

Between marginality and privilege: gaining access and navigating the field in multiethnic settings

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Abstract

In this article we propose a framework of credibility and approachability for researchers to use as they prepare for fieldwork and write up their data. Highlighting intersectional perspectives from two women and scholars of color, this framework translates the important theoretical critiques of dichotomous thinking (for example, insider-outsider) into methodological practice. We argue that credibility and approachability are not just performed by researchers, but are also perceived by respondents and placed on researchers' bodies. By conceptualizing credibility and approachability as both performed behaviors and perceived characteristics, we are able to incorporate the researcher's positionality, the standpoint of the researched, and the power-laden particularities of the interaction in our data analyses and fieldwork reflections for the benefit of both researchers and readers.

Keywords

approachability, Brazil, credibility, field work, insider/outsider, North Carolina, positionality, power, race and ethnicity, reflexivity

Challenging the traditional adherence to rigid notions of objectivity and researcher distance in the social sciences, qualitative researchers regularly address their own subjectivity in the field (Gallagher, 2000; Harrison et al., 2001; Hawkins, 2010; Horowitz, 1986; Jacobs-Huey, 2002; Merton, 1972; Mikecz, 2012; Scholte, 1972; Sprague, 2005; Taylor,

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2011). Exploring the insider/outsider status of researchers has been an important avenue of addressing researcher subjectivity in the literature. Similar to other researchers, neither of us was firmly located as an insider or outsider during our research in Durham, North Carolina (USA) and Salvador, Bahia (Brazil) (Blix, 2015; Cui, 2014; Ergun and Erdemir, 2009; Naples, 2003; Sherif, 2001; Weiner-Levy, 2009; Young, 2004). Our experiences were context-specific, dependent on whom we were speaking with and what we were speaking about. While many social scientists acknowledge the importance of resisting reductionist dichotomies, these ideals have not necessarily shaped how qualitative researchers are trained or write up their results (Few et al., 2003; Smith, 2012). We view this article as another step of a corrective course.

We began writing this article to unpack our time in the field as women researchers of color. In the field we both experienced unexpected obstacles when it came to connecting with some of our respondents. For example, Sarah Mayorga-Gallo was told by a faculty member that she would have no problem connecting with Latino/a migrants in her study since she is also Latina – which turned out to be untrue. Her privileged standpoint in multiple regards (for example, skin color; citizenship; educational background) made some of these initial ‘within group’ connections awkward. Similarly, Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman received general advice to be cautious of the inevitably ambiguous relationships that researchers develop with respondents, but she was not advised about how to negotiate this ambiguity. During our data analysis, we also lamented the lack of literature on the methodological particularities of navigating multiracial and multiethnic spaces. This article is an attempt to fill both gaps – in training and in writing. Our framework engages with the reflexivity literature and has practical implications for how to prepare for fieldwork and write up one’s experiences in a transparent¹ and illuminating way. While qualitative researchers have been theorizing about the multifaceted researcher-participant relationship for many years, our contribution is a translation of these models for training and reporting.

Our standpoint as women of color led us to an analytical framework of *credibility* and *approachability* to understand our multiplex field experiences. By focusing on credibility and approachability to understand our experience with ‘getting in’ and ‘getting along’ in the field, we continue to move the discussion of researcher positionality beyond binaries (Lofland et al., 2006). To do so we examine: why and how did respondents speak with us? While we cannot answer this question definitively without directly asking our respondents, we attempt to theorize the successes we had in the field to shed light on active and passive strategies of *credibility* and *approachability* that qualitative researchers can use to gain and maintain access in multiethnic settings. Our unique² experiences as women of color who moved between marginality and privilege in the field provide a useful analytic frame for understanding how researchers can successfully and ethically negotiate the intricacies of studying individuals occupying different social positions. Thinking through ‘why and how did people talk to me?’ can help researchers theorize their positionality in a more productive way than a discrete list of personal descriptors. We document our attempts to be both credible and approachable as well as our perceptions of how these categories were placed on our bodies by respondents based on their responses to us. Although we came to these understandings because of our unique experiences as women of color, the conceptual framework that we developed has broader

applications (Smith, 1990). It provides all qualitative researchers with an avenue to increase data transparency for readers and understanding for both readers and themselves. It also creates a space for researchers to reflect on how they are implicated in the negotiation, management, and (often) reproduction of power in the field.

Background of studies

The first author is a light-skinned Latina who was raised in the US since she was two years old. She reflects on eighteen months of interviewing and observing the social interactions between and among black, Latino/a, and white residents of CreekrIDGE Park, an urban neighborhood in Durham.³ Mayorga-Gallo studied the social relationships among these three racial-ethnic groups to understand if quantitative measures of ‘integration’ reflect on-the-ground experiences. Due to her light skin, among other markers that she discusses below, Mayorga-Gallo was often read as white, non-Hispanic by white and black respondents.⁴ Latino/a respondents seemed to read her as *americana* (literally translated to ‘American’, but most often used to connote whiteness) as a result of her Latina identity, light skin privilege, and elite educational background.

