

# **Food, Culture, & Society**

## **Mini-Ethnographic Research Project & Podcast**

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The major assignment of this course is structured around a mini-ethnographic research project. After choosing a topic of interest to you relating to food and food practices, you will carry out observations, conduct interviews, analyze your data, write a research report on your findings, and present your findings to the class. Students may work in pairs or groups if they choose. In addition to producing a final report detailing their research and findings, students will work with classmates to produce a short podcast sharing their research with a broader audience.

### **PROJECT COMPONENTS**

This entire project is worth 40% of your grade in this class. The project will consist of the following components:

- **Research Proposal and Plan (3%)**: You will decide on a topic for your research and come up with a plan about who you are going to interview, what you will ask them, and write up a schedule to make sure it gets done in a timely manner. (\*If you are interested in presenting or publishing on this work, you would need to follow the university IRB guidelines. Please talk to me further if you are interested in potentially doing this).
- **Annotated Bibliography (5%)**: Each student will find 3-4 academic sources on the topic you are studying and submit an annotated bibliography.
- **Interview Guide and Informed Consent Script (2%)**: Each student will develop a list of the questions you plan to use as your guide when conducting the interview. With open-ended qualitative interviews, you do not need to stick to a strict list of questions, but each interviewer should be working from the same guiding questions, following up as needed. The best questions are open-ended and prompt interviewees to tell stories and describe their experiences. Additionally, students will develop an informed consent script that describes their efforts to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of interviewees.
- **Interview Transcripts and Field Notes (raw data) (5%)**: Each student will be responsible for conducting and transcribing (typing up from an audio recording) 3 interviews, and submitting at least 3 sets of field notes. On the same day you conduct each interview, you should type up your observations, reflecting on your time with the person, the context of the interview, the surroundings, any initial interpretations or analyses you might have. Depending on your project, you might also want to conduct observations outside of your interviews, and you should submit field notes for these observations as well.
- **Coded Transcripts (5%)**: We will spend time in class learning how to code qualitative research, and the coding will take place during class time and outside of class time as well. You will come up with codes that emerge from your data and learn how to draw conclusions from your findings based on these codes. Coding methods and technology options will be discussed further.
- **Group Podcast (10%)**: Students will work in teams to create a 5-7-minute-long podcast, drawing on your research and presenting your findings for a general audience. Students will be grouped with classmates who are conducting research on similar topics. To successfully complete the podcast, students will be asked to turn in an audio treatment

form, a draft of the podcast script, a draft of the podcast, and the final version of the podcast.

- **Mini-Ethnography Final Report (10%):** The final product of this mini-ethnographic project will be an 8-10 page report. Forthcoming guidelines for this report will lay out the specific sections and expectations for this assignment.

**\*\*A note about the work\*\*** Keeping up with deadlines and getting things done in advance is vital to success in this project. Set up your interviews as early as possible. The transcribing, coding, and interpretation will take the most time, so you do not want to leave that until the last minute (transcribing a 30-minute interview takes approximately 2 hours). I have built in many deadlines into the syllabus to keep you on task, but the project requires that you keep current with deadlines.

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## Research Proposal and Plan

You will decide on a topic for your research and come up with a plan about where you will conduct observations, who you are going to interview, what you will ask them, and what schedule you will stick to in order to complete the project in a timely manner.

Your research proposal and plan should contain the following sections.

1. **Project Title:** Please include a creative project title (it is ok if it changes later based on the way the project develops).
2. **Authors:** Who will work on the project? Will you work on your own, with a partner, or in a small group?
3. **Topic Overview:** Please write a short paragraph describing the topic you would like to explore during your research, what kinds of problems or issues you are going to investigate, and what kinds of general questions you will seek to answer through your investigation.
4. **Research Plan:** Please describe the research procedures, including how you will recruit participants, where you will be interviewing them, how many people you will interview, how you will record the interviews (i.e. what technology or app will you use), and the schedule for each of your interviews.

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## Annotated Bibliography

*What's an Annotated Bibliography?* An annotated bibliography is a list of your sources, accompanied by an evaluation of each source's relevance and quality for your particular project. An entry in an annotated bibliography should be about five or six sentences and it includes 1) the citation for your source, just like in a regular bibliography, followed by 2) a short paragraph that describes the source, and answers the following questions (see below).

