Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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DA-RT and qualitative interview data

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Posted: **Sun Jan 08, 2017 3:34 pm**
by **Kristen Monroe**
To begin by being clear, let me state my understanding of the DA-RT initiative. In 2014, American political scientists, led by Colin Elman and Arthur Lupia, organized the DA-RT initiative to encourage greater data access and research transparency. The goal was to make visible both the logic of inquiry and the empirical foundation of research, and to allow others to replicate test results. The idea seemed reasonable and, with little public discussion of the practical implications, many top journal editors quickly signed the joint statement endorsing DA-RT, e.g., APSR, AJPS, BJPS, JCR, and the JOP. APSA's leaders supported DA-RT and, despite new expressions of concern in 2015 and panel discussions at the APSA meetings in 2016, DA-RT is now being implemented by most journals. (POP and Political Psychology are two exceptions.) There have been some minor modifications proposed but when I wrote to several journals – chosen as ones in which I have published or served on Editorial Boards, only one of the journals I contacted who have signed onto DA-RT (Political Behavior) noted an editorial policy sensitive to the needs of narrative data.

I believe strongly in sharing data and have always shared mine. Indeed, many of my interviews are available, free of charge, via the UCI Ethics Center website (http://www.ethicscenter.uci.edu). So I applaud the general sentiment of sharing data and making clear the foundations of research. Nonetheless, I strongly oppose the institutionalization of the DA-RT initiative, as currently proposed, for three main reasons.

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(1) Protection of human subjects. DA-RT's provisions fail to protect the privacy and rights of human subjects, especially vulnerable populations. If someone asks to speak "on background" their interview should not be made available to the public, yet the knowledge from that interview can quite reasonably be used by the analyst. Interviews depend on trust and many

populations fear reprisals if they speak out publicly against political leaders, regimes, etc. If a subject speaks with us on condition that we not reveal their identity, or even their entire interview, we must respect that request.

(2) Right of first use. DA-RT penalizes scholars who use qualitative data by requiring they make their data sets available before the researcher has fully edited or analyzed these qualitative data. (The editor of the AJPS was the most adamant on this in my informal, small survey. But the APSR also indicated that they would not consider a manuscript unless data were made available within one year.) This is unreasonable. Some interviews are given on the understanding that they will never be made public. Even when the interviewee agrees, it takes a long time to fully edit an interview transcript, to ensure all identifying or private statements are removed. To stop and take the time to do such an edit – which cannot be given to a graduate student to check, as can many quantitative data sets–means the scholar then loses the time to do further analysis of the same data, or to begin a new data analysis. (In my case, I did my first interviews for a project in 1988. The last book utilizing these data was published in 2012. Had I not been able to publish the analysis using these data before all of the data were fully cleansed of identifying remarks, my last book would never have been written. Further, some of the people I interviewed did not want their interviews made public.) Other scholars are in the same or analogous situations.

(3) DA-RT will limit political science's ability to address fully important political topics. If DA-RT becomes the standard in the discipline it will impose extra burdens on scholars dealing with interview data, data that often yield different substantive insights than can quantitative data. Hence DA-RT is not only unfair to qualitative scholars; it also can harm the fundamental structure of the discipline itself.

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