



The General Online Qualitative Study Methodology

Michelle D'Abundo, PhD, MSH, CHES

Paul Franco, PhD, MBS

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Co-Presenters

**Michelle Lee D'Abundo, PhD, MSH,
CHES**

Associate Professor
School of Health and Medical Science
Seton Hall University

Paul Franco, PhD, MBS

Corporate Compliance Officer, Human
Subjects Research and Academic Affairs
Nuvance Health



Introduction and Background

- PhD students were struggling to identify the best qualitative methodologies for real world problems in health care and education.
- Qualitative designs that do not align with qualitative traditions have been described as:
 - Basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2016)
 - Generic qualitative study (Kahlke, 2014)
- Not using basic and generic because the words imply the methods are inferior to the qualitative traditions, which is not the case for innovative, well-designed qualitative research projects.
- In 2016, I proposed using the term general qualitative study and several students starting using the term.

The General Online Qualitative Study (GOQS)

- In Spring of 2020, we needed to adjust data collection to accommodate social distancing requirements.
- Both studies were originally envisioned as Grounded Theory (very little literature available)
- The GOQS design emerged and resulted in two Big Qual (n over 100), novel qualitative studies:
 - Quality of Life (QOL) While Working from Home - 709 participants.
 - Physical Activity (PA) During COVID-19 - 519 participants.

GOQS- Defining General

The term “general” was further defined in terms of our research as:

- Focusing on general topics (physical activity during COVID-19)
- Among general populations (not limited by strictly defined inclusion criteria or geographic boundaries)
- Any general combination of data collection methods that can be conducted online (Interviews, questionnaires, chats, images)

GOQS- Language

- Avoid disempowering language like “target, trigger, subjects, controlled, mastered”
- Avoid speaking in the third person- don’t refer to yourself as the researcher.
- Avoid anthropomorphic (attributing human characteristics to a study) language like “the study will....”

Use inclusive, trauma-informed wording:

- Use priority instead of target
- Use participants not subjects
- Use managed not controlled



Challenge yourself to speak and write in a humanistic way:

- Write and speak in the 1st person.
- For example, “we are interested in learning about QOL while working from home”

GOQS- Organization

- Avoid closed-ended questions
- Avoid leading questions
- Avoid starting with narrow questions
- Avoid starting with demographics (excluding qualifier)

Develop a participant centered organization

Easy to understand informed consent

Start with qualifying question

- Avoids wasting participant time if they do not meet inclusion criteria. Often age or location.

Questionnaire Design

- Start with: Broad, open-ended (what is top of mind)
- Neutral and hypothesis-free (tell their own story)
- Purposefully ordered questions (from broad to narrower-enables participants to get comfortable to share more personal and specific information)

Demographic questions (Gender, Race, Ed) last:

- Enables participants opt out of demographic questions, which may be uncomfortable.

GOQS Example

- **Purpose of Study:** To explore the quality of life of people working from home.
 - **The research questions:**
 - How do participants define working at home?
 - How do participants define quality of life while working from home?
 - What are participants' perceptions of social, physical, and emotional quality of life while working from home?
 - What are the facilitators and barriers to quality of life while working from home?
- Selected Questions from Quality of Life Home Workplace Questionnaire (QOLHWQ)
 - How do you define working from home? **Please explain.**
 - How do you define quality of life? Please explain.
 - In general, how would you describe your current quality of life? Please explain.
 - Please describe your current quality of life and how it relates to working from home. Please explain.



Social Distancing Sampling (SDS)

Collecting data from research participants despite physical and social barriers during times of quarantine.

We replaced conventional methods (e.g., in-person interviews or pencil-and-paper surveys) with virtual strategies (e.g., survey invitation links, Facebook closed groups, texting).

Online surveys can provide unique opportunities for research in the COVID-19 era (e.g., time-efficient, cost effective) (Hlatshwako et. al, 2020).

SDS-Closed Facebook Groups



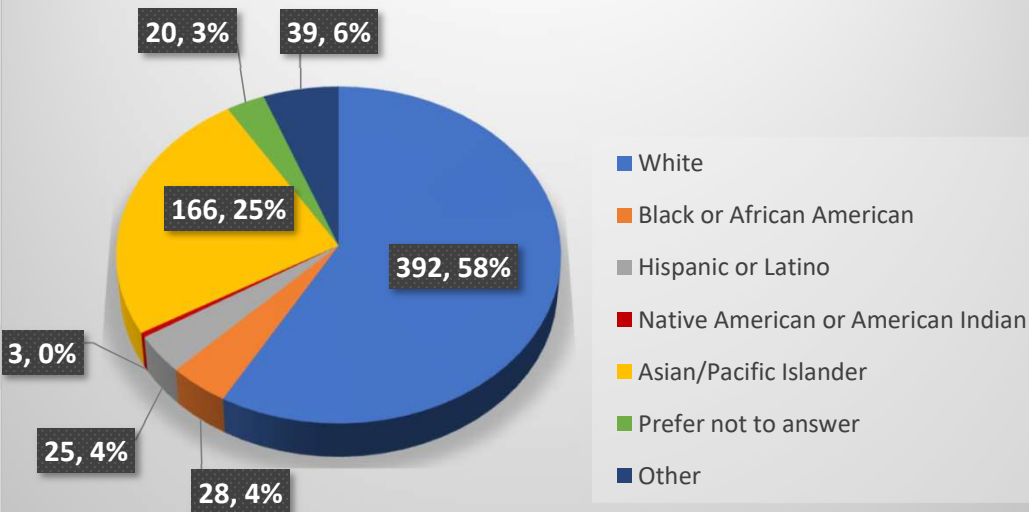
Closed groups > Public groups	Identifying Facebook groups by category can yield higher numbers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managed by admins who vet participants through a membership form• Increases likelihood of participation and true responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Groups by name: Fitness Lovers• Groups by size: >15,000 members• Groups by theme: Moms Home During the Pandemic• Groups by purpose: Survey Exchange Groups

