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/

How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120

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

How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Mon Sep 05, 2016 8:42 pm**
by **AnastasiaSh**
When is it appropriate, ethical, and feasible to make evidence from research with human subjects accessible to the broader public? Are there issue-areas or research contexts that pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public? What audiences (editors, reviewers, graduate students, broader public, etc.) might be appropriate for sharing interview transcripts or other forms of evidence from research with human participants? How have you addressed the trade-offs between data access, protection of human subjects, and unintended consequences of data sharing? What practical considerations have limited your ability to share data? Are there alternatives to making interview transcripts and other forms of evidence with human participants fully available?

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Tue Oct 18, 2016 10:04 pm**
by **Guest**
[quote="AnastasiaSh"]When is it appropriate, ethical, and feasible to make evidence from research with human subjects accessible to the broader public? Are there issue-areas or research contexts that pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public? What audiences (editors, reviewers, graduate students, broader public, etc.) might be appropriate for sharing interview transcripts or other forms of evidence from research with human participants? How have you addressed the trade-offs between data access, protection of human subjects, and unintended consequences of data sharing? What practical considerations have limited your ability to share data? Are there alternatives to making interview transcripts and other forms of evidence with human participants fully available?[/quote]

Much of the discussion that I have been privy to regarding DA-RT has focused on conducting research among vulnerable populations. I share the concerns raised by many concerning why the drive for data sharing is simply not appropriate for many such studies (and, further, that it is not methodologically appropriate or relevant for all types of research in the first place).

My own research has involved ethnographic interviewing among economic elites in Latin America. Gaining access to such privileged spaces was not easy and depended primarily on building rapport with gatekeepers and other key actors. This task, already fraught with difficulties, would have become, I suspect, nearly impossible if there were a uniform requirement to obtain consent for sharing with any third party interview transcripts or other such records of our conversations. Such elites, with public reputations to protect, would be highly unlikely to engage in unguarded conversations with researchers if they knew there were an automatic requirement for data sharing along these lines. The IRB process, in fact, already feels like a sufficient (or even excessive) burden. Given the extreme and increasing concentrations of wealth and power that define our world, it strikes me that we should be making it easier to conduct research among elites instead of putting up more obstacles.

These concerns are all the more salient when a U.S.-based researcher conducts fieldwork in the Global South. Such data sharing requirements would only feed into the perception that one's research is being conducted for the purposes of U.S. foreign policy or to gather intelligence for the CIA.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Wed Oct 26, 2016 11:01 am**
by **jane mansbridge**
The worry about obtaining consent from participants for sharing interview transcripts or other records with third parties or the public obtains not only with economic elites but also with people of other socio-economic classes. When someone comes to my door and asks to talk with me, why should I take the time to do this? If they then ask me to sign a form that says whatever I say will be made public although I will be made anonymous, I may well say, "Forget it." In much qualitative research we depend on the humanness of our contact to break down barriers of suspicion and make those we interview partners in the search for better insight in a particular realm. The interview or participant observation relationship is, ideally, a warm relationship, in which both interviewer and interviewee are engaged in a quest for understanding. Telling the interviewee at the beginning that you will share this information publicly, in full, seems to me a recipe for undermining not only easy, confiding discourse but also the possibility of the interview itself.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

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by **Guest**
[quote="AnastasiaSh"]When is it appropriate, ethical, and feasible to make evidence from research with human subjects accessible to the broader public? Are there issue-areas or research contexts that pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public? What audiences (editors, reviewers, graduate students, broader public, etc.) might be appropriate for sharing interview transcripts or other forms of evidence from research with human participants? How have you addressed the trade-offs between data access, protection of human subjects, and unintended consequences of data sharing? What practical considerations have limited your ability to share data? Are there alternatives to making interview transcripts and other forms of evidence with human participants fully available?[/quote]

(1) When is it appropriate, ethical, and feasible to make evidence from research with human subjects accessible to the broader public? : I think that the first part of the above prompt should be rephrased to

