

The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: Full Reports

Supplementary Materials for:
“The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations:
Insights and Implications”

Perspectives on Politics

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Epistemological and Ontological Priors: *Varieties of Explicitness and Research Integrity*

Final Report of QTD Working Group I.1, Subgroup A

August 2018

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This report summarizes and expands on the wide-ranging input received by the QTD Working Group on Ontological and Epistemological Priors. The posts on our forum of the QTD Discussion Board shared a deep skepticism about what has been aptly called the “heroic model of science,” in which straightforward hypothesis testing produces knowledge that is autonomous and thus unaffected by the historical, economic, political and professional context in which it is generated.¹ Participants agreed that this model is unrealistic, raising questions about the DA-RT and JETS guidelines, which it was seen to have inspired.² They generally advocated for a broader conception of research integrity – a term we borrow from Peter Hall³ – as a way to better acknowledge and address three aspects of of political research, made explicit as elements of research integrity:

- Research ethics, to which the heroic version of science pays insufficient attention, according to many respondents.
- Realistic accounts of the production of knowledge, such that normative guidelines for scholarship recognize insights from the history of science, sociology of knowledge, and cognitive psychology.
- The plausibility of a wide range of ontological and epistemological positions. Diverse research traditions connect different practices of explicitness to research integrity.

Figure 1 organizes the report. Ethical issues were salient in responses to our group, but are only flagged here because other QTD groups addressed them directly. We give more attention to how scholarship on knowledge production raises questions about the viability or appropriateness of “heroic” science guidelines. Most of the report then surveys five research traditions with different views of research explicitness. As Figure 1 suggests, the thin transparency notion of the original thin DA-RT guidelines align with the frequentist/experimentalist tradition. Bayesian/process-tracing, historical, and modern constructivist traditions lean toward more expansive notions of transparency or explicitness that thicken the original DA-RT criteria. This thickening process, however, also means that the criteria are less formalized and become more judgment-based, and purpose-built for each research project. It therefore makes sense to substitute research transparency with a more expansive, less formalized term like research explicitness. Especially prominent in posts on our group’s forum, and represented by three members of the full group, is the interpretive tradition. It rejects the notion of research transparency, but may be open to explicating their research methods to be consistent with other ways of critically evaluating scholarly interpretations and explanations. Our group had difficulty agreeing on a shared characterization of these relationships, especially with respect to interpretivism, and eventually decided to offer two separate reports.

¹ Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 2011, 15–51.

² Büthe and Jacobs 2015; Isaac 2015; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2016.

³ Hall 2016.

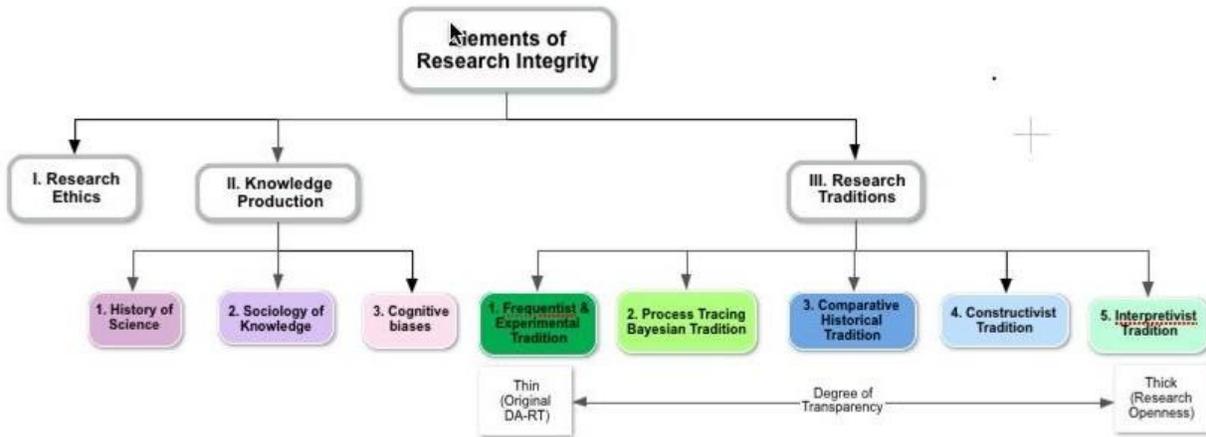


Figure 1: Elements of Research Integrity

Research Ethics and Research Integrity

A central theme in many submissions to the QTD, including to our working group's discussion, was that researchers' ethical obligations take precedence over other concerns, including transparency. This issue, including whether DA-RT may have insufficiently considered ethical concerns, are discussed in the reports of several other QTD working groups (especially: Research Ethics and Human Subjects: A Reflexive Openness Approach and Research Transparency in Authoritarian and Repressive Contexts), so we can simply take note of the summary of the debate in those reports and focus our attention on the ontological and epistemological issues that were our distinctive mandate.

Knowledge Production and Research Integrity

Behind the diversity of active research traditions at work in political science today stands a vast amount of scholarship on how knowledge claims have been produced so far. History of science, sociology of knowledge, and cognitive psychology raise questions about the heroic version of science by suggesting that knowledge production may not be autonomous from broader contextual factors that shape the production of knowledge. The range of research traditions surveyed below reflects debates over these questions and what they mean for scholarly practices.

History of Science

Thomas Kuhn's landmark book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* initiated important debates about the role of theory in defining what constitutes evidence. It thus raised fundamental questions about the nature of objectivity and whether facts are epistemologically neutral arbitrators among competing theories.⁴ Historians of science have illuminated the emergence of particular forms of evidence in particular socio-political contexts. Theodore Porter, for example, traces how efforts of nineteenth century civil servants to measure social and economic phenomena gave rise to statistical thinking.⁵ David Landes, Carlo Cipolla, Eviatar Zerubavel and Lynn Hunt demonstrate how

⁴ Kuhn 1962; see also Lakatos 1970.

⁵ Gigerenzer and Porter 1990; Porter 1986; 1996.

various time-keeping devices have transformed understandings of temporality, history, and the very notion of “the past.”⁶ Ludvig Fleck, Lorraine Daston, David Wootton analyze the changing nature of evidence over the past two centuries and the emergence of “facts.”⁷ Sharon McGrayne shows how the failure of existing frequentist techniques to crack the code of the German enigma machine and solve other intractable statistical problems in the 20th century led to the resuscitation of Bayes’ ideas, which had laid intellectually fallow for over two centuries.⁸ Siddhartha Mukherjee reveals how the very notion of human genealogy was shaped by the discovery of new measurement instruments and sociopolitical contexts from the 19th century to the present.⁹

Historians of science illuminate three points immediately relevant for current debates about transparency. First, historians of science make clear that techniques for handling evidence and assuring research explicitness have rarely had an epistemologically immaculate conception, as the heroic version of science may seem to suggest. Instead, they emphasize how practical research challenges, available technologies, and conceptual categories varied with research tasks at hand. Second, these works make clear that what counts as evidence, how it is best observed, and how it is to be evaluated have been contested questions for centuries, and answers to these complex questions defy a linear story of steady progress towards a singular notion of science. Third, new tools of inquiry can transform the very ontological categories that had heretofore informed scholarly inquiry. Works on the history of clocks suggest, for example, particular mechanical devices transformed conceptualizations of time and the past, replacing cyclical, ahistorical notions of time with a more linear account. Inherited from the Ancients, who saw time as repeating itself continuously,¹⁰ the cyclical conception of time constituted “the past” as little more than a “continuous present.”¹¹ When the past is qualitatively not different from the present, it is impossible to trace a history, which presupposes that the past is different from the present and that causal factors can be identified to account for historical transformation. The invention of clocks, together with new insights from fields ranging from geology to evolutionary biology, transformed understandings of time, and contributed to the emergence of history as a distinct field of study in the 19th century. This single example illustrates how our confidence in understanding the past is conditional on the ontological conceptualization of time.

