

Protocol, statement of ethics and risk assessment: *Qualitative Researcher Journeys*

Protocol

Principle Investigator

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<https://www.quirkos.com/>

Aims

This *Qualitative Researcher Journey* project aims to generate an open access data-set on the theme of qualitative research that can be used in the teaching and learning of qualitative research methods.

Project time frame

Collection of interview data and transcription will be conducted in May and June 2021. Materials will be continuously developed from July 2021. Data-sets will be published open access in Summer 2021.

Types of data to be collected

One to one semi-structured qualitative research interviews will take place via audio call. Zoom or other suitable web-based platform of the participants choosing will be used to enable global participation. The call will be recorded in audio only.

The interview will be professionally transcribed and returned to participants for review within 3 weeks of the interview and consent given within 4 weeks of the interview date. Withdrawal from the project is possible unconditionally up to 30th June 2021.

Conditions of anonymity and confidentiality

Interview data will be pseudonymised. However, there is a risk that potentially unique features of the research journey could identify participants to colleagues, past research participants and students. There will be an opportunity to discuss this post-interview so participants may influence the process of creating pseudonyms and anonymised data and preserve the context of their story. This could extend to the right of the participant to be openly named and credited if they expressly ask.

Data storage and protection

Personal data will only be accessed by the PI and Company Director. In extra-ordinary circumstances, other staff may be given access under the specific direction of the PI or Director. It will be stored in password protected drives and on Quirkos' secure server.

Participant commitment

One to one semi-structured qualitative research interviews will take place via audio call. The call will take approximately one hour. Interest in a follow-up focus group or brief survey will be assessed at the end of the interview. Further consent will be confirmed to any additional activity.

Consent and the right of withdrawal or decline

Informed consent will be required via consent form prior to involvement in interview. Verbal consent to continue will be gathered at the conclusion of interview and recorded on *Interview summary*. Further consent in writing will be gathered via the *Transcript return* form.

Withdrawal from the project is possible unconditionally up to 30th June 2021. After this date material will be incorporated into training materials. Conditional withdrawal may be possible after that date and participants have been encouraged to contact Quirkos if they have concerns after the unconditional withdrawal date has passed. Every effort will be made to comply with participants' reasonable wishes.

Enquiries and resolution

Enquiries about this project should be made in the first instance to Dr Cathy Gibbons, or to Dr Daniel Turner in the event of difficulty in resolving problems. Both Dr Gibbons and Dr Turner are members or associates of professional bodies. Whilst those bodies cannot approve research or mediate complaints, membership can be revoked. (Ref: British Psychological Society. *Statement on ethics review* | BRE33w | 18.08.2020)

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Future data usage and participant debrief

In keeping with Quirkos's philosophy of accessibility, the pseudonymised data-set will be made freely available via our website. Our plan is to include parts of the data as the sample data-set for use in training on Quirkos and as part of courses on qualitative research. It may also form the basis of a text book and other scholarly material. It is envisaged that others will use it for teaching, learning and other scholarly pursuits, however, as open an data-set we will not have control over how others use it.

Planned outcomes and benefits of the research

When learning about qualitative research methodology, novice researchers want to see and use practical examples. Yet open data sets and example materials are often so project specific that learners find it difficult to relate the examples to their potential research designs, and those teaching have to grapple with generalising and simplifying research processes with material that was never designed with teaching in mind.

As an organisation that is passionate about supporting qualitative researchers, Quirkos wants to hear about the research journeys of experienced qualitative researchers, wherever they are based in the world, whether they use analysis software, or not.

The research will explore what it was like learning to become a qualitative researcher; for example, favoured approaches to gathering, analysing and writing about research, practical examples and stories from their experiences of conducting research, and (if they teach) what it is like to teach qualitative research.

Statement of ethics

This project is being conducted following guidance from the British Psychological Society codes (BPS, 2018), and *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics* (BPS, 2020) and the Social Research Association *Research Ethics Guidance* (Social Research Association, 2021), with due regard to Covid-19 safety (British Psychological Society, 2020).

The final overall assessment is one of **minimal risk**.

