



The University of Texas at San Antonio

Oral History and Women and War Roundtable

Project

Dr. Kirsten Gardner

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Oral History: Women & War

By

Cristobal Lopez and Teresa Beckelheimer

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Women and War Oral History Project

Introduction

Historians have long shared their interpretations on the meaning of history, how it is conducted, and the type of sources utilized in historical research. One aspect that has been contiguous in historical writing and widely agreed upon amongst historians is the emphasis on factual evidence. It was in 1961 when renowned British historian E.H. Carr defined history as "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past."¹ However, defining what is to be considered factual has led to much discourse amongst historians.

For long, historians have held written documents as the primary source of factual evidence. However, problems arise when historians solely rely on written sources. First, written sources are often left by historical actors with the means to record written records. In many societies across the globe, it was only the social elite class that carried this distinction.² Second, not all societies recorded and share their history through written records. In his 2001 book, *Our Elders Teach Us: Maya-Kaqchikel Historical Perspectives*, historian David Carey illuminated how in the indigenous Kaqchikel Guatemalan-Mayan society, elder men served as the keepers of history and they passed down their histories through oral tradition.³ This form of record keeping allows for historians to study the history of societies that do not keep written records. However, history kept and passed through oral tradition highlights another issue. Women are often left out

¹ E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, (Penguin Classics: U.K., 2018), 26.

² Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999), 5.

³ David Carey, Allan Burns, *Our Elders Teach Us: Maya-Kaqchikel Historical Perspectives: Xkib'ij Kan Qate' Qatata'*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 9.

of the record keeping process or overshadowed in greater narratives. Thus, how can we examine history and historical evidence that is shrouded in uncertainties?

One historical method that historians can utilize to recover the voices of those excluded from traditional methods of recording history is through oral history. Historians began to use oral histories in the late 1940s under a strict set of guidelines that dictated the interview process. However, the strict "scientific method" way of conducting oral histories faced much criticism from many historians.⁴ It was not until the 1970s that oral history and social history (bottom-up perspective) began to gain popularity. Before then, the historical field regarded oral histories as factual evidence, not in line with empirical evidence.⁵ However, through recorded interviews between an interviewer and a narrator, oral history prevailed as a beneficial historical method. Oral histories provided a vehicle for empowerment for those often excluded by traditional written records.

Since gaining major popularity, historians and scholars have shared their insights on the importance of oral histories and how they define the practice. In his step-by-step guide, *Doing Oral History*, Historian Donald Ritchie defined oral histories as the collection of "memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through interviews."⁶ Sociologist Paul Thompson argued that oral histories can "give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place."⁷ Oral historian Alessandro Portelli contended

⁴ Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *the Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 581-582.

⁵ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999), 231.

⁶ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.

⁷ Paul Thompson, "Voices of the Past," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 34.

that oral histories "tell us less about events than about their meaning," by revealing the unknown events of the "unknown aspects of known events."⁸ Through oral histories, historians can shift the focus of historical analysis from a top-down perspective to a bottom-up perspective by utilizing the voices of ordinary people by granting them space and place in the greater narrative.

Nevertheless, conducting and utilizing oral histories takes practice, training, and is not something that can easily be jumped into. Much preparation goes into conducting an interview before the interview even begins. Is the interview going to be in person or online? What type of recording equipment will I use for each scenario? Does the equipment require special training? Do I have the proper pre-interview documentation? Once the technical questions are answered, we then must consider the questions we are going to ask, follow up questions, topics to avoid, and topics we would like to address but are unsure if they should be avoided or not.

Finally, after the interview is conducted and completed, we have to transcribe the interview. Will I be utilizing an A.I. computer software for transcription or transcribe the interview manually, which can take upwards of eight hours per recorded hour. How much do I edit the transcript? Do I take out the "um's," "right's," "mhm's," and "yep's?" Can I edit a transcription too much? Will taking out too much out of the transcript remove the narrators emotions? After addressing these questions, we then turn to the preservation of the oral history. Where will I be storing my oral history? Which archive will take it? Will an archive take my oral history? Without training, these questions may seem difficult to answer and address, such was the case for some graduate students in Dr. Kirsten Gardner's *Oral History: Women and War* course.

⁸ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 52.

University of Texas – San Antonio (UTSA) Associate Professor of History, Dr. Kirsten Gardner, along with Assistant Professor of History at Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU), Dr. Valerie Martinez, co-direct the Women’s Voices of Military City, U. S. A. Oral History Project, a project dedicated to women and war. This project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, began in 2018, two years before the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the project is to take a life history approach in understanding the role of women in the military, asking the narrator to tell us about her life from childhood to the present.

Texas Public Radio highlighted the Women’s Voices of Military, U. S. A. project on a December broadcast stating, “As part of the project, they will also comb through archival holdings at the 37th Training Wing History Office at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland and the Fort Sam Houston Museum. They will then digitize their findings in an archive accessible to the public.”⁹ Dr. Gardner explains that the project not only provides the voices of women veterans through oral history, but provides an understanding for the students as to the importance of oral history, “By getting our students out of the classroom, doing research, doing projects, digitizing, transcribing, they both learn the material but also gain some skill sets that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.”¹⁰

In the years prior to the pandemic, the project organized an oral history day to conduct in-person interviews with San Antonio area women veterans. The event was a success with plans for future dates to conduct oral history interviews. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and lock downs in place for the San Antonio area for the foreseeable future, plans had to pivot to

⁹ Carson Frame, “UTSA Awarded Grant To Collect Oral Histories From Women In The Military,” *Texas Public Radio*, <https://www.tpr.org/military-veterans-issues/2018-12-24/utsa-awarded-grant-to-collect-oral-histories-from-women-in-the-military>, accessed March 29, 2022.

