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CHAPTER 3

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION: RESEARCHING NEWS PRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Participant observation can be one of the most exciting, challenging and, potentially, rewarding of all mass communication research methods(1). *Exciting* because the method promises to provide, what remains, a rare look into the inner sanctum of media production, that privileged domain in which media professionals ply their trade, make their decisions and fashion their collective outpourings for consumption by the rest of us(2). Given the ease of access to media content, studies of media output are legion, but only a handful or so of studies have conducted detailed 'behind the scenes' research. These studies, as discussed below, have won important insights into the complex of constraints, pressures and forces that surround, select and shape media output. Entering a media production domain continues, therefore, to provide a sense of entering relatively unexplored territory. While past studies have provided general maps to this terrain, there is no shortage of new research trails to be pursued. Moreover, given the shifting nature of the media industry landscape, as much as changes in mass communication theory in recent years, findings from studies of only a few years ago may now be in need of up-dating and revision. The promise of finding out and theorising something new always remains a distinct possibility.

Also, it would be difficult for any social scientist not to be excited by the opportunity of studying a media production domain, and news production particularly. The romanticised image of news workers as independent watchdogs challenging government and powerful vested interests may say more about the profession's self-projected image than what remains for the most part a highly bureaucratic and less than critical professional practice. Even so, media professionals have privileged access to important decision-makers, centres of power and the latest social and political happenings. Unlike the vast majority of participant observation studies, then, studies of media professionals are not concerned directly with the 'underdogs' of society - the poor, the dispossessed and those labelled as deviant - but, unusually, with an elite group which itself has close links to other powerful groups and institutions. If professional groups and organisations are generally better equipped to resist surveillance from outsiders (always ironic in the context of journalism with its much vaunted claim of 'the public's right to know'), once access has been gained this same professional and organisational power can become a fascinating subject for study in its own right. How journalists and the news media interact with other organised centres of professionalism and social and political power has long been observed by participant-observers to be a fundamental relationship of far-reaching importance, a relationship which the method of participant-observation is eminently suited to reveal.

Participant observation can also be highly *challenging*. It demands much from the researcher including a sustained and intensive period in the field and an ability to reflect upon and adapt one's ideas and behaviour throughout the research process. Strictly speaking participant observation is not a single method at all, but rather a methodological approach involving at least three different forms of data collection and associated skills. First, the researcher must learn to become a good observer; second, he or she must become skilled in talking with and interviewing his or her professional subjects; and, third, he or she must discover, retrieve and, on occasion, generate various forms of organisational documentation. On each count, issues of quantity or frequency can usefully be brought into play, though clearly participant observation draws more upon qualitative than quantitative modes of investigation and interpretation.

Whereas other research methods typically involve the design and deployment of a research instrument, whether a content analysis coding schedule, survey questionnaire or audience interview schedule, the participant observer becomes his or her own research instrument. S/he must physically place him or herself in a position from which to make observations (data collection) and is dependent upon the practical skills of writing-up field notes (data recording). How the participant observer responds to the unfamiliar professional environment and negotiates relationships in the field can also become the object of self-reflection and reflexivity. Reflection on one's own intellectual and emotional responses can provide important insights into the norms, and often unspoken, rules, customs and values informing the professional practices of those observed; it can also throw into sharp relief those of the researcher as well. This can prove to be a disorientating experience. As the researcher struggles to interpret and understand the working milieu of his/her professional subjects, so he or she is also forced to reflect on personal value positions, theoretical commitments and assumptions. Field relationships can also be a source of further discomfort and are likely to be renegotiated throughout the research experience. If all good research should involve reflexivity, participant observation by its very nature demands it.

This is partly why the method can prove so *rewarding*. Through striving to arrive at a deep understanding of a working milieu, organisational culture and professional practice different from one's own, the participant observer will also have to clarify, firm-up and possibly adjust his or her own theoretical preconceptions. Rewarding also, because participant observation literally rewards the researcher's efforts with unforeseen and fortuitous events, contingencies and new avenues of investigation. Whereas other mass communication researchers set out, rightly, with a focused set of questions, participant observers remain relatively open to in situ developments and impromptu lines of inquiry. This is not to suggest, however, that the method can be deployed in a theoretically innocent way. Prior reading, the development of background issues, and the identification of a basic areas of research interest inform participant observation as much as any other research strategy. Data rarely simply present themselves, but must be won with the help of a theoretically informed and selective process aiming for valid interpretations and findings of possible wider generalisability(3). That said, if the researcher can respond flexibly to opportunities when presented, unforeseen lines of inquiry can be pursued, new findings secured and, following a period of conceptual and theoretical labour, revised understanding may result. As with all good social science, the method of participant observation can develop our thinking in ways not anticipated and even challenge a priori theoretical commitments.

Participant observation can indeed, therefore, prove to be an exciting and challenging experience which, if conducted with commitment and reflexivity, will reward the researcher with improved understanding of his/her chosen group of professionals and their production domain. Often such understanding represents an explanatory gain in so far as we are now better equipped to understand exactly why media output assumes the forms that it does.

With the intention of providing a user-friendly and essentially practical introduction to the method of participant observation, this chapter now seeks to do three things. First, it briefly reviews a number of participant observation studies, identifying principal lines of inquiry and findings. Second, it provides a defence of the method, identifying a number of strengths before considering a source of possible weakness, its so-called 'methodological blindspot'. Third, and finally, it outlines step-by-step the typical sequence and stages to a participant observation study. With reference to actual participant studies this last discussion addresses possible difficulties encountered at each stage of research and provides possible solutions.

2. News Participant Observation Studies: A Brief Review

A wide range of social science literature concerned with the general field and methodology of ethnography now exists. This ranges from relatively straight forward introductions (Burgess, 1993; Fielding, 1993), to more detailed field manuals (Burgess(ed), 1983; Lofland and Lofland 1984; Bernard, 1994) as well as more theoretical discussions of basic ethnographic principles and practice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1986; Hammersley, 1992). These are all worth consulting, but obviously do not provide detailed discussion of media-related studies. Two recent discussions which review the sociology of news literature and situate production-based studies within the wider field of media theory may be found useful, though neither directly addresses issues of participant observation (Schudson, 1991; Cottle, 1993a).

In overview terms, it is possible to group news production studies into three overlapping phases: i) formative studies of news processes; ii) substantive ethnographies; and iii) focused production-based studies.