The second author is a dark-skinned black woman from the United States who conducted ethnographic research with black families in Salvador for fourteen months between 2009 and 2011 including two additional follow-ups in 2013 and 2014.⁵ She studied how black Brazilian families both reproduced and resisted racial hierarchies through their socialization practices. Her experiences involved interactions with middle class whites and poor/working-class black families in Brazil. She often passed as Afro-Brazilian, which sometimes meant that in public spaces, including stores, buses, and restaurants, she was ignored or subjected to stares often from middle-class white Brazilians to suggest that she did not belong. Likewise, there were several incidents in which white European tourists assumed that as a black (and to their knowledge) Brazilian woman, she was a prostitute.⁶ She was treated differently by all Brazilians, however, when her US nationality was discovered.

Mayorga-Gallo’s experience as a light-skinned Latina in Durham was in part shaped by the racial history of the city. Durham’s history is simultaneously characterized by racial segregation between black and white residents as well as moments of black prosperity (for more detail, see Mayorga-Gallo, 2014). Since the 1990s, Durham has experienced a 1,700 percent growth in the Latino/a population due to increased Latino/a migration from Mexico and Central America. In new Latino/a destinations such as Durham the construction of the category ‘Latina’ tends to be narrower and more stereotypical than in historical Latino/a hubs such as Miami and Los Angeles. There is little room for someone who looks like Mayorga-Gallo to occupy the Latina category in CreekrIDGE Park. As such, she often gets placed in a category that does not match her identity or represent her lived experience: non-Hispanic white. Occupying this category situates Mayorga-Gallo in a position of power in Durham, North Carolina, and other white spaces; as such, she has the rare opportunity as a scholar of color to study whites.

Similarly, Hordge-Freeman’s presence in Salvador, the ‘blackest city in Brazil’, meant that physically she approximated the appearance of many of its residents. Consequently, she was acutely aware of the ways that people’s behavior and treatment towards her

immediately changed once her Americanness became known. While she was often still categorized as black in these interactions, her North American nationality meant she was positioned as ‘better than’ black Brazilians and higher status than most Brazilians of any racial category. Though Brazil has often been referred to as a racial democracy, it is a myth predicated on promoting racial mixture to remove evidence of African influence from its population. The stigmatization of blackness of Brazil is reflected in this ideology as well as through the significant structural barriers that disadvantage Afro-Brazilians along political, economic, and educational lines. Hence, social interactions involving Afro-Brazilians are often influenced by negative assumptions about their competency, economic potential, and status. These same (gendered) assumptions and their accompanying treatment were extended to Hordge-Freeman because she was assumed to be a black Brazilian woman.

As sociologists, we both recognize the fluidity of identity and its more stable relationship to racial structure. Our data illustrate how contexts and with whom we speak can change how we are racially perceived. Moreover, what elements of our identities (for example, class, nationality, gender, race) are most salient also shift from situation to situation. This does not mean, however, that our racial identification necessarily changes across contexts. What we are capturing in our self-identification (for example, as a Latina and black woman) is a more stable power relationship embedded in a racial structure. To say racial identity is a social construct and contextually-based does not mean that an individual will change their identification from one place to another. Our identities reflect social and political histories of communities of which we are a part (see Dowling, 2014).

Credibility and approachability framework

In their now-classic methods text, *Analyzing Social Settings*, Lofland et al. (2006) conceptualize credibility and approachability as behaviors that one intentionally performs. While we agree with this performance-based definition, it misses an important component of how these characterizations work: approachability and credibility are also categories that are placed on the bodies of researchers by participants. These categories are racialized, gendered, and classed (Vartabedian, 2015; Warren and Hackney, 2000). By conceptualizing credibility and approachability as both performed behaviors *and* perceived characteristics, we are able to incorporate the researcher’s positionality, the standpoint of the researched, and the power-laden particularities of the interaction (for example, local structures of domination) in our data analyses and fieldwork reflections.

In Table 1, we operationalize credibility and approachability and include examples of how they may be constructed in the field. Credibility – called trustworthiness by Harrison et al., (2001) – refers to how we presented ourselves and were perceived as scholars. This occurred through both institutional and informal mechanisms. Local structures of domination also shaped whether respondents determined we were worthwhile investments of their time or not. The cultural elements of establishing credibility were not taken-for-granted facts, but categories that respondents imposed upon us and that we sometimes intentionally crafted.

Table 1. Operationalization of Credibility and Approachability.

Credibility: Researcher is a worthwhile investment of time		Approachability: Researcher is nonthreatening and safe	
<i>Performed</i>	<i>Perceived</i>	<i>Performed</i>	<i>Perceived</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vouched for by key informants • Hierarchical differentiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable incompetent • Critical accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comrade • Intrigue Factor • Easy to talk to • Acceptable incompetent

Approachability means being seen as nonthreatening and safe. Safety here is not just physical, but emotional. It refers to respondents feeling like we could take proper care in relaying their stories as well as withholding judgment. There were two key interactional roles on which our approachability in the field seemed based: acceptable incompetent and comrade. We explain both in detail below. We also discuss our desire to maintain perceptions of ourselves as approachable and how that required us to accept uncomfortable modes of interactions and suppress our more critical perspectives during conversations we found profoundly offensive. Hordge-Freeman’s concept of “critical accommodation” captures this fraught process (Horge-Freeman, 2015b: 73).

