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CHAPTER

16 Oral History Interviewing with Purpose and Critical Awareness

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Abstract

Oral history interviewing is a viable qualitative research orientation for many qualitative researchers in various disciplines. Oral history is the collection of stories, statements, and reminiscences of a person or persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences. It offers qualitative researchers a way to capture the lived experiences of participants. The techniques of oral history are those of the qualitative researcher, including interviews, document analysis, photographs, and video. The current digital era offers many opportunities to address critical issues and possibilities for the oral historian as qualitative researcher. Major issues that emerge are those of understanding the purpose of power structures in participants' lives, arts-based approaches to oral history aware of transdisciplinarity, and developing critical consciousness or awareness of one's place in societal structures. Possibilities are endless in terms of using digital techniques and arts-based techniques for data presentation, data analysis, and dissemination. The power of oral history is the power of storytelling. By using current technology and working in a transdisciplinary context, oral history may now be more readily accessible and available to a wider population, thus moving toward a critical social consciousness.

Keywords: oral history, digital techniques, social media, photography, transdisciplinarity, critical awareness, interviewing, narrative research, reflective journaling

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There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

—Maya Angelou

Introduction

MANY think of oral history as one recorded interview stored in a library or an archive and left on a shelf. In this chapter, I propose an active view of oral history that appreciates the techniques of the past and moves into the digital era with a critical eye toward analysis and interpretation of the oral history interview or set of interviews. In other words, we should consider moving beyond the oral history interview while incorporating it into any given narrative. In addition to interviews and besides using documents in any given report, this chapter will treat the use of current technologies to augment the storytelling of any oral history project. This is with an eye to understanding the power structures of our participants' situations and to develop a critical awareness in ourselves as researchers and in our participants as active agents. Current writers have awakened us to using a transdisciplinary approach to qualitative research in general, and that will be a major issue for consideration here. I use the metaphor of choreography to describe and explain the current state of oral history with an eye to the future and punctuate the value of arts-based approaches to oral history. The strength of oral history is that it offers a firsthand view of the lived experience of any number of participants in any moment of history. Oral history is a powerful technique for qualitative researchers. It is powerful because it tells a story of one or more person's lives. Furthermore, it renders a historical record for future generations. From these unique cases, we can learn more about what it means to be part of the human condition.

p. 458 Oral history enables us to capture lived experience. In recent memory we have a huge database of examples of completed oral histories following the disasters of September 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina, all of which are available online. These examples are also in print and on the Web, with free and open access. This is another admirable quality of oral history. Oral history is for the most part openly accessible in digital form, written text, and visual text. For more information, visit <http://www.oralhistory.org/>.

This site will lead you to journals, books, articles, blogs, and social media devoted to oral histories and the description of the history and process of oral history. You do not have to pay to read an oral history; you may visit any library and view completed oral histories, and most recently, you may view on the World Wide Web 2.0 many classic and new examples of oral history. Oral history archives are available online from virtually every corner of the earth. In this section of the handbook I discuss the issues and possibilities facing oral history in this digital era through the metaphor of choreography, beginning with the basics of the oral history interview through the analysis, interpretation, and usefulness of oral history, moving toward a critical consciousness. Furthermore, in this digital era, free and moderately priced software is available to make interviewing and transcribing user-friendly. Finally, future directions and possibilities in oral history will be discussed, specifically, oral history as a critical awareness project, the value of transdisciplinarity approaches, and the value of arts-based approaches to oral history.

The Choreography of Oral History

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There are many resources on the Web and in print defining oral history and describing basic techniques of interviewing. Here, I use the term *oral history* as the collection of stories and reminiscences of those persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences (Janesick, 2010). I use this definition because it casts a wide net, is inclusive, and is moving toward oral history as a social justice project. The heart and soul of oral history is to find the testimony of someone with a story to tell. In this chapter, the term testimony is used in its generic meaning, giving testimony, oral or written, as a firsthand authentication of any event. Oral history and testimony provide us with an avenue of thick description, analysis, and interpretation of people's lives through probing the past to understand the present. The postmodern and interpretive appreciation of the study of people and their stories, those stories from persons generally on the outside or periphery of society, offer a unique opportunity to view oral history as a social justice project (Janesick, 2007). For example, women, minorities, and any person or group categorized as *the Other* may find a benefit from recording their stories, not just for themselves but also for future generations. As a social justice record is kept, the stories cannot be lost. While oral history as a genre is most often associated with the field of history, since the 20th century it has been readily used by the social sciences and most recently in the field of education. Many oral histories are written to describe firsthand witness accounts of traumatic events, such as Hurricane Katrina survivors' oral histories or the first responders to the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. Other types of oral history include long interviews with soldiers returning from war fronts to document the trauma of war. The U.S. military has been documenting these stories for over a century and they are cataloged in military libraries, to use just one example. Initially, the oral histories collected by the military were from generals. Then, over time, a gradual movement toward documenting the experiences of the everyday soldier became a goal. Likewise, throughout history, oral histories have been documented by virtually every group and every possible category of individuals who have a story to tell. Another example of oral histories in a complete rendering of an era or experience are the oral histories of the Holocaust survivors. Most often noticed is the project completed by Steven Spielberg, who filmed all survivors of the Holocaust over a lengthy time period; these histories are available for viewing through his project. If we view oral history as a continuum of stories, we find elite participants' stories on one end and ordinary participants' stories on the other. In the middle of the continuum there is a median of combinations of stories, from the stories of elite participants to those of everyday citizens. To use an example from the dance world, before his death, Merce Cunningham's dances were recorded, as well as lengthy interviews with him about his art. Thus, a new database will provide future dancers and choreographers with a rich and textured archive about choreography, artistic expression, improvisation, and performance. This is what we are trying to do in the early 21st century in the field of oral history. We are documenting the lived experience of individuals who experience life in any of its stages.

Oral History as Technique

Like the choreographer, all oral historians and qualitative researchers have to come to grips with the central techniques needed to tell a story. For oral historians, the well-tested techniques of interviewing and document analysis are first and foremost. Furthermore, in this postmodern era, the visual image through photography and videotaping may take prominent roles in terms of technique. Since interviewing is the heart and soul of oral history, the discussion begins here. There are literally thousands of articles in print and hundreds of books on interviewing.