2.1 Formative studies of news processes.

These represent the first wave of significant journalist and news-making studies. Often failing to engage in a full production study of journalists and news-making, they nonetheless singled out aspects of the news process for detailed attention, whether the gatekeeping selections of news editors (White, 1950)(4); the reasons for journalist conformity to a news policy, both in relation to press newsrooms (Breed, 1955), and press and TV newsrooms compared (Warner, 1971); the effects of collective journalist expectancies upon reporting behaviour (Lang and Lang, 1953); the strategic use of 'objectivity' by journalists as a means of warding off criticism (Tuchman, 1972); the journalistic reliance upon typifications in routinizing the unexpected nature of news (Tuchman, 1973); or the role of organisational policies in conflict avoidance between reporters and their superiors (Sigelman, 1973).

These early studies, all worth reading to this day, pointed to the explanatory potential of attending to aspects of the news production process and becoming familiar with the journalist's working environment. Other studies did likewise, though these relied mainly on professional interview testimonies and retrospective accounts of media production and organisational factors. Thus early studies of specialist correspondents (Tunstall, 1971), crime reporters (Chibnall, 1977), the institution of the British Broadcasting Corporation(BBC) (Burns, 1977), and political programme makers (Tracey, 1978), all made numerous references to the determining influences of organisational contexts and production practices - as recounted by the professionals themselves. A seminal study of a particular news event, documenting journalist reporting practices based on interviews and observations of both TV and press newsrooms also proved influential with its discussion of how news values and a journalistic expectancy or 'inferential framework' came to structure the reporting of a major anti-Vietnam war demonstration (Halloran, Elliott and Murdock, 1970). These early studies, then, indicated something of the insights that could be won from attending to professional practices and the news production domain.

2.2 Substantive ethnographies.

Across the 1970s and 1980s a number of studies developed further this interest in the organisational, bureaucratic and professional nature of news production and news processing (Epstein, 1973; Altheide, 1974; Tuchman, 1978; Schlesinger, 1978; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987; Soloski, 1989). This second wave of studies truly deserves the anthropological label of 'ethnography'. Based on extensive and intensive periods of newsroom observations and interviews, sometimes conducted across many years and different news outlets, researchers became fully conversant with news making processes. How news was subject to temporal routines, how newsroom layouts were organised spatially, and how news processing was organised in relation to a newsroom division of labour and corporate hierarchy all became basic building blocks to understanding. Indeed it is this organisational character of news production that has remained a consistent theme across these studies and provides a key to understanding news and its ideological limitations: 'The organisational imperatives of network news, and the logics that proceed from these demands, irrisistibly shape the picture of society in consistent directions' (Epstein, 1973: 265); 'The routines of production have definite consequences in structuring news...The doings of the world are tamed to meet the needs of a production system in many respects bureaucratically organised' (Schlesinger, 1978: 47); 'It is the organisation of news, not events in the world, that creates news' (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987: 345).

Researchers also observed the professional pursuit of deep-seated news values and the operation of a journalistic culture and milieu sustaining of colleague relationships, journalist professionalism and news policies. Indeed participant observers of journalism continue to draw attention to the organisational function that both professionalism and news policies can play: 'Both news professionalism and news policy are used to minimise conflict within the news organisation... Like a game, professional norms and news policies are rules that everyone has learnt to play by; only rarely are these rules made explicit, and only rarely are the rules called into question' (Soloski, 1989: 218).

On occasions researchers became so deeply immersed in the professional culture of their subjects, some even admit to temporarily 'going native'. This further reference to the anthropological literature and the phenomenon first recounted by anthropologists of loosing their sense of cultural identity when immersed in the culture of their host society, again indicates the extent and depth of researcher involvement in the world of journalism. These studies in the sociology of news represent a substantive literature, rich in empirical detail and theorisation of the mechanics of news production. They also drew attention to a wider field of interaction however. Gaye Tuchman, for example, argues her study:

> "emphasises the ways in which professionalism and decisions flowing from professionalism are a result of organisational needs. It explores the processes by which news is socially constructed, how occurrences in the everyday world are rendered into stories occupying time and space in the world called news. This theoretical task makes the book not only an empirical study in the sociologies of mass communication, organisations, and occupations and professions, but also an applied study in the sociology of knowledge".(Tuchman 1978: 2)

While others may demur from Tuchman's social constructionist approach, studies of news production have generally sought to examine the relationship between news centres and the wider society. A wider society, that is, which is also in large measure institutionally organised and structured in dominance. Here a key finding of most studies concerns the way in which news producers and news production generally depend upon a few institutions of organised power for routine news copy. Bureaucratically expedient and serving journalist claims to objectivity via accessed authoritative (and authority) comment, news organisations access, as a matter of routine, official spokespeople and the views of the powerful (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, 1978). Whether the media serve as 'primary' or 'secondary definers', or perhaps as something else, is currently a moot point. But what is apparently clear from the studies above is the heavy dependence of bureaucratically organised news institutions upon other, resource-rich, knowledge disseminating institutions. The obverse obtains: resource-poor, unorganised knowledge sources will find it relatively hard to secure favourable routine news entry (Gitlin 1980). Taken together, these studies have produced an invaluable sociological record and analysis of news production and the forces constraining news output. In short, no would-be participant observer can fail to recognise their achievement. Even so, recent studies have developed new lines of interest.

2.3 Focused production-based studies.

More recent studies, loosely termed here ‘focused production-based studies’, indicate that much remains to be gleaned from the method of participant observation. This is not surprising; as mass communication theory and media industries change, so past findings and new inquiries inevitably point to the continuing relevance of research. Recent American studies, for instance, all deploying participant observation have pointed to the impacts of the ‘competitive ethos’ of news making on news output (Erlich, 1995), the market-driven nature of local news (McManus 1994), and the role of the sub-cultural milieu of specialist war correspondents (Pedelty, 1995). More generally three theoretical developments now look set to inform future research in this area and can be grouped around concerns of media-centrism, media differentiation and notions of the ‘public sphere’.

