwanted 'baggage', as it were, during the course of this study — emotions I was dragging around from my past, my own preferred ways of viewing situations, and my own biases. (Gail Levine)

There is no easy or surefire way to dispel bias. Confronting one's own 'hiding ghosts', as Barbara Gagliardi stated, can be a difficult and painful process. Recording feelings, including biases, in the log is extremely helpful for many qualitative researchers. One may choose to keep that part private, as in a diary. However, if a person can share those aspects of the log with others, those others may throw light on the matter in new and useful ways. Steve Rosman articulates the process in his following advice:

> ... assess the biases and presumptions you bring to the subject(s) of your observation. Use the log to raise these matters to the level of awareness. In addition to recording your observations of the phenomenon in question, be honest and be thorough in the investigation of your feelings. Include copious notes about your emotional reactions.... Additionally ... there are times when it is useful to test one's thinking against the probing inquiry of a disinterested peer. We humans sometimes take our own opinions for fact and, every now and then, need the perspective of another to refocus our attention.

An example of this came from Flora Keshishian who refused to go into a gay bookstore with her homosexual participant because she did not want others to assume she was a lesbian. It was only when she shared this part of her log with her support group that she began to discover her ambivalence about her research participant's life-style and how she may have communicated that to him as well. As a consequence of her discussion of these issues in the support group, she was not only able to bring a heightened awareness and

a more subtle understanding to many of her final themes, but she had learned [illegible]

Deborah Lamb said that perhaps 'all research is me-search'. Me-search, including one's personal biases, is certainly a part of the ethnographer's pursuit of knowledge.

Making the Familiar Unfamiliar

Many people do ethnographic research in settings with which they are familiar, as became clear in the previous vignettes on bias: teachers often study classrooms, nurses do research in hospitals, storytellers observe librarians. In some ways, familiarity with one's setting can be an advantage. As Joanna Landau said:

> Studying the familiar can be a boon rather than a liability since the 'insider' expertise, provided it is continually validated in the field, can really move the work along. Having past experience to guide the flow is extremely helpful.

Familiarity with the subject at hand — the subculture, the jargon, the unwritten codes of behavior — may enable a researcher to delve deeply into the research without having to do all of the preliminary work, such as learning a new lingo, becoming acquainted with the norms, and developing a level of comfort within the environment being studied. There is a certain degree of intimidation upon entering uncharted terrain — I certainly felt it as a total newcomer into the world of police precincts, police bars, street patrol — that may be largely avoided in this way. Avoiding excess intimidation is an advantage not to be dismissed easily, especially when the research process itself might be new and relatively awe-inspiring.

However, there are certain issues that arise from familiarity with the subject of which the researcher must be aware. An important, subtle issue concerns a researcher's presumption of understanding. This was brought home to me in quite a vivid way during my own research experience. After interviewing a number of female police officers of vastly different backgrounds from my own, I set up an appointment with an officer who, like myself, is Jewish. I was thrilled! At last someone with whom I shared a common background. We both sprinkled our conversation with Yiddish expressions, made Jewish jokes, discussed our mutual preference for seltzer water over other sodas. I felt I understood her and I understood how unusual her decision to become a police officer was, given her background. It was only when I asked, half-jokingly, 'So how did a nice Jewish girl like you

[illegible] about her personal and family history — growing up in a working-class urban area as one of two white children in an otherwise all-black school; the daughter of a civil servant who, contrary to the stereotype of Jewish parents, put little premium on education for their children; a brother who enlisted in the army. This was nothing at all like my suburban upbringing where, among other things, higher education was assumed and the military avoided at all costs. In my erroneous presumption of similarity in all things Jewish, I nearly missed an incredibly interesting, colorful, and individual story. Moreover, I almost neglected to explore her value system, her sense of herself in the world.

As Joanna Landau mentioned above, 'insider' expertise must be validated. Knowledge of others' hearts, minds, and experience simply cannot be assumed, regardless of familiarity, or perhaps especially when one is familiar with their subcultural landscape. When dealing with familiar terrain, self-exploration is crucial for the qualitative researcher. 'Am I talking about them or am I talking about me?' The question must be asked time and again.

