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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some insights about the rigors of ethnographic fieldwork gained in the conduct of an ethnographic study of the Muscogee people of Oklahoma (called "Creek" by European settlers). The difficulties and issues discussed include: (1) gaining entry; (2) selection of key informants; (3) ways informants tested the investigator; (4) glitches in the use of technology; (5) mistakes in interacting with an unfamiliar culture; (5) the realities of living in a motel; (6) data coding and analysis in the field; and (7) what it was like to be an outsider. (Contains 17 references.) (SLD)

THE REALITIES OF FIELDWORK

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The Realities of Fieldwork

Fieldwork is not as easy as one might imagine. In the following pages, I would like to share with you some of my experiences in the field to illustrate this contention. I will address such aspects of fieldwork as gaining entry, selection of key informants, ways that they tested the investigator, glitches that can occur when using technology, mistakes I made in interacting in an unfamiliar culture, the reality of motel living, data coding/analysis in the field, and what it was like to be an outsider.

These insights about the rigors of fieldwork were gained in the field while collecting data for my doctoral dissertation and in subsequent ethnographic data collection with the Muscogee (Creek) people of Oklahoma. The dissertation addressed these indigenous women's perceptions of work. To collect interview data and to conduct participant observations, I have spent several months over the last several years in Oklahoma among the Muscogee people, who are descended from the original inhabitants of the southeastern United States. In referring to this group of indigenous people as Muscogee (Creek) people, it is important to note that "Creek" is the term given to them by European settlers; they prefer to be referred to as Muscogee people.

Brief Historical Background of the Muscogee People

The Muscogee (Creek) people are descended from Muskoghean people who originally inhabited Georgia, Alabama, and upper Florida, but who were forcibly removed on the Trail of Tears in the 1830s. According to O'Brien (1989), 34 organized rural and small urban communities of the Muscogee Confederacy are scattered over Central

Oklahoma. Their ancestors from the southeastern United States were a loose confederation of individual, independent chiefdoms of 60 to 70 towns (Paredes, 1987). Muscogee people are a matrilineal group, meaning that the children belong to their mother's clan.

European contact began in 1540 when Hernando de Soto invaded the lands of the Muscogee Confederacy. In the 1700s, Lower Creeks allowed Oglethorpe to establish a colony in Georgia to increase trade opportunities, which began a hundred year period of land acquisition from these people and other tribes by European settlers. Forced removal attempts began in 1825. More than one-fourth of the population died within the first year after removal from their homelands as a result of starvation, malnutrition, abysmal living conditions, increased factionalism, and harassment by indigenous tribes of that area of Oklahoma, then known as Indian country (Debo, 1942).

Muscogee people struggled to live and prosper through the beginning of the twentieth century, when they were forced to allot their reservation lands to individual tribal members as a result of the 1906 Dawes Act. From the first part of the twentieth century until the early 1970s, governmental focus on indigenous tribes centered on dissolution of tribal governments. In 1970, a U.S. law was passed that allowed for election of their tribal offices. Three years later, elected chief Claude Cox and committee drafted a new constitution with three independent branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. This form of government is still in use today in the Creek Nation. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation now has over 40,000 tribal members.

There was little information about the Muscogee people of today in the literature. My interest in conducting this ethnography was, in part, because of the lack of information

about today's Muscogee culture, but was also because of my family's Muscogee heritage, about which we knew little. I was interested in learning about their culture, because it provided a contextual foundation for their socialization and, therefore, their identities, which affect their perceptions of work and life in general.

Ethnography as the Basis for the Methods Design

Ethnography is considered to be the methodological foundation of cultural anthropology (Crane & Angrosino, 1992). The techniques involved in ethnography included being objective, being able to understand and use the techniques of observation and interviewing, being able to establish rapport with participants, and being able to report the findings accurately (Crane & Angrosino, 1992). Bernard (1995) suggested that ethnography is a description of culture or a piece thereof. In this ongoing study, the culture to be described was that of the Muscogee people of Oklahoma.

The process of doing ethnography is the collection of data that describe the culture. Ethnography is a phenomenological approach, focusing on the meanings that events hold for those who are being studied (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Thus, one of the primary functions of the research was to explore the meanings that events hold for those who are being studied (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Participant observation and interviews are qualitative, ethnographic methods of data collection; an ethnography is the written description of the culture under study. This process involves field work, which involves asking questions, eating native foods, learning the language, watching the ceremonies, keeping field notes, interviewing informants, and more. Field work is the rigorous study of "what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak,

think, and act in ways that are different" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3). Spradley suggested that fieldwork is done to learn from others, rather than to study them, a feminist approach to conducting qualitative research.

According to Spradley and McCurdy (1972), cultural anthropology is learned through ethnographic fieldwork. They pointed out that this process involves:

1. acquiring the conceptual tools needed to perform the study,
2. gaining entry into the cultural scene and making contacts,
3. collecting and recording data, and
4. analyzing the data and recording a description of the analysis.

