

Using Diaries for Social Research

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Using Diaries for Social Research

Andy Alaszewski

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SAGE Publications Inc.
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Preface

**A writer does not always know what he or she knows,
and writing is a way of finding out. (Alan Bennett, 1998,
pp. 539–40)**

I first became interested in using diaries for social research in the mid 1990s when I was commissioned by the English National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting to undertake a study of the ways in which community nurses managed risk in their everyday practice. As part of this research, the research team wanted to capture and analyse actual clinical decisions and explore their risk implications. Both of the two established approaches, interviewing and observation, were flawed. Interviews rely on memory, and inviting nurses to recollect specific decisions was likely to generate generalised and idealised accounts of the ways in which nurses felt that they should make decisions and manage risk rather than how they actually did deal with the complexity of specific situations. Observation also presented problems. It would have intruded into the potentially sensitive relationship between the nurses and their clients and might have distorted the very processes which we were seeking to capture. We therefore decided to use a less intrusive approach by inviting nurses to act as self-observers and to record their observations in diaries (Alaszewski et al., 2000, pp. 81–2).

We then looked for texts that could guide us in this approach. We searched the obvious social science databases. There was some practical guidance available, for example Corti (1993), and a number of major studies in our area of interest had used diaries, for example Robinson (1971) in his study of the process of becoming ill. However the literature was patchy and we found it difficult to identify a major overview which would provide systematic guidance on the ways in which diaries could be used for social research. We did identify an article by Zimmerman and Weider which described a diary-interview approach which they summarised in the following way:

Individuals are commissioned by the investigator to maintain ... a record over some specified period of time according to a set of instructions ... The technique we described emphasizes the role of diaries as an observation log maintained by subjects which can be used as a basis for intensive interviewing. (1977, p. 481)

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Since this approach seemed to meet our requirements, we decided to use it. However we found it difficult as there was little guidance on the type of instructions to provide, the precise form of the diaries, the ways in which the contents of the diaries were analysed and the ways in which these analyses informed the intensive interviewing.

While the literature on the use of diaries for social research is growing, it does not match that on other commonly used social research methodologies. For example researchers who want to use focus groups as a research method have the choice of a number of excellent texts (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; Kreuger, 1994; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). Diaries seem to be a neglected source even in areas where one would anticipate they would be a key resource. For example Roberts's (2002) text on biographical research included only one relatively short discussion of diaries.

I really recognised the need for a book on diary research when Bob Heyman invited me to take part in a workshop on qualitative research in primary health care in the North of England. At the conference there were detailed presentations on focus groups and conversational analysis but nothing on diary research apart from my paper. I discussed this with David Silverman and suggested there was room for a book on diary research in the qualitative research series he edited for Sage. He agreed and I offered to submit an outline. I had in mind editing a text that would bring together a range of expertise on the use of diaries, especially in qualitative research. The proposal was accepted with the proviso that it should be a single authored text and should cover the use of diaries in quantitative as well as qualitative research.

It was a considerable challenge, which I am very pleased that I accepted. In writing the book I found that I knew more than I had anticipated, even if some of this knowledge was only dimly remembered from past academic work and had to be considerably refreshed. However there were still considerable gaps, and writing this book gave me an opportunity to explore areas and forms of research of which I had very little experience or expertise and also made me aware of how flexible and useful diaries are in the research process. This book is designed to contribute to the literature on the use of diaries by providing a text for researchers who are interested in using this methodology. I hope this book will stimulate interest in the use of diaries and stimulate others to write about diary research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank David Silverman, editor of the series, for responding positively to my initial suggestions, encouraging me to write a broad overview text and commenting on initial drafts. It has been challenging and it took far longer than anticipated. Partly this reflects my misplaced optimism about the amount of time it would take, but it also reflects some unexpected events in my personal life including a major job change, three house moves and a serious illness. I would like to thank my wife Helen for all her love and support during what was at times a difficult period and for her helpful suggestions for and comments on drafts of this book.

In retrospect my illness did have some positive aspects. It made me concentrate on what I wanted to complete if things went wrong. Getting this book finished became one of my main priorities. The progress of this book was a regular topic of conversation when I met Sarah Beasley and her colleagues at the Maidstone Oncology Centre in Kent and I hope that it justifies the decisions we made.

Writing this book has enabled me to read some wonderful diaries and to find out far more about some fascinating research using diaries. As will be clear I am indebted to some first rate researchers, in particular to Anthony Coxon who commented on an early draft of this book and gave me permission to make use of the first class work published by Project SIGMA. I would like to thank Anthony Coxon and Cassell for permission to quote from his book based on Project SIGMA data, *Between the Sheets* (Coxon, 1996), Louise Corti at the University of Essex and Nigel Gilbert at the University of Surrey for permission to quote from issue 2 of the *Social Research Update* (Corti, 1993) on 'Using diaries in Social Research', Oxford University Press for permission to quote from Alan Bryman's (2001) text on *Social Research Methods* and the management board of *Sociological Research Online* for permission to quote from Heather Elliott's article on 'The use of diaries in sociological research on health experience' (1997). I would also like to thank Jill Manthorpe, Kirstie Coxon and David Wainwright for their comments on early drafts. While I have found all these comments helpful, the final judgement on and responsibility for the published text is mine.

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The Development and use of Diaries

The inescapable duty to observe oneself: if someone else is observing me, naturally I have to observe myself too; if none observes me, I have to observe myself all the closer.

Franz Kafka, 7 November 1921

Key aims

- To outline the ways in which diary keeping has developed and key features of diaries.

Key objectives

- To define what a diary is.
 - To examine the development and evolution and consider the conditions underpinning the development of diary keeping.
 - To consider the publication of diaries and the different types of published diaries.
-

Definition of diaries

A diary can be defined as a document created by an individual who has maintained a regular, personal and contemporaneous record. Thus the defining characteristics of diaries include:

- *Regularity* A diary is organised around a sequence of regular and dated entries over a period of time during which the diarist keeps or maintains the diary. These entries may be at fixed time intervals such as each day or linked to specific events.
- *Personal* The entries are made by an identifiable individual who controls access to the diary while he or she records it. The diarist may permit others to have access, and failure to destroy the diary indicates a tacit acceptance that others will access the diary.
- *Contemporaneous* The entries are made at the time or close enough to the time when events or activities occurred so that the record is not distorted by problems of recall.
- *A record* The entries record what an individual considers relevant and important and may include events, activities, interactions, impressions and feelings. The record usually takes the form of a time-structured written document, though with the development of technology it can also take the form of an audio or audiovisual recording.

The precise form of diaries varies. The simplest form is the log that contains a record of activities or events without including personal comments on such events. Such personal logs are similar to 'public' journals such as ships' log-books which are regular-entry books whose completion is 'a task, whether officially imposed or self-appointed, performed for its public usefulness' (Fothergill, 1974, p. 16). More complex diaries include not only a record of activities and/or events but also a personal commentary reflecting on roles, activities and relationships and even exploring personal feelings. The diarist may explicitly address different audiences. Elliott (1997, para. 2.2) suggests that diaries where the prime audience is the diarist should be classified as intimate journals, whereas diaries with a view to a wider audience and posterity should be classified as a memoir. Such a distinction is difficult to maintain. For example most of the entries which Gladstone, the Victorian politician, made in the diary which he kept for over 71 years were:

Lists of the persons written to, persons seen, places visited, meetings attended and works read. Once a week or rather more often, Gladstone added a sentence of comment about some individual, event or book, or his own reactions. More rarely he wrote a paragraph, usually of soul-searching. (Beales, 1982, p. 464)

The distinction between intimate journals and memoirs implies that it is possible to clearly discern the motivation of diarists. However it is difficult to make a clear differentiation between private or personal and public. MacFarlane suggests that the term 'diary' can be used for all personal documents which individuals produce about themselves, and uses the term:

as an all-embracing word [which] includes autobiographies. Often a 'diary' is nothing more than some personal observations scribbled in the margins of an almanack. (1970, p. 4)

The development of diaries

Diaries in their modern form developed in the early modern period in Europe. However there are texts which have some of the features of diaries that predate these by over 500 years.

Japanese 'diaries' and Anglo-Saxon Chronicles

The diary-like documents which predate the development of modern diaries in sixteenth century Europe were produced by literate elites, members of the Japanese Emperor's court and European monks in mediaeval monasteries.

JAPANESE 'DIARIES' By the tenth century courtiers at the Japanese Emperor's court had acquired sufficient expertise in writing to create a vernacular literature. Amongst the literature which has survived from this period are a number of so-called diaries, including Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* (Morris, 1970) and Murasaki Shikibu's diary (Bowring, 1982).

Since the original documents no longer exist, the versions that survive were based on copies which in the case of Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* date from the mid thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries (Morris, 1970, p. 12), and it is difficult to be certain about the original content, structure and purpose. Sei Shonagon recorded how in the year 994 the Emperor gave her a gift of paper which she used to record 'odd facts, stories from the past, and all sorts of other things' (1970, p. 11). In contrast, Murasaki's diary appeared to have been written as a record for a third person. Some sections had a letter-like form and there were also references to a third person.

Both texts contained accounts of events that can be clearly dated. In section 82 of the *Pillow Book* (dated to the tenth month of 995) Shonagon records the behaviour of the young Emperor Ichijo on his return from his first independent visit to a shrine dedicated to the god of war, Hachiman:

When the Emperor returned from his visit to Yawata, he halted his palanquin before reaching the Empress Dowager's gallery and sent a messenger to pay his respects. What could be more magnificent than to see so august a personage as His Majesty seated there in all his glory and honouring his mother in this way? At the sight tears came to my eyes and streamed down my face, ruining my make-up. How ugly I must have looked. (1970, p. 11)

THE SAXON CHRONICLES In Europe writing skills were developed amongst and monopolised by the clergy, especially scribes in monasteries. In England these scribes used calendars to maintain a record or chronicles. When Saxon monks in pre-conquest England had to plot the date of Easter, they produced booklets with a line or two for each year and these were filled with 'what might be considered significant events to the institution or locality in which the document was maintained' (Swanton, 2000, p. xi). For example in a surviving set of Easter

tables drawn at Canterbury Cathedral covering the years 988 to 1193 a scribe has recorded that in 1066 ‘Here King Edward passed away’, and a later hand added ‘and here William came’ (2000, p. xiii).

In its essence the form resembles a diary whose entries were made year by year instead of day by day. It could serve as a repository of the simplest statements of fact, demanding of the compilers no more than a knowledge of writing and of the facts to be recorded, yet at the same time it offered ample scope for a writer who wished to give a detailed account of the events of his day and perhaps even to make his own comments upon them. (Hunter Blair, 1977, p. 352)

These records formed the basis of the Saxon Chronicles which have literary as well as historical interest. For example the victory of the Saxon King Athelstan over the combined Viking, British and Scottish armies was recorded in a poem in the entry for the year 937 in the Parker Chronicle.