Interviewing has taken hold in the social sciences, the arts, the sciences, society at large, business, and journalism. For the purposes of this chapter, we will look at interviewing in multiple ways. The first way is metaphorically, by conceptualizing an interview much like a choreographer conceptualizes a dance. Both the choreographer and the interviewer are working toward a performance activity: one a completed dance

and the other a completed interview. Both are connected to some individual or group of individuals communicating through a regular feedback loop. Both work with social context, social boundaries, what to include and exclude, and what to eventually present in the form of a narrative or story.

p. 460 Another way to look at interviewing is in terms of a creative habit. Like the dancer or choreographer who sees dance and its technique as a creative habit, the oral historian as interviewer may view the interview as a creative habit (see Janesick, 2011). Many choreographers have written about the creative habit (De Mille, 1992; Hawkins, 1992; Tharp, 2003). In my own field of education, it was John Dewey who wrote extensively on this topic, featuring the idea of habits of mind (Dewey, 1934). I mention this to point out the transdisciplinary nature of the ideas of habits of mind and body. Transdisciplinarity has been described extensively and is influencing our understanding of research (see Leavy, 2009, 2011). Transdisciplinary approaches are problem based, methodologically sensitive, and responsive to voices outside and inside the margins of society. They represent a holistic approach to research methods. For oral history, that means stretching to collaborate with at least one other discipline with high levels of integration. It means thinking in a new way about oral history and its borders. Thus, it is an evolution toward developing new theoretical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks. For the oral historian, this is a custom fit. We already have at least two defined disciplines, oral history and qualitative research methodology, to begin with. Usually and most often, another discipline, such as the performing or visual arts, sociology, or anthropology, may provide a third part of the triangle. If we use arts-based approaches such as film, photography, painting, dance, sculpture, theater, or graphic arts in our work, we add another textural layer. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on interviewing as a creative habit dependent on a collection of good habits of mind as well as practical habits. I have written about qualitative techniques as creative habits previously (Janesick, 2011). These habits include the creative habit, the writing habit, the interview habit, the observation habit, and the analysis and interpretation habit. I extend these ideas throughout this essay. Furthermore, the work of Elliot Eisner (1991, 2002) has been profoundly influential. His career was devoted to clarifying the importance of arts-based approaches to education and cannot be overlooked.

Interviewing as a Creative Habit

If we think about the creative act of interviewing, it may be a useful tool for oral historians and other qualitative researchers. Creativity is essentially about discovery, and interviewing allows us a great deal of room to discover the meaning of a person's life or portion of a life, as well as allowing for an understanding of ourselves as researchers. I use creativity here in the sense that Csikszentmihaly (1996) viewed creativity, which is as a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed. The creative act of interviewing is such a process because the symbolic meaning of the interview, its analysis and interpretation, and its final narrative form change the landscape of the historical record. Each researcher, dancer, choreographer, or social scientist is called on to develop habits of mind and body that change the culture. Some practical habits for the interviewer may include preparing materials for the interview, such as testing the digital voice recorder, bringing an extra thumb drive for the recorder, and bringing a battery charger if the recorder is chargeable. In other words, all the technical components must be in order to facilitate the creative habit of interviewing. In addition, the habit of being at the site of the interview ahead of time to test equipment and see that the setting is in order is good to develop. Another habit is to compose as many thoughtful questions as possible. It is far better to be overprepared than to be caught in an interview without questions. Usually five or six holistic broad questions are reasonable and may yield etc. A simple question like, "Tell me about your day as an airline pilot" once yielded nearly 2 hours of interview data, leaving all the other questions for another interview time. You will learn to develop a sense of awareness and timing about your participants in the study and rearrange accordingly. All these habits help to make way for the creative act of interviewing.

Probably the most rewarding component of any qualitative research project, especially oral history, is interviewing, because it is a creative act and often requires the use of imagination, much like a

p. 461 choreographer imagining what a dance will look like. In addition to the habits already noted, another useful habit to develop before the interview is the reading of recent texts and articles on interviewing. For example, see Rubin and Rubin (2012). Oral history texts and feminist research methods texts also have described interviewing in great detail. A good deal of what can be learned about interviewing ultimately may come from trial and error within long-term oral history projects by practicing the interview act. I defined interviewing earlier (2011) as a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic. With that in mind, because we are always researchers in the process of conducting a study, we rely on different kinds of questions for eliciting various responses.

The How: Active Interviewing

Many agree that the mainstay of oral history is interviewing. Interviewing is well described in all fields, but for this chapter I agree with those who view interviewing as a type of guided conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Furthermore, I see interviewing as a creative act. Just as the choreographer must know the technique and components of a dance, the interviewing must prepare questions. All of us, as oral historians or qualitative researchers, practice our craft and presumably improve over time. In addition, we are prepared with the latest digital equipment and have done research prior to the interview about the social context in which the interviewee is immersed. Depending on the stage of our own development as researchers, we may construct various types of interview questions.

Types of Interview Questions to Consider

1. *Basic descriptive or help-me-understand questions*
Can you talk to me about the recent decision you spoke of earlier that gave you such stress concerning reporting child abuse? Tell me what happened following this decision. Help me understand what you meant by the statement, "They are always with me." Basically, you, the interviewer, probe further into the meaning of the experience of the participant.
2. *Structural/paradigmatic questions*
Of all the things you have told me about being a social worker, what keeps you going every day? Can you walk me through a typical day? What are some of your proudest achievements? Are there days that were more difficult and can you describe such a day?
3. *Follow-up/clarifying questions*
You mentioned that "time for meditation is important" to you. Can you tell me how you use this time? Another example might be, Tell me more about what you mean about your description of yourself as a "technology nut."
4. *Experience/example questions*
You mentioned that you are seeing students succeed in ways you never imagined. Can you give me an example of this success? Can you give me an example of your most difficult day during your interviews for this position? You said, "High-stakes testing is killing our school." Can you say a bit more about this?
5. *↳ comparison/contrast questions*
You said there was a big difference between a great leader and an ordinary one. What are some of these differences? Can you describe a few for me? You mentioned that there is no simple board meeting and at the same time you can almost predict what will be the point of contention at the meeting. Can you say more about this?
6. *Closing the interview*

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Closing an Interview Is Often Difficult for Both Interviewer and Interviewee

Another good rule of thumb for this situation is to ask questions that indicate the end of the interview and enable the participant to keep thinking about the information already given and quite possibly look forward to another interview. Here are two solid questions for closing an interview: Is there anything you wish to add to our conversation today? Is there anything I have forgotten to ask that you feel is important? Notice that there is always room for the participant to elegantly deal with the end of the interview in the moment with such a closing set of questions. In fact, many oral historians and other researchers report that participants will later say they are still thinking about these closing questions and want to tell the researcher something that was forgotten at the time of the interview. If this occurs, there is a serious opportunity for rich data to complement the existing interview or set of interviews through a follow-up interview.

