

Focus Group Triad 2

SAMANTHA (Female, 24, Columbia PostBac with Psychology BA from Brooklyn College)

MARTHA (Female, 39, Grenada, has Education BA from University of West Indies, went to US to get an American degree)

FAY (Female 25, Bangladesh, BA in Business in progress at Brooklyn College)

MODERATOR AND TRANSCRIBER: Frans Albarillo (PI)

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MODERATOR: The question is to talk about your research here, and then compare it with school work and how you found information before.

SAMANTHA: Okay, so I think the main differences between here and back home is access to resources, because here you can, everybody has Internet. It's not the case back home. At least in Brooklyn, we have a good public library system. It's not perfect, but it's useful. And you can access that, and you can access the Internet in the library even if you don't have a library at home. In Columbia. There's one public library in the entire city where I lived. Just one. And every school has a library. But they were limited, but those were my only access to library school, and the one public library. And the one public library, it's very nice. It has a lot of things, it's very well kept. To contextualize, it's in a very bad area. So you don't want to go to the library, because you might get robbed. So, that was a factor there. We would go in school groups, so the school bus would drive us in, or a parent. But it was an event. It wasn't like I'm going to the library to find out information like you can here. Yeah, I think that's it.

FAY: Here research for homework, it depends. For me it varies from professor to professor. For example I can say this term, I have two courses. The professor he demands that to actually do the homework from the textbook, only from the textbook. So in such cases we don't need to do references, for example Googling or look up other books from here (the library). Because the only source is our textbook. But there are cases where we do look for different books, and do Google for finishing an assignment. The most scary part for me is here. I am always scared about the plagiarism, because back home I never had any idea, what is this. Because we were never taught about anything. Back home there is no issue about plagiarize, you can always go copy. You don't even need to give credit. But here you can get an F, you can be, it's a very serious issue. So initially it was a very panicking

issue for me. Now that I'm used to it, I know what to do and what not to do.

MODERATOR: How about your assignments, were they similar, like group projects? Where did you go?

FAY: As I told you, I've never been to public libraries, not even in back home. As she said, we only had one public library in the whole city. It was very well equipped. I've been back there once, with my friends when I was a kid. Everybody wants to go there, like what is out there. So not for day to day research. It's not that convenient. For example in school, the library doesn't have any computers. so you can only look up for books, not do the whole complete research there. It's kind of inconvenient. You can only take out the books, and you go home and do the actual research there, not in the library.

SAMANTHA: I'd like to add something when you're done.

FAY: You can, feel free.

SAMANTHA: In the library in Colombia, you can't take out the books. And another thing I wanted to add, I just thought of it, sorry I get inspired. One thing we used in Colombia a lot, even college students did. I didn't go to Colombia for college, but my sisters did, was I feel now that I think about it it's like a community library. Because people have encyclopedias at home, so my parents have a lot (emphatic) of books. So we don't have access to public libraries. So people are in the habit of buying books and encyclopedias and dictionaries. So we had a lot of things. And if you didn't have something, you knew somebody who had something. So you go to your friends house. Or your mom knows like you know I have a friend who's a doctor, she has to have anatomy books. So why don't you go there do homework there. There is a community setting for like this resources that are not public or provided by the government. But because the culture is so community oriented, everybody talks to each other, oh I know this person let me see if I can lend you the book. And people don't want to lend you the book, so you go to their house and do homework there.

FAY: Yes. We have that too.

MARTHA: I'm glad she mentioned this. Because I forgot everything about it. So I went to high school in the 80s, and I need to say this some of the things that I'm saying may not be happening now. But I have a son in high school back home. When we were growing up we had encyclopedias, and then my dad was a teacher when I was younger so he made sure we had all the books at home that we needed. We would use the one public library on the island, after

school. Some of the books were reference books, so you couldn't go home with it. Which were the important books. So it was good that everyone had a private library at home. We did, we had a special area for it.

FAY: We had a room full of books.

SAMANTHA: Like wall to wall.

SAMANTHA: Dust collecting on it.