¹⁰ Carson Frame, “UTSA Awarded Grant To Collect Oral Histories From Women In The Military,” *Texas Public Radio*, <https://www.tpr.org/military-veterans-issues/2018-12-24/utsa-awarded-grant-to-collect-oral-histories-from-women-in-the-military>, accessed March 29, 2022.

allow remote interviews. This also allowed the project to reach out beyond local veterans in the San Antonio area, allowing narrators to participate across the country and expanding the project to focus on women veterans in general. The name of the project unofficially became Women & War Oral History Project.

In 2021, graduate students from UTSA and OLLU began to work on the project remotely, reaching out to women veterans both local to San Antonio and across the nation. Utilizing Zoom for online conferencing, students restructured the project to a digital format and interviews resumed in the summer. While working remotely lost some in-person connections between narrator and interviewer, the reach to a wider audience of women veterans allowed for more oral histories than anticipated. Over 15 women were interviewed in the late summer and fall of 2021. Video and audio were captured by Zoom and the interviews were transcribed. These interviews included women veterans from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. They have served in varying lengths of time from 27 years to 2 years. Some retired many years ago, while others are currently serving. Interviews halted during the winter holiday break and began again during the spring semester.

In the spring 2022 semester Dr. Kirsten Gardner led a class of 14 students for the *Oral History: Women and War* graduate course at UTSA. Each student was assigned to conduct two oral history interviews with women veterans during the semester. The class consisted of students with varying degrees of experience with oral history interviews. Some students had a military background, while others were new to military service and military vernacular. Many lessons were learned, with an end product of Best Practices for future students participating in the project. The class wanted to arm future students with clear guidance and lessons learned from

their experiences, to allow smooth transitions from semester to semester, in hopes that the project will continue for some time.

Throughout the class, students were eager to compare notes each week from their experiences during the pre-interview phase, the interview, and the post-interview activities. Each week new stories from students' experiences in preparation for their interview and the interview itself. Many students had shared experiences while others had some unusual issues or unexpected topics that arose during the interviews. Often, class became more of a group therapy session as we bared our own emotions that would surface from the powerful stories of women veterans. It became apparent through the many facets of the stories of the women veterans that it is imperative to gather these oral histories for historical context and research.

These class discussions led several students to organize a round-table panel to discuss various topics of the oral history process, in particular to the Women and War project. What follows is the project plan, the execution, and the transcript of the round-table discussion and a Best Practice list that we hope will be useful for future oral historians.

Project Plan

The purpose of this roundtable is to discuss key topics in conducting oral history interviews with women veterans of all branches of the military, from the pre-interview phase through the passing of a veteran's oral history collection to an archive housed with the UTSA John Peace Library.

The expected roundtable will take place sometime in April 2022 and will be conducted in person. It will consist of one moderator and four to five graduate student panel members. There will be an audio recording and/or video recording. A transcript will be created and added to an anthology, edited by students of Dr. Kirsten Gardner's Oral History: Women and War graduate class. The audio/video will be available to be placed on the Women and War Oral History Project website.¹¹ Included in the project will be a comprehensive list of Best Practices for oral history interviews, concentrating on the Women and War Oral History Project. These best practices will be gleaned from the students of Dr. Kirsten Gardner's Oral History: Women and War graduate class and this document will also be included in the class anthology. The final project will consist of the following:

1. Oral history roundtable audio/video
2. Transcript
3. Pictures
4. Best Practices document

¹¹ "Women's Voices of Military City, U.S.A.: An Oral History Project Dedicated to Women and War," accessed April 27, 2022, <https://womenandwar.omeka.net/>.

Discussion questions to be highlighted during the roundtable will cover the four key elements of oral history work including preparation, interviewing, preservation, and access. A sample of questions follow.

1. For some of you, this oral history project was the first-time interviewing narrators. How did you feel at the beginning of the project and what was your comfort level before getting started?
2. Let's talk about your first interview. What was your biggest takeaway from the pre-interview phase? Your biggest hurdle?
3. How was the process of collecting pre-interview and consent forms from the narrator?
4. Tell us about your initial contact with the narrator.
5. What concerns did your narrator have prior to the interview?
6. Tell us about the logistics of your interview. Was it in-person and recorded or was it conducted online through Zoom or another video chat program?
7. Tell us about your narrator and your first interview.
8. Were there any issues, technical or otherwise, during your interview? Tell us about them.
9. Pre-planned questions to ask the narrator were provided to you by the class. How did these questions help you during the interview?
10. How did your narrator's story affect you? Did you utilize any special deep listening methods?
11. What lessons did you learn that you wanted to note for your second interview?
12. What technological issues did you come across when saving and transcribing the interview?

