

Final project report

Fostering cultures of open qualitative research



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This report presents research from a project titled '*Fostering cultures of open qualitative research*' conducted between January 2023 and July 2023. The project was internally funded by the University of Sheffield with £13,913.85 of Research England monies as part of their 2022-2023 'Enhancing Research Cultures' programme.

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The research presented in this report was conducted in-line with ethical approval granted by the University of Sheffield School of Sociological Studies' Research Ethics Committee on 26 January 2023 (Ref: 051118).

Research data referred to within this report can be accessed under a CC-BY-NC 4.0 licence from the University of Sheffield ORDA data repository at:
https://orda.shef.ac.uk/projects/Fostering_cultures_of_open_qualitative_research/170673

The project website can be found at:
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/our-work/human-futures/fostering-cultures-open-qualitative-research>

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The *Fostering cultures of open qualitative research* project was conducted between January 2023 and July 2023, and internally funded by the University of Sheffield Faculty of Social Sciences with £13,913.85 of Research England monies as part of their 2022-2023 *Enhancing Research Cultures* programme. At a point in time where funders are highly likely to mandate open access datasets alongside publications, the project sought to examine how a culture of open qualitative research steeped in interpretivism might be fostered, the resources needed to support it, researchers' main concerns.

Approach and methods

The research involved a small, non-representative scoping survey with 91 full responses, 15 semi-structured interviews, and a stakeholder workshop with five key experts to elicit feedback on the findings. A literature review of the terms *open qualitative* and *qualitative open* undertaken across eight academic databases partly informs the findings, as do concepts from systems theory including the notion of 'sociotechnical regimes.'

Limitations

The sample and findings are slightly biased towards the opinions of early and mid-career academics in London and/or Northern England and that work in research-intensive universities.

Key findings

- There is a poor level of awareness about open science, and/or processes for making qualitative research data open access. In working towards doing so, situated ethics and participant anonymity are key concerns.
- Uncertainty abounds over the roles and responsibilities of different types of researchers (i.e. student, employee, independent). in terms of copyright and licensing.
- There are various niche and nuanced ways in which the notion of making interpretivist inquiry open has been received, with most willing (in principle at least) most to make their data open.
- The notion of re-renderability, in place of reproducibility or replicability appears palatable - with raw qualitative data made open access alongside detail on how interpretations have been arrived at and temporal, spatial, and political background contexts of research.

Key recommendations

- Better central signposting of existing open qualitative resources is needed.
- More support is needed within grant-writing and costing to build in time to prepare/generate open qualitative data.
- Institutional policy on open research needs to better engage with and cater for qualitative, practice-based, mixed-methods, and multimodal research.
- Space and resource are needed for meaningful discussion of the and epistemics involved with rendering interpretivist inquiry open in differing fields.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Executive Summary | ii |
| Contents | iii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Background I: Moving towards open qualitative science | 2 |
| Background II: Open science as a sociotechnical regime | 4 |
| Data and methods..... | 6 |
| Surveying the scope of open qualitative research | 9 |
| Survey sample | 9 |
| Survey findings..... | 10 |
| Perceptions and practices of open qualitative research | 14 |
| Interview findings..... | 15 |
| Workshop findings | 19 |
| Discussion and conclusion..... | 23 |
| Summary of findings | 23 |
| The new landscape of open qualitative | 23 |
| Limitations and further research..... | 24 |
| Recommendations | 24 |
| References | 14 |

Introduction

Reproducibility and replicability are well established as mainstays for assessing and/or evaluating scientific research. Over the past two decades, they have become standard expectations, generating various cultures of making research outputs openly available to the public.

Alongside outputs, making the analytical processes and methods used to generate data more transparent has also become a standard expectation. It is often seen as a mark of good research, with standards such as the FAIR principles and institutions like the Open Science Foundation (OSF) providing instructions and guidance.

However, the movement towards open science has been inflected by its origin in progressivism and a disciplinary base in natural science (life and physical), technology, mathematics, and engineering (STEM). It is underpinned by a democratic ethos of collaborative and shared responsibility for furthering scientific knowledge incrementally, labelled *normal science*. Within this, discussion of open research has tended to coalesce around quantitative and quantifiable data.

Qualitative research, by contrast, tends to be steeped in interpretivism and has seen far less importance being placed on reproducibility or replicability. Methods such as ethnographic

immersion are seen to negate the process, small and vulnerable populations and sample sizes make anonymity problematic, and disentangling researchers from research contexts can prove troublesome for many. Meanwhile, personal interactions in interviews and/or focus groups can differ from one day to the next, depending on the dynamics of the interaction, mood of a participant or researcher, and on when, where, and under what conditions it takes place. These all pose challenges for our ability to reconcile qualitative research with current moves afoot to make research more open and transparent.

In working to address this quandary, the research behind this report sought to: (1) examine how a culture of open qualitative research might be fostered; and (2) report on the resources needed to support it. Rather than focussing only on technical and processual aspects, the project also investigated: (3) what it might mean to make interpretivist inquiry open at various stages; and (4) how we might move towards open qualitative research whilst acknowledging the diverse array of underlying epistemological bases it encompasses. The latter will inform a peer-reviewed paper building on this report through a literature review to explore the epistemics of open qualitative research in more detail.

Background I: Moving towards open qualitative science

In late August 2022, the Executive Office of the (American) President published a short memorandum (OSTP, 2022). Often referred to as the *Nelson memo* (OSTP, 2022) after its author Dr. Alondra Nelson, it marked the beginning of a new era for open science in the USA.

A previous OSTP memorandum in 2013 instructed all publicly/federally funded research institutions (i.e., departments, and agencies, including universities) with >\$100 million in research and development (R&D) expenditures to make their publications available on an open access basis (OSTP, 2013). Shortly after, the National Institutes for Health (NIH), and other large funders began a move towards implementing open science mandates.

The Nelson memo expands on its 2013 precursor to now include data, stating that research data should be '*made freely available and publicly accessible by default in agency-designated repositories without any embargo or delay after publication*' (OSTP, 2022). Institutes with >\$100 million in federal R&D funds must do so within 180 days of generating publications, those with <\$100 million have 360 days grace.

In short, by 31 December 2025, most research receiving public monies in the USA must make its publications and datasets open access.

In tandem with work undertaken to develop the Nelson memo, UNESCO released their *Recommendation on Open Science* report in 2021 (UNESCO, 2021) - with the explicit aim of standardising open science protocols worldwide to help improve the dissemination and sharing of science. These revolve around increasing the quality, rigour, and integrity of science by opening it to scrutiny. UNESCO add that doing so is of collective benefit, both in redressing uneven access to resources, and in promoting a sense of equality and fairness in science. The latter, it adds, serves to increase diversity and the inclusion of a wider set of knowledges, strengthening science.

