

CHAPTER 8

Teaching Emergent Methods of Data Collection

While much of qualitative research focuses on observations and interviews, the stress is on creating interview structures that are participant oriented. Recent work in qualitative methods that are community, participant, or action research oriented have critiqued the dominantly verbal paradigm of gathering qualitative data and have instead focused on ways to supplement data collection. Data-gathering techniques include the uses of image-based data ranging from drawings and illustrations to photography, photovoice, and video. In addition, data gathering online is explored as a growing area in qualitative research methods.

In this chapter, we:

- Discuss ways that faculty in qualitative research courses can effectively teach these new and emergent methods in data collection.
- Explore issues of participation in gathering visual data and online data.
- Discuss ways to facilitate the teaching of emergent methods.

Teaching Emergent Methods of Data Collection

One of the challenges that faculty teaching qualitative research face is how to introduce students to think about data beyond participant observation and interviewing. Time is a factor in many qualitative research

courses and we acknowledge this at the outset. Each of the following modes of data gathering that we outline can be taught as a stand-alone mini-course, perhaps as a 1-credit course that can benefit students who are adept at interviewing and participant observations. However, it is also our contention that these methods can be introduced early, even in an introductory course, so that students can become aware of the multiple forms of data that can be gathered. In our experience, many students find supplemental forms of data that are incorporated into photovoice or videos useful and informative and need to learn about the issues surrounding such forms of data gathering. Multimodal data are in keeping with the multiple facets of qualitative research that can be framed within a holistic pedagogy of qualitative research.

Why Emergent Methods?

Chambers (1997) said that research methods should shift the balance from “closed to open, from individual to group, from verbal to visual, from measuring to comparing” (p. 104). The movement by qualitative researchers over the last few decades to expand the ways in which data can be gathered has opened up the sites that can be explored besides leading to new ways of conducting research. New vistas that can showcase the rich possibilities of qualitative research have opened up to include participants who may be hard to reach; may be in different geographical locations; who may not be physically mobile or be vulnerable for a variety of reasons; and who had previously been excluded from research or whose viewpoints had been marginalized. Teaching qualitative research so that it expands the scope of research participants and spaces is a feature of the holistic pedagogy that we have been sharing in this book thus far. In this chapter, we focus on making meaning from a variety of data-gathering modes, explain their promises and limitations, and offer classroom exercises that help illustrate the critical issues that each can explore.

What Are Multimodal Data?

Data gathering using multiple modes has gained traction in the qualitative research field. Gathering nontextual data has been seen as a response to the overuse of textual data over other forms of communication. While textual or verbal methods demand an immediacy of response from the participants, multimodal data allow participants to reflect and have greater control over the data gathering and production. Twine (2016)

critiques the “invisibility of visual culture in research methods,” especially in the discipline of sociology (p. 971). Twine’s critique of sociology can extend to other social science disciplines and her advocacy of visual literacy as part of research methods courses is important and timely. Multiple forms of data gathering in recent years have included a variety of visual methods, role plays, and panel discussions, as well as walking. While visual methods are not a recent arrival into qualitative research (indeed, photography has a rich history in anthropological field studies; see Bateson & Mead, 1942), photography and other visual- and arts-based methods have come increasingly into use with the intent to decolonize methodology and correct the imbalance of power between the researcher and the participants. Qualitative research practices that go beyond the verbal to the nonverbal and seek to understand the experiences of participants in a variety of ways, are in line with a holistic approach that includes dialogic communication.

One way to get students to think about different methods of gathering data is to first encourage them to see the different phenomena around them that can benefit from qualitative data gathering. Exercise 8.1 encourages students to use their creativity to think about different ways to gather data.

Classroom Exercise 8.1. Brainstorming Interesting Phenomena for Qualitative Research Data Gathering

GOAL: To have students learn to develop awareness and curiosity about phenomena they see all around them.

OUTCOME: Students will learn to ask questions and inquire about the everyday activities they see.

TIME: 20 minutes.

