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ANTH 323: Field Methods in Cultural Anthropology

**Semi Structured Interview**

I interviewed my informant on Sunday afternoon in the Commons here on campus. It was the place where my informant suggested. We sat in the corner, closest to the main doors but furthest from the CUB desk. There were some strange things going on at this time, as a group of fraternity brothers walked through the CUB loudly shortly before the interview, and later came back during the interview. It was not very noticeable in the recording, other than the fact that the informant made a statement about it, but overall it was not a large problem. There was also a group that at times was fairly loud sitting nearby, and they can definitely be heard in the recording, but this also never created a problem. Very few of the tables, overall, were occupied and traffic was low. When transcribing, I was able to understand nearly everything that my informant was saying. When I could not, it did not have anything to do with this group, and they were extremely few and minor.

I was a little worried about the location due to noise, but also because some of the words the informant may have said were socially unacceptable. However, my informant was extremely open, direct and talkative and I do not believe this had an impact on him at all. This was probably not the most optimal location or time at this location for an interview, but everything went perfectly fine.

In listening to the recording, I found I am good at coming up with follow-up questions, as well as the guiding “yeahs,” and “uh-huhs,” that show that I’m listening. Overall, I did not use entailment statements very often, and when I did they were successful (see minute 22, or marked by %%entail). I used a lot of “how” type questions, but, I did not use “why” directly often. I usually simply repeated what I wanted more information about, and this answered my questions (see minute 21, or %%parrot). I did not really personalize or depersonalize questions, but my questions usually weren’t personal—they were dealing with Anonymous itself. As above, he was extremely open and so even as he did things which may have been ethically a bit questionable, he talked about them. I avoided using leading questions on the plan, which I did follow, but on some on-the-spot follow-ups I did lead into certain answers, after having him answer independently. This is most notable when we talked about racism (see minute 25:15, or %%racism). He gave his own answer, then I gave him my conclusions and he strongly agreed with them, though they were not his own ideas. I did some of phased assertions, trying to show that I knew about Anonymous. In this case, I did not find it very effective, other than a short discussion we had on Courage Wolf (see minute 38:25 or marker %%cw).

I found that overall I was leading the discussion well, and did not have to do too much of the talking, which to me, for an interview or conversation, means that it goes very well. I did find that for the pre-conceptions already made, I tended to apply them when I didn’t hear what I expected. For the most part, he agreed with them, and so it was good for confirmation, but also notable that they were not his ideas. He thought some of them were quite good, however. A few times I also said that “I know about that.” For the most part, I don’t believe this was harmful, and I didn’t mean to say that he shouldn’t keep talking about something. There was only one case where I thought it had such an effect, which is the first time I made the %%share mark. I took it as knowledge, and broke off from it. I did not mean to convey that he shouldn’t talk about it and we can move on, and that’s exactly what I did this time. I realized this was not a good thing to say and ceased to do it.

I used my questionnaire, and asked every single question and sub-question except for one, which in the end made no sense to me. It was the very last sub-question:

How do you think pop culture in general has influenced Anonymous?

* 1. Does this make raids less effective?

I did not ask the sub-question, I forgot why I put it there. The rest of the questions I asked, but changed the words slightly without altering meaning. Overall I followed the guide very closely, and it worked well. I did come up with follow-up questions to things he had said on the spot, and this happened often. It was usually quite good though.

Overall, I do not believe that my informant provided with inaccurate data. The only issue I find worth mentioning was that he was softened a statement from “everyone” to “most people,” as he was trying to speak “anthropologically.” As I caught that however, and he’s right, I don’t see it as inaccurate. As above, he was extremely open on questionable things that he has done, and used socially unacceptable terms in public. I trust the information a lot. As above, my conclusions altered his opinions in some cases, but as I have his original ideas too, I can account for this.

Overall, this interview was extremely successful, and my informant was excellent. I believe that he really enjoyed it too, given the energy he put into it and in some of his reactions. He has offered to be of help in the future, and I could not ask for anyone better. The information gained from this interview is invaluable.