In this year King Athelstan, lord of warriors,
Ring-giver of men, with his brother prince Edmund,
Won undying glory with the edges of swords,
In warfare around *Brunanburh*.
With their hammered blades, the sons of Edward,
Clove the shield-wall and hacked the linden bucklers,
As was instinctive in them, from their ancestry,
To defend their land, their treasures and their homes,
In frequent battle against each enemy. (1977, pp. 88–9)

SUMMARY Both the Japanese ‘diaries’ and the Saxon Chronicles lacked the full characteristics of modern diaries. Japanese diaries contained both personal accounts and reflections but lacked the clear time structure of modern diaries. While the Saxon Chronicles did form a regular record of contemporary events, they lacked the personal and intimate characteristic of diaries and it is not clear that they were kept contemporaneously.

Box 1.1 Characteristics of early Japanese diaries and Anglo-Saxon Chronicles		
	<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon</i>
Regular, time structured	Possibly	Yes
Personal	Yes but possibly written for third person	No
Contemporaneous Record	Yes but reworked Yes, events and personal reflection	Yes but reworked Yes, events

Development of the diary form in the early modern period

Diaries emerged as a recognisable method of keeping personal records in the early modern period in sixteenth century Europe. In England the young Protestant King, Edward VI, kept a *Chronicle*. It appears that he began the *Chronicle* as an educational and formal exercise for his tutors when he was about 12 years 5 months. Within a year or so it became more personalised and informal in style and he maintained it till shortly before his premature death at the age of 15 (Jordan, 1966, pp. xvii–xviii). The *Chronicle* was a record of events and contained little commentary. For example on 2 May 1550 Edward VI recorded the first execution for heresy in the reign, Joan Bocher, an Anabaptist:

[May, 1550]

2. Joan Bocher, otherwise called Joan of Kent, was burned for holding that Christ was not incarnate of the Virgin Mary, being condemned the year before but kept in hope of conversion; and 30 of April the Bishop of London and the Bishop of Ely were to persuade her. But she withstood them and reviled the preacher that preached at her death. (Jordan, 1966, p. 28)

By the seventeenth century, diary keeping had become an established mechanism for keeping personal records and there was a rapid expansion of the form (MacFarlane, 1970, p. 5). An increasing number of diaries survive from these periods. The most famous were those kept by Samuel Pepys (whose main diary covers the period 1660 to 1669) and John Evelyn (covering his whole lifetime from 1620 to 1706). Diaries were also kept by Robert Hooke, the scientist and architect; John Ray, John Locke and Celia Fiennes, who recorded their travels; Anthony Wood, who recorded university events; John Milward and Anchitel Grey, who recorded parliamentary debates; and Ralph Josselin, who recorded the events of a village from the perspective of a Puritan parson (Latham, 1985, p. xxxv).

The development of diaries during this period was underpinned by technological and socio-economic changes. The technological changes included the widespread development of writing skills in vernacular languages and the production of ready-made almanacs. The socio-economic changes included the fragmentation of Christianity in Western Europe and the rise of Protestantism with its greater emphasis on individualism and the changes associated with the rise of capitalism.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS UNDERPINNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIARIES The main precondition for the development of diary keeping in the seventeenth century was improved access to writing. Prior to the development of modern technologies such as mass production of paper and writing implements such as pens and pencils, writing was a complex and expensive technology restricted to an elite who were specially selected and trained. The difference between the

language used for writing and the vernacular language used for everyday communication created an additional barrier to wider access to writing. In mediaeval Western Europe, the written language used by the Church and for international contact was Latin. Reading and writing were taught in schools associated with monasteries and cathedrals, some of which developed into universities (Janson, 2002, p. 168). The changes associated with the Reformation and the emergence of Protestantism in Northern Europe in the sixteenth century had a major impact on literacy. These new churches emphasised the importance of lay access to religious knowledge so that:

the clergy should preach the Christian faith in the languages spoken by the people, and that the central texts should be available in those languages. (2002, p. 168)

This stimulated a related technological development, printing, which was used to produce bibles and other religious texts in vernacular languages. This increased access to written texts in turn increased the opportunity and incentive to learn to read and write. Thus by the end of the sixteenth century writing was becoming an increasingly accessible skill.

An early by-product of the new printing technology was the publication of almanacs, annual calendars of events, which had spaces for individual annotation and facilitated diary keeping (Latham, 1985, p. xxxv). Such early diaries were often extensions of household accounts but also included observations of events or happenings that attracted the diarist's interest or curiosity. There was awareness that such records could be used as a method of systematic observation and learning. Francis Bacon in his *Essayes* emphasised the educational value of travel for young men and the role which a diary could play in maximising the learning opportunities of such travel by providing a systematic record of the diarist's observations. Bacon's *Essayes* evolved over a 30-year period in the early seventeenth century (1597–1625) and were intended to be a guide or 'conduct book' for civil or public business (Kiernan, 1985b, pp. xix–xx):

Traivale, in the younger Sort, is a Part of Education; In the Elder, a Part of Experience ... It is a strange Thing, that in Sea voyages, where there is nothing to be seene, but Sky and Sea, Men should make Diaries; But in *Land-Travaile*, wherein so much is to be observed, for the most part they omit it; As if Chance, were fitter to be registred, than Observation. Let Diaries, therefore, be brought into use. (*italics in the original*: Kiernan, 1985a, p. 56)

John Evelyn followed Bacon's advice and his diary was designed as a complete record of his life and the events he observed. His full *Kalendarium, My Journal &c* amounts to over half a million words. It covers his whole life from his birth on 30 October 1620 until 3 February 1706, just a few weeks before his death on 27 February (de la Bédoyère, 1994, p. 15). Evelyn's diary records contemporary events in England. In 1688 he records the invasion of William of Orange and the plight of James II:

November 8 I went to Lond: heard the newes of the Princes of Oranges being landed at Tor-bay, with a fleete of neere 700 saile, so dreadfull a sight passing through the Channell with so favorable a Wind, as our Navy could by no meanes intercept or molest them: This put the King & Court into greate Consternation, now employed in forming an Army to incounter their farther progresse. (1994, p. 357)

While Evelyn provided an account of events, his personality and opinions shine through.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS UNDERPINNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIARIES The development and popularity of diary keeping can also be linked to the socio-economic changes associated with the emergence of modern individualism based on the development of capitalism and Protestantism which, as Weber (1976) argued, were linked.

The evolution of individual identity is perhaps most evident in the artistic sphere in the late fifteenth century when artists began to challenge the control that patrons exerted over their work and claimed ownership over the intellectual content of their creativity. These moves culminated in the development of individual control of intellectual property in modern copyright legislation (Carter-Ruck et al., 1965, pp. 28–9). Albrecht Dürer, a North European artist, played an important role in developments. He maximised the commercial value of his work by using the newly developed printing technology to create saleable reproductions. To differentiate his work from others he created a distinctive personal identifier for each work. He developed his initials into a clearly definable mark, perhaps the first example of a commercial logo.

In 1520 and 1521 Dürer visited the Netherlands, mainly on a business trip. He wanted the new Holy Roman Emperor Charles to confirm his imperial pension, and while he was in Antwerp he wanted to sell his collections of woodcuts and engravings (Goris and Marlier, 1970, p. 8). During his visits, Dürer kept a diary. It was primarily a record of his receipts and expenses including his gambling (1970, p. 8). However he also recorded his reaction to the ‘men, artists, places, monuments and works of art he encountered in the Netherlands’ (1970, p. 9) including his reaction to the news that Martin Luther had been taken prisoner and his life threatened:

On Friday before Whitsunday in the year 1521, came tidings to me at Antwerp that Martin Luther had been so treacherously taken prisoner; for he trusted Emperor Charles, who had granted him his herald and imperial safe-conduct. But as soon as the herald had conveyed him to an unfriendly place near Eisenach he rode away, saying he no longer needed him. Straightway there appeared ten knights and they treacherously carried off the pious man, betrayed into their hands, a man enlightened by the Holy Ghost, a follower of the true Christian faith. And whether he yet lives I know not, or whether they have put him to death; if so, he has suffered for the truth of Christ and because he rebuked the unchristian Papacy, which strives with its heavy load of laws against the redemption of Christ. (1970, p. 90)

Protestantism, especially the development of North European Puritan sects, played a key role in the development of diaries. It stimulated the development of vernacular writing, and provided an incentive for using diaries to record and reflect upon personal actions and activities. Puritans emphasised the importance of the direct relationship between the individual and God. Pollock noted that Puritans had an 'inexorable drive to put their thoughts to paper as a means of cultivating the holy life by techniques of self-examination and self-revelation' (1983, p. 70). Documents such as diaries formed an important part of this self-examination:

The diary-keeping that is so significant a symptom of the new type of character may be viewed as a kind of inner time-and-motion study by which the individual records and judges his output day by day. It is evidence of the separation between the behaving and scrutinizing self. (Reisman, cited in MacFarlane, 1970, p. 5)

Tomalin identified the influence of religious factors when discussing the reasons why Samuel Pepys kept a diary:

At Cambridge puritan divines ... recommended Christian diary-keeping as a valuable exercise, a form of moral accounting that encouraged the individual to watch and discipline himself. John Beadle's *The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian*, published in 1656, also approved the keeping of a diary and suggested it should include public events and private experience. (2002, p. 81)

Pepys's diary reflected his Puritan education. He used his diary to confess his sins. He used a shorthand system, which he probably learned as an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge (Latham, 1985, p. xiv). This protection meant that Pepys felt confident enough to use his diary to candidly examine his own motives, emotions and lusts. For example on 24 September 1663 he recorded an illicit liaison with a Mrs Lane in Deptford, making the following entry in this diary:

After being tired of her [Mrs Lane's] company, I landed her at Whitehall and so home and at my office writing letters, till 12 at night almost; and then home to supper and bed and there find my poor wife hard at work, which grieved my heart to see that I should abuse so good a wretch, and that it is just with God to make her bad to me for my wronging of her; but I do resolve never to do the like again. So to bed. (Latham, 1985, p. 311)

Pepys was a self-made man who acquired his wealth and status, at least in part, through his own skill and judgement. Pepys's public career was closely linked to the Restoration monarchy, as is his diary. He started his diary in 1660 when he accompanied his patron Lord Sandwich to the Continent to escort the restored monarch, Charles II, back to England, and stopped in 1669 following his unfounded fear that writing a diary was making him blind. While Pepys's diary is 'primarily a personal journal, [it] was designed also as a chronicle of

public affairs' (Latham and Matthews, 1970a, p. cxv). He recorded his own role in such affairs and also used this record as a resource to protect himself from inevitable political attack (Latham, 1985, p. xxxiii) and to publicly claim credit for his role in state affairs. While his diary remained private in his lifetime, he used it when defending his actions before Parliament and in preparing his *Memoires Relating to the State of the Royal Navy* which were published in 1690 and outlined his role in the development of the Navy.