GUIDELINES TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS: Write five types of work or activities of the everyday working life of people that might be interesting to study. Some examples might include a parking meter officer, school crossing guard, or a nail technician. Now, think of five different ways to gather data for each that do not include participant observation or interviewing.

After students have individually thought about the different ideas of qualitative study and data-gathering methods, they can share their ideas in groups of four.

REFLECTION PROMPTS FOR STUDENTS:

1. What were some challenges you encountered with this exercise?
2. What is one lesson you learned from your own thinking, and one lesson you learned after the group discussion and sharing with your peers?

GUIDELINES FOR THE EDUCATOR: Ask students to share the different ways to gather data and ask each group to write a comprehensive list on the whiteboard or on large Post-it sheets.

Ask students to take the different ideas from the Post-it sheets and make one large list for the class to see whether they encompass different ways to gather data. The next activity (Exercise 8.2) is a field activity for students to try out visual data gathering and reflection.

Teaching Visual Literacy

Researchers argue that visual literacy is increasingly important in the world today where technology is at one's fingertips and allows participants and researchers alike to record, create, and produce images of various types. Qualitative research offers us the opportunity to teach visual literacy with a pedagogy of the visual. Visual research demands that researchers be aware of and sensitive to people and places that are photographed. Schratz, Walker, and Wiedel (1995) and Fasoli (2003) regard photographs as having a “power that words often lack” (Wiedel et al., 1995, p. 76). Photographs cannot be regarded as capturing reality nor as depicting the whole truth. Like other image-based data—they are partially constructed by the researcher and the selection and eye of the researcher—circumstances and chance, as well as particular contexts, play a role in what is photographed and what is left out of the picture that is used to tell a story.

Exercise 8.2 introduces students to visual literacy as an important facet to understanding visual data gathering. It is much like the exercises on field observation in earlier chapters. This exercise is designed to get students to think about visual research by considering their own role in decision making regarding what photographs to take, who is the audience, and what are some of the challenges of taking photographs for data collection.

Classroom Exercise 8.2. Keeping a Visual Diary

GOAL: For students to experience using photography or other forms of visual data.

OUTCOMES: Students will learn what it means to use visual data and the advantages and disadvantages of gathering data through images.

TIME: Teaching visual literacy and discussing keeping a visual diary and lesson learned can take up to one full class period of 2–3 hours.

GUIDELINES TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS: Keep a visual diary for 1 week. You may choose any topic that you like or choose an aspect of your life to document.

You could describe through photographs an aspect of your neighborhood or community. Take 10–12 photographs at least. You may do this over the course of several days or use just 1 day for your field diary.

REFLECTION PROMPTS FOR STUDENTS: Write a reflective memo that explains your visual diary and consider the following:

- Discuss what you felt when taking these photographs.
- What decisions did you have to make?
- Did any issues arise?
- What ethical dilemmas, if any, did you face?
- Whose story did you tell with your images?
- Who is your audience?

Points to ponder and discuss in class: Photographs represent a highly selective eye or slice of the truth. In other words, photographs represent “partial truths” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and do not tell the complete story. In addition, it is important to point out to students that photos can be manipulated (Morris, 2011). This exercise can be extended into a class discussion where students can share their visual diaries. In addition, this exercise is suitable for online courses since the visual diary can be uploaded and shared with peers for their comments and discussion.

Below are further issues to consider in image-based data gathering. Some questions to discuss are:

1. What is the researcher’s responsibility?
2. How is one to photograph places that might be illustrative of community problems and yet spare the community members embarrassment? For example, Tunnell (2012) asks, How should researchers use a visual qualitative research document or “photograph rural poverty or indications of poverty (e.g., littering) without shaming the people?” (p. 349).
3. How is a researcher to present him- or herself as a participant in the community so that the presence of a camera is not viewed as a threat? Rapport building is as salient to visual qualitative research as it is to interviewing or participant observation. In a surveillance society, as the present is increasingly becoming, a camera can be seen as intrusive and not friendly, an issue that qualitative researchers need to keep in mind while using visual methods. People may wonder, “Why does this person want to photograph me or my store or house?”

