

Supplementary Material S1

COREQ (COnsolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research) 32 item Checklist.

Topic	Item No.	Guide Questions/ Description	Notes	Reported on Page No.
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity				
<i>Personal characteristics</i>				
Interviewer/facilitator	1	Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?	The undergraduate students (JM. CP, AS, and JT) conducted the interviews.	N/A
Credentials	2	What were the researcher's credentials? E.g. PhD, MD	1 PhD, 1 MRes, 3 BSc, 1 BSc and PGCE, 1 MSc.	Title page
Occupation	3	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	The interviewers were students undertaking their BSc Psychology degree at the University of Sheffield. Two researchers were completing their PhD's and are Psychology Lecturers at Sheffield Hallam University. One researcher is a Teaching Associate at the University of Nottingham.	N/A
Gender	4	Was the researcher male or female?	The research team consists of six female identifying researchers (4 of these were the interviewers) and one male identifying researcher.	N/A
Experience and training	5	What experience or training did the researcher have?	All research team members have experience of conducting qualitative research.	N/A
<i>Relationship with participants</i>				
Relationship established	6	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	The students had no relationship with the participants they interviewed prior to the study.	[method]
Participant knowledge of the interviewer	7	What did the participants know about the researcher? e.g.	The interviewers introduced themselves to participants as students completing their BSc	N/A

		personal goals, reasons for doing the research	Psychology undergraduate degree, described the research team, the purpose of the project, and answered any questions they had about the project.	
Interviewer characteristics	8	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer/facilitator? e.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic	The interviewers were students completing their undergraduate dissertation projects.	N/A
Domain 2: Study Design				
<i>Theoretical framework</i>				
Methodological orientation and Theory	9	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis		[method]
<i>Participant selection</i>				
Sampling	10	How were participants selected? e.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball		[method]
Method of approach	11	How were participants approached? e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, email	Online	[method]
Sample size	12	How many participants were in the study?	12	[method]
Non-participation	13	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	No person responded directly to decline taking part, nor did anyone drop out once agreeing to take part. However, 3 individuals were excluded from the data analysis as they were based in a different country outside of the UK. The research team felt that due to the COVID-19 restrictions being different across countries this was not sensible to include.	N/A

<i>Setting</i>				
Setting of data collection	14	Where was the data collected? e.g. home, clinic, workplace	Online	[method]
Presence of nonparticipants	15	Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?	No	N/A
Description of sample	16	What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g. demographic data, date	Information can be found in the method.	[method]
<i>Data Collection</i>				
Interview guide	17	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	An informal session was held with the researchers to go through the interview guide with mock participants (i.e., researchers pretended to be participants to explore the flow of the interview schedule). A semi-structured interview guide was used.	Supplementary Materials 2
Repeat interviews	18	Were repeat inter views carried out? If yes, how many?	No	N/A
Audio/visual recording	19	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	All interviewers were audio recorded and later transcribed	[method]
Field notes	20	Were field notes made during and/or after the interview or focus group?	Yes, reflection notes were taken after the interviews regarding the nature of the interview and their perceptions of the participant responses etc (e.g., how did the interviewer think the interview went?)	N/A
Duration	21	What was the duration of the inter views or focus group?	Interview times varied but generally took no more than 40 minutes.	[method]
Data saturation	22	Was data saturation discussed?	Yes. However, BP was familiar with the literature so took a deductive approach, and RM did not and took an inductive approach. No new codes came up in the last interview analysed.	N/A