Box 1.2 The preconditions for the development of diaries in the early modern period

Technology

- Written version of the vernacular language
- Paper preferably bound in books or almanacks
- Writing equipment – ink, pens/brushes

Skills

- Schools providing training in writing
- Individuals with the skills, equipment, time and opportunity to keep a private record

Motivation

- Perceived benefits (spiritual/personal, financial, political, social) of keeping a private record
- Means of ensuring the diary is not used to discredit the diary keeper, i.e. personal privacy and security

Development of the diary form

Diary keeping in sixteenth and seventeenth century England developed in a very distinctive social and religious environment that influenced both the motivations for keeping diaries and the forms of diaries. By the nineteenth century diary keeping had become a 'conventional habit amongst persons of culture' (Fothergill, 1974, p. 34):

Faithfully and earnestly penned by hosts of respectable people – ladies and travellers, intellectuals and politicians, clergymen and soldiers, and the Queen – these diaries contain an enormously detailed picture of life within the Victorian social fabric, and reflect contemporary attitudes and values with great fidelity. (1974, p. 34)

These diaries exhibited growing literary self-consciousness as diarists became increasingly aware of the possibility of publication. For example Barbellion

(1919) maintained a diary from 1903 which appears to end with a note on 31 December 1917 recording the diarist's death. Barbellion described his struggle to develop a career as a biologist despite ill-health. However, as Fothergill noted, Barbellion actually prepared the diary for publication before his death in 1919 and intended it be 'an epoch-making work of fearless self-revelation' (1974, p. 35).

This increased self-consciousness is related to surveillance of the self both by the diarist and by others. The prime motivation of the self-surveillance in early diaries is religious; however, with the secularisation of society and the development of psychoanalytical theory, diaries can be used to understand and manage the self. For example Graham Greene, the twentieth century novelist, following his psychoanalysis as a young man recorded his dreams in his diary to monitor his unconscious mind. Anaïs Nin, a novelist who also trained as a psychoanalyst, kept a diary which has been described as a 'record of a modern woman writer's journey of self-discovery' (Stuhlmann, 1974, rear cover). In her entry for the month of April 1935 she described her decision to choose the role and identity of a novelist rather than a psychoanalyst:

There was a meeting of psychoanalysts, and there were seven of us in the train going to Long Beach ... It was that day, at a dinner, with a tag on my shoulder, that I discovered I did not belong to the world of psychoanalysis. My game was always exposed. At the door there is always a ticket collector asking: 'Is it real? Are you real? Are you a psychoanalyst?' They always know I am a fraud. They do not take me in ... I was not a scientist. I was seeking a form of life which was continuous like a symphony. The key word was the sea ... I could not hear the discussion. I was listening for the sea's roar and pulse. It was that day I realized that I was a writer, and only a writer, a writer and not a psychoanalyst. (1974, pp. 45-6)

The role of the diary as a mechanism for surveillance is evident in twentieth century diary keeping, especially in the 'reflective journal'. In human services reflective journals have become one way of monitoring and enhancing the personal development and performance of professionals, especially in initial training programmes. As Bain and his colleagues (1999, p. 52) have noted journal writing is a recognised way of teaching in counselling, psychology, nursing, management, leadership and teaching. Wellard and Bethune (1996, p. 1077) suggested that reflective journal writing has become the road to the Holy Grail in nurse education. Riley-Doucet and Wilson (1997) gave a description of reflective journals used in their nurse education programme and made it clear that such journals have all the defining characteristics of diaries:

All students are asked to keep a journal of their clinical experiences with daily entries throughout the academic semester. The journal is the private property of the student. The student is not required to show the journal to the nursing educator, although this is certainly offered as a means of gaining feedback from the educator regarding their acquisition of critical thinking skills. It is essential that the student is given the option of keeping

their journal private and confidential, so that the journal becomes a safe place for self-disclosure and self-reflection. (1997, p. 965)

While Riley-Doucet and Wilson stressed the self-surveillance role of reflective journals, it is clear from their accounts that such journals were incorporated into broader surveillance. The journals not only formed part of peer group discussion but were also used in the formal evaluation process (1997, p. 965), creating a power imbalance between educator and trainee professional (Wellard and Bethune, 1996). While the use of diaries as a mechanism of surveillance may be seen as relatively benign in this context, in totalitarian states it is more sinister. Sun Yushun, who grew up in Mao's China, described how she kept a diary which recorded her use of Mao's *Little Red Book* and how she read out sections of her diary in class. For example when she was 10 she read out the following entry:

Our great leader, teacher and helmsman Chairman Mao said that unity was paramount: without it, there would have been no victory for the Communist Party. But I fought with my brother today. If I could not even unite with him, how could I do so with all the people in the motherland? If people do not unite, how are we going to realise the goal of communism, paradise on earth? Must read more of Chairman Mao's works, listen to him more attentively, and be his good child. (Yushun, 2003, p. 6)

In the twentieth century new forms of technology created new opportunities for diary keeping. For example relatively inexpensive audio and video recorders have provided the opportunity for audio and video diaries. Ellen MacArthur, during her record-breaking solo round-the-world sailing voyage, recorded audio and video reports which were posted on a website (MacArthur, 2005). The proliferation of technology for recording and communicating sound and image has created the opportunity for mixed media diary. Lynn Redgrave, a British actress, when she was diagnosed as having breast cancer, decided to collaborate with her daughter on a project to record her treatment and recovery. Lynn kept a written record and her daughter, Annabel Clark, a photographic record which they used to produce a journal combining visual images and text, extracts from which were published in a British weekend colour supplement (Redgrave and Clark, 2004). In the extract the final photograph of Lynn Redgrave after her operation is accompanied by the following text describing why she had decided not to have breast reconstruction:

Monday, August 11 [2003]

I had this vision of altering oneself – cutting oneself, not worthy, not beautiful unless ... and I'm thinking, as I sit on my porch with candles and wine – no. My lesson to learn through my long-ago eating disorder, through my cancer, my acting, my life, my loss of youth, my lesson is that the essential core of me is right here – unadorned, single breasted – that's a way to look at it. (2004, p. 20)

The World Wide Web has created a major opportunity for diary keeping. Individuals can record their everyday life and post it on the web. There are a number of websites providing access to 'diaper diaries' recording the experience of bringing up babies (Brown, 2005; Armstrong, 2005) and 'blogs' or weblogs. McClellan (2005) described the University of Warwick Blog project which encouraged students to write online journals or weblogs; the website (<http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk>) hosted over 3,000 weblogs.

COMMENT While the early diarists established many of the features and conventions of diary writing, the development of the form reflects changing social context. While the form and context of each diary reflects the specific purpose and motivation of its diarist, it is possible to identify trends, especially the development of increased literary self-awareness reflecting greater awareness of the opportunities for publication. In this context the distinction between a diary and an autobiography is blurred. As diaries are increasingly published or 'made public', so it is possible to identify a surveillance function. The development of an interest in and concern with the development of the self and personal identity that is evident in psychoanalysis can also be found in diaries. They can be used as a mechanism for self-surveillance and for external surveillance and shaping of the developing person as in reflective journal and reflective practice. In modern society an individual's social standing and identity are relatively flexible and fluid and need to be created and protected. Diaries provide one way of creating and protecting such standing and identity.

Box 1.3 Development of the diary form

Technology

- Development of new forms of recording technology, including photography, audio and video recording
- Development of new forms of communication including radio, television and the internet

Access to resources

- In most developed countries, high levels of literacy and relatively low cost of traditional diaries and increasing access to audio and video recording equipment
- Increased personal security
- Increased openness of communication media such as newspapers and internet

Pressures and motivation

- External scrutiny and surveillance
- Increased awareness of self and need to develop and account for self

Publication: diaries and autobiography

While the diary as an individual mechanism for recording and commenting on events and activities became popular in the seventeenth century, public access to diaries did not develop until the nineteenth century when publishers recognised a market for such personal records. For example William Upcott discovered Evelyn's diary during a social call to the widow of the diarist's great-great-grandson and subsequently published it in 1818 (de la Bédoyère, 1994, p. 16). This stimulated moves to transcribe and publish Pepys's diary and the first edited version was published in 1825 (Latham and Matthews, 1970b, pp. lxxiv–lxxxiii). The process of publication can change the status of a diary from a private personal record to a publicly available document or biography. In this section I will explore some types of published diaries.

The diary as a record of facts

The expansion of European power in the sixteenth century was linked to increased knowledge and control of both the physical and the social world. It was associated with both factual and fictional accounts of voyages of discovery (Howell, 2002). By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries public interest in the major scientific discoveries created a market for accounts of such voyages. Captain James Cook's and Charles Darwin's journals provided accounts of their voyages of discovery.

Captain Cook was commissioned to undertake three voyages to the Pacific between 1768 and 1780. The stated aim of the first voyage was to undertake observations of the transit of Venus on 3 June 1769 on behalf of the Royal Society, an important English association of scientists, so that an accurate assessment could be made of the distance from the earth to the sun. Cook also had secret instructions from the British Admiralty to look for and explore the lands that lay to the south of the observation point (Beaglehole, 1988a, pp. cix–cxi and cclxxii). Not only did Cook maintain a journal of all three voyages but other members of his crew also kept diaries. One incident in the journals has attracted particular interest: Cook's death in Hawaii on Sunday 14 February 1779. It seems to epitomise the conflict and mutual misunderstanding between expanding European imperialism and the traditional cultures which it affected. Samwell's journal included the following entry, a graphic account of Cook's death:

Captain Cook was now the only Man on the Rock, he was seen walking down towards the Pinnacle, holding his left hand against the Back of his head to guard it from the Stones & carrying his Musket under the other Arm. An Indian came running behind him, stopping once or twice as he advanced, as if he was afraid that he should turn round, then taking him unaware he sprung to him, knocked him on the back of his head with a large Club taken out of a fence, & instantly fled with the greatest precipitation; the blow made Captain Cook stagger two or three paces, he then fell on his hand & one knee & dropped his Musket, as he was rising another Indian came running to him & before he could

recover himself from the Fall drew out an iron Dagger he concealed under his feathered Cloak & struck it with all his force into the back of his Neck, which made Capt. Cook tumble into the Water in a kind of a bite by the side of the rock where the water is about knee deep; here he was followed by a croud of people who endeavoured to keep him under water, but struggling very strong with them he got his head up & looking towards the Pinnacle which was not above a boat hook's Length from him waved his hands to them for Assistance, which it seems it was not in their Power to give. The Indians got him under water again but he disengaged himself & got his head up once more & not being able to swim he endeavoured to scramble on the Rock, when a fellow gave him a blow on the head with a large Club and he was seen alive no more. They now kept him under water, one man sat on his Shoulders & beat his head with a stone while others beat him with Clubs & Stones, they then hauled him up dead where they stuck him with their Daggers, dashed his head against the rock and beat him with Clubs and Stones, taking a Savage pleasure in using every barbarity to the dead body. (Beaglehole, 1988b, p. 1198)

Cook's mapping of the Pacific was continued by various ships of the British Navy including HMS *Beagle* which was commissioned to complete a survey of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. The *Beagle* set sail in 1826 to survey the shores of Chile, Peru and some islands in the Pacific including the Galapagos Islands. The expedition included a 'scientific person', Charles Darwin. In 1845 Darwin published 'in the form of a Journal, a history of our voyage, and a sketch of those observations in Natural History and Geology, which I think will possess some interest to the general reader' (1888, p. v). The journal anticipated Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1951) in which he fully and explicitly expounded his theory of evolution. In his entry for 8 October 1835 Darwin wrote an extended commentary on the natural history of the Galapagos and commented on the ways in which one bird species had evolved on the islands to fill different ecological niches:

Seeing this gradation and diversity of structure in one small, intimately related group of birds, one might really fancy that from an original paucity of birds in this archipelago, *one species had been taken and modified for different ends.* (italics added: 1888, p. 380)

Such scientific journals purported to record facts whose significance could be subsequently evaluated. In the case of Cook's voyage the value of the facts was both strategic and scientific. All the men keeping diaries aboard had to hand in their diaries to the captain at the end of the voyage and were enjoined to secrecy over their discoveries (Beaglehole, 1988b, p. 1295).

