

marginalized people employ as they world travel. Traveling to Other worlds is the ethnographic project. To travel to these worlds with the desire to do ethical work is an ongoing concern. To understand this ethnographic traveling to Other worlds through the particular kind of traveling or code switching that many minority populations must employ is the contribution that Maria Lugones brings to the ethics of ethnography.

Code Switching

To learn the skills of world traveling involves code switching: learning the language, rules, norms, and aesthetic conventions, of that world, along with what it means to inhabit that world. When one world travels, shifting codes becomes a skill of mobility and necessity, but it is also a matter of choice. There are consequences if I do not shift codes, but there are also consequences if I do. When I code-shift, I am behaving out of respect and appropriateness for that world, and because it is necessary (for a number of reasons: work, health, education, or fieldwork) to enter that world. In traveling to other worlds, when code shifting is necessary, a member of that world may express, "We are comfortable talking with this person and sharing what we do here, because this person knows and respects us." Yet there are other times when code switching may be resented: "She is trying to be like us and we don't like it," "He is not from here, and he doesn't belong here." Code switching for the world traveler is a delicate balance.

Stereotypes

In this Other world, you realize your identity is already constructed. You have a way of talking, gesturing, and valuing as that world constructs you as the outsider before you even travel there. Once you arrive and enter that world's construction of you, you may consciously or unconsciously animate the constructed identity or stereotype prescribed for you as the outsider, or you may resist it. We must also be aware that subjects will perform, in turn, the images, stereotypes, and caricatures they believe we hold of them.

Playfulness

For the ethnographer, the concept of playfulness is profoundly useful relative to ethics. We may both compare and contrast it to ethnographic world traveling. As ethnographers, we may be both playful and unplayful while recognizing and understanding when the subjects of the world we enter feel they can be both playful and/or unplayful with us and the worlds we represent.

Loving playfulness for the ethnographer is a playfulness that allows us to enter Conquergood's (1982b, 1998, 2002a, 2002b) dialogue with the purpose of understanding when we can be playful and when we cannot. To be deeply and honorably engaged with the world through Conquergood's concept of dialogic performance is to engage this balance. This is a turning back on the self with a loving and conscious self-reflection—a deeply felt dialogue that inspires you to extend and reach out to the Other who welcomes acceptable play. You are at ease, but, more importantly, through dialogic encounters you have changed and augmented another self, a plural self, that can be at play through your own permission and the permission of your subjects. Full play is protected by trust, loving perception, and different world constructions. It is here where ethnographers may learn from ethnic minorities who travel to different worlds all the time as a matter of course. To be playful is more than a matter of ease; it is a matter of being in a world that allows and encourages you to be playful, a world where it is healthy for you to play without threat.

Foolish Play

In foolish play, one ignores the rules of the world and becomes reckless, playful, and permissive, thereby projecting oneself toward a kind of folly and abandon that the world does not accept or understand. The ethnographer or subject acts in ways that are too familiar and too informal; therefore, others respond with insult, dismissal, or hostility. One is foolish to be playful in some worlds. For the ethnographer to play in these worlds is to disrespect certain boundaries of civility, privacy, and cultural norms.

World Traveling

As ethnographers, when we travel to Other worlds, we open ourselves to the greatest possibility of loving perception and dialogical performance, because (a) we witness and engage cultural aspects of the Other's world; (b) we witness and engage with Others' sense of self in their own world; (c) we experience how we are perceived *through Others' eyes*; (d) we are now bodies that must touch, see, and listen to each other because we are inhabiting a space in their world where distance cannot separate you; (e) we witness and engage the Other as a *subject* even as he or she may be subjugated, and, as a result, meanings of power and positionality begin to arise between us; (f) we are dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood. Traveling to another world threatens arrogant perception and makes loving perception possible. Loving perception evokes dialogical performance and sustains it. Loving perception is not sentimental or sappy, nor is it a romanticization of the Other.