Another issue related to making the familiar unfamiliar concerns those deeply held values, expectations, ethics, and biases that are being newly discovered by the researcher during the process of exploring the field. This issue was touched upon in the previous vignettes on personal biases in which the student researchers were acutely aware that they had certain values that they needed to acknowledge and continually explore so as not to impose them on their research participants or otherwise distort the findings. One might hold certain values near and dear and expect others, such as research participants, to do the same. When others do not, the experience might be jolting. Margot tells the following story about her study of boredom in an urban high school.

> I saw so much boredom in this school that it stunned me. Day in and day out, period after period, it seemed that classroom life was characterized best by boredom. It seems that this is a learned social phenomenon, and I felt students had to be angry at what was being ground out each minute of each day in classrooms there. So I thought I'd tackle it frontally by interviewing some of the students I know in that school. They had been good informants before, were generous to a fault with me, although we were different in age, race, experiences, and job possibilities. I asked fifteen people what about being in school was interesting, and I went from there, valiantly probing responses to get as rounded a picture as possible. And of course once one starts asking about interests, one gets other pictures. The pictures I got of interest, non-interest, and boredom were shocking, not so much for content, which was shocking enough and sad, but because it was not at all what I had 'known' it would be. I was pushed to see the familiar from an unfamiliar perspective.

> The students did not seem to be at all as interested as I was in the topic. I thought they'd be bursting to talk to a friendly ear about being bored, but they seemed to be passive. I had expected students to express anger, disgust, outrage regarding what was to me the obvious grey pap that filled their school lives. They expressed no great anger. Certainly not outrage. Instead, most indicated that their boredom was their fault. 'If I could get it, I wouldn't be turned off'. Students did not indicate that it was their teacher's job to be less boring. 'Teacher's ain't here to be interesting. Teachers be here to drill facts in my head'. They described a variety of strategies they used when they were bored: 'First I try to get it. Then sometimes I think of something else'. 'I look to fool around, man. It's no use anyway.' They blamed, gently, the school and the larger society, but not the teachers or specific teaching or curriculum. 'It isn't her fault. She tries. Everything in this lousy school is unfair'. They described teaching methods, but did not relate them to their boredom. 'We copy from the board all day. We get tests we don't even have studied for. I don't know what the teacher talk about'. To a person their solutions were passive and self-punitive. 'You just gotta sit an' take it'. And, 'I'll leave, that's all, I'll leave. I'm no good in school'.
>
> It was at first a distinct shock to me not to get my familiar, expected replies about boredom. But then I received another, more valuable, but much more unsettling insight — that of the victims blaming themselves by internalizing convenient, biased, authoritarian, and dis-educational messages. Here the act of making the familiar unfamiliar resulted both in my heightened insight and my heightened sorrow.

The findings when studying a familiar setting are frequently not what one expects. This was part of Margot's experience in the above vignette, as well as the common experience of many students in our class. As Leslie Rice reported, one researcher in her support group:

> ... was observing an adult physical disabilities therapy clinic. He said he was surprised with how much he identified with the patient and how cold he felt the therapists were. This surprised him because he himself is a therapist and he had not experienced the coldness before.

Joanna Landau commented that as she began to observe her place of work from a different vantage point, that of a researcher rather than a nurse, she discovered that she really knew very little about what the staff truly believed. She could no longer take her knowledge of the situation for granted, as 'the subtle truths of that particular environment' were far different from those which her previous understanding had led her to believe. She describes an ironic process:

> ... the progression from 'knowing' what one is going to learn, to feeling a [illegible] mystery, to finally having some beginning understandings about that which is being observed.

The point here is that the familiar, when observed from a different stance or a new perspective, may frequently turn out to be quite unfamiliar. This may have a surreal emotional effect on the researcher:

> ... you are innocent as Alice, faithfully following your curiosity, when suddenly you find yourself tumbling into a world once familiar turned on its head; you walk through the looking glass of your observations and encounter a whole host of strange characters, which come to include yourself. Mirrors, you find, are no longer useful — you are more and less recognizable than ever. Are you awake, or are you dreaming? 'The' truth gives way to a maze of many. (Deborah Lamb)

Being able to see the 'maze of many' truths requires an openness of mind, a willingness to confront one's own beliefs directly, and the strength of character and intellectual honesty to let go of cherished assumptions. This is yet another instance of Deborah Lamb's 'research as "me-search"'.