The memoir: creating a record for posterity

Monarchs, statesmen and politicians like to construct monuments which highlight their achievements. While Roman Emperors built monuments – for example, the Emperor Trajan built a column highlighting his triumphs – in contemporary society such monuments often take the form of written accounts

or memoirs. Politicians have used diaries to provide immediacy and authenticity to such accounts.

In the United Kingdom, the first politician known to keep a diary with a view to publication was Hugh Dalton, a senior minister in the 1945–51 Labour government. Pimlott (2002) has suggested that Dalton wrote his diary for personal enjoyment rather than for financial rewards. Pimlott notes the ways in which Dalton recorded and commented on his colleagues in the British Labour Party:

When his diaries were published in 1952, Herbert Morrison happened to be dining with Jim Callaghan and his wife, and found a copy in the loo. 'I didn't know the bugger kept a diary like that,' growled the former foreign secretary as he emerged. Callaghan promptly reported the remark to his friend Dalton – who gleefully recorded it in his still-continuing diary. (2002, p. 2)

The 1960s Labour Cabinet included three diarists, Tony Benn, Barbara Castle and Richard Crossman. Crossman died in 1974 and the second and third volumes of his diaries were published posthumously; Janet Morgan had to complete the editorial work. Crossman dictated his diary while the 'memory was still hot' and then prepared the published version (Morgan, 1997, p. 9) in which he recorded events and his feelings about them. The first entry in this diary recorded his first visit to his new ministry:

Monday, April 22nd [1968]

I made my first visit to the collection of huge modern glass blocks that was custom-built for the Ministry of Health at the Elephant and Castle. It is on a ghastly site and Kenneth Robinson [previous minister] told me they chose it for its cheapness. It cost only half as much as normal sites for government buildings but a great deal of the money they saved is now being spent on air-conditioning and double-glazing because the building stands right on top of an under-ground railway which makes the most dreadful din. It's also appallingly inconvenient ... It was hoped that one effect of planking [*sic*] the building down there would be to improve the area and attract other government buildings. It hasn't happened and the Ministry stands isolated and terrible. (Crossman, 1977, p. 17)

Since the memoir-diary form was first used in the 1940s, it has become increasingly popular and profitable. Individual politicians supported by editors can rapidly produce accounts of and commentaries on events and cast themselves as neutral independent observers who are giving readers a privileged access to decisions or events as they happen.

Bearing witness: the diary as a personal testimony of suffering

While public figures and celebrities with a media profile use diaries to 'record' their role and response to public and private affairs, diaries can be used by

individuals to record or even bear witness to events, especially those involving personal or collective suffering. The Second World War and the Holocaust involved intensive suffering and Anne Frank's diary has become particularly well known. Anne was a young Jewish girl who lived in Amsterdam. She started her first diary on 12 June 1942 and recorded events of her everyday life, for example her opinions of other pupils in her class at her Jewish school. However when her father was 'called up' on 8 July 1942 by the German authorities, a euphemism for being sent to the concentration camps, she and her family went into hiding (A. Frank, 1997, p. 19) and her diaries recorded the pressures of her exceptional life in hiding. As her diary moved towards its close, the family were taken into custody by the Nazi authorities on 4 August 1944 and sent to concentration camps where Anne died in a typhoid epidemic (O. Frank, 1997b, pp. 338–9). Just before her arrest, Anne wrote to her fiction friend in her diary commenting poignantly on her situation (A. Frank, 1997, p. 330):

SATURDAY 15 JULY 1944

Dearest Kitty,

It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!

Yours, Anne M. Frank

Many recent diaries bear witness to more personal events and experiences such as the impact of illness. Robert McCrum, a journalist, experienced a stroke when he was 42 and both he and his wife kept diaries recording their experiences. He used these diaries to produce an account of the consequences of his stroke. In his book McCrum provided graphic examples of the practical problems he encountered when trying to reconstruct his life and the support he received from his wife. Shortly after his stroke, which happened on the night of 28–29 July 1995, McCrum recorded in his diary some of his practical difficulties and the support he was receiving from his wife:

[Monday 7 August 1995]

I shave sitting in the bath, looking at my reflection in the bath taps. I have not seen my face in a mirror since I fell ill, and I'm frightened at what I might find. (In fact, apart from a slightly drooping left side to my face and an expression of great sadness, I find that I am not a freak.) Afterwards I clean my teeth one-handed with considerable difficulty (*it's surprisingly hard to unscrew a tube of toothpaste one-handed*) and get given fresh clothes. Then I am wheeled back to my room. Now I am sitting in a chair with my headache and Sarah is on

the phone. Sarah seems to have understood my condition very well, and is tremendously organised. She is being quite amazing. (McCrum, 1998, p. 75, emphasis added)

McCrum provided extracts from his wife's diary which indicated that while she was supporting and reassuring him, the stroke was having a major impact on her life and she was experiencing anxiety and fear:

SARAH'S DIARY: SUNDAY 6 AUGUST

I feel so very sad and scared. R. making progress but he is so depressed and so unable to try – the smallest thing tires him out – it's as if he doesn't care. I worry, I worry, that this has changed him, that he is not the same man. We went into the Square, him in a wheel-chair, today, and my heart just about broke. What are we going to do? I don't know who he is, who I am, what we've gotten ourselves into. I feel that I have no one in the world to lean on, no one to help me. What if it never gets any better? What will I do then? If I keep his spirits up, I wonder, will I actually be able to do something for him, or is it just hopeless? I feel bone tired and not up to it, and so very, very frightened. (1998, p. 75)

Diaries such as Anne Frank's and Robert and Sarah McCrum's bear witness to suffering. The diarists, or in the case of Anne Frank, her father Otto, were willing to publish these diaries and make their contents public to provide insight into and understanding of the personal consequences of an event such as the Holocaust.

The artistic journal

Given the skills which writers display in producing fiction, it is hardly surprising that they should use these skills in recording and commenting on their everyday life and the ways in which they produce their fiction. Some writers have seen their diaries as a purely personal record and have ensured their destruction. Philip Larkin, the English poet, wrote over 30 volumes of his diary which were shredded shortly after his death (Motion, 1993, p. 522). However such destruction appears to be the exception and writers' diaries form a substantial body of literature in their own right.

Virginia Woolf, a major twentieth century writer, kept a diary for most of her life and the publication of her diaries provided a record of her struggles to write. The final published volume of her diary covered the last five years of her life and started with her struggles to complete one of her major works, *The Waves*, and ended four days before she drowned herself on 28 March 1941. In her diary Virginia Woolf documented her continued struggles against depression and her feeling about the war. For example on Sunday 26 January 1941 she outlined how she responded to the rejection of a story by a magazine and the political situation:

This trough of despair shall not, I swear, engulf me ... Sleep & slackness; musing; reading; cooking; cycling; oh & a good hard rather rocky book – viz: Herbert Fisher. This is my

prescription ... There's a lull in the war. 6 nights without raids. But Garvin says the greatest struggle is about to come – say in 3 weeks – & every man, woman dog cat even weevil must girt their arms, their faith – & so on.

It's the cold hour, this, before the lights go up. A few snowdrops in the garden. Yes, I was thinking: we live without future. That's what's queer, with our noses pressed to a closed door. Now to write, with a new nib, to Enid Jones. (Olivier Bell, 1984, p. 17)

The Czech writer Franz Kafka also kept a diary. This was very much a sketch-book in which he recorded his thoughts and ideas. Indeed the link between his diary and his other fictional work is so strong that his diaries are included as part of a compendium of his work. Like Virginia Woolf, Kafka recorded his personal struggles. In his case these included tensions over his Jewish identity and the challenges to his mental wellbeing (Kafka, 1976, p. 849).

Artists' diaries can be treated both as a record of the creative process and as a product of the creative process having the same status as their other writing. It is therefore hardly surprising that there should be blurring between fact and fiction, with some writers using the diary as a fictional form. As the introduction to Kafka's collected work noted: 'In Kafka the autobiographical and the fictional are so intertwined that it is futile to try to unravel them' (1976, p. xi).

The diary as fiction

The narrative structure of the diary provides a 'natural' form which can be used for narrator-centred fiction and was extensively exploited by Daniel Defoe in the early seventeenth century. Three of his major works exploited the form: *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) (Backsheider, 1992), *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720) (Boulton, 1991) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) (Shinagel, 1994). The original title page of each work clearly signals Defoe's narrative form, for example:

A JOURNAL OF THE **Plague Year**: Being Observations or Memorials, Of the most remarkable OCCURRENCES, As well PUBLICK as PRIVATE, Which happened in LONDON During the last GREAT VISITATION In 1665. Written by a CITIZEN who continued all the while in *London*. Never made publick before. (Backsheider, 1992, p. 3)

Gogol, a Russian writer, also used the form in his *Diary of a Madman* first published in 1834. In the diary Gogol chronicled the increasing delusions of his diarist and especially his diarist's conviction that he was the King of Spain. The 'diarist' exhibited his madness and his 'rational' irrationality in the following entry:

No date: The day didn't have one

I walked incognito down Nevsky Avenue [St Petersburg]. His Imperial Majesty drove past. Every single person doffed his hat, and I followed suit. However, I didn't let out that I was the King of Spain. I considered it improper to reveal my true identity right there in the middle of the crowd, because according to etiquette, I ought first to be presented at court. So far, the only thing that had stopped me was not having any royal clothes. If only I could get hold of a cloak. (Gogol, 1972, p. 36)

Although Defoe's and Gogol's writing are clearly fictional, commentators linked them to historical research. For example a critical edition of Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* included other plague narratives as well as Foucault's sociological analysis of surveillance and the 'panopticon' as a response to plague (Backscheider, 1992, pp. 244–50). In an article in the *British Medical Journal*, Altschuler argued that Gogol's fictional work is 'one of the oldest and most complete descriptions of schizophrenia' (2001, p. 1475).

Comment

Publication changes the status and nature of diaries. The 'original diary' has to be prepared for publication. Anne Frank rewrote her diary in response to a radio broadcast from Gerrit Bolkestein, a member of the Dutch government in exile who asked for letters and diaries so that he could collect eyewitness accounts of the suffering imposed on the Netherlands by the Nazi regime (O. Frank, 1997a, pp. v–viii) and her father edited the published version. Unpublished and published diaries share features in common, especially the diarist's/author's use of a time framework to create a record and narrative structure. However they differ in terms of their readership: the readership of unpublished diaries is restricted to those who have access, in the first instance the diarist, whereas published diaries are targeted to a wider audience.

