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Conceptual Framework in Reflexive Bracketing Techniques in Qualitative Methodology

Kyari Muhammadu Habibullah ^{1, 2*} | Bashir Usman Mohammed ¹ | Musa Hamza ¹

Abstract:

Bracketing is a qualitative research methodology that aims to minimize the damaging effects of assumptions that might taint the research process. However, the mechanisms underlying bracketing are poorly understood due to a shift away from its phenomenological roots. The current inquiry looks into the philosophical and historical roots of bracketing, as well as the disputes that have arisen since it has been limited in terms of who can bracket. When and how is bracketing used during the qualitative research process? A conceptual framework is finally given in order to advance the debate and use of bracketing in the gathering and analysis of qualitative data.

Key words: Bracketing, Phenomenology, Presumptions, Assumptions, Qualitative Methods.

1. Faculty of Environmental Technology, Department of Architecture, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU) Bauchi, Bauchi State Nigeria.

2. Faculty of Design and Architecture, Department of Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In the field of social work research, qualitative approaches are increasingly being employed to capture and investigate the participant's lived experience. While conversational interactions provide unique chances to create understanding from the informant's perspective, they are also intrinsically subjective endeavors. The researcher functions as an analytical tool throughout the qualitative research project (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Preconceptions are inescapably passed along within and between research projects. They include beliefs, attitudes, interests, feelings, and theories. These biases have an effect on the collection, assessment, and presentation of data.

Some researchers employ bracketing to lessen the detrimental effects of implicit biases in their work and thereby increase the project's rigor. Given the sometimes close bond that can form before and during the qualitative research process between the researcher and the research topic, bracketing is another technique for shielding the researcher from the cumulative effects of looking at potentially upsetting material. A lengthy study project on a delicate issue could drain the researcher and make it difficult for them to continue, which will influence the outcomes and analyses. While bracketing can help decrease a research project's negative impacts, at every level of qualitative research, it also helps the researcher to more

thoroughly reflect: selecting a topic, planning the interview, collecting and evaluating the data, as well as presenting the findings. Long-term deep thought capacity may improve research clarity and permit more extensive and comprehensive analysis and results. In order to elucidate some of the uncertainties and contradictions that now exist in the discipline, we start by tracing the philosophical and historical foundations of bracketing. We first examine the various definitions associated with the bracketing process and then analyze the definitional disputes that have arisen since its inception. Who brackets? How bracketing techniques are employed, and when bracketing occurs in the research process are all discussed. Research examples addressing various types of bracketing throughout the study process are provided along with a conceptual framework. Finally, the value of bracketing in the research process and its application in social work are emphasized.

2 | DEFINITIONS

Many authors have speculated on the constitutive essence of bracketing due to the lack of a uniform definition. The challenge, according to Drew, is to identify the characteristics that relate to the researcher's knowledge of the phenomenon. According to Gearing (2004, pp 215), bracketing is a "scientific technique in which a researcher suspends or keeps in abeyance his or her presuppositions, prejudices, assumptions, hypotheses, or previous experiences to view and describe the phenomenon." When articulating her own perspective, prior opinions and ideas, and creating hypotheses. The researcher must be forthright and exhaustive. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007, pp 1430), in order to accomplish the analytical goal of attentively hearing participant accounts, participants "engage in the self-reflective process of "bracketing," in which they acknowledge and set aside (but do not renounce) their a priori knowledge and beliefs." According to the tradition of grounded theory research, Creswell and Miller (2000, pp 1376) emphasize the significance of researchers identifying their biases early on in the research process to make them

understandable to readers. "Bracketing or suspending those researcher biases" as the study goes on, people take into account the influences of history, society, and culture on their perception (p. 127).

One of the most difficult components of employing this extensive number of definitions is deciding when, how, and if to use bracketing as a qualitative research methodology. Being comfortable with ambiguity is a constant struggle in qualitative research, and the struggle with the lack of standardization surrounding bracketing concepts gives qualitative research material to work with. While acknowledging the complexity and ambiguity of the process, the lack of uniformity in bracketing also enables researchers to interact with and situate themselves along what is, in reality, a bracketing continuum. The absence of a precise definition and a single method of bracketing may be useful in qualitative research because it allows for a diversity of approaches. A strict set of implementation standards and a single method for bracketing may not be efficient in an inductive research endeavor. The ability of researchers to recognize their preconceptions will improve. If they carefully consider the different features of bracketing and how to address them within their chosen qualitative research approach,

3 | THE COMPOSITION OF BRACKETING

According to several authors, bracketing also includes values and beliefs, ideas and hypotheses. Preconceptions include beliefs (Glaser, 1992), hypotheses (Crotty, 1998), feelings (Drew, 2004), biases (Creswell and Miller, 2000), assumptions (Charmaz, 2006), and beliefs about the phenomenon being studied.