While the interview is the mainstay of oral history, many oral historians go further to augment and support the interview data. This can be done by collecting other types of data. For example, the use of demographics to develop and describe the social context is always helpful. In addition, photographs, videos, newspaper clippings of the day, and any other written documents relevant to the main themes are also useful. Documents are a mainstay and can be analyzed just as interviews are analyzed through the constant comparative method, looking for themes and coming to some interpretation of the interviews and

documents. In fact, emergent document analysis has been described by Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, and Schneider (2008) as a way to study and deconstruct power. In this sense, emergent document analysis moves toward a critical awareness orientation.

Here, I list some additional ideas that may be helpful as you design your interview project:

1. Remember the categories of culture that affect how you frame a question, deliver the question, take field notes as the tape is recording, and ultimately make sense of the data.
 - a. Cognitive culture: how the interviewer and interviewee perceive their own context and culture.
 - b. Collective culture: how both see themselves as part of a collective culture including gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity.
 - c. Descriptive culture: all those written works and works of art and science that have had an effect on both the interviewee and the person who takes the role of interviewer.
2. ↪ Assumptions to be aware of while interviewing someone:
 - a. Assumption of similarities: just because you may professionally act in a role as, say, an educator and you are interviewing another educator, do not assume similarity of thoughts, beliefs, values, etc.
 - b. Language difference: the importance of one's own first language and the misinterpretation of meaning in other language usage is critical.
 - c. Nonverbal misinterpretation: we may all read nonverbal language incorrectly—that is why you interview someone more than once, for example, why you keep coming back to find the answer to your questions.
 - d. Stereotypes: before any interviewing, check yourself for any stereotypes and be clear about their description in your role as a researcher.
 - e. Tendency to evaluate: while most educators continue to evaluate every spoken or written word even outside the classroom, try to avoid an evaluation of the content of given remarks.
 - f. Stress of interviewing: if you are stressed, the person being interviewed may pick up on those cues. Be prepared, use all your active listening skills, relax, and enjoy the interview. Be still and listen.

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Thus, we see the what and how of interviewing. But, you may ask, Why do we do oral history?

The Why of Doing Oral History

For the purpose of this chapter, I will work predominately from a postmodern perspective to emphasize the evolution of oral history. In this perspective, oral history takes on more texture and possibly more credibility. Thus, *postmodern oral history* is characterized by:

1. An interpretive approach that may include the participant in the project as a co-researcher or at least an active participant in terms of member checking the material to be included in the final report, attempting to raise a critical awareness and consciousness of persons left on the margins of society.
2. Both interviewer and interviewee use ordinary language in the final report to make the story understandable to the widest possible audience.
3. Technology is used to enhance the power of the story being told and may include multiple uses of

technology and the written word to complete the storytelling. Digital cameras, digital video cameras, cell phones, and other devices are regularly used as part of the narrative itself. Possible posting on YouTube or another Internet site for more rapid access to a larger audience is an option. The use of blogs, wikis, and social networks and the potential use of computer-assisted software for data analysis is ever-present.

4. Ethical issues are discussed and brought to the forefront of the project and throughout the project. Once again, raising a critical awareness of participants and their situations culturally and economically becomes important.
5. Oral history is the approach to qualitative research work that continually persists and prevails and is available in public spaces such as libraries and websites. It is one of the most transparent and most public approaches, regardless of the discipline base, be it history, sociology, education, gerontology, medicine, anthropology, business, etc.
6. Oral history validates the subjectivities of participants and is proud of it. We acknowledge subjectivity and celebrate it to reach new understanding of someone's lived experience. This, in turn, helps us make more sense of the human condition. It also presumably can lead to wider and global projects.
7. Voices and stories of those members of society who are typically disenfranchised and marginalized are included for study and documentation. In that regard, oral history may be seen as a social justice project, moving toward a critical awareness of one another.
8. Oral history is viewed as a democratic project, acknowledging that any person's story may be documented using accessible means to the data. In other words, oral history focuses not only focus on elites in society, but also on a broad spectrum of participants.

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In addition, to use the metaphor of choreography to help in understanding oral history, it is helpful to understand something about the work of choreography. Often, the choreographer asks the following questions as a general beginning to any dance/artwork. Many dance teachers frame it this way:

- *Who* (or what) is doing
- *What* to whom (or what) and
- *Where*, in what context, and
- *Why*, what were the difficulties?

Thus, oral history stands as a noteworthy approach to understanding the lived experience of any number of individuals. It is a user-friendly list of questions to guide an oral history project.

Furthermore, like the choreographer whose aim is to communicate a story of some kind to an audience, the oral historian has to communicate a story. This means that writing is critical for a person who is becoming an oral historian. Like the choreographer and the dancer who train the body to perform, the prospective oral historian also is in training, particularly as a writer. In fact, writing is an athletic activity in the same way that dance and choreography are athletic activities. To write oral history, as in dance, you are engaging your mind, memory, and your body parts, such as the hands, muscles, nervous system, spine, joints, eyes, ears, and brain.

Many may ask questions, such as, Why do oral history at all? Many wonder about the qualities that may assist an oral historian and the characteristics of oral history. In reflecting on the characteristics of oral history, the following points may serve as a guideline as you become an oral historian in the field and as you begin interviewing someone.

