

Chapter 15: Toward a Feminist Sonic Pedagogy: Research as Listening

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6. Episode 6: Deduction and Hypothesizing by Abby, Carly, and Emily

Students were not required to fully produce the episode this week, although we have included the script here.

Transcript

[intro music]

Abby: Hi, everyone, and welcome to our final episode of “Substratum.” I’m Abby, joined by Emily and Carly, and it’s 6 weeks later but we’re still fascinated by the story of Robert Grunenwald aka “Tunnel Bob.”

Emily: If you’ve been listening in each week, you’ll know that we’ve covered a lot of bases to try to get to the bottom of this mysterious man. From basic Google searches to interviews, to our own observations and a day in the archives, we’ve tried to explore our question from every angle to get the fullest picture possible.

Carly: Now it’s time for us to take a look back at what we’ve learned. Did we change our research question as we went along? Were some sources more insightful than others? Were we shocked by anything that we found out? Find that all here, in our closing episode of “Substratum.”

Emily: To open up our research, we started where all tech savvy millennials start: the glorious Google search. And why shouldn’t we? We found it was a good source to help us see what there is to see as it were. We found links to other forms of secondary and primary research that helped us solidify our research question based on what was readily available.

Carly: Based on what we saw, we were able to home in on the question, “Who is Robert Grunenwald?” A lot of the sources online seemed incomplete to us, so we saw room for our story in the narrative. The internet gave us many people’s impressions of Robert, most of them from the last 5 years, and many of them based solely on observation and speculation. One source that we found did interview Robert, but turns out their story left us feeling incomplete as well since there was a strong bias in the questioning and the editing.

Abby: After doing research through Google, we took a step back and reflected. All in all, this was a good way to kickstart our project as it was easy to see what information was already out there and easily available. We were able to pinpoint holes in the story and formulate our own research question around them. We found that we did not fully trust many of the online sources since they were based off a friend of a friend’s hearsay, but from a larger perspective it was exactly what we needed to dive into our research question. For us, the Google search served as a push towards other, more reliable, sources.

Carly: The next step in our research method was to do interviews. We thought long and hard about who to interview and what we expected they would bring to the narrative. We wanted to achieve a well-rounded story so naturally we needed Robert’s voice. We also wanted to get some perspectives from people who knew him in varying amounts, and maybe some professional opinions too.

Abby: In the end, we were unsuccessful getting everyone we had hoped to, but we still learned a great deal from those that we did speak with. For instance, I interviewed Emily from this podcast, because she had had a firsthand experience with Robert while studying at Union South. She described him as nice, and possibly a little shy, but not too much because he did offer to watch her bag for her. She left that encounter with a positive impression of Robert- he was polite, thoughtful, and didn't steal her things or takeover her space. Emily was in a unique situation since she had actually interacted with him in the past, so her input was a good perspective for the story.

Emily: I have a friend who interned at city works in the summer, so I interviewed him to get a firsthand account of the steam tunnels and to possibly see if we could get a tour ourselves. No such luck with the tour, but what my friend Josh had to say was pretty interesting. He knew an old coworker who had actually been invited down into the tunnels by Robert to play hide-and-seek, and this coworker had accepted. From what Josh had heard, everything went fine, and his coworker actually had a great time down in the tunnels. So while this story is again all hearsay, it's a fascinating account of something that could've been very horrific, but in reality was not at all.

Carly: For my interview, I spoke with my friend Christian, a Madison local who has lived near campus for about 4 years. While he isn't a student at UW, he is still aware of the mysterious guy who roams the steam tunnels. Like many, he has never personally interacted with the man people call Tunnel Bob, but he has heard many of the common stories about him. Christian can offer up a physical description of Robert as well as the common opinions about him, but that's the extent of his knowledge. This interview was interesting to us because it shows that the legend of Tunnel Bob extends beyond just the undergraduate population. Community members who have never taken classes at the University have heard and perpetuated stories, so that this became a cultural phenomenon associated with Madison as a whole.

Emily: The interviews we were able to gather turned out to be very informative for us. From my firsthand experience interacting with Robert, we were able to dispel the notion that he's shy towards women, or always moody and hostile. From Josh's interview we got some information on technical aspects of the tunnels and also a story of a recent lighthearted encounter with him in the tunnels. From Carly's interview with Christian, we saw just how far spread the legend of Robert Grunenwald is.

