Changing rooms
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Abstract

The abstract should be a concise summary of your case study. What aspect of the research process, or specific methodological and practical challenges, will your case study address? It should be succinct and enticing, and should incorporate key words and concepts discussed in the body of the text. Please do not cite references within the abstract.

[Abstract: This case study will reflect on the ethical and technical challenges of designing and conducting online qualitative research. Utilizing photoelicitation and a written survey, our research team investigated the new or adjusted workspaces that educators and students used during the social restrictions and campus closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As a new team conducting online and remote research for the first time, we identified a number of challenges involved in adapting qualitative and creative research to a fully online format. This case study will focus on exploring these challenges and the bespoke approach we adopted which permitted flexible, anonymous collection of multiple forms of data via a single submission point. We reflect on our team’s learning as we collaboratively embarked on an ‘emergency remote research’ project as a new team and we make recommendations for the adoption of a customized approach.]
Learning Outcomes

Please refer back to these learning outcomes when writing your case study. Your case study must satisfy each proposed outcome. It is vital that you provide achievable and measurable learning outcomes. Please see the links below for guidance on writing effective learning outcomes:

- Writing learning outcomes
- Bloom’s Taxonomy Action Verbs

[Insert 3–5 learning outcomes under the following statement: “By the end of this case, students should be able to . . .”].

By the end of this guide, students should be able to . . .

- Develop ways to navigate ethical considerations such as researcher and participant anonymity and responsibilities when conducting research online.
- Identify approaches to overcome technical challenges in adapting to online research and infrastructure.
- Understand team-based reflections on conducting qualitative research online.

Case Study

[Insert your case study here. The main body of the text should be between 2,000 and 5,000 words.]

Headings and sub-headings add structure to the body of your case, enhance online discoverability and make your case easier to read on screen. This template includes suggested headings, you should also add your own according to the focus of your case study.

Each main section with a heading must be followed by a Section Summary. Each Section Summary should consist of 2-3 bullet points, written out as full sentences, succinctly encapsulating the preceding section.

Suggested headings:
**Project Overview and Context**

Includes information about the substantive focus of your research project. Why were you interested in studying this topic, particularly using the methods you chose? Are the methods you chose typical for researching your topic? If not, explain your choice of methods. This section should not read as a literature review, but should be a reflective exploration of your research interests.

[In March 2020, in response to measures implemented to curb COVID-19, UK universities closed physical campus spaces and moved to engage in the ‘emergency remote teaching’ of courses online. Alongside the UK Government directive to ‘Stay at home’, all teaching staff and students were required to participate in education from their personal home spaces. Our research team employed online photoelicitation and qualitative survey approaches to explore Higher Education educators’ and students’ unique, novel experiences of remote studying and working in the new or adjusted physical workspaces.]

Photoelicitation involves using photographs (these can be either selected by the researcher or more often the participant) in interviews or focus groups to help support qualitative data collection (Bates et al., 2017). Lapenta (2011) and Pink (2006) suggest that the use of photographs and/or videos during interviews, ethnography and other qualitative methods can facilitate a more in-depth discussion of the topic investigated. Moreover, this method provides opportunities for a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences and has the potential to generate interpretations and meanings that would otherwise be kept hidden. Harper (2002) states that ‘photo elicitation evokes information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph’s particular form of representation’ (p.13). This SAGE Research Methods Case Study aims to explore the ethical and technical issues related to our research project using the methods mentioned above.
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated by Universities UK (2018) that online learning made up fewer than 10 percent of all Higher Education (HE) provision which reflects the typical experience of Higher Education learning being undertaken on campus. Therefore, the complete shift from these traditional campus environments to only working from home spaces meant that both educators and students faced unprecedented changes to their lives, as well as their physical learning and working environments.

The importance of the physical environment in education has often been explored. For example, a body of work considers the impact of lecture settings on student engagement (e.g., Acton, 2018; Adekokun et al., 2017) and how classroom settings and interactive technologies can influence students’ perceptions of staff teaching ability (Thomas et al., 2019). However, during the early months of ‘emergency remote teaching’, a key consideration for educators was around the online provision of teaching. This is not unexpected given the rapid, overnight shift to remote teaching and learning and the challenges this brought for all involved.

