2. PURPOSES, ETHICS, AND VISIONS

Before you enter the field to conduct videotape research, it is important to address the purposes or goals involved. Videotaping results in masses of data that can be used for many possible purposes, yet the possibilities are constrained by the site selected and the specific ways one goes about setting up and using the camera. Purposes can delimit outcomes.

The decisions prior to field entry also involve the need to consider ethical issues as they relate to the rights and concerns of participants and others involved at the field site. Concern for the purposes and ethical issues together make up the preliminary plan, or vision, for the research study conducted.

Purposes of Videotaping

To keep videotaping from becoming something other than research, it is crucial to distinguish qualitative research video from other ways of using videotape. As noted in the previous chapter, commercial video is clearly distinct in purpose from videotape recorded for research purposes; television is for entertainment, while research video is for developing understandings. While none of the sources consulted on videotaping mention it, I am impressed with some of the similarities of research video with home videos that are taken by nonprofessionals. Even one of the children in my study made this connection--one fourth grader in the hallway commented, "I know, you're gonna go home, sit on the couch, munch on stuff, and just look at it [the video]." Home video approximates research video because the purposes are often similar: to document significant events, places, and people for later viewing. Home videos are an excellent way of gaining an emic perspective of those involved, since the person doing the videotaping is almost inevitably a participant in the videotaped culture and researcher effects are minimized. The down side, of course, is that home videos are not likely to be oriented towards the specific research interests of qualitative investigators. But perhaps there are some qualitative studies that need to be done on the question of what life events people choose for home videotaping, what subjects and events are excluded, and why these decisions are made.

Video for illustrative purposes can be distinguished from video as research data (Ball & Smith, 1992, pp. 9-12). Often photographs are ancillaries added to a primarily verbal research project as evidence for conclusions, and videotape could be used in this manner as well. The visual part of many anthropological movies has often been edited to support and illustrate the concepts described in the voice track, rather than the pictures being used as sources of data on their own. I used video data to illustrate central concepts in my dissertation research by making still photographs of children in the three social formations I found in the hallway. I tried using a 35 millimeter camera to record the three kinds of groupings I found, but children tended to pose for these pictures (I wanted natural groupings, not staged shots) or if I caught them in natural groupings, the angles tended to be less than ideal. As a result, I reviewed my notes for videotapes and found several segments that provided high quality views of the groupings I wanted, yet were naturally occurring groupings. I placed a 35 millimeter camera in front of the television screen, and turned off the color on the monitor so I could see what the black and white image for the book would look like. I also used black and white film in the 35 millimeter camera, since the dissertation would require black and white images and I did not want to lose clarity by making a black and white image from a color picture. The results were quite clear, and of almost equal quality to the still shots taken at the school.

Video may be used to document the research process. In this case, the goal is to provide evidence that the research was actually conducted or document reactivity to the researcher's presence. This was not a central purpose of videotape in my research, but it very well could be in others. I did attempt to record my own possible unconscious influences on children during the last phase of interviews with children. Without mentioning it, I placed my camcorder and tripod in a back corner of the room where I interviewed children. While I used audio cassettes to record these interviews, the addition of the camcorder was to view how my own body language may have encouraged some children to speak or encourage specific kinds of speech. I also wanted to examine the context of interviews more carefully during interviews, as well as look at some

of the body language children were giving me and other children. The visual component, from across the room, was also an important means of triangulating data, which helps establish qualitative validity.

Video can also produced data for methodological decisions (Albrecht, 1985), such as the locations that reveal the most important information and which people may be optimal for interviews. In my research I ruled out interviewing sixth graders about hallway events because in the videotapes I almost never saw them mingling with the other lower grades; I suspected they would be less able to describe the whole social context as well because of this selection involvement. Video can provide rich contextual detail (Young, 1975). When this is the primary purpose for videotaping, it is probably more important to do an initial survey of the environment with the camcorder, recording details of the surroundings, then leave the camera in a peripheral position to gain the large picture of the researcher being conducted. In my research of an elementary school, I surveyed the surroundings to establish context. At first I did this with pen and pad of paper in hand, and later took the camera on a similar survey while giving verbal details. When no children were in the hallway, I walked around with the camcorder examining children's drawings on the walls, commented on architecture of the building, described colors and possible significance, and even spent time videotaping ceilings and floors while describing what I saw. It turned out that some of the details were significant in themselves, such as the older elementary hallway having fewer drawings than the early elementary wing.