Whereas substantive ethnographies focused more or less exclusively upon media-source relationships from the journalists’ point of view and their working domain, recent studies have sought to realign theoretical sights in a less media-centric way and pursue the operation of major source institutions and their news interventions (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1989; Schlesinger 1990; Schlesinger, Tumber and Murdock, 1991; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). This opens up a whole new vista on the play of institutionalised social power and the circulation of knowledge claims within the public arena, and necessarily corrects previous tendencies to privilege media organisations and actors. Work has only begun in this area but already important insights have been secured at the interface between news sources and news organisations. It can be anticipated that participant observation, in contrast to the interview method, will shortly be fully deployed in a major news source organisation. The value of participant observation has also recently been demonstrated in a study of a further media related, but hitherto neglected, domain (a major oversight of mass communication research), that of a professional journalist training school (Parry, 1990).

Increased recognition that the mass media and news media may not be quite the 'dominant ideology disseminating monolith' once presumed, points to increased interest in news differentiation. If all news outlets are bureaucratically organised and heavily reliant upon certain new sources how are we to account for evident differences of news output, both within and between broadcasting and press output? Here observations of news workers and news processes can be carried out with an interest not so much in the general production of news, but rather the production of a differentiated news product. A recent participant observation study of the distinctive, popular, but relatively neglected, UK regional TV news form aimed to do just that (Cottle, 1993b). Relatedly, past findings concerning organisational reliance upon key news sources may also need to be qualified in the light of discerned differences of hierarchies of news actor access, particularly in relation to populist TV news and press forms (Cottle, 1993c) as well as across news subject areas, whether crime or the environment for example. Detailed participant observations of journalist text and discourse processing also continues to promise insights which could not be achieved by any other method (Van Dijk, 1988: 95-137; Bell, 1991; Cottle, 1991; Jacobs, 1996).

Recent research into the media informed by ideas of the 'public sphere' has sensitised many to the contested nature of public discourse and the facilitating or constraining impact of media forms on accessed voices (Elliott, Murdock and Schlesinger, 1986; Cottle, 1993b; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). Participant observation of programme design and production will, no doubt, in future throw considerable light on considerations of choice of programme form and their impact on mediated public contestation and debate. A recent discussion highlighting production considerations influencing choice of different news formats, each differentially enabling or disabling opportunities for news access and discursive participation, is perhaps a case in point (Cottle, 1995). Though none of the above may be 'substantive ethnographies' in the sense described above, each points to new and promising departure points for further participant observation inquiry. In short, access permitting, the field is wide open.

3. Participant Observation: Strengths and Methodological Blindspots

From the discussion so far a number of strengths of the method have already become apparent. These can now be formalised and added to as follows(5). The method of participant observation:

1. Records and makes the invisible visible
2. Counters the ‘problem of inference’
3. Improves upon other methods through triangulation
4. Qualifies or corrects speculative theoretical claims
5. Reminds us of the contingent nature of cultural production
6. Provides evidence for the dynamic as well as embedded nature of cultural production

3.1 Records and make the invisible visible

Participant observation is the only method by which the normally invisible realm of media production can be recorded and made available for wider consideration. Published insider accounts and interview testimonies may be of interest, but these remain dependent upon insider viewpoints and values. As such, though they may be rich in anecdotes and tell us about professional value judgements and perspectives, the fact remains that media practitioners immersed in their professional outlook and working ethos may be poorly placed to articulate and reflect upon the taken-for-granted assumptions or wider systems of constraints routinely informing media work and output.

3.2. Counters the ‘problem of inference’

Participant observation goes behind the scenes of media output to help reveal the complex of forces, constraints and conventions that inform the shape, selections and silences of media output. Too often critics of the media have made the illicit leap from a critical reading of media content to inferences about motivations or explanations accounting for this output. In such accounts, ideas of agency and intentionality, even conspiracy, are likely to be forefronted though these may be far from accurate explanations. Participant observation studies continue to provide empirical findings of direct relevance to explanations about media output. They can also analyse unused and edited news material and observe editorial processes consigning such material to the newsroom waste bin. This is potentially revealing, but out of bounds to the cultural critic dependent upon published/transmitted news.

3.3 Improves upon other methods through triangulation

As stated above, participant observation typically deploys a number of methods including observation, talk and interviews, and attending to documentary sources. Though each on its own may be considered to have its weaknesses, together they provide a solid source of evidence and findings which can be triangulated. That is, claims and accounts produced from one source can be contrasted to those from another. Consistencies can be recognised and interpreted, discrepancies or differences can be pursued further, but all in pursuit of deeper, more valid, interpretations. Triangulation can be carried out in a variety of ways - across time, space, personnel, settings, organisations, methods, and researchers. But one only needs to consider the discrepancy between, say, a local TV journalist's claim in interview to support community news access as a matter of course, and newsroom observations of that same journalist routinely relying on only institutional sources, as well as perhaps a quantitative breakdown of newsroom documents detailing accessed spokespersons, to appreciate the value of triangulation. When presented with such evidence, the journalist may well proceed to provide a more meaningful account of community access and those possible practical or professional reasons for the discrepancy between stated aims, newsroom observations and documented outcome. This can prompt, in turn, further multi-pronged inquiries until the researcher is confident that a realistic understanding and interpretation of the situation has been achieved.

3.4. Qualifies or corrects speculative theoretical claims

Media theory has never been short of ambitious theoretical approaches. While improved understanding can only proceed within the guiding framework of theory, theories should never be allowed to remain at a speculative level only: they must be encouraged to engage with sources of evidence. Participant observation of news organisations provides a rich source of evidence which can usefully be put to a wide range of theoretical approaches, including instrumental conspiracy theories, social compositional approaches, political economy and cultural studies perspectives. These, and other approaches, frequently claim to have identified the mechanisms accounting for partisan or discerned ideological forms of media output. On each count, findings from the studies reviewed have tended to contradict or at least qualify some of the more blanket statements advanced by each.

3.5 Reminds us of the contingent nature of cultural production

Related to the above, it is sometimes easy to become so immersed within the guiding framework of a theoretical approach that the world can assume the form of an aesthetically pleasing, but empirically distorted, theoretical object. Both the 'billiard ball smoothness' of some ideological analyses of cultural processes criticised by Paul Willis, or the arid and mechanical apparatuses termed the 'orrery or errors' associated with Althusserian Marxism by E.P.Thompson, both some time ago, usefully remind us that processes of cultural production and consumption are likely to be less clean, less tidy, more happenstance, more leaky than theorists sometimes acknowledge. Attending to both the routine and the contingent nature of media production, in all its complexity, dents the idea that cultural production is a smooth running operation and points to the 'mediatedness' of cultural processes.