As universities around the world adapted to the changes the COVID-19 pandemic brought, early research discussion tended to prioritize the student experience raising concerns around digital poverty (e.g., Alvarez Jr., 2020; Dube, 2020). Selwyn (2010) argues digital poverty may encompass access to the internet and/or online systems as well as the formal and effective use of ICT. In the context of COVID-19, Coleman (2021) explains that despite some initial recognition of digital poverty across various educational levels, the ‘digital divide’ had a broader impact than just on students, and thus, the impacts on teaching staff and parents should also be acknowledged. Coleman also argues that consideration should be given to the different levels of knowledge and abilities in using this technology across students, parents and educator groups. This led us to include both educators and students within our study.
In addition to the academic concerns around access to technology and the various levels of knowledge of its use, our research team started to observe educators and students posting images and videos to social media reflecting the challenges of the new working environments, some of which we considered very striking. We also began to become aware of colleagues and students working full-time in their bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms, spare rooms and even cars and hospital rooms. Spaces that were occupied not just by the learners or the educators but that were also inhabited by children, partners, families, pets and other people not typically involved in the learners’ or educators’ experiences of learning and teaching on campus. This narrative highlighted to us the shared challenges and opportunities educators and learners were experiencing in this shift to emergency remote teaching, one which we considered warranted further exploration.

We regarded this as an opportunity to explore the experience of teaching and learning from home that would go beyond the focus on digital poverty and the ability to use technology to capture these experiences as a whole. This would also help to understand learner and educator experiences of home-based learning and teaching within the context of COVID-19 related disruption to education. The focus on the physical and socio-physical environment is significant in Higher Education where millions have been spent refurbishing campus estates in attempts to invigorate teaching pedagogy and practice and improve learner attainment and satisfaction (Jones et al., 2016). This helped lead our team to focus on exploring the unique experiences and perceptions of these new teaching and learning ‘workspaces’ from the perspectives of both learners and educators. In total we recruited 26 participants; 18 students, 6 educators, and 2 dual role from the School of Education and Social Sciences within the
University of the West of Scotland to participate in this photoelicitation and online written study.

The decision to adopt a creative qualitative methodological approach was partly influenced by our shared appreciation of creative methods in social science research. Our participation in an internal career development program (itself fully adapted for emergency online delivery) permitted us space to explore creative methods and methodologies from our distinctive disciplinary perspectives (Psychology, Human Geography and Social Work). We noted past challenges in obtaining ethical approval for qualitative and creative qualitative studies, which sparked the goal of creating an incubator space for the development of a cross-discipline collective aimed at illuminating awareness and understanding of creative approaches to social research.

In summary, we adopted photoelicitation to explore the experience and perceptions of teaching and learning spaces within private homes. We were influenced by our real-world observations of colleagues and students within and outside our institution, along with our recognition of the common humanity in these experiences and our shared aims to promote creative methodologies. Photoelicitation has the power to support understanding between participants and researchers through visual metaphors and empowers participants to focus on aspects that are important to them rather than those identified by the researcher (Richard & Lahman, 2015). Exploring a novel phenomenon required a method that would allow us to step away from our own interpretations and perceptions of ‘emergency remote working’. We found the process of applying these methods enlightening and hence decided to focus the remainder of this case
study on our learning journey as we negotiated the ethical and technical challenges in designing and conducting this research study, rather than its findings.]

Section summary

- This case study reflects on the lessons learned while designing and conducting our research study exploring the physical ‘remote’ workspaces involved in teaching and learning in Higher Education as a result of the social restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The research team utilized their individual areas of expertise within Psychology, Social Work and Human Geography, as well as their shared enthusiasm for creative methods to develop this research idea.
- Due to the personal nature of the topic area, the research team decided to focus on utilizing photoelicitation within an online written survey. This case study explores our learning from engaging with this method.

Research Design

Includes an investigation into how you designed your study, taking into account any fundamental decisions you had to make. This section should emphasize the aspects of the research project – specific methods or challenges - that you will focus on in this case study. You should ensure that you define and explain any key terms for student readers.

[Following a number of research discussions, we undertook a review of relevant literature on learning spaces and concluded our main research objective was to explore educators’ and students’ experiences of new or adjusted teaching and learning workspaces by understanding and comparing their experiences. We wanted to comprehend how this transition to complete online teaching and the working environment felt at the time. To explore this in-depth, we
decided that a qualitative creative approach alongside an online written survey would offer participants the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts either by using an image and/or writing about it.

