

GATEKEEPERS AND KEYMASTERS: DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIPS OF ACCESS IN GEOGRAPHICAL FIELDWORK*

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ABSTRACT. This article contributes to a recent and growing body of literature exploring the nature of fieldwork in human geography. Specifically, we critically examine the role of gatekeepers in providing access to “the field,” based on existing conceptualizations of gatekeepers in the literature and on our own experiences with gatekeepers. We argue that the concept of gatekeepers has been oversimplified, in that relationships between researchers and gatekeepers are often assumed to be unidirectional—with gatekeepers controlling or providing access by researchers—and predominantly static in form and time. Although we accept the necessity and advantages of working through gatekeepers, our experiences suggest that relationships with them are highly complex and evolve over time, with sometimes unexpected implications for research. In gathering and analyzing data, researchers become gatekeepers themselves, what we are calling “keymasters.” Reconceptualizing the gatekeeper-researcher relationship will contribute to ongoing efforts to more fully understand field-workers as undertaking a practice inherently political, personal, and linked to the production of knowledge. *Keywords:* access, gatekeeper, geographical fieldwork, keymaster, reflexivity, research methods.

Fieldwork has long been an important part of geographical research and a rite of passage for doctoral students, but the subject has historically been overlooked in graduate geography programs (Driver 2000; Mathewson 2001). These focus instead on the acquisition of knowledge related to regions, methods, language, and topics (DeLyser and Starrs 2001b). As reflected in recent collections of essays related to the practice of fieldwork (see DeLyser and Starrs 2001a; SJTG 2003), this is changing. Part of the change involves reconceptualizing the researcher; the long-outdated image of the lone, white male, tramping about in his “stout boots,”¹ overcoming obstacles, “objectively” recording observations and revealing truths—a view that has been described as masculinist—has been found wanting.²

Challenges to the historical treatment of fieldwork and field-workers have come from several directions: from feminist geographers concerned with subject-object

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relationships in research (see, for example, PG 1994; Moss 2002) and with the role of researchers as advocates for social change (for example, Kobayashi 2001); from postcolonial researchers concerned with the historic role of anthropologists and geographers in the colonial project, the reality of differential power relationships in cross-cultural research (for example, Skelton 2001), and obligations of researchers to conduct studies that are meaningful to people at the local level (for example, Stevens 2001), particularly when working in developing countries but also with disadvantaged communities; and from more general and social science-wide concern with the ethical responsibilities of researchers to their human subjects (for example, Dowling 2000; Kobayashi 2001). These challenges pose fieldwork as an inherently political process and see data collection, analysis, and results as embedded in such politics. Taking these challenges seriously requires researchers to be reflexive, engaging in “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher” (England 1994, 82; italics in the original), although this is far from a straightforward task (Rose 1997).

While a reconceptualization of fieldwork has widespread epistemological implications regarding the nature and construction of knowledge, it also highlights both the importance of human relationships in the field and the “humanness” of researchers. In the 2001 special issue of the *Geographical Review*, topics addressed that relate to “being human” include the need for researchers to maintain some privacy (Myers 2001), the sense of obligation researchers develop toward their subjects (Stevens 2001), the personal importance of being accompanied by family or friends (Price 2001; Veeck 2001; see also Frohlick 2002; Cupples and Kindon 2003), negotiating and sometimes manipulating personal identity (Hapke and Ayyankeri 2001; Myers 2001; Sangarasivam 2001; see also Mullings 1999; Dowler 2001), and the conflicting ethical issues that arise from representing views of others when such representation is critical (Duncan and Duncan 2001). Inevitably, these issues of “being human” have an impact on relationships with research subjects, and they can also have sometimes profound impacts on how research is conceived, conducted, analyzed, and presented.

In this article we address a critical, but often oversimplified, human relationship associated with fieldwork, that between researchers and what have been called “gatekeepers.” We begin with a definition of gatekeepers as those who provide—directly or indirectly—access to key resources needed to do research, be those resources logistical, human, institutional, or informational (Figure 1). We find that, in the methods literature, relationships between gatekeepers and researchers are portrayed as unidirectional and predominantly static in form and in time (focused on the “entry stage” of Figure 1). Although we accept the necessity and advantages of working through gatekeepers, our experiences suggest that relationships with gatekeepers are more complex than this, sometimes restricting methods adopted and highlighting ethical challenges associated with research on human subjects, for example. When field research occurs over extended periods of time, these relationships evolve and change, with unexpected implications for research. The complex-

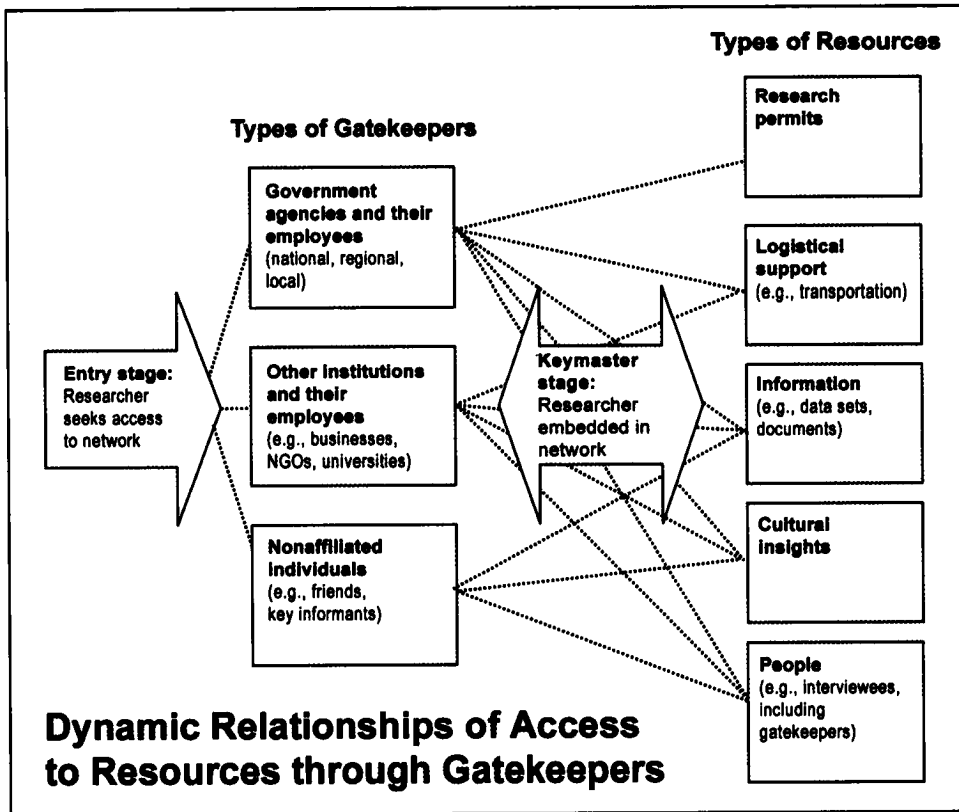


FIG. 1—Gatekeepers in geographical fieldwork: The diagram highlights the changing position of a researcher over time as she or he transitions to keymaster; different types of gatekeepers and possible variations in the types of resources to which they can provide access; and that gatekeepers are also resources (a gatekeeper may be an interviewee, for example).