FAY: Yeah, wall to wall.. And my father, basically he was a professor in English, he had a lot (emphatic) of books.

MARTHA: So Britannica. Big things in those days.

MODERATOR: I brought some of these (shows print encyclopedias) just to see if you might recognize them.

FAY: We do have those.

SAMANTHA: You have all the volumes.

MARTHA: And then we had a globe. And an Atlas.

SAMANTHA: Everybody has an Atlas.

MARTHA: Even in high school right now, they have to have an Atlas as textbooks. So we have to purchase our own textbooks for our kids. There equipped with all these things, but the schools have their own libraries. And right now, three years ago the public library closed. Amazon, I don't know Amazon. So there's a lot of people back home they order the books on Amazon.

MODERATOR: Is that true for all of you?

FAY: No, we never use Amazon.

SAMANTHA: No, not in Colombia. People never buy online. It's very unsafe. It never makes it home.

FAY: Yes. You cannot buy from Amazon back home.

MODERATOR: Who pays for the textbooks or the books?

FAY: My father.

SAMANTHA: Parents do, and it also depends on the level of education of your parents, as she was saying. So my parents are, one is an educator and the other one is a lawyer. And my family is Presbyterian, so we had a lot of books on religion that my mom just purchased. Or they were given by the church. A lot of books on education, a lot of encyclopedias. I don't know if this thing still exists, but when I was growing up there was this thing called the Reader's Circle. Circulo des Lectores, I don't know if you heard about that? It's like you buy books by catalog. That's how you get the encyclopedias. So this person comes around with a catalog, and you order it right? So I want these two volumes next week. This person, brings them and you pay for it. The person comes around with the magazine.

SAMANTHA: And they bring you books, and what do you want to order for next week?

FAY: Yeah, that's how we buy our books.

SAMANTHA: You buy Avon here, you buy books. (Fay is agreeing) and my mother would be like, and the more you buy you get discounts. It's like Avon. You get discounts, you get prices, so my mom is like if we buy all of this, then we get this other encyclopedia.

FAY: Or a free globe.

SAMANTHA: Or a free dictionary in English for English or Spanish. That was the system of buying books. The Readers Circle.

FAY: Yeah, I mean my dad came home with seven books, and he says no that guy came to my office and say hey.

MARTHA: Back home, I work with customs, so when the ship with cargo. I notice that a lot of charity organizations in the US, especially New York, and other global cities. They would ship books that the other libraries are throwing out. They would ship it back home and donate them to schools. So I think a lot of students rely on these books. And even Amazon. We get a lot of orders on Amazon. Because I check the stuff. And that's what we rely on to do research. So we get a lot of books from the US.

MARTHA: My son uses the Internet, and I remember back home they would say, don't copy the exact words, but they never use the word plagiarism. They would say, do it in your own words.

SAMANTHA: Yeah, do it in your own words.

MARTHA: So would just reword the thing from the encyclopedia, but that's plagiarism. Because that was a new thing for me too.

FAY: We never learned the stuff like bibliography

MARTHA: Yeah, we never even heard the word plagiarism. And I see my son now, and he goes on the Internet and Google every day. And then I will take him away, and show him the books. He was doing the exact words. And then I was like, no that's plagiarism. (laughing) And I got upset and it was because of my experience here, in the educational institution with plagiarism. I think it's more emphasized if you went to University, but in high schools they allow the kids to plagiarize.

FAY: That's true.

MODERATOR: Plagiarism is one thing that's clearly different for all of you, here in the US, are there other things? Things like databases that you mentioned earlier.

MARTHA: Oh yes, they will tell you which databases to use. Like when I was doing that online course in Granada through the University of London. And the University of the West Indies they would give you Harvard Business Review, so I had to subscribe to the journals. And it came they were shipped home. And that was the only US source I could've referred to when I was writing my sociology essays.

FAY: Really so you would pay for your subscription?

MARTHA: Yes, I paid for it. Because when I went to the public library there were no Harvard Journals there.