Risk assessment

The purpose of this risk assessment is to identify risk to a project and all of its participants and stakeholders, and identify mitigating and responsive actions, all with due regard to proportionality.

Project and other stakeholder risks

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation	Action Protocol
Extended illness or injury to PI	Low	Both Daniel and Cathy are named in the project and consent forms. The timeline for collection is short.	Postponement of analysis and writing of materials will not impact on participants.
Renewal of consent	Low	Participants have been given choices and options around their data.	Transparency of project aims and clear documentation
Integrity			
The project seeks to draw from a wide range of disciplines and type of research context and draw out some common themes and potential hypotheses. Given that the project seeks narrative there is a medium degree of likelihood that third parties may think they recognise themselves in stories, but there will be no confirming personal data from which others can corroborate their belief.			

The context of the stories is likely to be one of lessons learned and perceived personal impact so the potential of harm or embarrassment to 3rd parties is assessed to be low.

Threat to anonymity of third parties who have not consented to involvement in this project.	Medium	Anonymity will be discussed at the end of the interview.	
Causing more than minimal stress or harm to third parties who have not consented to involvement in this project.	Low	Transcripts are being returned to participants with specific invitation to consider this risk.	Transcript return form allows for further discussion with participants and agreed actions. These could include context changes as a preference, with redaction being a final possibility.
Giving incorrect advice.	Low	As experienced researchers, interviewers are mindful of their areas of expertise and the limits thereof.	Sign-posting to appropriate individuals and sources. Any advice given should be recorded on Interview Summary sheets, in addition to capture on interview recording.
Requests for advice are unlikely, given that participants are mostly established researchers. Even so, it would be inappropriate to deny perceived requests for advice, but the researcher will be mindful of the limits of their expertise, and the appropriateness (or otherwise) of the level of their response in an interview context. The risk of any advice being incorrect is therefore low.			

Participant risks

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation	Action Protocol
Confidentiality and anonymity			
Given that the research will be cyber-mediated (i.e. interviews via the web), threats to anonymity occur in multiple domains; that which cannot be seen without significant cyber skills (either legal or illegal), that which can be compared across platforms, such as discussion fora or published articles, and that which can be found in transcript text and narrative. As we will be gathering stories, there is much context from which to identify participants. (British Psychological Society, 2017)			
Linking of data sets: Cyber traces	None	There will be no cyber background traces to be cross-linked or interrogated as recordings will not be released.	Dates will be avoided, and named individuals, places, organisations and projects will either be changed or redacted. Other identifying characteristics will be specifically noted as they are encountered.
Content online	Low	As this is primary data, as any stories will be difficult	

Narrative content	High	<p>to cross link to other areas of the web without direct quotes.</p> <p>Anonymity will be discussed at the end of the interview.</p> <p>Transcripts are being returned to participants with specific invitation to consider this risk.</p> <p>There a risk of identification because of stories they may share with students.</p>	
Harm or distress	Low	Any potential harm as a result of breach of anonymity is assessed as low as the focus of the project is the self-selected personal narrative of experienced professionals.	Participants will have had more than one opportunity to consider what, if anything they wish to redact. Every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate wishes of participants even after the unconditional withdrawal date has passed.
	Low	Whilst the research topic itself is not sensitive, it is possible that participants may experience some upset as they recall incidents from their past, especially but not limited to those whose research areas are sensitive.	Both interviewers are experienced with potentially distressing topics and acknowledge that triggers can appear in unlikely places. Interview summary form will include a prompt to cover triggers with participants.

Dr Cathy Gibbons

30th Apr 2021

References

BPS. (2018). Code of Ethics and Conduct. In *The British Psychological Society* (Issue July, pp. 100–102). www.bps.org.uk.

BPS. (2020). *Ethics best practice guidance on conducting research with human participants during Covid-19: Vol. BRE* (Issue 33x, pp. 1–4). BPS.
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Social Research Association. (2021). *Research Ethics Guidance* (pp. 1–38). <https://www.the-sra.org.uk/common/Uploaded files/Resources/SRA Research Ethics guidance 2021.pdf>