13. Tell me about the transcription phase. Was this a more involved process than you expected?
14. For those of you that have conducted a second interview already, compare the two experiences. What lessons did you learn from the first interview that you plan to use for your second interview?
15. What has stuck with you from your narrator(s)' stories?
16. Are you a member of the military community? How did being an insider or outsider help frame your connection with the narrator?
17. For the men who interviewed veteran women, did being an outsider cause any awkwardness during the interview?
18. What takeaways from the Women and War Oral History Project will you incorporate into future oral history projects?
19. What one or two best practices would you add to an overall list?

***Women and War Oral History Project Roundtable:
An Oral History of Oral History***

Participants:

Andrea Varga

Cristobal Lopez

Daniel Hendley

Lexi Howard

Teri Beckelheimer

April 25, 2022

Transcript

Teri Beckelheimer

Welcome to the Women and War Oral History Project Roundtable. I'm Teri Beckelheimer. Throughout this graduate class students were eager to compare notes each week from their experiences during the pre-interview phase, the interview, and the post-interview activities of the Women and War Oral History Project. This led several students to organize a round table panel to discuss various topics of the oral history process, in particular to the Women and War Project. The purpose of this roundtable is to discuss key topics in conducting oral history interviews with women veterans of all branches of the military. So, let's go around the table, introduce yourself, and then answer this question. For some of you, this oral history project is the first time interviewing Narrators. How did you feel at the beginning of the project and what was your comfort level?

Daniel Hendley

Yeah, absolutely. So, my name is Daniel Hendley, and this was my first semester working with oral histories, especially in the Interview-Narrator dynamic. I was not very comfortable going into the first interview, and I think that's kind of natural for anyone doing their first, doing their first interview. I had only used oral histories very limitedly, very sparsely. In my previous research I hadn't really covered any topics that really call for that, for those types of sources. So yeah, I guess I'm kind of a classical historian in the sense that I like my sources dead I guess.

Lexi Howard

I'm Lexi Howard. This is also my first time ever using oral history and taking an oral history class, and I was really nervous in my first interview, but I feel like my first narrator really helped me along. And her personality really helped me get through that interview and make me more comfortable.

Andrea Varga

I'm Andrea Varga, I also was quite nervous starting my first interview. I was excited because I think oral history has a lot of value in this field, and I do think that it brings back a lot of what Daniel mentioned in the dead history. So, I think that, you know, us learning this skill is very valuable.

Cristobal Lopez

My name is Cristobal Lopez. I've done oral histories before in the past. So not very many, but I've done a few. So going into this project I guess my comfort level was, I was comfortable doing them, but I feel like you're still you're still pretty nervous, regardless of you know, what your comfort level is because every interview is different. None of them are the same. So, you know, going into when you don't really know what to expect. But yeah, I was, I was really happy to just be a part of this project and to be a part of a class and actually get to have some sort of training because before I was a self-trained oral historian, so it was nice to actually learn the proper way to conduct these interviews.

Teri Beckelheimer

Well, I actually had started with the project back over the summer and into the fall, and I had done some oral histories before that, but it had been a while and I was a little uncomfortable just because the people that I was interviewing were people that I didn't know, where in the past who I did interview, weren't all familiar to me. So, that was a little nerve racking, I guess. And then there I went about a month or so until class started, and the people that I interviewed for class were people I knew, and I still felt a little uncomfortable. And one I had even already interviewed once before was doing again, but there's still a little bit of nerves because you never know if there's going to be technical glitches.

Teri Beckelheimer

Yeah, next question. So, tell us about your initial contact with the Narrator. How was the process?

Andrea Varga

Well, you know, I reached out to my Narrator, and I sent to our invitation as requested, and she gave me two word responses. That made me feel very comfortable, you know. I was being off to a great start. I tried reaching out again, you know, I tried being very friendly, saying, you know, feel free to ask any questions, or if you have any information that you would like to say, and she said, "Great, thank you." So, I was like, oh joy, this is gonna be a very easy interview to conduct. But then the day of interview came about and poor thing was having difficulties with her internet, and we managed to solve it. And then once we got on to the interview, she was a joy, and she just opened up and just wanted to share her story. So, it showed to me that initial contact versus actually conducting the interview can be two very different stories.

Teri Beckelheimer

I think sometimes when you have those technical glitches, you kind of build a rapport trying to work through them. And that helps out too.

Cristobal Lopez

It's almost a way of like breaking the ice a little bit.

Teri Beckelheimer

Absolutely.

Daniel Hendley

Yeah, bonding over shared, I don't know hardship, I guess. I had the exact opposite experience, my first interview like I, we had almost zero technical glitches and like, even on first contact, reaching out to of course I had known her previously, barely, she was involved in the same organization as my wife, but even, like, reaching out originally was very, like, you know, was more than willing to help, actually helped us out in the project as a whole, like, getting more Narrators to sign on for the project. So yeah, it was very, she made it very easy.

Lexi Howard

Yeah, my initial contact with my Narrator was very similar to yours (Andrea), one word answers. On the day, she was 15 minutes late. So, I was really nervous, that it wasn't gonna go well. But then, during the actual interview, she was very talkative, and very expressive, she was very easy to, she was very easy to talk to.

