

Why I love oral history and why you should read about it

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When people ask me why they should even think about oral history my reply is something about the story that needs to be told. This is the amazing thing about oral history. Through doing oral history projects one is able to find the narrative of a person's life or some segment of it. Oral history demands good interviewing skills and above average writing skills. Oral history can also amplify stories from a social justice perspective and may capture the testimony of those individuals on the periphery of history. Oral History is also accessible through digital archives across this earth and through digital content in journals, print media, and video. In fact if you went to your local library you may be surprised at what you may find. To be a good qualitative researcher in this vein, you need to know a bit about yourself, your local community, and the world. In terms of oral history projects, today there are many supportive sites online, in academic libraries and even a visit to a local bookstore will reveal a wealth and variety of oral history projects.

I hope you read my oral history chapter with an eye to being an active agent in the research project. I would ask you to think about power structures when interviewing a participant and I hope you will work toward a critical consciousness in your work. Also, as you read the chapter, think about your own history. Where are you a part of a community? What is the history of that geographic space? What is your contribution to that community? These questions should be on your mind as you plan your project. The heart of oral history is that it provides first person narratives of someone's lived experience. In many areas of civic life there is the use of oral history to understand everyday life in the military, medicine, science, the arts, business, and all creative activities. Furthermore, social media is a highway of oral history vignettes. Think about how accessible this is!

Technology has enabled the oral history to create a life story and it is forever there. This enables the researcher and the participant to stretch their minds. What a powerful element this is of your agency! While you read this chapter, think about how you may integrate technology on your work. When possible use video by filming your participants in brief moments of disclosure. Testimony is a powerful tool for all of us as researchers and as citizens. Testimony is something we all need to learn to make this a better world. And this is why I love oral history. This is why I hope you read my chapter.

Oral historians look for all types of evidence. Of course we read books and articles to begin with. But we also need to look for film, video clips, public and private documents, and finally after all this preparation for your interviewing, the interview is the star technique. One thing to recall about all qualitative work and particularly with oral history is to try to find a metaphor for your work. As you already know, I use dance, choreography and yoga while shaping the story, and the analysis and interpretation of the story. What is your metaphor? What parts of your work and life can handle a good metaphor? I mentioned

earlier that you ought to go to your local library and read some oral history. Look for that life quality and energy in those stories. This is where you are headed as an oral historian in my view. Yes, traditionally, many oral histories in past centuries often just transcribed and interview and set that on a shelf. That was then and know that we have advanced considerably in this field even in my own lifetime.

Are you ready to read the oral history chapter now? I hope so. Remember that if you have a narrative with credibility, authenticity, and texture you cannot go wrong. All this takes practice. In fact I view oral history as a practice like yoga is a practice. Yoga is called a practice because you practice it daily. This is the same with research and writing. If you do not write every day, how can you call yourself a writer? If you do not work on your oral history project every day how can you get to the point where you are ready to shape the story? Think this over and see what you think of the chapter on oral history in this handbook.

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