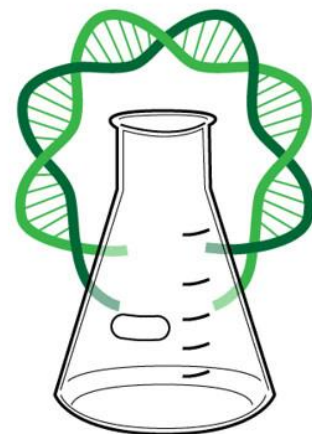
Similarly, in Europe twelve major funders formed an alliance in 2018 called *cOAlition S*, with support from the European Commission and European Research Council (*cOAlition S*, 2023). A broad range of funders have since joined *cOAlition S*, including the Gates Foundation, UKRI, and Wellcome Trust. Moreover, its members have followed the coalition's *Plan S* (Ibid.) from 2021 onwards, holding that any '*scientific publications that result from research funded by public grants must be published in compliant Open Access journals or platforms*' (Ibid).

It remains to be seen if they will follow the Nelson memo to mandate that data should also be made open access too.

The above American, European, and worldwide initiatives have not emerged out of the ether. Open access initiatives held a long and tumultuous history before being mandated, dating back to at least the 1665 publication of the first academic journal, *Philosophical Transactions*, and its concern to make transparent the empirics behind claims.

This report centres on the UK, a context in which *cOAlition S* members include major research funders such as the UKRI, British Academy, NIHR. and Wellcome Trust. In the literature unpacking what the above agreements, and the general move towards making data and research processes open might mean for researchers, a small subfield has begun to emerge around open qualitative research.

To date, existing scholarship on open qualitative research has tended to focus on three main topics: ethics and consent; data preparation and distribution; and methodological community-forming. As such, it largely revolves around process, leaving a debate open on the epistemics involved with interpretivist inquiry open access beyond publications.



"Open Science Logo v2 no text" by gemmerich is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Background II: Open science as a sociotechnical regime

Moves afoot to bring about open research promise a myriad of benefits. However, they tend to be steeped within a normative vision of science; that the subject/object of inquiry can be observed neutrally, and recorded in a format that can be readily shared – either within publications or as a dataset. Aligned with this, the principles, protocols, and mandates that have been set in place often focus on: how to ready, document, and structure data for interoperable sharing; how to negotiate specific open access licencing agreements in-light of research ethics; and/or expand on data management processes, including how to locate, access, and make use of existing open access resources on a secondary basis. Qualitative research does not always offer a good fit for this imaginary of science, leading this report to suggest that greater recognition and accounting are needed about how qualitative research is *rendered*, and by extension how it may be *re-rendered* rather than reproduced or replicated. It adds that doing so serves to facilitate openness without abandoning any interpretivist base. To arrive at this conclusion, the research underpinning this report has been read through a specific analytical lens steeped in science and technology studies (STS) and systems theory, and in which people (i.e., researchers, students, participants, and policymakers) and things – ranging from technologies (policy, legislation, hardware and

software) to material infrastructures are embroiled within complex networks, or rather sociotechnical configurations that emerge and are recreated and changed through lived practice. As nomenclature within this framework:

Regimes form the underlying structure or ‘grammar’ of the system – the shared set of rules that become institutionalised and embedded within practice over time (Geels, 2011; Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2014).

Sociotechnical imaginaries are ‘collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology’ (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 4).

Configurations are ‘sub-networks [of] technological and institutional concepts...more strongly interlinked among themselves than with other concepts’ (Heiberg, Truffer & Binz, 2022).

When configurations align, they form the base units of a regime. They also give rise to **niches** - ‘small networks of individuals and organisations... [separated and] protected from the established regime... enabling more radical innovation and transformations’ (Marjanovic et al., 2020) which challenge established configurations, regimes, and imaginaries, offering potential to bring about change.

Meanwhile, the infrastructures and specific institutional backgrounds against which sociotechnical systems and imaginaries form, change, and function are called **landscapes** (van Rijnsoever & Leendertse, 2020).

This approach also holds that *'technological innovations and their knowledge base are closely linked with earlier developments. New innovations line up with earlier technological change'* (Schienstock, 2011); all configurations have historical antecedents that must be extended or destabilised. Within this, there are **path dependencies** where the development a sociotechnical system along one trajectory closes possibility of other alternatives. As normal science progresses along that trajectory, those alternatives fade – until either a niche returns, or a shift in paradigm occurs.

At present, the move towards open science has been steeped within a landscape in which there have been several advances in computing to offer supporting infrastructure. These include multithreading processes, more efficient database design and search, multi-paradigm programming languages, and exponential growth in data science and artificial intelligence driven methods of analyses. Within this, a set of standards and practices around open science have emerged and been institutionalised by funders and governments, forming a regime of open science with a specific grammar. In the UK, for instance, a Horizon 2020 (European Commission, 2016) statement aligning open access research with GDPR reoccurs across

several of our participants' statements, in which data is expected to be *Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable (FAIR)*. Within this, a mantra has emerged within guidance that data should be *'as open as possible and as closed as necessary'* (Landi et al., 2020).

The sociotechnical regime previously established around open access publications, and following a normative imaginary of science, is now at risk. The Nelson memo presents a new potential configuration, with data openness brought into the mix within the US landscape. Europe may follow suit, or it may see a sociotechnical regime configure differently - only time will tell. The latter, however, is likely to be partially path dependent on the past, and thus follow a normative and progressivist imaginary of science - with transnational funders and science collaborations seeking smooth transition from one configuration to another, and across borders. Yet the position of qualitative research in this landscape is unclear. Is it expected to follow the same model, with datasets made open access within the grammar and logic of FAIR? If so, how? What challenges and opportunities might it present for future interpretivist-based inquiry? Also, if qualitative research forms niches at odds with the overarching sociotechnical regime of open science, then how might it destabilise and challenge its logic? This report addresses these questions empirically, generating suggestions on the resources, guidance, and support qualitative researchers need to prepare for open research readiness.

Data and methods

The findings in this report are based on empirical research carried out between January 2023 and June 2023. The study gained ethical approval from the University of Sheffield School of Sociological Studies Research Ethics Committee on 26 January 2023 (Reference: 051118).

Research design

Initially, a small non-representative sample survey identified specific areas of concern, perceptions of existing guidance and resources, and served as recruitment tool for interviewees. It acting as a scoping exercise rather than offering any statistical significance, with descriptive analyses of free-text responses providing useful insights.

Following a subset of survey respondents into interviews, as well as recruiting additional participants allowed further exploration of specific topics i.e., making art and practice-based qualitative research open, or comparing perceptions from commercial research agencies and academia.

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts provided a set of findings, which were then presented and discussed by key stakeholders at a workshop composed of past interview participants and other experts. Their feedback and commentary on findings helped to refine the recommendations presented in this report.