Credibility⁷

Credibility, which centers on establishing oneself as a worthwhile investment of time for the respondents, was performed by Mayorga-Gallo in multiple fashions. All performances of credibility, however, centered on cultural credibility. Cultural credibility refers to the behaviors enacted by researchers to illustrate their familiarity and openness with specific racial-ethnic communities. Due to her data collection process (snowball sample of interviews), Mayorga-Gallo felt that establishing her professional credibility would be the most effective approach for getting in. If she conducted a more typical long-term ethnography where she was a resident of the neighborhood, Mayorga-Gallo would have had other strategies, such as relationship-based credibility, available to her. Mayorga-Gallo’s performance of professional credibility, however, was inadvertently a performance of cultural credibility that resonated most with white residents.

Mayorga-Gallo’s first performance of professional credibility was an emphasis on her institutional affiliation. By discussing her status as a graduate student at an elite university, Mayorga-Gallo attempted to authenticate herself as a real researcher who could be taken seriously and trusted. As mentioned above, however, Mayorga-Gallo’s professional strategies seemed to work best among white respondents. In addition to expressing professionalism, her field dress was also in part an attempt to counter her typical self-presentation. Mayorga-Gallo typically dresses in bright colors and patterns (for example, polka dots) that relay youth, femininity, and preppiness. In the field, Mayorga-Gallo dressed in ways that reflected middle-class standards of professionalism balanced with casualness to convey warmth (for example, collared shirts or blouses with blue jeans or

shorts depending on the weather; no skirts, dresses, or heels.) Mayorga-Gallo also used small professional markers, such as business cards with Duke University's logo, to establish her professional and credible status. Rather than frame these professional markers as universally effective, Mayorga-Gallo now understands them as performances of a particular type of white, middle-class credibility. For example, in an email sent by Tammy⁸ (a white homeowner) to her immediate neighbors publicizing Mayorga-Gallo's project, Tammy stated '[Mayorga-Gallo]'s easy to talk to and handles herself professionally.' This performance of credibility, however, does not work in every context, as we see below. Upon further reflection, her professional performance – despite her simultaneous emphasis of her student status – may have been alienating to some residents and may explain why Latino/a and black residents were less willing to speak with her than white residents.⁹

In efforts to gain access to black and Latino/a residents, Mayorga-Gallo performed different types of cultural credibility. For example, Mayorga-Gallo spoke to Latino/a migrants in Spanish and shared information about her Latina background with them. This tended to occur when Mayorga-Gallo would greet Latino/a respondents and begin the conversation in Spanish; the first question from respondents was often 'how do you know Spanish?' to which she would reply that her family was from Nicaragua and she was born in Puerto Rico. With black residents, Mayorga-Gallo stated that she was a student who studied racial and ethnic inequality and wanted to know more about life in CreekrIDGE Park. This direct engagement with issues of race runs counter to normative practices in white spaces, such as CreekrIDGE Park.¹⁰ These gestures were dual-purpose: to increase approachability and affirm Mayorga-Gallo's openness and familiarity with issues of culture and race. It is also worth noting that establishing cultural credibility with Latino/a and black residents was continual – not just during recruitment but throughout the interviews – whereas establishing credibility mattered more during recruitment for white residents.

Constructing credibility is not just about highlighting certain traits, but also downplaying other researcher characteristics. For example, while speaking with her Latino/a respondents, Mayorga-Gallo tried to emphasize her identity as a Latina and downplay her Americanness. Her pale skin, occasional pronunciation blunders, and class status, however, highlighted her privilege and status as an *americana*. In an attempt to establish her credibility, Mayorga-Gallo tried to highlight her shared panethnic identity and deemphasize the differences between herself and her Latino/a respondents, many of whom were lower class and undocumented. This attempt, however, was generally unsuccessful – ironically because by using panethnic terms Mayorga-Gallo highlighted her US socialization. For example, Martín, a Mexican migrant, asked Mayorga-Gallo if she was white during his interview. She responded by saying, 'No, I'm Latina.' Later in the conversation, however, Martín made a statement about 'you whites/Americans', then corrected himself to say 'them whites/Americans.' Reflecting on this encounter, Mayorga-Gallo realized that identifying herself with the panethnic 'Latina' label in response to his question further marked her as American, perhaps explaining Martín's use of the term *americanos* to originally include her. As research has shown, national identities are much more relevant than panethnic labels in Latin America and for recent Latin American migrants in the United States (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral, 2000; Sears et al., 2003). This encounter

also underscores a central point: although Mayorga-Gallo's approachability and credibility hinge on her race, class, gender, and other characteristics, these can be perceived in complex ways by respondents. For example, a strict insider-outsider framework would assume that Martín would share his story with Mayorga-Gallo because they are both Latinos – an assumption Mayorga-Gallo originally made as well. Their interactions, however, indicate that because of her standpoint, Martín framed Mayorga-Gallo as *americana*, a group distinct from *mexicanos* like himself. This more accurate portrayal of her experience not only illuminates field dynamics but allows her to better present and understand the data from this interview. For example, because of this identification of her as *americana*, Mayorga-Gallo can contextualize Martín's insistence that life in CreekrIDGE Park was perfect. It seemed Martín wanted to present himself to Mayorga-Gallo as a well-assimilated immigrant who met the standards of his new home country. He, therefore, spoke negatively about other Latino/as who did not behave properly and framed life in his new *americano* neighborhood as idyllic.