Sociology of Knowledge

Sociologists of knowledge explore knowledge production in more contemporary contexts, often analyzing the practices of specific professions and scientific communities. Their starting point is the collective nature of scholarly inquiry as manifested in the development of professional associations, funding agencies, university departments and specializations, as well as academic journals. Since the 1870s, a distinct scholarly infrastructure emerged as science broke away from natural philosophy, humanities from philology, history from philosophy, sociology from history, political science from sociology. This development of intellectual specializations was a decisive step in removing the constraints on social inquiry established by religious and political authorities. Particular academic disciplines insisted on their sole prerogative to establish standards governing research practices, by appealing to emerging norms of academic freedom. Greater autonomy of

⁶ Cipolla 1977; Hunt 2008; Landes 1983; Zerubavel 1977; 1982.

⁷ Daston 2001; 2011; Fleck 1935; Wootton 2015.

⁸ McGrayne 2011.

⁹ Mukherjee 2016.

¹⁰ Toulmin and Goodfield 1982.

¹¹ Eliade 2012.

scholarly communities in accrediting particular research practices, however, does not guarantee that accredited norms will be entirely disinterested or that social values exert no influence on sanctioned modes of valid research. In her investigation of peer evaluation among the professoriate, for example, Michèle Lamont traces the complex processes through which scholars try to reconcile concerns for excellence, disciplinary standards and interdisciplinary norms, objectives of funders, and, in some instances, political considerations.¹² She emphasizes the absence of a single metric for research integrity, showing how a wide range of subjective judgments contribute to assessments of professional competence.¹³ University rankings and journal rankings also have a tremendous impact on how knowledge is evaluated in peer reviews, and what sorts of knowledge are produced and taught within particular institutional settings (e.g., community colleges, liberal arts colleges, major research universities).¹⁴ The recent popularity of experimental methods, for example, has contributed to a growing imbalance between testing and developing plausible, internally consistent theoretical propositions.¹⁵ Publication practices of specific journals also influence knowledge production. Length limitations imposed on submissions, willingness to permit old-fashioned footnoting, and policies pertaining to detailed literature reviews create powerful strictures on how scholars present their research findings.¹⁶ A journal's preference for publishing novel, positive results has the effect of under-reporting negative findings, thereby establishing a publication bias.¹⁷ The findings of certain studies within the sociology of knowledge have been deployed in the contentious debates over the DA-RT initiative, although they surface far more often in the works of critics than in the views of proponents of transparency.

Cognitive Psychology

Important psychological components of knowledge production have received a good deal of attention in recent years in cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychologists have illuminated a range of cognitive biases that structure the analytical abilities of human decision-makers. “Confirmation bias” explains why supporting evidence is over-valued and counter-evidence discounted.¹⁸ “Hindsight bias” reads current knowledge into the past, assuming linear progression, thereby masking alternative possible outcomes.¹⁹ The “representative heuristic” leads us to misjudge probabilities.²⁰ Cultural psychologists, in turn, have shown that evaluation of evidence is shaped by cultural values.²¹

Cognitive psychologists have also distinguished between two distinct modes of human analysis: fast, heuristic-based, intuitive thinking, which is our default mode; and slower, rule-based, inferential thinking that is less commonly used.²² Investigating the analytical processes of cognitive scholars themselves, researchers have documented that despite their rigorous training, their analyses frequently operate in the default, intuitive and error-prone mode rather than the

¹² Lamont 2009.

¹³ Camic, Gross, and Lamont 2011; Zuckerman and Merton 1971.

¹⁴ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2016.

¹⁵ Huber 2013; Swedberg 2014; Walt and Mearsheimer 2013.

¹⁶ Gerring and Lee 2016; Harzing 2002; Trachtenberg 2015.

¹⁷ Findley et al. 2016; Gerber and Malhotra 2008.

¹⁸ Cummins 2012.

¹⁹ Fischhoff 1982.

²⁰ Tversky and Kahneman 2000.

²¹ Iyengar 2010.

²² Kahneman 2012.

textbook-inspired, inferential mode. Philip Tetlock has documented a wide range of cognitive biases that shape the judgments of political experts, identifying variations in error rates that are closely correlated with two distinct cognitive mindsets. Building upon categories created in Isaiah Berlin's classic essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox,"²³ Tetlock suggests that scholars who emulate fox-like characteristics, tend to explore multiple hypotheses, revise theoretical assumptions in light of new evidence, and engage in extensive counterfactual thinking. They consequently are far less error-prone than hedgehog-like scholars who engage "gladiator style of analysis, where one perspective goes forth and slays all others".²⁴ Nate Silver and Nassim Taleb have extended Tetlock's findings by drawing insights from cognitive psychologists in order to evaluate the effects of randomness on fields such as financial forecasting, sports betting, and political analysis.²⁵ This literature demonstrates that all sorts of cognitive presuppositions and limitations structure scholars' definition of research questions, choice of methods, construction of evidence, and analysis of data in ways that impact research results significantly.

Scholarship addressing the history, sociology and psychology of knowledge production offer important reminders that the impetus for change in research practices stems from practical research challenges, technological innovations, historical contingencies and broad epistemological shifts that go unmentioned in the heroic model of science. Collectively this scholarship cautions against invoking singular epistemological principles to impose and enforce abstract research norms that occlude the diversity of research traditions within disciplines.

Research Traditions and Practices of Research Explicitness

Confronted by these complexities of knowledge production, scholars have developed a variety of research traditions. They draw on different epistemological and ontological presuppositions and arrive at different criteria to evaluate research excellence and sustain confidence in scholarly findings. The remainder of the report briefly presents and discusses the five salient traditions pictured in Figure 1, with particular attention to how they approach notions of transparency or explicitness.

The Frequentist/Experimental Tradition

The DA-RT guidelines closely reflect the conception of research explicitness championed by experimentalists and proponents of statistical analysis. The guidelines' emphasis on data access, production transparency, and analytical transparency offer a crisp set of criteria that places a premium on replication. Research explicitness is understood in terms of formalized mechanisms for gathering, sharing and evaluating evidence to facilitate replication, reflecting the epistemological assumptions that research integrity is most effectively assured through reconfirming earlier results.²⁶ This epistemological position is tied to two distinct models of causality. Causation as robust dependence (also known as concomitant variation) infers causality from the robustness of statistical correlations among variables, when potentially confounding factors are controlled for.²⁷ Causation as consequential manipulation (also known as the potential outcomes model) infers causality by "comparing what would have happened to a unit in regard to

²³ Berlin 1953.

²⁴ Tetlock 2005. Fritz Kratochwil cited in Bennet and Checkel 1995, 31.

²⁵ Silver 2012; Taleb 2007.

²⁶ King 1995.

²⁷ Goldthorpe 2001, 2-5.