replace "evidence" with "data." Evidence comes from data and it appears that the latter is what this prompt drives at. Regarding evidence, it is always appropriate, and imperative, to make one's evidence available to the broader public otherwise no one (editors, reviewers, disciplinary colleagues, etc.) would/should take any claim seriously if there is no supporting evidence. It is, in fact, impractical for an editor to accept an article for publication which makes an empirical claim without supporting evidence. The same cannot be said of data. Both evidence and data are important but one is less important to certain types of readers who believe, and hope, that a particular claim they are reading has been vetted and verified by some peer-review process under which the data for the evidence was also found acceptable. Such readers, who may or may not lack the academic and professional expertise to mind the data, will look to the evidence of the basic claim made by the study about which they are reading. On the other hand, professional peers tend to zone in on data more often -sometimes even before moving on to consider the evidence that was constructed using that data in question. In my view, handling data is situation-specific and context-dependent. The question of feasibility applies much more to the handling of data, in this regard, than to evidence. Certain contexts and situations make it feasible or infeasible to make certain kinds of data involving research with human subjects accessible to the broader public. This is part of the wave of objections that have rippled through the Political Science research community since DA-RT was proposed as many scholars engaged in research involving sensitive issues and vulnerable populations -ethnic minorities, subcultural sexualities, for example, have expressed concerns about disseminating their data when/if such dissemination is likely to endanger the safety and identities of their research subjects. There should be less of a concern about appropriateness of making data accessible to the broader public if such data is disseminated in aggregated form and individual preferences are masked. This, however, means that quantified data (thus quantitative studies) are much more amenable to such dissemination than the small-n or qualitative types of research involving personal interviews. Thus, we are back to the quantitative/qualitative divide in terms of the appropriateness, ethicality, and feasibility of handling data from research with human subjects. But this is not the only dimension to this continuing debate. There is also the dimension of expectations in the social sciences versus those in the natural sciences, among others. In the natural sciences, the first part of the above prompt should go without saying. Ever since the abuses of the infamous Tuskegee experiments and others, HSIRB are specifically instituted to ensure that it is always appropriate, ethical, and feasible to ensure that data/evidence from research involving human subjects is unequivocally accessible to the broader public...an expectation with which we are still grappling in the social sciences especially when it comes to the quantitative/qualitative divide. This part of the prompt also speaks to the whims of funding agencies. Most agencies will not give a researcher their money if s/he does not offer a plan for making the data they generate available to the broader public.

(2) Are there issue-areas or research contexts that pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public? Yes! As I mention in my response to the first part of the prompt, certain issues such as ethnic identities, sexual identities, corruption, some elite opinions on some matters (some elites are obligated by law to speak to authorized members of the public as part of their jobs), etc., pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public. Take the issue of corruption in an authoritarian state. A whistleblower on corruption who decides to give their opinion to a researcher would expect a certain element of confidentiality to protect themselves from retaliation except if the regime in question is so unpopular that members of the public assume it's on its last legs. Otherwise, a whistleblower in a stable-authoritarian regime who serves as an informant in a qualitative study is likely to experience very unpleasant consequences as a result of voicing their opinions on certain matters. A similar kind of concern goes with the ostracism associated with sexual minorities in societies such as Uganda and Zimbabwe where state authorities have made the persecution of sexual minorities key planks of their authoritarian agendas and where local communities are also intolerant of perceived sexual deviance. There are many more issues and contexts...but yes!

(3) What audiences (editors, reviewers, graduate students, broader public, etc.) might be appropriate for sharing interview transcripts or other forms of evidence from research with human participants? In my view,

where possible, interview transcripts should be shared with editors and reviewers to verify the quality of work that was done. If graduate students serve as research assistants on a project, it might be unpreventable to deny them access to the interview transcripts from which they will be coding answers. I think the greatest limitation should be applied for members of the broader public. Members of the broader public do not need to see an interview transcript for them to ascertain the veracity of a finding they are reading about, especially if the interview script contains some element of the personal information of research subjects. One expectation should be that if someone picks up a journal to read from it, then they already subscribe, in some degree, to what (ideas, viewpoints, findings, etc.) is disseminated by that journal on a regular basis. Thus, the expectation should be that they trust the journal and its editors and they trust that they would have already vetted the data/interview transcripts, etc.

(4) How have you addressed the trade-offs between data access, protection of human subjects, and unintended consequences of data sharing? I have generally made aggregated data from my work available to journal editors for onward transmission to reviewers who request access to them. In the case of personal interviews, I ask my interviewees in the field if they would like to be quoted and cited or if they prefer to remain anonymous. Depending on their choice, I quote them in my publications, or not. There are some instances where interviewees are unaware of the full implications of the total context of my work and how their role and viewpoint would play into the final product in such a way that others, such as state authorities, might disapprove. In those instances. even if someone consented to be cited, I have used my discretion to list such sources as personal interviews. I am yet to deal with an unintended consequence of data sharing because I take a great deal of precautionary measures while in the field, and after.

