DON H. ZIMMERMAN is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His most recent publications include "Sex-Roles, Interruptions and Silences in Conversation" (with Candace West) which appeared in the 1975 volume, *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance,* edited by B. Thorne and N. Henle; and "A Reply to Professor Coser" in *The American Sociologist,* February 1976.

D. LAWRENCE WIEDER is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma. His recent publications include *Language and Social Reality,* 1974. He is interested in the prospects of using phenomenological methods for the clarification and further development of the foundations of the social sciences and is currently doing research on the problem of intersubjectivity and the problem of animal awareness.

THE DIARY

Diary-Interview Method

DON H. ZIMMERMAN
D. LAWRENCE WIEDER

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION is one of the few methodological approaches in the social sciences which stresses direct observation of behavior in situ. The regimen for generating close description of ongoing social activities in their natural setting is demanding, and in various circumstances this technique is difficult to execute. Although this research tradition has roots in the urban ethnography of the Chicago school, it is perhaps most conveniently employed in settings

AUTHORS' NOTE: The ethnographic study on which this paper draws was funded by Grant 70-039, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, United States Department of Justice. The findings and interpretations presented in this paper do not necessarily reflect the policies or offical position of the funding agency. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans, August 1972.

URBAN LIFE, Vol. 5 No. 4, January 1977
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such as formal organizations, where the activity of interest is scheduled and relatively circumscribed. If the social scene is more diffuse, as within a counter-culture community, the patterns of behavior in question may have a less precise definition and lack as well the luxury of an eight-to-five work day. Clearly, the less focused the activity, the wider the range of observations required.

Assuming equal rapport with subjects, observers of activities organized by more diffuse roles are also likely to find that their presence alters the behavior of subjects to a greater extent than is the case with more highly specified roles. As Skolnick (1967: 36) argues with regard to the police, "They are hardly free to alter their behavior, as, for example, when a policeman kicks in a door in a narcotics raid" (see also Becker, 1970: 44-51). However, a housewife who typically spends much of her day in solitude or in the company of young children would have, in the presence of the ethnographer, an adult companion with whom she could constantly interact as she went about her day. We might expect her to alter her physical appearance, the manner in which she served meals, the character of occasions for taking coffee breaks, and many other matters which are to some degree optional or flexible.

If heavy observer effects are to be avoided, or if the "natives" are to tolerate or even permit the study to take place, ethnographers may, in some settings, find that they must display social characteristics, attitudes, and comportment similar or congenial to those of the people they observe. Some characteristics of the observer may be difficult to mask or fein, however. (For an extreme instance, cf. Sullivan et al., 1958.) The moral, ethical (cf. Coser et al., 1959), or legal constraints felt by observers may prevent effective participation in deviant scenes, for example, joining in a burglary or engaging in homosexual activities (cf. Polsky, 1969; Humphreys, 1970). Thus, some settings may dictate substantial alterations in the life-style of the investigator, for example, maintaining irregular

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hours, participating in highly unconventional activities, and so on. The difference between a problem that derails a field study and one for which a solution is discovered depends as much upon the researcher and what he or she is able and willing to accommodate as on the nature of the problem itself. The triumphs reported in the literature of this research tradition recount the many ways in which talented and resourceful field workers have overcome the variety of difficulties encountered in the field. For those situations where the problems of direct observation resist solution, or where further or more extended observation strains available resources, this paper suggests an alternative technique. This field procedure may be used, under some circumstances, to approximate the classic pattern of observational research when the investigator is unable to make firsthand observations or wishes to supplement those already collected. We call this supplemental procedure the "diary: diary-interview" method.

The diaries referred to are not those "intimate journals" (Madge, 1965: 83) persons ordinarily keep for their own varied and private purposes, although such spontaneously generated documents have been employed in sociological and psychological research (cf. Allport, 1942; Angell and Freedman, 1953: 300-309; Blumer, 1939; Gottschalk et al., 1945; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927). The term "diary" is used here to refer to an annotated chronological record (cf. Sorokin and Berger, 1939) or "log" (cf. Allport, 1942). Individuals are commissioned by the investigator to maintain such a record over some specified period of time according to a set of instructions. The employment of diary materials in this sense, when coupled with an interview (or series of interviews) based on the diary, is also similar to the "life-history" method (cf. Becker, 1966; Conwell and Sutherland, 1937; Denzin, 1970: 219-259; Dollard, 1935; Madge, 1965: 182-190; Shaw, 1930). The technique we describe emphasizes the role of diaries as an observational log maintained by subjects which can then be used as a basis for intensive interviewing.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIARY: DIARY-INTERVIEW METHOD