Y if this unit had been exposed to X (treatment) with what would have happened if it had not been exposed to X (control).” It simulates the counterfactual of “what would have happened if it had not been exposed” through randomization, which gives each Y an equal chance to be exposed or not exposed to X.²⁸ Both these models of causality make very specific ontological assumptions about the nature of evidence. They conceptualize the social world as analogous to the physical world, organized mechanistically such that evidence can be both uniform across cases and independent across time.²⁹ Within this frame, evidence is context-less and lacks any specific historical coordinates. The frequentist and experimentalist models are test-centric, stipulating that the causal inferences established through testing are largely autonomous of pre-testing stages of social inquiry. This model of research is relatively unconcerned with the influence that theorizing, description, test construction, or any of the stages of knowledge production have on a suitably comprehensive notion of research integrity.³⁰ It essentially sees transparently systematic and replicable practices in the testing phase as sufficient to deliver research integrity, while treating prior steps in conceptualization and measurement as less amenable to – and not requiring – systematic and replicable practices. As H. R. Hanson pointed out, it is less about the logic of scientific discovery than it is about “the logic of the Finished Research Report.”³¹

The Process Tracing/Bayesian Tradition

Causal process tracing evolved in response to critiques of the frequentist and experimental methods for under-specifying causal mechanisms. In its earliest versions, process tracing closely resembled qualitative case-centric research with the minor difference that it employed a more explicit mechanistic conception of causality.³² In recent years, however, a number of scholars have tried to ground process tracing in a more explicit Bayesian epistemology, demonstrating how new research practices evolve solving practical methodological problems before being formalized and grounded in an explicit epistemology.³³ This Bayesian perspective employs a conception of research integrity that both shares with the frequentist/experimental model a concern for data access and production transparency, but also employs a more encompassing understanding of analytical transparency. We highlight here the elements of the broader understanding of analytical transparency.

First, the Bayesian perspective views knowledge as evolving over time and insists that the confidence that can be derived from any piece of evidence is always conditional on how much prior research has been conducted on the subject and how conclusive that research was. In Bayesian terminology, process tracing seeks to estimate the prior probability that a particular claim might be true given the available foreknowledge. The implication of these methodological assumptions is that scholars must engage in extensive and careful analysis of the existing literature to properly estimate prior probability.

Second, Bayesian analysis insists that evidence supporting a particular hypothesis be challenged by any counter-evidence predicted by alternative, competing explanations. It draws attention not only to prior research validating a test hypothesis, but also to alternative approaches

²⁸ Goldthorpe 2001, 5-8. The epistemological assumptions and limitations of these two conceptions of causality are discussed further by Lieberman 1985 and Johnson 2006.

²⁹ Hall 2003; Hanson and Kopstein 2005; W. Sewell 1996.

³⁰ Kreuzer 2019.

³¹ Hanson in Trachtenberg 2006, 15.

³² Gerring 2008; Goldthorpe 2001.

³³ Beach and Pedersen 2013; Bennett 2008; Humphreys and Jacobs 2015; Kreuzer 2016.

that challenge an hypothesis. It thus cultivates a symmetrical testing protocol through which alternative hypotheses are tested in full rather than relying on a control variable that only faintly reflects the full range of possible empirical predictions.³⁴ It also does not treat all hypotheses as being created equal, but differentiates them on the basis of the number, precision, and uniqueness of the testable implications generated. In short, process tracing informed by Bayesianism recognizes that the inferential leverage of a particular piece of evidence is not tied exclusively to the frequency of its observations, but also depends upon the quality of the tests that the existing hypothesis permits as well as prior confidence in the hypothesis itself. It further realizes that the quality of the available testing is something that requires intersubjective judgments. Finally, Bayesian analysis views any test result as providing only interim confidence in the validity of a particular hypothesis. It thus requires continuous analysis to update what it calls posterior probabilities in the face of new evidence.

A formalized Bayesian approach requires assigning subjective probabilities to the various stages of the research process. These subjective probabilities have proven controversial but they point to a broader understanding of transparency.³⁵ This understanding still emphasizes the importance of data access and production transparency but also employs a more expansive notion of analytical transparency. It sees testing as entailing something more complex than drawing inferences from data because confidence of such inferences is conditional on the prior confidence in the hypotheses being tested as well as the strength of the tests that have been constructed. It thus asks scholars to be transparent about these two additional dimensions of testing.

The Comparative Historical Tradition

Comparative historical analysis (CHA) is an umbrella term for historical institutionalism, American Political Development (APD), path dependency, historical sociology, modernization theory and other approaches paying close attention to various elements of temporality. Like other research traditions, CHA tries to be explicit about the three key elements of research transparency: data access, production transparency, and analytical transparency. What sets it apart particularly though, from the frequentists/experimental and process tracing tradition, is its focus on the confounding effects of time. CHA has a much broader understanding of analytical transparency because it addresses the ontological implications of foregrounding time. It contends that approaches employing what Paul Pierson calls a “short/short” temporal ontology – in which both causes and effects immediately follow each other and each are of short duration – are temporally insufficiently explicit because it ignores sequences and their varying pace or duration as well as qualitative transformations that are at the heart of historical processes.³⁶ Such temporal ontologies freeze time and assume that all independent variables take place simultaneously, vary only in degrees but not kind, and thus are limited to capturing cyclical but not secular, historical changes.³⁷ CHA thus asks scholars to be explicit about two distinct elements of temporality: objective time (i.e. sequences, tempo duration) and history (historical context and processes).

³⁴ Rohlfing 2014; Zaks 2017.

³⁵ There are two views of Bayesian probabilities: objective Bayesians contend that probabilities represent impersonal expectations about the state of knowledge, whereas subjective Bayesians see probabilities reflecting more personal beliefs. This distinction is better established in Bayesian statistics than Bayesian process tracing. The latter subscribes mostly to the subjective notion of probability.

³⁶ Pierson 2004.

³⁷ Falletti and Mahoney 2015; Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000.

Sequence analysis emphasizes how the sequence of events and the pace of their unfolding affects outcomes.³⁸ Robert Dahl, for example, pointed out that democracies in which contestation precedes mass participation are more likely to consolidate than countries undergoing the opposite sequence.³⁹ And the consolidation is even more likely if the contestation/participation sequence unfolds slowly.⁴⁰ This focus of sequence analysis on the temporal order of events, their duration, tempo, or direction entails a focus on the clock-like, objective elements of time that are unaffected by the particular historical context in which they occur.

The second strand of CHA pays closer attention to qualitative transformations through time.⁴¹ They reject the notion that the past is an ahistorical “continuous present,”⁴² and insist instead that the past is “not just prior to the present but also different from it.”⁴³ The analytical task at hand therefore is to explore and explain the differences that set the past apart from the present. This focus has led scholars to formulate different conceptualizations of historical process in which the past is treated as a chronology of unconnected events,⁴⁴ linear, teleological past,⁴⁵ a sequence of distinct periods⁴⁶ or multiple concurrent and interlocking pasts unfolding at different rates.⁴⁷ This more historical strand of CHA asks scholars to be explicit about their conceptualization of such historical processes, about their periodization schemes,⁴⁸ as well as the “intercurrence” between multiple, concurrent processes.⁴⁹

In drawing attention to both the objective, clock-like as well as social, historical elements of temporality, CHA places ontological considerations ahead of epistemological ones. CHA does not have a single unified epistemology or methodology and has been linked to positivism,⁵⁰ set theory,⁵¹ or Bayesian analysis.⁵² Most comparative historians show limited interest in epistemological questions as they prefer to concentrate their energies on finding and interpreting the evidence necessary to answering complex, macro-historical questions. CHA thus does not have a formalized, transparency protocol for foregrounding temporality or other research judgments. Their transparency practices instead involve a series of informal judgments that are varyingly elaborated in detailed historiographies,⁵³ extended footnotes, and lengthy book reviews.⁵⁴ The [Qualitative Data Repository](#) (QDR) at Syracuse University also has developed [Annotation for Transparent Inquiry](#) (ATI) technology to give scholars new ways to be more explicit about temporality as well as to improve data access by allowing readers to directly link to the QDR data repository.⁵⁵ CHA tries to assure its research integrity by leaving more of their research scaffold

³⁸ Falleti and Mahoney 2015; Falleti 2005; Abbott 1995.

³⁹ Dahl 1971.

⁴⁰ Nordlinger 1968.