Abby: The only thing we wished we could've done was interview Robert himself. We had so many questions and our understanding would've been deepened by his input. We prepared for a while in case we actually were fortunate enough to speak with him—we created introductions that would sufficiently explain our purpose without putting him on edge. We ran through what-if scenarios so that we could be prepared for however he might react to us. We practiced empathy, tact, and distance so that we could gracefully withdraw from the situation if it turned out to be a terrible mistake. And although we weren't able to use these tactics, we became better interviewers from our preparations, so it wasn't a complete loss to our truth-seeking strategy.

Carly: For our observations episode, we each observed a location that Robert has been known the frequent: College Library, the Tunnels and Union South.

Emily: At College Library, Abby watched how people studying at the Open Book Cafe reacted to others walking around the room. She noted that no one really noticed and that maybe someone would look up everyone once in a while.

Abby: For Carly's observations, she watched the video of Tunnel Bob giving students a tour of the tunnels from the *Badger Herald*. In the video she noticed that Robert seemed genuinely excited about the tunnels and teaching other people about them. It made him seem less like a legend and more like a real person, because that's exactly what he is. Although he seemed a bit awkward, there was no sense of bad intentions behind his love for and genuine interest in the tunnels and these helped Carly's opinion of him go from neutral to more positive.

Carly: For Emily's observations, she actually saw Robert in person at Union South where he was reading a book and occasionally walking around or people watching. She thought about taking the opportunity to approach him for a few questions or an interview but decided against it because she didn't want to disturb him or put him on edge. She also noticed how indifferent everyone was to his presence. No one was staring at him or taking pictures, indicating how little he stands out or how little interest people have in him when they do see him.

Emily: Next, we did a test of our own to see if others noticed a strange individual walking past them at college library while they were studying. To do this we observed people's reactions to Abby walking around the Open Book Cafe and came to the consensus that no one really cared. This also could have been due to the fact that she blends in well as a student.

Abby: However, we also saw a tall man around the same age as Robert walk through the cafe and no one paid much attention to him either.

Carly: After all of these observations we realized that nothing Robert does is really that creepy. He read, walks around and people watches a bit, things we all do. He also has a unique interest in the tunnels, which doesn't make him creepy. This creepiness is an attribute we have given to him. He's a legend we like to talk about and tweak his story to make a better one. It's a tradition for us to be interested in and talk about him, but when he's actually right there in front of us, we don't care.

Carly: Last week, we tried a different source and dug into the archives at Steenbock Library in order to get a better idea of what historical UW records reveal about Robert Grunenwald. Although we didn't expect to find a ton of information about him, we did find interesting information relating to the steam tunnels and even some yearbook articles mentioning him and other notorious faces on campus. Our oldest article dated back to 1923, which described the engineering of the steam tunnel heating system of the time. We could then link this information about the steam tunnels with the later released yearbook articles from 1989 and 1993, which discuss Tunnel Bob and other urban legends. Overall, we concluded that maybe the only reason why UW-Madison is so fascinated with the urban legend of Tunnel Bob is because that's the way it's always been. For generations, people have put a label on a man they don't know because he does some quirky things like spending time in boiling hot, underground steam tunnels. The society at UW-Madison has morphed Robert into a semi-fictional character in order to enhance cultural appeal of the university and town.

Emily: Because of this archives research, we were given new angles to explore the audience of the Tunnel Bob story rather than Tunnel Bob himself. It ruled out the possibility of this story being a fresh and new one, but it gave us more questions and perspectives. It did give us the possibility to explore other urban legends and how they've evolved through generations, just like the urban legend of Tunnel Bob in Madison. We can compare different stories in order to distinguish if stories like ours are universal in nature, or if Tunnel Bob is a unique exception. Yet, a question the archives didn't answer

for us revolved around exactly how and why the story of Tunnel Bob arose. And what is it about him that keeps us so intrigued? Is this story an accurate portrayal of him as a person, rather than just an urban legend?

Abby: Through our research and observations, we have been able to remove a few misconceptions that people have about Robert. We know he does not live in the tunnels, he is not afraid of women and doesn't seem to have bad intentions. We've come to see him as a normal guy with a unique fascination which has lead us to ask ourselves and the rest of the UW Madison community, why do we care so much about him? Why do we still talk about him 30 years later? Does it have more to do with us than with him? It seems that may be the case.

Carly: We have constantly been trying to dig underneath the surface of Robert Grunenwald and figure out why he is so fascinated with the steam tunnels, making him notorious as Tunnel Bob. Yet, we had no way of finding out the answer to this question unless we met with him, which was highly unlikely. We tried different angles and mocked answers, but we would never be able to completely uncover the truth. Within this frustration, our research question evolved. Why are we, the authors and audience of this story, so obsessed with him? We've been focused on this question now, which gives us copious pathways to explore different options, talk to endless people from the area, and uncover more details.

[*outro music*]