Participation According to Demographic

High Asian/Pacific Islander Population Numbers

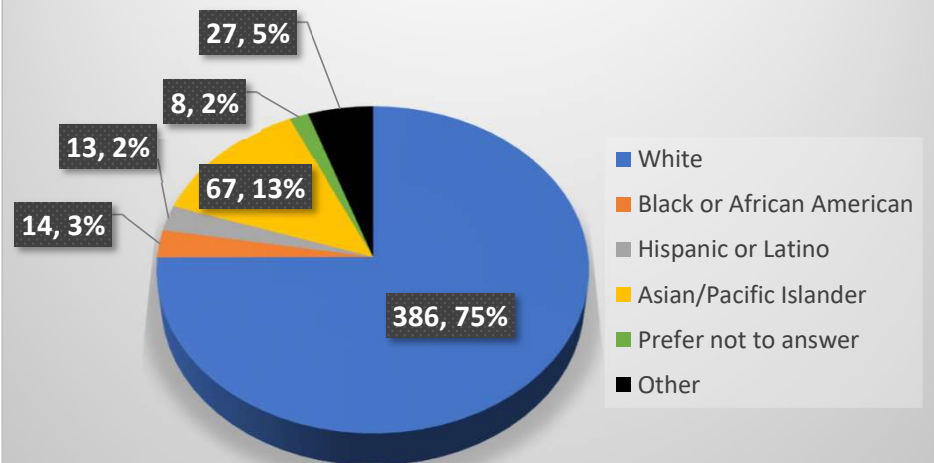
QOL Study


What is your race? (N=673 responses)



PA Study

What is your race? (N=515 responses)





GOQS Step-
Wise Data
Collection
and Analysis

Step	Process
Survey creation	Utilizing an online secure, data collection platform (<i>e.g.</i> , SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics®)
Social Media Access	Initiate contact with group administrators and/or completing membership form to join group
Posting	Invitation and survey link to potential participants
Reposting	A cycle of interactions will be maintained to achieve higher participant numbers
Raw export and Privacy	Data from Qualtrics will be exported into Excel to be cleaned at the conclusion of the data collection. Kept on pass-word protected computers.
Cleaning of data	Removal of non-applicable respondent cases (<i>i.e.</i> , minors, bots, incomplete questions)
Categorizing and sorting	Category and sort data to provide further implications (<i>e.g.</i> , by geographical region)
Clean export	export cleaned dataset into qualitative coding software (<i>e.g.</i> , ATLAS.ti)
Analysis	Use qualitative software features for open-coding and theme development from qualitative responses.

GOQS-Data Analysis



GOQS DATA ANALYSIS COULD BE COMPLETED BY CASE LIKE IN AN INTERVIEW OR BY QUESTION LIKE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH.

INCLUDING DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION IN GOQS DATA ANALYSIS WAS A CHALLENGE, WHICH WAS ADDRESSED BY SORTING RESPONSES INTO SUB-GROUPS FOR CODING.

FOR LARGE QUALITATIVE DATASETS USE QUALITATIVE SOFTWARE



Successes

- Large n: Unexpected number of responses from around the world.
 - Asian/Pacific Islander response (25% QOL and 13% PA)
- Enthusiasm of respondents
 - Participants provided positive feedback about the studies, contacted PIs, and championed the survey.
- Innovations in data analysis emerged based on skills and resources available.



GOQS Advantages



Advantages

- Excellent way to practice designing purpose, research questions, and methods.
- Data collection is consistent
 - Eliminates issues with interviewer skills and differences in the ways data is collected. For example, large interview studies require many staff conducting interviews who may ask questions and probe differently or have different positionality.
- Extends the potential participant population beyond geographic boundaries.
- Low cost and quick turn around enables collection of data from current situations almost immediately.

Significance

- The GOQS methodology can be used in the era of social distancing to reach the general populations.
 - Careful research design and wording can lead to detailed responses from many participants throughout the world.
 - Sampling in the *Quality of Life While Working from Home* and *The Physical Activity During COVID-19* studies illustrated how the challenges associated with online recruitment can be addressed using Facebook closed groups.
 - The online nature of a GOQS can enable participatory research through maintaining contact with respondents, creating opportunities for member checks, and participation in future research.
 - Challenges to analyzing large qualitative datasets can be tailored to the topic, coding skill level, time, and resources available.



References

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