Conclusion

By traveling to someone's world, we open a greater possibility for identification; moreover, we gain the opportunity to glimpse ourselves through *their* eyes. We see more than self-recognition with the Other, but the Other's recognition of us. It is this moment that leads the way to identification with the Other and the desire to be with the Other. Lugones (1994) writes,

The reason why I think that traveling to someone's "world" is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their "world" we can understand what is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. . . . Without knowing the other's "world," one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one. . . . Through traveling to other people's "worlds" we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (p. 637)

What Lugones is asking us to do is not always easy. We will meet people in the field that we general do not like. Some of these people may be victims of arrogant perception, but they are also arrogant perceivers: they may act in mean, repressive, and dishonest ways toward other Others. We have difficulty liking them or trusting them, let alone *loving* them. Loving perception, dialogic performance, and radical egalitarianism means that we must understand *every* individual as a valuable being worthy and deserving of understanding, fair judgment, and our caring attention. When this is of primary importance in our work, it also becomes the very reason that these individuals and their negative effects must be seriously contextualized and seriously criticized. Loving perception works to construct *agape* love and works to deconstruct its opposite.

Warm-Ups

1. Create three contrasting scenarios experienced by a specific identity that forms the character of a field researcher; that is, identify the sex, age, gender, class, nationality, or some other characteristic of the researcher and his or her research interest. The three scenarios should include a situation in which the researcher world travels to three contrasting worlds: one where the researcher is at ease but not playful; the second where he or she is playful in an unplayful world; and the third where he or she is playful in a world that

is safe and that welcomes play. Each situation must reflect a fieldwork environment. Please discuss the consequences or effects of each scenario.

2. Imagine that you are in a lecture hall explaining the concept of ethics, particularly as it relates to world traveling, to students who are divided into two different groups sitting on opposite sides of the room. On the right side of the room are students belonging to the Christian Right Coalition, and on the left side of the room are students belonging to the Young Socialist Party. Explain the theory and practice of ethics referring to the various thinkers and schools of thought outlined in this chapter.

Note

1. Outlaw (1995) states, "This work is produced from a lecture delivered by Hegel in the winter of 1830–31, though there had been two previous deliveries in 1822–23 and 1824–25" (p. 326). Outlaw also discusses the impact of Hegel's philosophy of European racism: "These ideas were expressed more than seventy years prior to the cannibalization of Africa by a person who was to become one of Germany's and Europe's most famous philosophers, and helped to nurture a complex of ideas that rationalized European racism" (p. 326).

Suggested Readings

- Ashby, W. (1997). *A comprehensive history of Western ethics*. New York: Prometheus.
- Clifford, J. (1988). *The predicament of culture: Twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Conquergood, D. (1982). Performing as a moral act: The ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance. *Literature and Performance*, 5(2), 1–13.
- Hamera, J. (1995). Ethics and answerability: Critical theoretical perspectives on "The Storytellers" project. In S. Mason & E. van Erven (Eds.), *The Storytellers* (pp. 112–120). Utrecht, The Netherlands: Ocean Film Foundation.
- Hord, F. L., & Lee, J. S. (Eds.). (1995). *I am because we are: Readings in black philosophy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- MacIntyre, A. (1967). *A short history of ethics*. New York: Routledge.
- Raphael, D. D. (1981). *Moral philosophy and social values*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Spellman, E. V. (1988). *Inessential woman: Problems of exclusion in feminist thought*. Boston: Beacon.
- Vardy, P., & Grosh, P. (1994). *The puzzle of ethics*. New York: HarperCollins.
- West, C. (1991). *The ethical dimensions of Marxist thought*. New York: Monthly Review.

- How were participants selected? What mechanisms did you use to gain access to the people in the field with whom you chose to speak and interact? You will explain your method and how you came to locate and meet them: for example, through an introduction from a key participant or community liaison, with assistance from relevant institutions and networks, through word-of-mouth, via the “snowball effect” or the “grapevine,” as well as by “hanging out” at local sites such as churches, social gatherings, rallies, and so forth.

- What are the possible benefits or risks to participants? What will participants gain and/or lose by your presence in their lives? You will explain what you hope your project will do to serve and contribute to the lives or population of your study. This means you will express what difference your presence will make upon a situation or experience that relates to or affects them. You will also express with honesty and humility the possible consequences that your project may have upon the situation and/or their lives. As you describe all the possible negative consequences, you must also speak in clear terms regarding what measures you will take to try to prevent such consequences from occurring. (This point is elaborated with more detail and examples in the section on ethics.)