ity of gatekeepers and our relationships with them are the focus of this article. We also explore the changing role of the researcher: As she or he acquires information, power vis-à-vis research subjects and initial gatekeepers often grows, to the extent that he or she becomes a type of gatekeeper as well. To distinguish this role from that of traditional gatekeepers, we label the researcher-turned-gatekeeper a "keymaster" (Figure 1).³

The origin of this study lies in Lisa Campbell's concerns regarding the nature of fieldwork in developing countries, which arose during her own doctoral work in a rural community in Costa Rica for a total of eight months in 1994 and 1995. Although she felt prepared for fieldwork, once there she quickly found that the "book learning" about fieldwork regarding ethics, neutrality, power relationships, personal conduct, and cultural sensitivity was inadequate. What were then vague and unarticulated concerns resurfaced when she began to advise graduate students. Her advice to them included stressing that they should be honest with research subjects regarding any outcomes of research (and clear that the most likely output was the

student's degree), and should take care of themselves physically. Most important, she emphasized the need to pay attention to personal relationships, especially because such relationships can affect the perceived neutrality of the researcher. Her concern was that any strong affiliation with a particular group would lead to loss of trust in relation to other groups. In addition to a general and oversimplified prohi-

TABLE I—DETAILS OF STUDENTS' FIELDWORK AND THEIR GATEKEEPERS

NAME	LOCATION	LENGTH OF FIELDWORK	TOPIC	GATEKEEPER ^a
James Abbott	Rural Namibia (Caprivi region)	11 months + 3 weeks	Fisheries livelihoods	Namibian Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources; WWF; USAID
Jennifer Silver	Caribbean island (British West Indies)	6 weeks	Fisher par- ticipation in research	U.K. research project, national government agency
Noella Gray	Rural Costa Rica	4 months	Volunteer ecotourism	National nongovern- mental agency with a local presence
Zoë Meletis	Rural Costa Rica	2 weeks + 3 months + 1 week + 3 months	Environmental and social impacts of ecotourism	U.S.-based nongov- ernmental agency with a national and local presence

^a The decision to reveal the identity of gatekeepers was left to the individual researchers.

bition against romantic liaisons, she offered some context-specific advice. She warned students studying the relationship between local communities and wildlife conservation, for example, that they should avoid certain activities that would be perceived as pro-wildlife. The underlying message, intentional or not, was that being aware of the factors influencing how researchers are perceived allows them to control how they are perceived and that controlling perceptions is part of being a good researcher. In spite of these conversations, her own students experienced similar feelings of underpreparedness in the field, and their willingness to share these feelings initiated a series of conversations related to "being human" in the field. In these wide-ranging conversations, then master's-degree students Jennifer Silver and Noella Gray and doctoral students James Abbott and Zoë Meletis identified relationships with gatekeepers as one important aspect of fieldwork that receives only cursory treatment in the literature.

Thus this article reviews the treatment of gatekeepers and, more generally, issues of access in recent geographical literature on research methods and fieldwork. Other social sciences with field components—for example, anthropology—address issues of fieldwork and the role of gatekeepers, but we restrict our discussion to the geography literature because we are concerned with the training of graduate students in geography. Although students could turn to other disciplines for advice or find references to gatekeepers in the methods section of traditional research articles

by geographers, we think their access to critical discussions of field methods should be easier than that.⁴

Following an overview of the literature, the four graduate-student authors describe their experiences with gatekeepers in developing countries; that is, in cross-cultural contexts.⁵ They do so in their own voices, in order to acknowledge the personal nature of the field experience (and following Scott, Richards, and Martin 1990; Curtis and others 2000; DeLyser and Starrs 2001b, on preserving voice when discussing field methods). To aid the comparison, individual descriptions are structured around the following questions: Who were the gatekeepers, and why were they chosen? What were the anticipated benefits and drawbacks of working with the gatekeepers? How did the relationship change over time and with what consequences for research? Although the students worked on different projects in different locations and for different amounts of time (Table I), common issues are evident in their stories. These commonalities are discussed in the final section of the article, as are their implications for our understanding of fieldwork and how supervisors and other instructors might better prepare students for it.

GATEKEEPERS IN THE GEOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

"Gatekeepers" can be found in the *Dictionary of Human Geography* under the entry "Urban Managers and Gatekeepers" (Johnston 1994, 660). This location reflects how the term was originally used by geographical researchers in referring to "individuals important in constructing and operating the constraints of choice in access to key resources, such as housing" (p. 660). Now, however, the term is used both more broadly and more specifically in the context of conducting research.

The treatment of gatekeepers in three recent methods textbooks directed at human geographers is reviewed here (Kitchin and Tate 1999; Hay 2000; Limb and Dwyer 2001). The textbooks were selected because they are recent and because we have used them in both teaching and preparing for fieldwork. We also review essays in special issues of the *Geographical Review* and the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* that touch directly or indirectly on gatekeepers (DeLyser and Starrs 2001a; SJTG 2003).

In general, the treatment of gatekeepers—and broader issues of access—in the three textbooks is limited and often arises as part of a larger description of a particular method or field project rather than as an issue in and of itself. Rob Kitchin and Nicholas Tate do address gatekeepers generally and directly in a brief passage that identifies them as a "practical consideration" when planning a research project (1999, 39). They define gatekeepers as those whose permission is necessary in order to conduct a study, because they control access to resources, both documents and people. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (Hay 2000), Robin Kearns addresses the issue of access when discussing participant observation and specifically refers to gatekeepers as those who facilitate "opportunities to interact with others in the chosen research site" (2000, 114). The issue of gatekeepers and

access is raised more frequently in *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers* (Limb and Dwyer 2001). Gill Valentine brings up their importance in a general chapter on research design but focuses on research with commercial organizations and on how a gatekeeper, “usually a secretary,” controls access to senior employees (2001, 47). Tracey Skelton (2001) also discusses gatekeepers in a commercial context, describing how plant managers controlled her access to employees. In describing how she conducted her research on the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, Lorraine Dowler identifies a family she boarded with as the first in a series of gatekeepers “who would not only facilitate interviews but at the same time advise me how to act in a way that would lessen the suspicion of both the Irish Catholic community as well as the British security forces” (2001, 154). Tracey Bedford and Jacquelin Burgess (2001) see gatekeepers as useful too, identifying them in the community or professional world as people who can help gather participants for focus groups.

In essays published in the 2001 special issue of the *Geographical Review*, access is often addressed, but without specific reference to gatekeepers. Stan Stevens (2001), for example, describes how having friends in the field helps him better understand local issues and define problems. Garth Myers tells how a friend explained his research agenda to the community and helped “open the community’s doors to me” (2001, 196). Stevens’s and Myers’s friends essentially performed the function of gatekeepers, even if the authors do not label them as such, and this highlights the complexity of relationships with gatekeepers. The story of Holly Hapke and Devan Ayyankeril (2001) illustrates this complexity most clearly: Although Hapke initially employed Ayyankeril because of his previous work with a community to which she hoped to gain access—and anticipated difficulties in obtaining—the two eventually married.

