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Community Biography Interview

While some may consider themselves to be who they are and what they strive to be as a result of genetic predisposition or parental influence, it is often overlooked what influence one's community has on their views of the world and the people around them. One's hometown, whether it is recognized or not, inextricably remains a significant part of their identity for their whole lives and to share such an intimate part of their lives to anyone, especially strangers can be unexpectedly expository and uncomfortable. While interviews can provide valuable information to those wanting to study the experiences of others, there are a multitude of factors that may compromise the interviewee's comfort or even the accuracy of the answers they provide.

Being from the northern suburbs of Atlanta, I experienced both aspects of the urban and rural lifestyles detailed in Wirth's "Urbanism As a Way of Life." In fact, the community in which I grew up, Johns Creek, dramatically changed during the 17 years I lived there and continues to transform as metropolitan Atlanta's population rapidly increases. Since 2001, the once rural, white-dominating town has transformed into a bustling suburbia which becomes increasingly diverse every year. (Green 2019) The introduction of apartment complexes and townhomes into the area which was once dominated by single-family homes on large lots brought never-before-seen diversity to the area both in racial and economic terms. As reflected in Clanton's article, "Georgia's most ethnically diverse city might surprise you," the suburbs of Atlanta, particularly Johns Creek, have become surprisingly diverse over the past 20 years.

While these areas remain majority white-dominated, the introduction of minorities to the suburbs has been an asset to those living in the communities as they brought new cultures, businesses, and ideologies. Being able to experience this transformation, especially in my formative years, has given me a chance to appreciate a multitude of cultures and ideologies, expanding my horizons and broadening my worldview. My interactions with those of different backgrounds than myself have made me who I am today, deepening my interest in the studying social sciences on the global scale and fighting for equality and social justice whenever possible. I found myself seeking out people with different backgrounds from me and I was often the only person of Anglican descent in my friend group- the differences between myself and my peers excited me as I had the opportunity to learn more about the human experience from a different perspective.

In all of its ethnically diverse glory, Johns Creek's population remains, as Wirth would have predicted, majority children and older adults. My classmate and I both found ourselves reflecting on our childhoods living in the suburbs of Atlanta. Our experiences were more similar than different: Dunwoody and Johns Creek are both upper-middle class suburbs of Atlanta (about 17 miles apart), so they yielded similar results to the interview questions. The majority of the families living in the area are made up of parents who commute to Atlanta for work or work at home- it is not uncommon to find the dynamic of a stay-at-home-mom and working father in either suburb. The opportunities for young people to achieve higher education in these suburbs are plentiful, a fact for which we are both grateful. I know that without the opportunities like AP-level classes and tremendous test-preparation resources afforded to me by my education at Johns Creek High School I would not be the same person I am today. I never struggled to find support when I needed it whether it was emotional, academic, or even athletic. "Georgia's most diverse city" (Clanton 2019) not only exposed me to a multitude of different people, ideas, and

opportunities, but it molded my psyche into one which values people, places, and experiences above material things.

Though I am grateful for the environment which Johns Creek afforded me during my formative years, having to explain all of my nuanced feelings about my hometown to a near stranger was a bit jarring. Interviews in themselves are an expository experience in which walls must be let down and true honesty must flow freely in order to be successful. Asking a stranger to bear their heart to you for the sake of research can be demoralizing in the sense that the words used to describe one's situation may seem to reduce the human experience to key words and statistical analysis. It's nearly impossible to adequately reflect a person's story in mere sentences and attempting to do so can feel a bit futile if the interviewee is not made comfortable by the interviewer.

From an accuracy standpoint, there are several qualities of an interview which may change the way an interviewee would respond to a question. If an interviewee is not comfortable with an interviewer for any reason, they may alter their answers to the questions or even answer with only one word. For that reason, it remains of utmost importance that an interview feels more like a conversation than an interrogation, especially if the interview is being recorded for research. In fact, the recording of an interview in itself may alter the atmosphere of an interview and therefore, the interviewer must take extra care to ensure that the interviewee is not only aware that they are being recorded, but that they are comfortable to remain honest and open while the tape is rolling.

Moreover, the phraseology of the questions being asked during an interview is possibly the most integral aspect of ensuring an interview is successful. When conducting interviews for research, an interviewer should ensure that the questions being asked are not framed in such a

way as to guide the answers of their subject. If an interviewee feels as though the interviewer is desiring a specific answer from them, whether or not this answer is true, they will be more apt to provide it. For this reason, the phraseology of the interview questions must remain neutral in order to yield accurate, honest answers. Not only should the interview questions be unbiased and neutral, but the interviewer must also be aware of boundaries they may be overstepping with personal information. In order to ensure that the interviewee does not feel like they are being intruded upon for the sake of research, interviewers must keep in mind that the stories that they are generously sharing were first-hand experiences and therefore sensitive issues should be treated respectfully.

Not only must the interviewer be neutral and sensitive to the interviewee during this process, they must also clearly explain for what purpose the information is being used and whether or not the interview is recorded so that informed consent may be given by the interviewee. If these steps are not taken, the interview is inherently unethical and cannot be conducted. Empathy and honesty between both parties make or break the integrity and productivity of an interview.

Being interviewed about my own community gave me greater insight on the what it feels like to be interviewed, allowing me to experientially learn about the nuances of creating a mutually beneficial conversation in an interview environment. Through this experience, I learned that by making the interview a conversation, maintaining an empathetic attitude toward the subject matter, and asking clear, neutral questions, the interview experience can not only become a source of information to further academic research, but a mutual understanding can be promoted between the participants. Aside from any differences between the two participants, a

well-done interview provides an uncommon opportunity to find mutual appreciation for what each experience has to offer.

Works Cited

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