- How will you assure confidentiality and anonymity, when necessary, for participants as well as the site? You will explain your ethical stance and your methods by outlining step by step how your research data—specifically, names, places, encounters, and identities—will be changed, altered, and safeguarded from the general public, other participants, and your institutional colleagues. (This point is also elaborated with examples and detail in the ethics section.)

- How often and how long would you like to meet for interviews and observations? You will inform participants of why you may need to meet with them on more than one occasion and the possible duration of each meeting. You will also inquire about significant times to meet that will enhance the data and address more fully your research question. You will also keep in mind that how often you meet is contingent upon what is convenient and appropriate for participants.

- How and in what manner will you ask participants’ permission to record their actions, experiences, and words? After you have described the project, particularly after you have informed participants of possible benefits and consequences, of what will be done with the data, and of the purpose of the project, the *means* by which the data will be recorded will more than likely be less invasive, foreign, or even suspicious. The means by which

you record your data are through notes, tape recordings, photographs, and videotaping. You will obviously ask permission to record, especially for photographs and audio or video recordings. It is often good practice, particularly with video recordings, and for participants who are reluctant to meet a day or two before the more formal interview. If time allows, have a conversation about more general subjects that are innocuous or that are of interests to them in order to develop more familiarity and ease with the videotape. It is also effective when using video to make arrangements for these individuals to be part of a group interview and discussion before you videotape them individually. Being part of a group for the initial taping buffers the focus and concentration on them as individuals. It gives them an opportunity to interact with and respond to others who are also being taped and to witness by comparison or contrast how others respond.

The lay summary, like the research design, serves only as a guide or a map. Remember that every situation is different and context specific. It is important to feel free to adapt and adjust the need of the lay summary to your particular project and situation.

Interviewing and Field Techniques

Unlike survey interviews, in which those giving information are relatively passive and are not allowed the opportunity to elaborate, interviewees in qualitative interviews share in the work of the interview, sometimes guiding it in channels of their own choosing. They are treated as partners rather than as objects of research.

—Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin,
Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data (1995)

Interviewing is a hallmark experience of fieldwork research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The ethnographic interview opens realms of meaning that permeate beyond rote information or finding the “truth of the matter.” The interviewee is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story. Interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience together. The primary aim of much social science research is to locate valid and reliable information, with the interviewer directing the questions and the interviewee answering them as truthfully as possible. This is not to suggest that validity and substantiation are irrelevant in critical ethnography, because they are indeed significant at many levels of inquiry. However,

critical ethnography reflects deeper truths than the need for verifiable facts and information. The beauty of this method of interviewing is in the complex realms of individual subjectivity, memory, yearnings, polemics, and hope that are unveiled and inseparable from shared and inherited expressions of communal strivings, social history, and political possibility. The interview is a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging: *I am because we are and we are because I am.*

The ethnographic interview may encompass three forms: (1) *oral history*, which is a recounting of a social historical moment reflected in the life or lives of individuals who remember them and/or experienced them; (2) *personal narrative*, which is an individual perspective and expression of an event, experience, or point of view; and (3) *topical interview*, the point of view given to a particular subject, such as a program, an issue, or a process. It is important to note that these forms are not isolated from one another. They are separated here for definitional purposes, because they each have special albeit discrete characteristics from the others. But please keep in mind that each type will often and necessarily overlap with the others.

Formulating Questions

What is seen, heard, and experienced in the field, these are "the nuggets around which you construct your questions."

—Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (1999)

One of the most interesting and important challenges of the interview process is during the initial stages, when you are thinking about what questions to ask. There are those who have a natural talent for asking questions, while others are not so sure what to ask or how to ask it and need more guidance. Questions will naturally evolve the more time you spend in the field and the more experience you have with participants and with the context and culture in which they live or work. It is generally advised that researchers should have a basic level of understanding of the field—the general history, meanings, practices, institutions, and beliefs that constitute it—before they plunge full force into the actual face-to-face interviewing. Spending time closely listening, observing, and interacting in the field while compiling extensive field notes will provide a foundation of knowledge and experience upon which you may begin to craft your questions.