Transcripts returned	23	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction?	No	N/A
Domain 3: analysis and findings				
<i>Data Analysis</i>				
Number of data coders	24	How many data coders coded the data?	Two researchers (BP and RM) coded the data and described codes, and these were discussed with members of the interview team on a regular basis (BP, RM, NDM).	N/A
Description of the coding tree	25	Did authors provide a description of the coding tree?	Codes and descriptions of these where they are not self-explanatory are included in the supplementary material.	Supplementary Material 3
Derivation of themes	26	Were themes identified in advance or derived from the data?	Themes were derived from the data.	Findings
Software	27	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	No software was used to manage the data, this was conducted by hand.	N/A
Participant checking	28	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	No	N/A
<i>Reporting</i>				
Quotations presented	29	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes/findings? Was each quotation identified?	Yes, participant quotes were presented alongside their pseudonyms.	Findings
Data and findings consistent	30	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?	Yes, consistency across data presented and findings exists.	Findings
Clarity of major themes	31	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	Yes, major themes are clearly presented in the findings in the form of subheadings	Findings

Clarity of minor themes	32	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	Yes, there are 2 sub themes to theme 2; online interactions vs meeting in person and considerations unique to COVID.	Findings
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Developed from: Tong A, Sainsbury P, Craig J. Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. International Journal for Quality in Health Care. 2007. Volume 19, Number 6: pp. 349 – 357

Supplementary Material S2 - Interview Schedule

Background Information

Can you tell me a little bit about your day to day life before COVID-19?

- Probe - How were your experiences of socialising?

How have things changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Probe - How did this make you feel?
- Probe - Can you describe your recent experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Probe - What were your initial thoughts on the national lockdown, which started on the 23rd of March 2020?

Can you describe some of the benefits and challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about for you?

- Prompt - What difficulties did you encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Prompt - Can you tell me about any positives during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Pre- COVID-19 pandemic - online dating motivations.

Can you describe your experiences with online dating before COVID-19?

- Probe - How did this make you feel?
- Probe - What prompted you to start online dating?
- Probe - Can you explain any other reasons why you have used online dating?
- Probe - What is the most important part of online dating to you?

What online dating websites did you use before COVID-19 and why?

- Probe - How long have you been using these websites?
- Probe - How often do you use online dating websites?

Are there any aspects of online dating that are rewarding to you before COVID-19?

- Probe - Are there any aspects of online dating that are unrewarding to you?

- Probe - Can you tell me about any successful online dating experiences?
- Probe - Can you tell me about any unsuccessful online dating experiences?

Have you ever paid for features on an online dating website?

- Probe: Can you tell me about whether this changed your experience with online dating?
- Probe - What is your reason for doing so?
- Probe - What is your reason for not doing so?

Current - Online dating motivations

Can you tell me about your experiences of online dating during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Prompt - Are your experiences using online dating platforms any different compared to before the pandemic?
- Probe - Can you explain if you have had any successful matches and/or conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Can you describe why you have used online dating websites during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Probe - How often have you used online dating websites during the pandemic?
- Probe - Has your usage changed compared to before the pandemic?

What are the best things about online dating during COVID-19?

- Probe - What challenges are you facing, dating online, during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Probe - What would you like to see improved in online dating (especially during COVID-19 pandemic)?

What are your thoughts on meeting up with people that you have spoken to on online dating sites?

- Probe - Have your thoughts changed since the pandemic?
- Probe - Can you explain your preference on either online dating or physical face-to-face dating?

Do you think the COVID-19 pandemic will have any long-term effects on how you date online?

- Prompt - What kind of impact do you think COVID-19 has had on online dating?

- Probe - Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your perception of online dating?

Final Closing Questions

Finally, in relation to the interview itself, how have you found it?

- Have you talked about what you expected to be talking about?
- What do you hope the research will achieve?
- Do you have any questions?

I would like to take this final opportunity to thank you for taking part in the study and to remind you of the information in the Debrief about sources of support.

Supplementary Material S3 - Collated table with themes, codes, and example extracts.