Internal suppositions of the researcher, such as historical suppositions, cultural suppositions, and experiential suppositions. According to Gear ing (2004), bracketing includes moral presumptions and so on, as well as academic assumptions such as orientations and theories Suggestions for various internal and external aspects of the phenomenon under study are bracketed together. However, there is still no agreement on what should be postponed.

These fundamental elements might be viewed as a homogenous group because there is no consensus on the bracketing elements. Even though internal feelings and prejudices might vary greatly between each type of assumption. In some cases, researchers may be more aware of their emotions than their cognitive biases, and depending on the essential topics being discussed, this awareness may change. The difficult process of bracketing enables you to reach various states of consciousness, and this awareness might change based on the important issues being discussed. The difficult process of bracketing enables you to reach various states of consciousness. Placing preconceptions on hold is only one aspect of bracketing, which is also a process of self-discovery that allows for the emergence of suppressed feelings and memories (Drew, 2004). Self-discovery does not have to be done alone; in fact, working with a coworker or research partner can be helpful (Rolls and Relf, 2006). As long as the researcher maintains self-awareness as a continuous process and acts as the instrument, data collection, study results, and interpretation could all benefit considerably from bracketing. Due to the researcher's emotional responses, past experiences, and cognitive biases, data collection and interpretation may be complex, distorted, or abbreviated.

4 | THE TECHNIQUE OF BRACKETING

When it comes to qualitative research, there isn't a lot of agreement among experts on when bracketing should be used. According to Giorgi (1998), bracketing should be limited to the analytical step. According to him, bracketing should not be used during an interview because engaging with the participant takes precedence over keeping biases at bay. Glaser (1978, 1992) recommends recognizing assumptions at the outset of a study project. Others claim that beginning the research process using bracketing when the project is first conceived will produce the best results, and continuing the procedure throughout the investigation is a good idea (Rolls and Relf, 2006). According to Ahern (1999) and Rolls and Relf (1999), preconceptions should be addressed before

beginning a research project (2006). However, this should be a continuous activity throughout the course of the study. Because qualitative research is cascading, there is a risk in restricting bracketing to just one stage, like the interview or analytical stage. The creation of research questions is followed by the collection of data, which is then analyzed. Some traditions, like grounded theory, use initial data analysis as part of an iterative process to guide both the theoretical sample and the acquisition of subsequent data (Charmaz, 2006). The entire research process can be impacted by the spread of preconceptions from one level to the next. Prior to starting the study, it is crucial to address any preconceived views that might have arisen through personal encounter with the research materials. Throughout the course of the research study, they should be watched as a potential source of insight as well as a potential barrier to participation.

5 | WHO SETS BRACKETS: RESEARCHERS, PARTICIPANTS, OR BOTH?

Who should bracket their preconceptions in the research is the next point of tension in bracketing. The study's literature places a lot of emphasis on the researcher's need to bracket; does the participant also need to bracket? Despite the fact that Crotty (1996) seems to encourage both the researcher and the participant to simultaneously bracket their preconceptions, he also admits that the researcher cannot guarantee that the participant will follow suit. This viewpoint may be troublesome because participants' bracketing out of assumptions may be the exact opposite of what qualitative research is intended to accomplish, preventing participants from being fully engaged with the subject of the study and the interviewer. It is crucial to keep in mind that many people use brackets during interviews, frequently without the researcher's knowledge. The researcher should expect the participant to bring preconceived notions. Regardless of this assumption about participant bracketing, or showing intent toward the occurrence during the interview (Crotty, 1996).

6 | METHODS OF BRACKETING

Writing memos as a means of evaluating the data collection and analysis process. One strategy for bracketing is to reflect on the researcher's involvement with the data (Cutcliffe, 2003). There are two types of methodological notes: those that describe the research procedures and those that describe the cognitive process of conducting research. Memos might contain observational notes that let the researcher consider their thoughts on the research endeavor. According to Glaser (1998), memoing is a flexible process rather than a constrained one that can help the researcher gain important insights. One of these insights is recognizing and highlighting one's prejudices. Contrary to popular belief, the researcher may be able to engage with the raw material more fully if they acknowledge their presuppositions and hunches rather than suppress them for the sake of objectivity or immersion. Conducting interviews with external sources to identify and expose biases and preconceptions is another way to use bracketing (Rolls and Relf, 2006). A negotiated, supportive link between the researcher and, during interviews with a non-clinical, non-managerial colleague or research associate, the study findings are established. By establishing a fee and setting up meetings, this procedure can become formalized. It should also include a confidentiality agreement for the data shared.

