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An Example of Non-Replicable Good Science: Alice Goffman's On the Run

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Posted: **Tue Dec 20, 2016 5:36 pm**
by **Bill Kelleher**
Alice Goffman lived with a group of inner city youths as a participant observer.[1] The study revealed the unintended consequences of an urban "get tough on crime" public policy. It exposed how the crime policy has been deleterious for a poor urban population. Her empathic interpretation was based on empirical observation, and shed light on actual facts; namely, the loss in the quality of life her subjects are being made to endure because they constantly fear the police. It was a paragon of empathic interpretation by participant observation.

Such important work cannot be done in ways that would satisfy the requirement of replicability, and not only for privacy reasons. [2] If Goffman's study was held to the quantitativist ideal of transparency-for-replication, it would be deemed unworthy of recognition as science in our field, since it was too unique to be replicated.

But her work was original, insightful, and could be very useful to concerned policy makers who might not realize what harm their policy is causing to individuals, families, and communities in urban settings.

[1] Alice Goffman. On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City (University of Chicago Press, 2014) For further readings see the announcement for the WPSA 2016 Pre-Conference Session entitled "Why Should We Believe You? Evidence and 'Proof' in Field and Other Interpretive Research" at
https://wpsa.research.pdx.edu/meet/work ... hp#methods

[2] RE "replicability," see my comment in this thread, How Ethical Transparency and Methodological Transparency Differ
viewtopic.php?f=18&t=202#p860

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