In the special issue of the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Jennifer Mandel most directly addresses some of the matters with which we are concerned and writes of her experiences negotiating with gatekeepers at different levels during her doctoral fieldwork in Benin, West Africa in 1997 and 1998. Even though fieldwork preparation informed her that she would need to consider the role of gatekeepers at various levels, and that traditional authorities could be “particularly officious and could cause considerable problems if their authority [were] not sufficiently respected” (2003, 203), she nonetheless underestimated the importance of gatekeepers. Specifically, she made erroneous assumptions regarding what approval by a high-level gatekeeper meant for gaining local access, and failed to realize that, in spite of women’s economic independence, she still had to negotiate access to them through men. As a Western feminist, she believed she should be able to interact directly with women. Finally, her physical and mental exhaustion at one point influenced how she interacted with a particular male gatekeeper, with negative consequences for her research.

Mandel also interacted with local research assistants who performed further gatekeeping functions. Based on the recommendation of her high-level gatekeeper,

a respected professor who negotiated her formal work authorizations, she hired a male research assistant even though she would have preferred a female one. In the end, the male assistant was an effective gatekeeper, helping her gain access and increasing her authority in local neighborhoods. Both the professor and her research assistant helped shape her survey and research approach, for example, by suggesting she use women's work groups to test her survey. When she later switched to female research assistants, they helped develop culturally appropriate questions to probe issues of interest, and "their participation in developing the survey also facilitated in their helping shape the objectives of the research" (2003, 205).

In general, the literature reveals two typologies of gatekeepers. First, gatekeepers can be obstacles to access, particularly in research where power relationships are reversed—for example, in economic geography, where researchers are often trying to gain access to elites in companies (Mullings 1999; Valentine 2001)—but also in communities where traditional authority structures are in place (Mandel 2003). In such cases, emphasis is put on the necessity of recognizing authority, treating such gatekeepers with respect, and even manipulating how we are perceived in order to increase our legitimacy (Mullings 1999). Second, gatekeepers can be helpful facilitators who provide access to and increase acceptance among research subjects and who help interpret cultural/political issues (Dowler 2001; Mandel 2003). In both cases, gatekeepers are usually individuals. The typology of the gatekeeper is static, and the role of the gatekeeper is most often seen as important in initiating research. Once access is achieved and relationships have been established, the assumption appears to be that these stay the same. Dealings with the gatekeeper are rarely mentioned after access is—or is not—achieved.

To examine more critically the often dynamic role of gatekeepers in the many stages of geographical field research, we focus on relationships with formal organizations (governmental and nongovernmental) that acted as gatekeepers for our various research projects.⁶ We acknowledge Margaret Peil's (1983) argument that gatekeepers exist at various levels and that researchers have commonly negotiated access to higher-level gatekeepers, assuming that it would filter through to the local level, whereas, in reality, access may be arranged by more informal gatekeepers. Nevertheless, we focus on high- and medium-level gatekeepers in order to facilitate comparison across our stories and to focus our discussion. These gatekeepers provided access to a variety of resources, including people, information, logistical support, cultural insights, and research permits, although this varied from case to case. They also influenced the research agenda itself, sometimes in subtle ways. Although Stevens (2001) suggests that alliances with government agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can make a researcher more suspect to local people, we believe this assertion is context specific and informed by existing relationships between communities and such organizations. Any gatekeeper, whether an individual or an institution, is unlikely to provide access to all groups of people and/or types of resources.

GATEKEEPER AND KEYMASTER EXPERIENCES

JAMES ABBOTT, IN NAMIBIA

In 2002 I spent eleven months on my doctoral research in a floodplain bounded by the Zambezi and Chobe Rivers in the far northeastern part of Namibia known as the "Caprivi region" (see Table I). A prominent livelihood in the Caprivi is fishing, as a source of both subsistence and income. I was interested in examining the relative importance of fishing and how this may have changed over time (Abbott 2005). Due to the largely rural nature of the region and its inhabitants' high dependence on natural resources, researching and implementing different forms of community-based natural resource management is the focus of considerable activity. Several NGOs and government agencies are involved in resource management and rural livelihoods in the region. I arrived just as a multiyear research project investigating the role of fishing livelihoods and fisheries management was set to begin. The project was funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Namibian Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. I had previously worked in the ministry as a Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteer and was familiar with some of the project participants, including the project coordinator (a British national) and the national government counterparts. Following consultations with the project team, we decided that I would join them with the understanding that we would all have input into individual data-gathering tools and would share data. At the same time, I was assured that I would be able to do what I wanted toward my doctoral research, thus overcoming my only concern at the time.

The institutional and political environment of the Caprivi region had the greatest influence on who acted as gatekeepers and how their roles evolved within the context of the project. The new interest in freshwater fisheries was largely taking place in an institutional and policy vacuum. Prior to independence in 1990, the Caprivi was a so-called semiautonomous Bantustan, with a mix of local and traditional authorities responsible for fisheries management. After independence, all natural resources became the responsibility of the national government. At the start of the project, freshwater fisheries legislation consisted of a single section in a pre-independence act, and the closest fisheries office to the Caprivi was about 1,750 kilometers away by car in Mariental, south of the capital, Windhoek, reflecting the general sense of political and geographical isolation of the area. In such an environment, NGOs, traditional authorities, and researchers were more prominent gatekeepers than were government officials. In addition, geographical isolation influenced my own evolving role as a keymaster.

The advantages of associating with this larger research project included an ability to draw on other relevant research that complemented my own, economies of scale resulting from collaboration (such as sharing transportation and research assistants) the legitimacy the association lent to my own research, and opportunities to participate in workshops as a representative of the larger project. Confidence that

my research would be "used" by someone was increased, because the larger project was tied to potential changes in government policy. The consultations with academic, NGO, and government researchers also made it less likely that my work would be redundant and more likely that it would be diffused widely. On a more practical note, I believed that the project's reporting requirements would force me to complete my work in a way that my own doctoral schedule might not.

The core research team comprised scientists from the Namibian and the neighboring Zambian governments, a researcher from a Norwegian institution, and locally based research assistants. In addition, the project employed Namibian post-secondary students seeking experience. Of the non-Namibian team members, I was the only one who was continually in the research area; the project director and other researchers would spend weeks at a time in the Caprivi but then return to distant cities. My role as keymaster developed through my formal relationship with the project and in my capacity as the full-time, in-situ team member; and my position as a visiting researcher, project team member, former vso volunteer in the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, and current resident of the Caprivi gave me privileged access to its inhabitants as well as to policymakers who were in Windhoek, three hours away by airplane but with whom I could communicate by cell phone.

One of the consequences of this position was what it implied for how research participants perceived me. Part of our research involved consulting communities about the present use and management of fisheries, as well as gaining input into appropriate management approaches in the new legislation. These issues were of interest to my own research, but, by taking part in these consultations as a member of the larger research project, I could be seen as representing the Namibian government. My desire to appear as neutral as possible for the purposes of my research was therefore at odds with this representation. I cannot tell to what degree this affected survey respondents in being candid with me, but if I had been in their position I certainly would have been restrained in my responses, at least at the beginning.

