Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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The Transparency Impulse in Political Science

https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=153

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The Transparency Impulse in Political Science

Posted: **Sat Oct 01, 2016 8:59 pm**
by **jawilliams**
[color=#0000FF]What do you think of the transparency impulse in the field of political science today?
[/color]

Re: The Transparency Impulse in Political Science

Posted: **Fri Nov 04, 2016 6:08 am**
by **Nancy Hirschmann**
Obviously, living in a democracy, we tend to think of transparency as the highest good. It is the primary safeguard against corruption and abuse of power. And in my own subfield of political theory, it is a constant: we all have access to the same "data" (books and articles in political theory), we develop our arguments by citations and quoted material from the texts in question, and other colleagues can take issue with what we argue. You can't get any more transparent or accessible than that (despite the claim made by some that political theorists try their best to NOT be accessible and transparent by using obscure language and phrasing). But the stress on transparency as an unalloyed good is possible only from the perspective of a particular subset of political science, and the myriad issues and dangers posed by human subjects and vulnerable populations have been inadequately addressed by the journals that have signed on to DA-RT and that is a serious concern for the future of the profession. It smacks of an effort to push all qualitative researchers out of the field by creating inappropriate standards, and by framing the conversation in a way that forces us to "just say no" rather than to engage in a real conversation about how political science can be improved across the board. That this conversation is happening now on this website is a positive good but will depend on more active participation. I see that there have been many "views" to this segment of the deliberation but few posts, so I hope that others will take the step of sharing their views on this question and the others that Juliet has posted here. You can do so anonymously if you wish.

Re: The Transparency Impulse in Political Science

Posted: **Thu Nov 24, 2016 2:28 pm**
by **Bill Kelleher**

Nancy Hirschmann wrote: But the stress on transparency as an unalloyed good is possible only from the perspective of a particular subset of political science, and the myriad issues and dangers posed by human subjects and vulnerable populations have been inadequately addressed by the journals that have signed on to DA-RT and that is a serious concern for the future of the profession. It smacks of an effort to push all qualitative researchers out of the field by creating inappropriate standards, and by framing the conversation in a way that forces us to "just say no" rather than to engage in a real conversation about how political science can be improved across the board.

Professor Hirschmann's Warning Should be Heeded

So called 'hard data' means nothing until its meaning has been interpreted. Interpretation about political behavior requires empathy. For example, suppose it is correct to say that 53% of white women voters voted for Trump. This is just a dry statistic w/o interpretation. Empathy is required to appreciate the significance of this fact in the context of the US presidential election in 2016. Trump said things that are widely considered demeaning of women in our culture. Thus, for so many women to vote for a man who has disrespected them seems to be unusual behavior, requiring explanation. But to understand what is 'demeaning' and the notion that an offended voter voting for the offender is 'unusual,' requires empathy. Hard data alone cannot set up the problem. I.e., the FEELINGS of political actors, like voters, must be understood on a person-to-person basis. How can this method of understanding be made 'transparent'?

Such empathic understanding is not the same as drawing an inference from hard data. Empathy, or what Michael Polanyi calls 'indwelling,' is a special kind of observation and method for acquiring knowledge. Professional training in the method is possible, and one professional's empathic understanding can be criticized by other professionals. A consensus of professionals can be developed so as to establish an accredited interpretation.

But for everyone involved, the exercise of an empathic interpretation is a highly personal intellectual act. This method is not comparable to the methods used in physics or chemistry. Those methods have a degree of objectivity which is allowed by the subject matter because the subject matter is inanimate. But animate subject matter demands methods of understanding that are appropriate to it. For political science, empathic understanding ought to be regarded and taught as ***the primary method*** of the science. To set methodological standards that threaten to banish empathy from political science, because empathy doesn't look like physics or chemistry, is a huge act of professional self-destruction based on deep self-alienation and self-ignorance.

William J. Kelleher, Ph.D.

Re: The Transparency Impulse in Political Science

Posted: **Fri Dec 09, 2016 6:30 pm**
by **cjones**

What do you think of the transparency impulse in the field of political science today?[/color]

In response to this question, I think there's something very "fundamentalist" about it, and I agree with Nancy that the notion of holding transparency above all else is problematic. I've been wondering what would have happened to science and the arts in earlier periods of history had there been the same fundamentalist commitment to transparency in and of itself. Probably, there would have been fewer scholars, those producing scholarship would be limited to a tiny elite (even tinier than it was), and scholarship would have been less creative. In some basic way, there needs to be a freedom to make mistakes at early stages in order to innovate - if everything we do as scholars is recorded and entered into a public repository in the name of transparency, this is going to make people select far more conventional topics and research strategies rather

than trying anything risky and path-breaking. I agree with others' suggestions for less radical efforts to improve transparency, which take into account (1) we don't know how a radical social engineering initiative like this will affect the ecology of human knowledge creation and (2) there are reasons to think it will harm that ecology, perhaps as much if not more than it will benefit it in terms of transparency.

Re: The Transparency Impulse in Political Science

Posted: **Fri Dec 16, 2016 9:11 am**
by **willh906**
Politico recently featured a detailed account of Hillary Clinton's campaign missteps in Michigan.
http://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/michigan-hillary-clinton-trump-232547
This quote in particular stood out to me:
"Michigan operatives relay stories like one about an older woman in Flint who showed up at a Clinton campaign office, asking for a lawn sign and offering to canvass, being told these were not “scientifically” significant ways of increasing the vote, and leaving, never to return."

This obsession with scientism in the Clinton campaign immediately recalled for me our discussions of DA-RT in the discipline, rooted as it is in a positivist obsession with "objective," data-driven analysis. I have been thinking a lot about how these DA-RT debates dovetail with the election of Donald Trump. It seems to me that had the Clinton campaign taken seriously the importance of cultural factors and the production of meanings among voters (techniques most amenable to qualitative and mixed-method research), rather than splicing the electorate into discrete units and laser-targeting specific groups, she might have won. Other scholars are making similar arguments: http://www.chronicle.com/article/After-Trump-s-Election/238703

There is a supreme irony, then, that just as our discipline is faced with its most existential threat from a federal government that is actively opposed to the knowledge that we are responsible for producing, DA-RT risks making our work even more marginal.

I would love to hear others' thoughts on how you understand the relationship between the Trump election and the will to transparency in the discipline.

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