Yet another purpose of videotaping is to create a stimulus to which participants respond (Krebs, 1975; Van der Does and others, 1992). This provides interviewed individuals a common reference point (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 105; Beresin, 1993, p. 162). Collier and Collier compared discussions with and without pictorial stimuli, and found that visual stimuli were far more effective in eliciting responses than just talking. Mehan and associates played a videotape of classroom events for teachers who stopped the tape whenever an interesting event was observed (Lancy, 1993, pp.94-95). Similarly teachers were asked to comment on their observed teaching methods in a study by Leinhardt (Lancy, 1993, p. 225). While most of my videotaping in the elementary school was intended for later detailed analysis, I copied several segments of videotape for children to view during interviews. These segments were carefully selected to portray the three social formations I found, so that the youngsters could be interviewed in detail about them to discover what meanings those groupings had for them. I attempted to use segments that included several of the children in each interview group, to help them more precisely describe their feelings as participants, as well as make it more interesting for them to talk about. Curiously, I found that the kids were more likely to talk about what was happening when they or their classmates were *not* in the video segment; when they or their friends came into view, the emphasis of comments tended to be identification of those pictured rather than discussion of what was thought and felt in the context. However, *after* the segment ended, children readily talked about thoughts and feelings about the situations, whether they were pictured or not.

When visual media are used as a stimulus for participants' responses, it is important to begin with the formal and public and later, after sufficient trust is established, move to the informal and private (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 27). Photographing things most prized by those studied conveys admiration and appreciation, then with time greater tolerance will be given for the researcher's choice of pictures. A variation of using video as a stimulus for participants is to use video segments as part of a member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 314-316), asking if the researcher's constructs and hypotheses fit with participants' ideas of the situation, as they watch videotape segments that relate to those constructs and hypotheses. Beresin (1993, p. 23) used videotape segments to obtain teacher reactions to her study of children at recess, an interesting variation of the member check.

An additional purpose for videotaping is for training (Pellegrini, in press, p. 273; Patton, 1990, p. 247; Hockings, 1975). For example, in a brief study of children on the playground, I videotaped the participants in the research for college students who would later code their behavior. This was done to help the student coders quickly identify children in the playground context, where they would later do the coding. I also recorded examples of the various behaviors to be coded, again as exemplified on the playground where the coders would do their work and with the specific children they would be coding. Thus the purpose of the videotape was teaching student coders the requirements of their task.

Analysis by several people is also possible using videotapes (Schaeffer, 1975). In my dissertation study, I used video segments to show several members of my dissertation committee what I was observing during the process of doing my research. These "update" meetings were valuable sources of feedback on what I was doing, and the videotapes provided examples of what I was attempting to do. After watching several video segments, committee members made a number of suggestions that helped me better focus the study as well as examine other details.

Videotapes can be made specifically to illustrate concepts for use in a classroom (Hockings, 1975). This could be done on an individual basis, or could involve making professional videos for more general use. The latter is coming close to a classic use of visual data in anthropology: ethnographic film and documentary, which is often carefully edited to present a specific analysis to those outside the study, rather than using the visual information for data analysis (Rollwagon, 1989, 1993; McDonald, 1989; Nichols, 1991; Hyatt, 1992). Sandall (1975) similarly contrasts the "documentary film" with the "film document." The permission requirements are more stringent when videos are intended for general use, even in a single classroom of the person who did the videotaping. Videotapes could also be used by students doing assignments--a videotape segment of children in the classroom, for example, could be analyzed for examples of Piaget's constructs. While some visual researchers emphasize video as data source as the most important area to consider (Mead, 1975; Brigard, 1975; Jacknis, 1988), I also want to affirm the other alternative uses for videotape work. Video can be used to illustrate written analysis, although I think it is also worthwhile to take it a step further as a separate source of data by which other observations can be triangulated. Videotapes for classroom or public consumption can also be very worthwhile, and I have profited from such productions [one of my favorites is the PBS special "Nomads of the Rainforest"].

For this book, the emphases will be on videotape as providing data and as a means of obtaining data from participants. The camcorder is a tool of indispensable value, but it is only a tool that helps record what the observer sees. Video recording is always a means to an end, machinery that is in the service of the researcher (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 5; Jackson, 1987, p. 108).

Participant or Distant Observer: Emic or Etic?

Important recent trends in videotape research are the inclusion of participants' perspectives in what is recorded, and sometimes even asking research participants to do videotaping (Collier & Collier, 1986, p 157). The goal is to gain an emic perspective, to attempt to record the opinions and values of participants. While I did not have the children do videotaping in my research, I did have them conduct interviews with one another as they led me throughout the school, as I carried my running camcorder on my shoulder. They took the microphone in hand, which was connected to a cassette recorder which I also had strapped to my shoulder, and did a series of interviews of one another as we stopped at locations of their choosing throughout the school. While this exercise in children directing the context and content of interviews met with disappointing results, it is potentially a valuable means of gaining information with adults and perhaps children as well if they are given adequate preparation. Perhaps forming good questions could be part of the preparation one asks of participants who take the lead in such interviews.

