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External Disruptions to Qualitative Data Collection: Addressing Risks Relating to Brexit and Researcher-Participant Rapport

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Abstract

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Keywords

qualitative fieldwork, bracketing, transparency, reflexivity, Brexit

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External Disruptions to Qualitative Data Collection: Addressing Risks Relating to Brexit and Researcher-Participant Rapport

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In this paper we present the importance of detailing the contextual conditions of a qualitative study to highlight any potential participant-researcher tensions. We emphasize the importance of understanding context in rich detail to expose societal complexities while maintaining positive participant-research rapport. Through two cases, this paper considers that bracketing, reflexivity, and transparency can be applied to form appropriate strategies to deal with external disruptions to qualitative fieldwork. The cases draw on Brexit's impact on two studies conducted in the United Kingdom. In so doing, we argue that time, relevance, and the individuals involved can coalesce to express varied influences on a study. Thus, bracketing, reflexivity and transparency become vital to dealing with such influences; particularly when they are disruptive to a study. Overall, the strategic approach outlined by this paper can be used to maximise awareness of potential sources of tension in the field and to deal with any tensions that do arise.

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Introduction

Qualitative methods have played a key role in shifting scholarly understandings beyond structuralist frameworks that tend to homogenise societal issues (McCoy, 2012). The structures inherent to certain cultural responses and social norms have expressed significant variance in different cases and actions have manifested with deviance from the structurally expected (Fox, 2015). This is highly evident in current societal challenges which academic literature grounds in complexity, such as climate change communication and collective action (Moser, 2016), and links between the natural environment and human health (Rydin et al., 2012). Qualitative approaches have been able to explore complex contexts through valuing co-constructed meanings and interpretations of phenomena. These meanings help researchers understand nuanced influences behind the development of specific cultural and social norms. Further, such nuances and norms can then be used to examine how collective action is instigated and/or curtailed in specific cases (McCoy, 2012). The importance of constructing collective meanings between researchers and participants makes building positive relationships (with positive rapport) a key feature of effective qualitative data collection (Guillemin & Hagan, 2008). Therefore, reflexivity and transparency are key practices in ensuring reliability and ethical soundness during qualitative data collection. Yet, whilst reflexivity and transparency are established features of high-quality qualitative research, building positive rapport remains a sensitive facet due to its close relation to ethical compromise (Crang, 2002). Researchers and participants may have and/or develop opposing views, which can influence their interactions. These views can be driven by political and social change. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), the 2016 Brexit referendum caused societal tension at a national scale. These tensions were entrenched in the differences between opinions on the benefit of the country being a

European Union (EU) member (Hobolt, 2016). In such socially divisive conditions, thought must be given to how qualitative researchers can reflexively deal with situations where tensions may arise between themselves and participants. This is particularly pertinent for when tensions are influenced by phenomena beyond the intended purposes of a study.

In this paper, we explore how highly charged and emotional themes can disrupt rapport and pose challenges to qualitative interviewing. These issues include those which interviewees attach tribal loyalties to, or those which question conceptions of interviewee identity and values. In this sense, tribal loyalties are defined by the standpoints individuals adopt due to their opinions regarding a certain matter. A form of tribalism is realised when individuals stay loyal to standpoints, often without critically appraising them, that are accepted as common characteristics amongst others that share the same opinions about a specific issue (Tsilotis, 2016). Such issues are sometimes intrinsic to lines of interviewing during a specific study, in which case, the interviewer might be expected to have made consideration for them. However, often they intrude as extrinsic emergences to the interviewing process. This can result in the need for the interviewer to adapt or face the consequences of disruptions that include interview drift and a loss of rapport (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). These issues have the potential to be highly disruptive to the qualitative interviewing process. Hence, we argue that qualitative researchers need to be attuned to the potential for these and, where possible, be forearmed with methods to mitigate disruptions in such situations.