In pursuing our study of the counter-culture (Wieder and Zimmerman, 1974, 1976; Zimmerman and Wieder, 1971), we would have preferred participant observation as our main method of data collection. However, the community in question presented a diffusely organized set of activities occurring at many different times and places throughout the day and into the night. This life-style seemed ideally suited to persons with a minimum of obligations and a corresponding surplus of free time. Indeed, freedom from a conventional schedule of activities is at once a theme and a goal of the counter-culture (Wieder and Zimmerman, 1974; 1976).

Our problems derived, in part, from the difficulty in balancing academic and other responsibilities with the demands of the field, which seemed to require our full attention and participation. Moreover, our target population was on the average ten or more years younger, rendering us quite conspicuous on that dimension, among others. Rather than attempting a full-time forray into the field, then, we decided to employ strategically placed but limited field observation while developing other sources of information. To this end, we tried a variety of alternative techniques.

The original design of the study called for the use of sociologically trained, paid research assistants[1] who, by virtue of age and closeness to the counter-culture scene, would not only be initially more credible to informants, but who could also adjust more readily to their pattern of living. Our selection of more or less "native" assistants also provided a solution to the problem of establishing contact with informants—our assistants provided a way into the community by inviting their friends, and friends of friends, to participate in the study.[2]

Our initial data collection techniques included "seminars" in which we and our assistants engaged informants in unstructured discussion of various aspects of their life, as well as both structured and unstructured interviews, organized biographi-

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cally, by which we sought to reconstruct the course of individual experience and the social pathways which led our informants toward the counter-culture lifestyle (cf. Wieder and Zimmerman, 1976). We relied on our assistants' field notes for a picture of actual behavior in the community, supplemented by limited observations of our own. While these procedures produced many valuable insights and much information was gathered in this way, we soon became uneasy about the progress of the research. Our most important questions had not yet begun to draw out the systematic answers required: What do these people do all day? What varieties of activities do they engage in? How many people do they interact with every day? What kinds of relationships obtain between people? What is the typical temporal sequence of events? And so on. Interviewing by itself was inadequate for the purpose of establishing a clear picture of such activities, in part because we were uncertain of the right questions to ask. Consequently, we came to the view that we had to get into the field with some approximation to participant observation. It was at this point we began to experiment with the informant diary as a data-collection tool. The following section discusses the rationale behind this decision.

A Conception of the Subject as Diarist

With the exception of the covert, nonparticipant observer (a sort of spectral presence), the ethnographer never relies solely on what can be seen and overheard. In the course of field research, one typically employs some type of interview, structured or unstructured (along with a lot of casual chatter), to elicit information going beyond what can be obtained by keeping eyes and ears open. Mostly, this information pertains to the point of view of the "natives," i.e., their definition of the situation, and includes their attitudes, beliefs, evaluations, boasts, complaints, and so forth, all of which adds the critical subjective dimension to the naturally occurring activities he witnesses.

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Granted that the observer both observes and questions, subjects function in two analytically distinguishable roles: naive *performer* and reflective *informant.* As performer, the native presumably moves through his or her normal activities "as if" the observer were not present, which is to say, "naturally" (cf. Becker, 1970: 43). In general, informants, reflect on their own and others' performances, specify their purpose, enunciate standards of conduct, allocate praise and blame in terms of such standards, as well as acting as critics of the ethnographer's attempt to formulate witnessed and recounted events. In a sense, the participant qua informant is a lay observer; in this role he or she thereby furnishes the ethnographer's major resource in reporting the "view from within." A single individual can and most often does function in both roles in the course of field research. It should be evident that participant observation entails treating subjects as both performers and informants.

The rationale of the diary approach involves more fully, exploiting the subject as both observer and informant. By requesting that subjects keep a chronologically organized diary or log of daily activities, we in effect asked for a record of their own performances as well as reporting the performances of others with whom they interacted. Completed diaries functioned for us in a way similar to the field notes turned in by our regular research assistants. Diarists thus served as adjunct ethnographers of their own circumstances.