In considering all these possible purposes for videotaping, a central issue is that of perspective: Is it better to stay etic, uninvolved and distant, or should one attempt a more emic perspective? Setting the camera in a corner and letting it run without adjustment represents a more extreme etic perspective, while turning the camera and making adjustments to follow specific events and people makes it a bit less etic. An even more emic perspective is possible by carrying the camera on the shoulder or in the hands, so that it becomes an extension of the participant observer holding the camera.

A number of writers recommend the more distanced approach to videotaping. Erickson (1992, pp. 214-215; Mead, 1975) emphasizes the importance of consistent visual framing, with few adjustments and movements of the camera, run for lengthy periods of time, particularly during the initial stages of research. This allows one segment to be more comparable to another. In contrast, Collier and Collier (1986, p. 148) believe that continuous video segments produce many wasted segments and often have inferior angles and framing. Cameras need to move, adjusting to contextual changes by panning, using closeups, and turning on and off regularly. This may be termed "participating cinema" (McDougall, 1975). I believe there is

value in both perspectives, both the distanced, stationary, long running wide angle overview as well as the mobile, involved approach that zooms in and out regularly. Each of these approaches will provide data the other can miss.

When carrying around the camcorder as it records, the camera becomes a co-participant observer. Children sometimes treated the camera as a separate person when I carried it, as when one child waved and said "Hi, camera!" Yet the camera and I were more often considered a unit.

When I first began carrying the camera while videotaping, I expected a significant rise in reactivity because I was moving the camera, but I found there was little more than when the camera was on the tripod. Perhaps the children had habituated to the camera wherever it was since I had moved the position of the tripod so many times. I was able to actively discourage reactivity by turning the camera to something else when I observed a child acting for the camera. On the other hand I found children asking for more details about why I was there once I began carrying the camera; my field notes record that the most detailed discussion of what I was doing was on the first day I carried the camera while recording.

It is important to emphasize that the distinction between participant and non-participant, emic and etic, is one of degree not kind. No one is entirely etic and uninvolved, because the researcher is present and has some influence as a result. The scientific ideal of objectivity is impossible to reach because of latent and manifest values and biases. But no one is perfectly emic either; one can never capture all of a person's perspective or cultural view. But we do choose to be participants or relatively uninvolved in what is observed; the camera either watches from afar or in a more involved manner. One can be a "fly on the wall" (Young, 1975), watching from afar, or one can observe from within, using those wings to soar through the group. I see value in both etic and emic perspectives, and various blends between the two. I used a more etic view of the school hallway during the earliest phases of my research, setting the camera in a corner so it could view the totality of the social context. I varied the placement of the camera from time to time, but the camcorder and I were relatively uninvolved in the situation. Later I began moving the camera on the tripod, following what I thought were important events and people. I became a bit less etic because of the emphasis on specifics. I was a bit more involved with what occurred. Still later I began moving the tripod every few minutes, and eventually hoisted the camera on my shoulder as I walked down the hallway viewing different events and people. I was a participant in the school hallway context, more emic than etic. Yet, even as a participant, I was still somewhat etic: I was neither child, teacher, parent, nor school official. I was a cameraperson, a distinctive role not indigenous to the school culture.

Which perspective, observer or participant, provided the best data? Each had its value and limitations. The distanced approach at first helped me see the context more fully so I would enter it with some ideas of what was important. By beginning in a more etic manner, I did not gain a sense of what it was like to be a participant, I lacked an insider view of what I observed through the lens. When I began moving the camera, and especially when I carried the camcorder on my shoulder, I learned a bit more of what it was like to be a participant. I could quickly change the angle to observe events more completely. But I lost the big picture that included surrounding events. Later when I watched these videos, I sometimes wanted to follow other events and people than what I videotaped. I could not because the decisions made as a participant could not be reversed. Fortunately I could return to earlier videotapes of similar events when I was not as involved, to observe these other events. There is value in both the etic and emic, in both participating and not participating. Indeed the two are complementary, and together give a bigger picture of the whole. *The Ethics of Videotaping*

Many ethical issues are involved in doing videotape research. Perhaps most basic are those concerns that institutional review committees consider, and this is an important aspect of the research process that can help protect those being studied, as well as the researcher.

