

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS:
THE EXPERIENCE OF A NATIVE RESEARCHER

Research accounts in the social sciences have emphasized the analysis of results without enough reflexive description of how the researcher's cultural and personal background is influencing the selection of the research topic, the methodological approach, relationship with participants and the research process in general (Lawless, Sullive and Zamora, 1983; Nash and Wintrob, 1972; Polkinghorne, 1983; Reinharz, 1984). The general orientation among social science researchers is to write about their research as if they were not present or involved in the act of interviewing, observing, participating and interacting with the people studied. Usually research publications are totally dedicated to examining the other ("the participants", "the subjects", "the co-researchers") without including a description of the self (the researcher) and how the interaction of the self and the other affected the research findings (Dwyer, 1982).

Generally, the researcher's personal experiences and reflection on the research process are most likely to be found in peripheral places of a work, such as prefaces, postscripts, footnotes, acknowledgements and appendices

(Bateson, 1936; Lambek, 1981). In doing this, researchers are disregarding their personal experiences and reflective stance in order to present a "scientific" analysis of their findings. Other researchers have first published their findings and then in a separate book have included their reflections and personal experiences (Maybury-Lewis, 1965; Powdermaker, 1966; Rabinow, 1975, 1977). It appears to me that these researchers are splitting ethnographic studies into a "subjective" dimension (personal account) and a "objective" dimension (presentation of research findings). For example, Maybury-Lewis in his introduction to The Savage and the Innocent wrote that:

This book is an account of our experiences, it is not an essay in anthropology. Indeed I have tried to put down many of those things which never get told in technical anthropological writings - our impression of Central Brazil, our personal reactions to the various situations in which we found ourselves, and above all, our feelings about the day-to-day business which is mysteriously known as "doing fieldwork" (1965, p. 9).

Recently, this situation has begun to change due to what seems to be the development of a new paradigm within the social sciences (Polkinghorne, 1983; Reason and Rowan, 1981). Especially in the field of anthropology and sociology, researchers are publishing accounts that integrate the researcher's personal experiences and self-reflection into

the presentation of findings (Beteille and Madan, 1975; Briggs, 1970; Crapanzano, 1980; Katz, 1982, in press-b; Reinharz, 1984; Ruby, 1982; Turner and Bruner, 1986). The researcher's personal experiences are beginning to be recognized as an important source of new understandings and insights, not as something one needs to hide in order to appear more "objective". The studies suggest the need to consider researchers as "positioned subjects" who have particular lived experiences that both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insights (Rosaldo, 1983).

In this "new paradigm research", the dichotomy between subjective and objective disappears, leading to a new concept of what it means to be scientific. Objectivity is no longer achieved by the elimination of the investigator's personal features but by his/her having a clear understanding of his/her influence on the research (Reinharz, 1984). As Beteille and Madan wrote:

To seek to eliminate the supposedly distorting role of the observer's subjectivity, if at all possible, would destroy the most precious of our tools - the fieldworker himself (1975, p. 6).

From this perspective researchers become more scientific by recognizing their subjectivity, not by repressing or denying it. The researcher is also more honest with the people who will read the research manuscript because he or she is

presenting a more complete and valid description of what happens during the study (Katz, in press-b).

Based on these principles, I will take the risk of telling the reader the "personal story" that evolved in the process of doing this study. This personal story is composed of prejudgements and assumptions that I brought to the study, moments of vulnerability in which my world-view was challenged, biographical data that influenced the research direction and mistakes that I made during the research process. In this sense I consider this chapter to be a deep confession, a very personal story of the major issues I confronted as a researcher.

When I was considering the idea of writing this chapter, I thought about the reasons a researcher may have for not telling a personal story. Usually the personal story is not considered significant because of the assumption that the researcher's role is to tell the participants' story not his or her own. However I discovered that my personal story influenced the way in which I described and understood the participants' story. How would it be possible to tell the participants' story without making any reference to my own?

In addition, in telling the personal story, researchers take the risk of exposing and disclosing their "subjectivity", making it easier for the scientific community

to point out the weaknesses and limitations of their work. This dilemma is very well described by Myerhoff and Ruby (1982):

The more the ethnographer attempts to fulfill a scientific obligation to report on methods, the more he or she must acknowledge that his or her own behavior and personality in the field are data. Statements on method then begin to appear to be more personal, subjective, biased, involved, and culture bound; in other words, the more scientific anthropologists try to be by revealing their methods, the less scientific they appear to be (p. 26).

