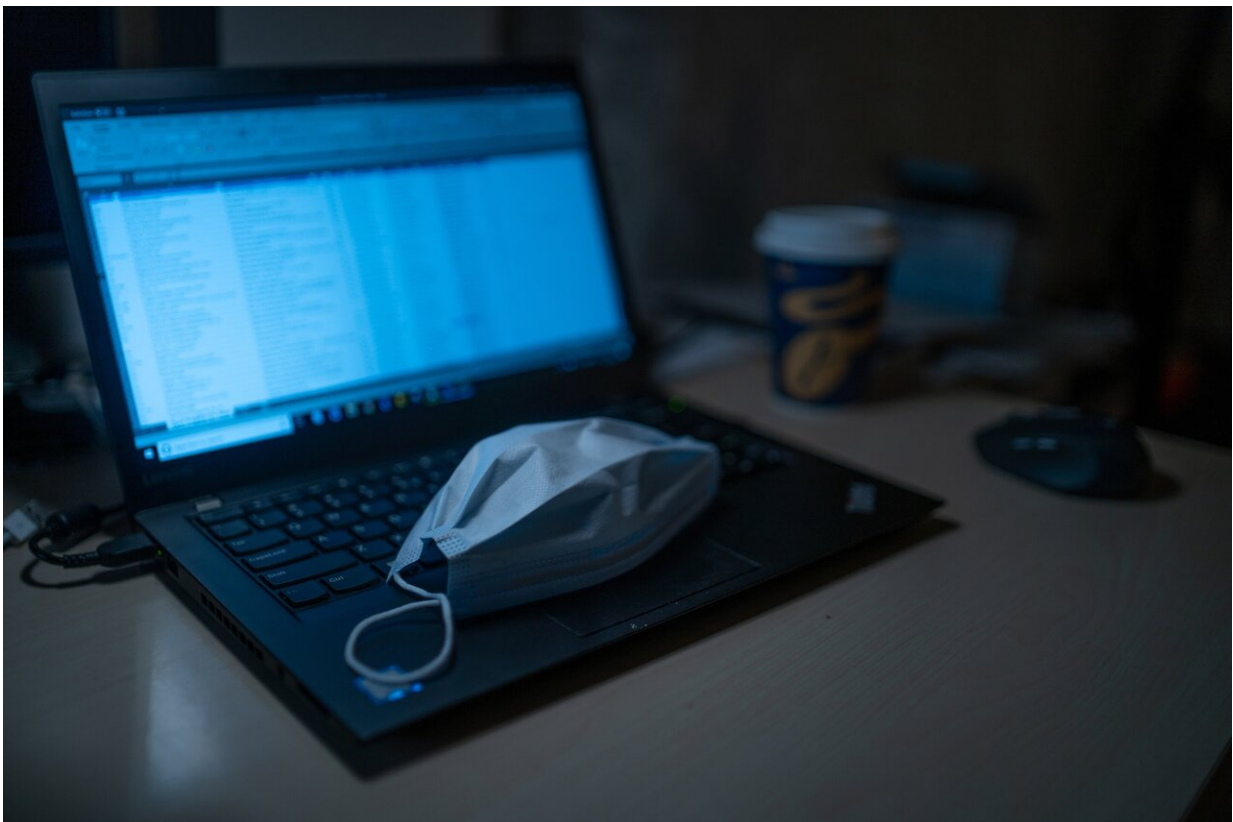


How do Americans view the virus? Anthropology professor examines attitudes of COVID

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In her ongoing research about Americans' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Northern Arizona University anthropology professor Lisa

Hardy and her collaborators have talked to dozens of people. A couple of them stand out to the researchers.

Hardy spoke to a man who had polio as a child and had to live in a home with an iron lung away from his family. He said he was not in [good health](#) but he was not afraid of COVID-19 because he has seen all of this. A woman told anthropology lecturer Leah Mundell that she was the only Spanish-speaking contact tracer in her county, and she took on the responsibility of helping clients with much more than their [physical health](#), connecting them with services and translating for them as they struggled to access resources.

Hardy's research, to which Mundell contributed, was published this week in *Medical Anthropology*. "Connection, Contagion, and COVID-19" looks at how Americans' attitudes and responses have changed during the time of the [pandemic](#) and how to many people, the virus is not a biological agent but instead a malicious actor. This perception may play a role in the various responses Hardy's team heard, including comments about racism, [social justice](#) and mistrust of information.

"Social scientists have done an excellent job of exploring past pandemics with regard to xenophobia—the 'Spanish Flu,' for instance—and how people understand bodies and illness," Hardy said. "This work builds on that by examining the COVID-19 pandemic in the current political moment. The results of this and other research can help to inform areas where collaborative interventions could potentially help to slow the spread of the virus and support well-being for people living through this time."

The research project, which is a collaboration as part of the Social Science Community Engagement Lab, started six months ago, in the early days of the pandemic in the United States. Researchers, including Hardy, Mundell and two others, conducted semi-structured

conversational phone interviews with 50 diverse participants. They asked open-ended questions about how people are dealing with the pandemic and their experiences of social and political responses. Then they transcribe the recorded interviews and apply codes to the transcripts to identify patterns. Hardy said this qualitative strategy is ideal for exploring a situation that is rapidly changing and unfolding over time.

As they've called more people, the researchers have seen the interview content change. In more recent interviews, people talked about social uprisings like Black Lives Matter. They're analyzing the relationship between these social movements and perceptions of COVID-19.

Researchers also are talking to more people who have had COVID-19 or had loved ones who got sick. Recent data includes how people reflect on [medical care](#) and contact tracing; that information will be useful for pandemic response. They also will continue interviewing after the Nov. 3 election, which will offer insight into the politicization of the pandemics and its effects.

Tracing the logic of different groups also is important for the group's research. Hardy said they've seen an increase in conspiracy theories in more recent interviews, as people across the political spectrum develop unfounded theories about the virus and its reach.

"We want to understand where these ideas are coming from and see how they influence behavior like vaccine uptake, health practices and voting patterns," she said.

The article includes specific responses researchers have collected as they describe their experiences. They run the gamut; interviewees shared fears, concerns and [conspiracy theories](#). Other interviewees talked at length about new connections and circles of care they have formed to help others and to accept help when needed.

"The strength of some of the people who are having to live through hardships is really heartwarming to us," Hardy said. "It gives us hope in this time of tragic loss and tension in the United States."

While the [long-term effects](#) of the pandemic are impossible to predict at this point, Hardy anticipates ongoing effects from the loss of loved ones and inability to grieve together as well as long-term health effects in people who survive COVID-19 but continue to have symptoms. But, she added, the country is seeing the development of creative and dynamic strategies for connection and resilience that will hopefully persist through generations.

More information: Lisa J. Hardy, Connection, Contagion, and COVID-19, *Medical Anthropology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/01459740.2020.1814773](#)

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