SAMANTHA: It's like buying a textbook.

MARTHA: And then the library closed. And I was doing the course before I came here. And I gave up. And I was like you know what I can't get any sources back home and it's costing me too much money to be ordering these journals. You know what, let me just come and study. And then I'd order stuff from England, and Europe.

FAY: I think for me back home, research was very much bookish instead of all this Internet search. It was very bookish. As she was saying, she has to look for all these journals. We were never encouraged.

MODERATOR: OK, I've got another question about research. Who teaches you research?

FAY: Teachers. Initially maybe my dad.

SAMANTHA: I would say parents. I mean it depends. I'm thinking of as a child, I was always encouraged to go find out. Their answer was to go find out. They encouraged to go do it on your own. It's an advantage in that setting to not have access to the Internet, as opposed here where you can literally Google what is a zygote. You know. And we didn't have that. So it's kinda like, you got to pick a book, and then find a word. And then if it has pictures, then you become interested. And you find something that you don't understand, and then you look up that word. And it becomes a process of learning. (Martha and Fay are agreeing). It's harder, but it allows you to learn more. So I would say as I child I did that, and then academically when you're given homework assignments, you already have the experience of I need to know something, so I look it up. And I don't think they didn't put such an emphasis on plagiarizing as such, as a crime. More like as you being lazy and you not doing your work.

MARTHA: be original

SAMANTHA: Yeah be original. You cannot possibly take a definition, and that is your assignment. Because you did not do your assignment. The assignment was something different. If it sounded too sophisticated, you didn't write this. It's kinda obvious, although it's not seen as crime or un ethical per say, it is looked down upon as you are lazy.

FAY: Yeah

FRANS: So teachers monitor it.

SAMANTHA: Absolutely, but it's not like you're going to jail or your stealing intellectual property. You really need to do your reading.

MODERATOR: So coming into the Brooklyn College, system plagiarism was...

SAMANTHA: It wasn't for me, because I went to Baruch College too right, when I first came. I had a teacher. I knew about plagiarism. And I knew that it was a crime. And I felt that they were overreacting. And I had a discussion with the teacher. What if you just happen say it in the way that the author said it, what if you've never read somebody who already said that. She said, no that's absurd. What are you saying, are you saying that I can't phrase a sentence in a way that somebody phrased it twenty five years ago in a book? I just thought it was absurd. I thought the idea behind

plagiarism was don't steal intellectual property, don't call it yours if it's not. And do you work, that was the idea that I was coming in with. They want you to create your own piece of knowledge or your understanding of something that is already there. The fact that they make it so legal here has to do with America's obsession with lawsuits. They just want to sue somebody. And sometimes for English assignments we have to submit it to a web site that will tell the teacher, it's annoying. You're overreacting.

MODERATOR: If there was just one thing was really difficult when you first came from Colombia to Baruch, what is it?

SAMANTHA: The notation system. Because you do have to reference in Colombia, but here there's more than one. There's MLA, there's APA. The notion difference, as opposed to saying where you got it. You have to buy a book that says, period comma, semi colon, page (Fay agreeing in the background).

MODERATOR: How about you Martha, one thing that was difficult?

MARTHA: I think it was just maneuvering myself through the library system. Because it was easier at home. If I wanted a book I would just go to the reference section or ask a librarian. Here it is more complicated. I was at BMCC and then I had to find a call number.

FAY: I couldn't even find a call number, first time I was all lost and I didn't know where to go.

MARTHA: So I fell back thinking, OK you're not a young student and your supposed to know this. Anyways, it's just a whole new system. The whole library system is so sophisticated. Because, as I told you back home it was easy, the library closed years ago.

FAY: It was easy, here it's complicated.

MODERATOR: So it's difficult?

FAY: Yes it's difficult for me. Initially I had no clue, like how to find a book. I was asking everybody, hey where do I get this, and people were like, oh you don't even know that? I was having difficulty. I don't understand like to look. They're like it's so easy look for the number and this and that. I never did this back home, so I had no idea how to do that.

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