3.6 Provides evidence for the dynamic as well as embedded nature of cultural production_

It is also the case that media production is not hermetically sealed from the rest of society and its dynamics of change. Cultural production must constantly respond to wider forces of change - whether political, commercial, technological, cultural. Participant observation studies have identified a number of these pressures for change in action, and observed how past corporate 'settlements' of programme design, production and output have become unsettled. Once again, such studies draw attention, simultaneously, both to the embedded industrial nature of cultural production, as well as its responsiveness to forces of change.

4. The Methodological Blindspot Reconsidered

All methods have their weaknesses, all have blindspots. Participant observation, of course, is no exception. Nonetheless, and for reasons already indicated, the weakness of this particular method may be less damaging than sometimes claimed. The criticism often takes two forms.

First, that the focus of attention on the immediate organisational vicinity of news production is likely to privilege precisely those organisational considerations of production and, in consequence, will be insufficiently sensitive towards, or aware of, those wider but impacting extra-organisational forces - those of commercialism and the marketplace say, or the surrounding cultural repertoire of discourses and values reproduced by journalists and programme makers. This criticism could, possibly, be on target if participant observation studies were conducted through the theoretically innocent prism of naive empiricism. Almost without exception, however, the studies reviewed escape this charge. Most have devoted considerable attention to the interaction between media production and wider society, even if deliberately focusing upon internal organisational and professional arrangements. If the immediate production domain is the principal object of investigation, how and to what extent and with what impact wider commercial forces or surrounding cultural typifications, for example, inform the operations of the media organisation have not, for the most part, been lost from view. My own study, for example, was acutely aware of, and observed at close quarters, the intensified commercial, technological and political pressures bearing down upon a particular media organisation and how this then resulted in corporate restructuring and affected programme design, production and output (Cottle, 1993b). Far from bracketing off such wider pressures and forces, production studies can throw them into sharp relief at that very point where they impact the most.

Second, it has been argued ‘the ethnographic approach has a methodological blindspot that tends to obscure the way in which managerial pressures are brought to bear on journalists’ (Curran, 1990: 144). This is, perhaps, a more damaging criticism since, as Curran has suggested, ‘it is difficult to gain regular access as a participant observer to senior levels of management’ and ‘managerial controls are rarely exercised with continuous force’ (Curran, 1989: 132). In response, difficulties there may be, but senior decision-making as well as variations in editorial and corporate control do not necessarily escape the participant observers net. A number of studies have stepped outside of the newsroom and deliberately sought to gauge the informing impact and control exercised from higher up the corporate line of command (Burns, 1977; Schlesinger, 1978; Cottle, 1993b). Cross-referenced interviews at comparable levels of management seniority as well as with those above and below (further forms of triangulation), and all informed by observations of programme production and change, can provide considerable insight into corporate and editorial lines of command and control. Schlesinger's research, for example, provides an exemplary study of how a participant observer was able to recover and interpret the formal and informal channels of control at the BBC arguing: 'The command structure does not usually perform its work of editorial control through obvious routine intervention at the production level. Rather, in general it works according to a system of retrospective review, as a result of which guidance is referred downwards and becomes part of the taken for granted assumptions of those working in the newsrooms', also, 'a commitment to the BBC's Weltanschauung is central to the mediation of control' (Schlesinger, 1987: 162).

Clearly, senior management intervention and editorial involvement is recoverable through participant observation. In summary, while participant observers must never assume their observations will necessarily capture the shifting, and largely invisible, play of corporate power and editorial control, the involvement of surrounding cultural typifications or the relentless pressure of the marketplace, there are good grounds for suggesting that the method, if applied to various corporate levels, departments and professional strata and drawing upon as many sources of data as one can muster, will leave the approach with at least one eye fully open.

5. Participant Observation: Sequence and Stages of Research

The discussion so far has hopefully introduced the method of participant observation. A review of studies has indicated the variety of inquiries pursued to date and some of their principal findings. The method's strengths as well as possible principal weakness have also been considered. But what about the method itself? How, exactly, should you go about putting the method into practice and what do you need to consider when operationalising it? This last part of the discussion provides a step-by-step approach to the method and its typical research sequence. But first a health warning.

The problem with published research studies, many of which you are probably about to read, is that they read as so eminently logical, perfectly executed and just so damn pristine with everything in its place. The reality of the research process, as any one who has been involved in research will attest, typically falls far short of the image found in the published (polished) report. Participant observation, perhaps more than most other methods, as indicated earlier, is destined to be reflexive, open to the contingencies of the field experience and therefore less than strictly linear in its execution or predictable in its findings. The health warning now over, it is also the case, however, that 'good' participant observation depends upon a series of sequenced research stages each of which forms an indispensable part of the ethnographic research process. Six analytically distinct (but in practice typically overlapping) stages to participant observation can now be discussed in turn under the following.

1. Design
2. Access
3. Field relationships
4. Collecting and recording data
5. Analysing data
6. Write-up

5.1 Design

As with all academic research, the researcher needs to have at least some idea of what they are about, why they are about it, how they intend to go about it, what they hope to achieve by it and what they intend to do with it once they have achieved it. Participant observation studies are no exception. It is only on the basis of answers to these fundamental questions that a research design can begin to take shape. Whether an undergraduate or postgraduate student, a salaried or a commissioned researcher, research will take place within inevitable confines. Principally those of time and resources. While you may be able to do little to increase either quantitatively, prior reading, reflection and the development of a broad area of theoretically informed interest or, better, the formulation of a research problem, may enhance qualitatively what can be achieved in relation to each. As the review of studies has indicated, much interesting work has already been carried out, it would be foolhardy to ignore this considerable body of insight; there is little value in setting out to rediscover the wheel. On the other hand, you should not assume that all the interesting work has been done either. As published findings settle into orthodoxies so, at the very least, it is possible to pursue one or more of these with a view to going deeper or wider than previous studies may have done, arriving at a new, probably refined, perhaps revised or, even, rejected, conclusion. In all events, you will have made an important contribution to the field and moved the debate on.