(5) What practical considerations have limited your ability to share data? Are there alternatives to making interview transcripts and other forms of evidence with human participants fully available? Cost concerns in data storage. I do not teach at a research institution where there tends to be all kinds of facilities for storing data. At my institution we do not even have software or a database for storing do files. Interview transcripts could/should be made fully available to editors, where possible. There is no need to make interview transcripts fully available to the broader public except if such transcripts do not contain identifiable information of human participants.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Wed Nov 16, 2016 11:37 pm**
by **AnastasiaSh**

> *Guest wrote:*
>
> > *AnastasiaSh wrote:*When is it appropriate, ethical, and feasible to make evidence from research with human subjects accessible to the broader public? Are there issue-areas or research contexts that pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public? What audiences (editors, reviewers, graduate students, broader public, etc.) might be appropriate for sharing interview transcripts or other forms of evidence from research with human participants? How have you addressed the trade-offs between data access, protection of human subjects, and unintended consequences of data sharing? What practical considerations have limited your ability to share data? Are there alternatives to making interview transcripts and other forms of evidence with human participants fully available?

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Thank you for your important points on elite interviewing, the IRB process, and concerns of data sharing "back home."

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Wed Nov 16, 2016 11:44 pm**
by **AnastasiaSh**

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Thank you, Pr. Mansbridge. The humanness and warmth that enable our interviews and participant observation are the key aspects of research with human subjects that discussions on transparency should integrate. These aspects of the fieldwork process underlie the trust without which researchers cannot access or engage in a meaningful exchange with the people we study.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Thu Nov 17, 2016 12:00 am**
by **AnastasiaSh**

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>
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Thank you for your insightful comments on the distinction between "evidence" and "data," the context-dependent character of data sharing, and the broader quantitative/qualitative divide underlying these issues. Equally important for the discussion of transparency are the editor/reviewer as opposed to broader public data access, using researcher discretion in anonymizing responses, and data storage costs.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Fri Nov 18, 2016 3:08 pm**
by **aepost**

Like some others who have already expressed themselves in this forum, I worry that publishing interview transcripts or recordings may put our “human subjects” at risk in certain cases. While some topics are unlikely to be sufficiently controversial to cause problems, other topics are likely to be sensitive even in political contexts with strong protections for civil liberties. For example, economic elites may be reticent to speak openly regarding their “non-market” strategies (formal lobbying and otherwise) out of fear of provoking public criticism or compromising their relationships with public officials, who may come under attack for their interactions with business. Such individuals are understandably more reticent to speak openly in less stable political contexts, or contexts with fewer protections for civil liberties. Even if individuals give permission for us to tape or share transcriptions with reviewers or even the academic community, can they always foresee how domestic political conditions may change? Is it ethical to share open criticisms of politicians or other actors that may later trigger reprisals, even when subjects explicitly give us permission to publish their statements?

I worry that if journals and other publishers were to require transcripts or recordings as a precondition for evaluating manuscripts, that we would unwittingly encourage qualitative scholars to focus on topics and regions where it is less risky for individuals to express their opinions openly. This may mean that we see less qualitative work published on authoritarian regimes or even competitive authoritarian regimes, and less work on sensitive topics—including business-government relations, criminal justice policy, etc. That does not seem

like an outcome we want. The costs of greater transparency may be greater than the benefits in such instances.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Wed Nov 30, 2016 10:42 pm**
by **cwarner@asu.edu**
I would like to amplify what has been said previously about even "ordinary" people perhaps being unwilling interview subjects if told the transcripts of their interviews, redacted or not, will have to be made publicly available, and possibly for an unlimited amount of time. In recent years, I have conducted interviews with Catholics in Western Europe on a rather benign topic. If I had had to tell them that their interviews would be posted in a publicly available forum, the vast majority, and maybe all of them, would have refused to be interviewed. My colleague, who was interviewing Muslims in Western Europe, likely would have had the same response. He probably would have been turned down entirely for interviews with Catholics and Muslims in Turkey. Furthermore, the religious officials we had to speak with for permission to access their religious communities may well have denied us access in the first place. They are sensitive to intrusion. No one would say these interviewees would be in danger were their interviews to be publicly available, but they would be subject to an invasion of privacy, an invasion to which most would have refused to submit. Even redacted, identities could be inferred due to locations of the research having to be disclosed as part of the normal method of justifying case selection. On a more sensitive topic, corruption, for which interviews were a part of the research process, my interviewees would likely all have insisted on "off the record" interviews. Assuming IRB approval solves the problem is naive.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Thu Dec 01, 2016 2:08 pm**
by **Guest**
I would like to echo the concerns about sharing interview transcripts. One cannot do so without obtaining prior and informed consent, and when conducting qualitative interviews on sensitive topics like (in my case) corruption, even a promise of anonymity is unlikely to make interviewees comfortable with the idea of having the interview shared. This is especially true in places without strong legal systems and norms where even the practice of signing a human subjects consent form that includes no sharing of information makes people uncomfortable.

