Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

hosted by the Social Science Research Institute at Duke University on behalf of the APSA Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research
https://www.qualtd.net/

Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed

https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=163

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Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed

Posted: **Mon Oct 24, 2016 1:49 pm**
by **cherianmampilly**
4.) To whom is transparency owed-- the academic community, the research subjects, or both? Does transparency only apply to the sharing of data or should it extend to the entire research process (i.e. sources of funding, researcher subjectivity, ideological orientation, etc.)? How can scholars achieve this transparency vis-a-vis these different audiences and different part of the research process?

Re: Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed

Posted: **Thu Nov 24, 2016 10:38 am**
by **steeleaa**

> *cherianmampilly wrote:*4.) To whom is transparency owed-- the academic community, the research subjects, or both? Does transparency only apply to the sharing of data or should it extend to the entire research process (i.e. sources of funding, researcher subjectivity, ideological orientation, etc.)? How can scholars achieve this transparency vis-a-vis these different audiences and different part of the research process?

This is an interesting question. My first reaction is that to the extent that transparency increases the validity of our inferences (which is not necessarily the case), then it is owed to both the academic community and the research subjects. For the academic community, not only to present something as accurately as possible (for descriptive or causal inference), but also to contribute to the collective goals of scientific understanding. (Not that the form this should take is obvious, or we wouldn't have this forum!)

But for the research subjects, I think we owe them the possibility to disagree with our inferences, or even with our representation of their story. In practice, of course, this is so difficult, and especially in the context of political violence where retribution and harm are possible.
Transparency may mean checking quotations with the interviewee, but again, in practice I am not sure how feasible this will be. One barrier is contacting interviewees again in some settings, where phones for example may not be easily accessible (though this seems to be changing quickly in many regions and could be one

avenue for exploration - maybe send SMS snippets for approval?); and another is language, to the extent that the interviewer translates the original, then back again, there could be important ways that an interviewee still cannot verify exactly what is written.

I do not think that these misrepresentations are likely to be prevalent in our work, though I don't know why. I do think what is more likely is that on occasion a researcher misremembers or does not translate well.

Another issue is what sorts of standards we would place on any sort of duty to consult with subjects before publication, even if it were logistically feasible. My hope would be that informal standards would be enough for researchers to think through their duty to represent what they learned from their subjects as faithfully as possible.

Re: Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed

Posted: **Fri Dec 02, 2016 5:38 pm**
by **separkinson**

> *cherianmampilly wrote:*4.) To whom is transparency owed-- the academic community, the research subjects, or both? Does transparency only apply to the sharing of data or should it extend to the entire research process (i.e. sources of funding, researcher subjectivity, ideological orientation, etc.)? How can scholars achieve this transparency vis-a-vis these different audiences and different part of the research process?

A hearty "both" re: to whom transparency is owed.

There have been discussions on other threads and at recent conference (e.g. APSA, Middle East Studies Association) regarding disclosing funding sources to research subjects. My interlocutors (members of militant organizations) used to ask about my funding directly--they would not have worked with me if I had taken certain grants/fellowships. I felt that my honesty in this realm was part of their ability to give informed consent.

But while I see these disclosures as fair, ethical, and necessary, I also realize that many scholars are starved for funding and don't have many choices in their funding streams or future professional choices. Indeed, this situation has created entire fields of study and disincentivized others. A deeper conversation about these structural dynamics--specifically, heavy scholarly reliance on funding from agencies such as the DoD--is necessary in the field (as Jesse Driscoll implies on another thread in this WG). But in the interim, how can we claim "transparent" research if people's research subjects aren't aware that they're being written into research as "the bad guys" or even "targets"?

Re: Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed

Posted: **Mon Dec 05, 2016 8:45 am**
by **cherianmampilly**
Thanks Sarah and Abbey. I'm going to push this a bit and suggest that both may never be possible for reasons you already identify (funding source in particular). If this is true, then I might suggest as a discipline, transparency must be owed first to the research subject and then to the academic community. Sarah's important point about informed consent is relevant here. To offer a provocative analogy that I hope is useful,

taking money from DoD to study insurgents actively fighting DoD allies or the DoD itself is like taking money from the tobacco industry to fight lung cancer. I'm not suggesting that industry funded research is always corrupted (though it is often discounted), but the priority from the researcher perspective should be, I'd suggest, to ensure that the research subjects are FULLY informed about the nature of the study including the source of funding. Why am I wrong?

> *separkinson wrote:*
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Re: Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed

Posted: **Tue Dec 20, 2016 10:38 am**
by **Guest**
[quote="cherianmampilly"]4.) To whom is transparency owed-- the academic community, the research subjects, or both? Does transparency only apply to the sharing of data or should it extend to the entire research process (i.e. sources of funding, researcher subjectivity, ideological orientation, etc.)? How can scholars achieve this transparency vis-a-vis these different audiences and different part of the research process?[/quote]

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