- Oral history is holistic. Even if you are telling the story of a vignette of someone's life, that vignette gives the entire picture. Oral history takes into account the social context, the emotional context, the economic and historical context, and the big picture.
- Oral history, by virtue of telling a story, looks at relationships. It is a people-centered occupation. In fact, many oral historians also interview participants who know the main participant in a study. You may wish to view the latest dissertations on Dissertation Abstracts for the latest in developments on oral history interviewing. For example, interviewing a teacher who is the main focus of the study might include interviews with a colleague and with significant others in the given context. Looking at the power relationships in any given study is a must. For example, deconstructing the power of family, culture, economics, and workplace dynamics can only help in the analysis of the data.
- Oral history usually depends on face-to-face immediate interactions, particularly in the interview and then later with member checking. Thus, oral historians should possess good communications skills. This applies whether the interview is done digitally on Skype or in person.
- Oral history, like all qualitative work, demands equal time for analysis as the time spent in the field. Interviews do not interpret themselves. Part of the job of oral historians should be to analyze and interpret the data.
- Oral history acknowledges ethical issues that may arise in the interview. Also, oral historians recognize that ethics come into play when deciding what stays in the report and what is left out. Issues of confidentiality, protecting the rights of the participant, and other such questions are always a potential reality.
- Oral history relies on the researcher as the research instrument.
- Oral history seeks to tell a story as it is, without reference to prediction, proof, control, or generalizability. We are researching subjectivity and proud of it.
- Oral history incorporates a description of the role of the oral historian/researcher.
- Oral history incorporates informed consent and release forms or any formal documentation needed to protect persons involved in the oral history.
- Oral historians check back with participants as a *member check* to share transcripts and converse about the meaning of data.
- Oral historians read widely and do all that is possible to understand the social context of the person being interviewed. Collecting artifacts or written documents often is part of an oral history project. Having an outlook of transdisciplinarity is helpful in oral history projects. This demands awareness of more than one discipline and a deep use of the disciplines involved as a basis for the final narrative report.
- Oral historians use all sorts of data. Even though oral history is a qualitative research technique, demographic information, documents, and other pertinent information may be used. Arts-based representations are useful and powerful tools for oral history projects. Photos, videos, posting stories on social media outlets, and YouTube are helping to disseminate a great deal of oral history. Archives store multiple types of data.
- Oral historians write every day and practice writing on a regular basis.
- Oral historians have a deep appreciation for history and the historical context and appreciate other disciplines and what they may offer in terms of understanding oral history.

- Oral historians may use the technology of the day, such as the Internet, to learn from YouTube, blogs, written and posted diaries and journals, letters, and any other documentation to tell a story. Digital oral history examples are widely available on the World Wide Web 2.0 and beyond.
- Oral historians may use photography and film to capture someone's lived experience and to augment the narrative. As a result, oral historians must use up-to-date digital ↪ equipment and software that allows for incoming data appropriate to the level of sophistication of the software.
- Oral historians may decide to tell the narrator's story using poetry, drama, or other art forms found in documents and in the transcripts or craft their own poetry or use other art forms in their storytelling.
- Oral historians, by virtue of doing oral history research, are gaining knowledge and insight into the human condition by understanding some aspect of someone else's lived experience. They also learn from the research they are undertaking.

This information is not new, but as individuals discover this for themselves, they can set about the task of becoming an oral historian. Many who shy away from oral history need not be intimidated.

Writing Up Oral History as a Narrative

It goes without saying that to do oral history one must be an above-average writer. Think of the great storytellers in print. Recall your favorite writer as you read this. Most likely, this writer is adept at storytelling through a written narrative. To do oral history, a good strategy to employ in terms of writing is to keep a researcher's reflective journal. By writing a journal of reflections, you clarify your position and situate yourself in the oral history. Writing up the narrative story depends on the interview transcripts, any documents being analyzed, and any other supporting data sets such as photographs, demographic data, artifacts, videos, and the researcher's reflective journal, as well as any observations on the scene. These may help fill out the context of the story. Likewise, the researcher's reflective journal is a valuable tool. I wrote in more detail earlier (1999, 2011) on the importance of the researcher's reflective journal. Let us turn once again to that topic to clarify some points on writing and the researcher's reflective journal.

The Researcher's Reflective Journal

Journal writing as a reflective research activity has been called reflective journaling; it is also called reflexive by many sociologists and researchers in training. It has been most used by qualitative researchers in the social sciences, education, medicine, health, business, mental health, gerontology, criminal justice, and other fields since these professionals seek to describe a given social setting or a person's life history in its entirety. The researcher's reflective journal has proven to be an effective tool for understanding the processes of research more fully, as well as the experiences, mindsets, biases, and emotional states of the researcher. Thus, it may serve to augment any oral history reporting. This inclusion of the description of the *role of the researcher* and any reflections on the processes of the oral history project can be a valuable data set for any final reporting.

Many qualitative researchers advocate the use of a reflective journal at various points in the research project timeline. To begin, a journal is a remarkable tool for any researcher to use to reflect on the methods of a work in progress, including how and when certain techniques are used in the study. Likewise, it is a good idea to track the thinking processes of the ↪ researcher and participants in study. In fact, writing a reflective journal on the role of the researcher in any qualitative project is an effective means to describe and explain research thought processes. Often, qualitative researchers are criticized for not explaining exactly how they conducted a study. The researcher's reflective journal writing is one device that assists in

developing a record of how a study was designed, why certain techniques were selected, and subsequent ethical issues that evolved in the study. A researcher may track in a journal the daily workings of the study. For example, did the participant change an interview appointment? How did this change subsequently affect the flow of the study? Did a serious ethical issue emerge from the conduct of the study? If so, how was it described, explained, and resolved? These and other such questions are a few examples of the types of prompts for the writer. In addition, this emphasizes the importance of keeping a journal on the role of the researcher and the research process throughout the project, in this case an oral history project.

