



Collecting Qualitative Data in the Age of Covid-19: Virtual Possibilities

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 Panelists: Emily Lawrence, Bryan Kutner, Rob Fredericksen, Arpita B

	<i>Questions for Panelists</i>	<i>Responses</i>
Emily Lawrence	If participants met in a location to receive their phones, was there a concern about confidentiality? If so, how was it relieved by the researchers?	We followed the same protocols as a normal FGD and reviewed the importance of confidentiality etc. Additionally, while they were in the same physical space, no one knew what phone number linked to each individual so their actual responses were de-identified.
	Have you found any type of mobile application that would allow for exporting audio?	We have not yet found an application that allows for exporting audio and text together. WhatsApp(c) did allow for exporting audio text, however the challenge we encountered is that it didn't export the audio and text together, thus leading us to have to weave together the narrative from the message chains manually.
	You mentioned that the participants in the virtual interviews preferred to type rather than use voice overs. How did that work out exactly?	In fact, the participants preferred using the voice memo feature as opposed to typing text (see: https://faq.whatsapp.com/android/chats/how-to-send-voice-messages). Essentially, they would respond to a prompt or a text message with a voice memo of their response.
	Regarding remote FGDs, did you have a set time for everyone to gather and have a discussion or they could participate at any time of the day?	Yes, this was our initial intent for several of the remote sessions, however in some instances coordinated showing up at the same time dissipated at the end of the month and discussions were more sporadic and at participants leisure.
	Has a pre-test of the study tools been done, if so, I wonder what were the findings. Were you able to detect some of the technical challenges?	No, we did not pre-test the tools. This is something we strongly recommend research teams do in the future.

Bryan Kutner	Would you recommend future studies advise participants to engage in interviews in an environment where they feel comfortable or safe to disclose information to avoid disruption if possible?	Indeed, we made that advisement when setting up interviews -- and reiterated it when a handful of participants chose to transition from a private space to a more public space (e.g., a bus, walking on the street). We figured that we should trust participants' judgment that they did indeed feel comfortable and safe to disclose. They also didn't want to reschedule in order to be in a more private location, even knowing as they did that we were talking about a particularly stigmatized form of sex. I was surprised myself by their insistence, given the sensitivity so many people feel about the subject matter.
	Was it challenging to analyze data that came from phone interviews vs chat?	The online chat data was very easy to explore because it was immediately available as text after the interview was complete. The phone data required time for transcription from voice to text. That meant that reflecting within a debriefing report on the chat data could be informed by the actual verbatim data, whereas reflections on the phone interview data were based more on memory. That said, the phone interviews were richer sources of data because they held more lengthy responses and more context. The chat data still allowed interesting explorations of disclosure but were sometimes more ambiguous in their meaning.

<p>Do you have tips for building rapport with participants over the phone?</p>	<p>For the stigma measurement project, I was straightforward with participants about my work and research history with LGBTQ people and my personal identification as a gay man. I also asked them what kind of language best suited them when we talked about sex, whether they preferred that I match their explicit language or use more 'professional' language. I told them I would follow their lead -- and that I was accustomed to talking about sex in detail as a therapist and as a former HIV/STI test counselor in sex clubs. Those are somewhat idiosyncratic tips. In general when discussing a sensitive topic, it likely helps to be forthright about who you are and why you're interested in your line of research. I've found it useful also to acknowledge hunches about implicit experiences that participants may not be expressing directly. For example, I'm a white person and I wanted to probe the intersectional experience of racism and sexual stigma. Concealment is a prominent dimension of stigma; people hide aspects of their experience if they think its disclosure will result in an aversive response. When the topic came up, I tended to disclose my racial identification and the rationale for the questions (e.g., to hear what people might not typically share about their thoughts and feelings). I do this kind of self-involving self-disclosure about my motivations typically when I sense that participants may feel more comfortable being forthright if they hear confirmation that I am indeed eager to listen to what they might otherwise keep concealed. The final tip I would offer is to verbalize, sparingly and naturally, the kinds of attending body language one might use during an in-person interview: mmm, yes, uh-huh, I see, that makes sense, and summarizing to confirm comprehension when I was not sure I understood the meaning of what was being said.</p>
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<p>Rob Frederickson</p>	<p>Why did you initially decide to use the chat function of Zoom instead of a Zoom video or even voice call? Also, did you run into technological challenges at all - hosts or participants dropping due to connectivity? How did you handle or plan for those? Any tips for preparing to use Zoom with a group?</p>	<p>I don't recall any connectivity challenges. We were concerned about maintaining anonymity given the subject matter (e.g., many of our participants were from rural areas where homosexuality is highly stigmatized), hence our choice of chat function over video.</p>
	<p>Were you able to disable participants being able to message other participants on Zoom? How can you guarantee there was no harassment? Did you ask for participants to report such behavior?</p>	<p>I believe we did have the ability to disable, but never needed to. It's hard to guarantee no harassment, as in any group setting, you hope for the best. If anyone's behavior was concerning, we could limit their interactions with the others and address them privately.</p>
	<p>You mentioned higher educated individuals were included, do you think the platform and access to such limited your sample?</p>	<p>I do think this format privileges those with tech savvy and access, and that this may limit generalizability of our findings.</p>