Visual qualitative research can be used in empowering and disempowering ways. Students can discuss the ways in which the perspective of the researcher can empower rather than objectify. For example, anthropologists had a history of documenting cultures that they deemed “exotic,” and in the process, rendered their participants powerless and distanced them by casting

them into objects or the “other.” Once visual qualitative research moves from documentation to understanding the world of the participant, the emphasis shifts as does the power.

With the “Keeping a Visual Diary” exercise, students can see what it means to document their experiences or tell the story of a community. They can reflect on the limitations of telling the story from their perspective and what it would add if the community participants could share in the telling of the story.

Multiple Forms of Data Gathering

Multimodal data gathering has allowed for creativity and imaginative possibilities. Several researchers are experimenting with a range of modes of data collection and have reported on the relative success or limitations of their approaches.

In our own search, we came up with the following ways that can be shared with students. While each of these can be explored in depth, a few can be introduced to novice researchers while advanced researchers continue to explore independently.

1. Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997).
2. Photo elicitation (Harper, 2002).
3. Video elicitation.
4. Drawing (Kuhn, 2003).
5. Role plays and drama (Guruge et al., 2015).
6. Poetry and writing journals.
7. Walking methodology (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2017).
8. Virtual data or online data gathering.

Visual Methods

Visual methods is an umbrella term that comprises a host of different ways to gather verbal and nonverbal data. Putting the power of data gathering in the hands of participants necessitates a research design that is collaborative. Community, action research, or participatory research have all emerged as ways to decenter the researcher and privilege the participant so that participants and the community can own and benefit from the research that they participate in and conduct (Hagey, 1997). Image-based data that are collaborative and directly talk back

to research traditions that are tinged with colonial overtones challenge the traditional power relations between the researcher and the participant. They are effective for working with unrepresented populations and hard-to-reach or vulnerable groups, as image-based data are a less intrusive form of research. Moreover, putting data gathering in the hands of participants allows researchers to avoid the “indignity of speaking for others” (Foucault & Deleuze, 1977, p. 209).

Photographs and Visual Data for Empowerment

The popularity of photographs and visual data, regarded as creative methods for qualitative research and interviewing (Rathwell & Armitage, 2016; Wang, 1999), attests to the increasing attention being paid by researchers to multimodal data. Table 8.1 illustrates the ways in which photos are used and the attending terminology.

The ease of taking photographs and uploading them online shifts the relationship that researchers can have with images—moving from thinking of photographs as a means of memorialization to one that communicates. Photographs are tools for communication and community building.

Photovoice Methods for Interviewing

Photovoice has been used in participatory action research and community-based participatory research (Hogan et al., 2014; Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997). It was developed by Wang, Burris, and Ping (1996) as a way for rural women in China to tell their stories and influence programs that affected them. Photovoice, by putting the camera in the hands of participants, puts power in their hands as they choose how to express themselves and document issues that are important to them. It is an unobtrusive and strategic way to enter the world of the participants, learn what is important to them, and find ways to construct the research problem of interest. Participants in photovoice become coresearchers as they produce and contribute to the data collection and analysis. They take photographs, caption them, and then discuss with the researcher what is going on in the photographs through interviews and focus groups. If we regard vulnerable populations as experts of their own experiences, then dialogue construction is as important as images in visual qualitative research. Woodgate, Zurba, and Tennent (2017) discuss the questions that can guide the follow-up interviews after the photographs are taken. These questions try to get at what the coresearchers see in the photographs, why they think it is taking place, how it relates to their lives, and what can be done about the issue or problem as depicted