My position as keymaster grew as the project progressed. As the permanent team member in the field, I was increasingly asked to assume responsibilities such as coordinating meetings, transportation, and even payment of staff allowances and compensation for workshop attendees. Sometimes I had to use discretion regarding cash advances, absences, or missing receipts, often dealing with the very people I hoped to interview in the future. Clearly, my position vis-à-vis my research subjects was changing. It also became increasingly evident that the government policymakers expected me to play an active role in policy promotion and management on their behalf. Part of this was due to the ease of communicating documents, text messages, or voice mail through me on a cell phone rather than via bureaucratic channels. The two local research assistants, for example, were eventually hired by the government to be the first staff at the new fisheries office in the Caprivi. Despite this increase in their responsibility and the fact that these jobs should have shifted their own status, I was occasionally asked to pass along instructions to them

from their supervisors. Although I welcomed the opportunity to expedite the transfer of information and to be kept in the loop, so to speak, on occasions the local staff seemed to resent this extra step in administration, fearing, perhaps, that information was being filtered before being passed along or that they were somehow answerable to me as well as to their superiors in the head office. Whatever their concerns, I suspect that my role as keymaster was not entirely acceptable to them.

I was also often perceived as a potential conduit to the government for inhabitants' and NGOs' questions and concerns. The possible introduction of closed seasons, during which fishing would be banned in order to allow fish to breed, was one of the concerns I heard most frequently from interviewees during my household and fish-market surveys. The measure received support from the state and traditional authorities, however, because it asserted aspects of national sovereignty and reinforced a traditional form of management. Banning small-mesh nets, particularly adapted mosquito nets, also received broad support from state, traditional authorities, and male fishers alike. However, the fisheries scientists involved in the project concluded that, although the controversial practice ran counter to commonly held beliefs about fisheries management, it did not have a significant effect on fish biomass. My own research suggested that banning small-mesh nets would particularly affect the many female-headed households who depended on selling fish throughout the year in order to have sufficient protein for their families. I pointed this out to government stakeholders, but I could not promise the fish vendors in the market or the women in the households that their concerns would result in any action. This caused disappointment and some anger with the consultation process that at once identified what they were doing and made it that much easier to sanction. As a project team member, I could not hide behind the excuse of "only being a researcher"; clearly, the work in which I was participating would have profound impacts on peoples' lives and livelihoods.

JENNIFER SILVER, IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES

My master's-degree research focused on fisher participation in fisheries research and was based on fieldwork undertaken on a Caribbean Island in the British West Indies in May and June 2003. Because the fisheries literature was rife with examples of participation being used beneficially as a tool in fisheries research and management, yet lacked a satisfactory analysis of the potential negative aspects of participation, I wanted to explore how fishers experienced participation (Silver 2002). Why did they choose to participate? What did they hope to gain or fear to lose via participation? Were there negative aspects of participation, and if so, what were they? In order to answer these questions, I would have to be intimately involved with a specific project in which fishers were participating, yet retain the appearance of neutrality so that fishers would be willing to interact with me outside the project-specific context.

So began my relationship with my gatekeeper, a research project and its associated team members working in six British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean. The mandate of the project was to assess the status of marine turtle populations,

the levels of marine turtle harvest and bycatch, the genetic composition of stocks, and the status of current marine turtle research, conservation, and management efforts. The project was contracted by the U.K. government, and its mandate included making policy recommendations. Specifically, I was interested in one component of the overall project, a face-to-face socioeconomic survey of fishers.

In each of the six Overseas Territories, local government partners carried out the project's mandate, and local staff were responsible for administering the surveys. These were meant to assess the value of turtles and the capture/use practices of local fishers, as well as to learn about fishers' opinions on various conservation and management options. Lisa Campbell was part of the project team and was responsible for its socioeconomic component. She proposed that I spend six weeks on one of the islands facilitating the administration of the survey; that is, assisting the local government partners with a task they viewed with some trepidation. Theoretically, the surveys would have been administered by the government employees, regardless of my presence.

The project was thus the primary gatekeeper through which I gained access to fishers and pursued my research objectives. Being affiliated with the project was integral to my research, because my main method of collecting data was participant observation. Facilitating the surveys allowed me to be involved with and/or observe the administration of the survey, to have insider access to the group of researchers and to local government staff, and to have a point of common interest with which to open dialogue with local fishers outside our interaction for the project. I believe that being situated among these three stakeholders in the marine turtle fishery was an ideal position in which to explore my research questions regarding participation as a tool in fisheries management and research. However, as part of our agreement, the project team did have an influence on my choice of methods: It prevented me from formally interviewing fishers by making it a condition of its cooperation. The project team was concerned that asking fishers direct questions about the project while it was under way would encourage negative reactions and undermine the efforts of local project partners to complete this part of the research. This was a drawback to my research, for interviews would have allowed some triangulation of my research results, but it was a concession I deemed acceptable—especially given that my only other choice was to not do the research at all. One important feature of my relationship with the gatekeeper should be noted: I had little direct contact with the British project team members. Lisa negotiated my access, and, although I sometimes communicated with other team members by e-mail, my relationship with the British members was at a distance and impersonal.

In the field I had to balance my desire to contribute to a healthy marine ecosystem via healthy marine turtle populations with the knowledge that I was potentially affecting the futures—via probable changes to current turtle-fishing regulations—of the local fishers whose participation we were seeking. I was knowingly trying to forge relationships with fishers and better understand life from their perspective in order to do my job as a social science researcher, as well as to contribute informa-

tion on issues in the turtle fishery as assistant to the project. In this latter capacity, I acted as a keymaster. My concerns in the field were as much about my discomfort in this role and about how the knowledge I was helping to collect would be used as they were about the difficulties of obtaining information in the first place. Ultimately, I had no way to guarantee that the information the fishers provided would not be used to support changes in policy, and I did not lead them to believe otherwise. This was a second drawback of my affiliation with the project: I had no control over the results or recommendations that would come from the project, yet I was relying on fisher participation in that same project in order to collect data for my master's thesis. I knew that regardless of what I might be able to say about fishers' experiences with participation, the most important aspect of the project from fishers' perspectives was its potential to change fishing activities.

Overall, two opposing reactions underlay my fieldwork experience with regard to my relationship with the project as gatekeeper and my increasing role as keymaster. First, I experienced personal satisfaction that fishers were opening up to me and revealing their opinions about government, personal relationships of relevance to the fishery, and what they desired future management strategies to look like. The data I collected through participant observation of the survey process were greatly enhanced by my success in being a participant observer of everyday life. I reminded myself how much longer data collection might have taken had I been an independent researcher who did not have the benefit of being introduced to fishers through the project and the local government staff. This led to my second experience, one of personal conflict. I was aware that fishers may have been participating in the project because of the positive reputation that I was gaining among the larger group. Again, higher levels of participation were good for my own research and for the project, but the result might also yield more information that could be used to change fisheries regulations. I was never able to convince myself that I did not have a conflict of interest, in spite of following ethical protocols for working with human subjects when administering the survey and even though my ethics approval had been granted months previously.