At a more ambitious level, you may have identified a relatively unexplored or new set of theoretical concerns for investigation, in which case your study will be embarking on an original trail. Even here, however, the value of your study will depend, in large measure, on its discerned improvement over existing knowledge and theoretical frameworks. It is necessary, therefore, to become familiar with extant literature, if only to engage with it before moving on to new research pastures. At a preliminary level the research design should seek to formulate general areas of interest and recognise that your research will, inevitably, be confined by time and resources. This is probably the most important stage of any research programme; much that follows will depend on informed and clear thinking at this stage. It should be seen as a period of considerable intellectual labour and granted sufficient time within the overall research period. All the studies reviewed above have set out informed by prior reading and the identification of general areas of research interest.

The research design can be seen as a kind of map, identifying the route you intend to take, the approximate time allowed to travel between a number of milestones along the way, and the final point of destination. Of course, there are potentially limitless journeys and different destinations. It is as well to remember that you can't travel to them all, no matter how interesting they may be. It is better to arrive decisively at one destination with a good record of where you have been, than set out on a number of poorly documented or confused false-starts. In the case of participant observation the research design should aim to incorporate all six stages discussed here, filling in as much detail as you can about each. Of course, some of the detail will only become apparent at later stages of research, but even at the outset it is important to try and predict and plan as far as possible the research process, including anticipated problems and, importantly, the amount of time you intend to devote to each stage.

There are no set times for conducting participant observation, nor guidelines on what or how many media should be studied. All depends, of course, on the overall research aims and, no doubt, limitations of time, resources and conditions of access. That said, Gans, for example, chose to study two TV news programmes, and two major weekly magazines and did this in two phases, having visited each over several months between 1965 and 1969, followed up by a second phase in 1975 which involved a further month of visits and interviews and finally last minute interviews in 1978 before writing-up (Gans, 1979: xii). Tuchman also drew upon a lengthy period of investigations conducted over a ten year period, involving observation and interviews at a TV station, newspaper office, central city press room and interviews with involved participants in, and reporters of, the women's movement (Tuchman, 1978:9-12). Ericson, Baranek and Chan pursued a team approach to field-work between 1982 and 1983 which comprised 200 researcher days in the field or a total of 2,500 hours, including the preparation of field notes; they spent 101 days with a newspaper over a nine-month period, and 86 days with a TV station over a seven-month period (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987: 86). Clearly, participant observation can be extremely time-consuming. Less ambitious, but nonetheless important, studies confined to one medium and organisation, and with a manageable and focused set of production-based inquiries, could achieve a great deal in a relatively concentrated short period of time. The old maxim applies: cut one's cloth according to one's means.

5.2 Access

One of the first hurdles, and potential stumbling blocks, to any participant observation study is access. Without access the study is a non-starter. The literature includes accounts of difficulties and partial refusals, as well as limitations placed upon would-be observers. A few observers, however, have managed to avoid all such problems because they are already in situ. This raises the question of the exact status of the 'participant-observer'.

A few studies have been conducted by former, novice or paid in-situ reporters and journalists (Breed, 1955; Murphy, 1976; Fishman, 1980; Soloski, 1989). Soloski, for example, worked as a copy-editor on a news desk with the specific purpose of studying its news organisation. These participant-observers, though avoiding usual problems of access and undoubtedly securing an intimate vantage point on news processes, may also have been constrained by having to carry out a job of work and thus less mobile or flexible in what they could pursue. On the other hand, observer-participants who remain outsiders to the group studied may loose something of that insider knowledge, but are likely to have more autonomy in their movements and ability to follow-up new avenues of interest. In practice, as time goes by and as the researcher becomes acquainted with the field setting and manages to forge useful relationships with his or her professional subjects, it is not unknown for the researcher to be afforded a sort of 'honorary insider' status, to the extent that confidences will be shared, and even requests to carry out certain professional tasks will be made (cf. Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987: 90-91). In these circumstances, the strict distinction between participant-observer and observer-participant becomes less clear, and in any event is likely to change in line with the changing nature of field relationships throughout the research process.

Assuming that most researchers do not already have an established journalistic role, access must be gained. This can be easier said than done, though it is probably a great deal easier now than in the past. Some time ago Philip Schlesinger recounted how the BBC reluctantly granted him access and some of the lengths he had to go to in order to secure it, but how 'ITN (Independent Television News) has kept its doors firmly locked' (Schlesinger, 1980: 341-44). Thankfully, in the 1990s in the United Kingdom at least, perhaps there is now a less mistrustful or paranoiac response to researchers' requests. Even so, a few general principles obtain. Do your homework, find out who's who in the organisation and consider carefully who you need to approach first. Provide sufficient information about your proposed research in a non-threatening matter, and suggest a provisional meeting where you will be more than happy to explain your intentions and the value of the research. The 'friend of a friend' approach often proves useful. That is, if you have contacts it generally helps to use them. Family, friends, relatives, colleagues, past researchers in the field, and acquaintances of all of them, can prove instrumental in paving the way to gaining access. Always be sensitive to the demands that you are placing upon an organisation, be courteous, and remain cool in the face of unwarranted refusal. If you don't at first succeed, rethink your strategy, and try and try again.

Finally, a word of warning. As a condition of access never give an undertaking not to publish material that your host organisation thinks unacceptable. The cautionary tale of Tom Burn's study of the BBC is still worth recounting: 'It was quickly made clear to me that their sole interest in the report was in preventing its publication. In this they were able to rely, as they were entitled to do, on the undertaking I had given not to publish anything based on the study without the consent (which did not necessarily mean the approval) of the Corporation' (Burns, 1977: xiv).

5.3 Field relationships

An important key to successful participant observation is the forming of useful field relationships; it can also, on occasion, be one of the most difficult things to do. Having successfully gained access it is imperative that you get off on the right foot, introducing yourself to all interested parties and reassuring them that you are not the academic variant of Attila the Hun out to murder professional reputations and pillage newsrooms in pursuit of publishing trophies and academic kudos. You may find, for example, that your entry into the newsroom if agreed at a more senior level, is not entirely welcomed on the ground. You are also likely to come across a prevalent journalist mythology that all researchers of news and journalism are held of the conviction that news is 'biased' and that all researchers are out to pin the blame on them personally. In the past some researchers may have done little to disabuse journalists of this view, and you may find it difficult to shake off and have to deal with a good deal of mistrust. With time however, and as familiarity grows between you and your subjects, newsroom relationships will depend less on generalised myths, and more on your personal conduct and interactions.