⁴¹ Orren and Skowronek 1996; Sewell 2009, 1–18; Sorokin and Merton 1937.

⁴² Eliade 2012, 85.

⁴³ Schiffman 2011, 2.

⁴⁴ Rosenberg and Grafton 2010.

⁴⁵ Sewell 1996.

⁴⁶ Zerubavel 2003.

⁴⁷ Braudel 1980; Orren and Skowronek 1996.

⁴⁸ Bartolini 1993.

⁴⁹ Thelen and Conran 2015, 62–63.

⁵⁰ Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 2011, 18–80.

⁵¹ Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu 2009.

⁵² Carrier 2012.

⁵³ Trachtenberg 2006, 51–60.

⁵⁴ Grafton 1999; Lustick 1996.

⁵⁵ For an ATI application, see Kreuzer 2019.

standing than frequentists/experimental approaches. It arguably is more difficult for CHA to take it down because it is more purpose built and thus less standardized. And it has to be purpose built because the gathering and interpretation of evidence is oftentimes idiosyncratic and as are the various confounding effects of time.

The Modern Constructivist Tradition

Constructivism is a broad family of approaches that can be seen to include interpretivism below, but its “modern” strain holds an epistemological position on research explicitness that is distinct from both the historical and the interpretive traditions.⁵⁶ Modern constructivism overlaps substantially with the historical tradition, sharing its emphasis on a complex, temporally-situated world and thus typically its methods of contextually-situated, detective-style analysis of how action and outcomes resulted in particular cases. Importantly, however, it adds to the historical tradition's priors an ontology of social construction. Where leading figures in the historical tradition are no more interested in social construction than most scholars in the frequentist/experimentalist tradition,⁵⁷ modern constructivism centers on the notion that human action operates through interpretive social constructs: ideas, norms, beliefs, identities, cultures, discourses, practices, and other interpretive filters through which people perceive themselves and their surroundings and arrive at action.⁵⁸ The possibility of influential social constructs gives modern constructivism a still stronger emphasis on context and contingency than we find in the historical tradition's detective-style view of inquiry. From a modern-constructivist perspective, the historical tradition's practices might actually make most sense for investigation of complex non-human events, like a house fire or an elaborate mechanical failure. House fires are extremely complex, depending on very precise dynamics of sequencing and contextual interactions. We can only explain a particular house fire with careful case-specific detective work. Still, they unfold against an ontological background in which similar materials burn similarly under similar conditions.⁵⁹ Modern constructivists suggest that this does not hold for human action: people may interpret similar conditions very differently. Relative to the fire investigator, then, a homicide detective needs far more sensitivity to exactly what any bit of evidence might mean in the particular socially-constructed context.

Two key implications follow for views of research integrity. First, even more than in the historical tradition, modern constructivists' transparency concerns extend back into the first steps of research design. Good scholarship asks from the beginning, “What seemingly-unproblematic aspects of this context may actually reflect particular social constructs?” and scholars must make clear what they are problematizing and what they are not. This implies especially detailed attention to the precise social context of every conjecture, datum, or inference, and similarly specific parsing (in elaborate discussion and footnoting) of what exactly the scholar's claims and conclusions mean in a context. Second, the more we emphasize social construction, the more research standards seem better described in a vocabulary of “openness” or “explicitness” than of “transparency.” Scholars are humans like the actors they observe. An ontology of social construction suggests that at best scholars may try to be explicit and open about the questions they pose and the methods and analytic

⁵⁶ On modern and other constructivisms, Abdelal, Blyth & Parsons 2010; Adler 1997, 2013; Checkel 2004; Guzzini 2000; Hopf 1998; Hurd 2008.

⁵⁷ Consider Collier & Collier 1991; Mahoney 2001; Pierson 1994, 2004.

⁵⁸ Among many antecedents, Durkheim 1951[1897], Weber 1992[1905]; Simmel 2009[1908]; Wittgenstein 1953.

⁵⁹ Along these lines, Mackie 1965.

moves they make to answer them. The connotation of transparency—seeing through obstructions to reveal reality—suggests a misleading confidence in objective process and results.

However socially-constructed our scholarship may be, though, modern constructivists still share the preceding traditions' goal of advancing tentative but explicit truth claims. They typically design their research to compete empirically with scholarship from the more orthodox traditions. Behind this position—roughly, that we can *show* (tentatively) that the world is socially-constructed—lies some version of philosophical “realism.” Even if we have no unfiltered access to a real world, realists emphasize a tenable distinction between reality and what we believe about it,⁶⁰ or argue pragmatically that we should act “as if” such a distinction holds and “constrains our conceptual choices.”⁶¹ Thus modern constructivists' capacious and caveated view of research explicitness still remains in dialogue with more orthodox views of research integrity.

The Interpretive Tradition

The interpretive tradition shares modern constructivism's ontological emphasis on social construction but steps away from philosophical-realist views that some demonstrable correspondence to reality constrains our conceptual choices.⁶² In place of correspondence theories of truth (even in “as if” mode), its champions favor *coherence* theories of truth that emphasize how the concepts and referents in a theoretical narrative hang together. This does not entail rejection that a “real world” exists, but it does mean that interpretivists see little point in debating how much the world “really is” socially constructed.⁶³ Since we cannot usefully parse truth claims in correspondence to reality, we should focus on crafting coherent narratives that make sense internally and in context. Unlike modern constructivists, then, interpretivists eschew direct empirical debates with alternatives from orthodox traditions.

In and around our QTD discussions, we perceived widespread agreement that interpretivism implies standards about what constitutes more or less compelling research within the framework of coherence theories of truth. These standards may well vary across the many different strands within interpretivism – the QTD Working Group on Interpretive Methods discussed thirteen⁶⁴ – but all share basic features that imply such standards. Their work remains “world-guided,”⁶⁵ with dense references to empirical phenomena. Indeed, methods like ethnography, participant observation and genealogy are characterized by “thick,” detailed, painstaking empirical research to access particular socially-constructed contexts. Their many modes of analysis obviously draw on logic to build these empirics into distinctively coherent narratives about human action. Interpretive scholarship of all sorts routinely faces data-quality questions (i.e., how well do researchers speak relevant languages and know the cultural context?),

⁶⁰ Glymour 1980; Harre 1986; Newton-Smith 1981; Bhaskar 1986; Miller 1987; Wendt 1999; Wight 2006.

⁶¹ Putnam 1981; 1983; 1988; 1990. The cited phrase is from a summary of Putnam in Hawkesworth 2006, 35.

⁶² Exactly how interpretivism relates to realism is complex. Mary Hawkesworth suggests some compatibility, especially in Putnam's version of pragmatic realism (Hawkesworth 2006, 35). This seems plausible to us, but to our knowledge neither realism in general nor Putnam specifically receives substantial attention in any prominent political-science work of interpretivism. A footnote from Dvora Yanow and Schwartz-Shea contrasts interpretivism to critical realism (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013, ff 2, p. 140); Patrick Jackson's discussion (Jackson 2010) seems to define interpretivist work against the “mind-world dualism” that defines realism; and prominent scientific or critical realists distinguish themselves from interpretivism (Wendt 1999; Wight 2006; Kurki 2008).

⁶³ Winch 1958; Taylor 1971; Adcock 2003, Bevir 2003, Yanow 2003, Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2006; Bevir & Kedar 2008; Adler & Pouliot 2011; Davison 2015.

⁶⁴ Bjorkman, Wedeen, & Williams 2017.

⁶⁵ Williams 1985, 140.

methodological questions akin to case selection or sampling (do these empirics compellingly speak to the level or framing of the narrative?) and analytical questions about the construction of narratives (is each step in the account coherent with itself, its data, and the scholars' theoretical perspective?).

