



Video-based role playing: an innovative approach to qualitative data acquisition among men who have sex with men in Lima, Peru

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Background

Men who have sex with men (MSM) and male-to-female transgender women (TW) in Lima, Peru, have a disproportionately high rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) compared to the rest of the population. Estimates show that HIV infection rates in MSM are 10 to 20 times higher than the general population, and therefore, as a group, they are an important candidate for behavioral modification studies.

Studies have shown that video provides an excellent method of qualitative data collection for analysis of **both verbal and nonverbal communication** [1]. Prior research also shows that role-playing allows participants to act out and then discuss typical behavior patterns, and is particularly effective in sensitive social situations, specifically related to sexuality [2]. Homophobia, social and economic marginalization, discrimination, and HIV-related stigma (even within the MSM community) in Lima add layers of complexity to the subject, and may pose obstacles for acquisition of objective qualitative data. Therefore, we have implemented video-based role-playing within the context of a focus group setting for additional insight into a very complex issue, which is a new and innovative approach.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to use video-based improvisation to understand common patterns of interpersonal negotiation of sexual risk behavior among MSM and TW in Lima. The ultimate goal of these workshops is two-fold:

1. To use these workshops as a format for open discussion of sensitive social and behavioral issues
2. To develop raw content material in the form of potential characters and scenarios for a behavior-modifying *Telenovela* (Spanish soap opera)

Methods

Workshop format and data acquisition:

• Participants were recruited for 3 different focus groups (middle income gay, low income gay and TW) to meet for 5 2-hour sessions, once per week.

• Workshops are facilitated by the study team, including one professional HIV/STI education specialist and one professional actor with longstanding experience leading focus groups and improvisational acting exercises.

Each weekly workshop across all three stratified groups centers around a pre-selected theme, as follows:

- Week 1:** Introduction and character development
- Week 2:** HIV/STI testing
- Week 3:** Condom negotiation
- Week 4:** Partner notification and serostatus disclosure
- Week 5:** Homophobia/transphobia and discrimination

• The investigators selected similar improvisational scenarios for all three focus groups to insure ease of comparison across socioeconomic groups.
• After each improvised scene, participants are asked to critique the accuracy and realism of each performance. Discussions are recorded on audio while acting exercises are captured on video.

Data analysis:

• Video and audio recordings are transcribed and analyzed using a codebook developed around themes that were commonly raised within both the focus group and the improvised scenes using Atlas TI coding software (fig 2). The codes emerged naturally from the recordings and were not pre-determined by the investigators.

• The use of a video codebook is unique to this project. At the time of this presentation, this coding process is still in progress.

• This study was approved by the IRBs of UCLA and Via Libre, all participants were provided informed consent, and consent was reconfirmed with all participants prior to audio



Fig. 1: actual poster from workshop

Results

Low income gay:	
Pedro	26, bisexual, married with children; afraid of HIV testing, had a friend who died of AIDS; partners will often try to avoid condom use; reacts with denial and possible violence upon being notified of an STI positive test result
Raul	30, gay (masculine), lawyer, in love with a straight man from his neighborhood; believes HIV testing is for promiscuous men; no condom use when drugs or alcohol are involved
Johnny	25, gay, store clerk during the day, sex worker at night; condom use with clients depends on payment ("business is business"); would notify his partner of a positive STI test, but feels shock and shame

Middle income gay:	
Jorge	30-45, bisexual, married with hetero teenage son, works in an office, controlling/perfectionist; obsesses over condom use and HIV testing; would blame his wife upon discovery of STI positive status; would destroy his family if his wife discovered he was sleeping with men
Christian "Frank"	17-18, gay, friends with Jorge's son; due to young age, does not view condom use as important; length of relationship determines whether he will disclose a positive STI test result to his partner
Diego	25-30, bisexual, immature; never been tested for HIV; occasional condom use, more likely to use a condom with his male partners; views partner notification as a joke

Trans women:	
Fiorella	16, trans, attractive, sex worker with numerous clients; HIV positive; condom use with clients depends on price (usually double for no condom); afraid of disclosing HIV status due to rumors within trans community
Andrea	30-35, trans, works as community health promoter; gets HIV tested often; has long-term partner of 6 years but has affairs; would not disclose a positive STI test result due to fear of violence or rejection
Herminia	42, trans, cosmetologist during the day, sex worker at night; age plays a role in condom negotiation, younger clients will not use them; in denial of a positive STI test result, would not notify anyone

Discussion

Each improv not only allows us to create scenes with realistic dialogue and interaction, but also allows participants to address difficult or sensitive issues of sexuality, discrimination and stigmatized behavior through the projection of the *Telenovela* characters.

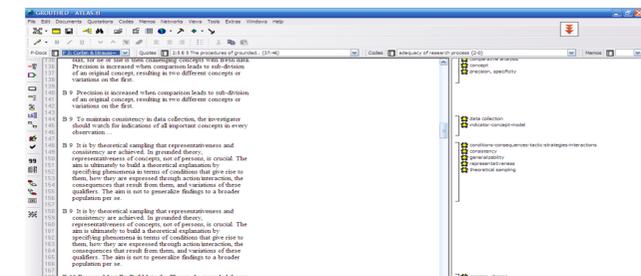


Fig. 2: sample screenshot of Atlas TI

The videos and video codebook serve two purposes:
1. They allow for analysis of nonverbal communication as an added level of data triangulation, which has not yet been done in this context.

2. They present not just original content, but different perspectives on the same issue that exceeds focus group discussion alone. **Post-scene conversations were more open and allowed researchers to better understand and adjust for highly-sensitive material which arose.**

Triangulated data from this study will be delivered to a television production company for development of characters and scenarios in an upcoming *Telenovela*. This has been proven to be a successful intervention in Latin countries [3], but this will be the first targeted at MSM and TW.

References

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