Overall, we explore how external factors, such as opinions on Brexit, can disrupt relationships between researchers and participants, and pose a risk to the positive rapport individuals may have built in a studied context. We present our ideas through two cases of research conducted in 2016 and 2018 using qualitative interviewing methods. One case study is about a health intervention and its influence on the studied participants. The other case examines stakeholder perspectives on integrated natural resource management. The subject of the UK's exit from the European Union (Brexit) was the high-tier disruptor in both cases. We define Brexit as a high-tier disruptor as its influence and the polarised views it gave rise to were apparent at a much larger scale than the two cases presented in this paper, that is, its influence was national and, in some circumstances, international. As noted by Vasilopoulou (2016) and Willett et al. (2019), Brexit is an emotionally constructed issue for citizens from across the UK. It speaks to notions of identity and citizenship and, as noted by Tsilotis (2016), the complexity of issues involved in Brexit makes it increasingly tribal and irrational. Moreover, the longevity of the Brexit process means that it will likely remain an issue with potential disruptive tendencies that could intrude upon qualitative interviewing for years. We provide more detail about Brexit in the following introductory section.

An Overview of Brexit

The UK's proposed exit from the EU under the aegis of Brexit has dominated the domestic political landscape since the advisory public referendum on EU membership in June 2016. The political campaigns that led up to and followed the referendum were constructed around the benefits of the EU into a binary construct, that is, leaving the EU versus remaining in the Union, with precious little nuance about various other forms of engagement with the EU (Clarke & Newman, 2017). Subsequent campaign discourses were heavily dominated by immigration, trade, and funding public services (Zappettini, 2019). Each sub-topic of Brexit was laid out in an equally binary fashion with the EU presented as an establishment that was either "good" or "bad" for the UK in terms of immigration, trade and funding public services (Zappettini, 2019). Essentially, citizens were invited to vote in support of their existing pro or anti EU views. Citizens that did not hold any existing views about the matter were encouraged to construct an opinion based upon elite cues (Hobolt, 2016). In this sense, elite cues are

politically driven, simplistic summaries of complex situations that politicians use to convince voters to side with a standpoint they favour (Darmofal, 2005). Although the integrity of some of the claims put forward during the campaigns remain under scrutiny (Buth et al., 2019; Freedon, 2016), one conclusive outcome of the referendum was the emergence of two new and distinct political tribal identities that transcend the traditional left-right spectrum. Post-referendum UK citizens can now identify with “Remainer” and “Leaver/Brexiteer” tribal political identities (Hobolt, 2016). Despite these simplistic tribal identities, some post-referendum studies have revealed the wide spectra and diversity of socio-economic and cultural drivers that lay behind individual voting preferences (Alaimo & Solivetti, 2019; Willet et al., 2019). Still, the tribal identities do persist. This is perhaps in part due to the persistent media, popular culture (such as television and/or radio dramas and satirical comedy) and social media references to these “Remainer” versus “Leaver/Brexiteer” binary narratives (Bonacchi et al., 2018; Tolson, 2019; Walter, 2019). As such, duality and division reside as prominent characteristics when Brexit is experienced, observed and debated. Extreme manifestations of the Brexit binary have resulted in a clash of ideals where justifications for ultra-nationalism and racism have been intertwined with identifying as a “Brexiteer” (Bonacchi et al., 2016; Walter, 2019). The “Remainer” tendency to stereotype “Leavers” as “uneducated racists” is also influenced by the simplistic binary narratives associated with Brexit (Kagarlitsky, 2016).

In the following sections of this paper, we will use Brexit as an example to illustrate how discourse can influence the relationship and rapport between individuals within a group, and between interviewers and interviewees. Identities formed and positions assumed along any binary tend to segregate opinion as a default; most simply, individuals can either belong to one category or another (Malka & Lelkes, 2010). However, the extremity of segregation is often dependent on the personal experiences of an individual or group relating to the overarching reason for someone identifying with one categorisation or another (Vasilopoulou, 2016). These personal experiences, and the spectral dimensions of Brexit identity and opinion, form the nuances this paper reflects on to inform how relationships and rapport can be better managed in the field when high-tier subjects exogenously intrude upon qualitative interviews.