In cultural anthropology, the major goals of the researcher are to explain, classify, compare, and describe the similarities and differences found in human behavior in various societies (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). The first three (explanation, classification, and comparison) are labeled by Spradley and McCurdy (1972) as ethnology; the last, description, is considered to be the ethnographic piece to the puzzle.

Through efforts to understand cultural knowledge and symbols, ethnography turns the focus of the research to the emic view, or that of the participant, rather than focusing on the perspective of the ethnographer, the etic view, as defined by Pike (1966). Asking the right questions to elicit participants' interpretations of various situations is an essential process in conducting ethnographic research (Spradley, 1979). It requires being objective, that is, as free from bias and distortion as possible. As such, it is necessary for the researcher to be aware of assumptions and other biases she takes into the setting.

A Synopsis of the Dissertation

For several years, I have been conducting an ongoing ethnographic study of the Muscogee (Creek) culture. The initial ethnographic work was my doctoral dissertation on Muscogee women's perceptions of work. Subsequently, I have continued to study and interact with this and other indigenous cultures in North America. In the initial dissertation study, sixteen Muscogee (Creek) women shared their stories through a series of in-depth interviews; these women were purposefully selected to represent a selection of specified work arenas. Participant observations in a variety of settings also provided much information about Creek culture, and, in particular, the role(s) of women. Such observations were conducted at senior citizen centers, social and ceremonial dances, churches, tribal complex offices, smoke shops, and more. Document analysis, while a poor source of information, also contributed to the data collection process. Using a variety of data collection methods and sources, prolonged engagement, an audit trail, negative case analysis, and other techniques, trustworthiness of the data was ensured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Focus questions used to guide the study included how the women defined work, what they perceived had influenced them to choose the work they do, what motivated them to work, and how they perceived the dual effects of gender and ethnicity on their work choices and success as workers. Findings shed light on how cultural referents led to differences in the workplace behavior and expectations, while increasing our knowledge about this group of minority women. Differences in values, communication and leadership styles, emphasis on community over individualism, (lack of) emphasis on individual

competition, focus on harmony within the tribe, the individual and nature, spirituality, gender role designation, time perceptions, and attachment to homeland were found.

The Ethics of Fieldwork

In conducting ethnographic research, the researcher has certain responsibilities regarding ethical behavior. Bernard (1995) shared the ethical responsibilities provided by the Society for Applied Anthropology. These responsibilities included the obligation to disclose the research goals, methods, and sponsorship; this also included voluntary participation by informants without coercion of any type. Confidentiality was emphasized to avoid personal risk to those participating; any obvious risk should be noted prior to participation. These responsibilities also included that the research(er) should show respect for the community's dignity, integrity, and worth. Also noted was the need for researchers to give credit for the contributions of others. The responsibilities included a duty to students learning these fieldwork methods as well; credit for their contributions was emphasized. Accurate reporting of researcher qualifications and work performed was also stressed. Last, these recommendations addressed the need for sharing with the rest of society what we have learned.

Kutsche (1998) added to this list from the Statements on Ethics of the American Anthropological Association. These recommendations emphasized that the interests of the participants come first, including issues related to confidentiality, receipt of copies of final papers, and topics to be discussed in these papers. He also added to the list the fact that researchers should not misrepresent themselves to participants; we are there to learn from them, and honesty is expected from both researcher and participant.

Boyatzis (1998) added to the list the need for the participant's informed consent, for preserving the participants' confidentiality, and for protecting against misuse of raw or coded data or of study results. To ensure these responsibilities are carried out, he suggested that only members of the research team be allowed to hear/view taped information to protect the confidentiality of the study.

Taking into consideration these suggestions, when I went out to Oklahoma to begin collecting data for my dissertation, I was occasionally introduced as a friend from Georgia. This short introduction about who I was and my purposes for being there was sufficient for observing public interactions. However, when I became a participant observer, I introduced myself as someone of Muscogee (Creek) descent from Georgia, who was collecting information from Creek women to write my doctoral dissertation about their views of work; I further explained that this was a way for me to find out more about today's Muscogee culture. In a few instances, initial conversations with potential participants focused on my reasons for wanting to write about this subject. I explained that the information that is presently available about Creek women was erroneous, biased, and out of date. I wanted to clarify and update the information by providing a look at today's Muscogee culture through the feminine perspective.

Before I conducted any interviews, I completed the Human Subjects review process and had each participant read and sign an agreement to participate in the study. To limit the risk involved with their participation in my study, I explained to informants the purpose of the study, how it would be used, how confidentiality would be preserved, and obtained their permission to participate. In this process, participants were made

aware that they would not be penalized if they chose to halt interviews or refused to answer my questions.

As interviews were completed, I sent a transcribed copy to each of the participants for her clarification and/or approval. Each participant also received a copy of the final dissertation. Since that time, I have written several articles and presented several papers at conferences about a variety of aspects of Creek culture; these writings resulted from my data collection for the dissertation and subsequent research on native cultures. As a result, I have shared with several of the participants these articles for their discussion and approval or clarification. I have tried to present this information honestly and with respect for Muscogee (Creek) people.

