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ANTH 258: Anthropology of Fear
Project Report: Tales from the Hill: Ethnographies of Fear at Kenyon College
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Introduction

During the Spring of 2020, the course ANTH 258: The Anthropology of Fear proposed a digital storytelling project, with the aid of the Kenyon College CIP, for students to present their class information and research in a different style than a traditional academic format. The original project focused on fears and the culture behind them at Kenyon College, specifically in the senior population. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the focus of the project was readjusted to a study of fears of the class students in their places of social distancing and isolation, and more specifically, their family fears. The readjustment resulted in students generating digital narratives in video interviews and an audio reflection in a podcast series.

Original Proposed Project

The originally proposed project was framed to expose the fears surrounding the college experience and individual student fears. The central premise is that the American college experience is perceived as a rite of passage in which young adults are groomed and educated to be productive members of society. However, cultural factors such as ethnicity, age, gender, social status, and personal identity, have a significant impact on students' individual experience. These factors influence behavior and have a profound effect on a student's college experience. Hence, a big part of the college experience is how each student navigates their college years guided by their cultural identities.

In a biological sense, fear is the response that our bodies have to a perceived threat. However, humans, as social animals, give a multiplicity of meanings to fear, which shapes their social and cultural practices. *Our primary goal in this class project was to explore how students' individual cultural and social identities frame their college experience, including places and situations that cause them to fear*. The main method for this task is Digital Storytelling, a process by which ordinary people tell stories about their everyday lives using digital media production software.

Digital Storytelling, Podcast and COVID-19

Initially, students from the class ANTH 258: The Anthropology of Fear were to produce a Digital ethnography focused on exploring how social constructs of fear experienced by senior Kenyon students affected their four years. In this class, students will use video and audio recordings to document narratives of diverse types of fears associated with Kenyon College campus life. The class project, *Tales from the Hill: Ethnographies of Fear at Kenyon College*, planned using digital storytelling as an ethnographic tool to understand the role of fear in the college experience at Kenyon College. This survey, although not meant to be exhaustive, will open a small window into how different individuals may experience fear differently. Moreover, having digital narratives as a central method gives the ANTH 258 students the skill to gather qualitative data that can be analyzed through an anthropological lens. Through the methods of digital storytelling, students expand traditional in-class concepts by applying them in the field and then interpreting individual narratives through an anthropological lens.

Due to the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and its consequences on residential campus classes at Kenyon College, mainly the switch to remote teaching and the implementation of social distancing, the focus, and scope of the project were changed. The main objective of approaching the role of fear in the college experience remained the same. Still, the focus shifted from Kenyon seniors to individuals from the same household where the students were quarantined for the pandemic. The project's new focus aimed for students to produce a digital narrative centered on exploring how fear is experienced in the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, before spring break, the class received technical and educational support from the Kenyon College CIP regarding hardware use and data processing during the pre-interview stage. This new focus explores the individual experience of students being quarantined with family members during the spring semester of 2020. To do this, the students carried out digital storytelling as an ethnographic tool to understand the role of fear during the 2020 Pandemic. The "narrative of fear" consisted of a 20 to a 30-minute audio interview of an individual quarantined in the same household as the student. The resulting narrative was suggested as an audio file; a video interview could be done if possible. Students were encouraged to carry out interviewees using only available technology, such as their phones. Moreover, the exercise was designed for

them to focus more on the content of the interviews than the technical aspect. This includes preparing before interviews, knowing how to ask different kinds of questions, and extract information.

Afterward, interviews were transcribed by students (the use of free online transcript software like https://otter.ai/ was encouraged), and all files, audio interviews, PDF's of transcripts and any additional materials (i.e., metadata and consent form sheet) were uploaded to a Google Drive private account made exclusively for the class. The resulting student folder hence contained a full interview, its transcriptions and documentation followed the recommendations and format recommended by Digital Kenyon.

Finally, students were required to create a synthesis and reflection on the role of culture and fear in your Digital Narrative. This reflection was in the form of an individual 5-minute audio file or podcast. Initially, the CIP was programmed to give technical advice on recording and editing. Still, just as in the case of the digital narrative, the podcast format had to be readapted due to the 2020 pandemic. Students were instructed to use their smartphones to record their reflections. Before students recorded their audio, a script of their podcast was created. A close reading of the interview transcript was crucial for this task. It will reveal, together with your critical use of anthropological theory, the role culture played in molding an individual's particular fears. The script consisted mostly of an introduction of the theme, main points and concepts, and a conclusion. Students then read and recorded their script and uploaded it to a private Google Drive.

The project generated very satisfying results, precisely 14 different digital narratives of fear were created and collected in Google Drive. All digital stories were well documented. The narratives took multiple subjects discussed in class, the biology of fear, and its relation to culture, and applied the current pandemic context. After collecting the files on google drive, the professor of this class retreated the audio files and consolidated them in a podcast format using Anchor.fm, a free online software designed for the fast creation of podcasts. The project's web page is configured so that only class participants, people with a direct link, and the instructor can access it. One student volunteered to create an introduction to the podcasts, and others suggested multiple audio files for in-between podcast transitions. The files were divided into four different episodes based on the content of the files. The four episodes consisted in:

1. Fear in the Media
2. Fear in Urban Spaces
3. Fear and the Transgression of Boundaries.
4. School, Relationships, and Covid-19.

Final Comments

Even though the Spring of 2020 semester was disrupted by a global pandemic, the project *Tales from the Hill: Ethnographies of Fear at Kenyon College* successfully adapted to remote instruction by modifying the focus and scope of the protect. Students were able to use essential technological tools to create digital narratives within a safe context. Students also showed an excellent capability to synthesis class information, extract information, and synthesize it in multiple formats. Advice from the CIP director Joseph Murphy was critical for technical advising and facilitating the transition of the project to a different scope.