Making the Unfamiliar Familiar

The need to discard stereotypes, or at least put them into the proper perspective, does not fall within the exclusive domain of those who are doing research in familiar environments. When we enter into research areas for the first time, regardless of our lack of actual experience, we are not devoid of a myriad of images, expectations, and beliefs about those areas. Although I was never directly involved with the police department, I held a slew of stereotypes derived from the media, my political beliefs, the experiences of my friends, and undoubtedly dozens of other sources. As mentioned previously, I had believed that the police, including females, were exemplified by being macho, somewhat impetuous, hard-drinking, loving to break the law in minor ways. After I gained entrée to their world and I began to talk to them in-depth as well as see them in a variety of contexts, a new image began to emerge. I began to hear stories like the following:

> I never forgot this one day, a girlfriend of mine said, 'How was your day?' and I said, 'Let me see, we had a homicide this morning, and we had a baby who was murdered, we had two fires and a couple of robberies, a burglary and two car accidents, it was a pretty busy

> day'. I hung up that phone and I tell you, it was like something hit [illegible] like that? I mean, I had a dead baby lying in my arms, it was murdered, beaten to death. I had a guy thrown out a window, five-story window, shot four or five times, with maggots crawling all over his body, went into a couple of fires, save a few lives, had a couple of armed robbery victims crying like crazy, people crying on your shoulder, car accident, mangled bodies, this was my day....
>
> ... I spent my first year on the job searching dead bodies, because policewomen had to search dead bodies, this was in my time. And I saw dead bodies that I would never in my life forget. The kinds of homicides, the suicides, a patricide, a matricide, infanticide ... and it wasn't the bodies, it was the families around you. The human drama that took place in every single incident. It was like you went into an empty room, you search the body, and nobody gave a shit. This was somebody that was murdered, a child who was beaten to death, it was a mother who was neglected. It was a person who hung herself, suicide, just throwing themselves in front of trains, thinking my children don't want me anymore. You know, that kind of tearing. I used to say, if you ever opened up a cop's chest and found his heart, it would be in shreds.

Well, this certainly wasn't the macho stereotype I was banking on. Once I was shocked out of my complacency, I realized that this theme, the long-term emotional cost of the job on these women was popping up all over the place. The underlying fear and anxiety of the job were becoming apparent. This was especially clear in an interview with one woman whose brother had recently died. The week of our interview, five police officers had also died — two in the line of duty, two suicides, one heart attack. She said:

> I don't know where people get the perception that when you become an officer, you become a super-person.... You're still a human being. If you get cut, you're gonna bleed. A lot of people think that officers, because you have on this uniform and a bullet-proof vest and a gun ... it makes you an oddity, different from other people. But you're not! You're still dealing with a human being that suffers. And I think a lot of officers, they try to put on a macho role or 'That doesn't bother me'. But I hurt! I hurt. You see, when I took the badge, it didn't make me bullet-proof.

She cried during this interview, as did several of the women. Sometimes they cried when they were describing what they see on the streets, and sometimes when they talked about the isolation they feel in general — from many male officers who don't accept the women as police officers, and from civilians, especially males, in their experience. They reported that they feel alienated from the outside world, not only because of their experiences, but because, as

at a party, she says, 'You might as well say you eat cobras for a living. People think it's either exotic or abhorrent'. Either way, she describes feeling alienated. Half of the women I interviewed reported that to avoid the discomfort this causes, they lie when asked what they do for a living, saying they are secretaries or word processors or whatever. They seem to put a good deal of thought and energy into trying to remain anonymous.

To deal with all that they need to deal with, the abuse from citizens and some male cops, the grotesque and horrible scenes they witness on the street, I discovered that they have developed a variety of coping mechanisms, such as lying to mask their professional identities, detaching their feelings, or developing raunchy or gallows humor. Moreover, when talking on these topics, these women seem largely aware that they are using coping mechanisms to deal with the streets — that they are consciously trying to ward off hurt. They talked about war stories as catharsis. They know that when they don't vent, they become sick from stress or anger or sorrow. Towards the end of my research, when they told me 'tough cop stories' or did some pretty hard drinking when we were together, they no longer appeared particularly macho or impetuous or interested in daring the law to catch up with them. Rather, they looked to me like human beings whose job it is to deal daily with inhumanity while maintaining their own human face.