As this was a new approach to data collection for the team (and as we will see - conducted in a ‘new platform’ to us), we decided to pursue this project as a pilot study. Recruitment for the study was advertised through internal University communication, this included a link to a Dropbox folder where participants were able to download one single file which included all the research documents and the survey. Participants were invited to upload a photograph of their ‘workspace’ and tell us about the image and what it meant to them and their teaching or learning experiences. For the purposes of this study, we defined workspaces as the physical environment within which participants study and/or work from. Participants were also invited to respond to open-ended questions about their experiences of working in these ‘new’ spaces via the online qualitative survey. Participants were made aware that they did not need to engage with the photoelicitation task if they did not wish to, and we had no forced responses within the text-based questions.

Informed consent was obtained by explaining to participants in detail the aim and methods of this project as well as their rights to confidentiality, anonymity and right to withdraw. To ensure the withdrawal process was as clear as possible, we asked participants to submit their completed questionnaire and save it under a file name using a memorable word of their choice and the date in which they were submitting their response (e.g., Pineapple200920) and then to upload the document to a closed DropBox link. The participants then could withdraw their
questionnaire up to two weeks after completion of the survey by contacting the research team (contact details were provided with the consent form and information sheet) and providing their memorable word, however we had no withdrawals.

Our approach to the consent process was guided by our University’s ethical protocols and by Wang and Redwood-Jones’ (2001) best practice standards for photovoice research, and Creighton et al.’s., (2018) discussion of ‘indelible’ images. To minimize intrusion into one’s private space, at the outset, we sought both consent to participate (as described above) and consent to publish any images submitted to the project. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) advise seeking publication consent at the end of the project, however as our research design ensured complete participant anonymity from the researchers, we had to ask for this in advance of submission of the image. To further protect participant’s anonymity and private space, we provided detailed instructions for participants to remove any personalization evident in the workspaces prior to taking the images and indicated we would pixelate any inadvertent inclusions.

Participants were also made fully aware that submitted images (subject to withdrawal rights described above), would be published as part of the dissemination of the study findings. Drawing inspiration from Creighton et al., (2018), we took care to identify the full range of potential places and spaces where the images could be published and sought consent for each of these. Additionally, we strongly encouraged participants not to share their digital images anywhere else, to avoid inadvertently undermining their anonymity at any future point. Lastly, given our distance from the participants in the research process, we sought to avoid the need to process “acknowledgement and release” consent for subjects in images (Wang & Redwood-
Therefore, we instructed participants to avoid taking images that showed people in them (even if they were happy to be included).

As this case study is further read, it will be apparent that many ethical and technical challenges arose during the design and execution of this study. What helped us were not only characteristics such as motivation and passion, but also our shared understanding of respect and kindness, something we applied not just within our research team but also to our research project and with our participants. Having a well-defined, common, and consensual purpose while identifying and utilizing individual expertise also contributed to creating an effective and productive research team (Lakhani et al., 2012).

Section summary

- The study adopted photoelicitation and a written survey. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire via which they could submit a photograph and/or describe their workspaces.

- Detailed information sheets and consent forms were provided to address ethical considerations accurately and explained thoroughly the withdrawal process.

When working with photographs researchers must make participants fully aware of the additional risks to anonymity.

Research Practicalities

This should include a discussion of the primary aspects of focus for this case study.

Which aspects of the process you had to navigate when conducting your research will hold the most value for the student reader? For example, how did you recruit participants of your study, or access secondary data? What method was employed for data collection or data analysis? How did you work within a wider research team? What ethical
considerations were essential? You might choose to rename this section, or to include a subsequent section (or sections) with a sub-heading that directly relates to the primary focus of the case study.

[Previously, photoelicitation and specifically auto-photography (asking participants to take and share their photographs) employed in this study has been used to explore marginalized societies and individuals as a tool that could offer them the power and control to visually represent their experiences (Lombard, 2013). Photoelicitation was selected for this study because visual methods can also produce a deeper and different understanding of people’s experiences and can provide different data to verbal or text only questioning (Harper, 2002). Photoelicitation traditionally involves a verbal interview to discuss images. We opted for an online qualitative survey, instead of the traditionally employed verbal interview for several reasons outlined below.