As suggested by LeCompte and Preissle (1993), in writing and sharing results, I have been careful to give them pseudonyms and have omitted identifying characteristics that would breach the confidentiality of their input. Though a couple of articles I submitted for publication were criticized for not giving more identifying information about the participants, I maintain that more information would have made the participants identifiable to their neighbors. After all, this is a small, localized group of people who know each other well. Though they are spread out over a ten county area of Oklahoma, their situation might be considered similar to a small town where everyone knows everyone else. Therefore, to preserve their confidentiality, I have related only selected information that makes it difficult for their neighbors to identify them. While some people in the tribe may be aware of (or may believe that they know) the identities of several women who were interviewed, they should be unable to strictly identify which woman said what.

In writing up the dissertation and subsequent articles/books, I have made the effort to write in such a way as to conceal the individual identities of the women. In native cultures, where many people know each other well, it is very easy for them to identify people through their experiences, background, or communication style. As a result, I tried to avoid using any names or other identifying characteristics that would clarify for the reader which participant did or said what. In this way, I was able to share information that was highly personal without breaching the confidentiality I had promised as part of the reciprocal arrangement.

Besides confidentiality, one senior woman I interviewed requested that she receive a portion of any monies I received from such publications. I have not (yet) received any remuneration for such writings; however, should any monies be received in future, I plan to either divide such monies with the participants by check or set up a fund for Muscogee women to benefit them in some way. In addition, copies of the dissertation, articles, and papers presented have been submitted to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation library for their historical records.

Gaining Entry

Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) described entry as "the process of developing presence and relationships in the designated research setting that make it possible for the researcher to collect data" (p. 69). They suggested that gaining entry necessitates several simultaneous actions by the researcher. She must learn how to function in the new culture, according to their customs and traditions. She must gain access to and build a trusting relationship with key people in that culture who can serve to guide the researcher in sample selection. These key informants also facilitate improved

understanding and clarification of cultural norms, beliefs, social relationships, etc. Additionally, key informants provide access to activities, such as tribal ceremonies, that would otherwise be closed to a researcher or other unknown person. The researcher must also learn to collect and record data efficiently and unobtrusively. Further, she must constantly be aware of how various data fit together to make meaning and what is important to observe and record (Schensul, et al., 1999).

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) have suggested that initiating contact requires that the researcher locate gatekeepers within the culture, informally and in-person. My entry into this culture and subsequent interaction for the purpose of collecting data would have been limited by a more formal request for entry. Through the use of several informants, I was able to collect information from a variety of people who represented different segments of the culture.

My entry was gained thusly. For more than twenty years, I have attended as many powwows as I could in the southeast to try to meet American Indian people who could share with me information about today's Muscogee culture. It was not until I began conducting my doctoral dissertation research that I realized that few Muscogee people powwow; they stomp dance. [Stomp dancing is both a social and a spiritual event, depending upon where and when it is conducted. Public stomp dances are held throughout east central Oklahoma among Muscogee, Cherokee, and Seminole people as social events. Ceremonial stomp dancing takes place at private ceremonial grounds that are typically not open to the public.] Therefore, my opportunities for meeting Muscogee people were exceptionally few. Still, I was able to glean much information about pan-Indian culture from these powwows, which gave me knowledge about how to interact

with American Indians to some degree. In later years, I became involved with (and danced with) a Native American dance troupe that participated in numerous powwows and exhibitions, where I was able to further my knowledge base about pan-Indian culture. At one of these functions, I was told that there was a Muscogee man and his family who were in attendance. I approached them and asked some pertinent questions about the culture, which resulted in their inviting me to attend the Green Corn ceremony at their ceremonial grounds in Oklahoma the next summer.

While in Oklahoma, this family took me to meet the Principal Chief; I advised him of my intention to interview a number of Muscogee (Creek) women for my dissertation and to use the information to write a series of articles and a book on Creek culture of today. He never officially gave me permission to talk with tribal members, and I never officially asked for that permission. I relied on the old adage that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to gain permission. Through the next several years, I continued to visit this area of Oklahoma to interview the women, observe the cultural interactions, and participate in activities with a variety of Muscogee people.

Establishing Rapport

Schensul, et al. (1999), noted that the researcher must establish a trusting relationship with participants. This process depends upon the researcher's social skills and personality. Being able to laugh at herself is an important characteristic for researchers to have. Schensul, et al., stated that rapport is achieved through the researcher's "connections" (p. 75). This rapport is also dependent on the researcher' ability to put people at ease, maintain confidentiality, and how quickly she is able to learn their customs

(Schensul, et al., 1999). They suggest that the people under study will initially be tolerant of the researcher's lack of knowledge about local customs, but after the researcher has been in their culture for a while, she is expected to conform to their way of behaving. A steep learning curve, in terms of learning culturally appropriate ways of behaving, helps the researcher to better blend in and not interfere with the normal process of daily life. Building rapport involves personality, social skills, and the ability to engender trust of others.

