

Mother's Story Assignment

Objective of this assignment: To conduct an ethnographic interview with a (non-kin-related) mother on a course-relevant topic and analyze the data through the lens of our course material. Your topic should be narrowly focused, but should aim to encompass at least 2 of the perspectives covered in class (psychology, communication studies, sociology). For example, your topic could be post-partum experiences, including post-partum depression (from a psychological perspective) and the tension between expectations of mothering (based on media representations) and the incongruent reality of their situation (from a communication studies perspective). Overall, the interview will allow you to learn about your interviewee's lived experiences with mothering and the issues you focus on in particular.

Final Product: You will produce a written report and a class presentation. The formal report will be an analysis of the interview (about 4-5 pages) and the oral presentation will be about seven minutes (typically six to nine slides). The report should include direct quotes transcribed from the interview framed by analysis of the interviewee's narrative using perspectives from course readings and discussions.

DIRECTIONS:

- In class we will review how to conduct and analyze a personal interview. Once you begin the assignment, carefully prepare for your interview questions (as discussed in class).
- Schedule the interview.
- Explain to the interviewee that this project is for our class and the data collected will be anonymous (you can assign or allow your informant to choose a pseudonym).
- During the interview:
 1. You should plan on taking notes during the interview; jot down anything that you want to follow up on that seems particularly important, or particular emotional responses or observations you make about how the interviewee is responding. These will help you afterwards.
 2. The interview itself should be also digitally or cassette recorded so that you can pay close attention during the interview and reflect on it afterwards. Do not trust your memory. (Recording equipment is available for rent at Media Services in basement of Maher hall; Prof Stern also has some old-fashioned tape recorders if you'd like to borrow one. Fresh batteries are critical in any case.) You should plan on taking notes during the interview; your interview questions and interview "jottings" should be turned in as an addendum to your report.
 3. You might consider buying a small gift (such as a \$5-10 coffee card) if you feel like it as a token of your gratitude. It is a good idea to send a hand-written thank you note to the informant after the interview is conducted.
 4. Analyze the data. Look for themes that concur or refute issues we've covered in class. Identify the quotes that capture this woman's individual voice and lived experience. Summarize your notes and identify key themes that you want to address in the paper. Organize the structure of your paper and use direct quotes from the interviewee to make your points. After every quote, be sure to unpack it and explain the meaning and why it is relevant.

Evaluation:

Your report should have the following elements:

- 1) Introduction & setting up research question -- Briefly describe the purpose of your project and the purpose of this interview in particular.
- 2) Relevant literature framing the topic; information from class is adequate but you may also conduct an additional literature search if that would be useful to you. Please be sure to use citations from at least four separate course readings.
- 3) Methodology – Explain who (demographic information about your interviewee, such as age, relevant characteristics, etc), where the interview was conducted, how you established this contact and briefly any difficulties you encountered; identify your “grand tour” questions and any other preparation you made for the interview. Tell us how long the interview lasted and any other detailed information relevant to the interview method itself.
- 4) Analysis -- Summarize the content of the interview – this should be related to the issues you addressed in the literature review. Identify key themes and use quotes to support your assertions. Discuss your findings.
- 5) Conclusions: Summarize the process. Include in this section your own reflections on this approach to collecting & analyzing data.

Your presentation should include the following elements:

1. Introduction – overview of your topic, description of who you interviewed, your primary research questions and a brief statement of their significance. (One or two slides)
2. Overview of the literature that framed your research (which areas were you drawing from? How did the literature help guide your questions?) (one or two slides)
3. What you found (up to three themes) and your analysis of the content of the data collected. It’s fine to include about three direct quotes to illustrate your points. (three or four slides)
4. Conclusions, sum up data with content of the course. Tell us why it was important (Answer, “so what?”) (one slide)

You will also be graded on presentation style, flow, and ability to finish on time.

Project is due: April 21st

All students should be prepared to give their presentations on April 21st.