By contrast, we see little agreement in and around the QTD on whether it is worthwhile for interpretivists to render these standards explicit in ways that could constitute interpretivist alternatives to the DA-RT guidelines. It surely makes sense for interpretivists to reject the DA-RT vision of transparency, because a core point of the interpretive tradition is that we cannot ever "see" through our socially-constructed filters. When scholars rooted in the frequentist/experimental tradition exhort interpretivists to articulate "transparency standards," interpretivists perceive a "tyranny of light" that is at best naïve, and more likely to be a political move to delegitimize their work.⁶⁶ Moreover, the notion of making available "raw data" strikes interpretivists as odd: in their view data never has the autonomous status implied by "rawness," and should be read in holistic context as much as possible.⁶⁷ With respect to analysis, interpretivists challenge the possibility of laying out the analytical steps to allow "replication"; as Katherine Cramer puts it, "I do not think it possible to remove me from the analysis."⁶⁸

At the same time, there are reasons why many interpretivists might be especially interested in prioritizing openness and explicitness. Amid fragmented subjectivities, in a world that cannot reveal itself to us, scholarly contributions presumably depend on communicating to the widest range of others how exactly the scholar arrives at a distinct narrative.⁶⁹ That is, it seems that a careful interpretivist like Cramer is actually very interested in highlighting as explicitly as possible how her analysis reflects her: her book on political "resentment" in rural Wisconsin won the 2016 APSA Sartori Award for qualitative methods in part because it is exceptionally explicit about how she gathered data, drew conclusions from it, and considered her own place in the process.⁷⁰ Precisely because the best interpretivists today can and do claim to showcase their own models of research integrity, it seems that interpretivists more generally might welcome discussion of the standards these exemplars set. There are limits to how well students or colleagues can infer guidance from these research projects in the absence of direct public explication of such standards. We have difficulty understanding, then, many comments on the QTD to the effect that interpretivists' standards are best articulated and deployed behind the veil of peer review.⁷¹

As leading interpretive methodologist Dvora Yanow put it in 2003, "...we can, I think, do a better job than we have to date of making procedures and rationales more explicit, which will more fully reveal their systematicity. We need writings that are more reflexively explicit and transparent about how it is we do what we do, whether in field-work mode or in 'desk-work' or 'text-work' modes, and we need to continue to develop an articulated set of criteria based in interpretive presuppositions for judging the 'goodness' of interpretive research."⁷² Though Yanow has since offered many cogent criticisms of DA-RT, and then recommended abstention from the QTD,⁷³ the work that she and others continue to produce as guidance for interpretive methodology

⁶⁶ Pachirat 2015.

⁶⁷ Cramer 2015; Pachirat 2015.

⁶⁸ Cramer 2015, 19.

⁶⁹ Parsons 2016.

⁷⁰ Cramer 2016.

⁷¹ Bjorkman, Wedeen & Williams 2017; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2016.

⁷² Yanow 2003, 11; her quote contained internal cites to Brower, Abolafia, & Carr 2000; and Erlandson et al. 1993.

⁷³ Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2016.

clearly suggests a continued commitment to the spirit of this earlier call.⁷⁴ We remain hopeful that the expansive and inclusive framing of the QTD will encourage interpretivists to read themselves into the public dialogue about research integrity.

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⁷⁴ As in Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2013.

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Epistemological and Ontological Priors: *Explicating the Perils of Transparency*

Final Report of QTD Working Group I.1, Subgroup B

December 2018

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Within contemporary epistemology, knowledge is defined as an “intersubjective product constructed within communal practices of acknowledgment, correction, and critique.”¹ This definition has the virtue of emphasizing that knowledge is a human product, generated by fallible inquirers through processes of interrogation and contestation that involve many people over long periods of time. The reference to “practices of acknowledgment” suggests plurality: there are multiple forms of knowledge (e.g., perception, memory, intuition, introspection, recollection, recognition, reflection, conceptualization, corroboration, contemplation), which cannot be reduced to a singular kind. As human conventions, practices have histories; they change over time. Practices also have standards internal to them that provide criteria for assessing quality. The criteria for judging recognition (of a form of government, a pattern of discrimination, a trajectory of development) will differ from the criteria for assessing conceptualization (adequacy of framing, theorization, representation, demarcation of boundaries). Assessing the validity of knowledge claims, then, requires attention to specific ways of knowing that are situated within particular social, cultural, and historical practices, which afford determinate standards of evaluation.

The discipline of political science encompasses multiple research communities, which have grown out of and rely upon different epistemological and ontological presuppositions. Recent debates about transparency raise important questions about which of these research communities will be accredited within the discipline, whose values, norms, and methods of knowledge production will gain ascendancy and whose will be marginalized. Although the language of “transparency” makes it appear that these debates are apolitical, simply elaborating standards that all political scientists share, the intensity and content of recent contestations about DA-RT, JETS, and QTD attest to the profoundly political nature of these methodological discussions.

Proponents of transparency insist that “it does not impose a uniform set of standards on political scientists.”² Transparency implies only “openness [that] requires everyone to show their work, but what they show and how they show it varies. These differences are grounded in epistemic commitments and the rule-bound expectations of the tradition in which scholars operate.”³ Despite such minimalist and inclusive framing, discussions of production transparency (providing an account of the procedures used to collect data), analytic transparency (clearly explicating links connecting data to conclusions), and data access (sharing full and unprocessed records of “raw” empirical observations) reflect presumptions about scholarship that are far from universal. As a regulative ideal for political science research, transparency is presumed to free the discipline from dishonesty and deceit, while fostering scientific norms of clarity, replicability and reproducibility of findings. Transparency, then, links ethical research to practices associated with certain versions of empiricism—an irony, given that the earliest celebration of knowledge as perviousness to light was found in Plato’s allegory of the cave, where the sun is envisioned to be the “Good” that illuminates the real.⁴ Whether the arguments are drawn from Plato or from contemporary debates about DA-RT, grounding knowledge in visual metaphors, transparency logics associate research excellence with contentious assumptions about the nature and capacity of knowers, processes of knowing, and the kinds of objects that can be said to be known.

¹ Code 1991, 224.

² Lupia and Elman 2014, 20.

³ Elman and Kapiszeewski 2014, 44.

⁴ Plato, *Republic* VII, 514a, 2 to 517 a,7.

In this report, we trace the epistemological and ontological assumptions that have shaped diverse research communities within the political science, situating “transparency” in relation to classical (Aristotelian), modern (Baconian) and twentieth-century (positivist, critical rationalist, and postpositivist) versions of empiricism. We then go on to discuss how recent discussions of transparency accredit certain empirical approaches by collapsing the scope of empirical investigation, while also focusing on a truncated model of the research process.