Greater knowledge and familiarity before you begin your interviews will inspire your questions. Your field notes will be an invaluable source and frame

of reference as you contemplate your questions; however, it also helps to have a few tried-and-true models and guidelines. Below are two models I have found to be particularly helpful in developing questions. They are drawn from Michael Patton (1990) and James P. Spradley (1979). Following these models is a list of "tried and true" methods that I have found most useful over the years.

The Patton Model

We will examine the Patton model using the example of a qualitative researcher conducting interviews with black students about so-called black isolation on the campus of a major state university.

1. Behavior or Experience Questions. Behavior or experience questions address concrete human action, conduct, or ways of "doing." It is helpful to think about behavior as comportment or as action in some form, and to think of experience as being more mindful or reflexive of the meanings of the action or behavior. "*I notice that most black students stick together and claim their own spaces and groupings on campus. They eat together in the dining hall; they congregate among themselves outside Wicker Hall on the quad; they sit together in classes and so forth. This is behavior that is obvious and that most people can observe. Could you describe other ways or behaviors that are not so obvious where black students come together?*" Keep in mind that this question is not asking *why* these students come together, nor is it trying to decipher meaning. It is asking the interviewer for more information on *action* or *behavior*.

2. Opinion or Value Questions. Opinion or value questions address a conviction, judgment, belief, or particular persuasion towards a phenomenon. Although opinions and values are very closely related and often interchangeable, an opinion question is usually considered more individually idiosyncratic, while a value question leans more toward guiding principles and ideals emanating from formal or informal social arrangements. "*In your opinion, why do you think black students behave in this way? And a somewhat different question is, What do you believe is the value of this behavior? Does it even have a value?*"

3. Feeling Questions. Feeling questions address emotions, sentiments, and passions. The interviewer is concerned not with the truth or validity of a phenomenon, but with how a person feels about it or is emotionally affected by it. "*How do you personally feel about this behavior? And to add another twist to that question, How do you feel about the need to come together as black students in these ways?*"

4. **Knowledge Questions.** Knowledge questions address the range of information and learning a participant holds about a phenomenon, as well as where this knowledge comes from and how it is attained. "What are the historical roots of this kind of behavior? How does the larger society influence the desire for these students to behave in this way?"

5. **Sensory Questions.** Sensory questions address the senses and human sensation. How does the body hear, taste, touch, smell, and see a phenomenon at the purely visceral level in its contact with the phenomenon? "How does your body, your senses, react in these moments of contact and allegiance with other black students? Do you see, hear, taste, smell, or touch in ways that are different at these times than other times?"

6. **Background/Demographic Questions.** Background and demographic questions address concrete and practical information concerning the distribution, location, and size of populations including births, deaths, and other significant information related to population statistics. "What is the population of black students on campus and what part of the country do most of them come from? Are there more men than women? What is the ethnic breakdown of black students on campus in terms of percentages of African Americans, Caribbeans, Africans, Europeans, and so forth?"

The Spradley Model

We outline the Spradley (1979) model using the example of a qualitative researcher conducting interviews with food service workers on campus and after a recent strike.

1. **Descriptive Questions.** Descriptive questions ask for a recounting or a depiction of a concrete phenomenon. The focus here is away from ideas, abstraction, and emotion. Although we often employ descriptive questions to move toward abstraction and emotion, we are concerned here with delineating or rendering a picture or image of a real or actual circumstance or object. For Spradley, descriptive questions can be subdivided into "tour," example, experience, and native-language questions.

- **Tour Question:** Spradley (1979) writes, "Whether the ethnographer uses space, time, events, people, activities, or objects, the end result is the same: a verbal description of significant features of the cultural scene" (p. 87). Like a tour, a cultural scene unfolds in its many and varied elements. Spradley makes a distinction between grand tour questions and mini-tour questions. "Can you describe an average working day in the cafeteria? Can you describe the space of the cafeteria itself, that is, the various rooms, cooking areas, and lounges providing a grand tour of the cafeteria building?"

• **Example Question:** Example questions ask the participants to provide an example of a response that may need more specificity or clarity. Spradley (1979) states that example questions "most often lead to the most interesting stories of actual happenings which an ethnographer will discover" (p. 88). "Can you recount an example of a particular working day that you will never forget?"