All Speakers	<p>How did you ensure participation of quiet group members?</p>	<p>Arpita: This was mediated through technology as there were different levels of participation in our study. With Slack, teens had the option to read, react and/or comment. We also provided participants an option to respond to one of the researchers privately via Slack message or email if they did not want to participate in the group. Teens used it a couple of times.</p> <p>Bryan: I let people know that everyone participates in different ways, that some people feel immediately compelled to contribute while others take a little more time before jumping in. That means that at times, I might encourage people who have already shared quite a bit to allow me to ask those who haven't said anything yet to add their perspective. If someone does not have much to say about themselves, I might also allow them to discuss their perceptions of other people (outside of the room, if this is a focus group), as a bridge between talking about the topic in a less threatening way before transitioning back to the participants' own thoughts, feelings, and behavior. I've also asked participants how I might phrase something in the future to encourage more quiet or reluctant people to feel more at ease -- basically leveraging participants' expertise in what might work for their peers.</p> <p>Rob: By very proactively calling on folks if they hadn't written in a while.</p>
	<p>How did you conduct the informed consent process?</p>	<p>Arpita: we sent out an online survey with the consent/assent text that was approved by the IRB. Teens could check off the options that were relevant to them. They also entered information about an emergency contact - a trusted adult we could reach out to in times of disclosures of physical emergency situations. We then downloaded a copy of the consent/assent form and sent it to all participants who consented to participate in the study.</p> <p>Bryan: The IRBs allowed us to conduct assent online. For interviews, participants completed an online screening questionnaire, then viewed an online information statement. This did not require a signature, just clicking forward to continue into the research survey. Before recording interviews, we confirmed consent orally. There was no additional written consent form or reviewing of the information statement; we just asked them+B11 if they had any questions about the study, and briefly covered some examples of topics they might want to confirm as research subjects. After starting the recording, we asked them again for oral consent, as a more formal record of their informed consent.</p> <p>Emily: This process was conducted in person.</p>
	<p>How did you confirm participant identity to make sure you are engaging with the person you've recruited?</p>	<p>Arpita: This was mainly done through the recruitment process (sampling through teen networks). We did not ask for any identity confirmation documents. Participants could use aliases and remain anonymous.</p> <p>Bryan: We prompted participants to create a personal identification number based on name/birth month. We also used the phone numbers and email addresses participants supplied during their initial online survey, as a match to confirm participant identities.</p>

<p>Based on your experiences, do you have a favorite user-friendly app for qualitative data collection, or apps you have found not as effective? Any advice on apps that would be effective for qualitative data collection from dementia caregivers on quality of life?</p>	<p>Bryan: I don't know of a specific app. At this point, you could use Zoom Pro because it is HIPAA-compliant. For data analysis, I like Dedoose for its collaboration functions, specifically being able to work simultaneously across multiple sites that may not be in the same geographic location.</p> <p>Emily: I don't have a favorite app, but highly recommend researching what applications are used most by the population you are targeting and then checking to ensure that application is secure and also allows for exporting data to excel or word documents for analysis. When I worked at the Veterans Health Administration, I did do a fair number of phone-interviews with caregivers of patients in short-term nursing facilities and found it worked well. I could also see messaging applications working well with that population since they are often very busy people managing their own lives in addition to the individual they are caring for.</p>
<p>I'm interested in the possibility of combining virtual and in-person qualitative data collection in the same project, potentially allowing the project to benefit from the strengths of each mode. What are the panelists thoughts about being able to combine virtual and in-person data in the same analysis?</p>	<p>Arpita: You can check out Calvin Liang's work. Their team expanded on the online processes we used in our study and also conducted offline groups: https://calvliang.github.io/projects/IDC2020</p> <p>Bryan: The stigma measurement project I discussed also involved 10 key informant interviews (5 in-person, 5 telephonic). While we didn't conduct formal comparisons, there was no obviously discernible difference in the quality of the data, comparing in-person vs. telephonic interviews. I would advise that using different platforms for data collection within the same project is feasible and productive, even if there is some variability in the quality of the data collected. For example, chats and survey textentry responses were never quite as detailed or specific as in-person and telephonic interviews, but they were still informative. Online textentry responses may also offer an opportunity for relatively quick data collection to explore triangulation within the qualitative inquiry. Across both projects I discussed, allowing multiple platforms for participation enriched the inquiry, so I would advise that using both within the same project is feasible and productive, even if online chat and textentry responses are not quite as typically detailed as telephone interviews.</p> <p>Rob: One thing that comes to mind as a dependent factor is the sensitivity of the topic. Would responses likely be quite different between the two modes? If the topic was sexual behavior, for example, I imagine this as likely to be true. The more sensitive the topic is, the less I'd be comfortable with both formats mixed in a single data set.</p>
<p>Do you have any suggestions for reaching people living on the street or who use drugs illicitly? Many of the groups you reached were already regularly using chat features, so I'm curious how you might reach people who are not online as frequently.</p>	<p>Bryan: If people are not online frequently, then online seems like a mismatched platform to meet the participants where they are. Telephone might be more appropriate if people are moving around a lot while on the street. This is one downside to virtual methods; you will miss some portion of the population that doesn't engage online (or have a telephone). However, that is a limitation for in-person methods as well; you will miss some portion of the population that doesn't want to engage onsite for an in-person interview.</p>
<p>Have the panelists used GROUP MODEL BUILDING either in person or virtually?</p>	<p>Bryan: I have not formally. However, all of our key informant interviews involved, at the end of the interview, the presentation of a conceptual model. Simply put, the model hypothesized how anal sex stigma influenced HIV prevention service engagement and safer sex practices. We presented the model piece by piece to key informants, then elicited their thoughts about the model: "What comes to mind when you see this?"; "What's missing?"; "What have we not thought about?"</p>



<p>How do we ensure data security when we use online platforms to collect qualitative data?</p>	<p>Arpita: Anonymity helped with this in our study. We asked participants to not share any identifying information on the group.</p> <p>Bryan: There will always be limitations to online security and this is something that worries me. At the same time, there are now many HIPAA-secure platforms for data collection, so these platforms are as secure as we can expect them at this point.</p>
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