Early Versions of Empiricism

Although classical conceptions of empiricism start from the premise that the senses are the primary source of knowledge, they did not rely primarily or exclusively on visuality as the means of knowledge acquisition. On the contrary, they devoted great attention to detailing the manifold obstructions that curtail accurate perception of the world. Although Aristotle (384-322 BCE) mapped the process of induction – repeated observation of particular cases in order to arrive at a generalization – he insisted that individuals must be trained to observe the world so as not to be misled by transitory appearances. By asking the right questions and making careful distinctions, empirical observation could generate accurate knowledge, but that knowledge was neither simple nor direct. Indeed, trained observers could produce very different kinds of explanation of observed phenomena. Where “genetic explanation” is oriented toward the past, tracing the origin of a phenomenon, identifying its “genesis;” “teleological” explanation is future-oriented, seeking to explain the goal or end toward which something is developing. Where a “material” explanation provides an account of the “matter” or “substances” of which something is made; a formal explanation provides an account of the various stages of actualization over the course of a developmental process, attending to particular forms assumed by a developing organism; and an “efficient” explanation provides an account of the mechanisms that cause the transformations from one stage to the next, locating the “engine” of change. Because each of these forms of explanation focuses on a different level of analysis, the accounts they generate are markedly different. The differences in these accounts do not imply, however, subjectivity in perception. On the contrary, each form of explanation generates objective information about a different aspect of existence. According to Aristotle, a comprehensive account encompassing all these modes of explanation is required to fully understand a particular organism.⁵

Through his studies of diverse subjects, Aristotle came to insist that different kinds of phenomena admit of different kinds of knowledge. Theoretical knowledge, which involves the contemplation of things as they are with no attempt to change them, is possible in the domains of physics, mathematics, and metaphysics—domains that are not observable with the naked eye and in which notions of transparency are quite misplaced. In contrast to theoretical knowledge’s recognition and acceptance of things as they are, practical knowledge involves the use of reason to guide choices in order to live well. Practical knowledge used to enable individuals to attain happiness is, according to Aristotle, the science of ethics. Practical knowledge of what is necessary to foster the good of communities is the science of politics. Aristotle also identified a third kind of knowledge, productive knowledge, a kind of “know how” essential to making things. The spheres of making and the kinds of “things” that could be made in Aristotle’s view are far more expansive than are typically associated with technical knowledge in contemporary understandings of production and construction. *Techne*, the term that refers to “making” in classical Greek, referred to the knowledge that artisans used to produce goods essential to survival, that poets and

⁵ Aristotle develops his doctrine of the four causes in *Physics* II 3 and *Metaphysics* V 2.

playwrights used to produce pathos, bathos, and catharsis in their audiences, and that rhetoricians used to persuade listeners to accept their arguments. Thus, Aristotle’s conception of productive knowledge is relevant not only to forms of knowledge that support industrial production and information technology. It also informs accounts of the manifold practices through which categories of difference such as race, class, and gender are produced and maintained, and the creative and symbolic production of cultural meanings. On Aristotle’s view, the criterion for truth in the realm of practical and productive knowledge is efficacy. The proof of the truth of practical reason’s ethical arguments is that they do indeed produce individual happiness. Similarly, political knowledge succeeds in promoting the well-being of communities and states. The proof of *techne*’s “know how” is that it succeeds in producing precisely the products, emotions, and convictions that it sets out to produce in particular instances. Practical and productive knowledge succeed because they get the world right, inaccurate or mistaken views fail because they do not.⁶

Francis Bacon (1561–1626), the “father of modern science,” declared all knowledge his province as he set out to accredit certain modes of inductive inquiry, which he envisioned as a way to overcome the undue reverence for the past. Yet he acknowledged that for individuals to be able to “open their eyes and minds to the world around them,” significant obstacles would have to be overcome. In *New Organon or True Directions Concerning the Interpretation of Nature* (1620), Bacon enumerated multiple sources of error that impeded the acquisition and progress of empirical knowledge and devised tools to identify, eliminate, or control sources of potential deception and misunderstanding. Bacon called these various sources of error, “idols” from the Greek, *eidolon*—“images” or “phantoms” that cloud the mind and impair an objective apprehension of external reality. He identified four distinct idols, which must be purged to prepare the way for empirical inquiry. Although Bacon’s references to “opening eyes” and “clearing the mind” might suggest parallels with contemporary notions of transparency, he did not believe that even the most scrupulous adherence to “scientific method” could enable a knower to escape significant obstacles to knowledge.⁷

“Idols of the Tribe” refer to basic operations of the human mind, which Bacon understood as fundamental “weaknesses of human nature.” As such, they cannot be eliminated, although they can be controlled by adherence to “scientific method.” One of the chief human weaknesses, according to Bacon, is that the human senses themselves are dull and easily deceived. In addition to sensory dullness, Bacon suggested that we tend to rely too heavily on immediate perceptions, rushing to conclusions and making premature judgments that are more likely to be wrong than right. Human observers also tend to impose more order on observed phenomena than actually exists. We think we “see” similitude when there is singularity or “perceive” regularity when there is randomness. Humans also have a profound tendency to “wishful thinking” in Bacon’s view. We tend to accept, believe, and seek conclusive “proof” for what we prefer to be true. These troubling tendencies can be partially counteracted by rigorous adherence to inductive techniques, which require careful and painstaking accumulation of evidence by multiple observers who subject one another’s claims to strict scrutiny.

“Idols of the Cave” involve peculiar distortions, prejudices, and erroneous beliefs that arise from an individual’s upbringing within a particular family within a specific tradition and culture.

⁶ For Aristotle’s discussions of theoretical, practical, and productive knowledge, see *Topics* 145a15-16; *Physics* 192b8-12; *De Caelo* 298a27-32, *De Anima* 403a27-b2; *Metaphysics*. 1025b25, 1026a18-19, 1064a16-19, b1-3; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a26-28, 1141b29-32.

⁷ Bacon discusses the Idols in *Novum Organum*, Book I, Aphorisms XXIII, XXXVIII - LXVIII,

Whereas the idols of the tribe pertain to all human beings, idols of the cave are social in nature yet vary from one person to another. Tied to an individual's position within a society, education, and personal history, idols of the cave could include biases linked to particular disciplinary training or theoretical orientation, a tendency to rely upon a few select "authorities" to justify one's stance, or to interpret phenomena in terms of one's own narrow specialization. To "dislodge" the idols of the cave, Bacon recommended the use of skepticism as a resource for the individual inquirer. Whatever one's mind "seizes and dwells upon with peculiar satisfaction is to be held in suspicion"⁸ and interrogated at length. Distortions of this sort can also be partially corrected by the practice of science as a public enterprise, involving many people, who test one another's claims and subject them to rigorous empirical tests.

Bacon's third and "most troublesome" type of obstruction to the clear apprehension of the world is related to language. Bacon suggests that language has the power to distort perception because it is not the neutral tool that many believe it to be. On the contrary language can shape understanding in a variety of ways. Everyday meanings of words may exact a powerful hold on people. Some terms can be markedly misleading because they have so many different referents that their meaning in a particular instance is always ambiguous. Bacon also pointed out that when technical meanings of terms proliferate, scholars can devote all their time and attention to fights over the meanings of words and lose sight of larger questions about processes in the world.

The final source of error identified by Bacon suggested that philosophical systems themselves can distort an individual's perceptions of the world. He identified three distinctive kinds of mistakes that generate flawed worldviews: casual observation and anecdotal evidence; philosophical systems based on a single key insight that is generalized to explain phenomena of all kinds, thereby producing a pattern of distortion; potent mixtures of philosophy and theology that impede objective perception of the external world.

In delineating these obstacles to transparency, Bacon anticipated twentieth-century discussions of the theoretical constitution of facticity, the argument that theoretical presuppositions structure every step of the research process, from the most elementary perceptions through the accreditation of particular forms of evidence and explanation. In contrast to these more recent debates, however, Bacon argued that these idols could be controlled. Induction, the systematic observation of particulars as a means to arrive at defensible generalizations, coupled with experimental methods designed to test the validity of inductive generalizations, could generate accurate knowledge of the world. Refutations of mistaken generalizations or axioms could also serve as a "ladder to the intellect" for they indicated wrong directions that should not be pursued any further. Moreover, the use of scientific knowledge to develop instruments to help humans solve problems and improve their condition also generated an important means to demarcate truth from falsity. Bacon anticipated the "pragmatic theory of truth," which links the assessment of knowledge claims to outcomes. On this view, both theories and technological innovations are true if "they work," if they enable people to achieve the objectives that they set for themselves.