The inclusion of the use of the reflective journal as part of the data collection procedure indicates to some extent the credibility and trustworthiness of this technique. Does it not also act as a source of credibility and descriptive substance for the overall project? As a research technique, keeping a journal is user-friendly and often instills a sense of confidence in beginning researchers and a sense of accomplishment in experienced researchers. Many researchers verify that the use of a reflective journal makes the challenge of interviewing, observations, and taking field notes much more fluid. Researchers who use a reflective journal often become more reflective actors and better writers. Writing in a journal every day instills a habit of mind that can only help in the writing of the final research report. In the field of education, for example, many researchers ask participants to keep a reflective journal and end up relating to each other as co-researchers in a given project. In this type of work, journal writing becomes an act of empowerment and illumination for both the researcher and the participants.

In beginning the researcher's reflective journal, regardless of the project, it is always useful to supply all the basic descriptive data in each entry. Information such as the date, time, place, participants, and any other descriptive information should be registered to provide accuracy in reporting later in the study. Especially in long-term projects, specific evidence that locates members and activities of the project can become most useful in the final analysis and interpretation of the research findings. Journal writing has an elegant, long, and documented history itself, which is useful to recall.

Journal writing began from a need to tell a story. Famous journal writers throughout history have provided us with eminent examples and various categories of journals (see Progoff, 1992). Progoff, for example, suggested using a dialogue journal where you and I as writers imagine a dialogue going on with the self and society. In this format, one writes a dialogue and answers the thoughtful questions posed. No matter what orientation is taken by the journal writer, it is generally agreed that reflexive journal writing is utilized for providing crispness of description and meaning, organizing one's thoughts and feelings, and eventually achieving understanding. Thus, the oral history researcher has a valuable tool in reflective journal writing. In a sense, the journal writer is interacting with one's self.

p. 468 Thus, the art of journal writing and subsequent interpretations of journal writing produce meaning and understanding that are shaped by genre, the narrative form used, and personal cultural and paradigmatic conventions of the writer, who is the researcher, participant, and/or co-researcher. As Progoff (1992) noted, journal writing is ultimately a way of getting feedback from ourselves. In so doing, this enables us to experience in a full and open-ended way the movement of our lives as a whole and the meaning of the oral history project. Journal writing allows one to reflect, to dig deeper into the heart of the words, beliefs, and behaviors we describe in our journals. The act of writing down one's thoughts will allow for stepping into one's inner mind and reaching further for clarity and interpretations of the behaviors, beliefs, and words we write. The journal becomes a tool for training the research instrument, the person. Since qualitative social science relies heavily on the researcher as research instrument, journal writing can only assist researchers in reaching their goals in any given project, especially in oral history projects. I see journal writing as a critical tool in becoming a solid narrative writer and a good oral historian.

Major Issues Facing Oral History Researchers

I wish to focus on three key issues facing oral historians in the early 21st century. First, how can we use the many digital technologies, software, and equipment more readily and in a critically aware manner? Second, how can transdisciplinarity enrich our narratives? Third, how might we use arts-based approaches to oral history that work in a transdisciplinary way, incorporate digital arts-based approaches, and arrive closer to a critically aware social project? These issues may present us with a few problems. As many will attest, when doing oral history interviews, some information is shared that is basically private; the participant would like to keep it private, and video and audio materials must be protected just as any research report in hard text would be protected. In other words, ethics is an overriding umbrella for oral history researchers in terms of our work. At the same time, with the proliferation of social media, YouTube, and the readily available technology to use these media, the current generation of researchers seems dedicated, if not glued, to computers and other handheld devices that open up to the world what previously might have been private.

Oral History in the Digital Era: A Way to Use Arts-Based Approaches

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Technology is a welcome addition to the oral historian's toolkit. Using technology is like choreographing a dance. You begin with the basics, as discussed earlier, and determine how to tell someone's story in photographs, video, etc. In addition, some researchers use social media networks such as Facebook or Twitter, blogs, wikis, YouTube, and TeacherTube to collect data and represent that data through technology. Following are some potential assistive devices for the oral historian or any qualitative researcher. By the time this book goes to press, it is highly probable that other sites will have emerged. What is happening is a move to go beyond the interview transcript/s to make full use of the transcript/s. See the following resources and sites on the World Wide Web 2.0. for strategies that will enable the oral historian to do exactly that.

Conducting Oral History in the Digital Era

In this digital era, conducting oral history takes on new forms, yet remains true to its original intent. Boyd and Hardy (2012), for example, wrote an overview of collecting in the digital era on the well-known and instructive site for oral historians, <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>.

This site is a treasure trove for anyone doing oral history. It is housed at Michigan State University and contains so many links and websites that you will want to travel there yourself. For example, they suggest these sample links.

SAMPLE Links

- American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress
- American Folklore Society
- Michigan State University
- Oral History Association
- IMLS
- Matrix
- Department of Communicative Sciences and Disorders, Michigan State University
- Michigan State University Museum
- Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History University of Kentucky Libraries

This is only part of what you will find here to assist you in conducting critical oral history interviews. As you get to know these centers and archives, you will have additional data for your oral history project. In addition, get to know your own community and university library. You may be surprised by what you uncover. That data may add to your own knowledge base about the critical social awareness of your participants. This listing is not meant to be exhaustive or complete. Even digital sites change remarkably in just a few years. The point is to get to know what is out there on the Web and in your own libraries.

Additional Resources

As mentioned earlier, because of the many resources available digitally, here I will present just three major resources.

p. 470 **Using VoiceThread**

What Is VoiceThread?

A VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com>) is a collaborative, multimedia slideshow that is stored and accessed online that holds images, documents, and videos and allows people to navigate pages and leave comments in five ways—using voice (with a microphone or telephone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam). A VoiceThread can be shared with other professors, researchers, students, and the wider community for them to record comments as well. Think of it as having a conversation with someone in the Cloud. VoiceThreads can also be downloaded in a movie format, but there is a cost for this function. VoiceThread supports PDF, Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint (including Office 2007 formats), images, and videos. VoiceThread also imports photos from Flickr, Facebook, or the Web. Each of these formats allows for artistic expression, including incorporation of photography and video.

VoiceThread is a flexible tool that can be applied to a wide variety of uses, such as:

- orally publishing written work with matching artwork displayed on the slide;
- uploading interviews for analysis;

- describing qualitative methods and techniques in a research class;
- displaying videos for comment and feedback;
- art portfolios describing processes used at each step or just as a simple art gallery;
- gathering perspectives on an idea or concept from participants indicating a more active role for participants; or
- creating an archive of interview responses.