Survey

The survey (running January 2023 to 30 May 2023) garnered N=91 full responses from a non-representative sample. Initially, it targetted qualitative, multi-modal, and mixed-methods researchers in any discipline within research-intensive Universities only (focussing on the Russell Group). We later expanded it to all researchers working with or undertaking qualitative research (self-defined by the respondent). Our recruitment was kindly aided by calls for survey respondents being distributed by the University of Sheffield Open Research Working Group and the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN).

Interviews

After analysing survey responses, we found that reconciling openness with interpretivist modes of inquiry and concern over institutional versus situated ethics were key topics to explore in more detail. Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants enabled us to do so: All but one had previously completed the survey. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts generated a set of emerging themes around both practical matters on situated and institutional ethics, consent, and data management – and more conceptual matters, such as how to disentangle self from context in interpretivist inquiry.

Stakeholder workshop

A full-day workshop (held on 18 July 2023 at the Wave building, University of Sheffield) included five attendees. Within this, four had previously been interviewed and three had completed the survey. Attendees new to the research were invited based on specific expertise related to the analytical themes identified during interviews. Workshop attendees were presented with emerging themes in the analysis and asked to discuss and feedback on them, serving to reinform our analysis. In general, the workshop attendees agreed with the findings, albeit enriching them with in-depth knowledge of specific aspects. One workshop attendee provided an exceptionally helpful overview of the history of open access publications in the UK, another expanded on the politics of making data open access, while other attendees helped flesh out theoretical insights in several ways.

Literature review

While not included as part of this report, a literature review was undertaken alongside the primary data gathering, partially informing the thematic analysis and findings. The literature review will inform a peer-review article on the epistemics of making qualitative research open access due for publication in 2024. The article will expand further on the concept of *re-rendering* introduced later in this report.

In total, the review gathered 1,882 items from eight academic databases -

(ASSIA, CINAHL, JSTOR, Medline, Overton, Psychinfo, Scopus, and Web of Science) - with all duplicate items

merged. The search terms were *open qualitative* and *qualitative open* with no filters set on language, date range, or item types. Thus, it gathered a broad range of literature from a wide geographic base, including academic and grey literature from various disciplines/fields. Further items are still being added to the review through backward citations.

All data produced by the project are available for secondary re-use under a CC-BY-NC license as set out below:

| | |
|------------|---|
| Survey | Hanchard M & San Roman Pineda I (2023) Fostering cultures of open qualitative research: Dataset 1 – Survey Responses. Sheffield: University of Sheffield. DOI:10.15131/shef.data.23567250.v1 |
| Interviews | Hanchard M & San Roman Pineda I (2023) Fostering cultures of open qualitative research: Dataset 2 – Interview Transcripts. Sheffield: University of Sheffield. DOI:10.15131/shef.data.23567223.v2 |
| Workshop | Hanchard M & San Roman Pineda I (2023) Fostering cultures of open qualitative research: Dataset 3 – Workshop Transcript. Sheffield: University of Sheffield. DOI: 10.15131/shef.data.24807753.v1 |

Surveying the scope of open qualitative research

Survey sample

The survey gathered a broad range of responses from respondents across various socio-demographic measures. Within this, 15 people were aged 21-30, 26 were aged 31-40, another 26 were aged 41-50, 18 were aged 51-60, while only six were aged >60. As such, the survey has more input from researchers in midlife than any other stage of lifecourse. Likewise, 56 respondents identified with being female compared 30 as male, with none in any other category, making for a slight albeit minor bias, while three respondents preferred to not to say. However, the survey was not deployed to find statistical significance. Instead, it sought a broad of range of research experiences.

In addition, the sample included more input from doctoral candidates (21), early-career (23), and mid-career researchers (19), than established (16), or emeritus/retired staff (2). It also gathered responses from three 'other' respondents in university professional services and teaching roles, as well as input from seven researchers working outside academia - either in local/central government, NGOs, third-sector organisations and/or private sector agencies (figure 1). Overall, 72 responses were from staff in UK-based research-intensive universities (all from Russell Group members), while only five were from UK-based teaching intensive universities. Similarly, only six responses were from universities outside the UK: four from research-

intensive universities, two from teaching-intensive ones.

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| London | 20 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 20 |
| North-West England | 15 |
| North-East England | 11 |
| East of England | 4 |
| Scotland | 4 |
| South-East England | 4 |
| South-West England | 2 |
| East Midlands | 1 |
| West Midlands | 1 |

Beyond academia, one response each came from governmental research agency and a private research agency, while six respondents declined to

Figure 1: Survey response count per UK region.

answer. Geographically, UK-based responses were mostly from England - either London, the North-East, North-West, or Yorkshire and the Humber regions (Figure 1). Seven responses from outside the UK included Brazil, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, USA, and an unspecified location in Asia. One respondent declined to answer.

In sum, the survey primarily provided insight from researchers at the earlier end of their careers within UK-based Russell Group universities in London and northern England.

Survey findings

The survey questions covered five main sections: socio-demographics; research experiences and approaches; perception and understanding of open qualitative research; barriers, challenges, and opportunities for making qualitative research open; and training, guidance and/or institutional change needed to support a move towards open qualitative research.

Questions about research experiences and approaches pried into the disciplines, methods/methodologies, and epistemic bases drawn on. It found that 47% of the 91 respondents claimed to primarily use qualitative methods, while 48% use mixed-methods. Three of the four remaining respondents primarily use quantitative, while one respondent chose 'other.'

The main methods used were less equally split, leading with interviews, focus groups, small-group discussion (i.e., workshops), participant observation, and ethnography as the most common for primary empirical data gathering - alongside textual analysis, digital methods research, visual arts-based practices, and storytelling as secondary (figure 2). Tracing this breadth across discussion of underlying philosophies found that only 58 respondents were aware of the epistemic base that their research approach rested upon; nine did not know at all, while 29 were unsure.

Respondents who were aware of their epistemic base covered a broad array when asked to define their

epistemology. The two most common (constructivism and interpretivism) - as broad categories - garnered 18 and 17 responses respectively. A further seven saw themselves as pragmatists, with 17 respondents aligning solely with a specialised approach, ranging from feminism to a theoretical domains framework (both identified by the respondent as an epistemic stance).

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| <i>Interviews</i> | 86 |
| <i>Focus groups</i> | 57 |
| <i>Small-group discussion</i> | 37 |
| <i>Textual analysis</i> | 37 |
| <i>(Participant) Observation</i> | 33 |
| <i>Ethnography</i> | 25 |
| <i>Digital Methods</i> | 24 |
| <i>Visual art methods</i> | 13 |

Figure 2: Main methods used.

In asking questions about research experience, the survey found that qualitative researchers are not often aware of their epistemic base. Likewise, when asked to specify their awareness of both open science and open qualitative research, most survey respondents were either unsure or had limited awareness, with open science being slightly better known. Very few respondents claimed a detailed understanding of open science (n=16) or open qualitative research (n=11). Yet equally, very few respondents were entirely unaware of it (figure 3).