Key Informants

Anthropologists and others have noted that the first group members to approach the researcher may be marginal members who wish to raise their social status or who wish to promote their own interests (i.e., Schensul, et al., 1999; Bernard, 1995; Agar, 1980). Care must be taken to ensure that the researcher chooses gatekeepers (those who can assist the researcher in gaining entry) who are well informed and able to share that information. They must also be trusted by others, or those to whom the researcher is referred as potential informants may not with to participate or may not be forthcoming with what they know (Bernard, 1994).

Agar (1980) pointed out the need for selecting informants who can inform the researcher. However, while a group member may be knowledgeable about the culture under study, there may still be problems with the data gathering process, as a result of the researcher's relationship with those informants. For example, I kept in touch periodically through the following months with the family I had met at the powwow, and, the following summer, I went out to Oklahoma to begin collecting data about the culture of

the Muscogee (Creek) people. For the whole of that first week, while his wife was working, the man, his mother and/or sister, and his daughter rode with me in my rental car to look at or attend various functions/sites, including cemeteries, intertribal powwows, stomp dances, various ceremonial grounds, churches, and Green Corn. [Green Corn is the annual celebration of renewal that is held when the corn is ripe; these ceremonies are held at the various ceremonial grounds of the Muscogee people.]

When I returned several months later to begin more intensive data collection, I again hooked up with this family, and they continued to show me what they thought I should see and took me to meet women they thought I should meet. The problem arose when, after a couple of weeks, the mother told me that people were talking about me. In what way? I asked. She said that they thought I was having an affair with her son. I was not, nor had the thought even entered my head. The sister of this man also told me that she had been asked if I was having an affair with her brother. When I asked her how she had answered that assumption, she stated that she had responded that it would be rather difficult to conduct an affair, when his mother and daughter were constantly with us and when he was riding in the back seat of the car I was driving. I rejected this as being unimportant, given the fact that these people did not know me. However, when, through my own ignorance, another incident occurred that resulted in the man's wife becoming jealous (I had given each family member a gift, so I wanted to include the male family members also, as this man, in particular, had been extremely helpful), I knew I had to find a different key informant who was not associated with this family, preferably a woman. I had imposed upon their generosity enough. This situation resulted from my own ignorance of the cultural rules about male/female interactions. I had stressed to all who

asked that I was (and am) happily married, that I was not there to look for a man. When asked, especially by Muscogee men, how my husband felt about my going so far from home for so long and for such a purpose as to collect research data, I told them that we have a trusting, loving relationship, indicating that he need not worry about my being unfaithful.

I later hooked up with a culturally savvy woman who has become a very dear friend and who, along with her husband, has very patiently explained to me their unfamiliar customs and protocols. She translated jokes and explained reactions I observed. She was a life line. Through the years, she has come to know me well enough to know that I am not "after her man." As a result, both she and her family have become a second family to me, and there are no subjects that are taboo for our private discussions. Though we may be able to discuss any subject, however, this does not mean that I am free to write about any subject we discuss. Since any writings would be available for both male and female members to read, it would be inappropriate for me to discuss subjects not acceptable for discussion in mixed company. The lesson I learned was that, though I had been told by an anthropologist who served on my committee to beware of male/female interactions and to limit my interactions with male group members, I had not really understood the degree to which this care applied to such interactions. My experience in the field, through making such mistakes, led me to a better understanding of the segregation of male/female roles and interactions in that culture.

Testing the Investigator

Once in the field and collecting data, it is not uncommon for group members to test the investigator about her knowledge of the culture or about her willingness to

participate in group interactions known to be foreign to her. One instance of testing the investigator occurred when I was at an outdoor church function. I had to go to the bathroom. They used an outhouse. I asked my key informant where one could take care of nature's call. She responded in a teasing manner that I needed to ask a group of female elders who were sitting around, talking with each other. She told me how to ask them in the Muscogee language where the "little house" was. They got a good chuckle out of this and pointed the way. As I returned, they motioned me over to them and asked me how it was. I responded that it was one of the sweetest smelling little houses I had ever been in. They got a big kick out of that response. I felt sure that they thought I was a city girl, when, in fact, I grew up in the country and had used outhouses on numerous occasions.

Another instance of testing the investigator occurred when I attended a different function at an Indian Missionary Church. The usher directed me to sit with the women on one side of the outdoor sanctuary, while the men sat on the other side. When the preaching stopped around the noon hour, we all adjourned to the various clan houses that surrounded the church grounds for a meal. As a guest, I was seated with the men, who eat first (the women and children eat next). They asked me if I would like to try some *sofkey*, a traditional corn dish. They introduced me to it, saying that some people found it bland and would put salt or sugar on it. I tried it, with all of them watching me to see my response. When I had tasted it, they asked me how I liked it. I responded that it was good, but bland, would someone please pass the salt. They laughed. I was thankful that the traditional Muscogee food they were asking me to taste was a corn dish, rather than animal organs or brains. I know that some of these people eat foods that are common in

the country where I grew up, like raccoon, squirrel, blood sausage, brain, chitterlings, and more. That does not mean that I would want to eat them, however.