By going to the wikis that house VoiceThread information, you can save yourself a great deal of time. Please go to <https://voicethread.com/>.

Creating a Blog with WordPress to Tell a Story

WordPress is an open-source blog publishing application. It features integrated link management; a search engine-friendly, clean permalink structure; and the ability to assign nested, multiple categories to articles. In addition, multiple author capability is built into the system. There is support for tagging posts and articles. Some researchers have made posters using WordPress to display data at conferences and other sites. In addition, WordPress is advertised as having beautiful graphics and photos available for use. It is worth exploring: <http://www.wordpress.com>.

WordPress allows you to publish almost anything in just about any field. For the oral historian, the possibility of blogging with your participants is one avenue of collecting additional data. The WordPress site is filled with ideas, directions for setting up your own blog, pricing, when applicable, etc. As you read and understand the value of WordPress, you may be able to enhance the final narrative of your project.

Using Photography in Oral History Projects

p. 471 Photography is a powerful research tool for oral historians and other researchers (Harper, 2003; Rose, 2007). Researchers in many fields are recognizing the value and use of photography to augment the final narrative of a qualitative research project. To give an example, since many libraries are adding to their digital collections, doctoral students in the early 21st century can expect that they will be doing completely digital dissertations. Thus, current doctoral students have the opportunity to use photography in the final dissertation product. Hard-text copies are going the way of the dinosaur for many individuals. In many fields, including oral history, researchers are using photovoice as a key technique.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a technique used in some projects to allow participants to photograph, describe, and explain their social context, particularly groups most often on the margins of society. This project began as a way for underprivileged students and parents to capture, using photography, neglect, abuse, and other aspects of the social context that give witness to those on the outskirts of society. For a more involved description and examples of photovoice, please do a Google search for photovoice. You will find numerous articles on this activity. Photovoice is most often described as a process. People can identify, photograph, and explain their community through a specific photographic technique. Photovoice has various goals, including: (a) enabling an individual to keep a record and reflect a community's strengths and concerns, such as the photographs taken after Hurricane Katrina; (b) promoting critical dialogue about community issues within a given community and; (c) eventually reaching policy makers through the power of the photograph. A growing body of photovoice examples can be found on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shrFa2c305g>.

Since this is a visual medium, it is helpful to view these many examples for a model of what is possible for oral historians. Familiarity with many of these sites can be helpful in crafting the final narrative, much like the choreographer improves his or her craft by photographing and making videos of segments of a dance or an entire dance performance. Photovoice allows for understanding your community more fully. It has been used for the following: activity-focused research, needs assessment, problem-finding, problem-solving, solution implementation activity, project analysis, and evaluation. Photovoice has been used successfully in projects related to issues as diverse as infectious disease, health education, homelessness, economic barriers, sexual domination, diasporas, population isolation, and political violence (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Oral historians strive to capture the voice of their participants, for which photovoice is a powerful technique. The leading site is <https://photovoice.org> on Google or <https://photovoice.org/projects/>.

Transdisciplinarity: Crossing Boundaries in Oral History

I like to think of transdisciplinarity as an insurance policy. It allows for crossing borders and boundaries of more than two disciplines to arrive at a strong holistic description and explanation of the data gathered during the project.

p. 472 In the 1970s, there was a push for multidisciplinary approaches to research, particularly in the qualitative arena. In oral history, life history, and biography projects, this was a welcome balm to the traditional one-shot interview taped and left on a shelf. In a way, the past 50 years have shown us that in fact more is more. By using more than two disciplines to view one's data, the chances are high that the story becomes richer, more textured, and multilayered. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is possible to see this as yet another creative habit for the interviewer. If you google the word transdisciplinarity, you will find many articles on the topic from France, Germany, and Canada, where a great deal of thinking and writing about transdisciplinarity has occurred. This leads me to conclude that transdisciplinarity is here to stay. Why should we not take advantage of it?

Future Directions and Final Reflections

To make sense of oral history, choreographing the story we tell as historians and researchers includes art, experience, and inquiry. I return historically to the third chapter of *Art as Experience*, a groundbreaking text by John Dewey (1859–1952) that suggests,

Experience occurs continuously because the interaction of live creature and enviroing conditions is involved in the very process of living.

(Dewey, 1934, p. 35)

While Dewey speaks in theory as a philosopher, Erick Hawkins (1909–1994), a choreographer, writes in the here and now of an actual dance in progress. Hawkins wants us to see the body as the perfect instrument of the lived experience.

Several times so called critics have judged the dancers of my company as being “too graceful.” How can you be too graceful? How can you obey the laws of movement too much? ... The answer is a kind of feeling introspected in the body and leads one into doing the correct effort for any movement. The kinesiological rule is to just do the movement.... The tenderness in the mind takes care of the movement in action.

(Hawkins, 1992, pp. 133–134)

Similarly, Hawkins wrote,

One of the reasons we are not accustomed as a culture to graceful movement is because we do not treasure it. The saying among the Greeks of the Athenian supremacy was that the body was to be treasured and great sensitivity was used in the observation of movement. They treasured the body by having many statues of deity ... maybe they understood that the body is a clear place.

(p. 134)

We can learn from these writers as we look ahead to our qualitative oral history research projects. We can see the lessons here.

1. We learn about the critical importance of experience, curiosity, and imagination, and the resulting artifact, the oral history narrative, is layered and connected.
2. We learn about the power and value of the subjective experience in interpretation of the oral history interview and documents, and these may be artistically rendered.
3. We learn that the landscape of feeling and emotions cannot and should not be avoided when expressing art or artifact. In fact, these are embraced in oral history.
4. ↪ For researchers to “have the experience” of telling someone’s story, the researcher must acknowledge the experience component of empathy, understanding, and the story itself. The oral historian must be prepared with the best possible tools and techniques of our craft.
5. We celebrate narrative storytelling in whatever form it may take, but appreciate the visual options through digital media and arts-based approaches to storytelling.
6. Because we are bombarded by images through multimedia, it makes sense to use these multimedia to effect a powerful story using photography, video, and other arts-based approaches to assist in using our research to move toward a more socially just world.
7. We can feel comfortable in returning to a true appreciation of storytelling, a space from which oral history derived.