Interviews conducted before, during, and after data collection can indicate themes that may block the researcher's capacity to listen to respondents or cause the researcher to experience strong emotions, preventing further research. By recovering forgotten personal occurrences, researchers may increase the researcher's clarity and involvement with participants' viewpoints. It can enhance the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon being investigated and aid in safeguarding researchers and participants in sensitive research situations (Rolls and Relf, 2006). Starting a reflective journal before choosing the research topic and then identifying prejudices as the research develops is another method of bracketing (Ahern, 1999). The reflexivity of researchers, their motivations for their work, and their assumptions about socioeconomic class, race/ethnicity, and

gender can all be improved. Keeping a journal, as well as the researcher's place in the research's power structure and sexual preference (Hanson, 1994), Conflicts in roles with research participants, remorse or disengagement feelings that may be indicative of preconceptions, and the researcher's preference for writing in the first or third person are all things to consider (Paterson and Groening, 1996). (Porter, 1993). Given the various ways to access researcher assumptions previously described, a single method of bracketing may not be universally recommended. Because bracketing strategies are not mutually exclusive and may even be complementary, qualitative researchers must decide which type of bracketing works best for them and the research question they want to explore. The researcher's commitment to disclose assumptions both before and during the study process supports the various bracketing approaches for jotting down thoughts. Conducting relevant and high-quality qualitative research requires conducting interviews with outside sources and keeping the process at the forefront of one's journal. The anticipated emotions or cognitions the researcher might experience while conducting the study may have an impact on the investigator's decision regarding the bracketing approach. In order to control and deal with the potentially powerful assumptions and feelings that can accompany lived experience. A researcher studying the experience of childhood cancer should conduct bracket interviews. Those who had the sickness as children may wish to seek advice from a third party. If a researcher is starting a new research topic and has no prior understanding of the subject, an appropriate first approach to bracketing is, On the other hand, Ahern's (1999) approach of creating a reflexive journal before beginning research would be more comparable. Before starting the research study, the researcher may find it helpful to keep a reflective notebook to help them become more conscious of the problem in their daily lives.

7 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR GATHERING AND ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

The suggested conceptual framework, depicted in Figure 1 below, demonstrates how bracketing's complicated character. Additionally, it develops a methodological framework that can help qualitative researchers construct a bracketing technique that is an ongoing component of their qualitative research plan. The researcher's personal and professional selves are represented in the conceptual framework. Putting up a wall between the researcher and the study project to block protection improves the way research is done. The framework outlines the methodical progression of the research in order to see how bracketing might be implemented into each stage.

The researcher continually enters and exits the data to help better comprehend the issue. The double-sided arrow between the researcher and the subject shows how the research data and bracketing method are used to compare the research data to a larger cultural context (Gearing, 2004). Additionally, there are parallel arrows showing how data gathering relates to research topics, data collection relates to data, and so forth. Due to the iterative nature of qualitative research, analysis can begin as soon as data has been collected, and questions can be changed or added in response to new information and interpretations. The iterative method of bracketing does not imply that the researcher retains their beliefs in a systematic or linear manner; additional problems and concerns can arise at any time while conducting the research.

The fundamental issue in project conceptualization, the first stage of a research project, is determining how unconscious biases could influence the procedure before the study ever begins. Humans cannot help but make assumptions about social standing, including those based on class, race, gender, and age. However, they invariably creep into analysis without the researcher being aware of them (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher may choose to create and keep a reflexive notebook in order to disclose prejudices during the project planning stage. When a research project is just getting started, keeping a reflective journal might help suppressed memories or unconscious biases come to the surface, which can affect the study process. The researcher could learn through this approach that specific memories or preconceptions need to be examined both before and throughout the investigation. When used in a reflexive manner, the researcher's personal experience can also provide useful insights during project design, allowing for a deeper connection with the participant and the data.