In revealing more about methodological issues I confront the dilemma of being seen by others as less "scientific". In other words, I become more vulnerable to being criticized by others for not being "professional".

Another reason for not telling the personal story is that most of the time researchers are guided in their writings by the model of the "good movie". In the scientific community there is a tendency to describe only "successful" accounts. At the end of the study, researchers seem to have found clear answers to all the questions addressed at the beginning. They do not seem to make any mistakes, nor to be confused during the research process. Similar to movie protagonists, researchers appear to be omnipotent, always having complete control of the research activities. If a researcher is following the model of the "good movie" it is

very unlikely that he or she will decide to tell stories that do not support the image of invulnerability.

My hope is that writing about the research process from a personal perspective will be helpful in illuminating the methodological issues that I confronted during this study. I understand that my research would be incomplete without this presentation. Due to my special relation to **Espiritismo**, I will begin this presentation with an autobiographical note.

Autobiographical Note

...field ethnography (and indeed all social science) as presently practiced, may be a species of autobiography (La Barre, 1967, p. viii).

I need to share with the reader some autobiographical information which has influenced my role as a researcher in this study. I was born in a small rural town in the mountains of Puerto Rico into an extended family and a community of strong spiritist believers. My world-view and concept of reality has been heavily influenced by being a Puerto Rican who was socialized within the subculture of **Espiritismo**. Having participated in the activities of spiritist centers in my community since I was young, I have had the opportunity to experience **Espiritismo** from an

insider's perspective.

My interest in the study of the development of spiritist healers can be traced to my first contact with a spiritist healer when I was seven years old. At that time I was suffering from a condition that did not enable me to defecate normally. There were times when I would go for two weeks without defecating. The doctors commented to my parents that there was a physiological basis for my condition and that I should be operated upon as soon as possible.

My parents were desperate and did not know what to do. A friend talked to them about a good spiritist healer who lived near my town. My parents decided to take me to the healer's house. I remember that the healer was a fifty-five year old man named Gumersindo. The first thing he did was to put a cup of water on a table. Then he laid his hands on my head and stomach, giving me some **pases**(passes). After this, he took the cup of water and said to me: "Drink it, thinking you will be cured." I drank the water as he told me, thinking it was the medicine that I needed to be cured. The last thing that I remember from this experience was when my parents asked Gumersindo, "How much do we owe you?" He responded: "It is free. The healing power has come from God and the good spirits. I am not responsible for it. Your child has been cured." He was right, from this moment my health

problem completely disappeared.

In my adolescence, I started attending different spiritist centers in my community, especially the one led by one of my aunts. It was in this center that I began to practice **Espiritismo**, participating in different healing rituals. I was also encouraged to read Kardec's books on **Espiritismo**. I was fascinated by the philosophy of **Espiritismo**, spending many hours reflecting on several issues such as the communication with the spirits, life after death and reincarnation. Each spiritist meeting was full of excitement and mystery. At that time, the possibility of becoming a medium was very attractive to me. I admired my aunt because she was able to help many persons as a spiritist healer. Sometimes I had the opportunity to collaborate with her in the treatment of clients. I was told by her that I have **facultades**, and she encouraged me to develop as a medium.

As one can see, the research questions that I explore in this study evolved from my own life experiences. I have not only a scientific interest in these questions but also a very personal one.

My involvement with **Espiritismo** gave me the opportunity to know several spiritist mediums who were practicing in my community. In talking with them, I began to be interested in

their development as healers. However, at that time I did not have any idea that it was possible to do research on **Espiritismo**.

I decided to study psychology at the University of Puerto Rico. My decision to study psychology in college was very influenced by my interest in spiritist healing. It was also reinforced by a medium who was a friend of mine. However in my four years of college I did not have the opportunity to do research on **Espiritismo**, nor to write about it. With one exception, none of my psychology professors mentioned the role of spiritist mediums in the mental health of the community. Very soon I recognized that **Espiritismo** was considered a taboo topic at the University. In addition, herbal medicine and other folk healing practices were considered to be superstitions. I was afraid of mentioning to any of my professors my interest in doing research on **Espiritismo**.

Becoming frustrated by all of these obstacles, I decided to do a literature review on **Espiritismo** for my personal use. In the library I found that most of the articles about **Espiritismo** were dedicated to criticizing it in terms of religious principles. I could only find one scientific study entitled **El Espiritismo Como Una Religión** done by a sociologist named Angelina Saavedra de Roca (1969). I

thought that at least there was someone who was interested in studying **Espiritismo**.