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One of the reasons I do qualitative research and specifically oral history is that it is multifaceted and may include more than one art form, such as writing, poetry, and/or photography. In fact, I see oral history as an art form itself. A larger audience is more likely to be reached through the arts than through any other

curricular or cultural arena. The arts can meet the need of nearly every person, no matter who that person is or where the person is in the world, and so there are social justice implications. In fact, the digital revolution we are experiencing is filled with art, dance, music, poetry, collage, and other art forms stored in the largest digital archives of Google and YouTube. Oral history provides us with understanding the power of experience, art as experience, and artifacts resulting from the experience, all of which transcend the day-to-day moments of life. In fact, storytelling is its own art form. As we tell stories about the lived experience of our narrator and our participants, art illuminates that experience. For me, using poetry, photography, and video whenever possible helps to widen the repertoire of techniques for a person who wishes to become an oral historian and document and interpret a story. It seems to me that as we practice oral history, we keep a digital record, a reflective record, and move ahead to carve out our place in the inquiry process as we are building a record of lived experience.

Three Questions for the Field

To conclude this piece, I will discuss three questions for oral historians to think about in terms of shaping the future directions in the field.

How Might Our Work Be Used to Advance Critical Awareness of the Power Structures We Inhabit?

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One of the strengths of oral history is that a diverse and multicultural knowledge base is being built through the use of oral history interviewing. To use just one example, that of truth commissions across the globe, there is a steady stream of documenting injustice and exposition of power struggles and structures. Thus, this ironically can lead us to more of a movement toward social justice. By way of explanation, think about the critical testimony of the victims of apartheid in South Africa. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the major vehicle for capturing what occurred throughout this difficult period. Ordinary citizens came forward and faced their abusers. They gave long interviews, all of which are recorded, and the perpetrators of the various crimes asked for forgiveness. The person being interviewed had to forgive the individual. Torturers, murderers, and transgressors admitted their crimes and they were interviewed as well. There was an understanding that once the testimony was given by both parties, forgiveness was given, the case was closed, and both/all parties moved on. Desmond Tutu was the originator and overseer of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and he wrote of the experience (Tutu, 1999). What these testimonials as oral history gave us was a powerful understanding of the cultural, political, emotional, and psychological aspects of apartheid that had never been seen before. Furthermore, we could see the agonizing tales of brutality and its aftermath. It was an example for the world of what is possible and how it is possible to move toward critical awareness of one's culture, at least in these overt, clear cases.

As oral historians, we see how, when, where, and why people were able to recount their stories. Tutu (1999) reminded us of what he calls his four types of truths. First, he described factual or forensic truth, or the actual evidence of what occurred. Second, he mentioned the personal or narrative truth of the interviewee: the story told by the witness giving testimony. Thus, we have the actual human story and the description of the lived experience, which is the goal of oral history. Third, Tutu described the social or cultural truth, that is, the context of what occurred historically and up to the present time. This is the documentation of the power structures involved in the various cases. Here, this may also include the forensic and personal truth. Finally, he discussed the restorative or healing truth, which describes what is needed to heal the wounds of the three previously outlined truths. Thus, testimony as oral history becomes a way to move toward a new kind of critical awareness. This is a unique case and one in which the entire world was updated as the

hearings unfolded. But in the everyday lives of those we live and work with, there are many injustices that may be documented through oral history methods.

How Might We Think about Arts-Based Approaches to Improve Our Practice?

Writers have already outlined many arts-based approaches to qualitative research, and it makes sense to use arts-based approaches to enhance oral history narratives as well. After all is said and done, the oral historian is part artist, part historian, part ethnographer, and part active agent. Why not take advantage of arts-based approaches to research to disseminate the stories of our participants? For example, many possibilities for arts-based approaches include using the digital technology so readily available today for photography and videos, as described earlier in this chapter. Using performing arts such as play-making and reader's theater to augment data presentation offers many opportunities to integrate arts-based approaches to oral history as well. Likewise, using poetry to represent our data and our processes makes sense. Because of space allotted for this section, I want to focus on another type of arts-based approach, that of found data poetry or any form of poetry. Found data poetry is poetry found in the data itself, such as interviews and documents from the site of the study. This means using words found in the data and making poetry from the meaning ↴ of the text. Poetry offers us a new way to look at our data and a new way to express it. See the following short example from a transcript of an oral history project I am currently completing on oral histories of female leaders. In this excerpt, a female school assistant superintendent from a north central state is explaining one of the challenges in a case regarding attempted censorship of a middle school reading text. The text included a story about a young, ostracized, obese student who contemplated suicide but then realized he was good at music, so he put his energy into music. The story of redemption rather than suicide was appreciated by students. However, some fundamentalist parents tried to mount an email campaign from around the United States and Canada to object to this optional text being included on the school's summer reading list. Following this excerpt, which was used as an example of how leaders deal with multiple public stakeholders, you will see poetry constructed from the interview.

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Sample excerpt from a transcript of an interview with a female assistant superintendent of schools in a north central state

q: Think about yesterday and today, not necessarily as typical days, but what does your day look like? Tell me about the things you deal with.

a: Well, it's been a typical days so that's ... And that's something I've been thinking about. There isn't ... There are typical days and they're boring. The typical days are the days when you're sitting and working on paperwork for the state and working on budgets and trying to analyze test scores to make them meaningful to the teachers and to the ... and whatever. So those are the typical boring days. This is our second week of school so there's no typical beginning of the school year. Now I'm spending more time supporting teachers, right now new staff. Right now I'm doing ... pulling on my Special Ed background. I have a little guy who is in one of our self-contained classrooms but he's struggling with the transition coming back to school and mornings aren't good for him and he's got a new teacher. And the principal in that school is on maternity leave. And the principal who is filling in was a little panicked. And so we met and talked about strategies for this little guy that, no, you know in first grade he's not ready for therapeutic day school. He's not hurt anybody. Everything's fine. It will be okay. We have a controversy going on right now related to curriculum materials that have been selected for students' optional use, optional reading. So we've been laughing and ... on one hand ... and cringing on the other because we're responding to one parent's concern. We have only heard from one parent who has a concern about a book that was on the summer reading list. Kids take home a list of six or seven books that are optional. The kids give a synopsis of the book at school. They talk about them. And if you don't like any of those books you can read any other book in the whole wide world to choose from. And this one is, as

much young adult literature is, has controversial themes because it gives us the opportunity to support kids as they worry about these things.