The next step in our procedure is perhaps the most crucial. The diarist, having furnished an initial record of activities of potential interest to the investigator, was then cast in the role of informant. The diarist was subjected to a lengthy, detailed and probing interview based on the diary in which he or she was asked not only to expand the reportage, but also was questioned on the less directly observable features of the events recorded, of their meanings, their propriety, typicality, connection with other events, and so on. Thus, the diaries employed in our research were (1) done on request, (2) prepared according

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to a set of instructions, (3) limited to a span of seven days, and (4) employed as the basis of a lengthy interview with the diarist.

We view the diary *in conjunction with* the diary-interview as an approximation to the method of participant observation. While actual observation is to be preferred as an ideal in every case, the diary: diary-based interview affords at least the possibility of gaining some degree of access to naturally occurring sequences of activity, as well as raising pertinent questions about their meaning and significance. The diary partially recovers features of scenes and events which, if witnessed via participant observation, would have been the topic for on-the-spot interrogation. In many circumstances, it offers the possibility of researching topics which would otherwise be impractical for the reasons we have already enumerated.

The practice of having subjects maintain chronological records of their activity is not without precedent (cf. Sorokin and Berger, 1939),[3] nor is the coordination of some form of personal document (e.g., an autobiographical statement) and an interview or series of interviews (cf. Denzin, 1970: 228-231). Our approach differs from other applications of the life-history method in its emphasis on the diarist as surrogate observer. That is, one way we treated the material generated from the diary: diary-interview was as analogues of the field notes of a thoroughly debriefed research assistant. Treated in this way, the diary and diary-interview materials revealed the same sorts of located (i.e., perspectival) views of social and cultural objects that are obtained through participant observation. These "located views" of social and cultural objects, reported by an ensemble of diarists, are then combinable, in ways discussed below, into coherent descriptions of the social setting under study. It is perhaps unique to the use of multiple, contemporaneous or near-contemporaneous diaries and diary-interviews that data may be obtained which may be comparable to data from direct observation of such matters as socially structured patterns of action, norms, roles, and so forth. Characteristically, former uses of the general "life-history" method have yielded descriptions of an ensemble or similar or analytically identical

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situations in which the subjects are located, treated as those subjects' particular situations, rather than their cultural or socially structured situations from which descriptions of "culture" and "social structure" could be obtained (cf. Angell, 1936; Cressey, 1953; Lindesmith, 1947).

THE DIARY FORMAT

While each investigator must devise a set of instructions for potential diarists which are congruent with his or her own research interests, the instructions we used are rather general, simple, and serve as a good example. In brief, the diary writer was asked to record in chronological order the activities in which he or she engaged over the course of seven days. We provided the formula: Who/What/When/Where/How? We asked them to report the identity of the participants in the activities described not by name, of course, but by relationship to the writer—roommate, lover, and so on—using initials to differentiate individuals and noting the sex of those involved. The "What?" involved a description of the activity or discussion recorded in the diarist's own categories.[4] "When?" involved reference to the time and timing of the activity, with special attention to recording the actual sequence of events. "Where?" involved a designation of the location of the activity, suitably coded to prevent identification of individuals or places. The "How?" involved a description of whatever logistics were entailed by the activity, e.g., how transportation was secured, how marijuana was obtained, and so on.

It should be noted here that all of our diarists had at least some college or univeristy training; many had bachelor's degrees and some had gone on to post-graduate training. Moreover, virtually all of them came from middle- and upper-middle-class business and professional families. Thus, the task of maintaining a diary was perhaps not inconsistent with their education and background. For research dealing with subjects from different backgrounds, adjustments in the application of this technique

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may be necessary. The use of more standardized diary formats or the provision of tape recorders to subjects to collect an oral record might be substituted for more discursive written diaries. Where subjects possess telephones (many of ours did not), a daily telephone interview in which the desired information is sytematically elicited is another possibility. The point should be clear: the form of the elicitation must be fitted to the requirements of the field setting and the characteristics of informants.