At that time I also heard about a North American anthropologist who was working in Puerto Rico and was involved in developing collaboration between spiritist mediums and mental health professionals. I was very interested in the project but I could attend just one presentation because it was located too far away from my college.

In doing the literature review for this thesis, I found that only two Puerto Rican researchers have been interested in publishing their work on **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico (Saavedra de Roca, 1969; Seda-Bonilla, 1973). In addition, after having looked at the abstracts of more than 300 theses done by psychology students at the University of Puerto Rico and the Centro Caribeño de Estudios Postgraduados, I found only two theses on the topic of **Espiritismo** (De los Santos, 1982; Stewart, 1982). Thus, it seems that the situation has not changed very much since I was a college student.

Becoming a Native Researcher

The specific issue confronted by native researchers and their special contributions to social science have been

examined in several works (Fahim, 1982; Jones, 1970; Khare, 1983; Madan, 1975). Native researchers have been defined as those who conduct research on the ethnic group of which they themselves are members. Consequently, the researcher and the people studied share the same culture. In doing a study on Puerto Rican **Espiritismo** I became a native researcher not only because I am Puerto Rican but also because I have experienced this healing system from an insider's perspective. To some extent I also share with my participants the subculture of **Espiritismo**.

Being a native researcher has several advantages. First, I did not have any language problems in communicating with my participants because Spanish is also my first language. I did not have to begin learning a new language nor to use a translator as many foreign researchers have to do in order to communicate with the participants. In addition, I have been using spiritist concepts for many years, which made it easier for me to understand their symbolic and experiential meanings. However, it was in the process of translating my experience and the experiences of my participants to the English language that I confronted difficulties. It was not only a matter of translating words and concepts but also of "translating" worlds of experiences lived by people.

As a native researcher I did not experience any of the usual difficulties related to settling in to the field situation when I went to do the study in Puerto Rico. My parents picked me up at the airport and the next day I was doing a participant observation at one of the spiritist centers in my hometown. Having relatives in different parts of the Island offered me the opportunity to stay at their homes while I was doing the study. To have the support of my family was very important during my field work.

Another advantage that I had in doing this research was that I already had established several contacts with spiritist centers and mediums around the Island. I did not have to spend too much time finding participants.

I also had a deep knowledge of my participants' culture, being able to "think in their symbols". Sharing their culture made it easier for me to think, see and feel like them. It also helped me to understand the symbolic and basic value system of their culture. Being a Puerto Rican myself helped me to understand their stories in a special way.

There are also certain disadvantages in being a native researcher (Fahim and Helmer, 1982; Kelman, 1982; Koentjaraningrat, 1982). It has been mentioned that native researchers may have problems in overcoming cultural bias and "subjectivity" (Koentjaraningrat, 1982). However this is a

problem that foreign researchers also have to overcome. Native researchers may have less freedom to ask naive questions, which may produce significant new information (Kelman, 1982). The informants may presume that one knows the culture. In addition, native researchers may not be able to develop new insights about areas which they regard as self-evident. They may take for granted elements of a culture which may be important to the understanding of a problem.

Recognizing the value of research done by natives, authors have recommended collaboration between foreign researchers and native ones (Levine, 1982; Maruyama, 1981a). According to Maruyama (1981a), "endogenous research", the study of each culture by its insiders, is the first step toward an anthropology that "incorporates different perspectives obtained with the use of different epistemologies" (p. 145). She argued that:

...future anthropology must restructure itself with the recognition that not only the objects of research but also the researchers themselves, may come from many epistemologies (p. 145).

Maruyama (1981b) has found that native researchers may achieve insights that have been overlooked by outsiders. Native researchers may offer alternatives for studying a problem; collecting, analyzing and understanding data in a

way which is more consonant with the culture they belong to. Their understanding of a research problem may add a new and valuable perspective, enriching and complementing the research done by outsiders.

The study of **Espiritismo** will benefit very much from the collaboration between indigenous and foreign researchers. This kind of collaboration may open the door for the exploration of new dimensions of **Espiritismo**. It may also provide the basis for a different kind of research approach to the study of **Espiritismo**.

