

Open Forum

Challenges and opportunities for non-quantitative open research

Open research presents specific challenges for those engaged in disciplinary, methodological and epistemological research approaches that are 'non-normative' in the context of open research practices. This session aims to open a forum for discussing these challenges and provide an opportunity to contribute to the design of guidelines and training options for improving open and transparent research practices particularly among non-quantitative researchers.

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An opportunity to think about and discuss:

- How can we respond positively to transparency calls?
- What counts as 'data' or 'evidence' in our own research?
- What are some of the issues and challenges we face?
- What specific aspects of open qualitative research would we most like to see covered in training offered by the university?
- ...?

Challenges: ethics and open data archiving

A definitive move towards mandated openness for qualitative research and data by funders such as the AHRC and the ESRC

- ❑ 1994: Qualitative Data Archival Resource Centre (QUALIDATA), University of Essex

- ❑ 1996: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Datasets Policy

Hammersley M. **1997**. Qualitative Data Archiving: Some Reflections on its Prospects and Problems. *Sociology*. 31(1):131–42

Mauthner NS, Parry O, Backett-Milburn K. **1998**. The Data are Out there, or are They? Implications for Archiving and Revisiting Qualitative Data. *Sociology*. 32(4):733–45

Parry O, Mauthner NS. **2004**. Whose Data are They Anyway?: Practical, Legal and Ethical Issues in Archiving Qualitative Research Data. *Sociology*. 38(1):139–52

Moore N. **2007**. (Re)Using Qualitative Data? *Sociological Research Online*. 12(3):1–13

Chauvette A, Schick-Makaroff K, Molzahn AE. **2019**. Open Data in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 18:1609406918823863

A misguided application of quantitative research standards to fields of study governed by radically different epistemological foundations?

- ❑ The idea of 'replicability' is nearly meaningless in this context where “interrogation of data, coding and reduction are highly iterative processes, where small decisions are likely hard to capture”

Corti, Louise. 2018, September 18. “Show Me the Data: Research Reproducibility in Qualitative Research”, *UK Data Service Data Impact blog*. <https://blog.ukdataservice.ac.uk/show-me-the-data/>.

Challenges: ontological and epistemological foundations

❑ Issues that “go to the heart of what it means to ‘do’ qualitative research”

Broom A, Cheshire L, Emmison M. **2009**. Qualitative Researchers’ Understandings of Their Practice and the Implications for Data Archiving and Sharing. *Sociology*. 43(6):1163–80

❑ Qualitative research is “co-produced, co-constructed, embedded in and by contexts and the conditions of production are inextricably interlinked with [the] process of analysis and interpretation”

Corti, Louise. **2018**, September 18. “Show Me the Data: Research Reproducibility in Qualitative Research”, *UK Data Service Data Impact blog*. <https://blog.ukdataservice.ac.uk/show-me-the-data/>.

❑ The challenge of “disentangling the researcher as self from the research as product/output within interpretivist inquiry”

Hanchard, M. and Pineda, I. **2023**. *Project report: Fostering cultures of open qualitative research*. December 2023. Sheffield: The University of Sheffield. [doi: 10.15131/shef.data.24807987](https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.24807987)

Perspectives

Hanchard, M. and Pineda, I. **2023**. Project report: Fostering cultures of open qualitative research. December 2023. Sheffield: The University of Sheffield.
[doi: 10.15131/shef.data.24807987](https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.24807987)

- Survey (N = 91)
- Semi-structured interviews (N = 15)
- Stakeholder workshop (N = 5)

Our own active survey (Moreh et al. 2025):

https://newcastlebusiness.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4MyHpA7HYEzP8ua

- Survey (N = 11 completed so far)

Barriers

What barriers (if any) preclude you from making your qualitative research open access?		Count	What barriers - if any - preclude you from making (more of) your qualitative research open access?	
Ethical concerns regarding identification of research participants, communities, etc.	65		Concerns about privacy of personal data	8
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Ethical concerns on investigating sensitive topics	52		Ethical concerns in respect to investigating sensitive topics	7
Making qualitative data open is time consuming	40		Not ready to share my data as I am still analysing them myself	5
Concerns about my research being unfairly appropriated by others, i.e., being 'scooped'	28		Data sharing doesn't align with my epistemological commitments	4
Technical difficulties regarding making my data accessible and usable by others	27		Making qualitative data open is time consuming	4
Issues of commercial sensitivity	16		Concerns about being scooped, misrepresented, critiqued and/or exposed	3
Concerns about local, national and/or international laws and policies	15		Unsure on how to do it	3
Unsure on how to do it	15		Concerns about my research being unfairly appropriated by others	2
Possibility of experiencing marginalisation due to my choice of research methods, methodology, etc.	9		Technical difficulties making my data accessible and usable by others	2
Other	14		Concerns about local, national and/or international laws and policies	1
None	3		Issues of commercial sensitivity	1
			Other (please detail)	1
			Respondents	11
Total	91			

Hanchard and Pineda (2023)

Moreh et al.(2025)

Can it be ethical?