There is no way to know to what extent the relationships I forged in the community increased the number of fishers who agreed to participate in the project, but there is evidence that at least some fishers were influenced by a desire to do me a favor (Silver and Campbell 2005). It would have been easy—but unethical—for me to take advantage of my position by encouraging fishers to participate for personal reasons, while playing down the potential that information they provided could lead to changes in turtle-fishing policy. Although I resisted such temptation, the conflict between my desire to increase the number of interviews while respecting the rights of fishers to opt out of a research activity that had the potential to affect their livelihoods negatively was highlighted. Working through a gatekeeper, specifically a research project that was designed to have policy impacts, meant that my master's-degree research might have an impact on the lives of fishers and that I, in my emerging role as keymaster, would be implicated in such an impact.

NOELLA GRAY, IN COSTA RICA

From May to August 2002, I undertook field research in a small Caribbean community in Costa Rica. Although this research was undertaken independently as an master's-degree project (Gray 2003), it was linked to other past and ongoing projects conducted by Lisa Campbell and various graduate students. All of these projects share the feature of having taken place in rural Costa Rican communities that are home to marine turtle conservation projects managed by NGOs. My research focused specifically on how various actors in the community viewed marine turtle ecotourism as a means of incorporating conservation and development.

The community is small, inhabited by approximately 100 people, and is adjacent to a wildlife refuge, a protected area that includes nesting beaches for endangered marine turtles. The Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) is legally responsible for the management of the refuge, but it permits a Costa Rican NGO to manage a marine turtle conservation project. In its current form, the project attracts mostly foreign volunteers/ecotourists who assist with turtle research and conservation work on the beach; these same volunteers also provide a source of income for the local families who supply their food and accommodations. Several local research assistants, all young men, are also employed by the NGO. Thus the key groups of actors in the village are the NGO, the volunteers, the MINAE park guards, the host families, and other local residents. In order to conduct research in the village, I had to gain access at several nested scales: the community, the various actor groups within the community, and individuals within each actor group. Decisions made at one scale inevitably affected access at other scales, often in unforeseeable ways.

In order to gain access to the community as a whole, I had two main options: I could just show up one day, or I could work through the NGO and ask the staff to facilitate my transportation and accommodation. I chose the latter option, for several reasons. First, my research was focused on the NGO project; if I wanted to gain information from the staff or volunteers, I would need to gain access to them eventually. It seemed better to be open and communicative from the beginning in order to encourage cooperation with my research. Second, it was logistically much easier to work through the NGO. Because the village is off the beaten path, arranging transportation and accommodation is difficult for non-NGO-affiliated visitors. I already had an indirect connection to the manager of the marine turtle project through Lisa, who had interacted with him previously; had we not requested his cooperation and assistance, he might have been suspicious of my intentions. I also gained official access to the community by submitting a letter to the local MINAE office requesting permission to conduct research. Although this formal permission technically gave me access to the entire community and wildlife refuge, practically it served only to give me access to the MINAE staff. In contrast, my informal permission from the NGO project manager facilitated access not just to the NGO but also to the volunteers and the host families. Therefore, the two gatekeepers with whom I worked to gain access to the community—the NGO

project manager and the senior park guard at MINAE—enabled access to particular actor groups.

Gaining access to the community through the NGO project manager yielded several benefits. He facilitated my access to other NGO staff, encouraged the host families to cooperate with me, and generally helped to create a welcoming environment. However, by gaining access through the NGO and staying with a host family, I was also positioned as being with the NGO, a position that, I worried, would limit my access to other residents in the community who did not work with and/or support the marine turtle project and would imply that I held certain views and values with respect to marine turtle conservation. In order to be perceived as a neutral researcher, I tried to distinguish myself from the project volunteers and NGO staff in several ways: I rarely went to the beach at night to participate in the turtle work; I repeatedly emphasized to people that I was not a volunteer and had no strong views on turtle conservation; and I distinguished myself by going to local organizations' meetings and introducing myself as an independent researcher. These activities positioned me as independent from the NGO project, at least in my view, but whether they had this effect for other actors is questionable. My host family could not understand why I did not want to work with the turtles, but other people did not seem to care whether I did or did not. Several local residents were dissatisfied with my neutral position on the project and pushed me to offer an opinion. Others had preconceived ideas of who I was and what I was doing that may or may not have been affected by my actions. Some respondents, for example, identified me as a well-meaning foreign student whom they wanted to help, while others positioned me as a selfish foreign researcher whom they had no interest in helping; these views seemed to be a product of preexisting perceptions of foreign volunteers and researchers rather than based on any interpretation of my personal neutrality or affiliation with the NGO. Gaining access to the community through the NGO may have contributed to my positionality, but so did many other factors that were beyond my control.

Although I was preoccupied by the effect that my affiliation with the NGO would have on my ability to gain access to other groups, I neglected to consider my access to the NGO as an ongoing process. Although I had gained access to the NGO as a whole through the project manager, I still had to gain permission from each staff member individually in order to conduct an interview. The NGO actor group comprised a variety of people, including Costa Rican project staff based in the capital city, San José, international volunteer research assistants, and local Costa Rican staff. My relationship with all of these individuals had been friendly from the beginning, yet part way through my stay in the village I found the local staff—the young male research assistants—suddenly cold and reluctant to interact with me. In conversation one night, they finally explained that the project manager had told them to be on their best behavior with me because I had complained to Lisa about being sexually harassed. I insisted that this was not the case, but I was never fully able to recover their trust or cooperation with my research. The one local research assistant who did agree to be interviewed spent the entire time emphasizing that he was a

responsible, hard-working staff member who never responded to romantic overtures by tourists, while declining to answer many of my questions about the project and community. When I was finally able to confront the project manager about the situation, he insisted that it had been a misunderstanding between him, me, and Lisa. How such a serious "misunderstanding" could have come about remains unclear,⁷ but one possible explanation is that the project manager felt threatened by my position as keymaster. The NGO project, like so many other NGO-managed projects, depends on funding from outside sources and is continuously seeking new sources of funds. As someone able to report on the project in venues that are accessible to potential funders—journals, conferences, the Internet—I was in a powerful position. Although the project manager was willing to act as a gatekeeper for my research, he did not want me to have any negative experiences, such as inappropriate advances by local staff, to report. The irony is that, had he not intervened, I would not have had any unusual experiences with the local staff to report.

ZOË MELETIS, IN COSTA RICA

My doctoral research deals with the relationship between tourism development and solid waste generation and management in a rural Costa Rican ecotourism destination. The community of more than 800 people has a history of boom-and-bust resource-based economies, with ecotourism as its current economic base. Until the late 1960s the capture and sale of marine turtles for export was an important part of the economy. This ended when the turtle nesting beach and surrounding area were protected in the 1970s. The village adjoins a national park, and nesting marine turtles are an important tourist attraction, drawing more than 50,000 tourists a year. Although many residents appreciate the economic value of marine turtles through ecotourism, some local demand for (now illegal) turtle eggs and meat persists.