It became clear to me during my research that many of my initial questions that had been based on stereotypes, or unknowns, changed. In-depth research can both knock down expectations and bring about new discoveries that were not initially imagined. In either case, it can pierce through superficiality. Laura Lee Lustbader provides a deeply felt tale of having entered into a totally unfamiliar world — the mind of a schizophrenic girl — to do her research — and some of the lessons she learned:

> As a graduate student making my first attempt at qualitative research, it was my choice to do a study of an 18-year-old girl who was recently released from a nine-month hospitalization. Eileen is her name. She had twice tried to kill herself by slitting her wrists, the second time just prior to her high school graduation. Eileen has been diagnosed as schizophrenic. It was my intent to discover what re-entry to home and community would be like for her. Getting to know Eileen was not at all the experience I thought it would be. Looking back, I'm not quite sure what I thought, but I had no experience to pull on to help me. The ease with which I usually come to know others was not present in this case, In fact, it is now four months since I began my case study, and I'd venture to say that what I do know now is that I will never really know who this girl is. However, recognizing some differences in how her mind works has given me some insights into her being (and, into my own). I like her,

yet I am at times frightened by her fantasies. I have had great hopes for her. Yet now I have great doubts about what the future holds.

Getting as far along as I did with Eileen was something akin to a roller coaster ride. I began by telling her what I was involved with in my graduate studies. I explained the case study and told her of the eventuality of an interview situation. I promised her anonymity and honesty. What I failed to understand was that the honesty part, the development of a trust between us, would be the most difficult factor to accomplish. I had read about the importance of establishing and maintaining trust; I had heard about it in class. I was sure, at the onset of the study with Eileen, that this would not be a problem. In fact, I don't think I even gave it much thought. I knew who I was, how I related to others. My own personal respect for ethics, hard work, and honesty were well-grounded. Never before, though, did I have to communicate with such regularity with a schizophrenic individual. What I thought I was so darned sure of became something to work very hard at throughout the study. A simple sentence, a compliment, might be interpreted by her in a whole other way then I had intended. I could see it, feel it — I could sense that I would have to do some work to repave the way and get back to a point of feeling trust. This could take a few sentences of explanation or it could take one or two more meetings to re-establish the groundwork for a trusting relationship.

Each time I met with Eileen, usually for two to four hours, there was a new or different part of her to deal with. What seemed to begin as a relatively 'normal' time together (i.e., simple conversation at home, bowling, dinner) could and oftentimes did turn into an emotion-laden or emotion-barren experience. Her laughter became, at times, depression. Depression became silence. I had to learn to watch for changes in facial expression, posture. I came to recognize that her sweeping body motions indicated more serious, contemplative periods, and chain smoking characterized times of pronounced anxiety.

Along with watching is listening. Changes in tone of voice, the rapidity or slowness of speech — these signaled definite changes in mood, even growing suspicions on her part. There were many times when Eileen would abruptly say, 'I don't want to discuss this anymore', and she'd close down. At first, I reacted by prodding her and cajoling her, as we usually do with people we know. Again, with time as a friend, I came to know when not to talk. So, when Eileen wanted to stop pursuing a topic of conversation, the conversation stopped. It had to be that way. I came to acknowledge and respect that.

Perhaps what I found most difficult was the use of spoken language. I'm an easy talker. The first thing I had to learn to do was to think of my mouth as zipped closed. Too often I could feel the words of suggestions, advice, even criticism knocking against my lips. But . . . listen. Just listen. And when I do speak, ask a question — and watch out for how that question is phrased. Misunderstand-