Hordge-Freeman's credibility was rarely linked to formal institutional or university ties, and in many cases, her lack of formal ties to institutions in Brazil provided her with more credibility. The local structures of power are such that university researchers are often white and middle-class and there is a sense that they are disconnected from the reality of many of the local black residents. Other residents' general unfamiliarity with university research in Brazil made a strong affiliation and endorsement from the local university meaningless. A reflection of the importance of personal relationships in Brazil, Hordge-Freeman's credibility was more directly related to the trust and endorsements resulting from being vouched for by her key informant, Luana. Luana, a poor Afro-Brazilian woman, introduced Hordge-Freeman to her neighborhood as her 'American friend' who enjoys learning to samba and travels all over the city for her research. Indeed, Luana's references to Hordge-Freeman's appreciation of Brazilian culture were indicative of the importance of cultural credibility to rapport-building with community members. Hordge-Freeman's distinct approach to building credibility in Brazil is also due to Hordge-Freeman's data collection process, which was based on long-term ethnography. Hordge-Freeman was present on a weekly basis in family homes for nearly a year and years later, she returned for follow-up interviews. Given this time commitment, respondents needed to be sure that Hordge-Freeman had more than a fleeting interest in them and in Brazil, which they determined by evaluating her investment in Brazilian culture, her use of slang, and ability to talk about current events – including recent happenings on *telenovelas*.

Credibility, however, was not simply a question of demonstrating that Hordge-Freeman appreciated Brazilian cultural activities; it was a largely embodied process. Hordge-Freeman intentionally changed her wardrobe once in the field, shopping at local stores for bright flowing dresses that were similar to the clothing worn by neighborhood women. Hordge-Freeman was successful at finding 'Brazilian dresses' at affordable prices at local stores, but she learned early on that she was perhaps too successful. Her selection and purchase of numerous Brazilian dresses made her the topic of conversation in the community, as women were curious about where she had purchased the dresses and how many she had. As a result, she decided to only wear a limited number of dresses to manage these perceived (and real) status and economic differences. Hordge-Freeman's credibility was not only the product of her explicit actions; it was also influenced by her race, gender,

nationality, and perceptions of culture. For example, many Brazilian residents internalized ideas about US cultural superiority and subsequently determined that Hordge-Freeman was worth their time once they discovered she was from the United States. Many were flattered, but also very confused about why someone would learn Portuguese for the purpose of conducting research in Brazil. Constant compliments about how well she spoke Portuguese ('You don't sound like the other Americans') reflect the ways that she was viewed not as a tourist, but as a scholar with the linguistic fluency and cultural knowledge indicative of a commitment to truly understanding Brazilian culture.

Credibility worked slightly differently in Hordge-Freeman's interactions with white middle-class Brazilians who generally positioned her on their level and 'superior' to black Brazilians based on nationality and perceived class status. We call this construction of credibility hierarchical differentiation because Hordge-Freeman was seen as both better than Afro-Brazilians by black and white Brazilians due to her middle-class Americanness, but also below Afro-Brazilians due to her inadequate samba skills and 'racist' interest in studying racial inequality. Hierarchical differentiation is multidirectional, meaning researchers can be framed at both the top and the bottom of the hierarchy depending on the situation. For example, a white Brazilian associate refused to group Hordge-Freeman and her husband (who is also African American) with Afro-Brazilians, stating, 'You all are not like our blacks.' Yet, middle-class white Brazilians seemed amazed by her ability to samba, a dance developed by enslaved Africans in Brazil. They delighted in explaining that—because of her African roots—the ability to samba 'está no seu sangue' (it's in your blood). In this way, her perceived racial similarity automatically translated to perceived cultural knowledge and ability to samba, at least among white Brazilians. In other contexts, however, (as evidenced in the example with her husband), white Brazilians positioned her as superior to Afro-Brazilians because of her nationality despite her perceived racial similarity. Contrastingly, black Brazilian residents in the poor and working class neighborhood were convinced that her samba skills were inadequate but were adamant that they could transform her samba through their own lessons. For example, one Afro-Brazilian mother spent weeks teaching Hordge-Freeman to samba and ultimately took pride that Hordge-Freeman's ability to dance samba was a product of her labor. The very idea that Hordge-Freeman's samba could be transformed, however, was also a result of the same racialized assumption that by virtue of being black, she had samba 'in her blood.' Hordge-Freeman's blackness made her a credible student in the eyes of Afro-Brazilians. Ultimately, however, Hordge-Freeman occupied a position of power in both black and white spaces. Much of the privilege that Hordge-Freeman experienced came from her status as a black woman *and* as someone from the United States. As is the case with Mayorga-Gallo, determinations about being a worthwhile investment of time reflect the ways that Hordge-Freeman was situated in a position of advantage as it relates to racial and national hierarchies.

Approachability

Performed approachability

We operationalize approachability as the ability to be viewed as nonthreatening and safe. Approachability is necessary for both initial and continued access in the field. Due to the

differences in our data collection processes (for example, snowball sample of one-time interviews versus long-term ethnography) the strategies to maintain approachability that were available to each of us differed. Below we discuss the behaviors and roles we deployed and why we believe respondents perceived us as approachable.