### **Your description may include the following:**

1. A **summary** of the material (its main points or arguments in a few sentences)
2. An **evaluation** of the source (its strengths or weaknesses)

- How recent is it? An old article can be a strength (if you are looking for a historical perspective or if it is a respected perspective in the field) or a weakness (if you are researching a contemporary issue that is constantly changing).
  - Is it a reputable author/journal?
  - Any other obvious weaknesses? Strengths?
3. **How it fits in with your other sources** (if it supports your other materials or brings up new questions, highlights new evidence, or introduces a different point of view)
  4. **An assessment of its value** to your research (its importance or usefulness)
    - What aspect of your argument are you using this piece to support?
    - What part of your research question does it help you answer?

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## Interview Guide

When doing qualitative research, sociologists and anthropologists often conduct interviews. One style of ethnographic interview is called a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth, open-ended conversations on specific topics. The researcher must arrive with a list of topics and questions that they would like to ask the person who they are interviewing. This list is called an interview guide. One of the things that makes interviews different from conversations is the amount of planning that goes into them. Developing good questions is an essential part of conducting good semi-structured interviews. But it is not easy. It is common to go through several drafts of questions before getting the final set that you want to use.

Develop interview guide(s).

1. Each interview guide should be tailored to each person you plan to interview. For example, you would not ask a farmer the same questions you would ask someone who shops at farmers' markets. Decide how many interview scripts you need to develop.
2. Develop at least 15 questions per interview guide. Remember that the questions are designed to elicit narrative conversation. Questions should be open-ended!

Develop an 8-10 sentence consent script. The script should:

1. Introduce yourself
2. Describe your research topic or interest
3. Share the practical considerations a potential interviewee should be aware of (i.e. how long the interview will take, that you would like to audio record the interview, and that they can decline to participate with no hard feelings)
4. Ask the potential interviewee if they are willing to participate in the interview.
5. Ask the potential interviewee if they are willing to have the interview recorded.

Things to consider when designing questions:

- Do background research on the interviewee and the topic to inform your questions
- Use initial questions to build trust and rapport (i.e. have your interviewee tell you about their background)
- Questions need to make sense *to the interviewee*
- Avoid yes/no questions
- Avoid vague questions

- Avoid multi-part questions
- Construct unbiased or non-leading questions
- Have interviewees walk you through different time periods (past, present, future)
- Ask interviewees to narrate their experiences related to your research topics (i.e. Could you talk me through what your job as a \_\_\_\_\_ entails? What is a normal day like at your work?)
- Avoid potentially controversial topics

### **Before an interview**

- ✓ Gather background knowledge of the topic—never ask questions that you can easily find the answer to online!
- ✓ Learn as much as possible about the potential interviewee
- ✓ Contact potential interviewee
  - Be sure to explain
    - your project and its purpose
    - what information is being sought and what it will be used for
    - your reason for contacting this person in particular.
  - Be sure to *ask* if she will agree to be interviewed and explain that it is ok if she doesn't want to.
  - If she says yes, set up the details of the interview including date, time, place, and permission to record if necessary.
- ✓ Prepare a specific interview guide for each new interview.

### **During an Interview**

- ✓ ARRIVE ON TIME!
- ✓ Introduce yourself and your research and ask if the interviewee has any questions about your research.
- ✓ Share your consent script.
- ✓ If recording: Re-confirm that this is acceptable to interviewee. Select an environment as free of anticipated noise and distractions as possible.
- ✓ Take jotted notes of key points, even if you are recording! This will help you keep track of all main topics of the interview. Also, taking notes during an interview can reassure the interviewee that you think what she is saying is important.
- ✓ Create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.
- ✓ Ask one question at a time.
- ✓ Avoid interrupting the interviewee.
- ✓ Use probes to solicit more in-depth information. Ask for clarification when necessary.
- ✓ Try to maintain a balance between following your planned interview guide and following relevant leads your interviewee opens up to you.
- ✓ Be aware of and sensitive to how the person is affected by and responds to different questions, this includes observing body language and silences.
- ✓ Respect the time-constraints, attention and physical comfort of the interviewee. Before you conclude the interview, ask if the interviewee has anything else to add or any questions to ask you.

### After an Interview

- ✓ Thank your interviewee for her time and participation. Thank the interviewee again later by phone, email, letter or personal visit.
- ✓ Provide the interviewee with your contact information if you have not already done so.
- ✓ Write out field notes as soon after the interview as possible to avoid forgetting important details. Be sure to include pertinent setting and contextual details.
- ✓ If you will be conducting more interviews, revisit your interview guide and make any necessary adjustments.