The researcher's most difficult task is articulating the study question. This entails asking questions that actively engage the subject in delving deeper into his or her ideas while avoiding bringing up the researcher's assumptions, which, in many circumstances, could obstruct the process. The qualitative researcher may have hunches or even entire hypotheses, though the researcher's awareness of this varies. The qualitative researcher frequently has suspicions or even entire hypotheses, albeit the degree to which they are aware of this varies. Those that appear to assume the gender of the offenders or the interviewee's particular emotional state or developmental experiences or cultural preconceptions may result in the examination being terminated too soon and the discussion of the subject of child abuse mentioned earlier. While developing the study questions, the researcher may choose to conduct bracketing interviews with a trustworthy colleague to better understand their perspectives and biases. A coworker who is not personally invested in the subject matter of the study can help identify research questions that are skewed or unclear and

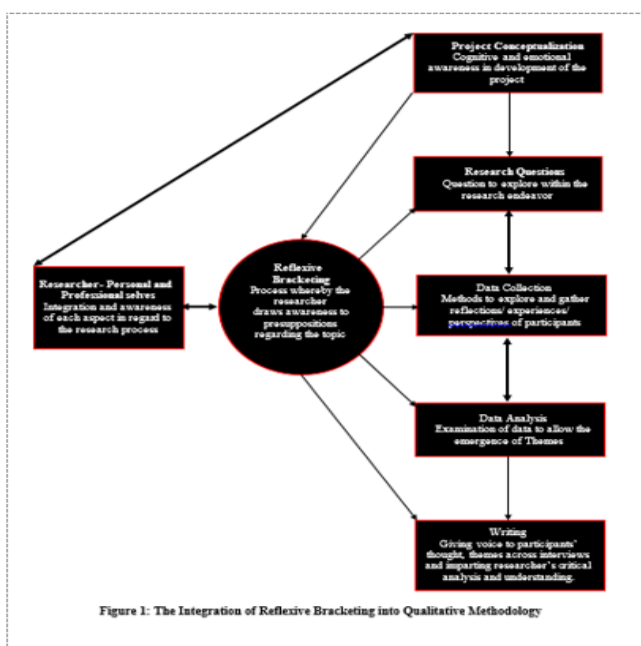


Figure 1: The Integration of Reflexive Bracketing into Qualitative Methodology

present obstacles to investigation. The researcher may decide to keep a reflective journal throughout the research process to better articulate his or her evolving viewpoints.

The intensity of the researcher's feelings about the research topic may make many issues that may develop during data collection much worse. Due to the possibility that even minor adjustments to the questions asked of informants or the interviewer's body language could affect their response, bracketing is a technique that can be used to manage strong emotional reactions. Delicate societal concerns are being explored in qualitative research more and more. For example, bereavement, mental illness, infertility, or risky behavior may cause a person to exhibit strong emotional reactions during the interview process. The participant's body language may disclose extra layers of meaning in their responses and may also imply discomfort or anguish, so the researcher must be conscious of both his or her own body language and that of the subject. According to Rolls and Relf (2006), doing multiple sensitive and emotionally taxing interviews can negatively affect the researcher, who may unconsciously take on the participant's depression or hopelessness. By altering one's expectations, one can comprehend the cumulative consequences of the researcher's acute emotional responses as well as rapid reactions to participant narratives. Bracketing can be beneficial in the iterative process of qualitative research where new data can encourage the investigation of new issues (for example, progressive focusing) (Schutt, 2006). In addition to adding details from the researcher's experience to questions for additional data collection and developing interpretations while collecting data, bracketing can aid in the researcher's concentration on the subject matter of the study. The researcher can utilize bracketing to convey thoughts and opinions by making theoretical notes and observational remark memos while collecting data. Writing these memos and notes after interviews might expose cognitive and affective biases, enabling a more in-depth analysis of the material. The remarks of some participants may appear to conflict with those of the researchers, other

participants, and readers since qualitative research is subjective. A participant with a diverse perspective may raise unexplored ground in qualitative research that needs to be probed, open up fresh avenues of thought, and offer a bad case example for a certain occurrence. However, the researcher's capacity to consider such diverse opinions depends on his or her readiness to hear and become more sensitive to various viewpoints, which opens up additional research avenues and makes apparent conflicts surface. The next step in the research process is data analysis, or it can be done in tandem with data collection as part of an iterative process where the researcher switches between the two to better understand and arrive at saturation. When analyzing data, biases can unintentionally affect what the researcher hears or doesn't hear in the participant's voices. In order to hear the nuances and nuanced responses of participants and avoid the trap of categorizing responses into predetermined categories, a researcher must put aside preconceived notions or the participant's lived experience is filtered by the researcher's own personal experience. A researcher with preconceived ideas in this sector may not detect the culturally unique opinions of immigrant parents on how they discipline their children in the situation of child abuse. In general, a researcher who belongs to a dominant ethno-cultural group or has a relatively higher socioeconomic status may overlook how structural and social limitations have an impact on the worldviews of people from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