TABLE 8.1. Multiple Uses of Photographs in Qualitative Research

Terms	Description	Data collection	Data analysis	Examples
Photo elicitation	The use of photographs as a device or point of reference in interviewing. This involves showing photographs of events or places; the photographs can be researcher- or participant-generated.	Data may be collected by the researcher or by the participant. Interviews are conducted by the researcher using the photographs as points of reference.	Visual data analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placing photos in social contexts Understanding why photos were taken (satirize, expose, explain, represent, etc.) Examining photos in isolation versus as part of a group of photos Looking at issues of power: race, gender, power, and sexuality Examining the significance of the frame of the photo (what was considered significant to photograph) Visual analysis combined with interview analysis 	Harper (2002): www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods/harper.pdf
Photo stories	Photos are used as a form of narrative.	Photo diaries, family albums—usually generated by the participant		Brown (2013), Harrison (2002)
Photo collage or photo montage	A blend of images and narrative text where conceptualizing, reflecting, and eliciting are possible.	Photos gathered by the participant and arranged by the participant and/or the researcher. Arrangement by the researcher may reflect several participants' photos to create a montage around a single theme.		Gerstenblatt (2013), Vaughan (2005)
Photovoice	Participatory action research method where the participant takes photos to share his or her point of view.	Participant-generated photos		Wang (1999)
Photo documentaries	Photographs are used to document a life over time. <i>Photo documentary</i> is a term that is often used to document the lives of a group or an individual over the long term.	Photos are taken by the researcher or by the participants. Selection and arrangement is usually done by the researcher.		Hubbard (2007)

in the photographs. Photovoice is anchored in activism and advocacy for vulnerable populations to change conditions for the better.

The goal of photovoice as participatory research is to involve participants in the research process from beginning to end—from the point of crafting research questions and gathering data to analysis and giving their viewpoint in terms of the final write-up. While photovoice has been undoubtedly one of the methods of data gathering that allows participants to have a degree of control over the data gathered, it is also the method that requires that participants be trained in both the methodology and the ethical issues involved. For the safety of the researchers and for the consent of participants, a discussion and dialogue regarding the techniques as well as the social aspect of photovoice needs to be organized.

When teaching qualitative research methods courses incorporating photo data is often an engaging low- or no-cost way to practice data analysis.

Consider trying the following exercise, or some variation of this activity. It is designed to run across two 3-hour class sessions in a workshop mode. Workshop-style teaching incorporates hands-on learning with independent peer learning with the teacher as organizer and facilitator. The workshop style of teaching fits with the holistic pedagogical framework that we advocate throughout this book.

A classroom exercise using workshop pedagogy through which students can try out photovoice research is illustrated below. The instructor should absent him- or herself from the room in order to allow students to build community and negotiate roles. This helps students to identify and grapple with ambiguity—an essential skill for novice researchers.

WORKSHOP: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Using Photos and Other Artifacts to Explore a Cultural Phenomenon

Team up with an interview partner.

PART 1. IN-CLASS PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK'S IN-CLASS WORKSHOP

1. 4:00 P.M.–4:30 P.M. Meet with your interview partner to review the instructions for the forthcoming workshop and discuss how you might approach the tasks.
2. 4:30 P.M.–6:10 P.M. Work independently on Electronic Discussion (due next week), which prepares you for the in-class workshop. You are provided with in-class time today *to read and post* so that you can have time to select photos throughout the week.

Below are the instructions you will find on Blackboard for Electronic Discussion.

Read the following materials and create *two original posts* (one related to the readings and a second one that contains your photos) and *two response posts*. Your original posts must include:

1. Original post 1: a reaction to some portion of the readings below.
2. Original post 2: a presentation and an analysis of five to eight photographs that you have taken or found (and included as attachments to your post) that reveal some aspect of the cultural phenomenon (e.g., college or university homecoming) under investigation. These photos are intended to be used for a photo-elicitation conversational interview.

You can perform a Google image search of, for example, “Ball State University (BSU) and homecoming,” or explore digital archives of homecoming-related photos, such as the Digital Photo Archives at BSU’s Bracken Library, or the *Daily News* photo gallery.

Electronic Discussion Readings

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1101721.pdf>

http://sweb.cityu.edu.hk/sm6324/Schwartz_VisualEthno_using-photography.pdf

www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1155/2564

www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/394/856

http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/196/ar_schulze_reflexivephotography.pdf?sequence=1

www.jove.com/video/2342/using-visual-narrative-methods-to-achieve-fair-process-clinical

www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Unstructured_interviews.pdf

http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php

PART 2. IN-CLASS WORKSHOP, NEXT WEEK

When you arrive in class for Part 2 of the workshop, please have with you a computer, a digital recording device, and a printed copy of your selected five to eight photographs (on regular paper or photo paper) and follow these instructions:

Note: [Insert name of one student] will serve as the timekeeper and taskmaster to help the class adhere to the schedule.