In these situations, ethical practice must ensure all researchers and participants are at ease with the conditions of a study. These include the safety and security of all actors, and that qualitative research participation is self-determined with the choice to withdraw at any point at no disadvantage to any individual(s) (Etherington, 2007). Hence, the case of Brexit is useful for presenting a challenge to researchers in terms of transparency, that is, to reveal how discourses around Brexit have impacted rapport and relationships, without compromising the constructs put forward by particular participants that oppose a researcher’s stance on Brexit. An additional challenge to qualitative research in such cases is the consideration of abandoning research activities and/or taking steps to combat extreme views if harmful and/or prejudiced views emerge (Bell & Nutt, 2012). This could be undertaken through either appropriate legal procedure and/or, if more appropriate, through expressing personal disdain. Such instances are rare. However, they are extremely important as researchers do have ethical obligations to fulfil. If an individual and/or group of people are judged to be in direct danger due to the disclosures made by a research participant, then researchers should notify the relevant legal authorities (Israel, 2004). In less threatening situations, researchers may choose to confront prejudiced views and/or end their research with a particular individual and/or group based on the personal discomfort any prejudiced views may cause them (Bell & Nutt, 2012). Thus, this paper’s next section contextualises Brexit in relation to the case studies we reflected on. We provide more information on the case studies before presenting our reflections.

Reflections from the field

This section reflects on two cases from the field during and after the Brexit referendum. These reflections aim to provide guidance on how researchers can determine how to best manage high-tier interview disruptors and risks to researcher-participant rapport.

Overall, this section will introduce bracketing as a useful practical consideration. Two key features of qualitative research which can be regarded as indicators of the research's quality, reflexivity and transparency, also inform the guidance outlined. Before that, we provide more information on the cases of research we reflected on in the following subsection. We then expand on the impacts of Brexit that we encountered in the field in the subsection that follows.

Cases of Research

The first case we draw from in this paper explored perspectives on natural resource management within the North Devon United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Biosphere Reserve. The study took place from June 2016 to October 2016 (during the Brexit referendum period).

The second case, which was conducted between June 2018 and August 2018 (two years after the Brexit referendum), reflects on fieldwork conducted in relation to the use of outdoor environments for walking amongst individuals with diabetes. Both cases employed recognised qualitative data collection methods. These included semi-structured interviews and go-along interviews with UK citizens on lines of questioning extrinsic to Brexit. However, issues relating to Brexit intruded interview discourses exogenously. Essentially, the two cases we present offer unique individual explanatory value, as well as a number of comparative insights. Table 1. summarises the methods and purposes of the cases described above.

Table 1

Summary of fieldwork cases

Case	Dates	Study Focus	Methods and Participants	Analysis Techniques
1.	June – October 2016.	The operationalisation of an approach to integrated natural resource management within an English UNESCO biosphere reserve.	Hour-long, face-to-face qualitative semi-structured interviews with 31 members of the Biosphere Reserve Partnership.	Interviews transcribed and coded against pre-constructed and emergent code framework in NVivo 11.
2.	June – August 2018.	The influence of walking in outdoor environments on the self-perceived wellbeing of individuals with type-2 diabetes.	12 weeks of go-along interviews with 22 walkers with diabetes (conducted in groups of 3-5). 7 participants conducted further in-depth semi-structured interviews.	Field diary of reflections on weekly experiences with walkers. Open coding of interviews and collation of emergent themes in relation to research question (Elo & Kyngas, 2007).

The following three subsections show how three key qualitative practices can be utilised to alleviate the tensions highlighted in similar circumstances to the two case studies presented in this paper. The considerations presented involve using bracketing, reflexivity and transparency as three key approaches to planning, conducting and learning from field-based experiences. We intertwine our case study experiences with the principles of bracketing, reflexivity, and transparency to show how these practices can help maintain positive participant-researcher rapport and respond to risks to rapport that are presented by high-tier disruptors like Brexit.

