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
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Data access-- giving back to the community

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Data access-- giving back to the community

Posted: **Fri May 06, 2016 9:31 am**
by **SMajic**
I have conducted qualitative research with community-based organizations-- namely, nonprofits developed and run by sex workers in the US. To do this research, I did not simply go into the community, take what I needed, and leave; instead, I developed relationships. This meant that in exchange for the interviews I conducted, documents I collected, and participant-observations I engaged in, I gave something back to the community-- I wrote grants, helped clean up after clinic nights, and served food at events, among other activities.

Many other political science researchers engage in similarly reciprocal projects, where the community studied generally expects that the data they provide will only be used by the researcher with whom they have a relationship. If DA-RT requires us to make our data available to other researchers **who have no connections to the communities we studied** , how does it ensure that these other researchers will also a) earn the community's trust and b) give something to the community in return?

Re: Data access-- giving back to the community

Posted: **Fri May 06, 2016 2:25 pm**
by **kathycramer**
Prof. Majic makes a great point here. I think it is important that we consider our work not as something that we do to the public but instead as something that we do as fellow residents or citizens. I say this because I believe an original and important role of higher education is to improve the human condition, and also because I fear that downplaying that purpose comes at a significant cost to public support for our institutions. It would be a significant mistake if the push for more transparency made us more scientific at the expense of being more disconnected from the people we study.

Re: Data access-- giving back to the community

Posted: **Tue May 10, 2016 2:21 pm**
by **talimendelberg**
These are good points. Qualitative research requires interpersonal trust and researchers build that personally.

That trust may be violated even if all the primary source information is anonymized, because the participants can still recognize themselves and their acquaintances in it. A good piece on that was published recently in the New York Times Couch section on the ethics of publishing reports on clients.

Re: Data access-- giving back to the community

Posted: **Fri May 13, 2016 2:19 pm**
by **mneesha**
Thanks to Majic, Cramer, and others in this thread for raising these important concerns. The human relationships at the heart of much ethnographic work are woven through with ethical implications about why we are given access to particular communities in the first place. The concerns Majic raises - that as ethnographers we are given access to information BECAUSE we show up in person, so how do we know others given access would do the same - points to a major flaw in the notion of data sharing for ethnographic work. Since community engagement cannot be ensured beyond the original researcher's commitment, we are essentially asking communities that invite us in and trust us to provide the same to people who don't "show up". When I think of how it would feel to explain this to the community members who have granted their informed consent to speak with me personally, it is hard for me to imagine their enthusiasm for such an endeavor. It furthers the notion that research is for someone else (the circle of researchers), rather than as something that can also serve the community.

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