> ings of the simplest sentences occurred so frequently at first that I began to doubt what I was saying and how I was saying it. I slowly [illegible] as my message. This had a direct effect on the development of trust between us. Once I saw the problem for what it was, and given the time and willingness of both of us to learn how to be with each other, this problem of understanding intended messages did dissipate and trust no longer was challenged and/or jeopardized during our last few meetings. At least not in a way that required major work for rebuilding.
>
> I found, with Eileen, that time and space have meanings all their own for her. Her use of both is as effective as spoken language. If she were late or early, this had great significance and bearing on how she saw the trust between us. Location proved to be difficult for her from the start and has remained so. This means that whenever we were going to meet, it had to be in one of two places — her home or my own. On the several occasions when I had appointed other places to meet (even something as familiar as the Metropolitan Museum of Art) the meeting never occurred. Eileen got lost, Eileen slept through the meeting time, Eileen took the wrong train. A lesson was there for me each time this happened: do not, under any circumstances, show signs of disappointment or anger. It was absolutely necessary that I learn to keep my feelings in check, that I learn not to be offended — for what was running through Eileen's mind was not intended to offend, disappoint, or anger me. Her fears kept her in a specific place. I had to come to know and understand that those fears are far different from the sort and depth which plague me or most of the people with whom I regularly spend time.
>
> I think the characteristics in me which I really had to draw upon to do a fair job at this case study were patience, openness, and persistence. I learned some things about Eileen that I would never have learned had I not put to check my quickness to talk, interject, and project. Watching my own self so that I could see her better was of the greatest importance. There were times I feared that I was losing my 'self' to this case study. She and it became a top priority, and, in trying to know her mind, I sometimes thought that my grip on my own life was slipping a bit. The temptation to offer advice, to snap out of the listener's mode, was always present; it changed only in matter of degree.
>
> I remember I began this study with a big, personal question to ask of Eileen. It was gnawing at me: How could you do it. . . . How could you, an attractive, smart, lovely 17-year-old girl want to close your eyes and heart? Didn't you at least want to see how tomorrow goes? I know now that Eileen doesn't think that way. I'm not sure exactly how she does think, day to day, but it is not in that way. Endings are not always as sweet as we wish.

It may already be clear to you, our reader, that qualitative research is not the methodology of choice for researchers who wish to remain dispassionate

observers, nor for those who view research as an 'objective' endeavor totally divorced from one's personal self. Entering into the minds and hearts of others is by all accounts a powerful experience. Laura was open and flexible enough to observe that Eileen's psychological processes were radically different from what she had assumed they would be, based on her experience of herself and her usual acquaintances. With that observation, she no longer could cling to her initial assumption that an 'attractive, smart, lovely 17-year-old girl' would necessarily envision a future for herself. As a result of her research, Laura grew to understand that her 'truths' may be very different from Eileen's 'truths'. The willingness to recognize certain personal 'truths' as myths, and to abandon them if necessary, takes strength of mind and character and leaves a powerful emotional and intellectual legacy.

Is Qualitative Research for You?

Implicit in this chapter is the assumption that qualitative methodology is not for everyone. It is not the methodology of choice for those who wish their research to be cut-and-dried, bare-boned, or devoid of emotional intensity. Nor is it for those who do not want to become intimately involved with people throughout the course of the research. Who, then, is likely to derive satisfaction from this type of research? What individual characteristics in the researcher are important in order to meet the rigorous demands of this research, as well as to appreciate the unique joys that ensue from the process? To answer, we have looked to ourselves, to our beginning researcher students, and to other experienced researchers in the field.

Flexibility

The overriding characteristic that many qualitative researchers find most crucial is flexibility. Intellectual flexibility is one aspect. We may in fact start out with some ideas of what we will find — it is natural for the human mind to be curious about the future and to anticipate its outcome. But it is incumbent upon qualitative researchers to remain open to the data that emerge from the field. Cognitive rigidity may interfere with seeing many aspects of the data, and may seriously short-circuit the pursuit of further knowledge. Jackie Storm learned this lesson the hard way when she was studying a family of four.

> At one point, the couple had a fight and the wife ran away from home. 'Woe is me', I thought. I became sidetracked by the thought

> that she's not available to be observed. I failed to see that her

As in Jackie's case, it is sometimes very difficult to change plans mid-project when a totally unanticipated event occurs. However, one must learn to be responsive to new data, unexpected data, and, as Jackie experienced, unwelcomed data. Otherwise, one risks imposing one's own perspective, without remaining grounded in the data. As Laura Cohen stated: 'I started out ... with unyielding rigidity and passed through stages of progressive relaxation of my intellectual muscles'. The ability to envision a prism of viewpoints rather than merely one single perspective is crucial if one is to engage successfully in this research methodology which is premised on the notion of multiple realities.

Flexibility of behavior is also extremely important. One is frequently called upon to be spontaneous and to improvise during the research process.

> I have a thorough list of questions that should uncover valuable information about my 3-year-old research participant. 'So, Sarah, what do you like about Grover on Sesame Street?' 'You asked me too many questions. I'm leaving'. (Ann Vartanian)

The situation forced the researcher to rethink her carefully planned interview schedule and follow the lead of the participant, in this case to play behind a couch.

