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/

Right to be Forgotten?

https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=82

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

Right to be Forgotten?

Posted: **Tue Apr 26, 2016 4:40 pm**
by **rktromble**
I have lately been pondering the idea of the "right to be forgotten" and its implications for social scientific research. Though most of the discussions surrounding the right to be forgotten have focused on the limits and responsibilities of corporate and media data "controllers" who gather, store, and use vast troves of digital data, I think there are some interesting ethical concerns that should be taken seriously by scholars and that are particularly germane to our discussions of data access and transparency. And these issues impact quantitative and qualitative research alike.

Beyond concerns about anonymity, few have yet questioned the value of retaining and publicly sharing large amounts of data *in perpetuity*. We generally seem to presume that preserving data is in and of itself desirable. But what might be the unintended consequences of, say, retaining outdated information? Might we wind up creating incentives to use and re-use old, poor, and/or de-contextualized data simply because they are easily accessible in our repositories and the costs of generating and preserving new data so high?

And what of the dignity and privacy of those captured by our data? Perhaps our subjects have fully consented to data use, with or without anonymity guaranteed. Does their signature on a form on April 26, 2016 mean that they can never withdraw--2 years, 5 years, 10 years later? What of those who never actually signed a form--those whose "public" data were collected, for example, from online platforms (where researchers tend to conclude that we can make use of whatever we want as long as the data are not shielded by "privacy settings")? What if any one of these subjects comes to discover that their data are being used in distasteful ways? What if they determine that their data represent episodes or conditions that they find shaming or otherwise harmful? Once data are made public, it becomes exceedingly difficult to adjudicate such matters and effectively impossible to grant one the right to be forgotten.

Of course, none of these concerns are unique to DA-RT. They apply to any shared data. But DA-RT broadens the scale and raises the stakes.

Re: Right to be Forgotten?

Posted: **Thu May 05, 2016 12:10 pm**
by **mneesha**

I think this is an excellent point that brings up a range of concerns about how IRB practices would have to shift under DA-RT requirements. For example, qualitative interview data collected under informed consent can be legitimately used in a range of forms by the researcher, but unless the consent form explicitly notifies interviewees that their complete interview transcript will be posted publicly online, it would not be ethical to do so. For my own work, it would be nearly impossible to trace some of the respondents - community members in rural communities in the Global South - to re-ask the question prior to publication: would they be willing to have their complete interview publicly available, if anonymous? They may want to access the right to be forgotten, to not have a conversation they had on a whim ten years ago be available for all the world to download.

Provided they could be found to be asked in the first place, for many interviewees, the answer would be no, they would not consent, years after the fact, to such "data transparency," because they spoke on politically sensitive subjects that could endanger them if not physically than professionally, or stigmatize them in some way. And why would they agree to do so anyway? So a foreign researcher can get a publication? Not a very convincing argument for a benefit as yet to be established by our intellectual community of political scientists. So what happens to all that data we spent years collecting if DA-RT goes forward? A self-serving concern, perhaps, but bound up in the many layers of reflection on what the point and legitimacy of such an approach to data-sharing is in the first place.

Re: Right to be Forgotten?

Posted: **Sun May 22, 2016 12:30 am**
by **Guest**
I think that both of these posts raise very important points. With regard to the second post in particular, I too am someone who has spent a good deal of time collecting data via interviews. I did most of these interviews as part of my dissertation research several years ago, and am now working on trying to publish my findings. At the time I conducted the interviews for my dissertation, the DART standards did not exist; at this point, I can't go back and contact all of my interviewees about making my interview notes and transcripts publicly available. Even if I could, I think that many interviewees would be troubled and upset if I asked them to change the terms under which the interviews originally took place. The fact that people like me are effectively barred from publishing research in some of the discipline's best-known venues on the basis of standards that were not in place at the time we did our research seems unfair. I would add as well that I am particularly troubled by the negative consequences that these new standards may have on people who are facing down a tenure clock or seeking tenure-track jobs. In short, I think there are significant ethical issues at play here in terms of how these standards affect junior scholars, as well as (to return to the excellent point raised by the other posts) those interviewees who may wish to be "forgotten."

Powered by phpBB® Forum Software © phpBB Limited
https://www.phpbb.com/