The first role of performed approachability is that of the acceptable incompetent. The acceptable incompetent is commonly employed by researchers in the field (Lofland et al., 2006). The interactions between the acceptable incompetent and participant include explanations and identifications of otherwise unspoken or taken-for-granted practices and attitudes. These encounters also partially redistribute the power of the researcher, allowing the participant to function as knowledge-holder and producer. As an acceptable incompetent, both the researcher's credibility and approachability are important. Participants must believe the researcher will accurately document the participant's expertise (credibility), yet participants must also feel like they can trust the researcher with their experiences – i.e., that the researcher will not cause them harm as a result (approachability). Participating in research is a vulnerable experience and approachability captures the emotional safety that individuals must feel to engage in the process. It is, therefore, important that the researcher is seen as affirming of her respondents and willing to learn from them.

When doing work where one passes as a member of the dominant group (for example, as white or heterosexual), the role of acceptable incompetent takes on a slightly different meaning. One's incompetence does not merely include refraining from sharing information one knows, but includes the added stress of not sharing information that may no longer allow one to 'pass.' Mayorga-Gallo did not pass as white and non-Hispanic in CreekrIDGE Park through declarative statements of her identity; instead, respondents made assumptions about her whiteness based on local structures of domination. In other words, someone who is light-skinned, does not have an identifiable 'Spanish accent', and is a doctoral candidate at an elite university is not assumed to be Latina by many whites.¹¹ Whiteness, like other categories of dominance, maintains its power by constructing its normativity. As such, it can often go unspoken, although it is always being perceived.¹² This disconnection between unspoken assumptions about herself and her own identity caused Mayorga-Gallo distress. Similar experiences are discussed by LGBTQ researchers regarding their decisions to disclose (or not) their sexual identity in the field (Barton, 2011).

During Mayorga-Gallo's interview with Roy and Valerie, a married, white, upper-class couple, they discussed the types of tea they had available. One was *manzanilla*, which Roy identified as apple, and the other was chai. They then turned to Mayorga-Gallo and asked what kind of tea she would like. Apple, she responded. Although the distinction is irrelevant to her study, *manzanilla* is actually Spanish for chamomile, not apple, which is *manzana*. Mayorga-Gallo stayed quiet about the misnomer. Correcting Roy and Valerie could have outed Mayorga-Gallo as Latina and changed or ended their conversations on relevant issues, such as Latino/a migration and residential politics. Mayorga-Gallo did not want to correct them for fear of unintentionally limiting potentially illuminating conversations about Latino/a migrants. And as someone who was passing as white, being discovered – no matter how innocuous the circumstances – can be distressing. To maintain her approachability and access, she performed the role of acceptable incompetent.

Hordge-Freeman learned about Brazilian families from her key informant, Luana. Luana relished the role of educator, the counterpart to the acceptable incompetent researcher. As an extension of her commitment to educating, Luana also engaged in mothering the researcher. In fact, she introduced Hordge-Freeman to others in the community as her 'filhota' (diminutive form of daughter) and demonstrated a maternal concern about the researcher's health and well-being. Attuned to questions of power asymmetry, Hordge-Freeman benefited from Luana's role as educator, but was uncomfortable with the developing kin-like relationship because it masked the ways that she had more power in the relationship than Luana. On Mother's Day, Hordge-Freeman was busy writing up her field notes in her apartment. When she stopped by the next day, Luana was so furious she would not even look at Hordge-Freeman, whose failure to call or visit on Mother's Day Luana considered a deeply offensive slight. Hordge-Freeman's relationship with Luana included assumptions that she uphold certain expectations and standards of kinship, a dynamic also described by other qualitative researchers (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Chatters et al., 1994). Luana was accustomed to being exploited as a mother and caregiver in her adoptive family, but revealed that with her relationship with Hordge-Freeman she took pride in being able to do it voluntarily. Ultimately, Luana educated Hordge-Freeman in exchange for something highly valued in Brazil: the ability to perform motherhood in a way that was voluntary, enjoyable, and offered her status in the community. In this sense, Hordge-Freeman embraced the acceptable incompetent role, as someone who needed to be mothered and supported through fieldwork, in order to comply with Luana's terms of reciprocity.

The second strategy of performed approachability is that of critical accommodation. Critical accommodation is a strategy of silence, or going along in order to get along. In *The Color of Love: Racial Features, Stigma, and Socialization in Afro-Brazilian Families*, Hordge-Freeman deploys the term 'critical accommodation' to capture the intentional decisions that Afro-Brazilians make to conform to racial hierarchies in the short-term in order to have the opportunity to achieve a goal that can have an even greater impact on undermining racial inequality in the long-term. Much like Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman, Afro-Brazilian men and women did not make these decisions to remain silent lightly. Instead they sometimes engaged in intense deliberations to determine how to respond in the face of prejudice and discrimination. Both Hordge-Freeman and Mayorga-Gallo sometimes chose to remain silent in the face of racialized commentary in order to document how discursive strategies and stereotypes display participants' understandings of relationships and neighborhoods. The constant self-regulation that they used, which involved managing both facial and bodily displays in response to offensive comments, echoes descriptions of emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012). Though the notion of emotional labor is often discussed in the realm of paid work, both researchers experienced pressures to enact certain emotional performances and refrain from others in order to facilitate their data collection. To be clear, our strategy of silence is not about literal silence. We still engage in conversations with our respondents to try and understand their points of view. That is the goal of our work: to understand the mechanisms by which racial structures are reinforced and confronted by individuals. What we silence are challenges to the beliefs of our participants, as is our duty as researchers (Lofland, et al., 2006).