It seems to me that the issues confronted by a native researcher get obscured when one looks at them from the insider-outsider dichotomy. To look at native researchers as insiders and at foreign researchers as outsiders is not appropriate for understanding the complexity of the research process. The extraordinary challenge confronted by the native researcher is described by Madan (1975) as follows:

He is placed in a particularly difficult position: he is an insider who takes up the posture of an outsider, by virtue of his training as an anthropologist or as a sociologist, and looks at his own culture, hoping to be surprised. If he is, only then may he achieve new understandings (p. 149).

In agreement with Kelman (1982), I think that "it is much more reasonable to think of the insider-outsider dimension as a continuum with many gradations between the two extremes"

(p. 755). Researchers, "insiders" as well as "outsiders", are always moving between these two extremes in their attempt to find meaning from their data. As a native researcher I experienced myself during the research process moving within this continuum, not only experiencing myself as an insider but also at other times feeling much more like an outsider. I became an outsider by being trained as a researcher, by doing this research and by writing "about" the people I have worked with. All of these conditions increased the distance between the participants of this study and myself.

The degree to which I was an "insider" in this study is not very clear to me. To a great extent, I share the world-view and epistemology of my participants. My conceptualization of the self and the world has been very much influenced by **Espiritismo**. I understand and respect the realities articulated by the mediums not only due to a scientific attitude but also because sometimes I have been able to participate to a certain degree in these realities. Their experiences of reality are very familiar to me.

To some degree I have also been involved in the process of becoming a medium. Four years ago when I began to visit spiritist centers as a researcher I was not sure if I should continue participating in this way in the meetings. I was afraid that my degree of participation may be seen by other

researchers as a sign of being too personally involved. In other words, I felt that they would disqualify me as a researcher arguing that I did not have enough "objectivity" to study **Espiritismo**.

After some time of reflection, I realized that my experiential approach to the study of **Espiritismo** could be one of my unique contributions as an insider. I felt that my personal experiences as a researcher would not necessarily be an obstacle or limitation but rather an asset and a resource for understanding the process of becoming a medium. I discovered that I did not have to conceal this experiential background in order to appear as an "objective" researcher.

The experiential approach is an excellent way of obtaining an emic perspective of religion and healing systems. Over the last decade this approach has been used by those researching healing systems in order to increase their understanding of another culture's world-view (Jules-Rosette, 1975; Katz, 1982; Maquet, 1975; Peters, 1981). In his study of Tamang shamanism, Peters (1981) undertook an apprenticeship with a shaman in an attempt to experience what the participants said they did. Katz (1982) chose to participate in the healing dance of the !Kung, finding that this experience provided him with insights into the nature of healing, and thus motivated healers to share more of their

knowledge with him. Jules-Rosette (1975), in her study of rituals and symbolic meanings in an African church, had a conversion experience that led her to become a member, changing her emphasis from being a participant observer to being an "observing participant". Reinharz (1984), supporting the use of experiential data, writes:

Experiential data can thus generate concepts that are eventually included in a grounded theory. Experiential data and derived concepts can then be complemented by other kinds of data in a study... If the experience of the researcher is omitted, then the discipline is limited to the study of observable behavior and responses to instruments and contrived situations such as questionnaires. Studies built on such a foundation lack both the experience of the researcher and of the subject since the information concerning the subject is not experiential but an artifact of research procedures (p. 337).

The experiential approach can become an essential resource for decreasing the experiential and epistemological gap between the researcher and the people studied (Wexlex, 1985). A female Korean shaman, talking about being a healer and becoming possessed, made the following argument to the researcher trying to describe this gap:

You, though you say you are trying to understand how I became a mudang (shaman) and what it's done to me, you will never understand me... You see, there cannot be any real understanding between the possessed and the non-possessed... The possessed have had experiences that the non-possessed cannot begin to comprehend no matter how they try. At best,

they can only see what your possession is doing to you and to them (her family) socially. They cannot really understand your inner feelings or experiences (Harvey, 1979, p. 199).

The distance between a researcher and his/her participants is increased when the researcher is unable to experience their realities. The degree of researchers' connectedness with and subsequent understanding of a culture may depend to some extent on their accepting their own experiences of "vulnerability" which are inevitably brought about by working in that culture (Katz, in press-b). By accepting one's own vulnerability and thereby giving up the security of one's own world-view, one is open to being transformed by a culture through participating in its world-view.