Box 1.4 Some forms of published diaries

Diary as scientific 'record'

- Author absent or presents self as neutral observer
- Narrative of discovery in which the strange and unfamiliar are recorded
- Reader offered experience and insight

Diary as memoir

- Author is an 'important' person who claims privileged access to key events and decisions
- Narrative based on author's role and contribution to events and decisions
- Reader offered opportunity to see events 'through the eyes' of the author

Diary bearing witness

- Author presents self as 'ordinary person' experiencing or surviving extraordinary events
- Narrative of suffering and survival
- Reader offered access and insight into 'how it feels'

(Continued)

(Continued)

Literary diary

- Author claims status as a 'writer'
- Narrative of author's struggle to create
- Reader offered insight into the creative process as well as a product of that process

Fictional diary

- Fictional narrator who claims status of an independent often scientific observer
- Narrative of discovery and revelation
- Reader offered insight through fictional world

Summary and comment

The development of diary keeping was a product of technical changes which increased access to the resources needed to write diaries, and the social and religious changes that provided the stimulus and motivation for maintaining a personal record. With the reduced cost of publication, an increasing number of diaries have been published and made accessible to the public. It is possible to identify within these diaries a diversity of form and function ranging from 'factual' accounts of discoveries to fictional accounts of insanity. While the purpose and structure of diaries vary they provide a rich source of data for social researchers, and in the next chapter we will consider how diaries can and have been used in research.

KEY POINTS

Diary keeping

- Diary keeping is a recognised form of social activity.
- Diary keeping can only develop and flourish when certain conditions are met: there is a written vernacular language; there are lay groups within society who have the skills and resources to use this written language as a medium for keeping a personal record; and the incentives for these groups to keep a diary outweigh the risks.
- It is possible to recognise diary-like documents in some premodern societies but diary keeping in its modern form developed in Europe in the early modern period.
- While religious developments were an initial stimulus to diary keeping, diaries in contemporary society are kept for a variety of reasons and take a variety of forms.

Publication

- Given the interest in and market for diaries, there are now a substantial number of published diaries.
- Published diaries vary in form and structure from factual/scientific journals to fictional diaries.
- It is possible to identify distinctive conventions in the different forms, related to the role of the narrator, the nature of the narrative and the role of the reader.

EXERCISE

The best way of developing an understanding of the ways in which diaries have developed and the conventions that underpin diary writing is to read some diaries. This should not be a great chore as most published diaries are both interesting and in some cases beautifully written. While most of the more popular diaries are in print, often in abbreviated forms, and can be purchased, they are also widely available in libraries. So I suggest that you access one of the diaries from each of lists A, B and C. Read the introduction to each diary and at least 10 pages of the main diary and then consider the issues raised.

Diaries which can be used in the exercise

The diaries are grouped into three categories: historic, contemporary and fictional.

List A: historic diaries

Japanese

Bowring, R. (1982) *Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoir*, trans. and ed. R. Bowring, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
 Morris, I. (ed.) (1970) *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, trans. and ed. Ivan Morris, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

Early modern

de la Bédoyère (ed.) (1994) *The Diary of John Evelyn*, Headstart History, Bangor.
 Goris, J.-A. and Marlier, G. (1970) *Albrecht Dürer: Diary of his Journey to the Netherlands 1520–1521*, intro. J.-A. Goris and G. Marlier, Lund Humphries, London.
 Jordan, W.K. (ed.) (1966) *The Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI*, Allen and Unwin, London.
 Latham, R. (ed.) (1985) *The Shorter Pepys*, selected and ed. R. Latham, Bell and Hyman, London.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Voyages

Beaglehole, J.C. (1988) *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: the Voyage of the Endeavour, 1768–1771, Part One*, Kraus Reprint, Millwood, NY.

Darwin, C. (1888) *A Naturalist's Voyage: Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. 'Beagle' round the World*, Murray, London.

Political

Foote, M.R.D. (1968) *The Gladstone Diaries, vol. 1 (1825–1832)*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Foote, M.R.D. (1968) *The Gladstone Diaries, vol. 2 (1833–1839)*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Helps, A. (1868) *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands: Victoria, Queen of England*, Smith, Elder, London.

Social

Hudson, D. (ed.) (1972) *Munby, Man of Two Worlds: the Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby 1828–1910*, Murray, London.

Stanley, L. (ed.) (1984) *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maid-servant*, ed. with intro. Liz Stanley, Virago, London.

List B: contemporary diaries

Literary

Bond, M. (ed.) (1948) *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1910–1913*, Secker and Warburg, London.

Bond, M. (ed.) (1948) *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1914–23*, Secker and Warburg, London.

Olivier Bell, A. (ed.) (1984) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Volume 5, 1936–41*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, Penguin, London.

Social issues

Frank, A. (1997) *The Diary of a Young Girl: the Definitive Edition*, ed. Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Presler, trans. Susan Massotty, Penguin, London.

McCrum, R. (1998) *My Year Off: Rediscovering Life after a Stroke*, Picador, London.

Political

Castle, B. (1980) *The Castle Diaries 1974–76*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

Crossman, R. (1977) *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister. Volume Three, Secretary of State for Social Services 1968–70*, Hamilton and Cape, London.

(Continued)

List C: fictional diaries

Defoe

Backscheider, P.R. (ed.) (1992) *Daniel Defoe: a Journal of the Plague Year*, Norton, New York.

Shinagel, M. (ed.) (1994) *Daniel Defoe: Robinson Crusoe*, 2nd edn, Norton, New York.

Gogol

Gogol, N. (1972) *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, trans. with intro. R. Wilks, Penguin, London.

Shields

Shields, C. (1994) *The Stone Diaries*, Fourth Estate, London.

Issues which you should consider

- 1 For each of your three chosen diaries, when and for what purpose was the diary written?
- 2 Is there any information on how each published version relates to the original text?
- 3 How is each narrative structured and presented?
- 4 Can you identify the ways in which authenticity of each is claimed and established?
- 5 What are the similarities between the three texts you have read?
- 6 What are the differences between the three texts you have read?

2

Researching Diaries

Diaries tell the truth, the partial truth, and a lot more beside the truth ... In them, you seek – and often find – an atmosphere, a sense of mood of the moment, which could not be acquired in any other way. They should never, ever, be taken as the last word. But as raw material for reconstruction of the past they are as invaluable as they are savagely entertaining. (Pimlott, 2002, p. 2)

Key aims

- To examine the ways in which diaries have been and can be used for social research.

Key objectives

- To consider the different ways in which social research projects can be designed and the implications of different designs for diary research.
 - To examine the use of diaries in experimental and social survey research, historical research and naturalistic research.
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Research designs and strategies

Each research project has its own unique purpose. Researchers should use methods of data collection and analysis which will enable them to achieve their purpose efficiently, effectively and in a way which is considered acceptable by the users of their research. To avoid reinventing the wheel and to demonstrate the credibility of their research, researchers can make use of established research designs and strategies.

Blaikie (2000, p. 40) in his text on research design asserted that there are well-established social science research designs and identified 12 different designs:

- experiment
- survey
- fieldwork/ethnography
- comparative/historical
- case study
- content analysis
- secondary analysis
- observation
- simulation and gaming
- evaluation research
- social impact research
- action research.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 20) in the introduction to their *Handbook of Qualitative Research* defined nine 'research strategies':

- study design
- case study
- ethnography, participant observation, performance ethnography
- phenomenology, ethnomethodology
- grounded theory
- life history
- historical method
- action and applied research
- clinical research.

Given the emphasis of their text on qualitative research, experimental and survey research were notable absences from their list.

It is the purpose of this study not to review research designs *per se* but to consider how diary research can be used within different research designs. Therefore in this chapter I will concentrate on four contrasted designs that are important within social research – experimental, social survey, historical, and ethnographic or naturalistic research – and the ways in which diaries can be used within these designs.

Experiments and social surveys are based on primary data, i.e. data collected for the purposes of the research. In both there is an emphasis on the scientific role of the research and a concern to minimise extraneous factors that are not relevant to the research and cause bias. The main emphasis is usually on deduction or testing, which begins with:

a hypothesis derived from social theory which is then tested against empirical observations and then subsequently used to confirm or refute the original theoretical proposition. (Brewer, 2003d, p. 67)

Experimental and survey researchers can use diaries to overcome one major cause of bias: recall or memory problems. Historical research relies extensively on the use of secondary sources – information which has been recorded in various forms, often for purposes other than research, and is reused by the researcher to provide an understanding of past events, actions, relations and social formations. Historical researchers can use diaries as an additional source of data or as a prime source of evidence when other sources are suppressed or the focus is on a specific individual or group of individuals. Ethnographic or naturalistic research relies on primary data. It exploits the relationship which the researcher establishes with the participants in the research and their willingness to trust and share their lives with the researcher. Ethnographers can use diaries to gain privileged access to the lives of the individuals and communities they are studying and their own journals or fieldnotes can provide important insight into the ways in which their understanding and relationships developed.

Box 2.1 Key issues which researchers need to consider when selecting research designs (developed from Blaikie, 2000, p. 42)

Research design

- *What* will be studied?
- *Why* will it be studied?
- *How* will it be studied?

Selecting research strategy and methods

- *What* research strategy will be used?
- *Where* will the data come from?
- *How* will the data be collected and analysed?

Using diaries

- *How* relevant are diaries for the overall purpose of the research?
- *How* can diaries form part of the research strategies?
- *Can* diaries provide a valuable source of data?
- *What* are the benefits and drawbacks of using diaries compared to other methods of accessing information?

Diaries in experimental and survey research

Experimental and survey designs

In both experimental and survey designs researchers tend to adopt the role of the neutral scientist who is concerned with recording and analysing facts. This

approach is more clearly developed in experimental and quasi-experimental research in which the researcher seeks to use facts to test theories and hypotheses:

Experimental designs test casual relations by randomly assigning individuals or entities to experimental and control groups and then applying different procedures or treatments to these groups. Quasi-experimental designs also test casual relationships by using some compromise on random assignment to the experimental or control groups. (italics in the original: Blaikie, 2000, p. 41)

In survey research the researcher collects facts to increase understanding and explanation of social phenomena such as voting behaviour or lifestyle choices. Surveys can be used to formulate hypotheses as well as test them (Moser and Kalton, 1971). Wells, in an early poverty survey, defined his social survey as a:

Fact-finding study dealing chiefly with working-class poverty and the nature of problems of the community. (cited in Moser and Kalton, 1971, p. 1)

Marsh noted that social surveys involve collecting and analysing data in a specific way and she defined a survey as:

an investigation where:

- (a) systematic measurements are made over a series of cases yielding a rectangle of data;
- (b) the variables in the matrix are analysed to see if they show any patterns;
- (c) the subject matter is social. (1982, p. 6)

In both experimental research and social survey there are circumstances in which the use of methods such as observation or interview is restricted and diaries provide an important source of data.

Use of diaries in experiments

In medical research, experimental designs such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are designed to measure the impact which specific interventions have on treatment group and compare this with a matched control group. For many medical researchers the RCT is the gold standard of research (Cochrane, 1972) and the Cochrane database of RCTs records about a third of a million a year (Lilford and Stevens, 2001, p. 8). The emphasis is on identifying observable and measurable differences. Most studies use researchers' objective physiological measures or assessments to assess the impact of treatment on outcomes. For example, RCTs on hypertension used a diastolic blood pressure of 90 mmHg and above as the criterion of entry and then tested the hypothesis that life could be prolonged through the use of hypotensive drugs to reduce blood pressure below that level (Cochrane, 1972, p. 49).