- **Experience Questions:** Spradley (1979) suggests that experience questions "are best used after asking numerous grand tour and mini-tour questions" (p. 89). You are, in essence, asking the participants how they experienced the scene or subject just described. "How would you describe the experience that day when you and the other cafeteria workers decided to go on strike? What did you do exactly and how did you feel about it?"

- **Native-Language Questions:** According to Spradley (1979), "The more familiar the informant and ethnographer are with each other's cultures, the more important native-language questions become" (p. 90). With these questions, you are addressing the larger meanings, implications, and symbolic value embedded in the respondent's everyday language. "How do you and the other cafeteria workers come up with the various terms like, 'snub nose,' 'hungry giant,' 'green pill,' and 'mean spot' to describe students and their different attitudes? How do you use these terms among yourselves?"

2. **Structural or Explanation Questions:** Structural or explanation questions are not to be confused with inquires of actual societal or cultural structures, as in institutions or systems of power. By structural questions, Spradley (1979) is really referring to questions that require explanation. So, structural questions are really explanation questions that complement and should be asked concurrently with descriptive questions. Structural questions "explore the organization of an informant's cultural knowledge" (p. 131), and they most often require contextual information, because such information "aids greatly in recall and will avoid the problem of making an informant feel he is being tested with a series of short questions" (p. 125). "Can you help me understand how the workers came up with the idea of a strike in getting the administration to pay attention to your demands? Can you explain how making up your own words for students is important? What is your role at the university?"

3. **Contrast Questions:** Contrast questions evoke unlike comparisons. They often require contextual clarification from the interviewer in asking the questions and further explanation or elaboration from the interviewee after answering it. Spradley (1979) outlines three principles that give rise to contrast questions: (1) the *use principle*, in which "the meaning of a symbol can be discovered by asking how it is uniquely and distinctly used rather than asking what it means" (p. 156); (2) the *similarity principle*, in which "the

meaning of a symbol can be discovered by finding out how it is similar to other symbols" (p. 157); and (3) the contrast principle, in which "the meaning of a symbol can be discovered by finding out how it is different from other symbols" (p. 157). Contrast questions may take on a range of forms, from implicit or suggested contrasts to obvious and culturally understood contrasts. Questions may also constitute a contrast of two phenomena to several others, perhaps even referring to a listing of phenomena. "*How useful was the strike in getting people on campus to pay attention to the conditions and circumstances of laborers on campus? How did your campus strike compare to the strikes of other laborers, like the city garbage collectors two years ago? How was it different from the garbage strike?*"

Extra Tips for Formulating Questions

More Models

Other models for questions in addition to the series outlined above include the following:



1. **Advice Questions.** In searching for a point of view, personal philosophy, or disposition, you may ask advice questions as another choice for a model, using a formula such as, "What advice would you give to . . ." or "What would you say to others who. . ." Advice questions are helpful in addressing some of the suggestions set forth by Patton (1990), such as behavior, feelings, knowledge, and opinion. "*What advice would you give to other campus laborers who are underpaid, overworked, and feeling disrespected by the campus community?*"

2. **Quotation Questions.** Repeating direct quotations from others and asking for a response is another effective model in addressing abstract issues, such as feelings and opinion. "*Someone once said, 'Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength.' What do you think?*"

3. **Once-Upon-a-Time Descriptive Questions.** Some descriptive questions aim for a narrated experience reflecting the drama of a story. These questions are most effective when the interviewer is relatively confident that the interviewee is capable of telling such a story, based on prior questions that reveal experiences, opinions, knowledge, and so forth. The interviewer referring to a context or situation already being discussed in the interview may then ask, "*Can you describe the time when . . .*" or "*Would you tell the story about the time when you. . .*" "*Can you tell me about the time when*

you felt the most disrespected by a student and decided to let the person know how you felt?"

Initial Brainstorming

When you first begin trying to formulate your questions, a useful exercise is to reread your research question or problem over several times and then ask yourself, "If this is what I am to understand, then what is it that I need to know about it to answer the questions or address the problem?" You will then list everything of interests that comes to mind.