Our diary writers were instructed to record as much of what transpired during a day as they could and were told that whatever was notable to them was of interest to us.[5] They were also instructed to avoid omitting events because they seemed mundane. We inveighed them to be frank and include such things as sexual activity and drug use. Imposing no length requirement, we asked them to be as detailed as they could and suggested that they set aside regular periods during the day to write the diary. We cautioned them to avoid writing their diaries "all at once" and to make entries at least once a day. We should note that if the diaries we collected were to be construed as exhaustive records of the diarists' activities, we would have to conclude that this group was characterized by extraordinary bladder and bowel capacities, since no instance of the elemental act of elimination was reported. If one is interested in the frequency or mode of occurrence of mundane or intimate behaviors, it is probably necessary to specifically ask that they not be omitted from the diary narrative, as we did in the case of drug use and sexual activity.

An excerpt from an actual diary elicited by the instructions above is presented here.

> Thursday Evening: About 7:30 p.m. I was outside sitting on the bench in the front yard [of his rented duplex in the student community] playing my guitar and Bob [one of several roommates] came outside and said he thought he heard a band playing. As he went back in the house I noticed that he had a joint [marijuana cigarette] in his hand. I followed him in and helped him finish it off and then rolled one of mine for Bob and Vicki [another roommate]

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> and I. Adequately ripped, we followed the noise of the band, cutting through the blocks [between buildings] to Jackson St. In an apartment complex's front yard was a small crowd of people (about 50-70 standing around listening). The band really sounded good. I wondered why they were playing there, but then just settled back to enjoying the experience. People in the crowd were moving in time to the music. There had been a couple of cases of beer passed out and wine was offered around. Finally the smell of pot filled the air and later a joint came my way which I toted on for all I was worth. Really stoned now, the music sounded better than ever. About 10:30 I got sleepy and went home and crashed.

For their efforts, diarists were paid a fee of $10. We counted on three things to motivate a reasonably conscientious effort. First, there was the personal relationship to one of the research assistants, i.e., they were helping the assistant to "do his job." Second, the research assistants checked the diarists' progress within the first few days to encourage the writers to make regular entries and to deal with any questions that might have arisen concerning the task.[6] Third, there was the factor of the fee itself, and the fact that the task would not be complete and the fee paid until there was an interview completed based on the diary materials.[7]

The effectiveness of the diary method, we believe, is undercut if all that is collected is the diary. Our experience has indicated that there is considerable variation in the depth and detail reported in such diaries. Further, there is the ever-nagging possibility that some diaries would in whole or in large part be fabrications. Short of obtaining comparable observational data (cf. Becker and Geer, 1957a), the only check feasible is that of internal consistency. Since "consistency" is at best an amorphous concept, something more than an inspection of the diary is clearly called for (Dean and Whyte, 1958).

THE DIARY INTERVIEW

Hand-in-hand with the diary, as a data-collection "instrument," is what we call the "diary interview." Like the personal statement prepared by the "focal subject" of the life-history

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approach (Denzin, 1970: 226-228, 237), the diarist's statement is used as a way of generating questions for the subsequent diary interview. The diary interview converts the diary—a source of data in its own right—into a question-generating and, hence, data-generating device.

Preparation for the diary interview requires inspection of the relevant diary. In our own research, each diary was read by at least two research personnel (one of whom was a senior investigator) who sought to formulate questions to ask of the diarists based on the diary narrative. Then the two collaborated and noted all the questions on a single copy of the diary in question. One of these two persons would then interrogate the informant, "armed" with the prepared questions. For example, one of our diarists wrote in her diary:

> Talked to S.H. about the bathing suit which she is going to batik for me. She "got it for me wholesale" from [a local store], and I will probably trade something for her doing the suit.

The researcher first read this section of the diary to the diarist, hoping that she would "spontaneously" elaborate. But the diarist replied, "Mm-mm," requiring the researcher to be more direct in her questioning:

> Interviewer: Could you tell me more about that—is that a typical kind of thing that you do, like, sort of exchange goods?
>
> Diarist: Yeah, yeah, it's very typical. Uh, I live, around, and it always seems that I've known a lot of people who make things and do things, and so we just exchange one skill for another. Somebody made me a pair of earrings once, and I dyed some cloth for them, with natural dyes, and, uh, ah, especially in where I live now, you know . . . there are lots of people around that exchange skills, and nobody seems to have a lot of money, so we just, ah, L. gave me a drawing once, and I gave her some homespun wool so she could do a weaving, and then she did me—she did a weaving for me, and I crocheted her a hat and gave her some homespun to do some more weaving.