> Researchers must be responsive to ever-changing situations and field demands. Ethnographers don't ask their participants to comply to their situations; they adapt to their participants' situations. After all, how the participants live their lives is what an ethnographer wants to study (Patricia Thornton)

A common experience of researchers is that of being forced to change one's schedule at the last moment to comply with the demands of their participants. This is sometimes due to commonplace logistical complications that are part of everyday existence. It may also be related to the nature of the project itself. During my research, the bane of my existence became the last-minute changes in the women's tours of police duty and the constant emergencies that cropped up as part of police work. Their frequent complaint that their time is not truly their own, due to the nature of their work and the paramilitary structure of the police department, was brought home to me in a very concrete way: I, too, had to work around their relative lack of freedom to plan their lives far in advance. My need to be flexible with my time

paralleled theirs. This was something I had not previously considered. I learned a great deal about the virtues of spontaneity during my research.

Humor

The ability to maintain a sense of humor in the face of minor adversity is a tremendous asset for qualitative researchers. During the early stages of her research, Donna Flynn had difficulty framing clear, coherent interview questions. She began her first interview in this way:

> Try answering this introductory interview question: 'I don't really know how to begin this. I would think, I know we talked in terms of a whole life history, maybe if — we got the whole picture there, so I guess we can start at any point of whatever point strikes you or a period of your life. You know, I really don't know, whatever strikes you, how you would want to begin, in talking about your life up to this point?'

Try answering that interview question! As can be seen, anxiety and inexperience can wreak havoc on one's clarity of expression, as illustrated by Donna's initial interview question. Rather than becoming overly concerned, however, the ability to listen to what one has said, to laugh at it, and then seek ways to improve, is a prerequisite to continuing without undue ego-battering or loss of confidence.

Jackie Storm noted that often, what can go wrong, will.

> It all sounds so simple in the book. You observe. You record. You analyze your data. You develop hypotheses. But then reality sets in. You arrive 'in the field' to begin research and the field isn't home. You spend an hour taping a brilliant conversation with one of your observees and when you get home you discover the tape is blank....
>
> Once in an attempt to record a telephone interview, I attached the suction cup to the wrong end of the phone. My own voice came through loud and clear. The voice on the other end of the line was never to be heard again.

Another beginning researcher in our class, Suzy Hahn, reported the time she felt she was being completely inconspicuous while observing a pizza maker at a fast-food restaurant. Suddenly the pizza maker turned around to her and exclaimed, 'Whatsa' da matter, honey? You like a pizza or you lika my face?' She reported that she was completely nonplussed, and not a little embarrassed. Suzy was able to respond to the humor of the situation and retain

presence of mind, however, coming away with excellent observational field notes as well as two large slices of pizza.

Students of qualitative research reported countless similar episodes of making mistakes, being caught off-guard, and in general being subjected to a thousand trifling humiliations that, as Rhonda Sternberg noted, 'are all the blunders of trying to be professional and winding up human'. The ability to transform minor adversity into humor is an invaluable resource for the qualitative researcher.

Accepting Ambiguity

It is important that qualitative reseachers be able to tolerate ambiguity. We do not start with a set of fixed hypotheses. We do not know what we will uncover, reveal, or learn. We may begin with some preconceived notions of what we will find based on the literature or past experience, but it is imperative that we be willing to overturn or dismantle such assumptions as the data come to light. Especially in the initial stages of the research, we frequently record events, including verbal interactions, without any idea if they will turn out to be significant or meaningful. There is by necessity a selective element to logging; one cannot possibly write down every single element in the environment that one sees, hears, or otherwise perceives. Decisions need to be made about what to log and what to omit, without knowing which observations will ultimately prove important or relevant. In an interview setting, one must decide which areas of interest should be most deeply probed and which of the many proffered directions would be most profitable to pursue.

There is also the question of interpretation. What level of analysis is appropriate to describe accurately and understand the phenomenon being studied? The researcher must be willing to commit to certain interpretations of data even if he or she perceives other possibilities. During the process, interpretations may change — one may end up seeing a wholly different phenomenon than one imagined. It might be said that one does not know what one will find until one has found it. In addition, not all ambiguities will dissipate. The qualitative researcher must be able to tolerate this uncertainty. Some students found that the lack of a clearly defined, superimposed focus and direction presented difficulty.

