

## **Student experience podcast transcript: Amy Knight**

**Could you tell us about your research project? We are particularly interested to hear about the research design and the research methods that you chose.**

My research project was investigating which gender was more likely to recycle and to look at factors why differences can occur. The methods I chose to gain data were an electronic questionnaire and interviews with heterosexual cohabitating couples. Both methods were asked closed ended questions such as age, occupation, and gender. The electronic questionnaire had a set of statements designed to measure individual's level of environmental concern and questions asking individuals about their recycling habits. The interview covered a range of topics including recycling habits, climate change, household routines, and environmentally friendly behaviours. The conclusion reached from this research project was that women completed the majority of recycling tasks; the factor linked to this was that women had higher levels on environmental concern.

**What sparked your interest in the subject you chose to research?**

I had previously studied the topic areas of risk, recycling and gender differences and found them interesting. I also completed a smaller scale research project looking at students' levels of recycling participation; this study also found differences regarding which gender recycled the most. I then was eager to see if there was a gender difference from a range of ages.

**Could you tell us how you came up with those questions?**

I completed extensive reading focusing on the topics of recycling and gender differences. In previous studies gender differences regarding levels of environmental concern tended to be similar (typically showing that females demonstrated higher levels of environmental concern than men). However previous published research was inconclusive regarding recycling habits and gender differences. I was interested to see whether levels of environmental concern could also link to recycling habits hence the two research questions.

**How did you go about the literature review? Can you illustrate the steps that you took?**

I spent a lot of time reading previous published material that focused on recycling habits, which individuals are most likely to recycle and why. I then chose the areas I wanted to focus on; this was gender, recycling and environmental attitudes/levels of concern. Once I had chosen the specific areas I wanted to focus on, I then went back to the relevant published material to produce an interweaving discourse about what other researchers and academics had found.

**What prompted you to choose this research design and method?**

I chose the research design, as the methods are complementary. The questionnaire is concerned with gaining an understanding of individual's environmental concern, and then obtaining information regarding respondents' recycling habits. Whereas the interview places more emphasis on why there

might be gender differences by discussing such topics as housework routines. Using complementary methods ensured that detailed results and comparisons could be made.

### **What factors influenced your choice of research methods?**

The types of data they produced; the questionnaire responses could be analyzed quantifiably in a statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) whereas the interview data produced qualitative data that could be coded. This made making comparisons between both data sets easier and clearer. As stated I used an online questionnaire to benefit the environment, this also meant no specific sample was used, as participants were self-selecting.

### **How did you choose your sample and what principles guided your sampling?**

There was no specific sample for the questionnaire, as respondents were self-selecting since I made the questionnaire available online. Although the questionnaire sample is not intended to be representative, it provides valuable insights as to whether males and females have similar attitudes regarding the environment. The questionnaire sample also provides useful information regarding individuals' recycling habits.

Due to time constraints a convenience sample was used to obtain participants for the interviews. To reduce a misrepresentation of the population the sample was taken from a range of ages. The interviewees needed to be co-habituating heterosexual couples. This was because the division of household work and the division of recycling tasks between each gender needed to be identified. The division of household tasks was needed as it may offer an explanation as to which gender is more likely to recycle.

### **Were there any problems when it came to administering your research instrument(s)?**

Both techniques were heavily piloted; this was to reduce any problems whilst collecting the primary data. The questionnaire was piloted twice with four people in total completing them. Originally, the question asking the participant's occupation was closed, meaning a participant needed to categorize their occupation. This proved difficult for the pilot questionnaire's respondents; to resolve this, the question was then left open for the participant to write the title of their occupation.

The interview themes and questions were piloted with two couples; primarily this was to reduce any faults with the interview questions that may lead to incoherent answers. Whilst piloting the interviews some changes were made to the themed questions. The original questions required in-depth knowledge regarding climate change and the environment. This proved ineffective as participants were left confused and unsure. The questions were then changed and required less expert information about climate change. There was also an addition of questions based on the theme of household routines; this was to establish an insight of which gender completes the relevant tasks within a household.

A concern when completing the interviews was that information would be shared between couples. To prevent this happening, each couple was interviewed separately, which also prevented one couple from

answering all the questions. Each couple's interviews happened straight after one another. This was also to prevent participants relaying the questions to their partner.

**What were your research questions?**

1. Is there a gender difference regarding individuals' level of environmental concern? 2. Is there a gender difference regarding individuals' recycling habits?

**Did you encounter any difficulties at this stage? If so, how did you deal with them?**

It is difficult to know what literature is useful to your project or dissertation's literature review and which material is useful for background reading. To overcome this problem I made sure my research questions were concise and this enabled me to divide the literature I had read into two sections. The first being background reading that consisted of general recycling habits, research that focused on demographics such as age and types of recycling. The second being material relevant to the literature review for example published studies on gender and recycling, how to measure environmental concern, and why people choose to recycle. Both sections became useful when putting my dissertation together, for example the background literature I had read became part of my introduction.

**Do you have any comments about your relationship with your research project supervisor? What role did they have in the process of doing a research project?**

My project supervisor was extremely helpful and provided excellent feedback on draft chapters and offered great guidance. It is important to keep a good working relationship with your supervisor. This is so that they know what stage you are at, which then means they can help when you need it. It's also useful when completing a research project that you meet with your supervisor regularly, not only to get feedback from marked draft papers but also to bounce any ideas off of each other, which may help whilst completing the research project.

**What are the main lessons that you have learned from this process? Are there any aspects of the research that you would like to have done differently?**

If I had more time to complete the research project I would like to have completed more interviews and questionnaires. This is so that I could obtain extensive data, which could then be analyzed. I would also like to complete a representative study to compare to the results I achieved from this research project.

**If you had one bit of advice to give to students who are about to begin working on their research projects, what would it be?**

Complete as much background reading as possible so that you really understand and have an interest in the topic areas you are researching. Background reading also helps you to understand where your research will fit in with previous published material.

**How did you go about analyzing the data?**

Questionnaire: I used SPSS to analyze the questionnaire data. This enabled me to complete cross tabulations and build graphs. Interview: I transcribed the interview responses for these and then coded them manually.

**How did you go about writing up your research project?**

I decided to begin with the literature review; I had two literature review chapters. Once both chapters were completed I designed how I was going to collect the data; the methods were then piloted. Once all research was completed and analyzed, I wrote the methods chapter. This was so that I could explain in detail my research process and I could also note any difficulties I faced. I then wrote my findings and discussion chapter. This linked together my findings with previous published material that was discussed in my literature review chapters one and two. I was then able to conclude my findings and offer recommendations for further research in chapter five. After writing my concluding chapter I went back and wrote my introduction. This enabled me to explain exactly what was going to be discussed throughout my dissertation, as it had already been written. By writing the conclusion and introduction last it meant that the two really interlinked with each other. The last thing I wrote was my abstract; again, this was so that I was able to explain exactly what topics my dissertation was about.

**What problems did you encounter at this stage, and how did you succeed in overcoming them?**

It was difficult managing the workload and balancing it with other assessments, which needed to be completed simultaneously. Effective time management is needed when completing a large research project such as a dissertation. I spent a lot of my summer between my second and third year collecting relevant literature and putting together draft chapters. I would also recommend setting personal targets, for example aiming to complete the literature review chapter within a month of starting your third year. Setting targets worked well for me as it spread my workload, it also meant that I could get effective feedback from my dissertation supervisor with plenty of time to make adjustments.