Introduction to Oral History

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TOHA is a network for oral history practitioners that promotes the use of professional interviewing and archiving standards.

- Established in 1983
- Annual sessions with TSHA
- Annual conferences since 2012
TOHA continues to expand our network.

- Working towards a more diverse membership of practitioners
- Being proactive in sharing resources, support, and skills,
- Actively seeking presentations outside academic circles
Presentation Outline

- What is oral history?
- Project development
- Interview process
- Preservation
What is oral history?
Oral history is...
<table>
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<th>Why is it important?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fill gaps in historical record</td>
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<td>Capture diverse viewpoints</td>
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<td>Help us understand change</td>
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<td>Enrich historical understanding</td>
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OLD
RICH
WHITE
HETEROSEXUAL
MALE
What oral history is not
Oh yeah, Storycorps, right?

Kinda? But, not really..

Abra in 2009
The short film also inspired Judge’s live-action feature debut, *Office Space*: a box-office-flop-turned-cult-classic that ultimately became one of the most watchable workplace comedies of all time. The movie, which starred mostly unknown actors – besides Matt Foley and Bill Livingston) revenge against the office’s coversheets. (Did you get that joke?)

**AGAINST THE MACHINE**

Another scene came from writing the *Beavis and Butt-Head* movie, which we were working on in New York. I used to tell him I was going to walk in and watch the movie was done and videotape it.

Naidu: We debated, “Okay, in what authentic way would the mob beat you in a field like this?”

**Livingston:** I was like the mafia don walking around in the back with a bat. I don’t actually touch the printer during “the hit.”

**Naidu:** Years later I was in New York. Some *Goodfella*-looking guy says to me, “We’re huge fans. What you did with that printer was so authentic.” I think I got props from the mob. [*Laughs*]
1. It’s an interview - it is an exchange between a knowledgeable interviewer and a narrator.
2. It’s recorded, preserved, and made available to others.
3. It’s historical in intent - it looks for insights and perspectives into the past.
4. It’s recognizes the element of subjectivity.
5. It’s an inquiry that is in-depth.
Oral history is a methodology grounded in process

“An interview becomes oral history only when it has been recorded, processed in some way, and made available...Availability for general research, reinterpretation, and verification defines oral history.” – Donald Ritchie

“Oral history is characterized by a structured, systematic planning process, thorough research, careful consideration of copyright, emphasis on the depth and detail of information collected, and adherence to strict processing techniques.” – Barbara Sommers
ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Principles & Best Practices

Legal and Ethical Considerations

A Guide to Oral History and the Law

Donor agreements
Narrator rights
Examples/scenarios of legal matters

Use OHA’s Principles and Best Practices as your ethical guide

Building trust and rapport with your narrators
Informed consent
Correct representation of narrators
Project Development
SO YOU WANT TO DO AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRAINING

RESEARCH
Project Planning

Start with the end in mind

What does “finished” look like?

How will you track your progress?

Who is responsible for what?
Project Design

• Title
• Topic/Purpose
• Methodology
• Scope: time, place
• Potential narrators
• Selected archives
• Planned outcomes
• Time frame for completing project
Interview Process

Before, During, and After
Pre-Interview Checklist

Build rapport with your narrators

Go over your project (your project design will help with this)

Choose your recording location

Check to see if there are any photos, scrapbooks, or other items available

Discuss potential topics and gather and biographical data that may be missing

Develop your project outline
Items to have on hand

Your outline
Recording equipment
Notepad and pen/pencil
A watch (or silent time-keeping device)
Forms
Extra batteries, power cords, etc.
During the Interview

Use open-end questions and discussion

“How did you handle…?”

“Tell me about your experience with…”

Get examples and ask for elaborations

Allow the narrator to fully share their experience

Take notes during the interview

A good interviewer is a good listener
Post-Interview

Be sure to thank your narrators for their time

Make a copy of the interview (and leave the original alone)

Transcribe

Keep your narrators in the loop

Preserve your interviews
Preservation

“The obsolescence of all media formats should be assumed and planned for.”

– OHA
File Storage and Repositories
File Formats
Metadata Task Force

TDL presentation 12/10/2020

File Descriptions - aka METADATA
That's all Folks!
Resources

- Remote Interviewing Practices - https://www.oralhistory.org/remote-interviewing-resources/
- Baylor University Institute for Oral History - https://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/
- Voces Summer Research Institute - https://journalism.utexas.edu/home/voces-oral-history-research-summer-institute
- Oral History in the Digital Age - http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu
- Texas Oral History Association - https://www.baylor.edu/toha/
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