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Trust is also a major component of obtaining access when, as in the stories reported in this section, researchers are asking their respondents to talk about issues that are politically and personally sensitive. Building trust requires establishing strong, respectful ties with respondents. For Edin, building trust with informants often meant overlooking situations and conditions that might have made other researchers uncomfortable (e.g., conducting an interview in a housing project with an armed gang member outside the door). Moreover, Edin not only continued her research despite these situations but, when possible, set up play dates between her kids and some of the informants' kids. Fenno reminds us that trust is "less a special talent than a special willingness to work hard—a special commitment. And one reason it is hard work is because of the many contexts and types of people you find yourself confronted with."[13]

If one is studying marginalized, hidden, or heavily stigmatized individuals, the challenges in gaining access and developing trust are magnified. Individuals in these populations may prove both harder to identify and harder to find because of their membership in stigmatized groups. Some individuals marginalized from groups may be suspicious of the researchers' aims and may be hesitant to allow access. All of the access stories that follow involve sensitive issues, and three involve populations that are relatively marginalized. Manion talks with Chinese cadres about the establishment norm in a system that has never had one. Both the Bosnian ethnic minorities that Pickering studied and the Arab immigrants in the United States that Jamal and Lin studied could pay a heavy price for opening up to the wrong people. The HIV-positive sex workers that Berger studied appear to have nothing to lose, but they are so heavily stigmatized that they have a hard time believing that Berger wants to learn from them rather than further stigmatize them. These researchers report the difficulty of, and their strategies for, convincing people to open up in this context. The strategies vary by the context, but an overall theme prevails: Show sincere respect for these people and for what you can learn from them, and some of them will come to trust you and confide in you. This is clearly not a responsibility to be taken lightly.

Maintaining Access

Amaney Jamal and Ann Chih Lin

Gaining access is generally understood as coming "first" in a research project. But as the following anecdote explains, access is a continual task whose success is always uncertain. A year into our project on Arab immigrant political socialization

and activity, we decided to try to recruit respondents through radio ads. We wrote a one-minute message that was broadcast three times daily on the local Arabic radio stations, and then we sat back and waited for the calls to start rolling in. Two weeks later, we had a grand total of three responses.

But the story does not end here. Although few people called us in direct response to our advertisement, we found people mentioning the ad when we went up to them on the street. "I heard about you on the radio," an immigrant would say in response to Jamal's opening approach. "Sure, I will be glad to help." Clearly, hearing about us on the radio made people more receptive to listening to our description of the project and our request for an interview. It gave us credibility as well as visibility.

This incident illustrates a number of issues we encountered as we sought to gain and maintain access to a diffuse "community"—the population of first-generation Arab immigrants living in the Detroit metropolitan area. Unlike researchers in organizations, we did not have a gatekeeper to go to for access. Instead, to *gain* and *maintain* access, we repeated the process of getting access every time we approached a new person for an interview.[14]

Gaining Access: Does Insider Status Facilitate the Research Agenda?

We had the incomparable advantage of being known to many in the community as we started. Jamal, an Arab American, is well known in Arab American circles in the Detroit area, and she is a fluent Arabic speaker who wears the *hijab*, or Muslim head scarf. At the same time, the professional credibility we established, both through our institutional affiliation with the University of Michigan and through our various assurances of confidentiality, was crucial. But without question, the most important thing we did was simply to ask, explain, and ask again, with the understanding that we were in the community to stay.

When we began this project, we knew our biggest asset was Jamal's insider status. We were deeply concerned that our respondents might be afraid that we were affiliated with a government agency—especially the FBI or INS, both of which are believed to target immigrants. Lin's outsider status exacerbated these concerns: If not for some nefarious purpose, why would an outsider want to know so much? Jamal's appearance and language, however, immediately identified her as a member of the community. Her connections and referrals provided a set of networks to get us started, and her presence was critical in convincing people to listen to us and in vouching for Lin, a Chinese American.

The dynamic changed somewhat once we began to interview. We found there were advantages to pairing an outsider with an insider: Respondents exerted themselves to explain things to Lin that they thought she would not otherwise understand. This al-

lowed us to get a better perspective on their reasoning. Lin's outsider status also allowed her to ask basic questions, questions that would have seemed laughable from an insider. At the same time, Jamal's insider role meant that respondents felt comfortable moving into Arabic when they wished to elaborate on a point or explaining something that they might be shy about saying in front of an outsider.

Despite this pairing, however, the burdens of access clearly fell most heavily on Jamal. She struggled with the vulnerability of blending her professional identity as a student of political science with her personal identity as a well-known parent, friend, and community member. She had to be responsible for Lin's actions as well as her own. She knew that anything that might offend the community or compromise her research objectives could ultimately lead to a two-edged condemnation: one professional, the other personal.