For example, Hordge-Freeman was sometimes expected to empathize with those who engaged in behaviors that reinforced racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies. Vacillating at times between indifference, disregard, and disgust, she tried avoiding breaks in rapport by choosing to ‘suppress a sense of outrage while in the field... and take advantage of [her] rage’ in order to develop theoretical insight about race, class, gender, and discourse in Brazil (Erikson, 1984: 61; Hordge-Freeman, 2015a). For example, when Manoela, a white Brazilian woman, offered to drive Hordge-Freeman to an event in a neighboring city, their chatting led to a conversation about romantic relationships. During the conversation, Manoela revealed to Hordge-Freeman that her father had engaged in numerous marital affairs and that many of the women with whom he had cheated were black Brazilian women. Manoela explained to Hordge-Freeman that she did not understand why her father had that peculiar racial preference, but she revealed that she inherited (*puxou do lado dele*) his preference for black sexual partners. As evidence of her attraction, she pulled out her cellphone and giddily showed Hordge-Freeman a nude picture captured on her cellphone of the muscular dark-skinned man with whom she said she was having sex. His face was not included in the picture, only his naked body, and as she scrolled through the picture, Manoela zoomed in to capture his exposed body more fully. Relying on racially-charged language to sexualize him, she referred to him as her ‘Negão’ (a term suggestive of a virile, hypersexual black man or a big black man) and smiled while encouraging Hordge-Freeman to peruse the personal pictures. Manoela expressed a sense of guilt, excitement, and desire for approval as she asked Hordge-Freeman to evaluate the nameless and faceless man’s attractiveness. Although Hordge-Freeman did not validate her feelings, Manoela seemed to be content with having voiced/confessed her racialized erotic desires to the researcher. Throughout this interaction, Hordge-Freeman silenced the type of critical response that she would normally give in a non-research context, and instead asked general questions that allowed her to better understand the intricacies of interracial relationships and gendered sexualization of the ‘Negão’.

Similarly, Mayorga-Gallo did not critique or correct respondents unless it related to information that she had shared with them about her study. If they misidentified a street name or could not come up with a neighbor’s last name, she did not chime in. Lofland et al. (2006) advise that this is also part of being nonthreatening. They call for researchers to refrain from threats ‘to the beliefs, practices, existing social arrangements, and even self-esteem [of participants], that are communicated by argument, ridicule, sarcasm, gestures of disinterest, and so forth’ (Lofland et al., 2006: 68). As previously mentioned, this practice of silence also had racial implications. Sometimes these silences felt innocuous, and sometimes they were much harder to perform. For example, during her interview with Jamie (a fifty-something white homeowner), Jamie explained her work. Jamie described her expertise as physical therapy that addresses the underlying genetic and historical causes of behavior. She explains:

And another thing that, you know, I used to get really upset over when I was growing up in Columbia [South Carolina], because my family was, my mother and father were quite prejudiced against black people is – there was always jokes in school about how a black person lived in a very poor house but had a great big Cadillac, new Cadillac sitting outside the door. And we were talking about that the other night. And that also goes back to African culture because in,

uh, the African communities, the chief and the medicine man, they always dressed outrageously, um, flamboyantly and richly compared to the other villagers because it was status, right? Status held a big, big place in African villages. And, now it's shown up differently in America. The status is having that great car to set you apart that you're somebody, right? And in European culture, that isn't where we put our eggs. That isn't the basket that we put our eggs in. You know, for us, we're, you know, we come out of a different kind of a, uh, genetic culture from European culture and it's all about working hard and providing for your family and having a good roof over your head and it's not about status symbols so much. Although, you wouldn't, I mean, some people have that, but it's, it's just very different. So it's always very interesting to look at how all of that works, you know, and how it manifests itself in different times and different places.

Despite her confidence in her decision to not contradict participants, Mayorga-Gallo felt distress during this interaction. In the moment, Mayorga-Gallo believed that challenging Jamie's assessment of the differences between blacks and whites would potentially shut the conversation down. While Mayorga-Gallo disagreed with Jamie's comments, she decided her job was not to argue with her; she needed to document Jamie's experience and make sense of how her work and beliefs related to her championing of the 'liberal', 'accepting', and 'diverse' neighborhood she lived in. While Jamie first posed herself as different than her 'prejudiced' parents, her biological understandings of race reified old racist tropes about black inferiority. Having Jamie speak openly about her beliefs and work was especially illuminating because it seemed incongruous to her statements later on about how much she appreciated living in her diverse and accepting neighborhood. Making sense of these seeming contradictions is the centerpiece of Mayorga-Gallo's theory of diversity ideology and the limitations of current conceptualizations of diversity to produce racial equity. In this interaction, silence facilitated the data collection process by maintaining Mayorga-Gallo's approachability and marking her as safe and nonthreatening to Jamie's beliefs. During her interviews, Mayorga-Gallo felt her light-skin privilege made her privy to information that her respondents may not have shared with those they perceived as non-white. For example, she interpreted Jamie's use of 'us' and 'we' when referencing Europeans and whites as her inclusion of Mayorga-Gallo in that category. While it may be the case that a more confrontational field style would have yielded similar results, while in the field Mayorga-Gallo believed the strategy of silence was necessary for her 'undercover' race work.