The interviewer would then listen to the informant's response and then probe again for more detail if the developing

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description was relevant to the research concern. Sometimes these probes were also prepared; in other cases, simple, nondirective (Rogers, 1942, 1945) probes were employed. The character of these nondirective probes can be seen in each of the researcher's queries to the diarist in the following transcript:

> Diarist: [In responding to a question about having children:] I don't know. I really don't know. I really like kids, and every time I see a baby, I get this surge, you know, of maternal feelings, but, um, a lot of things, you know, come into it. Like, the population problem is just so incredible. Uh, you know, you can feel it so strongly here in three years. Just too many people, and it really gets to be a strain on you.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-mm.
>
> Diarist: And I'd feel like it would be part of, mm, part of my job just to try to keep that down. And, uh, uh, also, things are, they're just really shakey. You know, it seems that nothing is terribly stable, or secure.
>
> Interviewer: You mean the world—or what?
>
> Diarist: Yeah, the whole world. The world; the world.
>
> Interviewer: The world?
>
> Diarist: In general. That's the way I feel about it at the moment, and that could also be part of my being shakey and insecure, feeling this. Um, but I don't think that can be discounted entirely. Um, and also, the other thing is that kids take a lot of your life—a lot of patience. Lot of years.

Our reading of these documents, guided by the general concerns of our research, represented a search for the relevant questions to ask of this particular group. One notion of relevance was tied to the assumption that if we could clarify the detail of everyday life in the scene, we would, in the process, discover the structure of relevancies that inform, render sensible, and give value to such activities. We adopted the stance of one who was ignorant and needed to be told about the most trivial matters. We attempted to guard against assuming that we fully understood a particular entry and, indeed, asked questions in the face of the conviction that we knew the answers.

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In one aspect, the diary interviews were a process of expansion, i.e., filling in details that were omitted. In another aspect, they led beyond the particular events recorded, touching on attitude, belief, knowledge, and experience of a more general character. We explored not only the community context of the seven days' activity, but invited reflection on the connection between that context and the diarists' "world view." A five- or ten-page diary often generated over 100 specific questions, and diary interviews sometimes covered five hours of interrogation. While no unimpeachable assurances were available that a given diary was not a work of fiction, the impact of this intensive interrogation was presumed to be such that maintaining a pretense would be difficult without falling into glaring inconsistency, especially since the diary writer did not have access to his or her diary after its completion or during the interview.

THE ANALYTIC PROCESS IN THE DIARY: DIARY-INTERVIEW METHOD

Our experience with the diary: diary-interview method recapitulates the basic structure of most ethnography: the ethnographer only partially knows what particulars of conduct he is looking for before they are encountered, but upon seeing them, he or she knows that they are what have been sought "all along." The effective ethnographer is either constantly or intermittently operating as a theorist over the course of his data collection. The ethnographer engages in a self-corrective, continuous process in which:

> analysis is carried on *sequentially*, important parts of the analysis being made while the researcher is still gathering his data . . . Further data-gathering takes its direction from provisional analyses [Becker, 1970: 400; cf. Lindesmith, 1947: 9]

This systematic use of a provisional working hypothesis bears strong resemblance to the process of analytic induction (Cres-

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sey, 1950, 1953; Denzin, 1970; Lindesmith, 1947; Robinson, 1951; Turner, 1953; Znaniecki, 1934) in that the researcher alternates between formulating the phenomena and gathering new data which is used to reformulate previously held notions. At each stage, the present formulation accounts for or encompasses all the observables at hand. Here, however, the end product is not causal theory, as it is in analytic induction, but empirically warranted, theoretically relevant description.

In our study of the counter-culture, we found that it was useful to formulate what we knew "as of today" once a week or so. We then used that formulation as a point of departure and as a schema of interrogation for the gathering of further data. Thus, at any given time, we had "questions in mind" which we addressed to the diaries—looking at them to find answers to our questions, and at the same time, when we read the diaries, we discovered new questions by seeing the written accounts as answers to some question. Furthermore, we often sensed that a question or an answer was implied in a diary remark, but was "not quite there," which motivated a request for further elaboration from the diary writer.[8]

Besides asking for further details of events, we also asked our informants about their feelings about the events they reported, their feelings about the other participants in those events, their sense for alternatives which were actually or potentially available to them as courses of action, how they choose one course of action over another, the consequences, especially social consequences, of choosing one course of action over another (and in this way uncovering sanctionable structures), and their sense for the typical flow of events.