Katz described how, by questioning his own world-view he was able to achieve a deeper understanding of Fijian healing. He recounts one experience of vulnerability when he was interviewing a Fijian healer possessed by a Vu (Traditional God), describing the confusion which resulted from not knowing how to define the situation. He decided to acknowledge and accept this experience, thereby accepting the loss of his own world-view, including the assumption that spirits have no objective reality. As Katz writes:

It would have been more comfortable and comforting to dismiss the possession as only a

dramatic act, thereby reducing the levels of reality in the conversation. But believing as a Fijian that the Vu was there, while at the moments when my Western mind intruded believing it was not, not only kept me in a state of intense existential transitioning but also kept me open to unexpected learning. This was not a case of acting like I believed in order to get "good data" but of stretching my own beliefs beyond themselves to allow new beliefs to enter on their own terms and in their own reality (in press-b, p. 6).

Generally, researchers who have studied **Espiritismo** make the implicit or explicit assumption that spirits do not have objective reality and proceed from there to analyze their data. A Haitian proverb says that "when the anthropologist arrives, the gods depart" (Deren, 1953). If spiritist mediums would have the opportunity to read some of the research literature on **Espiritismo**, they would also adopt this proverb as their own. One of the mediums in this study could not imagine that someone can begin serious research on **Espiritismo** with the assumption that spirits are products of the medium's mind. He argued that it is impossible to understand the process of becoming a medium if one makes this assumption from the beginning.

Being a native researcher and having a different epistemology from Western researchers, I find it more appropriate to examine the process of becoming a medium from an emic perspective, remaining at the level of the medium's

construction of reality, without trying to make interpretations beyond the data collected. My goal is not to examine the process of becoming a medium by using a framework borrowed from Western psychological theories but to examine this process based on the medium's world-views. Because it is the way in which they experience reality that interests me I do not find it helpful to analyze spirits as creations of their minds, nor to compare spiritist concepts with Western psychological concepts.

For example, to explain the concepts of **fluidos** (spiritual energy) as representing "libidinal drives" (Seda-Bonilla, 1969) helps very little to understand this experience as it is lived by the medium. Moreover it may obscure the real meaning of **fluidos** as it is articulated by the medium. It is a fallacy to believe that because one can name something by using familiar concepts, this means that one understand it.

As a native researcher, it is more significant for me to understand **fluidos** as an "experience-near concept" rather than as an "experience-distant concept" (Geertz, 1979). Geertz made the following distinction between both kinds of concepts:

An experience-near concept is roughly, one which an individual...might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his

fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one which various types of specialists...employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims (1979, pp. 104-105).

As a result of my personal involvement with **Espiritismo**, I have been able to experience what I think are **fluídos**. Since the first time that I felt a **fluído**, it became an experience-near concept for me. By questioning the mediums about their experiences and reflecting on my own experience, my understanding about **fluídos** was increased. I realized that to feel the **fluídos** of the spirits was one of the first steps in the process of becoming a medium. **Fluídos** are conceptualized by the mediums as "spiritual vibrations" or **corrientes** ("currents"). It is through the perception of **fluídos**, that a medium can identify a particular spirit. It is also through the concept of **fluídos** that illness and healing are explained by the mediums. The "bad **fluídos**" of an ignorant spirit may cause a person to be ill, while "good **fluídos**" are used by the mediums to heal others.

Although **fluídos** are "invisible", they are described by the mediums as being "heavy" or "light". **Fluídos** are also differentiated in terms of being cold or hot and "strong" or "weak". Usually **fluídos** are felt on parts of the body such as the hands, the stomach and the back part of the neck.

After being touched by a **fluído**, a medium may jump from the chair if he/she is not prepared to receive it.

It is my position that **fluído** can be understood as an experience-near concept without the need to translate it to an experience-distant concept. The task is not an easy one but it is worthwhile because it may prepare the way for a deeper understanding of **Espiritismo** based on a description systematically derived from native categories.

To write about my people is very much a process of self-discovery. The distinction that has been made in anthropology between the self and the other became very blurred (Crapanzano, 1980; Dwyer, 1982). In writing about the other, I am also writing to some extent about myself and vice versa. In trying to understand my participants' stories I am using self-knowledge as a primary resource. I could never imagine how difficult and complex the study of one's own people would be. Referring to this issue, Malinowski wrote:

If it is true that self-knowledge is the most difficult to gain, then undoubtedly an anthropology of one's people is the most arduous, but also the most valuable achievement of a fieldworker (1939, p. Xiii).

