GENERATING DATA AT A DISTANCE: LESSONS FROM ONLINE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.

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Why Online Research?

- Internet access - 90% of households have home internet access in the UK and 73% of adults have access "on the go" (ONS, 2017).

- Email –82% of adults in the UK send and receive emails – the most common internet activity (ONS, 2017)

- Established - used for over a decade in social research (Markham & Baym, 2009).

- Cost – low-cost compared to face-to-face, telephone or postal methods.

- Geographically – not tied down by researcher or participants location.

- Anonymity – offers the opportunity to allow anonymity even from the researcher.

- Ease of withdrawal – participants are able to withdraw at any stage of the research process with no fear of repercussions.

My Research.

Resilience: an LGBT+ Perspective.

- No reliable figures on how many people in the UK identify as LGBT+.

- Higher rates of mental health problems, self-harm, substance misuse and suicidal ideation (Department of Health, 2011).

- A 'hard-to-reach' 'group'?

- For LGBT+ people the online world offers a range of knowledge and community membership that was previously unavailable (McDermott & Roen, 2012).

- Qualitative Distance Methodology.

- Recruitment, informed consent and data generation all occurred online.

- Interested in how LGBT+ people understand and experience resilience.

Distance Methods.

Questionnaire.

- 94 fully complete (183 responses recorded - 111 partially completed).

- Recruitment (47 provided contact details) and data generation.

- Using Qualtrics software.

- Structured .

- Directly comparable responses.

Interviews.

- 15 Interviews.

- Data generation.

- Email, instant messaging, telephone or Skype (audio or video) chosen by the participants.

- Semi-structured.

- Non-comparable responses (with the exception of 3 methodology questions).

Questionnaire Methods Results.

'I could give fuller answers if required'.

- The questionnaire was successful in recruiting participants for interview.
- Many participants indicated they were willing to expand on their responses.

'The research is very interesting. I like the open-ended text boxes because they don't fit you into a narrow idea of what 'resilience' is, or indeed what 'LGBT+' is!'

- A number of participants liked the open ended response boxes.

'I have limited time but would wish you every success in your project. I would prefer to remain anonymous.'

- Anonymity key for a number of questionnaire participants.
- A number of participants thanked the researcher or wished her success in the future of the research.

Questionnaire Methods Results Cont.

'It has taken me over three quarters of an hour to complete this questionnaire. I can't see many people taking the time to do this, especially as the questions require lengthy answers. Some of the questions could be answered with multiple choice which would speed things along a little'.

- The majority of participants took 8 minute. However, 6 participants took 40 minutes.
- Although Qualtrics counts response times this includes questionnaires which have been abandoned.

'These sorts of questions are different to answer as a questionnaire, but I do appreciate that you are trying to strike a balance between reach and depth'.

- Purely qualitative open ended questionnaires are unusual and may not be what participants were expecting.

- 'No, surprisingly. Commonly, I find questionnaires irritating for bias in the way questions are worded, and/or for the lack of options given without the option of adding a comment. Good luck with your research!'

Interview Methods Results.

'Skype is I find useful. This isn't the first skype interview I've had. It's far and away the best system that is immediate but is free' (Skype video).

- ○ Participants were aware of the benefits of distance methods.

'I should say that I deliberately chose email because I've already been interviewed via Skype before, so I wanted to try being interviewed through a different method just to see what it feels like. I have to say it's worked pretty well.' (email).

- ○ Some participants had experience of Skype for research and job interviews.

'absolutely fine once we got over the technical problems' (Skype video).

- ○ Participants were very understanding of technical issues.
- ○ Some changed interview method to accommodate for this.

Interview Methods Results Cont.

'on reflection i would've preferred talking on the phone. Its a bit remote like this' (instant messaging).

- Online methods can feel disconnected (particularly email and instant messaging).
- In the future I would include an option for phone interviews along with online methods.

'I think I would have preferred a phone 8nterview, that would have given me kofe idea of who i am talking to, I know nothing about you e.g. age, ethnicity, class. E mail wa slower & I am not a good typist but being slower helped me think more and this has generated a lot of thoughts, memories etc' (email)

- Email interviews tended to last the longest but have the least questions.
- Several participants indicated they would like to have known more about the researcher.

Challenges of Online Research.

○ Approximately 10% of the population do not have home internet access (ONS, 2017).

○ The North East has the lowest rate of home internet access at 82% (ONS, 2017)

○ The problems of accessing/recruiting participants remain.

○ 'The authenticity of participants—that is, the question of whether participants are who they say they are—is an important concern for online methods' (McDermott & Roen, 2012, p.565).

○ There is also a suggested that online research has an increased risk of participants dropping out during the interview process compared to face-to-face interviews (Bryman, 2008).

○ Technical issues, particularly with Skype video or audio, can effect the quality of audio recording for transcription.

○ Some participants would like to have known more about the researcher (age, gender and sexuality).

Implications for Future Research.

- Online methods offer a range of possibilities for qualitative research.

- Distance methodologies offer the opportunity to add choice into the research process.

- With 'on-the-go' internet access increasing year on year its important research technology keeps up.

- While email, instant messaging and skype transcripts may look broadly the same the way they have been generated differs vastly.

- The ethics of online research are still in development. How do we achieve informed consent online?

- 'Hard-to-reach' or 'different-to-reach'?

- Not everyone is 'online'. How can we adapt our methods to be inclusive?

Key Points…

1. We need to think differently about recruiting participants from marginalised identities.

2. Online research is an established from of social research which is cost effective, anonymous and notably has been successful in recruiting 'hard-to-reach' participants.

3. Taking research online is not problem free. Can we ever truly 'delete' something that has occurred online?

QUESTIONS?

Thank you for taking the time to listen.
Any questions, comments or suggestions would be gratefully received.