As we proceeded, we came to a sense of the typical and sanctionable flow of events in the life of counter-culture youth. We found ourselves able to read the diaries in terms of expectable events which did not occur. Such discoveries permitted us to probe our informants about the reasons they had not done something, e.g., why had a particular diarist not gotten stoned before going to a Chinese restaurant, since this would have been a typical occasion for getting stoned? Replies

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to probes of this sort generated answers which were possible descriptions of the cultural conditions under which some event could and could not properly occur, i.e., we obtained descriptions of the conditions under which some event would or would not occur from the standpoint of our subjects' cultural knowledge.

Thus, although comparable data was gathered from many persons, and each person was asked many of the same questions as each other person, our use of the diary: diary-interview method was cumulative and more focused in character. That is, as more and more diaries were collected and the results of diary interviews inspected, each successive diary was subjected to increasingly specific and refined interrogation.

In addition, the process builds in a partially self-corrective mechanism. Each question which is directed at a diary writer, even if it is merely a request for additional detail, functions as an implicit, local hypothesis. Thus, the answers to such questions provide for the possibility of disconfirming some previously held notion. For example, asking why some event did not occur is based on the investigator's expectation that it should have happened, given what he thinks he knows. Some answers could modify or even radically alter that expectation. Thus, the diary: diary-interview method is, in part, a continuous process of challenging and refining the investigator's conceptions.

In conclusion, we must acknowledge that many issues relevant to the evaluation of this procedure remain to be addressed, among them the relationship of the diary: diary-interview process to standard conceptions of adequate hypothesis testing. Our concerns here have been with the use of this procedure to produce descriptive findings tied closely to the fine detail of daily activities. We can envision modifications in the procedure which would make it more useful to investigators with different aims, including the uses of sophisticated sampling techniques in the selection of diarists, more structured instructions to diarists, standardized questions to be administered during the diary interview, and so on. The procedure's most

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basic application is as an adjunct to, or approximation of, the process of direct observation which is central to the ethnographic research tradition.

NOTES

1. Roth (1966) has raised serious questions concerning the use of research assistants and other "hired hands" in the conduct of social research. Assistants are often assigned to crucial but uninteresting tasks, and like their counterparts in other work settings, they may devise various shortcuts and other imaginary skulduggery to avoid tedium or enliven their day.

Insofar as Roth's characterization is valid, there is no foolproof way to furnish assurance of quality for the data collected in any project employing hired hands. The problems Roth points out are particularly acute where assistants are shut out of meaningful participation in the research process, i.e., the formulation of the problem, the design of the study, and so on. On the other hand, where avenues of authentic collaboration between the senior investigators and the junior staff are open, it appears more likely that more incentives exist for the faithful execution of research tasks.

While our research problem and the general outline of data collection procedures were decided prior to hiring our staff, our research assistants (and, to a lesser extent, our clerical people) did have a significant degree of participation in day-to-day decision making, the development of our research instruments, and the planning of field work. All but one of the five assistants on the project were graduate students in sociology; the four graduate students were doing their work in sociology under our supervision; each had a claim to the use of the data for their own purposes; and all were encouraged to express their ideas on the research at any time. The research assistants were not held to a rigid work schedule, but instead were simply relied upon as junior professionals to perform whatever tasks were necessary to execute the research design.

These assistants were largely responsible for contacting and monitoring the diary process in the field and each worked closely with one or the other senior investigator in developing the interview protocol for each diary. This close working relationship was indispensable for the success of the diary process and provided an ongoing check on the informants well distributed across the relevant roles in the setting? (2) Is and comparing data sources for contradiction and inconsistency, there is no other safeguard on quality other than basic trust in and respect for the competence and diligence of one's research assistants.