Bracketing

Bracketing is an approach used in qualitative research to alleviate potential tensions during researcher-participant dialogues (Gearing, 2004). The approach is used to create a framework around appropriate moments and/or subjects, and informs circumstances a researcher should refrain from revealing and/or acting in line with their own preconceptions and biases (Gearing, 2004; Tufford & Newman, 2010). As in the case with many components of qualitative methods, the precise application of bracketing will be influenced by the studied context itself. Additionally, the moment bracketing is applied during a study's progression through design, data collection, data management, analysis and reporting is led by a study's aims and the dialogues that unfold (Drew, 2004).

Through our interview experiences, we find bracketing useful in relation to dialogues around Brexit, and for scoping any potential dialogues regarding the subject. This application of bracketing would need to be considered at the design phase of a study to ensure research questions can be linked closely to the influences of Brexit on a studied subject.

Case Study 1 (as outlined by Table 1) could have benefitted by assembling an agenda around possible links between the study's research questions and participants in relation to Brexit. For example, an initial analysis of who was going to be interviewed, their organisational political leanings, and any cues about their individual political and/or philosophical leaning might have been useful in this regard. This type of preparation could have formed a framework enabling the researcher to select and plan for opportunities and dialogues that could be bracketed. Preparing a risk-management framework might have enabled the researcher to have taken a more strategic approach to dealing with exogenous high-tier influences (if and when they emerged). However, this might be less effective under reactive and opportunistic snowball sampling. The exact manner that the outside influence manifested might have differed from the links and potential dialogues that were planned. Nevertheless, these varied manifestations could have been viewed relative to the planned framework and any decisions around bracketing could be made through a consistent epistemic lens (Gearing, 2004). This consistency would allow for each occasion of bracketing to take place within the milieu of a study and avoid the epistemic irregularities that a more reactionary application of bracketing would bring.

The main challenge for bracketing surfaces when we attempt to apply the approach to studies similar to Case Study 2. At first the study's aim, subjects and participants seem detached from Brexit's sphere of influence. Yet, dialogues based on Brexit did emerge and alter relationships, both collectively and on an individual basis, during the study. Upon closer reflection, we may construe the emergence of Brexit as a social condition of the studied context. Zappettini and Krzyżanowski (2019) demonstrate how media coverage and the dualistic presentation of Brexit has appealed to society and become an added part of collective and individual identities. In this sense, a bracketing framework constructed in the study's design phase, as recommended for Case Study 1, would be appropriate. Though, the disciplinary grounding of the study and the expertise of the researcher act as a limitation here and provide a challenge to bracketing in the design phase. Unlike Case Study 1, the political context of a

group, or population as its more often referred to in medical sciences, is often excluded when studying outcomes that are related to health. Although the processes of policy making in enabling improved health through health and social care services is well recognised, the individualised health benefits of an intervention are predominantly framed pathologically (Srinivasan et al., 2003). Hence, a disciplinary issue is created in relation to recognising potential disruptions by subjects like Brexit and, as outlined in Case Study 2, the emergence of the subject may arise as a sudden disruption. Therefore, it may not be possible for a researcher to formulate a detailed bracketing strategy, and the bracketing practised is reactionary by nature. Bracketing decisions need to be situated in the study's context retrospectively during data management and analysis in such circumstances. Here, reflexivity becomes a pivotal process to ensure consistency in a qualitative study's data analysis phase.

Ultimately, bracketing's main premise is to allow dialogues around a disruptive subject to develop but the researcher is self-selectively distanced from these dialogues (Tufford & Newman, 2010). At this point, it is important to recognise that dialogues around Brexit may progress to divulge perspectives from the extremities of the dualistic spectrum formed by "Remainers" and "Leavers" (Tolson, 2019; Walter, 2019). This raises ethical questions around allowing such dialogues to develop. Good qualitative practice dictates that the ethical decisions made during a study are cultivated and justified reflexively (Golafshani, 2003). Insights into how reflexivity can enable a study to translate an ethics plan in relation to Brexit into action will be covered in the next subsection.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a key part of qualitative research and allows researchers to align their study closely with the contextual complexities created by the convergence of manifold perspectives, social conditions and cultures (Berger, 2015). By reflecting on their interactions and own perspectives throughout a study, a researcher can identify their own positionality (Golafshani, 2003). In so doing, they can produce an in-depth account of a studied context and how the objects and subjects of their research interact with the context they have detailed. This provides the conducted research with elasticity. It is this elasticity that enables qualitative research to adapt and respond to the specific settings created by particular subject and object interactions (Migala & Flick, 2018). Thus, reflexivity establishes itself as an essential process for understanding and responding to Brexit's impact on a study. Consequently, the reflections we make after our experiences during each episode of data collection provide a marker for whether the approaches that were scoped during the study's design phase are appropriate and remain appropriate (Berger, 2015). This continued inquiry into the various interactions experienced during a study, both regarding the dialogues that emerge and those belonging to contextual complexities, allows for rigour to develop within in the episteme of qualitative research (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Therefore, it is through reflexivity we can ensure that field tools, such as planned bracketing and/or responsive bracketing during data collection and/or analysis, can occur with relevance to a study.

