



ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHODS

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW

Dr Eloise Govier

OUTLINE

- CREATING ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGES
- WRITING ETHNOGRAPHICALLY
- ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS
- CONDUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS



DIFFERENT METHODS OF 'INTERVIEWING'

- In-depth to semi-structured interviews
- Focus group interviews
- Surveys
- Collecting life-histories
- (Should be noted that it is possible to ask ethnographic questions via questionnaires)

CONDUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

- Why do it?
 - Complexity of human experience
 - Wanting to hear from people directly about how they interpret their experiences

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

- ‘Ethnographic practices constantly punctured by concerns about representation’

- “How does your relationship and ‘the broader social context’ affect the participants, the interview process, and the project outcomes?” (Heyl 2007: 370)



DIALOGUE IS DISCOVERY

- ‘Dialogue is discovery and only partial knowledge will ever be attained’ (Heyl 2001: 370)
- Researchers bring with them a ‘vocabulary of method’ (Heyl 2001: 371)

ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGES

- Formal interviews
- Material culture
- Performances
- Images
- Texts
- Observation, Reflection, Learning

METHODS

- Recording, Analysing and representing qualitative data
- Participant–observation ‘defining method that distinguishes ethnography from other qualitative research designs’.
- Participant action research
- Writing field notes / diary
- Visual methods (see previous lecture)

ETHNOGRAPHY: TIME- INTENSIVE

- Difficult questions – difficult to research and represent – language may not answer these questions
- Participation: ‘encounters’ with ‘others’



DE-COLONIZING ETHNOGRAPHY

- ‘DIALOGIC’ RESEARCH PRACTICES
- ‘ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC EXPERTS’
- ‘FOREIGN OTHERS PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE’

ETHNOGRAPHY

- Descriptive
- Reflective
- Interpretive



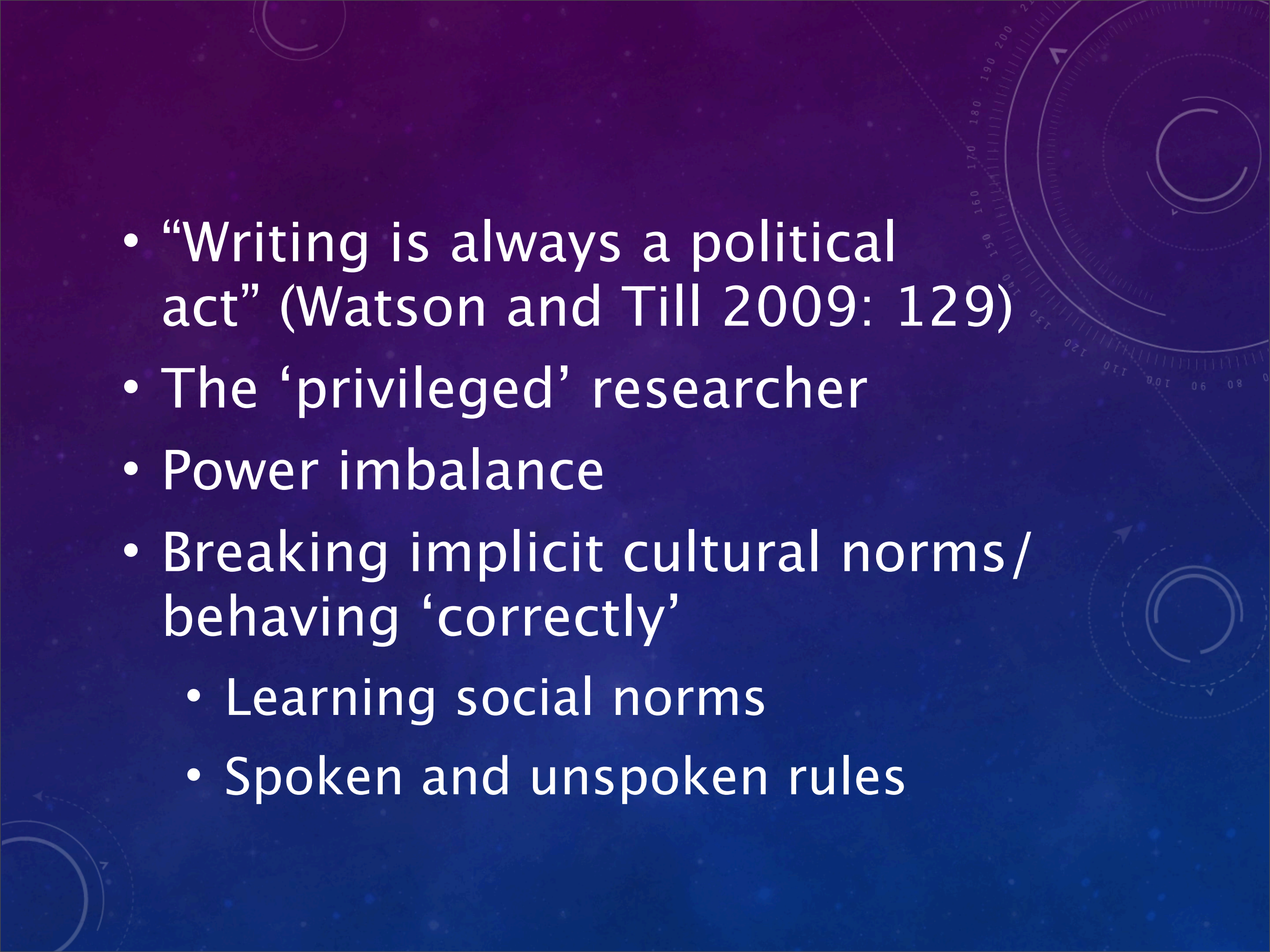
- “Ethnographic observations of, and interactions with, others highlight how bodies interact, meld, and constitute social spaces, and thereby create inclusions and exclusions” (Watson and Till 2009: 122)

