Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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Practical problems in the field

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Practical problems in the field

Posted: **Wed Nov 30, 2016 6:16 am**
by **SStroschein**
Real-existing fieldwork would have trouble with some of the bureaucratic requirements outlined by the DA-RT initiative. I obtain extremely relevant information by sitting in city council meetings, going to demonstrations, by talkng to people on buses, by chance encounters. Sometimes people tell me things that they don't want their boss or colleague to know about. Only some of my interactions take the form of an actual interview.

What am I supposed to do with this information? Pretend I didn't hear it? It is not always possible to take notes in a bus conversation, for example. It is a good way to stop the conversation. Should I bring out a consent form at the end? None of this is conducive to actually getting good information. The best information on something like ethnic relations emerges when you can be in a setting watching how people navigate them in their own interactions. A conversation at a pub can tell you a great deal. We know this from talking about the recent election amongst ourselves. Why would we try to ban all sorts of this conversation in the field if it is not easy to bureaucratize? All in the interests of transparency because some have the idea that I might be making up these bus or pub conversations? The "remedy" is far out of proportion to any potential problem here. Another potential remedy exists: plenty of individuals do fieldwork in the same countries I do, and they can review the work I produce and send to journals. Fieldwork-based research thus truly is different from something one might produce in a database, where the submission of these files could make sense in the absence of other researchers working on the same database. But in a DA-RT free system, regional specialists already provide a good check on potential problems in reviews, and I have seen this as a journal editor. Problem: small. Attempted DA-RT remedy: very problematic.

Is this kind of research ethnography? Maybe some would like to call it that. But it is also part of simply being observant in the field, accepting that information can come in forms one doesn't expect, just like it does in our own countries or settings when we are not doing research but just trying to understand a recent event. There is a strong disconnect between some of these DA-RT requirements on information submission and the way fieldwork actually transpires.

Re: Practical problems in the field

Posted: **Fri Dec 09, 2016 3:57 pm**

by **Guest**
I agree that chance encounters during fieldwork can often produce valuable information -- that has also been my experience. I agree that it would be absurd to ban or discourage these sorts of conversations in the field.

Given that: What do you think is the best way for us to present information gleaned from such encounters in our research? Should we worry about using information that hasn't been given to us in the context of an informed consent? Should we worry about our memories of conversations when we haven't been able to take notes while having them? What kind of information about our qualitative field work should we provide to give readers enough context to understand our method and build off of our research in the future? These are questions that I have found it difficult to answer in the past.

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