Part of this process is a two-way street. As you invite journalists to respond to you in a more meaningful way, so you may have to adjust any preconceptions you may have about journalists. One researcher I know quite well, for example, first entered a newsroom with a sense of trepidation, wondering if he could really mine the depths of this imposing milieu of high-powered professionalism. Perhaps clutching for reassurance he struggled to hold on to what differentiated him from those around him: his academic reading of mass communication theory. Imagine his surprise on talking to two newsroom reporters to find that one had recently completed postgraduate study at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham and the other at the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester - two of the leading UK departments in critical mass media studies!

One way of ingratiating yourself into the newsroom in a relatively painless way is by first carrying out a number of basic but informative tasks. It is often useful, for example, to familiarise yourself with the basic organisation of the newsroom, who sits where, and their respective responsibilities. As you draw your spatial and personnel map, so you can introduce yourself to the individuals concerned, ‘break the ice’ and gain basic nuts and bolts information. A similar exercise can be carried out over the first few days or weeks observing and recording the various newsroom rhythms and temporal processes. Such information is likely to be indispensable later, and provides you and your subjects with a relatively easy lead-in to your period of participant observation.

Clearly, the success of the enterprise depends on forming useful and informative relationships, but what should the role or projected stance of the researcher be? And how have journalists responded to researchers? Past researchers have noted how this can vary on a number of factors. It has been suggested, for example, that whereas such prominent and experienced academics as Tom Burns, Herbert Gans or Richard Ericson may have been at ease with their senior media counterparts, young postgraduate researchers, as Philip Schlesinger and Gaye Tuchman then were, may have enjoyed less defensiveness on the part of newsroom workers (Tuchman, 1991: 86)(6). Interestingly, Schlesinger notes how journalists were often curious at first and even flattered that ‘respectable’ academic interest should be directed at their work. This later gave way to a more sceptical attitude informed, he says, by surrounding public controversies about the news and a recently published news study (Schlesinger, 1980: 352-3). He also relates how his personal style was self-effacing and how he took care not to proclaim commitments or convictions (op.cit: 353). Though this was fostered, in part, in response to the prevailing personal-style of the BBC, his host organisation, it probably remains general sound advice.

Continuing acceptance within the newsroom and the willingness of professionals to volunteer information and insights depends on finding and an acceptable 'front' or newsroom role. This may have to be renegotiated throughout the research period. Perhaps a stance of respectful humility and naiveté, appropriate at the beginning of the research process, may later change to that of a deeply interested and informed inquirer. The nearer the presented 'self' to that of your actual state of mind and feelings the better, so long as it is the most appropriate (and ethical) stance for eliciting responses from others. Self-reflection and reflexivity, as always, are called for. As social actors we all tend to be practised in the skills of 'front-management', and it is important to be sensitive to the various cues presented from others in interaction and, as occasion demands, adjust and renegotiate relationships.

Lastly, for some the sudden immersion into what can appear a strange environment where everyone, apart from you, is an insider and has a role can be anxiety-inducing. It is as well to remember that feelings of isolation and difference are a product of the enterprise on which you are embarked and not a sign of personal inadequacy. Having a temporary retreat (if only periodic trips to the toilet) from where you can reflect, write up brief notes and plan your next period of observation, is generally recognised to be important. If your front-managed role is at variance with your normal public demeanour, this may also be a place of timely retreat. Interestingly, however, and as discussed below, exiting the field can also generate feelings of discomfort, as the researcher now struggles to find a renewed critical distance.

5.4 Collecting and recording data

The three techniques of data collection involved in participant observation - observation, talk and interviews, scrutiny of documents - all generate a mass of details, information and general impressions that need to be collected and recorded.

Without adequate recording of the field experience in all its aspects, later stages of the research process will be seriously impaired. Take observations first. Observers can become practised in observing settings, scenes and interactions. The problem comes in knowing exactly what to record and what not to. Part of the solution may lie in directing your observation to certain phenomena and occurrences and not others. For example, as suggested above, a useful thing to begin with is the basic spatial, temporal and hierarchical infrastructure of the newsroom. Having documented these in detail in your field log, you may then want to pursue particular lines of interest, or follow particular activities or personnel in a more detailed way, always allowing for the contingent, the unexpected or the simply 'interesting' (even if you do not quite know why it is 'interesting' at this stage).

As a rule of thumb fieldnotes should aim principally to record, not comment or rush to make wider interpretations or theoretical connections. They should be written-up from basic observation notes and memory prompts, and within a day or so at the latest if memory drop-out is to be avoided. They should record basic data for subsequent reflection, ordering and analysis. Good description of settings, scenes, people, events and interactions may prove invaluable later. However, as this labour of recording takes place so you will undoubtedly be stimulated to make more critical comments, see connections between your data and findings and arguments from other studies, and raise a number of questions and issues for future reference and possible development. These should also be jotted down as prompts for further thought and later analysis. A wide margin or separate space on each page of your field log for such conceptual/ analytical thoughts is a useful way of encouraging this formative process of reflection.

Talk, impromptu conversations and structured and semi-structured interviews can quickly generate an avalanche of data. (For a more detailed discussion of conducting interviews see chapter 9 in this volume). An immediate response to the newsroom setting may be to grab the tape recorder and press 'RECORD'. This needs to be considered carefully however. A tape recorder accepted by those present in one setting, may be felt to be intrusive and affect what is said in another. Tape recorders can capture hundreds of hours of talk and sounds, but who is going to translate all this and make sense of it? It can take an average typist anything up to three hours to transcribe one hour of taped talk, more if the quality of the recording is poor. In my study, for example, I found the use of a small pocket-size tape recorder ideal for recording newsroom morning conferences and weekly forward planning conferences; these relatively short meetings of assembled journalists provided a rich source of dense journalistic comment and verbalised decision-making. The pressurised nature of the occasion - decisions had to be made fast - minimised the possible effects of either my presence or that of the (inconspicuous) tape recorder. These recorded exchanges provided some of the most insightful professional exchanges, revealing journalistic values and judgements in action (Cottle, 1993b: 74-76). The tape recorder was also used for a series of formal interviews and impromptu interviews, generating many hours of material for transcription and later analysis. However, when overhearing journalist newsroom talk and participating in informal conversation, it was clear that others would feel the tape recorder to be intrusive and, in some sense, a betrayal of the informal nature of the relationship entered into. Judgements have to be made with a view to fostering long-term relationships. ‘Record and run’, or ‘smash and grab’ raids are of little use in serious participant observation study where a sense of trust needs to be cultivated for long-term gains.