In the eighteenth century, David Hume (1711-1776) launched a strenuous campaign to debunk the foundationalist pretenses of rationalism and empiricism. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Hume provided compelling demonstrations that neither deductive logic, the tool endorsed by rationalists for the preservation of truth, nor inductive logic, the instrument accredited by empiricists for the discovery of truth, could perform up to the

⁸ Bacon 1861. Book I, Aphorism LVIII.

expectations of their respective proponents. Following the demarcation of domains of knowledge developed by rationalists and empiricists, Hume accepted that there are two possible kinds of knowledge: “relations of ideas” and “matters of fact.”⁹ Hume was willing to grant that deduction operates admirably in some contexts such as the system of Euclidean geometry where the “relations of ideas” are governed by logical necessity. For example, a triangle is a three-sided figure. It would be logically impossible then for any four-sided figure to be a triangle. We can have “absolute certainty” then about what a triangle is and what it is not. In cases of such “relations of ideas,” tautological definitions establish the “truth” of the major premise and demarcate the properties of the geometric figure that may be deduced through syllogistic demonstrations. If rationalists restricted their claims about knowledge to the sphere of geometry or to a limited set of tautological “relations of ideas,” their case for deduction would be defensible. The problem arises, according to Hume, when rationalists claim that deduction can provide absolute knowledge about the material world, a domain governed by contingency rather than logical necessity.¹⁰

As a description of the material world, contingency captures the possibility that things could be other than they currently are. The sun “rises” each day, but not because it is logically required to do so. The physical forces governing the sun and the earth’s movement around it could change. As a star, the sun could cease to exist. As a planet, the earth could also cease to exist. What we think we know about the sun and the earth are not a matter of tautological definition. Thus, the truth-preserving power of deductive logic, which depends on the truth of the major and minor premises in a syllogism, does not hold in cases where contingent propositions supplant tautologies in syllogistic reasoning. In the absence of tautologies, which are the key to “absolute certainty” in deductive arguments, rationalists cannot guarantee the truth of any claim they advance about the world we live in.

Hume pointed out that claims about the natural and social world rest on inductive generalizations, which are themselves prone to error in the face of contingency. In a famous discussion of the “problem of induction,” Hume demonstrated that it is not possible to have sufficient empirical evidence to prove conclusively any inductive generalization.¹¹ The quest for absolute certainty grounded on observation of particular cases is foiled in a variety of ways. To achieve the status of a universal truth, an inductive generalization would have to hold for all past, present, and future cases. No matter how much inductive evidence we have to support a generalization, however, it will never be enough to cover all past and future instances. Moreover, in a world of contingency, things can and do change. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the future will be the same as the present or past.¹² Any number of factors could cause a generalization based on past evidence to fail to hold in the future. Contrary to the optimism of Aristotle and Bacon, Hume suggested that the impossibility of gathering universal evidence as well as contingency undermine induction as an absolute ground for truth claims.

Hume did not rest content with a demonstration of the limitations of deductive and inductive logic. He also developed an argument that the human mind operated according to principles at great remove from what is commonly considered “reason.” Hume agreed with empiricists that thoughts or ideas enter the mind through primary sensory impressions. He suggested, however, that the mind actively organizes these perceptions according to three

⁹ Hume 1748 [1955], 40.

¹⁰ Hume 1748 [1955], 40.

¹¹ Hume 1748 [1955], 41-46.

¹² Hume 1748 [1955], 49.

principles: resemblance, contiguity, and causation.¹³ Breaking with a long line of thinkers who characterized the mind as a passive medium that simply receives impressions from the external world, Hume argued that the mind actively imposes order on our perceptions, thereby structuring our understanding of the world. Indeed, he suggests that these principles support inferences that enable our minds to move beyond immediate experience and memory. Indeed, Hume notes that causal inferences, in particular, expand our knowledge of matters of fact beyond our sensory impressions and our memories of them.¹⁴

Breaking the idea of cause and effect into its component parts, Hume suggested that a causal relationship typically implies priority in time (the cause precedes the effect), contiguity (the cause triggers the effect by temporal and spatial touching as when pool balls move when physically hit by a pool cue), and necessary connection (the effect necessarily follows from the cause; its appearance is not arbitrary or coincidental). Following empiricist claims that knowledge of matters of fact derive from sensory observation, Hume tried to locate the primary sensory impressions from which the constitutive ideas of cause and effect arise. He pointed out that priority in time and contiguity are empirically observable, but necessary connection is not. “Constant conjunction” or “correlation” in the language of statistics – two things occurring together – is all that is empirically observable in a putative causal observation. Correlations, however, are notoriously fallible.¹⁵

According to Hume it is a “habit of the mind” or a “mental custom” that imposes “necessity” upon constant conjunction in order to “render our experience useful to us.”¹⁶ Rather than allowing us to be paralyzed by skepticism or by a lack of adequate evidence, our minds lead us to believe there is a causal connection when we observe constant conjunction. Any conflation of correlation with causation is based on a presumption that past experience is a reliable guide to the future because the future will be like the past, a presumption belied by contingency. Thus, Hume points out that our convictions about the reliability of our causal inferences rest upon mental custom, not rational argument. In a world of contingency there is no reason that the future should replicate the past. Custom not reason makes us expect a future that conforms to our expectations. A simple mental habit shores up our confidence in our fallible perceptions of constant conjunction, a mental habit with certain affinities to wishful thinking.

Twentieth-Century Debates in the Philosophy of Science

Positivism

The term, positivism, was first coined by the French sociologist Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who suggested that scientific understanding operates in the realm of the “positive,” which denotes “real” or “actual” existence. Comte suggested that scientists must eschew the metaphysical and theological realms and restrict their investigations to observable facts and the relations that hold among observed phenomena. Within this finite sphere of the empirically observable, scientific inquiry could discover the “laws” governing empirical events. In the early twentieth century, philosophers of science known as the “Vienna Circle” developed “logical positivism,” which further restricted the possibilities for valid knowledge by elaborating the “verification criterion of

¹³ Hume 1748 [1955], 39, 64-68.

¹⁴ Hume 1748 [1955], 50-51, 68.

¹⁵ Hume 1748 [1955], 56, 86-89.

¹⁶ Hume 1748 [1955], 58.

meaning.” Focusing on how to establish the truth of specific statements about the empirical world, the verification criterion stipulated that a contingent proposition is meaningful, if and only if it can be empirically verified, that is, if there is an empirical method for deciding if the proposition is true or false.

Within the natural sciences and the social sciences, positivist commitments generated a number of methodological techniques designed to ensure the truth – not of propositions – but of scientific investigations. Chief among these is the dichotomous division of the world into the realms of the “empirical” and the “non-empirical.” The empirical realm, comprising all that can be corroborated by the senses, is circumscribed as the legitimate sphere of scientific investigation. As a residual category, the non-empirical encompasses everything else – religion, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, and evaluative discourse in general, as well as myth, dogma and superstition – and is relegated beyond the sphere of science. Within this frame of reference, science, operating within the realm of the observable, restricting its focus to descriptions, explanations and predictions that are intersubjectively testable, can achieve objective knowledge. The specific techniques requisite to the achievement of objective knowledge have been variously defined by positivism and critical rationalism.

On the grounds that only those knowledge claims founded directly upon observable experience can be genuine, positivists deployed the “verification criterion of meaning” to differentiate not only between science and non-science, but between science and nonsense.¹⁷ In the positivist view, any statement that could not be verified by reference to experience constituted nonsense: it was literally meaningless. The implications of the verification criterion for a model of science were manifold. All knowledge was believed to be dependent upon observation, thus any claims, whether theological, metaphysical, philosophical, ethical, normative or aesthetic, which were not rooted in empirical observation were rejected as meaningless. The sphere of science was thereby narrowly circumscribed and scientific knowledge was accredited as the only valid knowledge. In addition, induction, a method of knowledge acquisition grounded upon observation of particulars as the foundation for empirical generalizations, was taken to provide the essential logic of science.