First, we were enthusiastic about the opportunity to use qualitative survey for the first time as a team. Braun et al., (2020) argue this method is an underutilized approach within qualitative enquiry but is one that offers many benefits including participant control and flexibility over when and where they complete the study and, relevant to our approach, increased ‘felt’ anonymity from the participant’s perspective. Second, we were aware of the increased workload as educators transitioned to emergency remote teaching, and the real risk of stress or distress all potential participants may have been experiencing because of the pandemic. We therefore wanted to ensure our method was as flexible as possible allowing participants to complete it in their own time. Third, we were aware of students’ concerns about themselves and their spaces being visible online in classes. We wanted to offer an opportunity to those who felt uncomfortable or embarrassed about being seen in class the chance to share their experience anonymously. Given the private nature of the data we were asking students and colleagues to share with us, preserving participant anonymity was critical to our approach. We
argued the remote ‘no contact’ nature of online survey would allow our participants to remain fully anonymous to us. However, as we will see, in practice this was difficult to achieve.

To conduct this study, we required an online platform that permitted us to conduct an online photoelicitation and qualitative survey, gathering a range of data including photographs in an ethical and practically effective way. Identifying the right online platform proved to be a challenging and complicated process raising several ethical and technical challenges. These challenges will be further discussed in the next section.]

**Section summary**

- Photoelicitation is usually combined with an in-person interview. In this study we instead opted for an online qualitative survey to ensure our participants had complete anonymity and flexibility in submitting.
- Qualitative survey is an underutilized research method but done properly can be valuable research tool for gathering information about experiences.

**Method in Action**

This should be a “warts and all” description and evaluation of how your chosen research method/approach actually worked in practice. What went well? What did not go to plan? What challenges did you face? How did you respond? What would you do differently?

[Our aim was to design a study that permitted our colleagues and students to share their home experiences with us anonymously. A key aspect for us was our desire for participants to submit a written survey and digital photograph within the same digital platform. To find a suitable platform, we tested a range of online options including SurveyHero, QuestionPro, Google- and MS-Forms, MS OneDrive and Dropbox. We primarily selected those for reasons of familiarity.
we were aware of them and their use in online data collection and because these were the ones that were available to us when we were designing this project, either freely, or through our University’s digital subscriptions.

‘Testing’ involved one team member setting up a draft survey which incorporated space to write free-form text-based answers, categorical answers and the upload of a digital image (.jpg) file (or files) in each of the selected platforms. Other team members then submitted ‘test’ data and we reviewed our findings.

In some cases (SurveyHero and QuestionPro), it was technically possible to collect all types of data required within the same platform. However, within our institution’s current subscriptions to both platforms only small (< 2mb) .jpg file uploads were permitted. Checking the size of the image files we had attempted to upload, led us to realize neither option would be practical as most modern phones take images that exceed this size limit. To negotiate this technical limitation, we could have asked participants to compress their images. However, we could not assume all potential participants would have the knowledge or software to do this. It is important to highlight that this situation both created challenges regarding the practical design of our project but, also provided additional evidence towards the argument on the issue of digital divide addressed earlier in this paper. The digital divide is larger and more complex than just between students and educators but includes differences between schools within institutions as well as across different universities.

It is beyond the scope of this case study to consider participants’ levels of digital literacy in detail, but our decision making around which digital platform to use was heavily influenced by some critical discussion around digital competency and digital poverty. Bennet et al., (2008)
have argued digital skills and literacy is not dependent on age, as others may assume, but instead can be influenced by factors including socioeconomic status, culture, and gender (though the authors argue more research is needed in this area). We cannot take for granted that within our participant pool there will be sufficient levels of digital competency; although some may argue focusing on people working and studying at university may reduce this concern. It could be argued that participants without the skills or knowledge of digital processes such as how to compress files, could easily resolve this with an internet search, but this could be presumptive and places too much responsibility on the participant. We therefore rejected these platforms with the aim of making it as easy as possible for people to take part.