1. 3:30 P.M.–4:00 P.M. Gather in your interview teams to conduct a brief “conversational interview” with each other about the meaning of homecoming as you derived it from *your photographs* and ask each other to recount personal experiences with the phenomenon of “homecoming”

in general, and then personal experiences with a BSU homecoming in particular. This requires you to bring a digital recording device and find a space somewhere in Teachers College to conduct a recordable conversation.

2. 4:00 P.M.–4:30 P.M. Together construct a transcript of the brief conversational interview and post it in this discussion board space.
3. 4:30 P.M.–4:45 P.M. Break.
4. 4:45 P.M.–5:05 P.M. All return to the classroom and then in your interview teams review your transcript and your photos, assign a few codes, and then construct three themes.
5. 5:05 P.M.–5:30 P.M. As a whole class, collectively have a discussion about the phenomenon of homecoming by having each interview team share their photos and their three themes. This will produce a total of 24 themes (8 teams × 3 themes per team). The full class must then decide, out of the 24 themes, how to rework them to arrive at the *five best themes* collectively. [Insert the name of one student] will facilitate this part of the discussion for the class. [Insert the name of two students] will take a series of photos of the discussion with their tablets or smartphones, and then post the photos to this discussion board.
6. 5:30 P.M.–5:40 P.M. Break.
7. 5:40 P.M.–6:10 P.M. *Each person* will create responses to the following prompts and post them in this discussion board space:
 - a. Review all of the types of data that were collected and posted in the discussion board and construct an *analytical memo* summarizing your own personal analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. What meaning(s) can be derived from this cultural phenomenon known as homecoming?
 - b. Answer the question “What does ‘homecoming’ mean to you?”
 - c. Of all of the photos shared in this exercise, which was your favorite and why?
 - d. What was the most memorable moment of today’s in-class exercise for you, and why?
8. 6:10 P.M. Done!

When the class returns the next week the faculty member facilitates a debriefing discussion to help draw out the essential elements of what the students learned from this process about data analysis, collaboration, and how cultural phenomena operate within systems of meaning.

The following points can be discussed in class regarding the uses of photovoice and the issues of ethics that arise with using image-based data. Participatory visual research, unlike documentary visual qualitative research, can be empowering to participants and can be a tool for their agency and autonomy. The researcher gives up trying to control the interview encounter and instead empowers participants who can now say what they want and in the way they want.

Performance- and Arts-Based Data

While photovoice and digital storytelling are very popular means of data gathering using visual methods, drawing has also been used by a few researchers as a tool that does not require a digital or technological learning curve. In a study of teenagers' aspirations, Gauntlett (2005) asked the teens to draw celebrities whom they admired and with whom they identified. They were assured that drawing skills were not important. Since the researchers concluded that it would not be possible for them to interpret the drawings correctly, the teenagers were asked to interpret their own drawings through a one-page questionnaire. The teens answered three questions: the first was an open-ended question asking them if they would like to be like the celebrity they chose and the reasons why; the second asked about the choice of the setting in which they drew the celebrity; and the third asked them to choose three words to describe the celebrity which would also be words that they would like ascribed to themselves. The researchers concluded that the drawing process had allowed the teens to develop a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

In a study with Kenyan children, Swadener (2005) asked the children to draw before interviews were conducted. The images they drew showed not only their lives as they lived it but also the possibilities they imagined. They drew images of hope and aspiration alongside depictions of everyday strife. Images can be a way for participants to express emotions and feelings, and juxtapose a variety of ideas, actions, and even places and times together. Images can be represented in a nonlinear way and connections that are complex can be made without assigning values or hierarchies to the ideas or concepts. They can instead be represented as equally important within a given context.