Perceived approachability

There were three ways that Mayorga-Gallo saw respondents perceive her approachability. The first was as a comrade, or as someone who is 'like us'. For example, when Mayorga-Gallo was setting up interviews, a few white respondents mentioned that her status as a graduate student resonated with their own experience and they, therefore, wanted to help with her data collection. The second way that respondents framed Mayorga-Gallo as approachable was as someone who was 'easy to talk to'. For example, when Mayorga-Gallo first sent out a solicitation for participants on the Creekridge Park listserv Deborah, a member of the Creekridge Park Neighborhood Association, sent a follow-up message to the listserv vouching for Mayorga-Gallo. Deborah wrote, 'Mayorga-Gallo is a delightful

person – friendly, polite, respectful. She has the qualities you'd hope someone would have who's doing interviews. She's very comfortable to be with. [...] I thoroughly enjoyed the interview she did with me.' Both comrade and being easy to talk – like all perceptions of credibility and approachability – are mediated through local structures of domination. As such, they are not random assignments but patterned ways of seeing. Mayorga-Gallo's social position as a light-skinned woman from an elite university also reflected dominant constructions of safety in Durham and the new south – particularly for white respondents (Mayorga-Gallo, 2014).

These same characteristics (such as light skin, Duke affiliation; graduate student status) potentially marked her as foreign and unsafe to communities of color and may explain why she had more difficulty in recruiting black and Latino/a residents to speak with her than white residents. Again, the safety referenced by approachability is not so much physical safety as emotional safety. For example, Latina migrants seemed the least comfortable speaking with Mayorga-Gallo. This discomfort, she believed, was in part because of their incredibly vulnerable structural position in Durham. Not all of the Latinas that Mayorga-Gallo spoke with were undocumented, although the female migrants who were least comfortable speaking with her were. In these encounters, however, Mayorga-Gallo's performance of the acceptable incompetent role was most effective; this is the third role of perceived approachability (see Table 1). Although Mayorga-Gallo is a native Spanish speaker, she did occasionally stumble on words and was not familiar with some colloquialisms used by her Mexican respondents. Making a grammar or pronunciation mistake in Spanish was one way she – mostly unintentionally – constructed herself as a student and someone who did not mean any harm to her respondents. These mistakes reified Mayorga-Gallo's position as someone who was eager to learn from residents.

Hordge-Freeman's perceived approachability was connected to her racial similarity and also to her intrigue factor, characteristics that made her simultaneously foreign and familiar. Her racial appearance, US nationality, and ability to speak Portuguese made her a curious conundrum for many, providing her with access to families. In discussing her family-related traumas, one respondent affirmed, 'I only tell my secrets to you, Bete,'¹³ viewing Hordge-Freeman as close enough to understand her experiences, yet distant enough to entrust with her more personal thoughts. But, it is important to note that the respondent only began disclosing her family secrets after she walked in on Hordge-Freeman as she was speaking to her parents on a Skype video call. After the Skype call, the respondent expressed her amazement to have met the author's family, which led to the respondent feeling more connected to the researcher and intrigued by the fact that her parents were 'beautiful blacks' from the US. Her embodiment of a particular racial identity also facilitated Hordge-Freeman's mobility in poor and working-class neighborhoods; 'you look so Brazilian', residents would often say. During a core family gathering one Afro-Brazilian man highlighted the incongruence he saw between Hordge-Freeman's blackness and US nationality; he repeatedly came over to Hordge-Freeman and tapped her on the shoulder to say, 'Geraldo is the only real American around here.' His repetitive assertions that his blue-eyed, blond-haired Brazilian nephew, Geraldo, was the 'true' American served as a reminder of how Hordge-Freeman's blackness and Americanness were occasionally viewed as contradictory or mutually exclusive. For most respondents,

their inability to reconcile her blackness and Americanness led to questions about the origins of her parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, as it was inconceivable to them that she was *really* from the United States.

In many cases, interviewees agreed to speak with Hordge-Freeman because they wanted to know more about her life in the United States, rather than because of their interest in her research. Upon her first meetings with families, potential participants often began their conversation by asking whether she was enjoying her time in Brazil, inquiring about where she had visited and whether she liked traditional foods of the region. Residents were also visibly interested in Hordge-Freeman's experiences in the US and often asked to see pictures of her family and to learn more about her US life. Among other issues, they wanted to understand why Hordge-Freeman would leave her husband in the United States to conduct research in Brazil, especially when they not so discreetly suggested that he was probably cheating on her. It seemed residents expected reciprocity for their openness and Hordge-Freeman obliged by sharing details of her family in the United States, and by later inviting both her husband and her sister to visit the community.