Cristobal Lopez

So, with me, we got the opportunity to interview people that we knew personally. So, my first Narrator was someone that I work with someone that I, we work in the same building. So, I see her every morning when I go into work. So that was nice, you know, there's already a little, you know, like a friendship there an established friendship. So that made it really easy. And then for my second interview, I interviewed my brother in law's sister. So, I've known her for, for a long time. So, I had it pretty easy on that part.

Teri Beckelheimer

Both of the Narrator's I've worked with were familiar to me. They were friends that I knew well before this. And so, they all went really well, and I didn't have any issues. But I was always afraid that there's going to be technical issues, you always worry, that's always in the back of your mind.

Teri Beckelheimer

So, let's talk about the logistics of your interviews. Was it online, in-person? Are there any technical issues? Do you want to start off Cristobal?

Cristobal Lopez

Of course. So, both of my interviews were in person. Technical issues with my first one, there wasn't. So, technology wise, no. However, we, we recorded the interview at the Mission San Jose Visitor Center. So, we both worked for the National Park Service. And the area, the conference room that we did the interview in, I was told that there isn't a necessarily like, a formal way to reserve that room, you just kind of do. And then being on a Saturday, I was told, "Oh, no one's gonna go in there, you're fine. You'll have it the whole time." Well, about 20 minutes in the interview, someone kind of peeks in the glass door, and they're like waving at me. So, I pause the interview, and then like, "hey," like, you know, "what's up?" They're like "Are you going to be in here for a while we have a meeting in here, a training, and it's going to be like, two hours." I was like, "Well, I guess I'll move." So, we pause the interview and then we just, we relocated to the break room. So, since it was a Saturday I think there wasn't that many people working. So, we're lucky, we're able to continue the interview there uninterrupted, which is nice.

For my second interview, I did have technical issues. So, I didn't video record the first interview, but for the second interview, I did a video recording. And since it was in person, I recorded it with my own camera equipment. But I was, I did not know that the camera stopped recording at 30 minutes. This was new to me. So, you know, we're talking we're mid conversation and all I hear is *beep* and Laura, my Narrator she looks at the camera and she looks at me, she's like, "I think that was your camera." And I'm like, "oh," so I got up and I looked and yeah, it was, it had to stop recording. So, I noticed that it stopped right at 30 minutes. So, what I did, again, because their interview went over an hour, I knew that I was going to have, you know it was going to cut off again. So, we're talking and I saw that we're approaching 30 minutes and we're at a good stopping point so I stopped you know, pause the recording on my recording device, pause the recording on the camera, and then you know, we took a little bit of a break and then we finished the interview. So yeah.

Teri Beckelheimer

Did it feel like it derailed your conversation at all?

Daniel Hendley

That was my question.

Cristobal Lopez

Honestly, not really, no, it almost kind of gave us a chance to, like re-group, to kind of gather some thoughts. There was instances, especially in my first interview, where there were some things that, you know, were preferred to be said off camera. Um, so that kind of gave us a chance to talk about those type of things. So no, I don't think it derailed me, I think it actually did the opposite.

Teri Beckelheimer

Well, that's good. Daniel, how about you?

Daniel Hendley

So, I didn't have any technical difficulties like, like you're talking about, the only thing I can think of, like I said, my interview went fairly smooth. As far as the technology side of the house, the only thing that the only thing that, the only thing that happened was this is purely human error. I had the wrong date on my script for the introduction. So, I started the recording, and didn't even think about it just read straight through. And it got to the incorrect date and my Narrator, Deborah was like, "Nope, no, it's not, that's not today's date." And I was like, "You are correct, that is not today's date." So, I stop the recording and started over again.

Lexi Howard

Both my interviews were online. I didn't run into too many technical difficulties. The only one I had was doing my first interview, my Narrator got up in the middle of it to go charge her phone so there's a lot of moving around. But other than that, I didn't really have any technical issues.

Andrea Varga

Well, I mean, as I mentioned before, I first had technical difficulties with my Narrator trying to get into our zoom meeting at all, and then once the Zoom meeting started, quite a few times throughout this meeting, her internet kept cutting out. So, I have unfortunately, at the most crucial point of the interview, where she breaks down crying about why the Army was the best decision of her life. Internet cut out, there's no camera, there's no audio, and there was no way to go back in time and get that back. And unfortunately, she decided to have this meeting on her phone, and she had the kind of alarm and that buzzed and she put it down on a table. So quite a few times throughout the meeting, probably every couple of minutes, you know, you would just share *buzz buzz, buzz buzz.* And then with my second Narrator, she had dogs. But luckily, it was only like, once or twice throughout the meeting, she's like, I'm so sorry, those are my dogs. So, there was nothing I could really see that, you know, please don't put your dog's away, and I just kind of had to grin and bear that. It is what it is, you're grateful that they're willing to share their stories with you.

Daniel Hendley

Before we move on, there's another point that I really liked to make. Because the reason the reason that we were on Zoom for all of our interviews was because of COVID-19. And I think that all of our experiences, you know, and all of our technical difficulties of human error and having to go on, go to class online, online via zoom has really kind of showed us how increasingly important technical, technological literacy is, especially when we're talking about history and the humanities now it's becoming is becoming vitally important that we know how to use technology.