2. The "snowball sample" resulting from this procedure is certainly far removed from a probability sample of the community, but nonetheless adequate for our qualitative interests (cf. Coleman, 1958). In evaluating the uses of available informants, one might consider the following:

Informants are indispensable resources for most observational studies. The more articulate the informant, the greater his or her value, and great effort is usually

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expended to establish and sustain the rapport necessary to gain the cooperation of key individuals in a given setting. Lurking in the background here is the possibility that those persons who consent to be informants (or diarists) are, compared to others in the setting, atypical in one or more respects. Informants are seldom selected randomly, and the kind of relationship involved is difficult to generate under the constraints of sound sampling procedure. While this issue is too involved to treat in depth here, several rule-of-thumb guidelines for guarding against the distortion that can result from the atypicality of informants can be specified. The investigator should ask: (1) Are my informants well distributed across the relevant roles in the setting? (2) Is their role behavior seen by others to be remarkable in some way, i.e., superior, peculiar, etc.? (3) Are they situated in the routines characteristic of the setting so as to reflect the temporal and spatial diversity present? (4) Is the range of interaction between the informants' roles and other roles in the setting restricted in some way? and (5) Do the informants stand to gain something from their cooperation with the researcher, and, if so, how likely will this be to affect what they report? These considerations do not solve the problem of the representatives of informants, but they should serve to avoid a naive reliance on the word of a few "special" individuals. For a striking example of the consequences of uncritical reliance on readily available informants in the field of linguistics, see Labov (1973). For other treatments of issues clustering around the use of informants, see Back (1960), Becker and Geer (1957a, b; 1960); Campbell (1955); Dean et al. (1969); Dean and White (1958); Lofland (1971: 111-113); Madge (1965: 81-87); Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 87-88); Trow (1957); Whyte (1960); and Zelditch (1962).

3. For a recent example, see Carey's (1968: 201) account of a limited use of diaries for purposes similar to ours. Carey's report stimulated our interest in diaries, although he does not appear to have followed them up with interviews.

4. Diarists' descriptive language was thus not standardized. A partial remedy for the problems involved in this potential heterogeneity of description is provided by the diary interview, through which the investigator can, for all practical purposes, coordinate his understanding of the particular diary's terminology with that of the diarist.

5. This feature of the diary instructions is at first glance particularly hair-raising, since it means that what is reported in the diary is a function of the unknown system of relevancies of each diarist which, further, could be substantially different between different diarists. Thus, a good deal of activity of potential interest to the ethnographer runs the risk of being omitted by even the most open and truthful writer. Such a risk must be acknowledged, the only effective remedy being direct observation or, at minimum, a highly structured set of instructions. However, the more the diarist is instructed on what to observe, the greater the possibility of another obvious type of distortion—one that is probably the more serious since it most often works in favor of the investigator's preconceptions.

6. This procedure, while valuable, raised its own problems, largely revolving around the personal relationship between many of the diarists and the research assistants. It is quite conceivable that certain materials were omitted by diarists to conceal them from the assistants. It is difficult to say if such omissions occurred frequently, or if they were significant.

7. It should be stressed that the procedure for motivating diarists to comply with our instructions was tied to the particular circumstances of our study. It may not be

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possible (or even desirable) in all cases to pay diarists, and in other situations the personal ties between the research assistants and the diarist may not exist. For example, if diarists were to be selected by probability sampling techniques, the latter type of relationship is all but ruled out. What must be kept in mind is that the agreement to keep a diary and to be interviewed about it represents considerably more of a commitment in time and effort than completing a questionnaire or participating in a standard interview situation. Thus, attention must be paid to the practical problem of how cooperation can be secured in the course of planning research using this technique.

8. Readers familiar with ethnomethodology may recognize that the procedure advocated here explicitly employs the use of the documentary method of interpretation (Garfinkel, 1967: 76-103). In every case, the diary descriptions and the diarist's interview remarks "document" the "underlying pattern" of the form of the phenomena. In using these remarks as a constant source of questions we capitalized on their retrospective and prospective meanings. This explicit use of the documentary method of interpretation acknowledges the differences between observing physical events and the events of social and/or meaningful conduct. Since use of the documentary method of interpretation apparently cannot be avoided in the description of "substantive" sociological phenomena (Garfinkel, 1967: 94-103; Wieder, 1974; Wilson, 1970) it seems to us that the observation of substantive phenomena can be made more effective, efficient, and even more methodologically rigorous through the explicit and to some extent self-conscious use of this "method." The alternative appears to be the artful masking of the use of this "method" (often even from the investigator himself) which, in a variety of ways, hides the essentials of ethnographic work and obscures the character of the observed phenomena. Becker's recommendation (1970: 411) that the ethnographer present the "natural history" of the processes whereby he arrived at his conclusions as the best "proof" available in ethnographic work, appears to be directed to some of the same matters as our recommendation.

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