Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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Practicalities of Transparency

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Page **1** of **1**

Practicalities of Transparency

Posted: **Wed Sep 07, 2016 5:38 pm**
by **nrsmith.ccny**
From the Moderators: What formats might be effective for researchers to share how they went about their research (e.g. appendices, prefaces, online archives, etc.)? Are there outer limits about what should be shared in published work (i.e. a point at which sharing becomes a distraction or overkill)?

Re: Practicalities of Transparency

Posted: **Thu Oct 20, 2016 7:47 am**
by **SMajic**

> *nrsmith.ccny wrote:*From the Moderators: What formats might be effective for researchers to share how they went about their research (e.g. appendices, prefaces, online archives, etc.)? Are there outer limits about what should be shared in published work (i.e. a point at which sharing becomes a distraction or overkill)?

It is already common practice for ethnographers/POs to provide a detailed methods section that explains how they accessed the community studied, length of time spent there, research techniques used, etc. If this is not sufficient for a journal, or if space prohibits a longer in-text description, then a longer discussion, placed in an appendix, would make sense. In my opinion, requiring more (and, after an appendix, I am honestly not sure what this "more" could be) would be overkill, and just seems to signal a general "distrust" of scholars who engage in ethnog/PO.

Re: Practicalities of Transparency

Posted: **Fri Dec 02, 2016 5:17 pm**
by **separkinson**

> *nrsmith.ccny wrote:*From the Moderators: What formats might be effective for researchers to share how they went about their research (e.g. appendices, prefaces, online archives, etc.)? Are

there outer limits about what should be shared in published work (i.e. a point at which sharing becomes a distraction or overkill)?

I think that it can be appropriate for authors of ethnographic articles to ask for more in-article space to describe their method(ology) in more detail (if they feel they need it). Sometimes placing this material in an appendix can artificially divorce the method from the analysis in a way that isn't particularly loyal to how ethnography often works (e.g. a more integrated, less linear evidence-gathering/analysis process). For example, I wouldn't want people to read my latest piece without reading about the methodological approach I took; I think the approach lends my argument credence and validity (e.g. conducting research in both "organizational spaces" and "private spaces" across generations allowed me to observe the practices I describe in the first place). If extra space can't be provided, an online appendix might work depending on what the author uses it to do; I could see these being productive places for discussions of power/positionality, the origins of an article, or changes to the research site (e.g. for my work, the start of the war in Syria).

I appreciate methods chapters in books if the author has done something particularly innovative or worked in a difficult/under researched location (e.g. the methods chapter in Elisabeth Wood's "Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador"). In some cases, a preface might be helpful. Séverine Autesserre, for example, has a nice opening note in "The Trouble with the Congo" about the fact that she worked in peacebuilding prior to conducting the research; this background clearly influences her research. I know other ethnographers who have written more extensively about how their personal background layers on to the research, but this is a more frequent practice in anthropology.

I also think that there are times when aspects of the project constitute a separate article all together (e.g. Lee Ann Fujii's "Truth in Lies" or many of the chapters in Ed Schatz's "Political Ethnography"). I do think we need to resist the urge to make every article 100% self contained to the extent that forces in the field seem to encourage; some things really are a separate article and not an appendix. Especially considering how long it can take to write an publish one of these pieces and how fast the tenure clock can move, I think we need to resist putting robust, stand alone material into appendices merely to satisfy the demands of a particular view of "transparency" (thus hurting our own pub/citation count).

Ethnography can fall into to the trap of "me-search;" there's a delicate line between some forms of ethnography/autoethnography and simply obsessing about one's own place and role in the research (e.g. certain threads of the "reflexive turn"). The work probably shouldn't read like an account of one's own spiritual/intellectual journey or one's own trauma rather than focusing on the research topic and interlocutors. I also don't particularly think that ethnographic primers are helpful (e.g. an appendix that explains to the reader what ethnography is and why it is generally useful); these don't seem to constitute "transparency" so much as a test to prove the method/author is appropriately "scientific."

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