I agree with Aili Tripp's post that qualitative researchers in sensitive contexts need to provide full information on the types of individuals interviewed, the timing of interviews, and the questions asked. In addition, they should be able to provide aggregate summaries of common themes and finding across interviews. This information would allow for reproduction of the study and a general comparison of findings. Qualitative, interview-based researched cannot be fully reproduced with exactly the same results, but someone speaking with similar individuals and asking similar questions should be able to uncover relatively similar (though probably not exactly the same) results.
Martha Johnson (Mills College)

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Sat Dec 10, 2016 12:32 pm**
by **Guest**
I agree with the concerns about sharing interview transcripts and notes. I conduct interviews in developing nations where government repression of activists is common. I interview on gender concerns and violence -- i.e. sensitive issues. My interview subjects are often uncomfortable signing a consent form, so they will not be comfortable if I tell them that my interview notes and full transcripts will be made public. They will also likely alter what they share in interviews after being informed that the notes and transcripts will be made public in full.

Even something as simple as writing the date / time of an interview in my notebook can have serious consequences for an activist or government official who agrees to be interviewed by me. In the places where I have conducted interviews with government officials or some others who have office space in a building, I have to sign into the building with the time in and out of the building, and I have to write Who I am seeing. If my notes are made public, then someone could easily go back to building records to figure out who is being quoted (instead of my general terms like "government official" or "NGO director" in a publication). In such cases, I will simply not publish and would stop conducting such interviews instead of risking the anonymity or confidentiality of my interview subjects. I go through an IRB process. People can duplicate my research, but I am not going to risk subject protection by publishing in journals or elsewhere that require my full notes to be made public.

I am also concerned about making public full interview transcripts -- not only is there a risk of figuring out who is being interviewed if someone reads the full transcript (as not every person in the locations where I conduct interviews could speak for a full hour with specific knowledge on a topic), but there is also a very real time constraint for professors who have heavy teaching loads and no RAs/TAs to asset with their work. Also, full transcription of interviews is not always necessary, depending on how an interview goes for my specific research question (as some subjects can go off on tangents for at least a brief spell before I can pull them back in). My interviews are typically one hour in length, and my research question requires process-tracing. Interviews are not the same across research projects -- full transcriptions are not always necessary nor are they safe to make public for the interview subject.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Mon Dec 12, 2016 3:29 pm**
by **Guest**
[quote="AnastasiaSh"]When is it appropriate, ethical, and feasible to make evidence from research with human subjects accessible to the broader public? Are there issue-areas or research contexts that pose particular challenges in making evidence generated with human participants accessible to the broader public? What audiences (editors, reviewers, graduate students, broader public, etc.) might be appropriate for sharing interview transcripts or other forms of evidence from research with human participants? How have you addressed the trade-offs between data access, protection of human subjects, and unintended consequences of data sharing? What practical considerations have limited your ability to share data? Are there alternatives to making interview transcripts and other forms of evidence with human participants fully available?[/quote]

I conduct research almost exclusively in authoritarian countries, focusing on issues of human rights, democratization, and political engagement. I work hard to protect my sources and promise them anonymity to the best of my ability. In many cases, exposing my sources could put them at risk of harassment, arrest, and even death. Transcripts of interviews that I conduct generally contain identifying information - personal details, place names, specific stories - that if made public would put my research participants at risk. I am

concerned that DART transparency rules would have a chilling effect on vital research among vulnerable populations like those I study.

To be frank, I find the entire DART push a cynical ploy by quantitative researchers to try to increase the value of their own work and undermine the validity of qualitative research. This entire discussion has further alienated me from the discipline of political science which seems to have dug itself deeper and deeper into a hole of narrow-minded thinking and irrelevance. Sorry to be harsh, but this whole discussion has made me cranky!

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Thu Dec 15, 2016 12:52 pm**
by **sbrooke**
Hi everyone,

I have a number of concerns with DA-RT, but I think it is worth specifically considering how the proposed DA-RT guidelines interact with the larger political environment, and in particular the priorities of the incoming administration. This has been at the front of my mind particularly because of the issue that I study: the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. I've already been thinking about DA-RT's ramifications for my work because of how the political environment changed so suddenly with Egypt's 2013 military coup and the violent repression of a group who had shortly before operated legally and openly. But last month's election results suggest a new dimension to the potential effects of DA-RT.