When it comes to processing data, the qualitative researcher who employs a bracketing strategy confronts particular difficulties. In addition to avoiding preconceptions, researchers may experience tensions between embracing them and using them as insight, as well as between openness and criticality (Finlay, 2008). These differences stem from the researcher's attempt to analyze the data fairly, putting equal emphasis on the nuances of the participants' viewpoints as well as the broad issues. Depending on the project and the researcher, there may be different approaches to managing these conflicts. However, by doing so, the researcher is able to fully participate in an

iterative process where they can draw from the conflicts between the general and the specific. In order to balance these tensions and highlight both important themes and problematic examples, the researcher may benefit from using bracketing interviews throughout the data processing phase. For instance, a researcher curious about the job experiences of recent immigrants should be receptive to participants' opinions, both favorable and unfavorable, but also critically assess these viewpoints, taking into account the social contexts in which the participant's experiences are located as well as the researcher's and participant's own social contexts.

The researcher attempts to bring the voices of the participants to life in the final stage of the research process, writing. A researcher may become more aware of how those voices are represented in writing and how the depth of emotion is displayed by putting aside one's prejudices. Bracketing also has the benefit of protecting the researcher from the temptation to favor some voices over others, particularly if those voices agree or disagree with the researcher's opinions on the subject at hand. Even when using the same conclusions from a specific data study, written narratives can vary greatly.

Preconceptions may influence how the researcher organizes topics, participant quotes, and other data; they provide context for participant accounts and the application of specific ideas to understand or make sense of the data; and, if revealed, all of this could result in more insightful, perceptive, and creative writing. An account of HIV-positive people's experiences For instance, Nigerian Aboriginal women may employ a range of techniques, including theory, literature analysis, the presentation of themes in a chronological order, the selective use of participant stories, and researcher interpretation. Recognize a variety of narratives, including victimhood and pessimism, as well as empowerment and resilience, according to their stated implications, recognizing the effects of colonialism, racism, sexism, poverty, and other unpleasant realities. By potentially uncritically imposing a grand narrative of victimization, the researcher may obscure alternative narratives in the

data that emphasize empowerment, which might entail feeling sorry for ongoing injustices, empathizing with participants' struggles, and being sad. Even if there isn't a single "correct" answer, reading through a reflective notebook and bracketing interviews can help the researcher be aware of the decisions he or she makes while writing up the study and exploring options. In order for the reader to assess the findings and interpretations for themselves, the researcher should also discuss their techniques, experiences with bracketing, and challenges with interpretation in the write-up. The many bracketing alternatives mentioned at each level of the study process stress bracketing as a strategy for fostering dynamic and fluid interaction with both participants and data. According to the stage of the research, the topic, the researcher, and the bracketing strategy will all vary. There is no automated or manual method, such as bracketing, that can guarantee a researcher that if they finish X, Y will come after. However, disciplined, perceptive, and sincere bracketing will promote deeper involvement with the topic and more reflective thinking on the researcher's behalf.

8 | CONCLUSION

Conflicts over who should apply bracketing, what should be bracketed, when it should be applied, and other related issues, as well as its constituent parts, can be a hindrance because of inconsistent conceptions. However, this lack of homogeneity may provide qualitative researchers with a range of possibilities and strategies, as well as the opportunity to contribute their own viewpoints and start their own research expeditions. The amount of time researchers spend researching before starting a research topic, as well as how they examine and plan for any unique issues their personal histories may present, will differ. With knowledge of the subject at hand, bracketing may be more helpful to the research project. The benefits of bracketing will be fully understood by the researcher if they remain dedicated to the process throughout the research trajectory, as well as expand their understanding of bracketing and investigate the problems that one might run into both personally and professionally when carrying out a specific. Bracketing allows for

a higher level of researcher involvement and integration across the entire qualitative research process. All great discoveries in the physical sciences, according to a famous physicist, are based on a sort of bracketing (Hut, 2001). To make the revolutionary claim that the Earth circled the sun at the time, Galileo, for instance, was forced to reject the prevailing notion that the Earth was immobile. Similar to how bracketing enabled Galileo to break out from the confines of egocentrism and ethnocentrism, bracketing can support creativity among social science scholars and new ideas on today's urgent societal issues.

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