

One & Other Project

Interviewing the Interviewers Survey

Wellcome Trust would like to capture your perceptions and reflections on the interviewing process as part of the overall Wellcome Trust oral history collection. It will allow you as one of the interviewers to document and reflect on their your own lived experiences (personal and emotional), provide an insider's perspective of the interviewing processes and develop a further set of reflective interviews that would go to enrich the existing oral history collection. Please answer the following questions and write as long or as little as you would like and feel free to add anything else you feel was important.

1- General

1. *Your name, age and where you come from.*

Emma Wright, 23, Born in Glasgow, brought up in Belfast now live in London

2. *How many interviews did you conduct (roughly)?*

55

3. *How did you get involved in the project?*

I was already assisting on the project and when someone called in sick at the last minute, I jumped at the chance to take their place.

4. *Any previous experience of interviewing? If so describe.*

No

2- Technical/Practical: rapport building, silences, listening

1. Did you know about Oral History before you got involved in this project?

Not really, no.

2. *What did you think about oral history as a methodology after receiving the training?*

It all made sense, when it was explained to us in depth during the training session at the wellcome trust. It made me reflect on the ways in which I had gone wrong in my interviews before the training.

3. *How comfortable did you feel with the recording equipment (including the MIC)?*

I found it much easier with the zoom recorder, much less technical stuff to worry about immediately before and following the interview. Also in comparison I think the laptop set up was a little distracting for the interviewee.

4. *How much did the interviewees know, understand about the project aims, the interview style before the interviews?*

I did my best to explain the purpose of the interview and what oral history was. i.e where it began and the kinds of things the interviews could be used for.

5. *Building Rapport and Trust: strategies you employed before and during the interview.*

I made an effort to introduce myself to them upon their arrival in the cabin... I always warned them of the time the interview would begin at least 40 minutes

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beforehand, with updates throughout, making sure they would have time to go to the toilet before. I found it reassuring to them to tell them it was only an audio recording. I tried to make them feel in control by telling them that they could talk as much or as little as they liked and they were free to stop whenever they wanted. I also told them the exact point at which the device started recording.

6. Strategies employed in getting the narrator to talk, open up.

Open body language, smiled a lot and nodded to show my understanding of what they were saying. I began with open questions about the plinth, how and why they wanted to be involved with the project before moving on to more personal questions.

7. How did you find managing your own agendas as interviewers (covering the main required topics) versus probing on what the interviewee was offering?

After my first few interviews I didn't have to think so much about my own agenda, I found it easy to cover the set questions however if they were talking about something more valuable I would give preference to that if time was running out.

8. Any anxieties when entering the interview relationship? Give specific examples.

Younger interviewees in particular 16-20 year olds seemed to have much less to say in their interviews so I was aware that their interviews may be shorter. On a few occasions it was obvious how nervous some interviewees were. On another occasion I had a particularly arrogant interviewee who spoke to me in an aggressive, and curt manner.

9. Topics that you covered in the interviews and reactions to them by the interviewee (silences, the interviewee not answering a question, unexpected turns in the direction of the interview)

I really never knew what direction an interview was going to head in, people surprised me over and over again. Some people were more than willing to talk about the most personal things. I found the silence a little awkward in my first few interviews, but after a while I got used to it and really realized the importance of the space.

10. Environment: the room, the shift organizations, which shifts worked best and why?

The room worked well, it was always warmer than the rest of the cabin, the two chairs were turned slightly inwards, and it was much quieter than the rest of the cabin and outside in the square thus giving the room a cocoon like feel. I found the nightshift often was the most revealing, there was already a bond there as you were both awake at say 5am. The cabin during this shift was much less busy, they generally had time to get to know the whole team.

3- Personal/Emotional:

1. Projections that you noticed (based on age, gender, class, identity of

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the interviewee)

The first question I always asked was 'how do you feel now'. I found that females gave me a more emotional response about how they were feeling in their head, ie if they were nervous, excited... Males on the other hand tended to give a more literal response, ie they felt hot, or tired. As I said before the younger interviewees sometimes had much less to say giving very short answers to the questions.

2. What were the most emotional moments of these interviews?

There were many, but a few who come to mind - When a lady told me she caused her husband's suicide 4 years ago, when a gentleman cried for 40 minutes describing the process of losing his wife to cancer, and how she had only one week left to live, and when a gentleman who had been homeless for 15 years, described the moment when he left home and cut off all contact with his family.

3. What were the hardest issues the interviewees raised? And why?

There were a few times when it was obvious people weren't being honest, i.e. there were few people who mentioned having once been an alcoholic, though they still smelt of alcohol.

4. Did you relate to any of their stories? If so describe.

Yes, the gentleman whose wife was dying of cancer, as he described the Process, it reminded me of the previous year when I spent a lot of time looking after my grandfather who died from the same type of cancer.

5. Any moments in which empathy was hard to achieve and why?

When a gentleman hinted at having been violent towards his ex-wives and his children, he still came across as very aggressive during the interview, even answering his mobile throughout despite being asked to .

6. Any moments in which empathy was easy to achieve and why?

I find that you can usually achieve empathy on some level, there is always a reason for people being the way they are.

7. Any other feelings/thoughts that emerged during your interviews?

I feel really lucky, i have discovered so much about people and places and things to do in the UK. Great charities I didn't know existed, hobbies I had never heard of. I have gained a lot of insight into the most private moments in people's lives.

1. What were the experiences you remembered most easily about your own interviewing practice and why?

How important space and silence can be in a conversation, and how by showing physical empathy we often stop people talking, when let to carry on speaking a lot of important things can come out of it. It is surprising what people actually want or sometimes need to talk about.

2. Is there more you would like to say?

No

3. What advice could you give to other interviewers about interviewing style etc?

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Be confident, let the interviewee lead the interview, listen carefully rather than worrying about your own agenda, be prepared to talk about anything, if they were the one to bring it up in conversation it is most likely ok to probe further.

4- Reflecting on the experience as a whole: (through time)

1. *What did this experience of interviewing the plinthers for the One and Other project bring to you?*

So much knowledge about the UK and the people who live here.

2. *Did you make new friends?*

Not so much with any of the interviewees, as there was always a boundary there, I was still a stranger to them, which in a sense was why, in my opinion, they were able to open up during the interviews. I have however made many friends amongst my colleagues at one and other.

3. *Did this experience change you as a person: if yes, how?*

I would like to carry this insight into how to listen to people when talking to people I know.

If not, then what have you learned? Specifically, what did talking to someone about their lives, feelings and motivations for going on the plinth make you feel/think?

That everyone has things going on in their life you would never dream of, that which we keep to ourselves really can be worth sharing.

4. *Finally, would you do it again?*

Yes definitely.

5. *If yes, what would you change in the interview structure or the project as a whole?*

I think It was great to have such a focused reason for interviewing them in the first place, it broke them in gently to opening up about more personal aspects of their life. It would have been exciting to have had unlimited amounts of time with a certain few interviewees. There were a few occasions when I would have loved to have let people talk for even longer.

6. *If not, why?*

Verusca Calabria