VALUE OF TALKING

- ‘sensitive listening’
- “Asking people to talk about objects is also a way to understand everyday movements and emotional worlds” (Watson and Till 2009: 129).

CIRCUMSTANCES OF EVENTS

- Details of landscapes
- Peoples' moods, movements, dress
- Rich description and detailed accounts

- 
- The background is a dark blue gradient with faint, light blue circular patterns and a scale-like graphic on the right side. The scale has numbers from 0 to 200 and arrows indicating a clockwise direction.
- “Writing is always a political act” (Watson and Till 2009: 129)
 - The ‘privileged’ researcher
 - Power imbalance
 - Breaking implicit cultural norms/behaving ‘correctly’
 - Learning social norms
 - Spoken and unspoken rules

PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION

- “Only by participating with others can ethnographers better understand lived, sensed, experienced, and emotional worlds”
- “Doings” unconscious or unarticulated acts
- What people do
- Interviews do not solely make an ethnography

DECOLONIZING ETHNOGRAPHY

- “Participatory and community-based research designs are necessary to develop co-generative inquiry, and our representational practices must legitimate expert knowledges beyond the limits of academic institutions and settings” (Watson and Till 2009: 130)



- “Ethnography is more about its ‘doing’ than it is about the procurement of facts” (Watson and Till 2009: 134)

FIELDNOTES THE MAKING OF ANTHROPOLOGY SANJEK 1990

- What ethnographers write before ethnography? (Sanjek 1990: xi)
- Mnemonic devices?
- Create our own documents via fieldnotes (Sanjek 1990: xii)
 - Running accounts of events
 - Texts
 - Reports
 - Impressions

CONDUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

- Spradley, J. 1979
- “Ethnography is the work of describing a culture”
- Seeking to understand meanings of actions and events of other peoples
- Understand another way of life/point of view
- Learning from people not studying people

WHAT AND WHY?

- “The ethnographic interview is one strategy to get people to talk about what they know” (Spradely 1979: 9)
- Based on the assumption that knowledge of all cultures is valuable. (Spradely 1979: 10)
- To what end does the ethnographer collect information? (Spradely 1979: 10)

ETHNOGRAPHERS RECOGNISE AND VALUE:

- Regularities and varieties in human social behaviour
- Cultural description
- Cross-cultural comparison

YOU DO YOU?

- Are you imposing your perspective/ideals/values/understandings?
- Consider the potential uses of your research
- Ethnographer can begin with 'informant-expressed needs' (Spradely 1979: 14)

ONTOLOGY

- “Different languages create and express different realities” (Spradely 1979: 17)
- Franz Boas, one of the founders of ethnography:
- “We know what we mean by family, state, government, etc. As we overstep the limits of one culture we do not know how far these may correspond to equivalent concepts. If we choose to apply our classification to alien cultures we may combine forms that do not belong together” (1943: 311 cited in Spradley 1979: 18).

TRANSLATION?