Hordge-Freeman's blackness and Americanness meant that family members often invited her to family events as a gesture of inclusion, but also because their association with Hordge-Freeman was a source of status based on regional power structures that highly value American culture; privilege foreigners' perceptions of Brazil; and reward high status social connections with opportunities. For example, on a small table in Luana's living room is a photo that was taken of Luana, Hordge-Freeman, and Hordge-Freeman's husband in Brazil. Ever year Hordge-Freeman returns to Brazil to visit and community members often descend on Luana's house, which was Hordge-Freeman's base during her research. At each of these reunions, Luana points to the framed picture and reminisces about the exquisite meal of steak, rice, and beans that she prepared the night the photo was taken. She prods Hordge-Freeman to add details about how wonderful the evening was, and indeed, Hordge-Freeman eagerly responds that the meal was delicious and elaborates with details of the fine dishes and embroidered tablecloth that Luana used to adorn the table. Certainly, Luana's nostalgia for that evening is a reflection of her close relationship with Hordge-Freeman. But as Luana smiles broadly and boasts to others that her American 'filhota' never comes to Brazil without visiting her, Hordge-Freeman wonders whether Luana's smile is a reflection of their friendship or the status that comes from her association with Hordge-Freeman's Americanness. Ultimately, Hordge-Freeman cannot discern which it is, and it is likely that because of how perceived and performed approachability function in this context, neither can Luana.

Discussion

Our credibility and approachability framework illustrates how we negotiated our multiple identities and perceptions of our identities to gain and maintain access in the field. Managing the various roles and perspectives of our research participants required both active and passive processes. For example, while cultural credibility is something Mayorga-Gallo actively performed, her status as comrade and 'like us' is something respondents placed on her. Likewise, Hordge-Freeman actively managed her self-presentation to convey cultural

credibility, but was also perceived as credible or worthwhile because of her blackness and Americanness. Though the way that researchers navigate the field has often been reduced to insider-outsider dynamics, our analysis disrupts this narrative of duality. By acknowledging the limits of dichotomies we can challenge essentialist and static understandings of positionality that have neglected the voices of those in between groups and on the margins, especially underrepresented scholars like ourselves. As the social sciences and academia diversify, this is an especially important task (Kim, 2012).

We also discussed how both performance and perception shape the researcher's experience and access to information. Intimately tied to these processes and negotiations are the local structures of domination. Local meanings, such as those imposed on Hordge-Freeman in Salvador and Mayorga-Gallo in Durham, are central to understanding why and how participants speak to researchers. These meanings may also differ across groups, as white Brazilians imposed hierarchical differentiation and black Brazilians used the intrigue factor to express their esteem towards Hordge-Freeman. This multi-layered reflexivity produces a more insightful and transparent analysis than the descriptive practice of listing a researcher's personal characteristics. Our recommendation is for researchers to ask the question, 'why and how did people talk to me?' using a framework of credibility and approachability to unpack their field experiences. This framework will not only increase data transparency, but allow researchers to productively reflect on their experiences for their benefit as well as their readers. This framework is particularly helpful for scholars of color and others who navigate marginality and privilege in the field.

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Notes

1. By transparent, we mean that we present the multifaceted realities of our experiences in the field. In this way, we create a clear and honest picture that allows readers of our work to understand the intricacies of the field dynamics that led to our data.
2. The uniqueness of our role as women of color is not based in our identification, but in our structural position as women of color. The uniqueness is directly connected to an understudied perspective in understanding how power dynamics impact research. This is not to say that white women or others do not have unique perspectives. On the contrary, all groups have a unique perspective that helps unpack how structures work. The uniqueness of our perspective comes from the gap in the literature, particularly with negotiating interactions with multiple racial communities both globally and locally from a liminal position.
3. To collect data, Mayorga-Gallo attended neighborhood association meetings, neighborhood events, informal gatherings, and visited local businesses. She also conducted a household survey (N=85 CreekrIDGE Park households). The majority of her data come from intensive interviews with residents (N=63 residents). CreekrIDGE Park is a pseudonym.
4. We use the term 'white' to mean white, non-Hispanic and the term 'black' to mean black, non-Hispanic. We understand that these terms are limited in capturing the diverse lived

experiences of 'white' and 'black' people and that these are top-down categories that are the result of historical power relationships (Daniels, 2006; De Andrade, 2000). We also acknowledge that these terms do not necessarily capture the ways people self-identify or experience the world; for example, while Mayorga-Gallo is placed in the white category by her respondents, she self-identifies as Latina. We use these broad racial categories, however, because they are still helpful in capturing differences in power, although we attempt to provide place-specific interpretations of how these categories function on-the-ground in Durham and Salvador.

5. Hordge-Freeman's research involved research with 116 residents of Salvador and members of the ten core families that participated in the study. Along with formal and informal weekly family visits and 'hanging out' with the core families, she also attended informal gatherings, cultural and religious events.
6. Hordge-Freeman elaborates in great detail about how race, gender, and body politics impacted her research in (Hordge-Freeman, 2015a) and in the introduction and appendix of (Hordge-Freeman, 2015b).
7. We collapse our discussion of performed and perceived credibility under one general section since the examples for one include discussions of the other and vice versa.
8. All respondent names are pseudonyms.
9. Of course, Mayorga-Gallo cannot know why residents did not speak with her, but she can use her interview and observation data to understand how the residents who did speak with her may have read her.
10. For an excellent discussion of white spaces see Chalmers (1997).
11. For more on Mayorga-Gallo's passing as white, see Hordge-Freeman, Mayorga, and Bonilla-Silva (2011).
12. Scholars in whiteness studies have pointed out that whites' silence on issues of race is different than not perceiving or noticing race. For more on the distinction between silence and invisibility, see Frankenberg (2004) and Gallagher (2000).
13. Bete was the term of endearment many used to refer to Hordge-Freeman.

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