Theme	Code	Example Data Extract
Theme 1: "Everyone just talks about COVID": Challenges in establishing an online relationship.	"everyone just talks about COVID"	<i>"it was a lot like simpler so you could end up meeting quite a few people (.) erm (2) and it kinda gave people stuff to talk about whereas now everyone just talks about COVID (.)"</i> Molly
	Decrease in app Usage	<i>"people started getting bored of being on dating apps all the time it was like a massive like er peak and then everyone was like this is boring I need something else to do"</i> (Louisa)
	Establishing a connection more difficult online: 'what to talk about' when there is no opportunity to meet	<i>"so if you're first talking to someone and they've got nothing on their profile and it's just a blank slate if you just say something generic because there's nothing to there's no talking points erm then you're seen as boring but in real life if you know if you're actually going and doing something you can comment on what's going on until you know them better and then you can ask about those things like the breaking the ice is so much harder"</i> (Samuel)

	Illegal to Meet	<i>“you’re not sure if the other person will be comfortable actually doing anything or like you know even just going for drinks or something cos technically it’s illegal” (Samuel)</i>
	The ‘grey area’	<i>“before it was very okay let’s try and get to know them as quickly as possible but more importantly meet them versus now it’s very talk to them for like two months and then very unsure as to where you go from there it’s like a bit of a grey area” (Samuel)</i>
Theme 2: "where do you go from there? It’s like a bit of a grey area": Challenges in moving a relationship offline.	At risk family/housemates	<i>“the start of lockdown I wasn’t going on dates cos I was back at home with my parents and they were classed as high risk so didn’t want to put them in danger” (Gary)</i>
	Tier System	<i>“it’s definitely a lot harder to meet with people and as well because at the moment obviously like where I live its tier two and it’s december so I’m not gonna sit outside with somebody in a pub in the middle of December.” (Molly)</i>
	Meeting Outside	
	Social Distancing	
	Necessary to meet to establish offline relationship within a particular 'peak' time frame	<i>“there’s a point where you talk for so long without seeing someone it’s almost like you’ve reached like a peak and then it comes back down again out of interest and yeah I think I’m way past the peak ((laughter)) so you get excited and then it’s been so long it’s</i>

*like eh hh I'm no longer that
bothered" (Samuel)*

Expectation is different from
reality – what happens in this
online world and is not
always reflected in reality

*"we just meet up and then its
just like a completely different
from what I thought, or it is
just completely different from
my expectation, and you are
just like oh shock, this is not
the person that I am talking to,
and it is kind of
disappointing" (Ralph)*

**Theme 3: "it's gone from
more of convenience to
necessity at this point":**

Motivations for online dating
during COVID-19

For a relationship

"now I'd say I've matured emotionally and I'm more interested in finding a romantic relationship"
(Gary)

Boredom

"mainly just boredom ((Laughs)) erm just not having anything to do just kind of wanting to kind of speak to people erm yeah that's that's the very sad truth of it ((Laughs))" (Sam)

Meeting new people - Easier

"when you go out to bars and pubs with your friends before you could obviously go up to someone you found attractive whereas now you have to sit at your table half the time with a piece of plastic barricading you from the table next to you ((laughter)) so you can only really give someone you fancy the eye from across the room erm so I think it's just easier now to use online dating apps than meeting someone out and about (Gary)"

A lack of human connection
Lonely, Depressed, Sad

"I think instead of using online dating to find romance people just used it to connect with others so they had people to talk to and not feel so isolated" (Gary)

Humour

"pure boredom if i'm honest it's not as if I'm looking for anything or anybody I'm just really bored and it gives me something extra funny to do"
(Molly)

Meeting people of the same
sexuality

“There isn’t a lot of LGBTQ+ venues so like when you’re heterosexual it’s probably a lot easier to go up to someone you find attractive and flirt with them whereas for me without LGBTQ+ venues it’s very difficult to know if someone is homosexual or not so online dating made it so much easier as you can obviously tailor your profile to suit you so like I obviously set it as being interested in men which is easier than trying to guess someone’s sexuality whilst you’re out in town or whatever so erm yeah that was the main motivation really to meet people of the same sexuality as myself” (Gary)

For non romantic connection

“I’m not sure if it counts as online dating but I have Bumble BFF which I don’t know if you’ve heard of it it’s like online dating but for making friends” (Gary)

Diminished Opportunities

“I think it’s probably just opportunities have diminished at the moment” (Samuel)