In order to facilitate my access to the field, I worked through a U.S.-based NGO with a permanent local presence. Lisa Campbell had an existing relationship with this gatekeeper because she and other students had conducted research in the village. This history of cooperation and personal contacts made a loose association with the NGO a natural choice for me. Specifically, it provided me with access to information and some support facilities (for example, e-mail), assistance with logistical arrangements, and introductions by local staff to key players in the village. The scientific director and field coordinator acted as important ambassadors and interpreters during my first visit in 2002, and their introductions lent weight to my project among people who viewed the NGO positively. Furthermore, because of its involvement in both local tourism and waste-related endeavors, the NGO itself had information that was useful for my research. On a personal level, NGO staff were reliable and friendly faces that helped allay some of my nervousness as I "found my field legs."

The NGO is a powerful player in local conservation and development, but my affiliation with it had potential drawbacks. The NGO's mandate in the village is to continue a long-running turtle-tagging program, and it is very supportive of

ecotourism development. The NGO is decidedly pro-turtle and anti-poaching, and it has ties to local enforcement (reporting and assisting in apprehending poachers). This puts the NGO in conflict with some villagers who would like the right to eat some turtle products. Because my research does not involve turtles, I believed that my association with the NGO posed no direct threat to the integrity of my project. Nevertheless, I did not want to be perceived as working for or with the NGO, and therefore associated with their views on important issues like turtle conservation, so that people would feel free to talk to me about my own research interests, tourism and solid waste.

While conducting my research I downplayed my association with the NGO unless doing otherwise was useful—for example, when interacting with local park staff, who have a positive working relationship with the NGO. Except for my initial visit in 2002, I did not live at the NGO compound but stayed at a hotel in town. When discussing my research, I stressed that I was an independent doctoral student working on my dissertation. All written documents, such as interview schedules, had my institutional affiliation at the top and no mention of the NGO. I also stressed that the NGO would not be receiving copies of the data with names attached, that comments were confidential, and that I did not have any reporting responsibilities to the NGO or the park. I tried not to wear any overtly turtle-loving or NGO-related clothing while in the village. I took special care to treat known poachers the way I did all residents, greeting them when I saw them.

In spite of my efforts, up until my very last day in the field in 2004, I was still being asked whether I worked for the NGO. I have since decided that the greatest factor contributing to peoples' perceptions of my relationship with the NGO was beyond my control. The reality is that very few foreigners—especially North Americans or Europeans—remain in the village for more than a week unless they are working with the NGO. Thus, even when people knew I was studying tourism and solid waste, they found it confusing because they assumed I was a biologist working for the NGO. This confusion could usually be cleared up during interviews, and I experienced few problems persuading respondents to open up about various topics, including questions about the NGO and turtle tours.

My foreignness was probably the biggest influence on how my association with the NGO was perceived, but my social life was an additional complication. Over time, I developed friendships with the mostly North American and European NGO volunteers and staff. When conducting fieldwork, it is difficult to resist opportunities to interact with people who speak your language both literally and metaphorically. These friendships represent opportunities for relaxation and escape, dealing with culture shock, letting one's guard down, reenergizing, and receiving news from home. I often felt I had an academic devil and angel, one on each shoulder. The angel reminded me that, in order to highlight my neutrality, I should minimize the time I spent with NGO people. The devil was telling me that it was all right, that I could always explain my relationship, and that I should spend time with the NGO people because it made me feel good. This conflict was essentially between myself as a re-

searcher and as a sociable and sometimes lonely person, far from home for a significant amount of time.

Over the course of my fieldwork I became particularly good friends with the NGO's field coordinator. We enjoyed each other's company and provided the valuable function of an escape from our respective work. We also cooperated in organizing and publicizing activities in the village. It reached the point that, when one of us was called on to help with an event, she was asked to bring the other. Surely all of this collaboration added to the confusion. Our relationship also placed both of us in difficult positions with our respective work goals. For example, off duty one day, we discussed poaching with other NGO volunteers. I argued against the perception that most of the demand for turtle products is from outside the village, as I had seen people walking through the village with turtle eggs. My NGO friends became excited when they realized that I, the social scientist staying in the village, had access to certain types of information and sightings that they did not. They suggested that I watch for and report poaching to the NGO and the park, and they saw this as an opportunity for me to contribute to anti-poaching efforts. They were surprised when I refused, even after I explained that it would compromise my research project and the future of social science research in the area in general.

A second example occurred when I was invited to a locally hosted party. I was proud of my invitation because I felt it was a signal that I was doing things right and integrating with the community. When my friend from the NGO showed up before I went to the party, I had a conundrum on my hands because I felt responsibilities to both my friend and my hosts. I decided to satisfy both and bring my friend to the party. When we arrived, my friend froze as one of the hosts took a bowl of turtle eggs off of the table and retired to the kitchen. I pleaded quietly with my friend, who sat down and pretended not to have noticed, and we stayed at the party. Later, however, against my wishes, she reported the incident to her superior, using the names of our hosts. I do not and do not want to know whether her superior confronted our hosts about the incident. This was a clear case of our conflicting agendas overriding our friendship, with potentially serious consequences for my research.

My relationship with some NGO staff changed over time. In the beginning, the NGO was very supportive of my work; it was interested in learning more about tourism and had always been interested in solid waste issues. In recent years, however, the NGO has shifted to an openly pro-ecotourism stance, extolling the virtues of turtle-based ecotourism locally and abroad. As the NGO's enthusiasm for tourism has grown, the view of my project by some staff members shifted. As an academic studying ecotourism, my job is not to sell ecotourism but to help tell the whole story. A recent experience suggests that some people may not want the whole story told: An NGO employee asked me how I think my research will affect people's perceptions of the village—implying that my research might harm ecotourism—and suggested that I focus on the positive, rather than the negative, aspects of local ecotourism. The gatekeeper has become uncomfortable with my transition to keymaster.

LESSONS LEARNED

These research stories expose some of the complexities of working with gatekeepers that we feel are absent from the literature on geographical fieldwork. Although the nature of the fieldwork and sites varied greatly, we have extracted common lessons learned.

1. *Gatekeepers come in a variety of forms.* Traditionally, gatekeepers are often described as individuals with or without some kind of official authority. The gatekeepers described here range from a foreign research project, to NGOs, to government agencies, all with varying degrees of presence at specific field sites. Different types of gatekeepers provide access to different types of resources, and rarely can a single gatekeeper provide access to all resources. Our mid-to-high-level gatekeepers provided access to some resources, including some groups of people, but probably restricted our access to others. We attempt to capture some of this variation in Figure 1.

With all institutional gatekeepers, the role of individuals remained important. James Abbott had personal relationships with researchers and government officials based on his former work in Namibia, and this facilitated his joining the larger research project. In Costa Rica, Lisa Campbell's prior relationships with the NGOs were in reality relationships with staff members. Had these relationships not been cordial, it is unlikely that Zoë Meletis and Noella Gray would have sought access through these NGOs. In Jennifer Silver's case, Lisa played a dual role: that of a supervisor who wanted to see her students' research succeed and that of a project team member who shared concerns about the potential of the research to have an impact on the project's success. Jennifer's ability to undertake her research was predicated on Lisa's vouching for her to the project team. Thus personal relationships are clearly important in facilitating access through institutional gatekeepers. However, researchers should not lose sight of the fact that the institutions have objectives of their own and that these can override personal relationships. Zoë's relationship with the NGO field coordinator illustrates this most clearly: In spite of their friendship, the field coordinator reported the "eggs at the party" incident, an action that could have jeopardized Zoë's work and position in the village.