Teri Beckelheimer

Good point, good point. I didn't have any issues with the two that I interviewed during class. However, one of my early ones that I did prior to class was a friend of mine. And when I saved the video from Zoom, from Zoom it put it out, I think, on the UTSA wherever it goes to in the cloud, but at the time, you only had like eight days, and then it would delete. And even though

Dr. Gardner reminded me, I did not heed her advice. And *puff* it's gone. So, I had the opportunity then for class to re-interview one of the Narrators. And it actually went much better, and I think part of that was because I already knew her story a little bit so I knew how to guide the interview. So that went really well. The other thing to comment on is I have cats and when I do these interviews, I have to turn off my grandfather clock. I have to get all the cats outside of the office and they still will go to the door with the door closed and cry. So, I have my husband corral them out. There's always those issues when you're doing it from home and doing it on Zoom. It is what it is.

Cristobal Lopez

Right. I want to also share with you (Daniel) that I also said the incorrect date. When I did my first interview. I don't have, I have no idea why. And I never, I never caught it. And we never caught in the interview. So, when I was transcribing it, I looked at the date, and I was like, "I did that on a Saturday. That wasn't Saturday." So, I looked at the calendar, I double checked, and yeah, so I made it, I made a note on the transcript like, you know, the date is wrong on this. Like before the transcripts started, luckily, it was like the first thing you see.

Daniel Hendley

Yeah. So, as I was doing my pre interview, that's what I was, like, kind of typing up my question checklist of like, you know, going through the questions and talking, talking with Deborah, and, you know, trying to get all that situated, trying to be proactive and be kind of ahead of the game ended up biting me in the end.

Andrea Varga

Yeah, actually, it was thanks to you (Daniel), that you mentioned that in our class meeting, that I was like, Okay, I'm gonna write ahead of time, my script and make sure I'm double triple checking. Make sure and I'm not gonna write the wrong date and say it incorrectly.

Teri Beckelheimer

You make a good point about talking about these things through class. Sometimes it felt like a therapy session, in class, just discussing what all we were going through is very helpful. So, let's go on to another question. What lessons did you learn from your first interview? And how did you apply them to your second interview? Lexi let's start with you.

Lexi Howard

I learned so much from my first interview. My first interview I had, despite building a barrier in front of my door, my dogs still cried to be let in. At one point, my mom yelled at me to let my dogs in. I've never interviewed someone before. So, at times, I tried to relate to them when I was responding back to them, because I wasn't really sure how to respond to their answers. So, I tried to relate a little bit. And then also, I kind of just read off the questions a little bit too much. So, my second interview, I worked on responding less. I also worked on creating follow up questions that related to their answers from the questions. I made sure there's less distractions in between

me asking a question and her answering, I would mute my end. So just to just to make sure there was the least amount of background noise as possible.

Andrea Varga

I mean, I can relate to pretty much 90% of what you're saying, thanks to our class discussions, as I just mentioned previously, because that was a lot of what was brought up in our workshopping, to mute our voices on our end while the Narrator's speaking, to work on transitioning throughout our discussions, and I also kind of reordered the questions for myself personally, because in my first interview, my Narrator broke down too soon, throughout the transitioning of the questions. And because we moved on from the subject so soon, she kind of didn't have time to really express herself. So, she kind of had to close up her emotions too soon. And I couldn't really circle to the topic, and allow herself to fully explain what happened and everything. And no matter how much I tried to circle back, she just closed off, and wouldn't be able to open up again. So, I tried to reorder things a little bit smoother, and for my second interview, it actually happened to work out a little bit better. And my Narrator was able to transition in a way where she was able to open up and share a very personal story, a very touching story and I was trying my hardest not to cry on my end. So, I was grateful that I was able to be muted because tears are starting to build it. So, it was definitely helpful to have the workshopping on our end.

Teri Beckelheimer

So, Daniel, what lessons did you learn from your first interview that you could apply to you maybe your second interview?

Daniel Hendley

Oh, like Andrea, I kind of learned that, you know, the pace of the interview is dependent on the person, and I think you have to be a really experienced interviewer to be able to go into the situation you just automatically know and be able to dictate and allow the Narrator enough freedom to be able to express themselves like they like, like they should, like we want them to, but mine was. So, a couple of things that I learned was just reinforcing ideas that we talked about in classes how important active listening is, because I had a couple of situations where my Narrator would cover where she was in a certain time or place, you know, and I would try and re-confirm like, "Was this some, was this in this place, or was it somewhere else?" It'd be like, "No, I already said," like, Oh, got me, got me a couple of times. And that happened a couple of times in my first interview, so yeah, just reinforcing those active listening skills you know.

Teri Beckelheimer

What about you, Cristobal?

Cristobal Lopez

Um, so, I completely agree with you (Daniel) on active listening. And, you know, it's difficult because especially whenever you interview, and so this was my first time interviewing someone who was in the military, veteran, or, or active duty. And one of the things that I did not, I was not prepared for is the amount of moving that happens when you're in the military. So, it's a lot of

dates. So, the first Narrator, that I interviewed, she was stationed somewhere different, like every two years, and she was in for about 18. So, my paper where I had my notes was like, I drew a timeline. So, I can try to track everything like she was saying, "Well, I moved here on this day, and then I moved here on this date, and then after that I was here," and then you know, you're trying to take notes of everything that happened within those dates. So, it's it is difficult, you know, and it's sometimes it's difficult to keep track of all of that, especially whenever someone had a really long military career. But another thing that I learned from my first interview that I tried to prepare a little bit more for my second interview, was the amount of acronyms that are in the military. So, I found myself when I was transcribing, doing a lot of googling of like, what is this acronym and what is it stands for so I can put it in parenthesis. So that caught me off guard a little bit. And I tried to, in my second interview, I tried to you know, they would say acronym, and after they would finish I would say, "So can you explain what this acronym was? Or what is this stands for?" Because I don't I don't know what all of them are. So yeah, those were my experiences.