In studies which focus on chronic illnesses such as asthma, not only is it difficult for researchers to observe and record the changing physiological indicators but other outcomes such as the individuals' own feelings of pain or fatigue are important. Furthermore patients' experience of pain and feelings at

the time of any investigation or interview may bias their recall (Stone, et al., 2003, p. 182). Diaries can be used to overcome memory or recall problems. As Stone and his colleagues noted:

By limiting recall and capturing experience close to the time of its occurrence, diaries are thought to produce more accurate and less biased data. Diaries are currently used for the collection of medical symptoms in many therapeutic categories, particularly those where the symptoms are subjective and/or variable. Indeed, it is estimated that diaries are used to collect data in 25% of all phase II–IV pharmaceutical trials. (2003, p. 182)

Parkin and his colleagues (2004) showed that diaries were an effective way of capturing the symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis and could therefore be used to evaluate the impact of beta interferon therapy on individuals who had relapsing–remitting multiple sclerosis. Patients recorded their own assessment of symptoms plus their own measurements of physiological indicators. Hyland and his colleagues (1993) undertook a similar study of asthma patients, inviting them to record physiological data such as peak expiratory flow.

Use of diaries in surveys

Marsh noted many surveys use one-off interviews or questionnaires that include memory questions such as ‘Have any of your family had a serious accident in the last year?’ (1982, p. 82). She maintained that respondents’ ability to recall even quite major events could not be relied on, as telescoping occurs in which individuals allocate to a period an accident which occurred outside the period.

Diaries have been used in surveys of areas such as household expenditure and accidents to overcome memory problems. In the United Kingdom the Expenditure and Food Survey, originally known as the Family Expenditure Survey, has since 1957 been using diaries to monitor the expenditure of households. The Expenditure and Food Survey is based on a voluntary survey of private households which are defined as ‘a group of people living at the same address with common housekeeping’ (Botting, 2003, p. 162). Expenditure on major items is assessed by a household interview but all other expenditure is assessed using diaries kept by household members:

Each individual aged 16 or over in the household visited is asked to keep diary records of daily expenditure for two weeks. Information about regular expenditure, such as rent and mortgage payments, is obtained from a household interview along with retrospective information on certain large, infrequent expenditures such as those on vehicles. Since 1998–99 the results have also included information from simplified diaries kept by children aged between 7 and 15. (2003, p. 162)

There are also examples of the use of diaries in *ad hoc* surveys. For example Sissons Joshi and her colleagues (2001) used diaries to examine the risks – accidents and near-misses – which road users experienced in and around the city of Oxford

in England. The study recruited through major local employers: 577 employees agreed to keep diaries and 299 returned their diaries. The diaries were a rich source for incidents. Diarists recorded 727 incidents, an average of 2.5 per diarist (2001, pp. 264–5).

Diaries and concealed actions

Experimental and survey research often uses diaries to overcome recall problems. However there are other reasons why conventional data collection techniques may be difficult to use. The behaviour which the researcher wishes to access may be seen as discrediting and therefore individuals may wish to conceal such behaviour. One such area is sexual behaviour. Since the development of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, sexual behaviour, especially risky or 'unsafe' sex, has attracted considerable attention. A major programme of research in this area, Project SIGMA (2003), used sexual diaries to provide insight into and information on gay and bisexual men's sexual activity and the contexts within which it occurred (Coxon, 1996). The project used diaries to overcome the disadvantages of conventional methods such as interviews:

- The diary method was more 'natural', as 'it exists in common social practice' and is 'written in natural language'.
- The data were more accurate, as the diary 'is designed to minimize recall and memory errors and cognitive strain'.
- The information was more detailed and precise in terms of both context, such as the sort of partners or setting, and actual activities (1996, p. 21).

The project built up a dataset of diaries kept by men who have sex with men and used this dataset to explore patterns of behaviour. Coxon and his colleagues used data from 1035 diarists covering 2182 individual diary months, and from a subset of 628 diary months which included one or more acts of anal intercourse, to explore the amount of risk activity, the number of men engaging in a given risk activity and the riskiness of sexual sessions (Coxon and McManus, 2000, p. 2). From their diary data they concluded that a small group of active men accounted for a large percentage of the recorded anal intercourse. However these 'active' men tended to be prepared and use protection. A high proportion of the 'risky' sex involved individuals who had anal intercourse infrequently as they tended not to be prepared (2000, p. 5).

Comment

While diaries can be used in experimental or survey research, they tend not to be the dominant or main source of data. Experimental research relies heavily on observational techniques while surveys tend to use interviews or questionnaires to access data. Generally diaries are used to supplement and overcome

the limitations of these methods, especially recall or memory problems, and when such methods are unlikely to access the desired data. When diaries are used in experimental or survey research, the diarist acts as an agent making observations and recording data on behalf of the researcher.

Box 2.2 Key issues which researchers should explore when considering the use of diaries in experimental and social survey research

- What are the main aims and characteristics of experimental and social survey research?
- What are the disadvantages of using diaries in experimental and social survey research designs?
- What are the advantages of using diaries in experimental and social survey research designs?
- In what circumstances do diaries provide access to data that other methods cannot?
- What are the limitations of using diaries and how can they be overcome?

Historical methods and diaries

History can be defined as a study of the past (Jordanova, 2000, p. 1) and is based on the interpretation of sources especially records – mainly written documents but also audio or video recordings, objects and images of the past, which may be collected and stored in and accessed from archives (2000, pp. 28–33). As Jones noted:

Documentary evidence is the raw material of the historian, whose interpretation of the past is constructed through a careful sifting of many documents of varying kinds: official government records, parliamentary debates, political speeches and election manifestos, mass opinion or surveys, diaries and memoirs, private correspondence, oral testimony, and statistical data. Increasingly, historians have to come to terms with visual evidence as well: propaganda, cartoons, photographs, and advertisements. (1994, p. 5)

Thus diaries form one source of evidence amongst many. For many researchers, the personal nature of diaries makes them an unreliable and biased source. Seldon notes:

Diaries, it should be remembered, are just one person's record, often jotted down in haste, of feelings at a particular point in time. At worst, they are dull, plodding and misleading; at best, as with Adrian Mole's, witty, colourful and full of insight. (1994, p. 29)

Traditionally historical research has been concerned with identifying objective facts about historical events and people, especially political events and political elites (Postan, 1971, p. 50). The focus of historical research has expanded with the recognition that historical research not only uses but also creates narratives, i.e. specific situated interpretations of the past (Jordanova, 2000, p. 156). The scope of historical research has also broadened to encompass groups, activities and events outside political elites. Within this broader approach, diaries provide an important source of information. As Jordanova indicated, there is actually a strong fit between historical research and diaries, for both use and ascribe meaning to time:

The basic measures of time – hours, days, weeks, months and years – were not invented by historians. But they use them as fundamental, taken-for-granted tools, and give them meaning by assigning additional tags to them, as Daniel Defoe did when he wrote *Journal of the Plague Year*, an account of the Great Plague of 1665 by an invented eyewitness. (2000, p. 114)

Thus it is possible to identify the use of diaries within a variety of aspects of historical research, including relatively traditional research on political events, as well as research on groups traditionally neglected in such research and even ethnographic research on culture contact.

Political research

Diaries can form a valuable source of information when other sources have been restricted by, for example, state censorship. During the second half of the seventeenth century in England, the restored monarchy exerted strong control over the media and therefore diaries such as Pepys's and Evelyn's form a valuable source on both political events and social changes. In the twentieth century diaries have also provided a valuable source of information. Paradoxically the increase in public access to information has made politicians more self-conscious and resulted in considerable self-censorship. Tosh noted the value of diaries in this context:

In the 1920s ... the select publications of official records grew out of all proportion, as governments strove to excuse themselves, and blame others, for responsibility for the First World War ... Ministers and civil servants, especially those concerned with foreign policy, became more inhibited in their official correspondence; what they wrote to each other privately, or recorded in their diaries, therefore gains in interest ... the vast majority of the diaries and letters available to the historian were written without thought of a wider readership. Of all sources they are the most spontaneous and unvarnished, revealing both the calculated stratagems and unconscious assumptions of public figures. (1984, p. 40)

Diaries and other personal documents form an important source for case studies which focus on specific decisions or events. For example Bale (1999)

used a variety of sources including published diaries and memoirs to explore economic decision-making in the Labour government in the mid 1960s. Using these sources he was able to show how in 1964 ministers' personal convictions, plus their perceptions of the electoral unpopularity of devaluation, meant that they resisted strong economic pressure to devalue. In contrast, the changed political circumstances after the government's victory in 1966, plus changed personal perceptions, created the context for devaluation in 1967.

Diaries are an important source for political biographies, which can be seen as historical case studies. Gladstone, a major nineteenth century politician, kept a diary for over 71 years, making an entry for nearly every day between July 1825 and December 1896 (Beales, 1982). Morley (1903), who published a major three-volume biography, had access to and published extracts from the diary. However other scholars were denied access because of the diary's 'introspections, its spiritual misgivings and self accusations and ... the fact that the confessions of human weakness are definitely connected with the other sex' (Herbert to Henry Gladstone, cited in Beales, 1982, p. 463). In particular the diary revealed 'not only the extent and some of the ramifications of Gladstone's work to reclaim prostitutes, but also his practice of self-flagellation' (1982, p. 463).

Gladstone's diaries are a rich source of evidence for his attitude to and influence on specific political developments. Beales himself noted some of these areas, for example the development of Anglo-Irish relations and especially Gladstone's changing view on the role of the established Anglican Church in Ireland. Gladstone wrote on 19 June 1845 which he marked secret:

Keep religion entire, and you secure at least to the individual man his refuge. Ask therefore on every occasion not what best maintains the religious repute of the State but what is least menacing to the integrity of Catholic belief & the Catholic Church. (1982, p. 466)

Social and anthropological research

Political history tends to be top-down history which focuses on the role and development of political elites. The specific impact of 'great men' such as Gladstone, and the privileged access which personal documents such as diaries give to personal developments, perceptions and motives, are important for understanding political decisions and events. However increasingly historians and social scientists working with historical sources have focused on broader social processes and on groups who are relatively excluded or only exceptionally given voice in the official record.

Social history is concerned with the ways in which social relations and structures are formed within specific societies at specific times. The emphasis tends to be on groups who are excluded from traditional historical narratives. This is reflected in the growth of oral history in which interview techniques are used to access evidence from excluded individuals and communities. For example Redlich (1975) argued that autobiographical sources such as memoirs and

diaries were rich sources of data which have been neglected by historians and should be used to develop a fuller understanding of the ways in which small social changes contributed to more fundamental changes. MacFarlane (1970, p. 3) has asserted that materials such as diaries can make a major contribution to understanding the past by overcoming the limitations inherent in other records.

Some of the well-known diaries have contributed to social history. For example, Pepys's diary provided substantial information about both working conditions in the emerging civil service and domestic relations. Westhauser (1994) has compared Pepys's diary with that kept by Adam Eyre. Westhauser noted that friendship and marriage made competing demands on men in the seventeenth century. High status men who had made good marriages tended to use their own homes as a basis for sociability and hospitality. Lower status men and those with 'bad' marriages tended to use public houses. Both Adam Eyre and Samuel Pepys were men of the 'middling sort' who were rising to prominence at the end of the seventeenth century; social change had implications for their sociability and their relationships with their wives, with a move from meeting in public houses to meeting in their own homes.