When presented with provocative statements on the benefits and value of open science (informed by institutional and policy rhetoric) and asked to state their level agreement, over 90% of the survey respondents agreed that

Transparency in research improves its public value. A further 82% agreed that *Open research fosters research integrity*, with far less consensus on whether open research could *Increase respect for research teams, participants and consumers of academic research*, *foster innovation*, or *encourage collaboration*. Likewise, although 64% agreed that *Qualitative research would benefit from implementing open research principles*, 30% neither agreed nor disagreed, making its perceived value seem uncertain.

While these statements sought to provoke value judgements, a further set of questions pried into perceptions and practices of doing open qualitative research. In this, we found that qualitative researchers are far more likely to make their publications and methodology open access than their data (figure 4), a position at odds with a potential set of moves afoot in-light of the Nelson memo.

A similar disparity shows when asking survey respondents about perceived beneficiaries, i.e. *How likely will the following groups benefit from open access research?* (figure 5). Here, the broader academic community and individual research teams and/or communities are seen to be likely to benefit most, while the general public (including participants) are perceived as being far less likely to gain any benefit.

When asked *Are you aware of any existing guidelines or resources for*

making qualitative data open? there was a relatively even split between 45% answering *No* and 55% answering *Yes*, suggesting a nuanced understanding of the support currently available.

Extending this onto a discussion of resources by asking *Are the resources available for making qualitative data open adequate?* led to a response where only 34% answered *Yes*. By contrast, two-thirds (66%) of the 91 respondents answered *No*. This highlights a need for training resources and guidance. Within this, core concerns revolved around ethics, especially regarding identification of research participants and communities (n=65 respondents). This connects with other barriers to open qualitative research, ranging from capacity to costing time into grants for generating open access datasets, through to worries of being ‘scooped’ (figure 6).

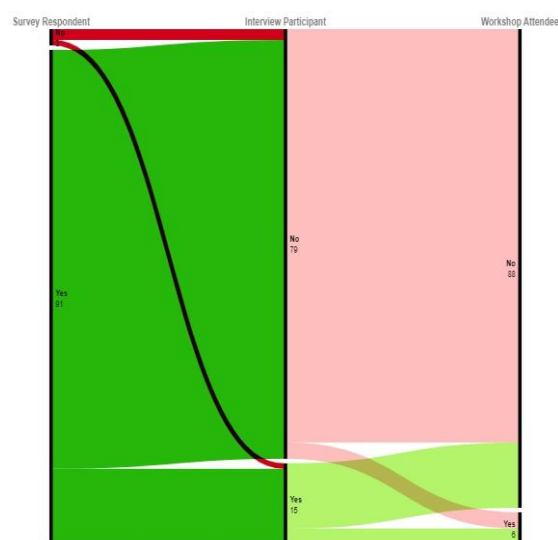


Figure 3: Awareness of open qualitative research

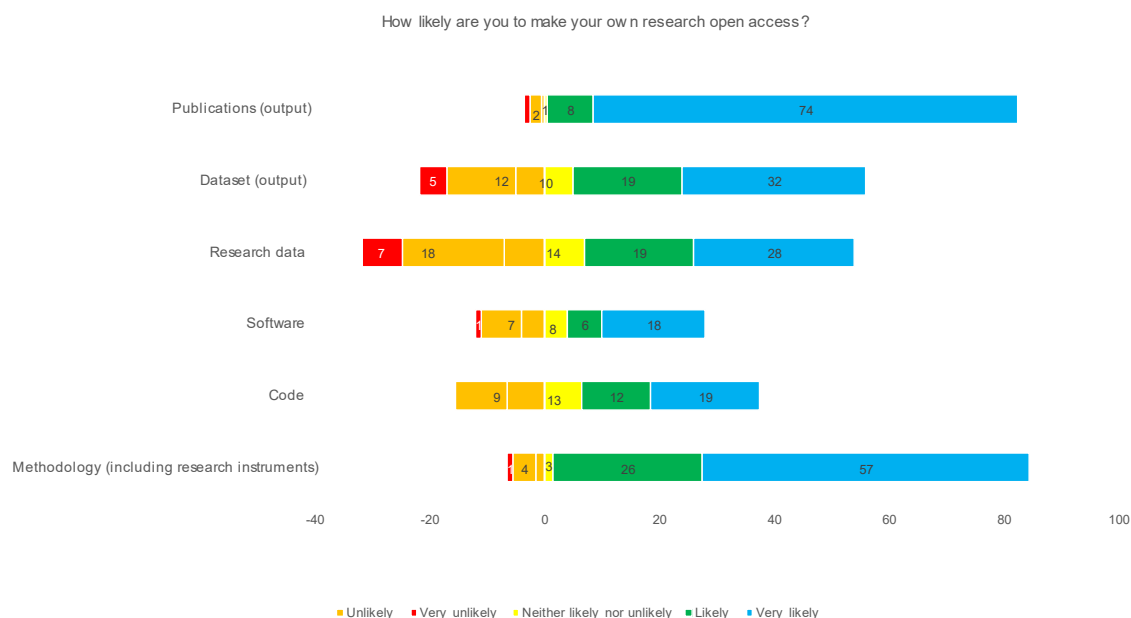


Figure 4: Respondents' perceived likelihood of making research open access.

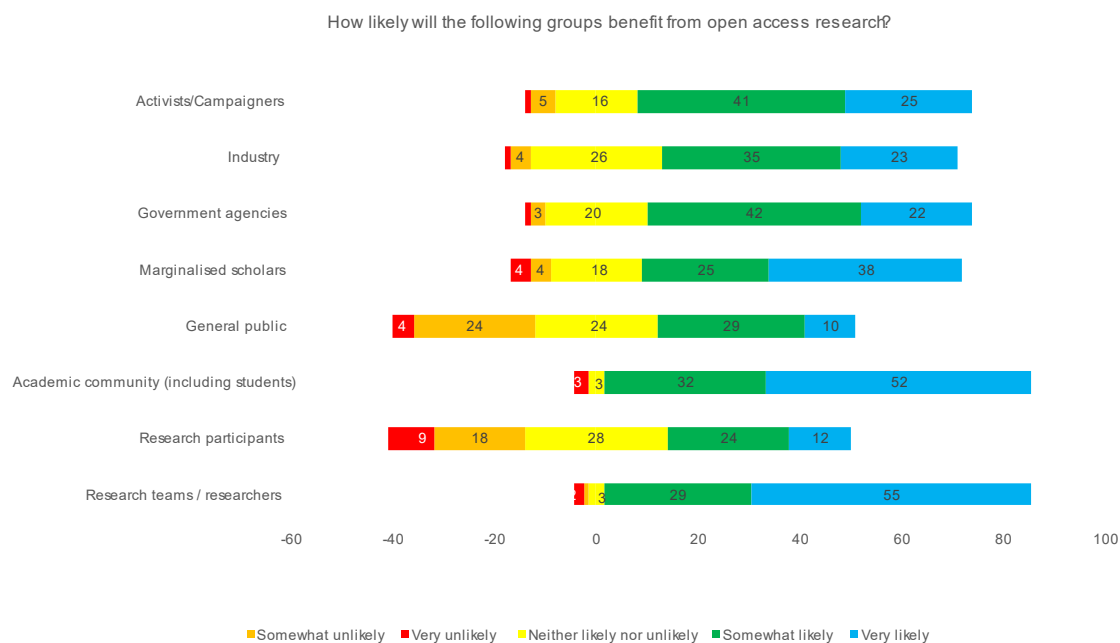


Figure 5: Perceived beneficiaries of making research open access.