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## Data Management & Analysis

As you (or your group) begins conducting interviews and writing up field notes, you should compile, organize, and analyze your data.

### *Interview Transcripts and Field Notes*

The first step to processing your data is to make sure all the information you collected is in text form. For your interviews, you need to convert the audio recordings to written text. The simplest—albeit time consuming—way to do this is to transcribe your interviews. Plan to spend about two or two and a half hours transcribing for every half an hour of recorded conversation. You should save your transcripts in a secure location, ideally compiling all your text data. In addition to these transcripts, each of you should have three sets of observation-based field notes. Depending on your project, these notes location will vary and many of you will want to take field notes of your interview context. Through your interviews, transcription, observation, and field notes, you are generating your data. The quality of your data dramatically impacts the quality of your written product, so make sure to be as careful, systematic, and thorough as possible in this stage of your research project!!!!

### *Coding Your Data:*

Once your data is in text form, you can begin to code the data. You are expected to follow the same coding process that you practiced in class on your supermarket field notes.

General Analysis and Coding Process:

1. Process and compile your data
2. Read through all of your data, making note of important points, repeated topics, things that are similar between different interviews, significant differences, etc.
3. After doing this, read through all the notes that you just made. Based on what is in your data, what are the most important themes that were addressed in your interviews or in your field notes.
4. Select the most interesting or most repeated themes (topics). Ideally, you should have somewhere between 5 and 10 developed themes.
5. Make a list of each theme—now called a **code**—including the following information in your description:
  - a. Think through what that theme consists of. How would you define what social fact you are addressing? What types of examples are included in that theme? Are there things that should not be included in the theme?

6. Once you have defined your codes, carefully read through all of your data, marking each instance of each code.

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## Podcast

### *Treatment Plan: Purpose, Content, and Structure*

#### 1. Purpose

What is the podcast's purpose? Why have you chosen to research *this* topic and make *this* podcast? What argument or claim are you hoping to make? Is your podcast meant to inform? to provoke? to call your listeners to action?

#### 2. Audience

Who is the target audience for your podcast? Are you assuming your intended audience will have prior knowledge of your topic? Do you plan to share your podcast with individuals outside of class?

#### 3. Content

Describe the planned content of your podcast. How will you effectively communicate your message? What data, facts, and quotes do you plan to include, and how will you get this content? What do you want listeners to remember or think about after they listen to your podcast? Are there particular emotions or feelings you want to evoke?

#### 4. Point of View

From what point of view will the podcast be presented? Who will tell the story? Will you use an impersonal/factual voice-over narrator, or tell the story from the point of view of someone directly involved in the issue?

#### 5. Narrative Form

What narrative form will your podcast take? For example, will you open with a quote from an interview, or have a narrator introduce the topic before moving on to interview material? Will your podcast have a narrative arc or clear beginning, middle, and end?

### Research and Citation

#### 6. Information Gathering

What information about your topic do you need to include? Will your podcast include factual information and statistics, opinions, or a mix? What types of sources will be most useful to you (e.g., websites, reports, newspaper articles, video clips, scholarly articles, books, etc.)? Where will you find these sources (e.g., Google search, particular websites, library catalog or journal databases, in an interview you conduct, etc.)?

#### 7. Citing Sources

What sources do you plan to refer to in your podcast? How can you cite them properly (see "Podcasting Citation Guidelines" handout)? Will a listener be able to track down a source based on the citation information you provide in your podcast?

## Division of Labor and Planning

### 8. Production Responsibilities

Define and assign responsibilities below. Who in your group will be responsible for which roles in the production of your podcast? For example, who will:

- Schedule group meetings
- Conduct background research on your topic
- Write drafts of your podcast script
- Provide audio content for drafts of your podcast
- Draft interview questions, schedule the interview, or conduct the interview
- Upload audio content to OneDrive
- Edit your audio content in Audacity

**Name:**

**Responsibilities:**

**Name:**

**Responsibilities:**

### 9. Planning

What will your next steps be after today's session?

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## Written Report

The final product of this mini-ethnographic research will be a written report, worth 10% of your final grade. Students working independently should write a 4-5 page report. Those working in pairs or teams should write 8-10 pages. All reports should be double spaced, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman. You should use subheadings where possible. Those writing the report in a group may divide up the paper however you like. Remember, you will all receive the same grade for the final draft (though you will have a chance to evaluate each other's contributions), so leave time to edit each other's work and make sure it is up to your standards, and it all fits together well. The report will include the following sections.