The Puzzlement

Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest another helpful exercise to inspire questions: Ask yourself, "What is it about this thing that is a puzzle to me? What is it that I see before me?" List your questions about the puzzle: As you jot them down, you are "teasing" out the puzzlements (p. 53). Lofland and Lofland state that by sorting and ordering the puzzlements, "they take on general clusters and topics that have a global or comprehensive design" (pp. 54–55).

Attributes of the Interviewer and Building Rapport

Above and beyond techniques for designing interview questions and charting out the field study, one of the most important considerations is the ethnographer's own demeanor and attitude in the field. Much has been discussed regarding the importance of the ethnographic personality and what it means to look inward to refine and develop our own personal attributes as interviewers (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Below is a list of considerations relating to the interviewer that will help in building a harmonious or productive relationship with subjects in the field, or what is commonly referred to as rapport.

Mindful Rapport

It is important to keep in mind in the beginning that rapport is the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Being mindful of rapport throughout the interview is essential in helping to create for the participant the feeling of being respected and of being genuinely heard. Keep in mind that being a good listener is an art and a virtue.

Anticipation

It is common to have feelings of anticipation that may range from joyful excitement to nervous apprehension. It is important to turn the energy of anticipation into positive planning—reviewing field notes, developing and brainstorming questions, and understanding that a level of excitement and anxiety are normal.

Positive Naïveness

The idea of the *knower and the known* is provocative in its implications of identifying who knows and who is striving to know. As ethnographers, our knowing is always leveraged by a level of unknowing that we struggle to fill by asking the knowers (Spradley, 1979). In the field, we will invariably come across to participants as unsophisticated, innocent, and easy targets for deception. Positive naïveness is acknowledging that you do not know and that you must rely with humility on others and trust upon the knowledge of knowers. Keep in mind that we are capable of grasping what we do not know with integrity, intelligence, and conviction.

Active Thinking and Sympathetic Listening

Although it is conventionally understood that the ethnographer is the interviewer and the participant is the interviewee, in critical ethnography the rigid back-and-forth replay of question-answer-question is replaced by a more fluid and reciprocal dynamic, in which the interviewee and interviewer become what Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe as “conversational partners.” The conversational quality that evolves from the interview is substantively meaningful and a key factor of rapport that is generated by active thinking and sympathetic listening. You are listening with an open heart and kind reception to what is being said and expressed to you; you are not motivated by judgment, but by understanding. As you fully engage the art of listening sympathetically, you are actively thinking about what is being expressed; you are not just present in body, but deeply engaged in mind. The meanings and implications of what is being expressed are significant, and your mind is alert, active, and thinking. Again, we are engaged in the performative dynamic of dialogue.

Status Difference

It is important to be aware of power differences and status. If you are oblivious to or refuse to accept the power and privilege you carry with you as a researcher, you will be blind to the ways your privilege can be a

disadvantage to others. If you cannot see or refuse to see the rewards of your status, you will also be blind to the complex inequities and veiled injustices of those whose status is unjustly subordinated. If this example of status difference does not apply to your project, and you are interviewing powerful people whose material and social status is greater than yours, you must still be aware of your status difference as a researcher. You have the power to tell their story and to have the last word on how they will be represented.

Patiently Probing

During the interview session, topics and questions will arise that will invariably lead you to feel that you need to gain a deeper or clearer understanding of what has been expressed. Perhaps an account seems contradictory and you feel you need to get at the veritable quality of the story. You need more information or a more lucid accounting, so you must probe further. Probing requires patience and understanding. No one likes to feel as though they are being tested or interrogated. Obviously, you are not a journalist or a judge; therefore, your probing must be done gently, with respect, and, when necessary, with assistance. Contextualize your probes with follow-up questions that aid memory and enhance dialogue.

The Gorden Model

In the awareness of our own attributes, we must also be circumspect about the attributes and elements that influence those we interview. Raymond L. Gorden (2003) makes an important contribution in his framing of “threats” that significantly affect those we interview. He sets forth a series of sociopsychological dimensions where participants generally feel threatened. Awareness of these dimensions and how they affect the interview are helpful to the researcher in understanding the subjective and idiosyncratic elements that shape responses. Each one will variously influence *what* is being said and *how* it is being said:

- *Degree of Ego Threat.* Gorden (2003) writes, “The respondent tends to withhold any information which he fears may threaten his self-esteem” (p. 159). Here is a situation in which the threat was not intended, but the response to the question brings feelings of embarrassment, shame, or belittlement. The participant may therefore avoid answering the question or respond in a manner that distorts reality in an effort to protect his or her self-esteem. When a threat to ego is recognized, the ethnographer may decide not to pursue the question or to buffer the threat with indirect words of comfort.