Besides visual data, performance-based methods are also increasingly being used to gather data. The use of role plays, drama, and poetry or journal writing may be suggested as ways for participants to express their points of view. In a study with youth, Gillies and Robinson (2012) discuss the inherent difficulties in gathering data from youth with their participation. The first point they make is that youth participation or consent is given on a conditional basis, a point experienced by us in previous research projects (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2017; Swaminathan, 1997; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). A second point raised by Gillies and Robinson is that researchers need to keep in mind that trying to go into schools as adults to gather data from children requires a degree of trust building that takes time. We agree that data gathering with children or youth might not be possible in the short term. Gathering data from populations that are hard to reach requires thinking

creatively. It also requires a degree of structure to pursue possibilities. Researchers need to be mindful of other variables that might influence participation—for example, group relations or the mood of the participants or the timing when they are approached for dialogue, role play, or even arts-based data.

Another form of data gathering has been the walking interview or the walking methodology. Used as a pedagogical strategy by Mulvihill (2013) and as a way to mentor students, it is also used as an interview technique by some researchers. Kusenbach (2003), for example, refers to walking with participants while they are engaged in their everyday life as a “go-along” method that might be more conversational and less formal than a structured interview while being less intense than a participant observation setting.

Issues, Ethics, and Best Practices for Image-Based Research

Ethical issues in image-based research can be challenging for researchers. In teaching the practices and uses of visual data, whether from photographs or videos or even drawing, it is important to engage students in a discussion of ethics. For example, how one presents the data collected is a question that needs to be discussed. What types of identifying information is revealed? Do photos reveal particular places? Often, these ethical questions may not be consciously thought through by the participants, making it important for researchers to carefully consider these issues. Marginalized populations might wonder why pseudonyms are needed to protect them, and indeed may also wonder what type of protection they might need at all. Youth, in particular, may resist being “protected,” considering it to be synonymous with control by adults. In research using photographs, the following issues need to be considered: (1) Who owns the photographs? (2) Is there informed consent to use the photographs? and (3) Do participants understand the plans for dissemination of the research and of the photographs? Miller-Happell (2006) took photos on loan from participants with the caveat that they would be returned whenever asked for by the participants.

Confidentiality in visual- or image-based research may need to be examined carefully since traditional forms of confidentiality like pseudonyms are inadequate. Instead, informed consent for images needs to be approached with sensitivity so that participants can choose whether to consent to their photographs being used for research purposes and for subsequent publication. In addition to informed consent, the emotional barriers faced by research participants who are taking photographs need to be addressed. If participants are taking photographs of themselves

in action, choosing to portray their own communities, or using ways to signify and depict what they want to say with metaphors and different types of images, they may face different challenges than if they were photographing members of the community other than themselves. Hannes and Parylo (2014) conducted a project where they examined the reflections of participants on using photovoice. They found that while some participants enjoyed the photography, others, mindful of the ethical concerns surrounding photographs, tended to avoid using photographs that might be controversial or avoided photographs with people so that they would not have to ask them for consent or have them sign a consent form. Others tended to use photographs that emphasized the background and where people appeared too small to be recognizable, leading Hannes and Parylo to conclude that additional practice might be needed for new participants to start feeling comfortable with asking permission to conduct visual research.

In the next section, we explore data gathering online as an emergent method in qualitative research.

Data Gathering Online

Online research involves two types of research: the first is doing research in the online environment, and the second involves using online platforms such as Skype, Google Hangouts, Zoom, or e-mail. The Internet therefore represents not only a field for research but also a data-gathering instrument. Studies have been conducted in chat rooms, virtual communities, and on social media sites. Analysis has usually been conducted on text already produced on the Internet.

