NYC COVID-19 Oral History, Narrative, and Memory Project

Zoom Interview Process

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INTRODUCTION

The NYC COVID-19 Oral History, Narrative, and Memory Project was created with the expectation that we would be conducting remote interviews only, at least in the first phase of our work. In fact, our IRB approval initially prohibited us from any in-person contact as part of the project - we could not even use flyers for recruitment.

Oral history is usually excluded from IRB review at Columbia, but because we are using a multi-disciplinary approach which includes surveys and written chronicles, and because we wanted extra guidance when working in such a volatile time, we did go through an IRB approval process. Participants fill out a survey to begin the oral history process, which includes consent forms and legal releases. Once they complete the survey, they are sent a counter-signed copy of their legal release for their records, and their interviewer contacts them to schedule a session.

When we began planning this project we felt an intense urgency to begin conducting interviews right away. Things were changing so fast, and we wanted to be able to capture people's experiences of the first wave of the pandemic in New York City before they knew what would happen next. This was especially important because some of our research questions were built around the creation of historical narratives in times of disruption, and how relationships between the past, present, and future shifted during the pandemic. Therefore, many of our decisions around how to do remote interviewing were made in the interest of expediency; we prioritized an easy, low-friction, low-cost approach.

We felt it was important to use a video conferencing tool so that narrators and interviewers could see each other, and we chose Zoom because it was one that was widely familiar within a few weeks of the onset of the pandemic, because we had experienced it as reliable, and because our institution could provide us with a subscription. We allow interviewers to use their own account or a shared project account, which is pre-set with the settings we are using for the project, and is accessible to team members on a first-come, first-serve basis. We also wanted a tool that worked on smartphones as well as laptops to increase accessibility. We decided to use Zoom alone, rather than using an additional higher-quality audio recording tool like Zencastr, to keep things simple for our interviewers and narrators. We also felt that, because our project was about the pandemic, audio quality typical of a video call would be sufficient. We began this project as much of social life was shifting online, and learning to

interview online has been, for us, a part of a larger process of learning to interact and collaborate via video chat.

We started without external funding, using staff shifted from their usual responsibilities due to the pandemic. Within a few weeks, we received funding from the National Science Foundation, but in order to work at the scale we planned we needed to keep the budget lean. Also, because of the need to work fast, we opted to use the equipment narrators and interviewers already had in their homes.

Because oral history interviews are dialogic, we wanted to take advantage of the chance to be able to see the interviewer and the interviewee at the same time, so we record in Zoom's gallery view. We also wanted to record the speaker in the highest possible quality, so we also record in speaker view.

So far we have found that Zoom works well for most people, although both the survey and Zoom have been less accessible to smart phone users and those with less experience with these technologies. Often this corresponds to class limitations, and so we are concerned that the way our project is structured creates barriers to participation for people who are low-income, people with less formal education, and people with some disabilities. We have created a process where if necessary narrators can skip the survey and give verbal consent with their interviewer in order to somewhat mitigate this issue. Going forward, as we are able to slow down a bit, we may consider changing our process to be more intentional about capturing higher quality audio and video, but we have been happy so far with the outcomes using our current process.

SETTING UP THE ZOOM MEETING

- Schedule a Zoom interview and send the participant a link. The title of your Zoom interview should be: "Your Name - Interviewee Name - Interview # - Date and Time"
- You can use the project Zoom account or your own
    - If you use your own, make sure your Zoom settings for recordings look like this:

Cloud recording

Allow hosts to record and save the meeting / webinar in the cloud

○ Record active speaker with shared screen
○ Record gallery view with shared screen ⑦
☑ Record active speaker, gallery view and shared screen separately
  ☑ Active speaker
  ☑ Gallery view
  ○ Shared screen
☑ Record an audio only file
☑ Save chat messages from the meeting / webinar

Advanced cloud recording settings

○ Add a timestamp to the recording ⑦
○ Display participants' names in the recording
☑ Record thumbnails when sharing ⑦
☑ Optimize the recording for 3rd party video editor ⑦
○ Audio transcript ⑦
☑ Save panelist chat to the recording ⑦

Automatic recording

Record meetings automatically as they start

IP Address Access Control

Allow cloud recording access only from specific IP address ranges

Only authenticated users can view cloud recordings

The viewers need to authenticate prior to viewing the cloud recordings, hosts can choose one of the authentication methods when sharing a cloud recording.

Require password to access shared cloud recordings

Password protection will be enforced for shared cloud recordings. A random password will be generated which can be modified by the users. This setting is applicable for newly generated recordings only.

- For the recording settings you should:
  - Make sure that Zoom is recording to the cloud
  - Confirm that a password is required to access the cloud recording
  - Confirm that the recording is optimized
  - Confirm that you are recording the active speaker with shared screen and gallery views
- For microphones:
  - If you have access to a better microphone such as a headset or a USB mic, use that over your computer's built in mic. Encourage your narrator to do the same.

HOSTING AND RECORDING

- Start recording as soon as you start the meeting but notify your narrator that you are recording. It is useful for others to see the way you and the narrator are interacting as you settle into the formal session.
- Use the project interview guide to shape your conversation
- If going off the record or taking a break, pause the Zoom recording instead of stopping it

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Once the interview is finished, if you are using your own account go to "Recordings" on the Zoom website (not in the app) to retrieve the link for the recording. The recording might not show up right away, or even for a few hours.
- Copy and paste this information along with the password that is created by including the by clicking the "share" button. Send the link to the file to the project coordinator for archiving.
- Write brief fieldnotes and submit them with the interview (you are of course welcome to save a different version for your own use). Your fieldnotes could include some mix of the following:
    - Notes on your relationship with the person
    - Context of the moment in time when the interview was done, if not on the tape (e.g. it was the day when the peak was predicted, or it was our third week of social distancing, etc.)
    - Your own subjective experience of the interview - feelings, expectations, surprises
    - Your impressions of the content and highlights of what was shared
- Write your participant a follow-up email