We encountered different difficulties using the other platforms. In the case of Google- and MS-Forms, and MS OneDrive, it was not possible to capture participants’ submissions without also capturing identifying information in the form of usernames and/or email addresses. Google Forms initially looked promising as overall submissions were collected anonymously, but on further inspection we realized the submitted images were autosaved using the individual’s Google account username. Additionally, for those without Google accounts it was difficult to submit.

We also considered if a two-step process combining multiple platforms would be possible. However, we rejected this as overly complex and potentially exposing us to the risk of being unable to match up informed consent and survey responses with the submitted images. This we felt, left too much to chance and placed our responsibility as the researchers to keep clean, matched data unfairly onto the participants. As previously acknowledged, we recognize that our participants may have varying levels of digital literacy, and this could affect their willingness to participate in an overly complicated research process. We were concerned that
this could inadvertently lead to exclusion of some groups of participants and further challenge our ideals of inclusive research.

By this point we were beginning to wonder if our aspirations for an ethical, creative, qualitative methods project could ever be realized in the emergency remote digital environment. This led our team to some robust discussions about privacy in the digital age. In particular, our recognition that online privacy is unachievable by all but the most expert digital user, if any at all. This is echoed in the British Psychological Society’s guidelines for internet mediated research (BPS, 2021), which recognizes that “absolute confidentiality” is an impossibility in online research. The BPS argue this is because the digital systems we use are outside our control. Based on our experiences in this study we reflect that this applies to systems that are external to our institutions, such as Google, but also applies to those available internally, such as Microsoft. This is important to avoid any potential false beliefs that internal systems could forgo the same levels of scrutiny as external providers. Following these discussions, we agreed there was no ideal internal or external platform for this study in terms of our technical and ethical needs.

So, online privacy may be ‘dead’ but is online anonymity also out of our reach as emergency remote researchers? We would argue the technical difficulties, however impossible they seem, do not absolve us of our obligation as researchers to mitigate these risks. Our challenges to achieve participant anonymity via a single point of submission with the varying data and file type requirements of our study eventually led us to develop a bespoke documentation and submission process. This involved a MS Word document using “content control” inserts and Dropbox ‘file request’ links. This approach was not without its own anonymity challenges as we will come to see later in this case study. However, it offered us the best possible solution
allowing us to collect the varying types of data we needed via a single submission point and provided participants with flexibility in choosing which parts of the survey they engaged with.

We advertised our study by sharing a link to our DropBox account where participants could download a single Word document. This file contained the project information sheet, consent form, qualitative survey, image upload and debrief forms. ‘Content controls’ within the word document offered control over the location and type of data participants provided. At the end of the document, participants were directed to save their responses and submit via a separate ‘file request’ DropBox link. This process provided an ethical advantage in ensuring that informed consent is captured at the point of submission, rather than at the beginning of the study. In online research, if a participant withdraws prior to the end of the online questionnaire, for example by closing the browser and survey website before completing it, it is difficult for researchers to interpret whether the participant wishes to exercise their withdrawal rights by ending the survey early or they just did not want to answer all the questions. Taking consent at the point of submission, rather than just at the beginning of the study helps researchers to be confident that valid consent has been obtained and the participant consents to sharing their responses, thus, overcoming some of the problems faced by researchers in interpreting participant withdrawal during an online study (BPS, 2021).

Like the other digital platforms, we tested Dropbox prior to data collection. We identified a similar issue to that which we found with Google Forms. Specifically, if participants were logged into their own DropBox account when submitting their response to the file request, their account details were automatically recorded against their submission. The main advantage that DropBox had over Google Forms was the ease in which participants without DropBox accounts could submit; something that was more difficult on Google. We attempted to mitigate this
anonymity concern by providing explicit instructions regarding submission in our research
document, which all participants downloaded and presumably read. However, when running
the study, we identified two further problematic issues.

1) Upon launching the study, we found participants could leave textbox comments on
the document we had provided for download. We had supplied two DropBox links;
one for participants to download the study document from and another for them to
anonymously upload their completed form. While we had restricted editing
functions (for example, participants were unable to upload to the download folder
or write on the document), we were unaware of DropBox’s functionality of allowing
users to add comments to the word document. Both links needed to have editing
features switched off to prevent participants from adding comments to the original
form.

2) Despite our best attempts, participants still submitted documents containing
personal data due to not logging out of their DropBox accounts prior to submission.
This resulted in us inadvertently collecting personal data (names) we neither
required nor requested as part of this study, and a key aspect of what we tried so
very hard to avoid.