Teri Beckelheimer

I had that same issue where, even though I married into a military family, I'm not military, I didn't grow up in that. And a lot of times, I did not know what they were talking about, some I did. And although all the different branches are similar, there's very different key words and vernacular used between each of them. But the lesson that I learned, was more technical, from the first and the second. When I was transcribing that first interview, I realized how much I interject and I verbally respond. And I really need to just shake my head and not interject, because so much of that transcription process, I was having to stop and add, you know, I said, "Uhuh," or I said, "Sure." I am really bad about saying "Sure" and "Yes," and you have to go through it that made it so tedious, so tedious.

Cristobal Lopez

I have the same issue, and I catch myself. You know, when you're looking back at your transcript, you're listening and you're reading along, and it was like a random "Yea" there like, oh, that's mine. Like it's going to, you know, either start a new paragraph or just, you know, get rid of it. I have that issue. That's bad.

Daniel Hendley

But again, it's that balance. It's finding that balance over doing a bunch of interviews that you've learned, like, how much to interject without, you know, without your Narrator thinking that you've just glanced over on the in the other window, you know, that you've just switched off and giving your Narrator the space to actually talk without you "Yea," and "Uhuh."

Andrea Varga

It's also the fact of how we show empathy because that's just our natural reaction that when something, somebody is trying to express something like, "Oh, yeah," like we're trying not to interject. And that's just our short shorthand or verbal shorthand of trying to say that I'm empathizing with you. And when I was doing as Lexi mentioned, to turn off my microphone, I

was finding it so difficult to try to show my Narrator that I'm here I'm listening to I'm feeling every emotional thing you're saying to me. And on my end of the camera, I was still verbally saying, but I had my mic off, so it wouldn't be going into the transcript. And I was trying to just in my face to try to somehow show her as much as I could. So, she could still see it that I was there. You know, I'm not just ignoring the things that you're saying. And you know, the only way that I got confirmation that I did it right is because I know her personally and her brothers sent me a text. And that, you know, she seems so sweet. So like, okay, good I did a good job.

Teri Beckelheimer

I did notice when I worked on the second transcript that I did it much less. So, I did learn from it.

Cristobal Lopez

I found myself now, you know, asking questions with your face. So, like, you're now you're like, agreeing you're trying to respond like, just with your facial expression. So, if someone says something that I understand, I'm like, *facial expression* you kind of give him like, a little tilt like, and they're like, Oh, you don't understand that, you know, let me elaborate or something.

Daniel Hendley

I wonder how would that translate over Zoom though? Because I don't know. I've never really, body language is weird over distance, you know. Test that out for science.

Teri Beckelheimer

Let's move on to another question. And I'll start this one. What has stuck with you from your interviews, any stories?

Teri Beckelheimer

Well, I have a lot of stories that have come out of these. And I think, as you guys, I assume that you'll continue doing oral interviews, you'll find that every, every interview is fascinating. And I interviewed people that were in just a couple of years in the service. And I think the longest serving one was 27 years. So, you can imagine that that was, a lot happened during that time. I had one person who during I believe it was Desert Storm was on the aircraft carrier where everything took off when we first went into Afghanistan, I believe it was, and was acting as a first responder for all the planes coming in and out. I had one that had some issues, getting responses from the military and had to walk away. And so, she was considered AWOL and actually had to go through a court martial, but then everything worked out well. So that was a fascinating story. And just to hear what everyone goes through good and bad. Everyone has some great experience, or maybe has a few bad experiences. But overall, they would do it again. I think that's the one thing I learned is they really appreciate serving and would do it all over again. Daniel what about you?

Daniel Hendley

So, one of the big takeaways, my Narrator she always kind of found herself throughout her life in these in these leadership positions, either through happenstance or for seeking them out herself.

And it's just always this, like, she's a very service minded person. And I think that's fascinating. Like even in her civilian life, she's still figuring out a way to serve veterans and women veterans, especially. It's just kind of the idea that you, you're called to service, you don't just go it's not a job, you know, so it's, so it's a thing that's ingrained in your being that you kind of always have to do I find that kind of interesting about your personality.

Lexi Howard

One of the most impactful stories that I remember, is my second Narrator, she went to go and join the Air Force. And whenever she was doing her, her like beginning stuff, she was one pound overweight, for the Air Force. And they would not let her in. She, I believe she said that she would have to try again in like two months. So, she called up the Navy recruiter, and they let her in automatically, so.

Teri Beckelheimer

Let's ask another question. Did anyone have any insider/outsider experiences? Daniel, would you like to answer that?