- *Degree of Forgetting.* It is important to keep in mind that memory is a factor in every interview, regardless of the topic or the identity of the participant. It is also important to understand that the purpose of the interview is often not simply to help the interviewee remember, but see *how* memory is expressed. In other words, it is not always the goal to get participants to remember facts and events correctly or as they “really” were. As critical ethnographers, we are not concerned with forgetting, but with memory itself and how individuals remember as they do. We honor the fact that each individual memory will be remembered in different forms and to different degrees.

- *Degree of Generalization.* As human beings, we capture experiences by generalizing them, as well as by specifying them. As researchers, we must be aware when generalizations take the form of “truths” that are really specific to a limited experience or are the result of a particular worldview. Just as generalizations are problematic in the truth claims they purport, specificity can be problematic in its oblivion to broader implications.

- *Degree of Subjective Experience.* As critical performance ethnographers, we are concerned with the construction and influences of subjectivity. We understand that the meaning of an event or circumstance cannot be devoid of the speaker’s subjectivity, of the narration that brings the event or circumstance into being. What is significant for us is how experiences are expressed and enacted through the speaking subject. An experience or event that we wish to grasp as researchers will always be grasped through the degree of subjectivity encased in the expression of the telling (the participant’s subjectivity), as well as the degree of our own subjectivity that is encased in our listening (the researcher’s subjectivity). Subjectivity becomes all at once a vessel, lens, and filter of every telling.

- *Conscious Versus Unconscious Experience.* The unconscious is a powerful force in constituting what it means to be human. Consciousness comprises that which we are aware of and forms only an infinitesimal part of our psyche; the unconscious forms the greater part of our being. Freud (1927) compared the conscious and the unconscious to an iceberg, where consciousness represented the tip, preconsciousness was the medium between consciousness and unconsciousness, and the unconscious was the mass of the iceberg forming almost 90 percent of what is unseen beneath the water. It is helpful to be aware of the significance of the unconscious as we speak with participants. We are often witness to unconscious meanings, implications, and intentions as we actively and sympathetically listen. The power of the unconscious will be more forcefully recognized as you later begin to interpret and analyze the data. While it is important to keep the

influence of the unconscious in mind, we must also keep in mind that our interpretations and questions are not meant to psychoanalyze the participant or to focus on deciphering consciousness from unconsciousness.

- *Degree of Trauma.* Deep fear, dread, and sorrow that leaves one traumatized by a past occurrence can manifest during the interview in the need immediately to shut down the questions or to respond to them in great length, detail, and emotion. Degree of trauma is further reason for the researcher to be prepared before scheduling the interview. Although degree of trauma cannot always be avoided, it is less difficult for both conversational partners to deal with trauma if the researcher is sensitive to and aware of the difficulties. This is an area that requires rapport; that is, dealing with trauma requires listening with sympathy, following the narrator’s pace, demonstrating appreciation through eye contact and gestures of concern, explaining the reason for your question, and, if necessary, guiding the responses with gentle empathy.

- *Degree of Etiquette.* “Communication is given its form by taboos, secrets, avoidances, ‘white lies’ . . . and certain symbols and attitudes circulate only in restricted channels or between people in certain social relationships,” says Gorden (2003, p. 163). When preparing for the interview process and in interacting in the field before you begin interviewing individuals, degrees of etiquette should be an important part of gathering information. There are elements participants will not express because of impropriety, and the reasons may be due to gender, race, age, or nationality, or to cultural civilities, habits, and taboos. It is important to understand when responses are affected or governed by norms of etiquette. What you think you are hearing as true to experience may actually be based upon how your gender or race is perceived in that culture or situation.