Issue number 1 was manageable within the research team. It highlighted that regardless of the
information presented to participants they may not always follow instructions fully or
accurately. It is therefore the researchers’ responsibility to ensure potential risks to
confidentiality and anonymity are mitigated. To do this, researchers must be fully aware of all
functionalities on the platforms in which they are conducting research. Part of our reflection
here acknowledges the need for technical understanding of how the various digital platforms
process, store and use any personal information collected – from ourselves and our participants. Without this knowledge or awareness, breaches of research data become possible. We were able to manage issue 1 by careful monitoring of our online submission platform, allowing us to identify and mitigate confidentiality risks as they arose in this unfamiliar data collection environment.

Issue number 2 was more difficult to navigate. Instructions regarding how participants could upload their documents anonymously were provided but not always followed. This raises the question – were our participants less concerned about anonymity, or unaware of how their data was being captured? We will return to this question in the next section.

Despite the continuing navigation of research ethics with this new approach, the research team would recommend this method of using the Dropbox ‘file request’ for collecting multiple formats of online data. We hope that through our ‘lessons learnt’ section we reveal ways to optimize this approach further by considering the remaining ethical concerns in greater depth.

Section summary

- Concerns are raised regarding the use of both universities internal and external platforms to collect qualitative data and maintain participant privacy. We acknowledge both need to be scrutinized before their use in individual research studies.

- Our Dropbox ‘file request’ solution answered previous concerns regarding consent and removing risk of partial data collection, a potential indicator of participants withdrawing from the study.
The Dropbox ‘file request’ solution is not without its own limitations, such as potential to collect participants’ information if they remain logged into their own personal account.

Questions are raised regarding participant and researcher responsibility in ensuring anonymity and privacy in research.

Practical Lessons Learned

This is perhaps the most important section of your research methods case study. This should be an in-depth reflection on the specific methods/approaches used in the research project, detailing the important lessons you learned from this experience. Student readers must be able to learn from these lessons in order to inform their own research projects.

[Lesson 1: Reflection on the specific methods/approaches used in the study.

On reflection, the approach of using the Dropbox ‘file request’ function has many positives in addressing some traditional ethical concerns about online research. By providing participants with all the research information in one document and requiring participants to engage with the full document to know where to upload their responses, we can be confident that only those who really wished to contribute to the research did so. We have no concerns about participants trying to leave the study halfway through as can be seen in other automated online data collection methods (BPS, 2021). Additionally, by providing all documentation as a download for participants, we avoid concerns about debrief information going missing, due to this only being presented at the end of a survey site (Emery, 2014). Our participants were able to reflect on their responses as a saved file that they kept. If on reflection, participants were unhappy with their responses, they had the information necessary to review their answers or withdraw from the study. Therefore, we believe there is a place for this approach in online qualitative research in providing participants with more flexibility and
control regarding their submission and withdrawal of data compared to some other automated online platforms.

The adaption of photoelicitation for an online written survey has also been considered by the research team as a success in terms of negotiating some of the traditional ethical concerns and maintaining participant engagement. Our survey involved no ‘required responses’, meaning participants were free to engage with some or all of the survey. This alleviates some concerns around informed consent when participants are forced to respond to question in online surveys to progress through and complete the survey (Emery, 2014). Of our 26 participants, 4 participants chose not to include/submit a photo. This suggests some participants did feel comfortable in engaging with the study even if they did not wish to engage with photoelicitation. We also asked our participants how they felt about engaging with this type of data collection. They gave positive comments indicating the use of photos was considered fun and thought-provoking. One participant suggested the photo was useful because they became ‘…like others lazy of typing’, possibly suggesting this method was useful in supporting participants engagement with the study. Two participants suggested that we could use videos/vlogs as a data collection method, suggesting further involvement from our participants could be possible. Like others, e.g., Braun et al., (2020), we found it noteworthy that participants occasionally responded to the survey with emojis and humour, perhaps highlighting a level of ease they felt in participating in this study.