One of the obvious advantages is the low cost of research since participants need not travel, especially over long distances. The ability to use Skype or FaceTime allows for face-to-face encounters, albeit at a distance, so that at least some of the nuances of body language can be observed and questions can be modified according to the non-verbal feedback that one receives. The second advantage of online research is the opportunity and potential for observing social media users—for example, Facebook users or blog participants and authors. Since these activities take place online, cyber research is the appropriate way to examine and understand how participants use these sites. A third advantage of online research is the ability to access hard-to-reach populations. Participants who are geographically separated or are experiencing restricted mobility due to a disability or medication may still be able to meet or be reached via the Internet. One of the disadvantages of online research is that such interviews can also be plagued with

technological glitches. Despite increased Internet speed, at times these interviews can be interrupted with some inadvertent “hang-ups.” Skype interviews can be rescheduled—however, it may be best to advise students to keep a backup option of a phone interview. Scholars speaking out in favor of video conference interviewing point out that even glitches have their advantages. They argue that the power differential between the researcher and participant can be switched around so that the power to interrupt, reschedule, or even hang up is in the hands of the participants (Saura & Balsas, 2014; Trier-Bieniek, 2012).

Online research often uses preexisting data that are stored and archived on the web. The question that remains less than clear is How is one to use online possibilities for gaining solicited information? Another question that arises frequently is How can participants give informed consent? The Association of Internet Researchers has suggested that researchers need to make it clear that informed consent is required. Kaun (2010), in asking for participation in an online project using online diaries, solved the problem of informed consent on the part of participants by asking people to register and create an account for the online wiki she created for the project. This allowed people to give informed consent as soon as they registered.

Some scholars have pointed out that boundaries between public and private can be more blurred in an online environment but it need not be considered more risky than traditional research (Kaun, 2010; Sudweeks & Simoff, 1999). Researchers cannot be regarded as traditional participant observers in online research. In addition, one of the issues that online researchers face is in integrating online research with off-line data gathering. In an online environment, it may be necessary to gather data both online and off-line so that the two can be blended together in order to be most effective (Sade-Beck, 2004).

In order to teach students how to gather data online and to get an experience of doing so, you can create a blog or wiki for the class. Pinterest can also be used to post images. Students can then partner with each other and practice interviewing online. Allowing students to post anonymously or to create online personas will help them experience the challenges of conducting online research that maintains the pseudonyms or personas adopted by participants while also finding a way to verify that they meet the criteria of purposeful sampling. Turney and Pocknee (2005) used discussion boards in order to conduct online focus groups. As Turney and Pocknee point out, although asynchronicity led to some variations in the type of focus groups that were advocated by Krueger (1988, 1994), they managed to get participants involved in asynchronous discussions and found it to be a superior data collection mechanism for gathering data on attitudes.

Exercise 8.3 gives students practice in gathering data online.

Classroom Exercise 8.3. Data Gathering Online

GOAL: To experience online data gathering and interviewing.

OUTCOME: Students understand the advantages and disadvantages of online data gathering.

TIME: 45 minutes in-class discussion and 1 hour, 30 minutes online. (Data gathering takes place online outside class time. Discussions and debriefing take place in class.)

GUIDELINES FOR THE EDUCATOR: Create a blog for the class. Divide the class into interviewers and participants. Ask the participants to divide themselves into two groups and choose a theme on which they will blog and write a short diary or post photographs, images, or drawings. Ask the interviewers to look at the initial posts and come up with a protocol that has the following components: (1) informed consent, and (2) an introduction and invitation to be a research participant.

Link the blog to the class online platform to allow students to have conversations and interviews. Create groups in the online platform to allow for privacy between group talks. Allow 3 days for the blog posts and 4 days for the interviews to take place. Alternately, allow 1 hour in class time for online interviews.

Have one group of students conduct the interview asynchronously via a discussion board and another group of students conduct the interview via online chat or synchronously.

REFLECTION PROMPTS FOR STUDENTS:

1. What were your experiences of trying out online interviewing?
2. What were some challenges you faced as an interviewer or participant?
3. What were some advantages of this type of interview method?
4. What did you learn about the differences between interviewing face-to-face and online?
5. What ways did you “listen” online?
6. Under what circumstances can we use this method over other methods of data gathering?
7. What ethical issues did you think about when conducting this practice interview?
8. How were emotions conveyed online?

This activity highlights some of the ways in which online interviewing can take place asynchronously and synchronously without visual cues. Students