> Before I began this project I knew in principle that reality is multi-layered and open to interpretation. I don't think I appreciated the tension that multiplicity can create for an observer ... when you discard conventional frameworks, when you open your range of attention, the focus blurs and it is difficult to see what you are looking at. (Steve Cullinan)

Those researchers who have difficulty tolerating a fairly high degree of ambiguity, or, as Steve called it, a blurred focus, would most likely be happier using another research methodology. Deborah Lamb summed up what might be considered the attitude most compatible with qualitative research:

> Prepare to lose your way,
> prepare to be unprepared, and enjoy it.

Empathy

The ability to empathize, to look at, and understand the world from another person's point of view is necessary for qualitative researchers. To do this, one must sometimes confront one's own beliefs and re-examine them or put them aside long enough to incorporate someone else's perspective. Or, on the contrary, someone may articulate beliefs that the researcher holds but does not wish to reveal to the public, such as prejudices. One must be willing to acknowledge these feelings to oneself so as not to deny, overcompensate, or in any number of other ways distort the data. Carmen Diaz stated, 'It isn't enough to know yourself; you have to be able to feel free enough to see yourself in other people'. To see oneself in others, and to accept that self, is a crucial ingredient in the character of a productive qualitative researcher.

Accepting One's Emotions

The final trait that will be mentioned here is the willingness and ability to tolerate strong emotions, including emotions that have been previously discussed in this chapter such as anxiety, intimacy and closeness, occasional antipathy, and the sadness of separation. It is an advantage to be able to view emotion as a source of strength and to be open to mining one's emotions for their intellectual lessons.

Postscript

While the dual sides of our research coin — cognition and affect — are integral to each chapter in this book, and are thus discussed throughout, the direct focus here on feelings has given us permission to be as personal, close, and affect-laden as we can communicate with words on paper. For this reason, Margot's analytic memo considers only one topic — studying oneself.

Making the familiar unfamiliar usually demands serious work.

But it takes on an entirely different realm of difficulty when the familiar person one is studying is oneself. Indeed, some of our professional colleagues in qualitative research insist that the self may not study the self. Just too tricky, they say; too fraught with possible problems, with eye trouble, with I trouble. Some even maintain a ban on any qualitative study in which the researcher is involved in any way at all in what is being studied. This reasoning would have done away with Diane's study since she was the teacher of the children whose play styles she documented at school and at home. It certainly would have put an end to the plan for Margaret's study because she was the librarian-teacher who interacted with children over two years to describe the process of moving toward transactional teaching and learning strategies. It would shut down a great deal of collaborative research in schools and hospitals in which people study their own situations. These situations, of course, include themselves. It would wreak havoc with Guba and Lincoln's (1989) fourth-generation paradigm of evaluation research since that, too, is based on informed, cooperative study by everyone involved.

So, it is possible to study oneself in interaction, and it has been done. But that is only part of the issue, not the whole. Being a studier of oneself — apart from studying oneself as the researcher — is sometimes excruciatingly difficult, sometimes impossible. Some of that has to do with developing extraordinary vision — that of seeing out of and reporting from double lenses — researcher/researchee — often simultaneously. Some of that has to do with facing the pain of seeing what we would wish not to see.

I have found that making the choice of whether to study oneself is an intensely personal task. But there are some key ingredients to consider. One essential ingredient is awareness of what one might be getting into. That awareness must be accompanied by acceptance of the unique responsibilities that studying oneself entails. Some of our students, for example, have been surprised, nay shocked, to discover that if they wish to study their situations, they are obliged to focus on what they are doing. This, of course, means that they write, reflect on, and analyze data about themselves along with the data about others. Sometimes the unique responsibilities of studying oneself entail such mundane tasks as setting up dual schedules — one for the researcher part, one for the professional part — and swapping lunchroom or ward duty with a kindred soul. Another essential ingredient is the personality of the possible researcher-of-self. The section of this chapter titled 'Is Qualitative Research for You?' may have some special relevance in this regard. In the end, I believe it is most important to know enough about oneself: to know what happens characteristically when you are challenged, or upset, or satisfied; to know the level of personal imperfection and doubt and unfinished business with which you can live; to know what brings feelings of accomplishment. With such considerations, a person can make a decision — with the proviso, of course, that life often brings surprises that can turn around any decision.