It is essential that data collection methods are consistent with the ethical principles presented in Chapter 5. The people being studied must know the nature of the study and be willing participants in it (this is informed consent), and any data collected should not be traceable back to particular individuals (thus maintaining their right to privacy). One common way of keeping personal data confidential is to assign various pseudonyms to different participants and to use those pseudonyms both during data collection and in the final research report.

Common to all qualitative studies is a need to identify an appropriate sample from which to acquire data. Another feature that most qualitative studies share (content analyses excepted) is heavy reliance on observations, interviews, or both, as a source of data. We now look at each of these topics more closely.

### Sampling

As we have seen, qualitative researchers draw their data from many sources—not only from a variety of people, but perhaps also from objects, textual materials, and audiovisual and electronic records. The particular entities they select comprise their sample, and the process of selecting them is called sampling.