The new administration has articulated their desire to fight "radical Islam," a centerpiece of which will assumedly be an effort to push through a current bill designating the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization (H.R. 3892). This would allow law enforcement authorities to use the notoriously vague "material support for terrorism" statute to investigate and prosecute suspects. On its own, this may exercise a chilling effect into on-the-ground research on major Muslim organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. But I worry that DA-RT may (unwittingly) contribute to this by requiring researchers to make public their interactions with individuals who may soon become a target of the American counterterrorism apparatus. Particularly for early career scholars and Ph.D. candidates now preparing to publish research gathered following the 2011 uprisings, these guidelines contribute to an uncomfortable juggling act between disciplinary incentives to publish refereed research and a need to protect subjects when they might be particularly vulnerable.

Potentially more insidious and less-visible will be the way that DA-RT and the new administration's priorities could pre-emptively dissuade research into these topics. DA-RT already seems poised to impose significant costs on those who conduct research in authoritarian regimes. But in light of recent political developments, I worry that DA-RT's requirements would make it incredibly difficult for scholars to conceive of performing any serious on-the-ground research into Muslim political activism. It will be hard enough to establish a meaningful rapport with a subject if they know our government is engaged in a ``witch hunt'' against their organization (https://goo.gl/pLPQCN). And it will likely be impossible if we have to lead off the interaction by explaining that we might will be required to make public portions of it (and even if the interaction doesn't end, the information provided will be largely banal). Of course, it is fairly easy to extrapolate beyond the specific case of the Muslim Brotherhood to see how this concern could arise with other subjects that sit at the intersection of qualitative academic research and American state interests- think about a project on Black Lives Matter. It seems a distinct possibility that, rather than struggle upstream against both American policy and disciplinary norms, many scholars- particularly early in their careers- will simply decide to direct their

academic energies elsewhere. The result will, I fear, be a further constriction of the questions we ask, and a general reduction in our willingness and ability to use the tools of social science to answer questions about the world.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Sat Dec 17, 2016 2:48 pm**
by **AnastasiaSh**
Thank you, Pr. Brooke, for pointing so sharply to the potential political consequences of our research and they ways in which transparency standards may interact with these consequences. For further consideration of transparency and unintended consequences, see Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson and Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Transparency in Intensive Research on Violence: Ethical Dilemmas and Unforeseen Consequences," Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Spring 2015, Vol. 13, No. 1: 22-6.

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Sat Dec 31, 2016 1:50 pm**
by **AnastasiaSh**
Four themes emerged in the course of informal conversations with junior scholars whose research involves interactions with human subjects:
1. Ethics: Making publicly available materials from research with human subjects, especially in authoritarian settings and contexts of research on political violence and war, almost always carries with it the danger of putting research participants at risk of retaliation and scrutiny by government officials and other actors with vested interests in the research subject. Even when the researcher works to deidentify transcripts and field notes to the best of her knowledge, this effort may leave description of the events that are particular to the location or set of actors she studies available to the reader with an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. Government officials and other actors who may retaliate for the disseminated information are among the readers with such a grounded understanding;
2. Access: There needs to be an appreciation of the ongoing character of much of the research with human subjects. The researcher who makes sensitive materials publicly available (or even writes and publishes on sensitive subjects) may put herself at risk of retaliation and scrutiny, both at home and back in the field. This has significant repercussions for the researcher's access to her site(s) and ability to carry out her research safely or carry it out at all in the future;
3. Local norms and legal responsibility: Research with human participants on sensitive subjects often involves materials that could be viewed as testimony to wrongdoing or criminal activity under domestic or international norms and legal regimes. Making such materials available may implicate research participants in ways unintended by the researcher and far surpassing and going counter to the purposes of the research;
4. Additional effort and time: Qualitative research with human subjects involves great effort and time to develop the rigorous and ethical research design, gain access to the field site(s), analyse the vast materials collected, and publish the results. There needs to be a recognition, especially among journal editors and reviewers, but also among colleagues involved in hiring and tenure decisions, that publishing qualitative research based on interactions with human subjects and making transparent the process by which the researcher arrived at her conclusions and the evidence to support her claims require great effort and time and potentially additional journal space (for example, for extended footnotes, excerpts, or appendices).

Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?

Posted: **Wed Jan 25, 2017 9:30 am**
by **sbrooke**
Hi Everyone,

Andrew March has written a piece for The Monkey Cage that intersects with a number of issues I raise in my post above:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/mon ... s-at-risk/

I hope it is of interest.

Best,
Steven

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