Another instance that I considered to be "testing the investigator" occurred when I was invited out to eat by a male relative of one of my informants. I replied that I would be happy to go, as it would enable me to visit more with his relative. When he indicated that she would not be present, I told him I would have to decline the invitation. My interactions with other married women in this culture suggested that it would be inappropriate for a married woman, though a researcher far from home, to meet a single man for an evening meal without endangering her reputation. Since I did not want to be perceived as less than professional, I felt that it was better to decline this invitation.

Technological Glitches

In terms of data collection, technology has added a new dimension to the process of conducting ethnographic research. It has eased the burden of taking notes, enhancing our ability to preserve specific quotes and voice inflections not evident in writing. Technology has provided researchers with the means for preserving collected data without relying solely upon the memory of the researcher or upon her ability to take good notes. Qualitative researchers have written in numerous books about the need for checking the equipment before beginning the interview process. For my sojourn in Oklahoma, I bought a new interview-quality tape recorder, which had lots of buttons that were Greek (or should I say Creek) to me. One particular instance reinforced the need for my reading the instructions that came with the recorder. I sat down with one participant to interview her, not realizing that the Pause button was on. Later, when I listened to the tape, there were

parts that were missing, because the tape recorder activates when the voices begin. The activation at the onset of speaking means that the first of every such onset is not recorded. As a result, the first part of each interaction was missing. After pauses in the conversation, the recorder Pause function would take effect, causing me to miss the beginning of the thought, when the participant again began to talk. Luckily, I had kept good notes as we talked; still, I'm sure I missed some good quotes. This Pause function was also a problem, since Muscogee people, as with many other indigenous peoples, tend to reflect upon what they want to say, leaving silences that others may not be accustomed to; these silences triggered the Pause function, which caused the recorder not to pick up the part of their answer following the silence. I also found that the need for changing tapes was frequent, and it was an interruption to have to say, "Excuse me, but would you hold that thought?" I also found out how important it was to label the two sides of the tapes with Side 1 or Side 2 to know where to begin listening. I found transcribing the tapes to be less confusing when I limited one person's interview(s) to a single tape – that is, the transcription process was cleaner when each tape held only one person's interview data.

When I began the interviewing process, I would record my thoughts about the interview as I rode home from the interview site. In this way, I would have my personal insights about the woman and her responses for my field notes. However, when I asked a colleague for assistance with transcription, she transcribed the tapes word-for-word, including my concluding thoughts. As a result, at the end of each interview transcription were my personal thoughts, which included information that I had not necessarily intended for others to hear/read. As I reviewed the transcription, it became clear that I should either refrain from ending these interview tapes with my thoughts or in some way, ensure

that the transcriptionist was made aware that the discussion that followed was based on my own thoughts and should be typed on a separate page or omitted altogether. The participants did not need to read information that I had recalled about my feelings of comfort or about how their house was kept/decorated, etc.

Another instance where technology presented a problem was with taking pictures. In one particular instance, I had left my camera at home, so I bought an instant camera to take pictures. The majority of pictures that I took were inside shots, all of which were too dark to be meaningful or to use to illustrate the culture under study. This camera did not have the flash capability for taking good indoor pictures. Those pictures that I had taken inside with a flash camera turned out well, however.

Using a camera, a videotape recorder, or an audio recorder is not always appropriate in indigenous cultures. I was invited to attend several ceremonial grounds on my various trips to Creek country. On a couple of occasions, since they knew that I was there conducting research, I was asked not to bring any cameras or recorders to the grounds. One grounds' speaker indicated to me that, in recent years, a researcher had attended Green Corn with them for several years and had written an article about their ceremonial grounds. Though I didn't question him deeply about their feelings about this research, I was led to believe that they were unhappy with the researcher's having shared so much information. As a result, I have only shown those pictures that I took at the ceremonials grounds where I was given permission to do so. Further, I have limited my writing about the specifics of ceremonial grounds worship to honor their wishes to keep such information sacred.

As a member of several list-serves, I am privy to the latest ideas about a variety of topics. Recent discussions have dealt with a number of topics pertinent to fieldwork. Of particular interest was a discussion of the best tape recorder and microphone for interviewing. There were so many recorders suggested that it would have been difficult for me to decide which to buy, had I been in the market for one. The general consensus of the discussion was that the researcher needed to find a recorder that was best suited to her needs. The recorder should be small enough to be comfortable to transport. It should provide recordings of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the study. The researcher should test the recorder's quality and the pick-up distance of the mike prior to purchase. Consideration should be given to the size of the tapes (regular or mini-sized tapes); for example, some transcription machines only accept regular sized tapes. Additional features are helpful, though not necessary. Such features include Pause (though I recently had a difficult time finding a recorder without one), tape counter, voice volume and speed regulators, and more.