In the circumstances presented by Case Study 1, where the study's research questions were more closely aligned with politics, reflexivity might have allowed the researcher to clarify whether particular Brexit-related dialogues held relevance. In the circumstances they did hold relevance, it would be beneficial to interact with these dialogues and, if need be, extend an inquiry into them with the study participants. For example, extrinsic and unplanned Brexit dialogues about its impacts upon UK farming should not be avoided. This type of reflexive attunement is particularly important for where opinions yielded valuable insights into the effects of farming, as this topic relates to integrated environmental management (i.e., the study's aim). Whilst such extrinsic dialogues might have been expected (and bracketed for),

when they did spontaneously emerge a reflexive positionality allowed the researcher to make ‘real-time’ decisions on the potential value of continuing discourses in relation to study aims.

This approach is also relevant to Case Study 2. The researcher would need to be vigilant of moments where dialogues on Brexit may be justifiably linked to the study’s purposes. Possible links to Brexit here are more tangential and it may be easier to consider all relational dialogues as being irrelevant. However, if a homogenous approach is taken to bracketing all Brexit-related dialogues, studies may overlook any subtle influences that the subject may have on their study aim(s). Subtle links and the revelation of novel perspectives and influences are an important strength of qualitative research and it is this quality which enables the approach to understand complexities beyond the logic of structuralism (Patton, 1990; Crang, 2002). Therefore, reflexivity becomes an important process to reveal these subtleties and to ensure their inclusion in the armoury of knowledge generated by a study, while allowing bracketing’s application wherever apt.

Ethical considerations are often at the centre of reflexive practice (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The case of addressing the challenges of Brexit in the field is no different and ethical awareness provides both the case studies presented in this paper with a commonality. For example, it should be recognised that most Brexit-related views do not belong at the extremes of justifications for whether the UK should remain or leave the EU (Alaimo & Solivetti, 2019). However, there is a latent tribalism possessed by issues, such as Brexit, when they are presented as a dualism and/or binary choice (Tsiliotis, 2016). This tribalistic view of the issue can unravel into extreme opinions and surpass an atmospheric tension caused by identifying with the opposite sides of a dualism and a binary of choices (North et al., 2020).

The ethical conundrum for a researcher in this circumstance is to make decisions which are ethically consistent and do not compromise the positionality, identity, equality, and inclusion of any individual involved in a study. Therefore, moments may arise where particular dialogues develop in a discriminatory manner. In this case, the researcher needs to practise an appropriate ethical code of conduct and if others are compromised by the subject and direction of a discussion this should be curtailed. An invitation to “park a conversation” and the exclusion of a participant from the study environment if they persist to continue with discriminatory contributions are effective and well-used recommendations here (Carpenter, 2018). Reflexivity provides a researcher with the germane context specific intuition to recognise and respond to such risks within the framing of their study (Guillemin & Heggen, 2008). However, the exclusion of particular participants from a study carries its own sensitivities. Significantly, transparency is a significant component of qualitative research too. By providing detailed accounts of any decisions made and the development of any discriminatory interactions, a researcher can demonstrate the justifications for their actions. Additionally, viewing interactions in such a detailed manner allows researcher decisions to respond holistically to any dialogues and events that take place (Golafshani, 2003). Transparency is covered in more detail in the next subsection.