One group often excluded from the historical record are women, and there has been substantial use of diaries in both studying the life history of women and exploring their roles and relationships. Botankie (1999) noted that in seventeenth century England the Protestant duty of self-examination stimulated diary writing among women as well as men and this enabled women to pursue a male activity, writing, as well as to expand into other areas of male activity such as providing spiritual guidance. However such activity was restricted to the elite until there was wider access to requisite resources for keeping a diary in nineteenth century industrial societies (see for example Huff's 1985 bibliography of nineteenth century women's manuscript diaries).

Huff (1985) used diaries to explore the ways in which Victorian women constructed childbirth and motherhood. She argued that excessive reliance on fictional sources for personal and emotional responses to childbirth has meant that images of women as devils or angels have persisted. She showed that Victorian women used their diaries to record the details of their pregnancy and childbirth and that such practices helped develop relationships between women sharing the same experiences. These diaries could also be used as sources of information on parturition and disease.

Diaries provide a rich source of data for researchers who wish to explore the development of an individual life, and the activities and relationships of particular groups in society. The utility of diaries may be restricted by their availability but it may be possible to minimise such limitations by seeing an individual diarist or group of diarists as typical or representative of a wider group. Diaries can be used to access information within a specific society or social group and to explore the relationships between groups and even between cultures in historical anthropology.

Historical anthropology can be seen as a form of social history that deals with the development and interactions of cultures. An emphasis on culture involves a particular interest in the development of the collective mental life of groups and the ways in which they perceive and mentally organise the world they live in.

MacFarlane used Ralph Josselin's diary to 'step back 300 years and to look out through the eyes of an Essex vicar of the mid seventeenth century' (1970, p. 11). MacFarlane examined the demographic and social issues, such as Josselin's relationship with his kin, godparents, servants and neighbours. However he was more interested in the cultural dimensions of these relationships and the diarist's life. He noted that:

The use of a diary as a prime source, rather than the parish registers or probate inventories upon which most social history is at present based, allows us to make a more personal and intimate study. It enables us to probe a long-vanished mental world, as well as to describe the social characteristics of a previous civilization. (1970, p. 3)

MacFarlane developed a picture of Josselin's mental world, especially the importance of religious and magical thinking evident *inter alia* in the millenarian images associated with the Second Coming in his diary:

This mental world, so full of omens and symbolic nuances, contained few barriers against rumours of witchcraft and the millennium, of monstrous births and meetings with the devil. Analysis of the Josselin family's dreams has already shown that during the 1650s they dreamt fairly frequently of strange fires and figures in the sky, which seemed to fit in with the prophecies in the Book of Revelation concerning the Second Coming. (1970, p. 190)

Sahlins (1995) also used diaries for a historical ethnography seeking to explain how native Hawaiian islanders made sense of an unprecedented event, their first encounter with Europeans. Sahlins used a variety of diaries and other documents kept by Captain Cook and his crew and compared them with oral traditions and histories from the islands. Sahlins argued that the islanders tried to make sense of the situation by using their experience and understanding of the world to interpret the new situation. The best fit between the new situation and previous experience was that Cook was an incarnation of the god Lono and this interpretation played an important role in events, especially Cook's death.

The starting point for Cook's analysis was the accounts of events in the various diaries. Sahlins started with an account published by Heinrich Zimmermann, a German seaman who kept notes in German. He used these notes to publish his own version of the voyage, which appeared in 1781 before the Admiralty's official version in 1784:

Zimmermann's text indicates he was present – 'We held the five boats at a short distance from the land' – and reports one of the interviews [between the party sent to recover Cook's body and the islanders]. The Hawaiians, he wrote, 'showed us a piece of white cloth as a countersign of peace but mocked at ours and answered as follows: "O-runā no

te tuti Heri te moi a popo Here mai” which means: “The god Cook is dead but sleeps in the woods and will come tomorrow.”... The Hawaiian here is again decipherable, but is more straightforward than Zimmermann’s translation: ‘Cook is indeed Lono; he is going to sleep; tomorrow he will come’ – no death, no woods. The apparently curious statement fits into the range of European accounts of the incident, all of which cite Hawaiians to the effect that Cook would return the next day. (1995, p. 18)

Sahlins supported this analysis with a review of the events of Cook’s visit to Hawaii in 1778 and 1779. He noted that there was documentary evidence that Cook was greeted in Hawai’i island as a personification of the New Year god Lono (1995, p. 20). Sahlins argued that events associated with Cook’s visit and his death provided insight into the islanders’ rationality, the way they thought about the world at the time. This rationality included the possibility that in certain circumstances gods, humans and natural entities such as winds shared characteristics and could have a common identity. Therefore it was not irrational for the islanders to see and treat Cook as a manifestation of one of their gods.

Both MacFarlane and Sahlins show the sophisticated ways in which diaries can be used to explore the culture and mindsets of past social groups. This is particularly challenging in the case of other cultures where some of the evidence is embedded and has to be deciphered from the diary, as in the case of the Cook voyage diaries. However, in such research it is important that the interpretation is supported from other sources such as oral traditions which themselves may be recorded in travellers’ or missionaries’ journals or anthropologists’ fieldnotes.

Comment

Diaries are a valuable and comparatively neglected resource for historical research. They can provide supporting evidence for traditional political histories. In social and anthropological studies that use historical data they are a unique source offering a way of accessing information that could not be accessed in any other way.

Box 2.3 Key issues which researchers should explore when considering the use of diaries in historical research

- What are the main aims and characteristics of historical research?
- What are the disadvantages of using diaries in historical research designs?
- What are the advantages of using diaries in historical research designs?
- In what circumstances do diaries provide access to data that other methods cannot?

Using diaries for naturalistic research

While research designs such as social surveys provide cost-effective ways of collecting large bodies of data, the explanatory value of these data is often limited. While survey research is good at explaining what people do, it is rather less effective at explaining or understanding why they do it. Accessing individuals' interpretations of their world is the only way to do this. As Porter has noted in a review of qualitative analysis in nursing research, the premise of naturalistic research is that:

the social world we live in can only be understood through an understanding of the meanings and motives that guide social actions and interactions of individuals ... Qualitative analysis is concerned with describing the actions and interactions of research subjects in a certain context, and with interpreting the motivations and understandings that lie behind those actions. (2000, p. 399)

Researchers can access these types of data by becoming part of the 'natural setting' (Fielding, 1993) and participating in the social life of the people who are being researched. The aim of naturalistic research is to study the world as far as possible in a state that is not contaminated by the research process, so that "natural" not "artificial" settings, like experiments or formal interviews, should be the primary source of data' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 6). Naturalistic researchers are committed to seeing the world from the social actors' point of view, and to do this they seek to participate in the everyday life of a community so that they can see the world from the point of view of a member of the community. Blaikie described the chief characteristic of this approach in the following way:

[It] is a commitment to viewing the social world – social actions and events – from the viewpoints(s) of the people being studied. This commitment involves discovering *their* socially constructed reality and penetrating the frames of meaning within which they conduct their activities. (italics in the original: 2000, p. 251)

Diaries provide an important and often neglected source of data for naturalistic researchers, as they can be seen as documents of life which 'give "voice" to other people' (Plummer, 1983, p. 1). While there are a variety of such documents, Plummer noted that:

The diary is the document of life *par excellence*, chronicling as it does the immediately contemporaneous flow of public and private events that are significant to the diarist. The word 'contemporary' is very crucial here, for each diary entry – unlike life histories – is sedimented into a particular moment in time. (italics in the original: 2001, p. 48)

Diaries are particularly suited to a naturalistic approach as they facilitate 'the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context' (Bolger et al., 2003, p. 580).

Diaries providing insight into taken-for-granted activities

Diaries can be used to access those facets of social life which members of social groups take for granted and are therefore not easily articulated or accessed through research methods such as interviews. Interactions within social groups imply common and shared characteristics, for example members of the groups can competently speak the same language and have sufficient agreement about the nature of the world to facilitate meaningful communication and interaction. The shared agreements or tacit knowledge about the world which Schutz (1971) called 'common sense' tend to be internalised through the processes of socialisation.

Diaries can be used to access such tacit knowledge. For example Robinson (1971) generated insight into the ways in which people decided they or significant others were ill. While he identified some elements of formal explicit decision-making, much assessment was grounded in tacit knowledge. Robinson noted that for the most part actors did not consider more than one course of action and responded with 'no thinking out and weighing up of alternative strategies' (1971, p. 36). So when faced with familiar situations people used their common sense; they 'knew what to do and did it' (1971, p. 36). In addition to household interviews, the wife or mother in each household was invited to complete a diary for a four-week period and 20 did so. Robinson used these diaries to identify patterns which indicated how individuals made sense of their situation and did or did not invoke the concept of 'illness' in this process. In particular he identified an 'incubation' stage during which the diarist recorded concerns about his or her health or those of a household member. These concerns then led into a decision to seek help which either resolved the matter or led to further action. For example he noted how Mrs S. who was a pregnant woman with a two-year-old child, used her diary to document a series of concerns about her health and to record how these concerns were resolved by a visit to an antenatal clinic (see Figure 2.1).

Diaries as a means of providing insight into the ways in which individuals perceive and interpret situations

Diaries can be used not only to identify patterns of behaviour but also to provide greater insight into how individuals interpret situations and ascribe meanings to actions and events and therefore how actions that may appear irrational to outsiders are rational to the diarist.