Newsrooms, news organisations and news sources all generate a wealth of documentation both hard copy and, increasingly, on computer disc. The researcher is likely to want to gain access to this and secure copies of selected documents. Newsrooms are bombarded daily with press releases through the post and fax machines; they typically monitor press agencies' reports via computer systems, and have access to computerised archival records and picture libraries; they daily monitor other news outlets including rival news organisations whether press, TV or radio; they monitor official listings such as court lists; they put together portfolios of press clippings and other documentation related to past and present news stories - especially running stories; they generate their own news copy and various edited versions of the same, often stored on a centralised computer system; they produce running orders, meeting agendas, prospect lists, and circulate memoranda; they make and transmit/publish news documents whether TV and radio broadcasts or newspapers; journalists also scribble notes to themselves and each other. Even the simplest document can be a source of insight and evidence. A memo, for example, which simply told all newsroom journalists to wear their contact bleepers in case of trouble before the Handsworth Carnival, is suggestive, with other sources of evidence, of a journalistic ‘trouble’ frame in operation (Cottle, 1993b: 86). With the advent of photocopiers and, if fortunate, granted access to computerised news related material and a print-out system, the researcher is able to collect/record a vast amount of relevant documentation. He/she may also generate their own newsroom related documentation, for example, a quantitative analysis of incoming news sources (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987: 182-3).

Clearly, participant observation will rapidly generate reams of data for later analysis. If this data is to be easily retrievable an appropriate system of storage, ordering and indexing needs to be considered.

5.5 Analysing data

As stated at the outset the analytical stages of the research sequence do not, and should not, be seen as chronologically separate. For example, you will undoubtedly have been stimulated to think about your collected data while in the process of collecting and recording it. Indeed, you probably began to order your material even before it was collected in so far as you deliberately directed your observations, conversations and interviews and retrieval of certain documents in particular ways and directions. The process of data analysis, then, is a protracted part of the research process. However, having collected your tome of field notes, transcripts and countless sources of documentation (which may well run to many hundreds of pages), it is now the time to begin to sort through what there is and identify the material which will be shaped into your final presentation. At this point it usually helps to put some space between you and the field setting. This is more than a symbolic act indicating that you have reached an important stage in the progress of your research. It may also prove necessary to regain a sense of critical distance, both literal and figurative, on your field experience and the deep appreciation of a professional milieu. Schlesinger describes this necessary adjustment as a time of ‘disengagement’, in contrast to the equally necessary process of ‘captivation’ earlier, and maintains: ‘integral to this process was the gradual reassertion of the primacy of sociological concerns. The main effort of simply decoding a journalistic setting was in the past; it was now possible to address the material I had gathered more theoretically' (Schlesinger 1980: 355).

Part of the process of analysis, then, requires you to read and re-read your notes and documents, and begin to identify cognate or related material, develop ideas about a number of core themes or areas of interest, and begin to order your material accordingly. A first step in this process might be to produce an index of all your material based on extant news study indexes and self-generated concepts/themes and issues. These may prompt the development of possible covering themes or concerns. You may also find it useful at this point to re-read relevant studies to see how your material relates to or departs from previous findings. You should endeavour to work up from your material however, rather than simply selecting one or two instances which may appear to confirm or contradict established findings and arguments. In short, this stage of the research process may be experienced as the most stressful, confronted as you are with an inert pile of field notes, thoughts from prior reading and your recent struggle to get a theoretical hold on both your material and recent experience. This, undoubtedly, is a time of sweat and perseverance.

To make the task more manageable you may want to make multiple copies of your field notes and physically allocate selected material to a number of relevant piles (or shoe boxes)(7). It is then easier to see what you've got. Your material may warrant the formulation of concepts or ideal-types as a means of describing important differences. For example, in my study of a regional TV newsroom, and contrary to the idea found in the literature of general newsroom consensus and conformity, I found a strong difference of opinion and professional approach. This appeared to cohere around what, for descriptive purposes, could be termed the old-guard of 'news magazine entertainers' and the new breed of 'news programme informers' with both influencing the distinctive populist nature of the current news programme (Cottle, 1993b: 37-68). Building such forms of conceptualisation up from your data, even at this relatively simple level, helps to get a purchase on your material, organise it and begin to engage with wider findings from media research and issues of media theory. Ideally this process continues until you have identified a number of themes each supported by a wide range of relevant field evidence and documentation which, in turn, may support revised or new forms of conceptualisation and ordering, and possibly relate to identified positions and debates of media theory. You should also be considering how these broad themes or areas relate theoretically to each other and how they could provide a general framework for the overall argument and written presentation. Writing by now will probably have already begun with provisional chapter length discussions of selected themed material or case studies.

It is perhaps worth restating once more, that this stage of formal analysis is not intellectually separate from everything that has gone before, even though it can be discussed separately. Remember, in so far as the research design initially identified broad areas of concern, later followed up in the field study itself and recorded in fieldnotes with accompanying analytical and conceptual prompts, so this stage is unlikely to be bereft of ideas. The opposite, in fact, is more likely, with the main problem now one of identifying which of your many ideas and sources of accompanying data, evidence and conceptualisation will form the core discussions, and which will play a more subsidiary role.

5.6 Write-up

The process of final write-up is intimately related to the stage of analysis. In fact the two are almost entirely inseparable to the extent that the process of writing is a continuation of the analytical process. As every writer knows, it is only when you put pen to paper that you discover what you don't know and are forced to revisit sources and struggle with the organisation of thoughts. Do not underestimate the amount of time realistically needed to carry out formal analysis and writing-up, both are a time of considerable intellectual labour and will consume many weeks and months of your waking thoughts. At this point in your life you run the risk of boring everyone to death, including the cat, with your incessant babble about seemingly (to them) obscure ideas. That's okay; to be a temporary obsessive is to be fully engaged in something you find intellectually exciting and will help you complete your project. As first and second draft chapters are won, so the shape and organisation of your overall presentation should also begin to be constructed. There is no right or wrong way to write up your material, but it may help to consult related published studies and see how they have managed it. You may also want to give serious thought to the prose style adopted and the 'voice' or 'register in which it is written; whether, for example, you write in the first-person replete with personal accounts and reflections, or perhaps in the seemingly more detached tones of an impartial observer, dispassionately portraying the scene as you found it. Ultimately, there is more at stake here than convention; how you present your claims to knowledge and understanding is likely to relate to where you stand in relation to the positivist-realist-interpretivist continuum that informs social science practice and epistemology.

