Introduction
In the Face of Uncertainty: Opportunities, Challenges, and Solutions for Qualitative Researchers

The ebook series, "New Trends in Qualitative Research: Practices and Challenges" began in July of 2020 with the release of its first volume. In the United States, this was a mere five months after the country began to encourage practices such as social distancing, shelter-in-place, and wearing masks due to the outbreak of COVID-19. In March 2020, the state of Georgia held its first (and at the time of this writing, only) lockdown to help stop the spread of the virus. In most European countries, restrictive measures have been adopted since January 2020, with lockdowns being somewhat frequent, according to the number of infections in each country at a given moment, and social distancing as a norm. Masks, alcohol gel, respiratory etiqueta, and walking on the right side of the streets are all now part of our lives. Now, with countries still being affected (some more than others), hope is in all our minds, due the development of several vaccines. At the same time, new variants of the virus have been discovered and uncertainty has become the new normal. Side by side with hope. And trust in science.

As we write this introduction to volume six of New Trends in Qualitative Research, we believe it is fundamental to refer to this current context. What else should be expected from the editors of a virtual space which gives voice to qualitative research? This international pandemic has changed the lives of many. Individuals are working from home, finding ways to share the burdens of their personal and family lives with partners and spouses so that they may continue to be productive in their professional pursuits. For those who cannot work from home, ways to embrace health safety, social distancing, and yet still continue to work remain major concerns.

Even without the complexity an international pandemic adds, the Academy is full of unique challenges related to teaching, scholarship, and service. For teaching, many institutions have converted face-to-face courses online or follow a model of dual modality offering both online and face-to-face learning options within a single course, as we (at the same time) try to understand the impact of these changes in the teaching – learning process (e.g., Arora & Srinivasan, 2020). For many faculty, the need to learn new teaching methods has imposed additional stressors in an increasingly stressful environment. Faculty already experienced in online learning are among the lucky, sharing their knowledge and skills by mentoring other faculty seeking to learn and rise to their new challenges.

Research and scholarship have also begun to move online. One such example is in the rise of virtual conferences. The World Conference on Qualitative Research (WCQR), from which we elicited manuscripts for this ebook, hosted an entirely online conference from January 20-22, 2021. Conferences for organizations such as the American Educational Research Association, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, NVivo through QSR International, and The Qualitative Report have done the same. Even more encouraging to scholars enjoying the new trend of virtual conferences is the rise of permanently online conferences such as the Virtual Conference for Qualitative Inquiry. The field of qualitative research is not alone in this change of modality. There is a rise in published articles in a variety of disciplines that look at this advancement in the academy (e.g. Reinhard, 2021; Roos, 2020; Yu-Ju, 2021). While many will undoubtedly return to in-person formats with the end of COVID-19, it is possible that just as many will maintain an online component.

Of course there are differences regarding the accessibility of researchers from different places around the globe regarding technology (namely connections and hardware), but many researchers were able to attend several international conferences in the same year, with far less funding. And, by doing so, we could make our work known to researchers from other contexts, in what may translate a greater democracy in access to the dissemination of science. Human beings need human interaction and online conferences are very limited at this level. Nonetheless, this experience allowed many researchers to experience new benefits that should be considered as a way to overcome differences that researchers have in access to resources.

As Mills and Birks (2014) state "The first building block of a qualitative research study is writing a research question that works" (p. xv). Since COVID-19 entered our lives, it seems the question that emerged as inevitably (particularly) to qualitative researchers, was: How to conduct my research

without being with the people, in their contexts? Being faithful to the nature of qualitative research, qualitative researchers embraced the pandemic context as a focus of research. We could see this in several papers presented at WCQR 2021.

Consider, for example, the work conducted in Costa Rica by Patricia Estrada, Lady Mora and Estefanía Hidalgo (Estrada et al., 2021). While developing a project in a rural community, they were forced to look at their research design and adapt to the circumstances in a dynamic balance between the possible (e.g., technological resources available) and the desired. The same is seen in the work by Ana Gama, Patrícia Marques, Bernardo Vega Crespo, José Ortiz-Segarra and Sónia Dias (Gama et al., 2021). While conducting focus groups in the context of an international project about cervical cancer screening, the team was able to see the particularities of turning the method online. They mentioned the need to reduce the number of participants, the difficulty to access non verbal behaviors (and verbal behaviours in the physical events, due to masks), the low self expression of participants (for being at home with other family members) and the impact of technology (being or not proficiency, ease, etc.).

Returning to Mills and Birks (2014), we are confident to say that, albeit still living a crises that may take us a long time to overcome, given that its social and economic impact is just beginning, qualitative researchers of different fields have shown themselves to be up to the challenge in several ways. They have been able to look at themselves, and reflect on their own practices and experiences as researchers. This is happening for instance, through the work of Melanie Nind, Robert Meckin, and Andy Coverdale, from the National Centre for Research Methods, in the UK, who have been giving online Workshops (e.g., "Changing Research Practices for Covid-19") where researchers are called up to look at themselves and their practices as they are impacted by the present context. Qualitative researchers have also been able to innovate, as the Asian Qualitative Research Association (AQRA) has shown at WCQR 2021, with the Panel Discussion "Data Collection Methods Through Online Modalities", where David Lumowa, Arceli Rosario, Pavel Zubkov and Safary Wa-Mbaleka, presented and discussed how in-depth interviews, observation, and focus group may happen mediated by technology, but also arts-based research (Lumowa et al., 2021). This latter emerged, to some of us, as a tremendously powerful method to conduct research today, namely participatory research.

While the use of digital technologies in qualitative research is not a new topic (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Morgan & Symon, 2004; Selz, 2016), it seems that digital teaching, research, and scholarship is more paramount than ever before. In a social environment where academics work through screens with one another and face-to-face interactions are minimal, they find ways to use digital technologies to their advantage (Paulus & Lester, 2021). The process of editing this ebook embraced the use of these technologies from beginning to end. Working in the U.S., Portugal, and Spain, we (the editors) work within the midst of the necessity to move scholarship to an online platform. The challenge of working from home, with colleagues across the world, during an international pandemic, is unique to our time. Never before has such a pandemic impacted the world during the digital age.

As members of the Editorial Team, we have worked online since the beginning of the ebook series, so this was not new to us. As in the first ebook, this was an exciting and fun process. It allowed us to add another two editors, enriching our own international academic community. Along the way we managed the natural challenges of these processes, as we had the privilege to work with great reviewers and authors, in a collaborative process that allowed for immense learning. However, this time around, we had to work with our families at home, as each member of the household juggled different roles - being in a relationship or alone, being a parent, missing family, and mourning for loved ones. It is always a joy to see a new volume of NTQR, a project we embraced since its beginning. But this volume feels a bit different, as it is a product that we managed to produce in particularly difficult times.

We present here volume six of "New Trends in Qualitative Research: Practices and Challenges." Putting this ebook together was a process that was the epitome of the practice of using digital technologies in qualitative scholarship and the challenges that lie within. It has been a rewarding and difficult experience.

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