2. *Relationships with gatekeepers vary.* The degree of association with gatekeepers can vary, and different levels of closeness can have benefits and drawbacks for researchers. Although James and Jennifer had official associations with their gatekeepers, Zoë and Noella did not, and this level of "officialness" turned out to be important. For Jennifer and James the advantages of formal relationships with gatekeepers were clear: Without them, James would have had less access to subjects and data, and Jennifer would have been unable to do her research. But their official relationships also made them answerable to their gatekeepers, who had varying degrees of input into how they conducted their research. Through these formal relationships with larger research projects, they also found themselves conducting research that would clearly affect the livelihoods of their research subjects. While all researchers may hope to "make a difference," neither Jennifer nor James had con-

trol over what that difference would ultimately be. They found themselves feeling ethically compromised, as their associations with gatekeepers gave them increased access to research subjects and, at the same time, furthered the cause of larger projects that they did not control.

In contrast, Zoë and Noella had unofficial relationships with their gatekeepers in that, once they obtained access to the field, they pursued their own research goals independent of the NGOs. Yet these gatekeepers arguably had greater impacts on their research than did Jennifer's and James's formal associates. Noella's example is most striking, in that the intervention of the NGO closed access to an important group of stakeholders. Zoë's friendship with one NGO employee undoubtedly had an impact on how she was perceived by both those who were for and those who were against the work of the NGO. Furthermore, this friendship made it uncomfortable for Zoë to deal with the concerns of other NGO staff members about the implications of her work.

Perhaps it was because of their formal associations that their gatekeepers welcomed Jennifer and James in their roles of keymasters; the research project was happy to see Jennifer advance the survey in the field once she had agreed to the terms of participation, and James was used as an in situ project administrator, even taking on some accounting responsibilities. Noella and Zoë, on the other hand, working outside the control of their gatekeepers, were or are seen as potentially threatening keymasters.

3. *Relationships with gatekeepers change over time.* Relationships with gatekeepers are not static, and Zoë's and Noella's stories suggest that changing relationships are based in part on the emerging role of the researcher as keymaster and on whether the gatekeeper perceives that as threatening. Change can produce a more comfortable or advantageous relationship, as in Noella's case. Her threat as keymaster was preconceived by the project manager and, since his original intervention, he has been supportive of Noella's work; he has circulated her thesis, which is fairly positive about the project, widely. Rather than threatening his project, Noella's activities were eventually perceived as beneficial. Change can also produce a less comfortable or advantageous relationship, as in Zoë's case. Her initially positive relationships with some NGO staff have been strained; as she has started to circulate her results in her role of keymaster, she is seen by some as undermining the NGO's work. Change may be sparked by specific events—for example, publication of research results—or more subtly through increased understanding of objectives or changing priorities of gatekeepers or keymasters. These changing relationships can, in turn, alter terms of access. Although the researcher's experience in the field may mean that access through the gatekeeper is no longer essential, the changed relationship with the original gatekeeper will undoubtedly change interactions with research subjects and the nature of the data we gather.

4. *To a large extent, how our relationships with gatekeepers are perceived by research subjects is beyond our control.* Rather than engaging in a positivist effort to "be" neutral, we all made efforts to be "perceived as" neutral and independent of

our gatekeepers. Like Skelton (2001), we saw this as a means of reflexively countering the power implied by our positionality, not just as foreign, white, educated outsiders but also in terms of our affiliation with particular gatekeepers. As field-workers, we can plan for how we act in the field, and we can make decisions and create relationships based on how we think these will be received. We need to think carefully about the trade-offs involved in working with one gatekeeper instead of another, for example, or about how we manage the gatekeeper relationship. However, we cannot assume that such efforts will have the desired effect or that we can control our image. In spite of a researcher's best efforts to establish her or his independence from a gatekeeper, research subjects will make up their own minds about this relationship based on a number of factors, many of which are beyond the researcher's control. Factors include former interactions with other researchers and a researcher's identity—as a student, say, or a North American, or a woman. For example, Jennifer found that she was considered a “turtle hugger” in spite of her efforts to appear neutral on the subject of turtle conservation and an expressed desire to taste turtle meat, which was legally available at her site. However, this perception may have had as much to do with the fact that she was a North American university student as it did with her working on a turtle project. Similarly, Zoë and Noella were seen as “with” their respective NGOs simply because they resemble the many people who do work with them—students, North American, white. For Zoë, this assumption continues despite three trips to the field and little current reliance on the NGO for access or support. For James, his involvement with a collaborative government-NGO project and long-term presence in a remote field site meant that both his research subjects and the project team members positioned him as a kind of liaison between them, regardless of his discomfiture at playing this role.

Our concerns about whether our relationships with gatekeepers influence research subjects reflect a disjuncture between the theory and the practice of field methods. Although our efforts to present ourselves as neutral were grounded in self-conscious analytical scrutiny of our power and positionality, any attempt to control—or perhaps manipulate—how we are perceived in the field remains problematic in at least three ways. First, as suggested by Simon Reid-Henry (2003), it privileges the position of the researcher and contributes to a sense of control by the researcher over the outcomes of a critically reflexive process. Most often, discussions of reflexivity focus on considering the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and this denies a network of actants. Reid-Henry (2003) points out that not all network agents are amenable to control, and some actively resist it and/or try to exert control themselves. Our experiences with gatekeepers, key actors in our research networks, support this argument. For example, Noella was prepared to manage how she was perceived by the community but not by the gatekeeper. Our attempts to maintain the appearance of neutrality are examples of what Gillian Rose referred to as “transparent reflexivity” (1997), in which it is problematically assumed that power is context and that we as researchers are powerful, able to fully understand both ourselves and the field of power in which we are embedded.

Second, it highlights a tension in human geography. On one hand, we ostensibly realize that we are situated researchers in a field of power relationships, where data are constructed in interactions; on the other hand, our efforts to be reflexively neutral also imply that we do not want to “contaminate” what the interviewee tells us—that is, we do not want to prevent the interviewee from giving us the “real” answer to questions (see Whatmore 2003).

Third, our experiences suggest that local people were often dissatisfied with any claims to neutrality. They sometimes resented our asking them to confide their views of conservation projects and policies, without returning the favor. Jennifer’s and James’s sincere efforts to assert their independence of their gatekeepers were viewed as suspect, given their associations with larger research projects that would have an impact on peoples’ lives.

5. *Relationships with gatekeepers do more than provide access.* A more critical treatment of gatekeepers is required, one that looks beyond their appeal in terms of facilitated access to various resources. We need to more overtly consider the power relationships between gatekeepers, communities, and researchers in the field and to recognize that gatekeepers can attempt to control, reroute, or otherwise influence research, regardless of how relationships between gatekeeper and researcher, both professional and personal, appear at the outset. We suggest that, instead of the “door” model of gatekeepers providing access, we need a “revolving door” model, in which access is always up for negotiation.

