

## **ASSIGNMENT 2: OPTION A - CONDUCT A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

CRIM 3821: Socio-Ethnographic Research Methods

Submitted to Andreas Tomaszewski

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An in-person interview would have been preferable, especially for reading non-verbal cues and creating comfort during the interview; however, due to the current global situation regarding the coronavirus, limiting the in-person contact and following social distancing, for the purposes of this semi-structured interview, I obtained informed consent verbally (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Before beginning the semi-structured interview, I fully read the "Letter of Permission - Interview Assignment" to the participant in its entirety. I confirmed that the participant understands the nature of the research, their participation in my research and that they are free to withdraw their consent at any time (Hesse-Biber, 2017). To view the Letter of Permission that was verbally read and verbally agreed to, please view Appendix B. I conducted the interview through a video call on Microsoft Teams. I used no audio or video recording during the interview; instead, I chose to take shorthand notes during the interview and elaborate on them afterward. The notes are securely stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer, as mentioned in the Letter of Permission. For anonymity, the participant is addressed using the pseudonym 'Jo,' both in this reflection and the notes.

After confirming that the video and audio connection was clear and receiving informed consent from Jo, I began the interview. Knowing that the interview was not being recorded seemed to put them at ease. Still, I wanted to make sure they had a sense of comfort and openness when answering questions, so I started the interview by asking them how the weather was as they were in a different province. That seemed to relax the first bit of jitters that were still evident in their body language. By typing my short notes, I was able to keep my focus on the video by using a split-screen. As Jo was at their home, they seemed comfortable and relaxed as the interview went on; though I am thankfully a quick typist, I personally found that it took away from the interview. That said, I feel that it was a combination of switching to a video interview and typing my notes that made it harder to read their facial expressions and body language thoroughly. However, it did allow for natural pauses; having the digital distance between us seemed to create an environment where I could continue to type while they

just kept talking. When needed, I could pull back to my questions if they strayed too far, but in general, it provided less urgency to answer and let the interview hold space for an unstructured conversation.

If conducting this research activity currently under the same platform on a video call, I feel that the focus group format would be rather challenging. It proves to be a struggle not to talk over each other in video calls, which could ultimately lead to participants not fully being involved and some dominating the conversation. In-person, I feel that a focus group format could be very beneficial, as the research was exploring adventure tour guides. Each participant would have different specialties and experiences that could open up new areas of conversation that were not addressed initially in my questions found in Appendix A. That said, using a focus group format could also elicit responses that I otherwise would not have gotten asking in the interview format.

I did not anticipate any awkwardness between myself and the interviewee; just in case, I did start the interview with some small talk to create a sense of ease before getting into the interview. Even before the small talk, there was no awkwardness; instead, it felt like a sense of relief having some form of human contact amidst the social distancing lifestyle we find ourselves currently in due to the coronavirus.

My interviewee was very comfortable and thorough in their answers, but they did seem to appear confused at one of my questions and asked for clarification. For me, the question they asked for clarification on, was written as a straightforward ladder question (Price, 2002). However, the way Jo asked for clarification regarding 'do you mean this or this' made me realize that the question I asked could have more meanings and definitions from the tour guide's perspective than I thought. As it turns out, they weren't particularly confused by the question and could have answered it how they felt, but they wanted to make sure that they were providing me with the answers I needed. That did make me wonder if they had been answering the questions directly or if they were answering them the way they thought I wanted them answered (Price, 2002); I may have made those ladder questions too focused.

If I were to conduct this semi-structured interview again, I would research the topic further, as Dilley suggests studying background information is a crucial first step for interviews (2000). I know about the subject in general but had I further looked into tour guides when writing my questions, I may have eliminated the clarification mentioned above needed by Jo to answer one of the laddered questions appropriately. If I were to conduct this interview differently, I would also rewrite some of my questions; because of the video call platform and my presumptions that keeping the conversation going would be a struggle, I prepared several laddered questions to probe for further details (Price, 2002). However, that was not the case with this semi-structured interview; Jo freely kept talking in a comfortable flow that surprisingly answered questions that I had prepared before even asking them. As part of this assignment was to interview someone that we know, I already had an understanding of the participant, their non-verbal cues and their passions. In this case, completing the interview in a socially distant manner proved beneficial for creating a stable comfort level. Under different circumstances where the interview could be in-person, I would like to interview another tour guide that I don't personally know to eliminate some of the bias or sympathy I have towards the participant (Becker, 1967).

All in all, upon reflecting on the semi-structured interview, I am comfortable in them and aware that I will only become better at formulating them the more I conduct them. There are always unforeseen issues and variables that are excellent learning experiences for future interviews, and completing this interview under the changing conditions of coronavirus provided both challenges and opportunities that I would not have experienced or benefited from in previous semesters.

## Appendices:

### Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- I. Have you worked as a Tour Guide or similar position?
  - A. What companies have you worked for?
  - B. How did you hear about them?
  - C. How long were you with them?
  - D. What size of group did you look after?
  - E. What type of tours did they offer (winter, summer, hard adventure, soft adventure)?
    1. Daily or overnight tours?
    2. Do you have a preference?
  - F. What ratio of guides to participants were on the tours?
- II. What was the training like?
  - A. Any special regulations or certifications required?
  - B. What was your previous experience?
  - C. Any major challenges of the job?
- III. As a tour guide...
  - A. What would you consider the pros of the job?
  - B. What would you consider the cons of the job?
  - C. What would you consider the compensation or rewards to be?
- IV. Is there room for growth as a tour guide, should you be interested?
- V. If you were in the role to hire a tour guide, what skills would you look for?
  - A. What personality traits?
- VI. If you knew then what you know now, would you do anything differently?

## Appendix B: Letter of Permission - Interview Assignment



## Letter of Permission – Interview Assignment

Dear Participant,

You are being asked to participate in an interview exploring **adventure tour guides**. The purpose of this interview is to **gain a better understanding of the interview process**, and will fulfill a course requirement for CRIM 3821, Socio-Ethnographic Research Methods, a course in the Department of Criminology at Thompson Rivers University. To this end, I will ask you a number of questions about your experience as an **adventure tour guide**. These questions are designed to lead to a broader unstructured conversation. I will record your answers to the questions and the conversation that follows by taking notes. The interview will be conducted on Microsoft Teams, will last approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and will not include any remuneration.

All interviews are anonymous; I will not record your name, contact details, or any other information that might identify you in the final written report. I will use a pseudonym when referring to this interview. All notes/recordings will be protected until they are destroyed at the conclusion of this project.

If at any point during this interview you experience stress, anxiety, or discomfort, you are free to decline to answer questions or to conclude the meeting. Please note that you have the right to withdraw, to not answer questions, and to terminate participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email at [brennanb18@mytru.ca](mailto:brennanb18@mytru.ca) or phone 1-647-968-7980. If you have concerns about the research, you may wish to contact the course faculty member Andreas Tomaszewski at [atomaszewski@tru.ca](mailto:atomaszewski@tru.ca) or the Chair of Ethics at TRU-REB@tru.ca or 250.828.5000.

Finally, please complete the permission form below and email it to me at [brennanb18@mytru.ca](mailto:brennanb18@mytru.ca). I look forward to future communications.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Brennan', is written over a horizontal line.

## References:

Becker, H. (1967). Whose side are we on? *Social Problems*, 14(3), 239-247.

Dilley, P. (2000). Conducting successful interviews: Tips for intrepid research. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 131-137. doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip3903\_3

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2017). *The practice of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN: 9781452268088

Price, B. (2002). Laddered questions and qualitative data research interviews. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 37(3), 273-281. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.2002.02086.x