Transparency

The multifarious and dynamic subjects qualitative research aims to explore and understand can often generate an overwhelmingly rich and dynamic set of dialogues (Patton, 1990). Societal issues and responses often emerge from a web of dynamic influences shaped by culture, politics, and how individual and collective actors interplay with each other at a particular moment (Latour & Weibel, 2005). Oftentimes, a different set of responses may be elicited to an exact line of inquiry due to the different configuration of the dynamic influences referred to above at a specific moment in time. Qualitative approaches encourage the documentation and inclusion of such variances. Even though such outcomes would be viewed

as discrepancies and inconsistencies in a structuralist epistemology, they often provide unique points of understanding, which are important for inquiries into the development of societal action (Moser, 2016). Transparency enables these variable and unpredictable conditions to be documented in rich detail and it reveals the subtle changes that may produce unexpected, novel and/or contradictory responses during a study (Patton, 1990). This is extremely pertinent to both case studies presented in this paper. Through practising transparency with a study's participants, a researcher can reveal risks, such as latent discriminatory dialogues, at an early stage of a study and prepare appropriate responses. This would mitigate the sudden disruption Brexit-related dialogues provided Case Study 2. In essence, the researcher would be more prepared to deal with the conversation topic's emergence. Furthermore, transparency allows for decisions of exclusion to occur collectively rather than being a decision imposed by the researcher. A transparent approach to fieldwork allows researchers to build rapport and any decisions taken during fieldwork can be better aligned with the principles of the collective formed by the researcher and the participants (Gerrard et al., 2017). This collective context avoids the development of power misconceptions, where a participant may construe that a decision to exclude their participation was completely grounded by the researcher's own view of Brexit. Hence, the origin of any decision made as an attempt to halt discrimination towards other participants needs to not only be transparent but co-constructed and well-communicated as well.

Overall, intertwining the designed, implemented and reflected approach to managing Brexit-related dialogues with transparency can ensure that a study's specific strategies can be documented in detail. It should be acknowledged that dealing with Brexit-related dialogues may include bracketing, actively pursuing dialogues and developing a suite of risk related responses. Therefore, transparency adds valuable richness to experience-based learning for researchers and enables shareable knowledges to continually develop in relation to emergent issues and conducting qualitative research (Tracy, 2010), such as Brexit.

This paper's concluding section summarises Brexit's impact on the case studies of research we reflected on. We then move on to highlighting the value of the three-part approach (bracketing, transparency and reflexivity) we have outlined to similar contexts of qualitative research, that is, contexts that are impacted by high-tier external disruptions.

Discussion

In this paper we have described how high-tier disruptors, such as Brexit, can impact research discourse and the rapport that buttresses qualitative approaches. We conclude our reflections by summarising Brexit's influence on qualitative research. We then present our thoughts on the importance of the three-part approach, formed of bracketing, reflexivity and transparency, which we presented in our reflective sections (above) for future qualitative studies.

Brexit's Impact on Qualitative Fieldwork

Acknowledging the multiplicity of Brexit's influence on qualitative data collection provides a platform for researchers to strategise, respond to, and reflect on its potential disruption to a study. This paper has already outlined how Brexit has continually been presented as a binary choice. Yet, the manifestation of this choice into individualised perspectives, social interactions and responses to opposing Brexit-related views are not confined to a dualism (Willet et al., 2019). In this regard, we refer to dualisms as an expression of a binary of choice into two distinct responses to any relational event (Uher, 2016).

Essentially, dialogues around Brexit diverge from a dualistic reaction and can develop unpredictably and inconsistently.

The key to defining an appropriate response to unpredictable disruptions, such as Brexit, is influenced by a researcher's awareness of useful qualitative practices in these circumstances (Agee, 2009; Crang, 2002). Furthermore, the reflections we put forward on the use of bracketing, reflexivity and transparency in responding to such disruptive circumstances highlight the importance of being aware of these qualitative practices at all stages of a study. The following subsection expands on the implications of considering bracketing, reflexivity and transparency at all stages of a study on qualitative research more generally.

