

Bracketing

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Although one's personal experiences and cognitive responses cannot be fully set aside when conducting an investigation, most qualitative methods, like those found in phenomenological or ethnographic designs require **bracketing** -- a process where you create a distance from previously held theories and assumptions [in order to] become a nonparticipating observer of conscious experiences of the world (Bertelsen, 2005). From the Husserlean philosophical stance, only from a point of suspended judgment can inquiry proceed unencumbered from masked assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon and conditions that are observed.

According to Stewart and Mickunas (1974, p. 36) " the researcher should not base insights on traditional or well-established theories, [or prior conclusions reached through personal experiences], whether philosophical or scientific, but only on immediate insights into the phenomena themselves." Husserl (1964) argued that the nature of subjectivity—or total involvement with a phenomenon—is not only what permits one to be objective, but represents the purest, richest form of objectivity. Thus, the recreated structural synthesis of the essence of any

experience comes through examination and abstraction of relevant, invariant themes emerging from involvement with a participant's experiences and perceptions.

Bracketing involves a *phenomenological reduction*, a process to develop a non-judgmental study that will not impede the perception of the phenomenon at the heart of the study (Husserl, 1964). Creating a bracketing mind-map (see Simon, 2011, p.41) can help you begin the bracketing process.

Creating a Bracketing Mind-map

1. Write a central idea or question in the center of a blank sheet of paper; you could also draw a meaningful symbol that represents this construct. This central term or image should capture the problem being investigated.

2. Brainstorm other terms that relate to this central concept, and write them as branches emanating from the main idea.

3. Add sub-branches that include *your* beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and views of each word or construct in each sub-branch.

4. Draw connections among the various terms you have written as you see them, based on how you believe or *feel* each of these terms interact.

5. Continue jotting down terms and drawing connections among them, without pausing to edit yourself, until you have exhausted your ideas about this central topic. Use additional sheets of paper if necessary.

6. Re-read your mind map of concepts and their connections; on a separate sheet of paper, list the connections that reoccur or appear most prominent.

7. Create another mind-map with the same main branches and think of how a person with an opposing view might view these terms and their interconnections. You may wish to research these views or discuss them with a person you know holds opposing views to yours.

For more information on bracketing check out:

<http://sociologyindex.com/bracketing.htm>
<http://www.phenomenologycenter.org/phenom.htm>
<http://www.iier.org.au/iier16/bednall.html>
<http://tinyurl.com/5rlpwp2>

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