| <i>What barriers (if any) preclude you from making your qualitative research open access?</i> | <i>Count</i> |
|---|--------------|
| Ethical concerns regarding identification of research participants, communities, etc. | 65 |
| Concerns about privacy of personal data | 61 |
| Ethical concerns on investigating sensitive topics | 52 |
| Making qualitative data open is time consuming | 40 |
| Concerns about my research being unfairly appropriated by others, i.e., being 'scooped' | 28 |
| Technical difficulties regarding making my data accessible and usable by others | 27 |
| Issues of commercial sensitivity | 16 |
| Concerns about local, national and/or international laws and policies | 15 |
| Unsure on how to do it | 15 |
| Possibility of experiencing marginalisation due to my choice of research methods, methodology, etc. | 9 |
| Other | 14 |
| None | 3 |
| Total | 91 |

Figure 6: Perceived barriers/concerns over making research open access (count of respondents).

Perceptions and practices of open qualitative research

To examine researchers' perceptions and practices surrounding open qualitative research in more detail, we invited a selection of survey respondents to interviews. Selection was based on career stage, methods/methodologies used, discipline, and familiarity with open science – seeking breadth of experience. However, this left a gap in insight, so we sought one additional participant new to the research. Thus, overall, 14 of the 15 total interviewed participants had completed the survey.

Each interview covered a set of questions/topics within four sections. One section focussed on participants' research experiences, their field of research, typical methods used for gathering and analysis, types of tool/software used, analytical framework or theories drawn on, and their experience of working with qualitative data. A second section examined participants' perceptions, opinions, and practices of open qualitative research. Discussion included notions of making qualitative data open access – both broadly and in relation to their own research, expanding on any perceived barriers/challenges and/or enabling factors. Questions also turned to discuss the practicalities involved with participant's making their own qualitative data open access, both in terms of formal processes, situated and

institutional ethics (i.e., protecting participants and/or gaining ethical approval), and the broader epistemics of making qualitative research open access. A third section opened discussion about participants' awareness of existing guidance and resources for making qualitative research open. The final section was open for participants to discuss anything they felt relevant.

The interview analysis identified five themes, covering: the ethics process and data management; training and guidance needs; the shift in process needed to support open qualitative research; concerns over how to disentangle self and context from research as data; and a final theme theorising a need to make qualitative research re-renderable rather than replicable or reproducible (see Discussion and Conclusion.)



"Finger face with a question" by Tsahi Levent-Levi is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Interview findings

Several participants held – as a core barrier to making their qualitative research open – the challenge of negotiating ethical approval processes as an institutional requirement balanced with the situated ethics of managing participants' data ethically as a skilled researcher. For some, existing processes within universities offer a useful structure to do so. Kelly, for example, notes that she is *'aware of pre-registering quantitative research and open science framework... [and] templates [that] have been adapted for qualitative research.'* Expanding on this, she adds that being aware of the available resources helped her to think through and plan research in advance with open qualitative in mind. Here, Kelly notes that *'it helped me think about things like analysis as well [and to] factor in data collection and open access data, really early into this process.'*

Echoing this sentiment, Bruce argued that institutional data management processes (DMPs) bring about considerations around open qualitative research that might offer potential cost savings. For example, the ESRC implores researchers to *'...check for any datasets [already] existing on this research, because you might be saving some time, and we might, you know, might save some money as well.'* However, Bruce highlights that realising these savings are unlikely until more open qualitative data is made available for reuse on an ongoing basis, adding that *'I've just submitted [an] application, as I, there was one dataset from 1976 that seems to be on the system, and it was*

interviews, and they would just really suck' (Bruce).

By contrast, other participants disagree with existing processes on political grounds. Ana, for instance, contends that *'waiving out copyright rights, it's not the way to go... I have to have the copyright, because otherwise I cannot publish it... [but] I come from the Copyleft movement. I don't agree with this copyright. Sometimes you have to go with it – because, you know, how the publishing world is, but I don't think it's fitting'.*

Extending this further, in a statement infused with a politics steeped in concerns over neoliberalism and surveillance, Jamie adds that *'there's a real concern that it'll just be used for kind of extractive Big Data style analyses... [leading to a] rise of armchair researchers [who] basically treat fieldworkers like, I don't know, you call them data collection monkeys, who are, like, you know, basically subservient and to these kind of bigger claims.'*

As a point of origin for this, Jamie contends that *'open access is a pressure from people who actually don't conduct fieldwork... they want to be able to see what we're doing, including government agencies.'* Thus, his account suggests a regime emerging in which the division of labour may separate primary and secondary qualitative researchers, with the latter positioned higher within an institutional hierarchy.

Together, accounts such as those of Kelly, Bruce, Jamie, and Ana, highlight

that while there is an awareness of the process and rationale for making qualitative data open access, it is often done so on uneasy grounds, opening room for debate on the emerging politics surrounding the move towards open qualitative research.

Elsewhere, in discussion about training and guidance needs, there was variable awareness of the institutional resources currently already available, and a sustained call for more time and money to be allocated to the preparation of qualitative open access datasets. Ana, for instance, recalls that that at the start of her project she consulted guidance from the ESRC, UKRI, her own university, and FAIR principles (all common responses within the survey), alongside attending *'two workshops organised by the library...[which] was amazing.'* But she adds that *'to do it better, [we need] specific time...'* suggesting that researchers be allowed *'one month/two months [of] support...[from] people that edit the transcripts...[and] organize your metadata.'* Resonating with the concerns of many other participants, Ana goes on to add that *'there's a machine. We are against the clock. We are doing too much with too little, all the time... Quantitative guys get your data and put it out there. But with qualitative, it needs an extra, it's extra work.'* As both root cause and pathway to a solution, Ana goes on to argue that:

there is...extra funding to do fieldwork... extra funding for going on research visits, or institutional visits... extra funding for writing... [but not] for open source [data].