Lesson 2: Reflection on anonymity concerns and privacy awareness in online research

The concerns that remain for us are around whether the participants are fully aware of when and how their data can be collected (and how to prevent this) when submitting their research
responses. This is a concern because if people remain logged into their personal Dropbox account when submitting documents to a file request, it captures their name. Within our study, half of the sample were logged in while submitting their information. The first point to consider is that participants did not find the logout instructions clear enough in our research documentation. However, this information must have been read for participants to complete their submission. The team also wish to reassure the reader that while personal data was collected, the team resolved this issue by having one researcher ‘clean’ the responses of personal information before sharing it with the rest of the team for analysis. We will now consider some of the potential reasons why participants may not have logged out prior to submitting their data.

It is important to note that we were, in part, recruiting participants who knew us or were aware of us through our School in the University. This raises questions about whether these relationships or acquaintanceships may have influenced trust levels in the researchers, and perhaps participants were more or less willing to share their information with us. For those less willing, we may assume they were more likely to decline to participate. While perhaps those more willing to share their information with us were less concerned about personal data being collected because they were aware we would anonymize any data provided. We acknowledge that without exploring potential participants’ decisions to engage or not with this research we cannot make clear conclusions, but we feel these are questions that warrant further investigation.

As already mentioned, as a team we were exploring new and adapted workspaces within private homes. For participants who chose to submit an image, they were providing us with an insight into their homes, and private world. We considered this project from a human geography
perspective and how features of the social world change across spaces and the differences places make to the nature of the human experience (Jones, 2012). By asking participants to submit an image of their remote workspace, we were asking them to explore their adapted private places. These personal spaces will inevitably hold clues to the occupier, and while participants are removing personal information from their images, as instructed, they are sharing a visual representation of themselves. Perhaps this provides an answer to why participants may have been less concerned about logging out, when they were already sharing private and personal information with the research team. Alternately, participants may not have logged out because they forgot to do so, because they were unsure of how to do this or were worried they would not remember their password to log in again after completing the questionnaire.

The research team has raised questions whether participants consciously chose not to log out of their Dropbox account, and if this may be indicative of this familiarity of sharing information in online settings, or online apathy. Hargittai & Marwick (2016) suggest that online apathy can be described as participants’ cynicism towards online privacy and reflects their lack of confidence about whether online privacy is possible. Previous research has explored the ‘privacy paradox’ which explore the idea that people express concerns about invasion of privacy online but that these beliefs and attitudes do not alter online privacy behaviors when using social media (Dienlin & Trepte, 2015).

To our knowledge this phenomenon has not been explored with regards to participation in online research. This paradox suggests people are concerned about privacy, but this is not being translated into protective behaviors online. Others contest this paradox and suggest people are both concerned about privacy and will act in ways to protect themselves. It could then be argued
other factors are involved, such as lower digital skills, when protection of data is not achieved. Either way, this raises questions about how researchers can best support participants to protect themselves. For example, should researchers be exploring alternative ways of communicating research information and the consequences of taking part in research online to allow participants to be more active in their own data protection?

Finally, other concerns we wish to raise are around whether this method was considered cumbersome by participants which may account for lower numbers of responses (26 participants compared to a target of 60 participants). Within our study, the research document was 15 pages, which may appear off putting to some potential participants in comparison to having sections appear in stages on online survey sites. The request for a photo may also seem like additional work compared to providing text only responses, however, we did provide all participants the opportunity to engage with the written survey without uploading an image and there were some positive comments regarding the use of photos in the data collection process. The use of images, we believe positively, allowed us to explore unique spaces within the bridge between public and private life which emerged because of remote working. However, this may have also discouraged some people from participating. Ultimately, there is no way of knowing why potential participants declined to participate and it is the researchers' intentions here to simply consider potential deterrents in participating in this research as well as convey to the reader the benefits of this method.

Lesson 3: Reflection on interdisciplinary team-working

Our shared interests and passion in addition to regular meetings, great leadership and equal input from all research members have contributed to making this project a reality and a
success in terms of finding solutions during all research stages despite the many challenges of the project itself and of conducting online research during a pandemic. We kept each other motivated, supported each other and despite the ups and downs we kept going with almost as much energy and enthusiasm we had when we first started this project. All members of the research team exhibited a level of work devotion that meant reduced feelings of overload during a very difficult time (Blair-Loy & Cech, 2017).