A. **Introduction:** 1-2 paragraphs, including:

- a. Introduction to the central problem/questions
- b. Background info on the topic (drawing on your sources from your annotated bibliography)
- c. 2-4 Research Findings Statements (see section D Findings).
- d. A thesis that pulls together the Research Statement Findings (when you think about them all together, what do they tell you about your research?).

B. **Methods:** 1 paragraph, including:

- a. Recruitment strategies
- b. Number of participants, demographics of participants, and lengths of interviews
- c. Topics of interviews – you do not need to list all the questions, but can talk about the general categories of questions or types of questions you asked
- d. Describe group coding strategy

- C. **Findings:** This will be the bulk of your paper, approximately 3 pages for those working independently, 4-6 pages for those in groups. You should come up with 2-4 Research Findings Statements. For each of these Research Findings Statements you should write about 1-2 pages that covers the following:
  - a. Write out the statement and briefly introduce it.
  - b. Illustrate the findings with ethnographic examples from your interviews and/or your notes. When citing interviews, you can use direct quotes from the interviews, or you can discuss someone's story in your own words, or a bit of both.
- D. **Conclusion:** 1-2 paragraphs
  - a. Summarize your research
  - b. Discuss how the Research Findings Statements fit together and connect to your thesis
  - c. Suggest some possible approaches either for future research (to find out more about the topic that would be important) or suggest ways that the people you researched might be supported or the problem you identified might be addressed.

**More about Research Findings Statements:** You should work as a group to come up with your research findings statement and discuss qualitative data from your notes/interviews that you think best represents this finding. When thinking about the data all together, what did you find? What trends did you notice? What codes or themes recurred the most and what do they tell you about this issue? You might actually start with a thesis and work back to these statements, or come up with the statements first, and then think about what they all have in common and come up with a thesis from them. Your research statement might draw primarily from one code or theme, but it might also combine them in interesting ways.

**Example:** Let's use the example of how Peruvian food and migration are talked about in Chile. My research explored the experiences of migrants in Chile (often women working as live-in domestic laborers) and the ways Chileans perceived this new wave of migration. Early in my research, I noticed some trends in my data. Namely, there were two common ways of talking about food. In my data, I had a code file called "Peruvian food" and another code file called "food scarcity." Among the Chileans who I interviewed, many brought up Peruvian food as an example of an influence brought about by burgeoning migration. During interviews with migrant domestic laborers, many spoke about how they were not allowed to eat enough food or to prepare Peruvian dishes for themselves. These two trends would be my two research findings. To fully develop my first Research Findings Statement, I could further explain:

Following a dramatic new wave of Peruvian migration to Chile, there is growing interest among Chileans in Peruvian food. New Peruvian restaurants attempt to meet this demand, and migrant domestic laborers are sometimes asked to cook Peruvian food. In contrast to the often ambivalent or negative attitudes towards recently arrived Peruvian migrants, Chileans position Peruvian food as a positive engagement with multiculturalism. In talking about their interest in Peruvian food, Chileans tend to emphasize both its potentially transformative (Bourdieu 1984) and transgressive (Douglas 1966) qualities—consistent with the ways in which "ethnic food" is engaged with in other parts of the work (Ray 2016)

Then, in the remainder of the section on this Research Finding Statement, I could provide some ethnographic examples (i.e. quotes from interviews, descriptions of people's situations, findings from my field notes, ways in which my data relates to the academic literature) of:

- People talking about Peruvians as uniquely skilled cooks
- Examples of Chileans talking about the dangers or "exoticness" of Peruvian food
- Examples of Chileans talking about the amazing experience of embracing Peruvian culture by eating at fancy Peruvian restaurants.

Sometimes it might make sense for you to quote a larger section of an interview. Sometimes, to save space or to give more context, you might describe someone's story, then include the most poignant quote(s) from their interview or your field notes.

Remember, you are looking for representative examples from across your data. So, you can use language such as: "Several of the interviewees noted..." then follow up with ones specific example such as: "One young 19-year old CSB student said she...". Sometimes it makes sense to discuss outliers as well, but you should put them in context. "Only one participant noted x, y, z – while others said..." Then if you think you know why that outlier was there, explain it. In these sections, you provide data/examples, and do some analysis and explanation of them.