Daniel Hendley

So, I do have insider status for these particular interviews being a being a veteran a little bit about my background, I was a Non-Commissioned Officer in the Air Force for a little while I did SIGINT (Signals Intelligence). So having that, especially when we're talking about veterans, it's very, it's very easy to build rapport, because you have a shorthand there that you can, you know, like all the acronyms and everything that you have to read to Google for and like I already know, those things. Those are all internalized already. So, we could just have that have that quick back and forth. And I think I think veterans also develop a particular sense of humor over time, especially, you know, you talked to a veteran that was in for 27 years. My first interview was, Deborah was a retired Chief Master Sergeant, so 25 plus years in the service and I think we developed very particular senses of humor that just would you see it, would you point it out, you know, it's just very easy to make those connections. So, it really does help in that regard with the interview process.

Lexi Howard

So, I didn't really have that much of an insider outsider experience. For me, I didn't know the acronyms. I just had an issue with the base names. I, as much as I tried to put them into Google, it was so difficult to figure out how to spell them.

Teri Beckelheimer

Especially the foreign ones.

Lexi Howard

Yeah, it was, it was so rough. And there was also point where I was interviewing a Narrator who was in the Air Force and I asked her where she did her basic training. And she was like, "We all do them at the same place," and I was like, Ah, so that made me feel like a real outsider.

Andrea Varga

I mean, I had very different experiences, because my first one was kind of an outsider experience, because I did not know her, and at first she treated me that way. She was not very comfortable. But then the more we talked, the more she got more familiar with me and kind of opened up. But then towards the end, she kind of grew more distant again. So, you could feel that it was still not that close, immediate connection. But then my second interview, it was more of an insider experience, because she felt more familiar with me that I knew her family and her relatives. And she was kind of joking with me that "Well, you know, my brother, and you know, my family, you know what we're like, and everything." And she even mentioned it that she herself is an interviewer. So, she knows that the insider outsider is, she's so proud of herself. She was saying how she is planning, and she actually is helping other veterans, with their mental illnesses and such. And she felt comfortable using acronyms with me and everything, even though I personally had no idea what she was saying. She felt comfortable saying that, and she actually mentioned that that, you know, as an insider herself, veterans feel comfortable using acronyms with her. Well, to outsiders, they would never do that. So, I found it so interesting that, you know, technically, I'm an outsider, according to her standards, but yet she was using acronyms with me. So, I thought it was a very interesting perspective to apply that to the class as a whole.

Cristobal Lopez

Absolutely. Yeah. And I think, you know, depending on your relationship, like with the person that you're interviewing, you know, you could be both you can be an insider, in insider and an outsider. So, for example, like with mine, I was not in the military, right. So, like the bases, same thing. One of my Narrators said that they were in Lakenheath. And I was like, "One more time," they said "Lakenheath," And like in my head, I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna Google that later." I have no idea where that's at. It's in England. So yeah, stuff like that was the bases no idea, acronyms, no idea. So, you know, I was an outsider in that regard right. But since I didn't know them personally, that kind of, I think it put me on, like a different level with them. So, my Narrator, the first one that I interviewed, so we both work for the park. So that was nice. You know, like I said, we see each other every morning, she's the first person I see when I walk in office, say your name see how she's doing. She's the last person I see when I leave the office, I always tell her, you know, have a good afternoon or have a good weekend. So that relationship was there. So, we know each other on that level. And also with my second Narrator, like I mentioned, she's my brother in law sister. So, we've known each other for years, years, we've known each other for a long time. And before interview, I took her maternity pictures, and yeah, and I took pictures of her son who just turned one. So that was it was like a fun day. It was like a long, like four hour day that we had. But it was nice, you know. So yeah. So, I think you can be an insider and an outsider in some regards, which, you know, there's, I guess, give and take for both.

Daniel Hendley

Just wait till you get to the acronyms of base names, then you're in for a real one

Cristobal Lopez

There's acronyms for base names?

Daniel Hendley

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Teri Beckelheimer

Well, I didn't really have much of an incentive outsider experience. However, I will say that I married into an Army family. So, most everything I know is Army, and I know how things work with them. But then the two that I interviewed were Air Force. And I also interviewed some Navy people. So, I'd always ask when the first question is, "Where do you go to basic training?" And also keep in mind, I interviewed some people that hadn't, you know, went into the military 30 years ago or more. And so, when I'd asked that they sometimes look at me and say, "We didn't do this training. We did training. It wasn't basic training," or, you know, it was very different. And so, you know, sometimes I feel a little awkward when you ask that question. Why I didn't I know?

Cristobal Lopez

Same experience with my first Narrator she went through ROTC. And you know, when I like I was trying to ask her like, "Where did you do your basic training? Where did you do any sort of training?" She was she told me she's like, did like two weeks during the summer between like her sophomore and junior year, and then they'd like another two weeks or senior year. And then she graduated and she's Second Lieutenant. Yeah, that, you know, yeah, I was very surprised by that.

Daniel Hendley

Well, it's kind of getting to the, but that kind of like, what we're talking about, you know, tailoring our questions for the person that we're interviewing, you know, when we're doing the pre-interview stuff, and kind of figuring out because, yeah, because when you ask, when you ask someone who's a Commissioned Officer was, what their basic training was like, Yeah, you're gonna get a weird response. Because for her, all of her college was basic training, essentially, you know? So yeah, it's just kind of, it's kind of interesting, the different the variety of different experiences that you've had, you know, nobody's story is 100% similar,

Teri Beckelheimer

And out of curiosity, both of you men interviewing women, did that lead to any awkwardness or any issues?