Future Research Implications

A fundamental facet of qualitative research is to provide rich detail into a studied context and the individuals interacting within this context (Patton, 1990). Therefore, as qualitative researchers, we must be attuned to the conditions of a studied context. Any studied social context is underpinned by history, culture, politics and socio-economics (Golafshani, 2003). These influences on context form the conditions for dialogue and any relevant changes to history, culture, politics and socio-economics will impact how dialogues take place and how study participants interact with researchers and each other. Key aspects, such as rapport and participant-researcher comfort, can be regarded as a construct as to how dialogues develop in the field (Guillemin & Heggen, 2008). Therefore, documenting more detail and reflexively understanding the context being studied enables researchers to gain a holistic view of how their study is situated in a context and impacted by the unique conditions therein. Understanding this uniqueness is what allows qualitative research to go beyond a structural understanding of societal issues and recognise the inconsistencies, and individualised variability in how complex issues are perceived (McCoy, 2012).

We have outlined Brexit as a change to the political condition of a context and, through two case studies, demonstrated how views on Brexit impacted qualitative data collection. Hence, a researcher's awareness of the potential emergence of opposing views and recognising that Brexit-related views are not *actually* dualistic, even though individuals may at first present their position as a binary, can enable a researcher to create an effective response strategy to any tensions brought on by the subject (Zappettini & Krzyżanowski, 2019). The three-part approach to strategising such a response presented in this paper has the central aim of reducing the detrimental impacts of tensions that may arise from polarised views. In so doing, researchers can attune themselves to the impacts that these potential tensions may have on rapport in the field, or at least understand why they have occurred and add this reasoning to the detail of a studied context.

In essence, we recommend three facets of qualitative research, bracketing, reflexivity and transparency, which researchers can apply to Brexit and other polarising issues during the design-phase, data collection phase and analysis phases of their studies. Primarily, researchers can use bracketing, reflexivity and transparency at each point Brexit, or a similar high-tier issue, poses a risk to rapport. When combined, these three qualitative research components can help researchers stay on track with a consistent and responsive strategy to high-tier disruptions.

At this point, we must recognise that disciplinary disconnects from political developments can overlook the role that Brexit and similar external disruptions may have on a study's fieldwork. In such scenarios, disruptive dialogues may occur unexpectedly and strategising appropriate responses are more reactive, as outlined by Case Study 2 (in Table 1). In this sense, a researcher may have a limited awareness in how disruptive dialogues may emerge and impact a study. This presents a challenging moment in a study and will require the researcher to maintain their ethical code of conduct if views oppose their own and/or develop

in a manner that is discriminatory to others. For such researchers, maintaining their ethical code of conduct can then become a platform to practise bracketing, reflexivity and transparency from then on. Hence, we advocate that researchers become well-versed in applying these three important considerations throughout a study. This application can be facilitated through ensuring that bracketing, reflexivity and transparency are central to any qualitative researcher's training and development, and presented to them as tools of response to challenges in the field.

Another overarching benefit of using bracketing, reflexivity and transparency as “go-to” tools in the field is the maintenance of qualitative research's ability to reveal insights into topics and issues beyond a structuralist approach (McCoy, 2012). This quality can be maximised through the inclusion of rapport and the recognition of how individualised relationships can be extremely dynamic within a study's context.

Ultimately, Brexit has posed a new challenge to qualitative research in terms of limiting the detail that a researcher may be able to capture in the field, that is, if poor rapport develops. We have presented this paper as a response to this challenge. Thus, we have outlined the strategic tools that may be used to address the risks that poor rapport can pose to eliciting rich, in-depth insights into complex and dynamic societal topics and/or issues (beyond Brexit). The value of this paper is where it re-articulates the criticality of rapport in qualitative interviewing in light of the potential threat to it from high-tier disruptive issues, and suggests useful tools (bracketing, reflexivity and transparency) that can shape potential researcher responses. This is of relevance to the readers of *The Qualitative Review* and those engaged more widely in research in which interviewee-interviewer relationships and, where relevant, group rapport plays an important and enabling role to achieving study aims.

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