“My primary concern would be protecting the **confidentiality** of participants, particularly when a study has been conducted in a specific area and sensitive and specific experiences have been discussed during the wider transcript.”

“Ethically, I worry about the **identifiability** of data. Even when anonymised by removing references to time and place, there may be linguistic identifiers (such as vocabulary or idiom) or overall narrative elements which may be invisible to a researcher, but apparent to the participant or people who know them.”

“My main concerns are about the potential **identification of participants** and how we make sure that they fully consent to these transcripts being available to others, and understand the potential impact.”

Can it be meaningful?

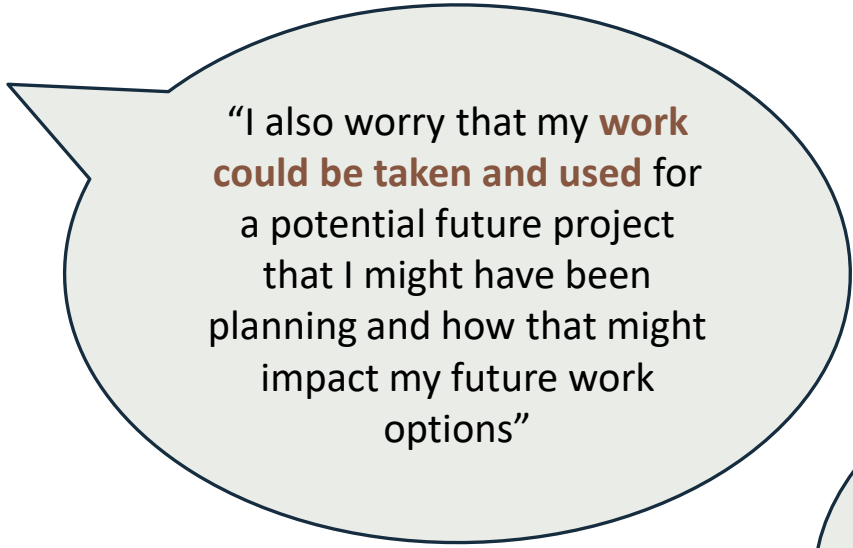
“Our experience of submitting data to the UK Data Archive is that [we have to] **remove so much sensitive material** from it that what is submitted seems pretty **meaningless** to me.”

“Qualitative research is much more exploratory in its approach and the **rigidity** of open science may hinder this”


“While secondary analysis of interview data is possible, I worry that **decontextualising data** by hosting it in a repository **loses meaning**, and creates spaces for **inauthentic/non-credible interpretations**. A thick description of context only goes so far, and is still bound by the assumptions and context of the original researchers.”

“I am also concerned that the Open Data movement is premised on **ontological/epistemological assumptions** about the value of replicability and data as an unmediated gateway to the truth”

Can it be trusted?



“I also worry that my **work could be taken and used** for a potential future project that I might have been planning and how that might impact my future work options”



“there are private/commercial entities who seek to **harvest 'social' data for proprietary purposes** with the intention of harming people, this is a matter of public record on a level I would think nobody could ignore it!

Open to whom, for what purpose, we really should not promote naivete by presenting openness as some simple good”

Opportunities

- ❑ Open Research ≠ Open Data
- ❑ Acknowledge research practices that can already be thought of as ‘open’ (e.g. participatory research methods)
- ❑ Alternative framings, concepts and practices:
 - ❖ production transparency vs. replicability: “methods used to collect data”, “description of research design, sampling, fieldwork, fieldwork materials such as topic guide and thumbnail sketches of interviews can provide a good deal of context. These could be sufficient for a future researcher to undertake a restudy or to revisit the raw data. ... For ethnography, this will be harder, but various fieldwork diaries, audio-visual sources, might help put the reader back in the original fieldwork scenario (Corti 2018)
 - ❖ process transparency (“supporting ‘grey’ materials”)
 - ❖ “re-renderability”: details on the context of the research ("e.g., a note on the temporal, spatial, and political context in which the research was undertaken") and "a statement on [the researcher's] own positionality in relation to the data, and thus on how their interpretations came to be" (Hanchard and San Roman Pineda, 2023: 25-26)

Our challenges and opportunities

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