Merton and his colleagues (1957) used diaries in their classic study of the education and socialisation of medical students. They examined the ways in which the students perceived and evaluated their situation and how the formal and explicit parts of their learning interacted with informal learning and the overall shaping of their attitudes to medicine and patients. Initially four and

<i>Day</i>	<i>Symptom</i>	<i>Action taken</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	My nails are splitting badly		
2	Nothing		
3	My legs are swelling badly		Wish I had time to rest my legs more
4	My legs still swelling and nails splitting. I have had a lot of constipation lately	Taken laxative for constipation	
5	I still have Wednesday's symptoms		
6	I still have the same symptoms		
7	My body is feeling very weak and my nerves are still bad		
8	Just the same as Sat.		
9	I have constipation	Taken laxatives	
10	I had very bad back and stomach pains before the laxatives work		
11	I had very bad wind in my back, eating far too much last week or so. But just can't stop myself	Had J. [husband] to rub my back until wind came up	
12	Now I have haemorrhoids	I went to antenatal clinic. Told doctor my symptoms	Doctor told me I am overweight and must stop eating too much
13	Nothing		
14	Nothing		
15	Nothing		
16	Nothing		
17	Nothing		
18	Nothing		
19	Nothing		

Figure 2.1 Extract from a family health diary (Robinson, 1971, p. 31)

subsequently two students in each of the four years of the training course kept a 'detailed journal'. One of the research team read each weekly instalment of each diary to identify:

tentative hypotheses about the distinctive aspects of the social environment and their significance for processes of attitudinal and cognitive learning. (Merton, 1957, p. 46)

Since these hypotheses were explored through 'intensive interviews' with the student diarists, little of the original diary material made it through to the final analysis. For example, Fox's (1957) analysis of the ways in which student physicians learnt to deal with the uncertainties inherent in medical practice relied heavily on data from the 'intensive interviews'. The only acknowledged direct quotations from the diaries come in the methodology section where Merton provided two extracts from diaries to illustrate how two students presented the same event, a below average mark in a chemistry examination, in different ways:

Student A: Monday, we got back our chem. Exams. As I supposed, I did flunk it. The marks in general were good; most folks about me got high 80's and 90's. *I guess some of us are just naturally born stupid and careless.*

Student B: Well, we got our chemistry tests today. I didn't do as well as I should have, but I passed with a very high C ... I really knew about a B's worth of material ... I seemed to see a lot of 100's and 90's floating around the lab, but what can you do about that? *So many of the fellows were chemistry majors and/or took elementary biochemistry in undergraduate school.* (italics in the original: 1957, p. 45)

Diaries and ethnography

Naturalistic research underpins ethnographic designs that were initially developed for the anthropological study of other cultures. Since Malinowski pioneered intensive fieldwork techniques by leaving the safety of the colonial enclave and living with and sharing the lives of Trobriand islanders in the 1910s, anthropologists have been committed to naturalistic research. Fieldnotes form a central component of fieldwork and these take the form of the researcher's contemporaneous record of observations and reflections, in other words a journal or diary:

Field notes are the bricks and mortar of an ethnographic edifice. These notes consist primarily of data from interviews and daily observations ... Fieldwork inundates the ethnographer with information, ideas, and events. Ethnographic work is exhausting, and the fieldworker will be tempted to stop taking notes or to postpone typing the day's hieroglyphics each night. Memory fades quickly, however, and unrecorded information will soon be overshadowed by subsequent events. Too long a delay sacrifices the rich immediacy of concurrent notes. (Fetterman, 1998, p. 114)

Similarly Emerson and his colleagues note that 'the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others' (1995, p. 1).

In de Munck's (1998) account of the life of a Sri Lankan village, he described how he observed and interpreted the conflicts between members of the village. The raw data for his analysis were two notebooks, which he used to maintain a daily record. One of these notebooks he classified as official as it included his formal records, his 'field jottings, maps, diagrams, interviews and observations' whereas the other was an 'unofficial' notebook that contained his personal reflections, 'mullings, questions, comments, quirky notes, and diary type entries' (1998, p. 45).

Anthropologists use fieldnote journals as the material for their accounts of the people they study. It is possible to use both the journals and published ethnographies to gain insight into the process. Malinowski's accounts have been subjected to particular scrutiny. He was a pioneer of fieldwork and his books were designed to give readers the feeling that they were participating in the lives of the people he studied. In the preface to *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* he states that:

In this book we are going to meet the essential Trobriander. Whatever he might appear to others, to himself he is first and foremost a gardener. His passion for the soil is that of a real peasant. He experiences a mysterious joy in delving into the earth, in turning it up, planting the seed, watching the plant grow, mature, and yield the desired harvest. If you want to know him, you must meet him in his yam garden, among his palm groves or on his taro fields. (Malinowski, 1966, p. xix)

Surprisingly there is little evidence that Malinowski's fieldnotes have been re-examined. Uberoi (1971) reworked Malinowski's analysis of the Kula ring, stressing its political role in a competitive environment that lacked the moderating influence of centralised political authority, but he used published ethnographic accounts not original fieldnotes. However the diaries which Malinowski kept while he was doing his fieldwork (Firth, 1989, p. xi) have been published and subjected to analysis, especially by Geertz (1988). Malinowski's *Diary* (1989) provided a rather different account of the development and practice of fieldwork to the conventional version. As Geertz notes, Malinowski's *Diary* showed that he 'did not, in fact, always maintain an understanding and benevolent attitude towards his informants, his state of mind in the field was anything but coolly objective' (1988, p. 112). Malinowski's comments on both islanders and Europeans were often highly judgemental, as can be seen in the following extract:

Thursday 21 [1918]. Slept a long time – 'catching up on my sleep' – I feel I need it. I feel a little knocked out; but not unwell ... Wrote diary, neglected since departure from

Sanaroa. I must draw up a system of investigation on the Amphletts. In the morning I wrote a long time, started ethnogr. fairly late. Worked first with Anaibutuna and Tovasana [Tovasana was the main headman in the Amphletts; Malinowski was staying in his village, Nu'agasi on Gumasila, and used him as an informant (see *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, particularly Chapter XI) (editor's notes)] who are not bad, *but not first-class informants*. After lunch Kipela and an old man; I got annoyed with the latter and chased him away. For a moment I was afraid that this would spoil my business, then Kipela successfully resolved the difficulties. (emphases in the original: 1989, pp. 228–9).

Geertz (1988) has analysed Malinowski's *Diary* and his other published work as texts. He has identified an oscillation in Malinowski's texts between two images, that of a scientific observer, 'a figure ... rigorously objective, dispassionate, thorough, exact, and disciplined ... and dedicated to wintery truth', and that of a compassionate and skilled fellow human being who has 'enlarged capacities for adaptability and fellow feeling, for insinuating himself into practically any situation, as to be able to see as savages see, think as savages think, and on occasion even feel as they feel and believe as they believe' (1988, p. 79). He argued that Malinowski constructed his text in this way so that he could overcome the fundamental problem of ethnography, creating an intelligible and persuasive account of another culture:

The problem ... is to represent the research process in the research product; to write ethnography in such a way as to bring one's interpretations of some society, culture, way of life, or whatever and one's encounters with some of its members, carriers, representatives, or whomever into an intelligible relationship. Or ... it is to get an I-witnessing author into a they-picturing story. To commit oneself to an essentially biographical conception of Being There, rather than a reflective, an adventural, or an observational one, is to commit oneself to text-building. (1988, p. 84)

Geertz identified this diary approach to ethnography in other texts including Read's (1965) account of life in Highland New Guinea. He noted that while Read presented himself in a very different way, he shared with Malinowski the same confessional approach to creating ethnographic texts:

Instead of the Dostoevskian darkness and Conradian blur [of Malinowski's text], the Readian 'I' is filled with confidence, rectitude, tolerance, patience, good nature, energy, enthusiasm, optimism – with an almost palpable determination to do what is right and think what is proper. If the *Diary* presents the image of the womanizing café intellectual cast among savages, *The High Valley* presents one of an indefinite country vicar. (1988, p. 85)

Geertz's textual approach to ethnographic narrative provides one way of exploring how such narratives are constructed and used and has stimulated an interesting interaction between textual analysis and social sciences. Diaries form an important source of data for such analyses and such analyses can

contribute to our understanding of the ways in which diaries work as texts. I will therefore return to these issues when I consider the analysis of diary evidence in Chapter 5.

Comment

Given the stated aim of researchers using a naturalistic approach to study individuals and communities in their natural setting and to minimise intrusion, diaries offer an attractive source of information. Since diarists control the recording of information, diaries appear to offer privileged access to the diarist's perceptions and world. This characteristic has made them attractive as a way of exploring tacit knowledge that is difficult to articulate in, for example, interviews because such knowledge is grounded in taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of the world. While diaries may be seen as a means to an end, they can also be seen as texts in their own right used by the diarist to construct his or her own identity to support an account of the social reality. The nature and structure of such accounts can be explored using techniques developed in literary or textual analysis.

Box 2.4 Key issues which researchers should explore when considering the use of diaries in naturalistic research

- What are the main aims and characteristics of naturalistic research?
- What sources and texts are available and how would diaries add to these sources?
- What are the advantages of using diaries in naturalistic designs?
- In what circumstances do diaries provide access to data that other methods cannot?

Summary and comment

Diaries can be used in a wide variety of research designs. In experimental and survey research, they can be used either to overcome the recall problems present in synchronic techniques of collecting data, such as the one-off interview, or to explore areas of human life concealed from investigation such as sexual relations between men. In historical research, diaries provide a valuable source of information, which can both supplement other sources and for some purposes and in some circumstances form a key source. Diaries form an

important source for the development of life histories and biographies that are used in traditional political history as well as in social history. Diaries can also play a part in developing anthropological histories and providing insight into other cultures, whether these are in seventeenth century rural England or eighteenth century Hawaii. For research using a naturalistic approach, diaries provide an important resource. While it is clear that diaries in the form of field-notes have formed a key part of ethnographic fieldwork since Malinowski's pioneering work in the 1910s, it is not clear that the full potential of diaries is recognised in this area.

KEY POINTS

Overall

- Diaries can be used in a range of research designs.
- Diaries can be used on their own or in combination with other methods.
- Diaries provide a means of accessing hard-to-reach groups or activities.

Experimental/survey

- Diaries can be used where there are practical problems in making suitable observation, because the relevant events or activities are rare or difficult to observe.
- Diarists can act as a surrogate for the researcher in recording data.

Unsolicited/historical

- Unsolicited diaries provide a major source of data, especially when other sources have been censored or are absent.
- Historical research using diaries is restricted to those periods when diary keeping was established and for those groups amongst whom diary keeping was a regular habit.

Naturalistic/ethnographic

- Diaries provide a way of accessing data in a relatively natural form and can therefore be used to explore the taken-for-granted aspects of social interaction.

EXERCISE

Diaries have been used in a variety of different research projects with different research designs. To familiarise yourself with diary research and to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities offered by using diaries, you should look at one or more example from each of the types of research identified in lists A, B and C. You should then consider the issues which I have outlined.

Diaries which can be used in the exercise

The diaries are grouped into three categories: experimental/survey, historical/unsolicited, naturalistic/ethnographic.

List A: experimental/survey

- Coxon, A.P.M. (1996) *Between the Sheets: Sexual Diaries and Gay Men's Sex in the Era of AIDS*, Cassell, London.
- Parkin, D., Rice, N., Jacoby, A. and Doughty, J. (2004) Use of a visual analogue scale in a daily patient diary: modelling cross-sectional time-series data on health-related quality of life, *Social Science and Medicine*, 59, pp. 351–60.

List B: historical/unsolicited

- MacFarlane, A. (1970) *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: a Seventeenth-Century Clergyman. An Essay in Historical Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pollock, L.A. (1983) *Forgotten Children: Parent–Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sahlins, M. (1995) *How 'Natives' Think: about Captain Cook, for Example*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

List C: naturalistic/ethnographic

- Crossley, M.L. (2003) 'Let me explain': narrative emplotment and one patient's experience of oral cancer, *Social Science and Medicine*, 56, pp. 439–48.
- Jones, R.H. and Candlin, C.N. (2003) Constructing risk across timescales and trajectories: gay men's stories of sexual encounters, *Health, Risk and Society*, 5, pp. 199–213.

(Continued)

Issues which you should consider

- 1 Identify the key aims and objectives of each research study.
- 2 Examine how and in what ways diaries were used to contribute to the achievement of these aims and objectives.
- 3 Were diaries the sole source of data?
- 4 If not, consider their relationship with other forms of data collection and their distinctive role.
- 5 How were the data from the diaries collected and analysed?
- 6 What contribution did the diaries make to the findings and conclusions of the study?
- 7 What status was given to the diary data?