Creating personal connections— not just as a team but also as four different individuals, getting to know each other and being kind, open and honest have been important lessons we learnt from this experience. Communication and considering what effective communication is have been an important aspect of our work throughout this project. Good leadership that respected and included individual expertise meant we could have a stable and supportive environment that enhanced our contributions and performances (Lakhani et al., 2012).

Section summary

- Photoelicitation appears to merge with the online written survey well and seems to be well received by participants who explicitly expressed their interest in the method as well as responded with humor in places.

- Questions are raised regarding the participants’ awareness and concerns of anonymity when it came to submitting their data. Future research is needed to fully understand participants understanding and perceptions of anonymity in research.

- Despite the struggles of remote working, this group has found it possible to thrive in a collaborative research project by being open to sharing our professional and personal lives to support partnership.
Conclusion

Includes a round-up of the issues discussed in your case study. This should not be a discussion of conclusions drawn from the research findings, but should focus reflectively on the research methodology. Include just enough detail of your findings to enable the reader to understand how the method/approach you used could be utilized by others. Would you recommend using this method/approach or, on reflection, would you make difference choices in the future? What can readers learn from your experience and apply to their own research?

[The research team note that the blurring of personal and professional lines helped support the collaborative and supportive nature of the team. However, it is a particularly difficult area to explore in terms of ethics and in respecting the anonymity of our participants when they are sharing such personal and visual insights with us. Our ideals for collecting anonymous data in online research are being questioned, and not for the first time. We have outlined that no internal nor external platform is above scrutiny, and just like creative methods have enabled us to explore data differently, perhaps creative methods for collecting data will be our guide in answering these ethical concerns via bespoke approaches. While we intend to provide insight into research ethics, technical considerations of conducting online research, as well as our reflections on remote team working, we also hope the reader will continue to engage with the questions we have outlined here to support ethical online qualitative research.]

Discussion Questions

[Insert three to five discussion questions on the methods described in your case study]

Discussion questions should be suitable for eliciting debate and critical thinking. Avoid questions which require only a single-word answer such as “yes” or “no.”

1. What are the ethical considerations researchers should take into account when exploring people’s private home-working spaces?

2. Who has responsibility for participants’ anonymity when submitting research data?
3. What factors facilitate effective collaboration within a research team and what factors can obstruct it?

**Multiple Choice Quiz Questions**

[Insert three to five multiple choice quiz questions here. Each question should have only three possible answers (A, B, or C). Please indicate the correct answer by writing CORRECT after the relevant answer.]

*Multiple Choice Quiz Questions should test readers’ understanding of your case study, and should not require any previous knowledge. They should relate to the research methodology, rather that the research findings.*

1. **Which of the following applies to the definition of Photoelicitation?**
   
   A) It is a method that involves researchers asking participants to select images to elicit discussion during interviews and other qualitative methods.
   
   B) It is a method that involves a range of images (photos, drawings, cartoons etc) to support interviews and focus groups.
   
   C) It is a method that can incorporate answers A and B. CORRECT

2. **What matters when choosing an online platform to use as a tool when conducting online research?**
   
   A) Researchers should choose the online platform they like the most.
   
   B) Researchers should choose a platform they think would be the most appealing to the participants.
   
   C) Researchers should consider a number of factors before choosing a platform such as the aim of their study, their methods, anonymity & confidentiality, accessibility, etc. CORRECT
3. Providing consent at the point of submission provides which ethical advantages?

A)Researchers can be confident that participants have read and understood the participant information sheet and have consented to participate. CORRECT

B)Researchers can be confident that participants have answered all survey questions.

C)Researchers can be confident that participants have been able to access the survey.

Further Reading
Please ensure content is inclusive and represents diverse voices. In your references, further readings and web resources you should aim to represent a diversity of people. We have a global readership and we want students of a wide range of perspectives to see themselves reflected in our pedagogical materials.

[Insert list of up to six further readings here]


### Web Resources

[Insert links to up to six relevant web resources here]

  https://helenkara.com/2021/03/18/creative-research-methods-in-education/

### References

[Insert bibliography of references cited in text here]

*References should conform to American Psychological Association (APA) style, 7th edition, and should contain the digital object identifier (DOI) where available. SAGE will not accept cases that are incorrectly referenced. Please ensure accuracy before submission. For help on reference styling see https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines.*


  

  
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