Another aspect of using technology that should be mentioned is that, with some group members, particularly elders, it is inappropriate to tape record conversations. For example, on several occasions, after our first taped interview, I was asked if I had to tape our conversations. In a couple of instances, when it was obvious that tape recording the interview was rattling the participant, I merely turned off the recorder and relied upon careful note taking. In these cases, I avoided using quotes, but felt more comfortable paraphrasing the information gleaned. As I found, some people are intimidated by the use of technology, though I found this to be rare. Most times, the women I interviewed were willing to be tape recorded and photographed.

Researcher as Village Idiot

I'm sure that there were times when I was perceived as someone who did not have the sense to come in out of the rain. Because you can't learn everything about culture from books, I only had limited knowledge of the customs and tradition of the Muscogee culture. When I first began to ask questions of Creek people, prior to gaining entry or visiting the area, I can remember calling the Cultural Preservation Office to gain some information about today's Creek culture. I had learned about Green Corn through books that were based on historic ethnographic studies by men like Bartram, Speck, Adair, and others. However, this information did not clarify for me what traditions were still practiced today. When I called, a Muscogee man who is extremely knowledgeable about their language and customs answered my questions. I mixed up Green Corn, which is a private ceremonial occasion, with Creek Festival, which is a public sharing of the culture; what I asked him about was the Green Corn Festival, though he corrected my inquiry in a patient way. He answered my questions, some of which, I know, must have sounded really dumb, correcting me gently as we talked, so that I used proper terminology to reflect their traditions.

When a researcher goes into a culture that is different from her own, she tries to prepare herself for fitting in. I had attended numerous American Indian activities, especially in the past decade. During this time, I have attended powwows, sweat lodges, sundance ceremonies, and more. Through this involvement with other American Indian tribes, I learned how to conduct myself. Such conduct included a modest mode of dress and conduct, a respectful attitude, and an understanding of gender roles. This included

knowing when and how to communicate with others. There are no written rules that tell you not to hug people you like. Having grown up in the rural South where people hug each other freely, I have been used to public shows of affection. As previously mentioned, I had been told by one of my committee members to be careful how I presented myself to men and to take care in my interactions with them. It never entered my mind that I might be stepping on toes by using the "preacher" handshake when I met people. I soon noticed looks askance from women whose husbands shook my hand. First, they don't take hold and pump the hand over and over. They take hold of the hand and pump once, then let go. Second, it is inappropriate for women to touch men (on the shoulder, arm, or back) when shaking their hand. People of different sexes do not mix in the same way as in the dominant culture. There is more segregation in their roles and interactions.

Another instance where I felt like I stood out like a sore thumb was when I attended a council meeting; I attended many of these meetings, some of which were very interesting, others of which were extremely boring, as would be expected of such meetings. One particular meeting stood out in my memory, because I had gone off on a mental tangent (watching some male/female council member interaction) and failed to hear them call for an executive session. As was typical, there was some in and out traffic as attending observers came and went at their leisure, so I didn't notice that all of the other observers were leaving. A council person turned around and asked me who I was, If I was with the lawyers; I responded that I was a researcher, not with the legal representatives. A small silence ensued, after which another council representative politely stated, "Lady, you need to leave now." I suddenly realized that he meant that I should have left when the others did, that this was a closed session. I apologized and quickly left

the room, meeting a man standing outside the door, who asked me, "Did they throw you out?" I responded, rather sheepishly, that they had. He laughed and said, "Don't worry about it. They do that all the time." I felt embarrassed, but still returned to other council meetings to pursue my observations of their interactions. In later years, I took the opportunity to laugh at myself with the man who politely had asked me to leave. He just patted me on the back, as if to say that it was okay. Though I made some monumental mistakes in my interactions with these people, I was surprised at how willingly they accepted my presence there and corrected my mistakes in a nonthreatening way.

Motel Living

Because I was going to be in the field for several months, I had to find the best deal (financially) that I could. I did not have a grant to help offset the costs of living in the field. After trying several motels in the area on my various trips there, I found a "Mom and Pop" motel with a restaurant attached that rented a room to me at a reduced cost, because of the length of time I would be there. It was important to me to stay in a motel, rather than accepting any of the invitations I received from Muscogee families to stay with them, because I knew that they would feel that they had to entertain me; they also might feel that they had to feed me and talk to me in the evenings. There would be no "down time" for either of us. So by staying in a motel, I was able to have some time to myself to write in my journal, code, analyze, and "veg out." I also felt free to use the telephone in my motel room. Motel living also gave me the freedom of coming and going at my leisure, without having to check in with others about schedules. Bernard (1994) noted that the researcher should spend from two to three hours per day writing up field notes. Living in

someone's home would hinder this process. I found myself sitting on my motel bed each night writing up the notes from the day, a process that was facilitated by the seclusion provided at the motel.