Interviewing is a dynamic process fundamental to ethnography. It is part technique, part ethics, part theory, part method, part intuition, part collaboration, and part openness to deep vulnerability. Della Pollock (1999) describes her positionality as interviewer and researcher on “birth stories” in her poignant book *Telling Bodies Performing Birth*:

I made myself . . . vulnerable to being moved. Listening and writing. I saw myself as the register of someone else’s power. Against the grain of current obsessions with the power of the researcher to shape, tame, appropriate, and control the worlds he or she investigates, in the course of talking with and writing about the many people who contributed to this project, I more often than not felt unnerved and overwhelmed, “othered,” interrogated, propelled into landscapes of knowing and not knowing I would not otherwise have dared enter. (p. 23)

Interviewing does not *absolutely* require a set of predesigned questions and entering the field with an effective and detailed plan. It certainly helps a great deal (especially for the new ethnographer) if you do have them, but your project will not necessarily fail if you do not. What *is* required is genuine curiosity, sincere interest, and the courage to be “vulnerable” to another at the risk of being “the register of someone else’s power.”

You have walked down many paths and listened to many stories as an interviewer, and your most pressing questions are evolving into thickly described stories that are beginning to require some attention and deciphering. It’s time to stop. What happens after the interviews have all been conducted? You now have an abundance of information and it all feels a bit unwieldy. You remember someone said something to you once upon a time about “coding and logging.”

* Coding and Logging Data

You are nearing the end of your fieldwork. You have conducted interviews, you have been listening and involved in the day-to-day processes that inform your research question, and you have a collection of data comprising field notes, interview tapes, and other relevant documents and artifacts collected and discovered during your stay. Now it is time to see what you have by bringing all the data together in some form or fashion of order. Coding or logging “allows you to recall the extra-ordinary complex range of stimuli with which you have been bombarded” (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 46). What do you do with this mass of information? Keep in mind that every project and every researcher is unique, so it is expected that you will pick and choose, select and sort, and blend and combine what is useful for you. Coding and logging data is the process of *grouping together themes and categories that you have accumulated in the field*.

Glesne (1999) suggests that, when you select and sort, you build what she describes as “code clumps . . . [by] putting like-minded pieces together into data clumps, you create an organizational framework” (p. 135). The following model draws from a combination of various coding procedures to outline a step-by-step method that can be revised as needed to serve your particular project:

- It is generally understood that you order the mass of data by beginning with generic categories: interview tapes, places, and people, as well as prevalent topics or key issues. You may also think of coding as *high-level*

coding, concerned with more abstract ideas, or *low-level coding*, concerned with more concrete data (Carspecken, 1996). However, you must also ask yourself before you begin, “What is the best way to group or cluster all this material so that it will help me focus more clearly on my analysis or how I wish to present this material?”

- The process of grouping is not only about putting similar categories together; the very selections and act of grouping is creating a point of view or statement: “Code with analysis in mind. . . . Themes emerge from your coding, these themes guide your analysis” (Carspecken, 1996, pp. 146–153). If you perform or adapt the data for the stage, you may also code with scenes for your performance in mind, and you may also think about coding with your audience or readers in mind. The point is that coding is not *exclusively* about grouping similarities—although this is the *priority*. You must consider factors of analysis, presentation, readership, and audience that may alter and guide your “clumps.”

- The precision and detail of interviewing will guide your coding (Carspecken, 1996; Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Keeping this precision is very important: The more specific and thematic your interview, the less complicated it will be to group and order your data.

- As your clumps or clusters begin to form, you will then begin a process of further ordering:

- a. You will examine each specific topic within that cluster.
- b. You will then compare and contrast that particular topic within that cluster.
- c. You will continue to examine and note the topics within each cluster.
- d. You will discover overlapping topics, marked distinctions, and topics that should be moved from one cluster to a different cluster. You will also discover that some topics should be eliminated from the study completely.
- e. After the topics within each cluster have been examined, you will then make adjustments for comparisons and contrasts across clusters, thereby creating linkages and themes.
- f. The evolution of your themes has now become more apparent.

- When you have completed logging or coding your data—or if you feel you need more direction and clarity during the process—it is often helpful to create a graphic or picture of your organizational framework. You may want to create a tree, cluster, box, or table of what you have developed. These graphics can be invaluable, displaying the connections, hierarchies, and distinctions with more clarity.