Relationship with Participants

My relationships with participants is another dimension that influenced the kind and the quality of the data collected in this study. Recent ethnographic studies have emphasized the role of the researcher's relationship with participants as a significant variable in the research process (Briggs, 1970; Crapanzano, 1980; Dwyer, 1982). A description of the way in which a researcher and his/her participants interact with each other may help the audience to make a more accurate evaluation of the research findings.

I introduced myself to the participants as a student interested in knowing about the development of spiritist mediums: how they become mediums and what experiences lead them to become mediums. Usually, at the beginning of the study I did not mention to them about my personal experiences with **Espiritismo**. However as I established a good degree of rapport with them, some of the mediums asked me about my personal position in relation to the spiritist practice. At that time I found it appropriate to talk about my personal experiences within the context of the research. It appears to me that my attitude of self-disclosure stimulated the participants to be more open in the interviews because they understood that I would not reject or judge what they may say

to me. Jourard (1971) commenting on the value of self-disclosure argued that "self-disclosure follows an attitude of love and trust" (p. 5).

The degree of intimacy and closeness that I could develop with some of the participants was facilitated by knowing them before the beginning of the field work. These participants already trusted me and in this sense it was easier to work with them. At the same time to interview them required that I adopt a different kind of role in the relationship. Although I knew these participants before, I had never related to them as a "researcher". I had never directly asked them questions about their development as mediums. Thus, the first interviews with these mediums became an interruption of our styles of relating to each other, and the creation of a different way of interacting with them. In this sense it was more difficult to interview these participants than those who I did not know prior to the study.

Different degrees of rapport were established with each of the participants whom I began to know after the beginning of the field work. It was very easy to establish rapport with some of these participants from the very first meeting, while with other participants it was a more difficult process. Some of them seemed to trust me from our first

contact while others expected me to gain their trust little by little.

Sometimes the participants' dreams and spiritual relations were a good indication of how they felt towards me. For example, a female participant expressed in the first interview that she had a dream in which a man was experimenting with rats. At that time she said that the dream was related to me. I asked her some more information about the dream but the medium said that she was in the process of studying and analyzing it. I thought that she was comparing me with an experimenter who manipulates and controls his/her subjects in order to prove a hypothesis. Maybe through this dream she was expressing her conception of what research and researchers are all about.

I continued working with this medium and in the second period of the field work I asked her again about the dream. The medium now did not associate the content of the dream with me. She said that the dream was connected to a spiritist center that she was attending. It seems to me that the medium changed the interpretation of the dream because she understood that I was not an experimenter interested in manipulating his subjects. As a result of our developing relationship she began to trust me.

The development of rapport with a medium who had

previously participated in a collaborative project between mental health professionals and spiritist mediums was also a great challenge. One may expect that after a medium had participated in this kind of project, it would be much easier to establish rapport with him/her. However one also has to consider that these kind of projects may also increase competition between health professionals and mediums instead of fostering cooperation among them. It appears to me that as a consequence of her involvement in this project, my participant was more defensive and mistrustful of health professionals.

I made several efforts to transmit to her the attitude that I was on her side, that I did not want to prove whether she had real healing power or not. However, she did not want me to be on her side because being a psychology student I was supposed to be on the other side. I felt that I represented a kind of competition for her.

In one of the interviews with this medium I faced a difficult situation because I repeated a question without being aware of it. The medium believed that I was trying to test whether she gives different answers to the same questions. She confronted me very strongly. I tried to explain to her that I did not remember that I had asked this question before. I felt very sad and frustrated about the

whole situation. But it seemed that at the end of our dialogue, she understood that I was being honest with her.

In our last interview, the medium made a statement which revealed that our relationship was moving towards more closeness and friendship. She felt that at the end of the previous interview I wanted to hug her but I was afraid to do that. The medium advised me that I did not have to be afraid to hug her. For me this was a good indication that she wanted me to get closer in the relationship.

I have presented these two examples in order to describe the complexity of my relationships with participants. My attitude was to be honest with them, trying to create an atmosphere characterized by open communication, respect and authenticity, so that the participants would feel free to disclose their personal experiences. In this attempt I was guided by the concept of genuine dialogue as described by Buber:

The chief presupposition for the use of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him (1965, p. 79).

In this sense, genuine dialogue is a two-way intercommunication, a horizontal relationship between persons who are engaged in a joint search (Freire, 1985).