How you organise your material is also theoretically meaningful. As already indicated, when discussing how fieldnotes and documents can usefully be separated and allocated to themed piles, your material is unlikely to remain at a descriptive or chronological level, simply narrating the 'story' of what you did and saw etcetera. Indeed, it is likely to be poor ethnography if it did this. Rather, both the organisation of your material and write-up will seek to reinforce the shape and form of your analysis. So, for example, the presentation may follow the principal themes now organised into chapters, or it could present a series of case studies each developing a particular argument. Perhaps it could follow the temporal flow of news processing through stages of story assigning, reporting and editing. There again, it could work its material inwards from wider extra-organisational pressures to corporate structures down to newsroom routines to final news story processing, or reverse the direction of analysis and presentation outwards from the newsroom to wider society. Decisions on how to organise and present your participant observation study can only be decided by you in the light of what does justice to your material, analysis and general informing theoretical framework.

Most book length studies typically opt for a combined form of presentation from the above. Schlesinger, for example, provides a historical chapter, a chapter outlining basic news processing, three newsroom-related themed chapters, a chapter which widens its sights to the level of the corporation, a case study chapter and a conclusion (Schlesinger, 1978). Ericson, Baranek and Chan adopt a more straight forward approach with introductory theoretical and methodological chapters, followed by chapters on the news institution, the news process and a conclusion (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987). Tuchman, for her part, presents her study through two chapters concerned with the basic spatial and temporal structures of news organisations, followed by a more detailed examination of journalist professionalism, and chapters on news facticity and one on narrative. These are followed by a detailed case study, wider discussion of news in contemporary capitalism, and theoretical discussion of news as form of social knowledge (Tuchman, 1978). Each of these presentations works in its own right, and each manages to construct an organised sequence of interrelated chapter discussions. Analysis and presentation appear to be mutually reinforcing. What none of them do, is descend to the level of a descriptive narrative of the participation observation field experience. This is not surprising because the field experience, though indispensable, is only the means to an end, not the end itself. The end, of course, is the developed analysis and formulation of improved understanding and theorisation of news, news making processes and the relation between news and wider society. Participant observation remains eminently suited to this important task.

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*	Studies of media organisations and production provide findings and insights simply not available by other means. These findings provide a basis from which differing theoretical approaches to the mass media - whether conspiracy theories, social compositional accounts, studies in political economy or cultural studies approaches - can be appraised and their (often) generalising claims qualified.

*	The 'method' most often used in studies of media organisations and production is that of participant observation. This involves a number of differing methods and skills including observation, interviewing, documentary collection and generation.

*	Participant observation can prove to be a highly exciting, challenging and rewarding method. The researcher must adapt his/her theoretical and methodological approach as well as personal stance in the field as the research proceeds. This calls for reflexivity, opportunism and, in terms of the methods used, creative eclecticism.

* Given the nature of the research opportunity and the contingencies of the field experience, the researcher must be open to the possibilities of the unexpected, the fortuitous as well as their own preconceptions and blunders. Naive empiricism as well as rigid theoreticism are to be avoided.

* The method has provided rich insights into and improved understanding of a number of media institutions and professional domains. Studies of news production have proved particularly illuminating across the years, developing from ‘formative’ to ‘substantive’ and, most recently, ‘focused’ studies of news professionals and their production practices.

* Like all methods, participant observation has its weaknesses. Its so-called ‘methodological blindspots’ may be less debilitating that sometimes thought however. When informed by prior theoretical reading and reflection the danger of naive empiricism can be avoided, and the wider influences of the marketplace, commerce, and culture upon the production domain and practices, for example, can be observed . Relatedly, if the researcher occasionally steps outside of the immediate production domain and researches the surrounding institutional context, hierarchy and decision-making, the method can also accommodate the influence of wider corporate culture, context and forces of change.

* Participant observation has a number of strengths. The method: 1. records and makes the invisible visible; 2. counters the ‘problem of inference’; 3. improves upon other methods through triangulation; 4. qualifies or corrects speculative theoretical claims; 5. reminds us of the contingent nature of cultural production; and 6. provides evidence for the dynamic as well as embedded nature of cultural production.

* Six typical overlapping stages to participant observation research can be identified: 1. theoretical and practical design; 2. access; 3. field relationships; 4. collecting and recording data; 5. analysing data; 6. write-up. Though in practice each stage is likely to overlap and interpenetrate the researcher is well-advised to reflect upon each and critically reflect upon the skills required and difficulties that will need to be negotiated and managed as he research proceeds.

Notes:

(1)‘Participant observation’ is also often referred to as ‘ethnography’. Strictly speaking participant observation is the principal method deployed in ethnographic study, that is, the detailed and in-depth study of human groups and societies, their milieux, culture and practices. ‘Ethnography’ can also make use of other methods, however, for example, ‘life-histories’. That said, the two terms are often used inter-changeably.

(2)A more personalised account of the author’s experience, problems and delights of conducting a participant observation study of news production is found in (Cottle, 1996). Clearly, this chapter focuses upon participant observation studies of news production specifically; other media genres have also, if less frequently, been researched by this method.

(3) For a more informed discussion of the general philosophical issues surrounding participant observation, and in particular its philosophical ‘realist’ variant, the position broadly informing this discussion, see Martin Hammersley’s excellent ‘Ethnography and Realism’ in Hammersley 1992.

(4) For the practical purposes of this chapter and its historical review, the original dates of studies have been used, even when quoting from later available editions. For ease of locating sources all sources cited and, where relevant, different publication dates and places of publication are indicated in the final references.

(5) This part of the discussion is in-debted to and adds to Schlesinger’s discussion of the method’s value (Schlesinger, 1980: 363-366).

(6) Field relationships may also be informed, of course, by considerations of class, gender, ethnicity and various other dimensions of social identity as well as age and status. The reflexive participant observer can thus also be sensitised to possible newsroom norms and practices on the basis of his/her own newsroom experiences.

(7) You may here want to explore the possibility of transferring or in-putting directly fieldnotes into an available computer software package such as 'The Ethnograph' for text indexing, ordering and retrieval. Alternatively, you may still prefer to keep in relatively close touch with your data and arrange and manipulate this by hand.

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