q: Can you tell the name of the book?

a: It's *Fat Kid Rules the World* by Kale Going. And the themes really are friendship, not giving up, perseverance. A student in there contemplates suicide. He's had a very tough time. His mom's died from cancer. His dad's an alcoholic. He's in an abusive home situation. And he is befriended by a homeless teen who is a gifted guitarist who asks this kid to join his band and play the drums. And it basically is about acceptance and you know it's a great story of Redemption. It's a wonderful story. And the parent that objects is objecting based on the proliferation of the "f" word. And it is in there and it ... kids are in Brooklyn. And interestingly enough, but it's not really spoken out loud. It's in this kid's thoughts. That she's objecting to the normal sexual fantasies of teenagers. He's describing a person and saying no not this one, not the one with the large breasts you know the other one ... physical features. So you know things like that. This parent has you know not accepted that the fact that her child was not required to read the book and ... She did not ask for the book to be banned from the library. I think she just asked for it to come off the summer reading list. However that has snowballed to some right-wing websites ... Concerned Women for America, the Illinois Family Network. I don't know which all ... SaveLibraries.org. And we have been getting interesting emails from basically all over the country and Canada.

q: What would be an interesting email?

a: Oh some that are saying ... One was, you know, "If I knew where Osama Bin Laden was, I would turn him in but first I would tell him where your school was so that he could bomb it. Hopefully when there was no children ... on the weekends when no children were present." You know, "You're responsible for the moral degradation of children and the increase in rapes and murders and school shootings because children have read ... because we have forced children to read this book."

q: Have you been threatened or has anybody?

a: I have not personally been threatened. The junior high principal has been threatened. You know "When someone comes and murders your family, it'll be because of how you taught them." Rather interesting. No one from the immediate community ... No other parents in the community ... There's an article in today's paper, we had a prepared statement to share with people who called anticipating ... And we did end up sending a note home today you know saying that you know we didn't believe that the threat was really credible but that we did have, you know, that there was a police presence. ... It was on the book list for incoming 8th graders, so that would be 13 and 14 year-olds. They talk about these things. And some statistic that I had recently come across said three to five ... Three out of five teenagers contemplate suicide at one point. So, um ...yeah, it's kind of important to maybe say, yeah, there's a place to talk about this. It was ... It's probably towards the young end of the age spectrum that the book might be appropriate for. And we did have a parent come and talk in support of the book. Her student had read it during 7th grade. He's a very capable student. And as a parent she also read the book and thought it was a perfect avenue to discuss some of these difficult situations.

In this example we have many options for creating poetry to describe the content of the issues at hand as well as the emotional meaning. Here is an example of poetry written by Jill Flansburg (2011), who read the transcript and created this poem.

Parent Misconstrue

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Parents misconstrue
The teachers, the kids the book.
Narrow mindedness.
Poise under pressure
↳ Never a typical day
But I really care ...
Parents find fault
Intolerant of teachers
And the kids miss out.

In this case you can see the power of the poem. It makes us think in new patterns and see something in the data that inspires poetic form. Poetry becomes a way to see possibility and hope in our work. Poetry allows us to say things that may not have been said or that make us notice what exactly has been said. Poetry becomes a method of discovery and a powerful technique in one's toolkit for oral history. It is evocative and personal. Many poetry sites on the World Wide Web 2.0 and many poetry blogs may even be used as a way to analyze, interpret, and disseminate data in digital formats. Poetry as data presentation is one meaningful strategy for the oral historian. This goes beyond the actual interview.

How Might We Work in a Transdisciplinary Way to Augment the Oral History Interview?

I like to think about ways to make oral history more accessible. In this segment, thinking about digital technologies, poetry, and critical awareness as contextual, it makes sense to think about what other disciplines might teach us. In fact, oral history is often described alongside life history and biographical approaches to research. For years, researchers have been writing, thinking, and talking about triangulating data. We also have seen many writers discuss cross- and/or interdisciplinary approaches to research. For example, the social sciences and health sciences may have researchers who team up to study obesity. Medical and educational researchers may team up to study AIDS education programs. But the question then becomes, How deeply might this collaboration occur between and among disciplines? A new development has occurred recently in terms of thinking about transdisciplinarity.

Historically, Jean Piaget most likely was the first to introduce the term transdisciplinarity, around 1970. In the 1980s in Europe, interest continued, and in 1987, the International Center for Transdisciplinary Research adopted the Charter of Transdisciplinarity at its first world congress. This charter called for doing research with a holistic approach by crossing disciplines and going deeply into the union of the disciplines while designing research that is problem based. Many European research centers, such as those in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and France, currently appreciate and use this approach. In many ways it is like choreography, because it shares many characteristics and in choreography the artist uses at least two disciplines to start with that are deeply imbedded in each other, dance and music. For example, the choreographer mentioned earlier, Merce Cunningham, worked with composer John Cage (1912–1992) for a lifetime of collaboration in dance and music performance. They were able to deeply create meaning from this collaboration in performance, in critique and in developing new projects.

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For oral historians, transdisciplinarity can work effectively because oral historians may use two or three disciplines embedded in each other. In my current research I use the fields of education, history, and sociology to examine the oral histories of female leaders. To go ↳ beyond the transcripts of interviews, transdisciplinarity offers us much to work with in terms of the design of our research, analysis, and

interpretations (see Hirsch et al., 2008; Leavy, 2011). In addition, this approach is well suited to qualitative approaches in general and oral history in particular. I see this as a steady progression toward a more integrated, unified, critically aware, artistic, and rational approach to our work. In closing, let me ask that we think about going beyond the basic oral history interview. Let us use arts-based approaches to presenting and interpreting data. Let us use the digital tools available. All this is to contribute to critical awareness of the power structures we inhabit through our work and our lives and to appreciate the purpose and value of transdisciplinarity in our work. As the novelist Brandon Sanderson (2010) reminds us,

■ The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.

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