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## **The Role of the Interviewer in Longitudinal Oral History Project. Biographical Interviews after 20 Years**

The paper is focused on the project The Student Generation of 1989 from Longitudinal Perspective: Biographical Interviews after Twenty Years. This current research builds on the successful project Students at the Time of the Fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia, which consisted of conducting more than one hundred interviews with former student leaders involved in the events of November 1989. Now we return to the same group of narrators exactly after 20 years in order to present crucial findings relating to questions of the transformation of remembering and memory processes of the studied group.

In this paper I will show some methodological aspects of OH longitudinal research, especially the role of the interviewer. Just one member of our team (Prof. Vaněk) was conducted interviews in the original project and now after 20 years he has realized interviews with cca ten same narrators. I would like to show some advantages and disadvantages of that situation.

Life changes have taken place by the narrators but also by the interviewer, who is actually their generation companion. Previously they were at the beginning of their career, today they are around 50 years old, established, mostly successful in their professions, they already have teenage children.

Equally important Mr. Vaněk himself has changed as interviewer. He has more than 20 years experiences with oral history, realized dozens of interviews, learned to listen better and moved on in analytical and interpretational questions. The narrators know Mr. Vaněk for a long time, a strong relationship of trust was build up, but on the other hand it requires a great deal of responsibility to narrators.

This paper will describe some of these methodological questions: the transformation of discourse, the life changes and the dynamics of interviews after 20 years.

**Carol Quirke<sup>1</sup>, Irum Shiekh<sup>2</sup>, Sharon Utakis<sup>3</sup>**

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### **More than Two: Oral Histories with Multiple Interviewers or Multiple Narrators**

How are personal narratives affected by being shared within a group? The canonical oral history project is a one-on-one interview, with one interviewer and one narrator. This paper examines examples of non-canonical interviews in three oral history projects. These examples, with either multiple interviewers or multiple narrators, provide insights into the areas of gender, racial and linguistic difference; the multiplicity within collective memory; intended and unintended consequences of silences and voices; and the role of audience. Group interviews unearth critical memories that may differ from one-on-one interviews yet provide significant insights into understanding the past, and may build new relationships among participants so as to engender connection, community, or commitments to justice.

Carol Quirke explores group oral history interviews addressing community, difference, and inequality, where a set of multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual teens interviewed their elders. The case study was part of a larger organizing project based at a public housing development that had experienced racist hate crimes. The organizing project aimed at nurturing community, animating a social justice mission, and redressing racism.

Irum Shiekh's research looks at two interviews completed with Japanese-Peruvian internees of World War II who were interviewed both individually and collectively. One former internee was comfortable in sharing his painful memories of internment in an individual interview, but the same individual sat, hesitant and quiet, in an interview with his three brothers. Instead of dismissing the group interview for its silences and awkwardness, Shiekh suggests rereading the interview to gain insights into the trauma of internment.

Sharon Utakis and Nelson Reynoso conducted oral histories with immigrants from the Dominican Republic to New York City. In one interview in particular, the presence of two interviewers, one Dominican and one non-Dominican, facilitated emergence of the

interviewee's story but also encouraged greater detail as he imagined a non-Dominican audience.

## **Martha Norkunas**

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### **Ideas about Listening in the Life History Interview**

My paper reflects on the nuances of co-creating life history interviews using conceptual listening approaches, especially with minority or at-risk populations. For the past ten years I have experimented with a range of approaches to listening. For example, listening to narratives connected with places and objects, narratives about values, narratives of joy or sorrow (and the complicated emotional terrain that connects them), or detailed stories about daily life each require unique forms of listening. When I teach oral history, I investigate additional categories of listening, exploring how they contour life histories. Graduate students engage in a series of listening experiences, assuming the roles of narrator and listener, and write about their perceptions. My ideas about listening, and the life history interview, have changed as a result of the listening exercises and my interactive dialogue with the students. Influenced by the literature on feminist oral history, trauma and narrative, and oral history in the digital age (the ethics of making life histories with vulnerable populations accessible to global audiences) I reflect on how nuanced listening relationships may enable narrators to speak outside of normative social categories. Can questions about a person's connection to trees, for example, open up avenues to speak about private feelings about nature, spirituality, and non-human others? How do questions about ordinary objects in the home—or for those who no longer have a dwelling, the memories of those objects—allow narrators to speak in unique ways about experiences connected to material culture? How does the listening pair negotiate the boundaries between intimate and public narratives? How do the narratives that emerge change the social history that the listening pair co-creates? Can these approaches to listening create oral histories that advance the rights of vulnerable populations when they are shared in particular digital environments?

**Suzanne P. MacAulay**

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### **Phased Longitudinal Oral History Research: Narratives of Survival and Adaptation**

This discussion examines the "twists-and-turns" of an ongoing longitudinal ethnographic and oral history research project over the last twenty years, which utilizes folklore methodologies in order to enrich analysis and interpretation. The "exile" project charts circumstances and changes over time of a group of expatriates from around the world living in a small coastal town in New Zealand. The first phase focused on narratives of violence, displacement, and migration reflecting the global unrest of the 1990s. Ten years later, the next phase highlighted narratives of settlement, citizenship, identity, and stories of survival transformed into accounts of adaptation and adjustment. Interview sessions from both phases became opportunities for self-analysis, reflection, re-evaluation of decisions made, pondering choices and alternatives, and confronting past history.

In terms of methodology and analysis for oral history research, this project offers the opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of folkloric and ethnographic methods used over time, their appropriateness for future phases, and how they impact interview situations as well as the results. Since the interviewer shares the experience of migration with participants, the style of interviews is based on a variable conversational mode with a heightened awareness of context, emotions, body movements, types of interactions, performance elements, etc.

The second phase calls for a different set of analytical tools than the first. In the initial phase a folklore approach including narrative interpretation, performance analysis and sensory awareness are prominent analytic modes extending oral history inquiry into the realm of corporeal and sensate properties operating beyond dialogic frames. An analysis of the second set of interviews, which largely addresses the consequences of migration, combines with the first set to offer an expansive model for oral history research with wide-ranging applicability enhanced by folklore and ethnographic practices.