English 102: Inquiry into the South

The Ethics of Conducting First-Hand Research

Wednesday, April 5th 2017
Group Chat

- Discuss your responses to looking at the photographs from Now Let Us Praise Famous Men, and reading Scott L Matthews’ “Protesting the Privilege of Perception: Resistance to Documentary Work on Hale County, Alabama, 1900-2010”

- Make a list of ethical concerns/considerations these “readings” bring up, especially as they connect to performing first-hand research with human participants.
Why do humanities scholarship?
“Hale County becomes a battleground where struggles over who gets to represent a people and place, and why, have flared for more than a century” (35).
Agee anguished over the ethical and moral pitfalls of his and Evans’s work, but excoriating himself and his readers for voyeurism could not protect the families featured in the book, or their descendants. Agee’s recognition of his and his readers’ “privilege of perception”—the “economic advantages” that allow one to not only document the poor but to see beauty in their circumstances and surroundings—could not temper the resentment, and even rage, that some family members felt at becoming icons of poverty, or “famous folk,” in the words of Howell Raines of the *New York Times*. (34)
She told her how unfortunate it was that the younger generation of her family seemed “unaware that their ancestors feature in the most significant historical documentation of Depression-era sharecropping and one of the greatest literary masterpieces of the 20th century.” None of her appeals or lessons seemed to resonate with Dottie. One of Dottie’s final statements summed up her position, and that of so many others whose family legacy for the outside world takes the form of an unwanted documentary about poverty that also happens to be a literary masterpiece. “That was invading their privacy,” she “emphatically” told Davidson. “They shouldn’t have done that.” (60-61)
Scott L Matthews’ “Protesting the Privilege of Perception: Resistance to Documentary Work on Hale County, Alabama, 1900-2010”

1. What (if any) responsibilities do researchers owe their participants?
2. What (if any) responsibilities do researchers owe their readers?
3. What (if any) obligations do people who do research in the humanities have?
“The Privilege of Perception” and Bias

- Note some ways in which you might have any bias regarding your research topic.
- How can you use the research protocol assignment as a method of monitoring yourself from “the privilege of perception”?
Ethics & Research

* Explain your project clearly to the people you will study, and obtain the requisite permission.
* Let your informants understand what part of the study you’ll share with them.
* Let your informations know what will be asked of them and if the questions you ask might make them feel uncomfortable.
The Qualitative Protocol Assignment
Revising Research Questions

- Research questions should be genuine questions. They should exhibit a genuine curiosity to see what is there.

- You should elaborate on this genuine nature in the paragraph before you give your research question on your protocol.

- Avoid asking questions that you think you already know the answer to, or that you hope provides a certain, desired answer.
While you want your participants to be specific, remember that they are people, and that they are more than their “type.”

See “Deciding Whom to Interview” p. 241, RoI

You should avoid leading or presumptive questions, and allow your participants different avenues to express what you're interested in (how they think, how they feel, or how they act).

See “Decide What You Should Ask” p. 241-242, RoI
Interview questions

• Interview questions should be written in a way to avoid “yes” and “no” answers. Instead, you want to get your participants explaining the thought, feeling, or act.

• Interview questions should avoid leading the participant towards any answer. The questions should be written in a way that makes the participant feel like the authoritative figure on the issue.
Questions on *RoI*, chapter 9?
GENDER STEREOTYPES AND PERCEPTIONS

Appendix C
Consent Form

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Gender Stereotypes and Occupational Status
Principal Investigator(s): Danielle Dezell, Cameron Dooley, and Elaine Acosta. Dept. of Psychology, Central Washington University. (509) 555-1234, student321@university.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Sally Lifland. Dept. of Psychology, Central Washington University. (509) 555-4321, ProfessorSL@university.edu

1. What you should know about this study:
   - You are being asked to take part in a research study.
   - This consent form explains the research study and your part in the study.
   - Please read it carefully and take as much time as you need.
   - Ask questions about anything you do not understand, now or later.
   - You are a volunteer. If you change your mind about participating, you may quit at any time without fear of penalty.
   - While you are in this study, the study team will keep you informed of
Tips for drafting your protocol…

- Once you have written your research question, you need to identify your key terms and define them. You need to be clear on exactly what you mean by each term and have a rationale for why you are defining the term in that way.

- For example, the term “identity” can be rather vague. However, if you are asking your participants questions concerning identity, you need to have a clear conception of what the term includes and what it does not mean.
Tips for drafting your protocol…

✦ “A research question or hypothesis should be something that is specific, narrow, and discoverable through” interview methods.

✦ Specificity matters. Look at the examples on page 220.
Homework

- **Reading:** *RoI* (pp. 240 – 254); the student sample protocol (on the blog)

- **Written:** Work on your interview protocol and bring a completed copy to class for workshopping on Friday.