Daniel Hendley

For me it did.

Teri Beckelheimer

It did?

Daniel Hendley

Well, yeah. I mean, we touch on some pretty sensitive topics in our in our interviews, and that being a man definitely informs the way I want to approach those things when I'm dealing with, when I'm dealing with a woman who may or may not have experienced sexual assault, or who or maybe was in a leadership role in the military and had seen sexual assault happen to others. So yeah, it definitely informs it, definitely makes you very hesitant and the way you want to, you want to approach those subjects in the interview.

Cristobal Lopez

Yeah, and I definitely agree with the hesitancy you know, there were some questions that I wasn't, you know, comfortable going into, or I would, you know, rehearse them in my head. "How do I ask this?" Like, "What's the best way to ask this? Should I even ask this?" So, you know, there's, I think there's definitely makes you kind of consider, like, reconsider, and like play scenarios in your head. So, it's, it's already a, you know, like, a very serious topic. So yeah, I guess, kind of the same thing, you know, like would you said, but in my regard, there were like some stories and some stuff shared off script, like, you know, not being recorded. So, I think that there was like a comfort level there to where they would share them. So, I, you know, for these two interviews, I don't think that it created any barriers, but I know that it would I you know, and I know that they're there.

Teri Beckelheimer

Okay, our last question. Did any of you or do any of you have any takeaways that you want to talk about? Andrea do you want to start off?

Andrea Varga

Well, I think that, for me, the biggest issue was that this was not my project, it was a project that I was involved in. So, while this gave me very valuable information, I am forever grateful that I got to be part of this. It gave me the tools, how to learn oral history, how to conduct interviews, it gave me the roots of it, and it inspired me a lot. Like, I'm gonna be forever grateful that I got to do this. And as a historian, I know that it's going to be part of my journey and part of things that I'm going to have to do. So, I think that it, the only barrier that I was finding was that it was not my questions, it was not my particular interest because I did not have any military background. So as Daniel was mentioning that each person's needs would have to be particularly tailored to the questions you're asking them, and I just don't have that knowledge to be able to do that. So, for me to have my own project would be a much easier interview process to be conducting because I would have the research background to be able to do that. So, I think that's my biggest takeaway, that this gave me a very strong foundation to be able to move on and do my own projects based off of this.

Daniel Hendley

Yeah, I'm with, I'm with Andrea like, this is as a historian and a veteran, this has been, like, just a delight, you know, to be able to do, to do something outside of my wheelhouse, and work on

something with other people that's cooperative. I don't want to say like synergenistic but you know, kind of the same kind of the same thing. But yeah, it's like, you know, probably the last time I've done something like that was when I was in the military working on a big project. So, that's been that's been really nice to kind of work with other people again, towards a common goal. My biggest takeaway, though, is probably I mean, I'll circle back to what I said originally in the fact that I like my, I like my sources dead, it's but this, but this class has taught me a whole new level of empathy for my sources. I can see things from their perspective much easier now, having learned the story of a living, of a living source, you know, if that makes sense.

Lexi Howard

So, I had zero expectations coming into this course. I was absolutely terrified at the idea of having to interview people. But this, those two interviews, and this course really taught me that oral history is kind of fun. It made me want to, transcribing is also kind of fun once you get used to it.

Daniel Hendley

When you're not doing it for 13 hours?

Lexi Howard

Yeah. It made me want to, I've always had the passion to want to interview my family members and learn about their history. So, I feel like this gave me better insight on how to do that, and how to learn more about them, even though it may not be like an official interview.

Cristobal Lopez

So, my biggest takeaways from this project, and really just like the class as a whole is like to begin with, I'm super grateful that I finally got some sort of training. I've been doing over the last two years, and without any sort of training other than just one book called *Doing Oral Histories*. So yeah, so it was nice to finally get some sort of formal training, you know, learn that, the ins and outs and, you know, actually be able to discuss it with a class, right? Because, you know, unless you're in a class like this, sometimes you're not going to discuss oral histories with anyone other than someone who's interested in like your project, or what you're doing. So being able to discuss, like what you've done, but also being able to learn from others. And then you know, you get to talk about your mistakes, or kind of what went wrong and say "Well, how do I fix this," and you get to, you know, kind of like every other seminar course, right, but now with oral history. So, I think that that was a huge gain and a huge takeaway in this project. And also, like you mentioned, it's just being a part of and like both you I mentioned, it's like being a part of a, of a group. We're all collectively working together, right, towards one end goal. And it's to preserve stories, to preserve these women's veteran stories. So, I'm super grateful and excited as well to be a part of the project.

Teri Beckelheimer

I've really enjoyed working on this project and I have again since the summer and I hope to continue on, at least for another couple of semesters. My biggest takeaway is that these women

all have various varied backgrounds and experiences and some of them go back years and years ago, and some are still in and things have evolved and changed. And so, every story is important. And it's really important for us to get this information and have it archived so that we can use it as historians. And every, everybody's story is important.

Teri Beckelheimer

Anything else you guys want to bring up? Okay. Well, thank you for joining this panel. We enjoyed having this time.

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