It is important to move beyond the “gatekeeper as a practical consideration” to the “gatekeeper as theoretical consideration.” If data are not predetermined but constructed by interactions between researcher and participants, then this coconstruction of data will take place in the shadow of the relationship with the gatekeeper; that is, it is a question not just of “Will this person talk to me?” but also of “What and how will they tell me, given how access was obtained?” In some ways, our notion of gatekeepers needs to catch up to our notions of “the field.” Many human geographers have challenged the notion of the field as a bounded space, viewing it instead as a “field of power” (Katz 1994), an open and porous network of practices and social relationships (Massey 2003). Even though we may travel to and from our field sites, we are always “in the field” in the sense that we do not leave this network of social relationships once it has been established, especially our relationships with gatekeepers. In all of our cases, we have maintained more—or at least as much—contact with our gatekeepers than with other people at our field sites. We are even concerned with our gatekeepers as we write this article, and we have debated what impacts it will have on our relationships and how we might try to manage these. Thus, even while writing, we are still “in the field.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR GRADUATE TRAINING

We echo the concern raised by other authors regarding the lack of critical attention paid to fieldwork in human geography, especially during graduate training. We have focused on relationships between researchers and gatekeepers and have argued that

these are complex and dynamic, involve professional and personal trade-offs, and can have subtle and not-so-subtle impacts on research methods and outcomes. Although we recognize that this is only one of many human relationships in which researchers are engaged, we believe it is an important one. It is perhaps becoming more important, given the current emphasis on “useful research,” the utility of which is immediately evident for policy reform, development interventions, law making, and so on, and ensuring this through partnerships with field organizations or communities. Many funding sources for research in developing countries, for example, require evidence of local institutional support in the field. Such field organizations often act as gatekeepers, and, in all of our cases, working with institutional gatekeepers was also seen as a means of making research more valuable. James Abbott articulated this most clearly when he described his reasons for joining a larger research project, and Jennifer Silver was motivated by her ability to forward the gatekeeper’s larger research project. However, even those who worked more informally through gatekeepers were motivated in this way. Noella Gray was pleased that the NGO project manager circulated her master’s thesis, for it contributed to her belief that her research made a difference to someone in the “real” world. Zoë Meletis recognized that the NGO with which she worked was also one of the proponents of waste management at her field site and was thus likely to be interested in her results. This understandable desire to link with gatekeepers in order to secure funding or to make our results more “useful” should not overwhelm our ability to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of particular associations.

We are not the first authors to call for researchers to be critically reflexive, to “require careful consideration of the consequences of the interactions with those being investigated” (England 1994, 82), but we join the few who suggest that this is necessary in dealing with gatekeepers. We make this call for critical reflexivity with Reid-Henry’s (2003) and Rose’s (1997) critiques of the concept in mind. Critical reflexivity should focus not exclusively on the relationship between the researcher and the researched but also on the network of actants, of which gatekeepers are a part. It should not privilege the researcher’s position; we need to move away from the notion that a researcher can fully understand and then control relationships in the field and that exerting this control is part of being a “good” researcher. The position of the researcher vis-à-vis research subjects and gatekeepers will change, and we use the concept of keymaster to illustrate the change. Graduate students working in developing countries or with disadvantaged groups are often made conscious of their greater power vis-à-vis research subjects at the beginning of research, just as those working with expert groups or chief executive officers are made aware of their lesser power. However, they are rarely made to reflect on how their power relationships change as they become keymasters, and we find no references to how their relationships with gatekeepers change as a result.

We suggest that, when contemplating relationships with gatekeepers, the message to graduate students should emphasize that, rather than attempting to control or manage our positionality through our actions, we need to be aware that every

action we take can have a variety of consequences for our perceived positionality. We need to think carefully about how we form relationships and about the implications of our choices for constructing “the field.” As Zoë’s story illustrates, choices can be small—to invite someone to a party—but potentially important. At the same time, we need to recognize that it is unlikely that we will ever be able to predict or control the consequences of these choices and that factors beyond our control will influence the extent to which our individual choices make a difference. This is not to remove responsibility from researchers; although it can be exhausting, we encourage researchers to make choices consciously, all of the time. But we also need to accept that, despite our best intentions, our choices will sometimes have negative consequences—for ourselves or other actants in our research network. Graduate students need to be prepared to learn from these situations, and their mentors need to be more open about how they have negotiated such situations themselves. This is not so that future “sticky situations” can be avoided—these are inevitable—but so that graduate students will not be paralyzed by fear of making a “wrong” choice or wracked by guilt if their actions produce negative consequences. Finally, we need to recognize that the choices we make will sometimes involve trade-offs between personal and professional considerations but that the distinction between the two will not always be clear. We are, after all, human and cannot easily separate these two selves.

NOTES

1. In reference to F. J. Monkhouse’s description of the geographical researcher, and his most important piece of equipment (Monkhouse 1955, quoted in DeLyser and Starrs 2001b, iv).
2. This view has been challenged, but it has not disappeared. Juanita Sundberg (2003), for example, argues that such masculinist epistemologies still dominate geographical research on Latin America.
3. The film *Ghostbusters* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1984) features a gatekeeper (Dana/Zull) and a keymaster (Louis / Vince Clothar). The original identity of each has undergone a transformation (Dana becomes Zull, and Louis becomes Vince Clothar). Borrowing from *Ghostbusters*, we use the term “keymaster” to represent the identity the researcher takes on during fieldwork. As pointed out by one reviewer, keymaster is loaded with a masculinist sense of power that is at odds with much of what we discuss in this article. But we decided to retain the term for two reasons. First, as a pop culture reference, the term “keymaster” is recognizable, and we like the emphasis on transformation in identity in the *Ghostbusters* reference. Second, the researcher’s position is one of power, sometimes attributed to him or her against his or her wishes by research subjects and gatekeepers. Even though researchers may not see themselves as powerful in any sense—masculinist or otherwise—this perception of power is critical, and the term “keymaster” captures it well.
4. Feminist geographers have contributed greatly to the reconceptualization of fieldwork. However, not all geography students are exposed to feminist geography. Our reference to this literature occurred after our fieldwork was completed, as we struggled to understand some of our experiences. We believe that all human geographers, feminist or not, should be exposed to these issues as part of their training. Sundberg (2003) makes similar arguments in reference to Latin Americanist geographers.
5. Relationships with gatekeepers are influenced by the context in which research takes place. Because all of our research experiences are in developing countries and cross-cultural contexts, we can only speculate as to how relevant our discussion is to other contexts. We do believe the generalizations made in the concluding section of the article are widely applicable.

6. Although none of the geographical literature we reviewed dealt with institutional gatekeepers, these are widely recognized in political science (see, for example, Feldman, Bell, and Berger 2003).

7. Lisa Campbell visited Costa Rica halfway through my fieldwork and attended a meeting in San José at which the NGO manager was present. She recalls a conversation with him when she asked how I was getting along in the field and thanked him for his help to date. We leave room for the possibility that some misunderstanding arose from this exchange.

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