I ended up eating out quite a bit, and I was disappointed that, for such an agricultural area, there were few fresh vegetables in the restaurants in the summertime. I found myself craving fresh vegetables – I am a farm girl, so summer means fresh veggies. However, I was fortunate to be asked to partake of some wonderful meals at Muscogee homes, churches, and ceremonial grounds, where I was able to satisfy my craving for home cooking. By the end of my fieldwork, I was sick of fried foods and bar-b-que. I was also sick of dust mites and roaches. I was tired of not having my own kitchen, my own tub and toilet, my own dirt. I was glad to get back home to my family and my own cooking, pillow, bedding, and bathroom. I was especially glad to get home to my own family.

A tornado came through while I was staying there, and it was an awful feeling to be away from home and family, with no electricity, flooded streets, and fierce winds. I was lucky to have a couple of American Indian friends staying with me in my motel room that weekend; they were on their way west to visit family and stayed in my room as a stopover. They brought their camping candles out of their tightly packed car, so we had some light when the electricity went out. We stood for hours in the doorway of the motel room, watching cars float down the street.

In packing for several weeks or months, I thought to myself, "I can buy that there." In that way my luggage was manageable. However, after buying much of the "stuff" I used everyday, like coffee maker, food preparation and storage items,

dishwashing detergent, clothes washing powder, etc, I found that I was unable to pack all of this for the return trip home. On one occasion, when I had been honored with a gift of food (in a laundry basket) by the Osage tribal council, I gave the food, coffee maker, and other accumulated items to some friends who came through and stayed overnight with me. That lightened my return load significantly. Otherwise, the maid who cleaned the room confiscated the extra stuff I left and gave it to someone who needed it, she said.

Motel living may seem a treat for someone who does not travel much. Fieldwork, however, means that the researcher has to reside away from home in conditions that may differ significantly from those that she is used to. As I live in a large house in a wooded area, there is little noise to interfere with my activities. Living in a motel means living in others' pockets. One night, having returned from a particularly harrowing ride in heavy rain, I was looking forward to having a good night's rest. Unfortunately the people next door were in the party mood, so they played their music and games all night, keeping me awake with their noise. One particular game they played involved their using the wall behind my bed's headboard as a backboard for their ball game. Hearing other residents' occasional noise was not uncommon or disquieting, but this particular group was obnoxiously loud and uncaring of anyone else's desire for sleep.

Another concern for me was safety. As I was a stranger to the area, I was careful not to become too friendly with male locals, nor did I go to any bars there, as my presence as a lone female might be misconstrued. Another safety concern was the lack of security at most of the motels in the area. Many of them lacked dead bolts for the motel room doors. Some only had door locks, which are easily forced open. Each night I would place a chair under the doorknob to help secure my room. The owners (or relatives who acted

as night desk clerks) of the Mom and Pop motel I chose to stay in for much of my fieldwork also stayed in the motel, which made me feel safer. Having access to an onsite restaurant also served me well, as it meant I did not have to get in the car to drive somewhere for a meal when I was tired. It also acted as a safe place (for them and for me) to invite potential participants or other group members with whom I wanted to interact. Since it was impossible for me to invite them into my home for a meal or a cup of coffee, this restaurant served as a good meeting place and as a place to which I could invite others.

Data Coding and Analysis in the Field

Miles and Huberman (1994) and Bernard (1995) suggested that the researcher code interviews and field notes as she goes along. They equate coding of field notes with analysis of data.

I began to code after the first interview was transcribed. Using the constant comparative method, I began the coding process with colored markers and Post-it Notes. As each interview was taped and transcribed, I coded them and began to analyze what I was finding. My motel room looked like the tornado I mentioned earlier had hit it. The motel housekeeper asked me once how I thought she was supposed to vacuum, when the floor was covered with paper. I asked that she limit her vacuuming to once per week with notice, so that I could have time to organize my note taking onto the table or bed while she cleaned.

During the 16 interviews for the dissertation, when a particular question elicited a question or a puzzled answer, I rephrased the question, sometimes in several ways before

getting the depth of answer I needed, as suggested by Spradley (1979). The themes and patterns began to emerge with the first interview, though they became more apparent with each succeeding interview. Each subsequent interview held many of the same categories, such that I reached saturation by the thirteenth interview, though I continued to interview three more women to be sure. As themes were first identified, I color coded them, but later I numbered them. As a concrete coding scheme began to take shape, I recoded and recoded and reanalyzed in an effort to "tighten up" the coding scheme as much as possible. The resulting coding scheme was numbered as 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3....1.5, 2.0, 2.1, 2.2.....3.0, ... and so on. My final coding scheme had three overriding categories with 32 subcategories, so you can see why the colors ran out quickly. When I returned from the field, I entered the coded interviews into QSR NUD-IST, a qualitative software program, as a data management tool. This was helpful in eliminating the need for Post-it Notes I was using to mark texts. I would suggest to others who plan to do fieldwork away from home that they take a portable computer with them, along with tape recorder and camera. In this way, transcription can take place in the field and coded field notes and interviews can be entered into the data management software immediately upon return or in the field, if the software is loaded on the laptop. This does not preclude the need for listening to the tapes and rereading the transcripts over and over, nor does it preclude the need to do member checks for verification of transcription quality and content. Nor should such activity keep the researcher from doing what she is there for – fieldwork; it's hard to collect data when you are sitting in your motel room. One thing I learned about myself in conducting fieldwork was that, because I love being by myself, I sometimes had to make myself get out and meet people, go places, and see things. It's very easy to sit in the

motel and watch TV, play cards, or even to become enthralled with the process of coding and analysis. But those types of activity do not get the job of data collection done. Granted, coding and analysis are ongoing, but to have data to code and analyze, one must first get out of that motel room and collect it. Discipline is essential in both recordkeeping and perseverance of data gathering. The best advice I can give here is do the field work so that you can go home!