Does the location make a difference in what kind of permission is given to videotape? Videotapes of public situations generally do not legally require permission of individual participants. Commercial television, for example, can photograph public events with people standing nearby, without gaining the permission of those photographed. The question, however, is what situations are public? In my research, I

asked myself is an elementary school hallway, cafeteria, or playground a public situation? In a sense, they all are public because many different people are involved, both adults and children. Yet there are restrictions to access; most schools do not permit just anyone to enter the school at any time of the day. Other locations may have access issues as well, but does public access automatically mean permission to videotape is not needed? I think permission is still needed, most obviously when interviews are desired, but in many other relatively public situations as well. For example, sometimes television crews enter public situations of tragedy and conduct interviews. While consent may be implied by the fact that people make statements, it is difficult to consider this completely voluntary consent because of the nature of the situation and the emotions involvement that may preclude full rationality. It may be legal, but is it ethical?

Some researchers, such as Raymond (1991), have begun to wonder if tighter restrictions are needed on videotaped data than in the past. He particularly questions the use of videotaped data after the completion of research, without the permission of those participating. Participants often fear the embarrassment of their activities being exposed to supervisors. Thus Erickson (1992, p. 211) recommends that they be given assurances that access to videotapes will be strictly limited. Confidentiality is also an issue because of the possibility of discipline by those who administrate the social situation. Erickson also emphasizes that legal proceedings can result from not limiting access to videotapes. I think a researcher needs to be careful not to make assurances to participants that are at best uncertain; videotapes can and are subpoenaed for legal proceedings.

Videos should be stored in a manner that protects confidentiality (Schaeffer, 1975). Erickson (p. 213) encourages storing videotapes by retrieval codes rather than site names and names of participants. This is also a good idea for filing notes in a file cabinet or in computer files. Schaeffer also recommends that participants be able to review and even destroy videos, if complete confidentiality is not possible. Seaman and Williams (1992) believe that in the future confidentiality will be more easily maintained by computer alterations of video data, such as distorting facial features.

Visions for Videotaping

Underscoring data collection as the primary purpose for videotaping, making decisions about the level or levels of involvement in the social context, and establishing a strong ethical context, all make up what I call the vision for videotape research. Having a well thought out vision prepares you for those foreboding initial days of research. In the planning process for videotape research, and when using theories to help orient a research study, it is imperative to keep an attitude of openness. Videotape data is incredibly rich, as dozens and even hundreds of kinds of data can be included simultaneously. One photograph of a street scene, for example, could be analyzed for the buildings included, the groupings of people, the vehicles seen, the sidewalk, the traffic lights, and so on. Videotape adds motion elements, thus time and process are more fully recorded than can be accomplished with still photographs. All the different kinds of data that can be analyzed in a photograph are multiplied by these additional elements of process and time. It is important to let the data push you to certain conclusions, and this is more likely to occur when multiple options and multiple perspectives are employed. Multiplicity in perspectives and choices match the vast amount of detail possible in video research. When I was asked to describe my orienting theories in the prospectus for my dissertation, I purposefully chose several theoretical frameworks to allow more directions in which to go with the data, and I also chose theories that were themselves more general and open ended. I used Edward T. Hall's ideas of situation frames and event chains because these concepts emphasize linkages without prescribing any specific kinds of relationships between components. It was a delightfully open (some would say vague) approach to data. I also used symbolic interactionist theory because, again, the wide variety of video data could be explained in many different ways with this theoretical position. Ball and Smith (1992) describe in detail how content analysis, symbolic analysis, and structuralist theories can be particularly appropriate for the study of visual data. I agree, as these are similarly broad and inclusive approaches. The theories that inform a study delimit topics and directions, but they can also open many different alternatives; theories establish the kinds of questions that are examined (Ball & Smith, 1992, p. 3). Most, if not all, funding sources and many doctoral committees require a strong theoretical orientation in the prospectus, and one way of accomplishing this is to use broad-based theories.

Even more crucial, and delimiting, is the selection of a topic. Again, I attempted to maintain an openness in this area as well by listing dozens of possible topics and subtopics that could be explored in the selected context of my study and the varieties of research strategies desired. I made it clear in my prospectus that I did not intend to study all the subjects listed, but rather I was providing a sample of potential subjects that might be considered. Most crucial was how suitable the site would be for exploring these topics (did those things occur at the site?), as well as how well the topics fit with videotaping (could I effectively tape data related to those topics?). I also encouraged flexibility in the choices of topics and methods by allowing for changes in my plan with the permission of the two co-chairs of my dissertation committee.

I believe that flexibility in research design, theory, and topics is crucial in qualitative research. This is especially important at the beginning of research, so that the most important issues will be included, whether foreseen or not. One can make the case that the unknown and unforeseeable aspects of using videotape in a research situation makes this guideline even more imperative.

Use back button on browser to return to previous menu, and from there go to another chapter