- “Every ethnographic description is a translation” (Spradley 1979)
- “Work with informants to produce a cultural description” (Spradley 1979: 25)

‘INFORMANTS’ (SPRADELY 1979)

- Sources of information
- Teachers for the ethnographers
- “Informants are engaged by the ethnographer to speak in their own language or dialect” (Spradely 1979: 25)
- Need to understand your role/ position/motive

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESPONDENTS AND INFORMANTS

- Both answer questions and appear to give information about their culture (Spradely 1979: 31)
- Respondents respond to surveys, questionnaires, or queries presented by an investigator
- Questions and language often arise out of the social scientist's culture
- Ethnography relies on the language of the informant and question's arise out of the informants culture (Spradely 1979: 31)

CONFLICTING VIEWS (SEE SPRADELY 1979)

- Informants and ethnographers can have different even conflicting values
- Always a wide range of choices
- “Off the record”
- The informants rights
- Have the right to remain anonymous
Make your work accessible to your informants

RELATIONSHIPS WITH INFORMANTS

- Initiate, develop and maintain a productive relationship
- Careful planning and sensitivity
- The ethnographer needs a 'cluster' of interpersonal skills: asking questions, listening to answers, expressing verbal interest, showing interest by verbal and nonverbal means.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- Same questions asked to all
- ‘Yes / No’ answers
- No scope for varying the questions
- Inflexible
- Researcher-led

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS

- Unstructured
- Deviation from the point
- Unexpected outcomes
- Flexible
- Participant-led
- Researcher's input changes according to the interview
- Different power dynamic

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWING

- A technique that combines immersive observation and directed one-on-one interviews
- Might involve different interview approaches as a means of talking to people(s)

WHEN INTERVIEWING AVOID...

- Long questions
- Leading or patronising questions
- Apparent bias in questions
- Threatening questions
- Too complex a question

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE HAND...

- There should be no 'right' answer
- Ethics/informed consent
- Describe the purpose of the interview
- Indicate the confidentiality of the interview
- Participation is voluntary, may stop interview or not answer any question
- No foreseeable risk
- Indicate approximate time (based on your pretest)
- Get their signature, printed name, and date
- This should be a separate page and not attached to your questions or the notes you take.

CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

- What do you need to say at the outset?
- How do you order your questions? (introduction, warm-up, body-text, 'lead-out', closure).
- How do you end an interview?
- How do you prompt for responses?
- How do you keep the interviewee on track?
- How do you record data?
- What should happen immediately following the interview?

EXPLICIT PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

- Ethnographic interviews tend to have purpose and direction
- Question explanations
- Interview explanations
 - Type of questions you are asking, signposting different techniques you intend to use
- Ethnographic explanations
 - Project explanations
 - Recording explanations

DIFFERENT TYPES OF QUESTIONS

- Descriptive questions
- Contrast questions (what's the difference between x and y?)
- Structural questions (understand the informants organisation of their knowledge)

HEYL 2001

- “Projects in which researchers have established respectful, ongoing relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds” p369.

TIME FACTOR

- Frequency and duration
- Quality of emerging relationship
- “Distinguish ethnographic interviewing from other types of interview projects by empowering interviewees to shape, according to their world views, the questions being asked and even the focus of the research study”
- Due to these qualities, life history interviews often have resonances with ethnographic interviews

CULTURAL MEANINGS

- Ethnographic interviews tend to focus on cultural meanings
- Different from 'open ended interviews' as 'there is no time to develop respectful, on-going relationships' (Heyl 2001: 369)

- “The researchers job in an ethnographic interview [...] is **to communicate genuinely**, in both subtle and direct ways that ‘I want to know what you know in the way that you know it’” (Heyl 2001).
- Therefore, you are looking for teachers

REFLEXIVITY

- “Acknowledge your position with your research, in the field, turn the lens back upon yourself” (Karp and Kendall 1982 cited in Heyl 2001).

REFLEXIVE INTERVIEW METHOD HEYL (2001)

- Recognition:
 - We intervene in the lives of those we study
 - Analyse social interaction
 - Identify those local forces that are in mutual determination with external social forces,
 - Reconstruct theories based on what we have learned in dialogue with those involved with our research projects

- A reflexive interview is interventionist
- Dialogic
- Designed to uncover processes in situationally specific circumstances and broader social contexts
- Results in the reconstruction of a theory that fits what has emerged from the dialogue
- Published results (or oral versions) will return to ordinary citizens including the original study participants

BOURDIEU

- Active and methodical listening (1996: 23 cited in Heyl 2001)
- The social distance between the interviewer and interviewee (social capital? linguistic capital – think about it!)
- Researcher needs to navigate the social distance (through knowledge/empathy) 'putting yourself in their shoes'
 - Whether you can is one thing, but it is 'reasonable and useful' to try (Liebow 1993 cited in Heyl 2001)

- **CREATE
COLLABORATIVE AND
EMPOWERING
RELATIONSHIPS**