Others attributed the need for clearer guidance and clarification on defining terms as responsible for holding back any movement towards open qualitative research, not a lack of funding per se. For example, when asked if he was aware of any guidance or resources that might help researchers make qualitative data open access, Peter responded that *'not outside my supervisors, and...that's overly encouraged...when they both instructed me through the ethics application, and [at] previous universities where they've encouraged how to search databases, and how to search for literature outside of that, I wouldn't say I've had any clear direction of how to make my actual research open access.'* Thus, he suggests an institutionalised limitation through lack of clear or accessible guidance; a point raised by others too.

Elsewhere, participants find uncertainty on whether their research is open or not. Pauline for instance explains that *'the poems I work [with] as data, but you know, like is that working with someone else's data when I, you know, if I cite a source - is that working with someone else's data?'* By extension, she associates this uncertainty with a lack of refined formal definitions:

I interviewed...a musician [who] just uploads them on YouTube and people can, you know, listen to it. So that would be a form of making it open... I think that isn't enough guidelines on that... the university has like a data repository and there's a data management team, and they have guidelines on [uploading data] but that's mainly quantitative files... people in the

arts and humanities don't really consider those things as data... the whole concept of open research needs then, a new vocabulary... It kind of started with STEM in mind, and I think it's still often STEM focussed. [It needs] to be more inclusive towards other art forms and other research formats.

A third source of unease stems from uncertainty over how qualitative research may be reused once made open. On this point, Jim notes that *'once you make your data open, you no longer have strict control... [Participants] might give consent to take part in the research that you're doing. But that might not necessarily mean they give consent to their data being used by other researchers for other purposes.'*

Similarly, Michelle finds a separation here between the institutional ethics of formally gaining informed consent on the one hand, and on the other, the *'everyday ethics [whereby] if some just came and said, "well how would it be used?" [which]... you can't anticipate.'* Taking the division further, Jamie goes on to explain how conducting research in a specific context (South-East Asia) can be difficult to reconcile with making qualitative research open. This is especially the case where *'political statements or actions, you know, could have negative effects on [participants] in the future'*, requiring *'ongoing and dynamic conversations about the ethics of what of what that means'* (Jamie). By way of solution, Jamie suggests the notion of moving from a priori ethics approval to a new form of archival process involving ongoing and dynamic

consent. However, as an additional barrier, he adds that it must also encompass flexibility. For example, the geopolitical context of his research often involve using *'spoken scripts for [consent] rather than signed forms... [because] there's a lot of anxiety around collecting written names on documents [following] a history of silence through governments'* (Jamie), making any process of ongoing consent difficult to manage.

Connecting with the latter, participants often expressed concerns over the epistemics of doing qualitative open research too. In particular, they focussed on disentangling the researcher as self from the research as product/output within interpretivist inquiry. For some participants, like Sam (worth quoting at length below), doing so adds rigour to qualitative research – but risks loss of contextual detail unless carefully managed:

[Y]ou were the person that was there... epistemically, you're in a standpoint that has to be respected if you're aiming for interpretive analysis... [and] qualitative open access puts you in a sort of weird spiral of legitimacy... [unlike] quantitative data... the interpretation of interpretation is always something you could appeal against.... [For example], I'm pretty sure that someone from the opposite professional background would read my findings in a very different way than I [do] and vice versa.... other people can then you know, transfer those findings to different sectors or maybe, you know, contradict, or reject some of my analyses... and interpretation of the data.

So, there is this tension between [being open and] making the process too anonymous, and therefore, you take away some of the meaning... [Making it hard to] understand exactly how and why the research has been done, and how the interpretation of that research has come to the fore. So, you need that extra level of data and detail in order to make the research much more usable.

Similarly, in managing this balance Jamie asserts that *'the kind of analysis you can do with an open access qualitative data set probably wouldn't do justice to the original collection method. Yet [in] anthropology, that kind of comparativist approach is quite popular'*, suggesting a need to develop more refined approaches to making qualitative research open that do not lose sight of the nuances of their underlying methodological and interpretivist bases.

As a final concern - or challenge – participants discussed how to make qualitative research open enough to be of practical use, whilst negotiating the concerns set out above. On this, Penni distilled many of these concerns in stating that qualitative research:

Exist[s] in a kind of political economy [with a] hierarchy of what research methods are more important, and one of the things that I think weakens qualitative data collection in that hierarchy is its transparency...It's harder for us because of the nature of the data we've collected to be open about sharing that data... [That] leads us not to be open about how we're doing our analysis as

well, which I think is really problematic... it also means that we maybe don't do enough about validation (Penni).

In working to add transparency and thus rigour to qualitative research (by making it open – or at least ready to be open), Peter adds that data itself is not enough – rather the analytical process and decisions made by researchers need to be made transparent too. That is, *'I think the important thing from my perspective is the not necessarily the raw transcript [but] the coding method that I am using - the open transcript... if I just put the raw data in without the code, I think you, effectively you'd have a lock without the key.'* Here, Peter's account provides useful practical direction for working towards making qualitative research open.

In summary, what the interview participants provided was an understanding that at a practical level, more guidance, support, and allowances (time and funding) are needed for qualitative researchers to make their data open access. Meanwhile, there is a need for theoretical and policy debate over the politics and epistemics of doing so, with a new vocabulary to be sought as a core aim.



Workshop findings

The workshop had five attendees, four of whom had previously been interviewed, and three had completed the survey. Following analysis of interview transcripts, the workshop involved in-depth discussion of the emerging findings, with the aim of eliciting feedback, challenge and/or contestation, refinement, and loose consensus amongst diverse expertise akin to a Delphi approach - albeit on a far smaller scale. As a workshop format, the attendees were presented with six provocative statements:

1. There is a need for new guidance on making qualitative research open. It should encompass debates about flexibility for including different methods, approaches, and meta-data.

2. There is a need for institutional change – both in existing (mundane) working practices and in the allocation of resources (time and funding) for making qualitative research open.

3. There is a lack of defining terms/process around open qualitative data.

4. There is need for theoretical debate over the epistemics of making qualitative research open access.

5. There a need for debate over the politics of making qualitative research open access.

6. There is a need for a new language surrounding open qualitative research.

The statements were used as starting points for group discussion, alongside

example quotes from the survey and interview responses related to each statement. Doing so directed discussion, to cover indicative themes identified through earlier analyses.

At the start of the workshop, one attendee - an expert in UK open access policy - noted that while the Nelson memo may offer an early intervention into mandating that publicly funded researchers make their data open access, for open access science – both in general and publications in particular - there has been a far longer and tumultuous history in the UK, predating many American initiatives such the OSTP statements. Notably, in a set of UK discussions ongoing before and in response to reports published by the Finch committee (founded to review open access research in 2011), with precursory policy work on the topic dating back to at least 2004.