Nor was Jamal's insider status enough, on its own, to guarantee us access. Given the close-knit networks that exist in the area, people were reluctant to speak to anyone they did not know personally or trust. Our project seeks to understand how experiences in one's country of origin and in the United States help socialize individuals into an understanding of U.S. politics and into a U.S. ethnic community. We asked about activities in the United States; acquaintances, families of origin, spouses and children; political experience and affiliations; and religious and social beliefs. This kind of information is hard for anyone to discuss, but within an immigrant population it is especially sensitive. Here Jamal's insider status, crucial in establishing contacts, could have also created hurdles for us. Would interviewees be less willing to talk about their lives to someone who might know them or whom they might see again at community functions or events? So although Jamal's presence was pertinent in getting our "foot in the door," it alone did not ensure cooperation, or the *maintenance* of access. The only way we could reduce (though never eliminate) the anxiety or speculation was to explain adequately our professional roles and obligations. The key to establishing this was our professional credentials, represented first and foremost by our various assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

Maintaining Confidentiality, Maintaining Access

Confidentiality is at the heart of most research designs involving research with people. In this process, the University of Michigan's institutional review board was an ally. We made copies of our human subjects approval and explained it to our respondents, so that they could see that we were constrained by our academic institution and its guidelines. With IRB support, we did not use written consent, knowing that respondents might want to avoid having their names in a file. Instead, we asked the interim dean of the University of Michigan School of Public

Policy, where Lin teaches, to write a letter explaining our project, our roles, and our respondents' right to withdraw their participation at any time.

By providing these documents and explaining our project at the beginning of the interviews, we ultimately reduced the speculation and anxiety about the nature of our work. We anticipated our respondents' fears of being identified and used familiar language to explain how we safeguarded their identities. We gave respondents the choice of being taped. We further explained that they could quit or ask to skip a question at any time.

These procedures are the norm in many research circles. But for us they were not a mere professional responsibility: They were a central aspect of our self-presentation. Our care in explaining and emphasizing confidentiality, both in our initial contacts and again at the time of the interview, was critical to our ability to *maintain* access. The dense nature of community ties meant that our reputation would precede us: One successful interview could lead to others, and one unsuccessful interview could ruin the environment of "good faith" we had diligently worked to create. If we had made individuals feel at any point that we were not being "professionally" considerate of their disclosures, we would have closed multiple doors.

Asking and Staying

The need to be both persuasive and trustworthy requires one to think about the presentation of self. For Jamal, commonly accepted procedures, like reading a script to potential interviewees at the time of contact, seemed unnatural. She was concerned about the success of the overall project and whether she could find a balance between both her Arabness and professionalism. Could she present herself as an objective observer in her own community? Would her natural empathy imply that she was not being a professional researcher? Would others expect her to be an advocate, activist, or lobbyist rather than an academic researcher? And if so, how could she maintain her professional role without creating barriers between herself and the community?

She dealt with these concerns by telling potential respondents about her motivation for starting the project: her sense that Arab Americans had been greatly misrepresented as an ethnic group. In her introductions, she made it clear that she was a student of political science and that she wanted to learn more about Arab Americans as an immigrant community. Taking sufficient time to discuss not only the project but her own studies as a doctoral student helped Jamal work through her own as well as our respondents' concerns.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Our turn-down rate was very low in cases where sufficient phone conversations and discussions took place prior to

asking for an interview. When adequate conversation did not take place, we were less successful. So we continued to take the time to talk to people. When we decided to increase our number of access points in the community by approaching social service organizations, going into stores, or talking to people on the street in Arab neighborhoods, we were careful to be generous with our time and sincere in our interactions. This could translate into hours on end helping store owners and drinking tea while awaiting potential interviewees.

The problem in not establishing sufficient rapport is that researchers can easily be classified as exploiters of a community's information, not people committed to the welfare of the community itself. When doing research in an organization, expectations about the dissemination and use of the results are often part of a research agreement worked out with the organization. By contrast, when working with a diffuse population, the question of responsibility is less explicit but no less present. The complications are compounded when doing research in one's own community. For Jamal, "exit" is not an option; she was involved with the community before the project and will continue to be a part of the community afterward.

For us, currently in the middle of the research, what this means in terms of our ongoing relationship with the community is still under construction. But it underlines the ways in which gaining access and maintaining access are two dependent and reciprocal processes of one's research. To gain access is not only to obtain initial approval but also to maintain the integrity of the privilege granted to the researcher. This maintenance is what allows for greater access.

Chinese Officials as Ordinary Respondents

Melanie Manion

In mid-1986, I set out for China as a graduate student to research an unusually difficult example of the party-state effort to build social norms from public policies: the replacement of de facto lifelong tenure for officials with regular age-based retirement. The policy, introduced in 1978, had little precedent. It broke with the tradition of political purge that stigmatizes exit from office under communism. It challenged the vested interests of 2.5 million veteran revolutionaries, who had monopolized power in party and government for most of the years since communist victory in 1949. It contradicted the basis of their hold on power, revolutionary seniority, as well as still prevalent traditional Chinese views about age and authority.[15]