Wal-Mart became a haven of sorts for me. It was one place that I could go where I felt at home and knew all of the customs. This Wal-mart was the talk of the town, as it was a new 24-hour Super store, which sells groceries, as well as the other things a typical Wal-Mart sells. Here I was able to get easy access to needed tapes, and other office supplies as needed, along with toiletries and other personal items (like a coffee maker) I required for my lengthy stay.

An Outsider Among Us

Schensul, et al. (1999) noted that, though the researcher may identify herself as a member of the population under study, she cannot identify with all members of the population; that is, she cannot be both male and female, middle class and lower class, gay and straight. When the researcher is unknown to the study population, Agar (1980) suggested, the researcher is watched by the native people; when they feel that you are of no threat and that you seem to be doing what they expected, they will begin to tell you what to do. In many instances I was instructed to go or was taken to functions that they deemed important; they made it clear that this was a good research opportunity. Key informants, in particular, clarified and explained aspects that were unclear for me.

On my first trip to Creek country, I was told by a well meaning person that, if I expected any elders to talk to me, I had better let my hair color grow out (it was streaked/highlighted), get some brown contacts (my eyes are blue), and go to a tanning bed (I have a light complexion). I found it interesting that they felt that I needed to look more "Indian" to get good information, yet there are mixed blood Muscogee people who have light skin, blue or green eyes, and light hair.

There were times when I felt that the people were looking at me, nudging their neighbor, and asking, "Who is that?" Other times, when I told them of the stories handed down in my family about our Creek ancestors, I felt that a few of them were saying to themselves, "Honey, you may say you're Creek, but you're white!" I was brought up in the white community; however, I am part Creek, though a thin blood, and I felt that I looked as "Indian" as some of them. I was recently told that the proper response to someone's statement that "you don't look Indian" should be "And you don't look rude." The main source of discomfort for me was in feeling that I was an outsider in terms of their not knowing who I was (that is, not know enough people), as well as through being perceived as non-Indian. Typically, when I explained my situation, where I'm from, and my family's history as we know it, they were receptive of me. There were two instances where my being a researcher was a prohibitive factor in their sharing information or experiences with me. One was a family celebration that included ceremonies that I have since attended with other Native American friends, but which, on this occasion, I was not invited to attend, as I was known to them as a researcher, and they did not feel that my inclusion was appropriate. Another occurred at the ceremonial grounds when I was interviewing an elder; she commented that she would not share with me information about

the ceremonial customs, as they were sacred to her. As a result, I have not written extensively about these ceremonies out of deference to her. So, while I had read about certain customs, and while others explained these customs to me in detail, this was an instance where I did not feel at liberty to share the full story.

As a researcher, it was necessary to constantly tell people I met that I was there to conduct research. Merriam (1998) suggested that doing ethnography is a schizophrenic activity, as the researcher must move between the roles of participant and observer. It is difficult sometimes to maintain your mental positioning as a researcher, while you are having such fun learning through participation. It is easy to "go native," thereby forgoing the researcher role. Yet, this stance does not facilitate your acquisition of "good data." The researcher must participate, but she must keep an inward focus on what is being observed and learned, on what is happening, on what meaning the activities have for the culture under study. As a researcher, I was an outsider. As a participant, I was, many times, considered an insider. This switch between the two stances was sometimes confusing and much less fun than if I were able to simply enjoy participating without trying to constantly dissect what was going on.

Though I have often thought of myself in the past as being an outgoing person, I found that I am much shyer than I had thought. I do not enjoy feeling forced to go up to people I do not know and introduce myself to facilitate interactions. However, this is necessary for conducting fieldwork. Getting to know each new person meant telling them about my role, my intent, my background, and my origins. This process enhanced the building of rapport and the establishment of a trustworthy relationship with participants and other group members. The emphasis then shifted from who I am to who I know. I

was interested to see that, when I was introduced to a Muscogee person, their first question was "Who are your people?" rather than "what do you do?" as is typical in the mainstream culture. These people did not care what my job was; they wanted to know who my family was, so they could make a connection with me.

Conclusions

Many researchers from a variety of perspectives have written about how to conduct fieldwork. While this information is extremely helpful to new researchers, it is also necessary for these neophytes to actually conduct research to be able to really understand what these experienced researchers mean by their suggestions for carrying out such fieldwork. By actually doing such research, the new researcher will gain the understanding and experience needed to conduct a quality research project.

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