In later discussion, attendees often echoed sentiments expressed across the survey and interviews, agreeing with the statements albeit with some points of contestation and refinement. For example, on the politics of ownership of open qualitative data, Amy noted that the institutionalised uncertainty of any continuity in employment for researchers can mean that data is viewed as an output to be valued and guarded, in part to secure further employment:

...when you research something like inequalities or gender-based violence, your researchers go through so much and then nobody employs them... [if] their

data sits online and somebody else harvests it... they could feel bitter about that... the structure does actually treat some fieldworkers like they are disposable. And it harms them through that process [and] the only thing [they] have to show for [it] at the end is the data. That's their kind of asset that they could use.

Within this, Amy added that retaining research data as an asset can be conflated too, with a sense of personal investment and situated ethics of safeguarding, when the research involves being immersed within highly sensitive contexts. In stark contrast, Martin took a far more instrumental stance, stating that:

[T]oo many academics behave as though they're self-employed... according to copyright law, when you can deduct creative work, when you're employed, your employer owns the copyright of that work. That's a really clear legal situation. Although there is custom and practice in universities that has been allowing people to dispose of copyright the way that they see fit...

As such, the workshop highlighted a clear need for guidance on open access data ownership and rights. Similar discussion followed on into notions of rights retention too, where Ana, drawing on expertise in copyleft culture, found problematic the notion of participants waiving their rights to any research due to be deposited onto institutional repositories under open access licensing, where 'you cannot apply for creative commons if there is

copyright, but at the same it circles again to controlling the protection.' By extension, while the workshop attendees agreed that data produced by employed staff falls under institutional ownership, Ana contended that 'if you're independent [or a PGR student] the University doesn't have the copyright, then it should be the Creative Commons or public domain', marking different roles and responsibilities of data ownership as an important point to clarify in future training and/or guidance. Meanwhile, Jenni pondered 'whether qualitative data is more co-produced than quantitative things [and] whether the subject of the data actually has, or should have, some kind of ownership' of it, making inroads with epistemic debate over the relevance of current approaches to open access data for research steeped within differing modes of knowledge production.

Moving beyond the politics of data ownership and licensing, a second point of discussion revolved around understanding the value of making data open within qualitative research. For some attendees, it follows a larger move towards open science, where increased transparency adds evidence of rigour. Jim, for instance, held that:

[A] big part of openness is not just allowing other people to use your information but it's rigour, it's also about quality, this idea of research excellence... being transparent in my methods, is all part of the process of trying to show that I've done a rigorous piece of excellent research. So as a qualitative researcher, how can you show that?

In partial response, Martin related this to a *'question of what constitutes reliability or credibility, whatever you choose to call it in qualitative research'* adding that qualitative researchers work along a spectrum; those at the more positivist end tend towards embracing the opportunity to make their data open, whereby *'if I gather a data set and interpret it, somebody else should be able to reproduce that, more or less reproduce that.'* Meanwhile, at the more constructivist end the *'positionality of the researcher are such that you couldn't possibly do that, and even trying to do it is nonsensical'* (Martin), connecting again with Jenni's concern to ensure differing modes of knowledge production are accommodated and accounted for.

Following this into a third major point of concern, Jim added that the current model of open access adopted by universities *'could be prejudicial to certain types of researchers, and [could] create an enmity between different kinds of researcher.'* Citing recent work by the UK reproducibility network (UKRN) to generate a set of benchmarking metrics or indicators for universities to assess their open research environments, Jim added that:

[O]pen research and open data is perhaps a more challenging thing to do for a qualitative researcher... if they're not developed appropriately, they could be prejudicial...leading potentially to inequities between different researchers.

Adding to this, Amy felt that moves towards open access research often feel *'dominated by quantitative research... [and] a misunderstanding of*

qualitative... [where] the value of qualitative research as a particular skillset is still kind of being undermined, and if you have this kind of metric where it's the same'. (Amy) - it simply will not work for some researchers. Here, Martin suggested that future guidance could include example use-cases.

As a third major point of discussion, we broached the term *re-renderability* as an alternative to reproducibility (i.e., using different methods and/or approach to arrive at the same results) and/or replicability (i.e., using the same methods and approach to arrive at the same results). We suggested that re-renderability might involve sharing raw data, or at least an idealised likeness of it (cf. Markham, 2012) alongside a story of analysis (i.e., how the interpretations had been arrived at, including researcher positionality) and detail on the specific political, spatial, and temporal context as far as practically possible. Doing so, we suggested, would enable claims from qualitative research to be transparently and fairly evaluated.

On this, Ana noted that:

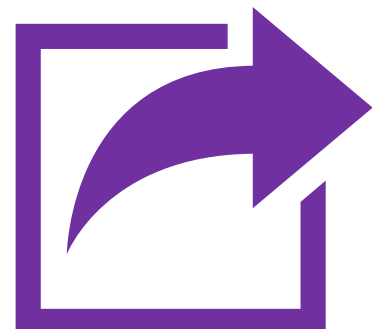
[In] qualitative, we can't think in terms of reproducibility, so like with reproducibility and replicability once you take the data out of the question, and maybe not a lot of others, but we are talking really about reuse. What happens when somebody makes reuse of something I have produced. But I find it more interesting... maybe this data is not there to be reused as data, maybe this data has become something else...

Adding to this, Martin suggested that there may be *'more of a case to be made, for actually, qualitative researchers... encouraging reuse into the way that they present that data, and actually going out marketing their datasets'*, as a potential shift in research culture.

On the term itself, Jim noted that he *'liked that renderability idea, because that's about allowing somebody else to see how you've got to where you got to, whether they gave that or not, but they can see how you've done it. It's like you've rendered it to them.'* Marking an agreement that term seemed plausible in principle. Extending and refining the term further-still, Martin added that:

[W]hen I think about does a web page render for example, which is about how all the code comes together to present something that is recognisable to an audience, and there you're saying could somebody else do the same, in effect, make it recognisable to somebody else.

By way of summary then, in proving expert feedback on the survey and interview findings, the workshop yielded a useful set of practical suggestions on how to better foster a culture of open qualitative researcher, the pitfalls, risks, and potential inequalities to avoid, and found agreement in principle that the term re-renderability might prove a useful addition to a new vocabulary of open access research for qualitative researchers.



Discussion and conclusion

Summary of findings

As a small-scale project, this research sought to examine how a culture of open qualitative research might be fostered, and the resources needed to support it, working towards set of upcoming changes to funders' mandates. While the initial scoping survey held bias towards early and mid-career academic researchers working in London and North of England, its main findings followed across into its broader demographics too. In general, the survey found a lack of awareness about open research amongst qualitative researchers – and likewise, a lack of awareness on the guidance, resources, and support currently available. In moving towards fostering open qualitative research, key points of concern for survey respondents included: ethics, participant anonymity – especially of vulnerable groups, and the time-cost of preparing open qualitative materials.

Following this into interviews found discord between the formal ethics processes and the situated ethics of safeguarding participants, in which the notion of openness of data became a key concern – with flexibility and options to opt-out of open access data deposition as a firmly stated need. On training and guidance, it became apparent that a (cultural) change needs to occur institutionally at all levels, and not just within courses aimed at postgraduate research students (PGRs) and early career researchers (ECRs).

In addition, many felt there needs to be greater provision on cost and time allowances to generate qualitative open access datasets, including support to build these into funding applications. Elsewhere, on epistemic grounds, concerns were raised about disentangling self from research context and on the status of different data types within interpretivist research.

The same set of concerns reoccurred in the workshop too, where expert opinion on the findings was sought as feedback. Workshop attendees agreed that greater support is needed to help justify and cost in time for generating open qualitative research datasets into project proposals/funding applications. The workshop also generated suggestions for guidance, including: use-cases on exemplars of good practice; clarification on the roles and responsibilities of researchers (paid staff, independent adjunct staff, and students) in terms of copyright and licensing of open qualitative research datasets and their implications. In addition, the concept of re-renderability developed throughout the interview analysis was well-received as an alternative to reproducibility and/or replicability for qualitative research.

The new landscape of open qualitative

In relating the research to systems theory and the notion of sociotechnical regimes, what the above findings highlight is that as qualitative research

is faced with a potential move towards mandated openness - shaped within a vision of open science steeped in progressivism. A new landscape is emerging in which there are risks of academic research being forced along one pathway only. Within this, existing institutional policy and processes appear to have been adapted to suit the contours of a landscape previously stabilised around STEM and normal science. As the two collide, many nuances are likely to be brought to the fore, with challenges likely to see heated debates stoked over situated ethics, the preservation of anonymity, the time-cost of generating open qualitative datasets, technicalities of copyright and licensing, and the re-rendering of open or interpretivist inquiry via different modes of knowledge production. As these debates emerge, space will need to be eked out for meaningful dialogue to take place.

Limitations and further research

A key limitation of this research, as noted above, is its scale, with a relatively small and homogenous sample of participants biased towards early and mid-career academic in London and/or Northern English based researcher intensive universities. Thus, further research could fruitfully build on this report to further examine the impact of mandated open access data on qualitative research elsewhere and/or in specific fields. For instance, practice-based and tacit research approaches are vastly understudied in terms of readiness for an emerging regime of open science. Likewise, reconciling

research on - and steeped within - indigenous knowledge systems and other alternative forms of knowledge production might provide an epistemic challenge in being made open, as too might interpretivist research based on researchers' recollection of first-hand experience (i.e., ethnographic fieldwork). While the notion of re-renderability goes some way towards helping formalise these approaches within the emerging regime, researchers' capacity to contest, diverge, challenge, and deviate along alternative pathways to openness must equally be protected. Doing so will require sustained dialogue and debate across disciplines, again requiring time, space, and resource for meaningful discussions to take place.

Recommendations

As key recommendations then, findings presented throughout this report have shown that:

> There needs to be an increase in awareness of the value of making qualitative data open access, as well as the processes followed to do so. This will require cultural and institutional change at all levels, and not simply as additional parts of incoming PGR and ECR training. Supporting this will require better central signposting to existing and new resources.

> There needs to be better levels of support within grant-writing and costing processes for building in the time needed to prepare and generate open qualitative datasets.

> Institutional policy on open research needs to better engage with and cater for qualitative, mixed-methods, and multimodal research and its attendant data, alongside those generated through arts and practice-based research – both on setting requirements for re-rendering work open access (and thus more transparent) and in meeting an upcoming set of funders' requirements around open access data.

> There needs to be sustained discussion of the materials and epistemics involved with open qualitative research in differing fields, i.e., healthcare, and sensitive topics where participant may be easily indirectly identified, or where there may be commercial sensitivity at stake. Likewise, working with indigenous knowledge systems needs further consideration to avoid a silencing or omission of diversity of research steeped in alternative ways of knowing. Derivative analyses of social media data via third-party applications too, where beyond service user terms and intellectual property (IP) there are a broader set of ethical concerns over how and what data to make open access. These, and many other dimensions challenge traditional notions of how research data may be made open that underpin the emerging regime of open qualitative data.

Here, the notion of re-renderability may serve as a base model, but it will need adapting/extending by a far wider academic community.

Re-renderability

The traditional notion of *replicability* holds that another researcher may redo the same body of work using the same data, same methods and approach, and could reasonably expect to arrive at the same (or very similar) set of results. Meanwhile, *reproducibility* holds that a researcher may employ different methods and/or approaches, but still arrive at comparably similar results. Both replicability and reproducibility arise from a realist notion of an empirically verifiable truth; that there is a correct answer to a research question. Interpretive inquiry, at the heart of qualitative research, is instead steeped in researchers' subjective comprehension and storying of experience – either the experience of others (i.e., the memories and opinions of an interview participant) or the researchers own (i.e., fieldwork notes recollection of ethnographic immersion).

As an alternative approach, better suited to interpretivist inquiry, what this report suggests instead is the concept of *re-renderability*. Within this, research data may be deposited traditionally (i.e., transcripts, fieldnotes, videos, drawings, artwork) with appropriate anonymity, consent, safeguarding checks, and licencing agreements – including pre-registration, ethics approval, and data management planning. In some cases, data may be 'fabricated' (cf. Markham, 2012) as an ideal type to preserve anonymity. The data itself need not be 'raw' – given that replication/reproduction of results is not its aim.

Alongside research data, detail on the context of the research may also be deposited, e.g., a note on the temporal, spatial, and political context in which the research was undertaken. Researchers should also provide a statement on their own positionality in relation to the data, and thus on how their interpretations came to be.

Rather than enabling research to be directory replicated or reproduced, making it re-renderable enables transparency for others to assess how and why certain claims have been arrived at, and to make sense of how the researcher has rendered their own experience interpretations, the experience of others (i.e., participants), and any decisions made throughout the research process. Here, it is the storying of the story that matter, not its faithful verbatim retelling. Doing so would not only serve to show the empirical basis of researchers' claims, but may also help others to better understand how they might appropriate the qualitative data as their own within secondary reuse.

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Fostering cultures of open qualitative research

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All research presented in this report was conducted in-line with ethical approval granted by the University of Sheffield School of Sociological Studies' Research Ethics Committee on (Ref: 051118).

All research data referred to within this report can be accessed under a CC-BY-NC 4.0 licence from the University of Sheffield ORDA data repository at:
https://orda.shef.ac.uk/projects/Fostering_cultures_of_open_qualitative_research/170673

The project website can be found at (non-persistent URL):
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/our-work/human-futures/fostering-cultures-open-qualitative-research>

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Survey Responses:

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Interviews:

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Workshop:

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