The task of science was understood to comprise the inductive discovery of regularities existing in the external world. Scientific research sought to organize in economical fashion those regularities that experience presents in order to facilitate explanation and prediction. To promote this objective, positivists endorsed and employed a technical vocabulary, clearly differentiating facts (empirically verifiable propositions) and hypotheses (empirically verifiable propositions asserting the existence of relationships among observed phenomena) from laws (empirically confirmed propositions asserting an invariable sequence or association among observed phenomena) and theories (interrelated systems of laws possessing explanatory power). Moreover, the positivist logic of scientific inquiry dictated a specific sequence of activities as definitive of “the scientific method.”

According to this model, the scientific method begins with the carefully controlled, neutral observation of empirical events. Sustained observation over time would enable the regularities or patterns of relationships in observed events to be revealed and thereby provide for the formulation of hypotheses. Once formulated, hypotheses were to be subjected to systematic empirical tests. Those hypotheses which received external confirmation through this process of rigorous testing

¹⁷ Joergenson 1951; Kraft 1952; Ayer 1959.

could be elevated to the status of scientific laws. Once identified, scientific laws provided the foundation for scientific explanation, which, according to the precepts of the “covering law model,” consisted in demonstrating that the event(s) to be explained could have been expected, given certain initial conditions (C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots) and the general laws of the field (L_1, L_2, L_3, \dots). Within the framework of the positivist conception of science, the discovery of scientific laws also provided the foundation for prediction, which consisted in demonstrating that an event would occur given the future occurrence of certain initial conditions and the operation of the general laws of the field. Under the covering law model, then, explanation and prediction have the same logical form, only the time factor differs: explanation pertains to past events; prediction pertains to future events.

Positivists were also committed to the principle of the ‘unity of science’, i.e., to the belief that the logic of scientific inquiry was the same for all fields. Whether natural phenomena or social phenomena were the objects of study, the method for acquiring valid knowledge and the requirements for explanation and prediction remained the same. Once a science had progressed sufficiently to accumulate a body of scientific laws organized in a coherent system of theories, it could be said to have achieved a stage of “maturity” that made explanation and prediction possible. Although the logic of mature science remained inductive with respect to the generation of new knowledge, the logic of scientific explanation was deductive. Under the covering law model, causal explanation, the demonstration of the necessary and sufficient conditions of an event, involved the deductive subsumption of particular observations under a general law. In addition, deduction also played a central role in efforts to explain laws and theories: the explanation of a law involved its deductive subsumption under a theory; and explanation of one theory involved its deductive subsumption under wider theories.

Critiques of Positivism

The primary postulates of positivism have been subjected to rigorous and devastating critiques.¹⁸ Neither the logic of induction nor the verification criterion of meaning can accomplish positivist objectives; neither can guarantee the acquisition of truth. As Hume demonstrated the inductive method is incapable of guaranteeing the validity of scientific knowledge because of the “problem of induction.” Because empirical events are contingent, i.e., because the future can always be different from the past, generalizations based upon limited observations are necessarily incomplete and, as such, highly fallible. For this reason, inductive generalizations cannot be presumed to be true. Nor can “confirmation” or “verification” of such generalizations by reference to additional cases provide proof of their universal validity. For, as Hume made clear, the notion of universal validity invokes all future, as well as all past and present, occurrences of a phenomenon; yet no matter how many confirming instances of a phenomenon can be found in the past or in the present, these can never alter the possibility that the future could be different, that the future could disprove an inductively derived empirical generalization. Thus, a demonstration of the truth of an empirical generalization must turn upon the identification of a “necessary connection” establishing a causal relation among observed phenomena.

The notion of necessary connection raises serious problems for an empirical account of science, however. If the notion of necessity invoked is logical necessity, then the empirical nature of science is jeopardized. If, on the other hand, positivism appeals to an empirical demonstration of necessity, it falls afoul of the standard established by the verification criterion of meaning, for

¹⁸ Popper 1959; 1972a; 1972b.

the “necessity” required as proof of any causal claim cannot be empirically observed. As Hume pointed out, empirical observation reveals “constant conjunction;” it does not and cannot reveal necessary connection. As a positivist logic of scientific inquiry, then, induction encounters two serious problems: it is incapable of providing validation for the truth of its generalizations and it is internally inconsistent, for any attempt to demonstrate the validity of a causal claim invokes a conception of necessary connection that violates the verification criterion of meaning.

The positivist conception of the scientific method also rests upon a flawed psychology of perception. In suggesting that the scientific method commences with “neutral” observation, positivists invoke a conception of “manifest truth,” which attempts to reduce the problem of the validity of knowledge to an appeal to the authority of the source of that knowledge (for example, “the facts ‘speak’ for themselves”). The belief that the unmediated apprehension of the “given” by a passive or receptive observer is possible, however, misconstrues both the nature of perception and the nature of the world. The human mind is not passive but active; it does not merely receive an image of the given, but rather imposes order upon the external world through a process of selection, interpretation and imagination. Observation is always linguistically and culturally mediated. It involves the creative imposition of expectations, anticipations and conjectures upon external events.

Scientific observation, too, is necessarily theory-laden. It begins not from “nothing,” nor from the “neutral” perception of given relations, but rather from immersion in a scientific tradition which provides frames of reference or conceptual schemes that organize reality and shape the problems for further investigation. To grasp the role of theory in structuring scientific observation, however, requires a revised conception of “theory” – a conception altogether incompatible with notions of transparency. Contrary to the positivist notion that theory is the result of observation, the result of systematization of a series of inductive generalizations, the result of the accumulation of an interrelated set of scientific laws, theory is logically prior to the observation of any similarities or regularities in the world; indeed, theory is precisely that which makes the identification of regularities possible. Moreover, scientific theories involve risk to an extent that is altogether incompatible with the positivist view of theories as summaries of empirical generalizations. Scientific theories involve risky predictions of things that have never been seen and hence cannot be deduced logically from observation statements. Theories structure scientific observation in a manner altogether incompatible with the positivist requirement of neutral perception, and they involve unobservable propositions that violate the verification criterion of meaning: abstract theoretical entities cannot be verified by reference to empirical observation.

That theoretical propositions violate the verification criterion is not in itself damning, for the verification criterion can be impugned on a number of grounds. As a mechanism for the validation of empirical generalizations, the verification criterion fails because of the problem of induction. As a scientific principle for the demarcation of the “meaningful” from the “meaningless,” the verification criterion is self-referentially destructive. In repudiating all that is not empirically verifiable as nonsense, the verification criterion repudiates itself, for it is not a statement derived from empirical observation nor is it a tautology. Rigid adherence to the verification criterion then would mandate that it be rejected as metaphysical nonsense. Thus, the positivist conflation of that which is not amenable to empirical observation with nonsense simply will not withstand scrutiny. Much (including the verification criterion itself) that cannot be empirically verified can be understood and all that can be understood is meaningful.

Critical Rationalism

As an alternative to the defective positivist conception of science, Karl Popper (1902-1994) advanced “critical rationalism.”¹⁹ On this view, scientific theories are bold conjectures that scientists impose upon the world. Drawing insights from manifold sources to solve particular problems, scientific theories involve abstract and unobservable propositions that predict what may happen as well as what may not happen. Thus, scientific theories generate predictions that are incompatible with certain possible results of observation, i.e., they “prohibit” certain occurrences by proclaiming that some things could not happen. As such, scientific theories put the world to the test and demand a reply. Precisely because scientific theories identify a range of conditions that must hold, a series of events that must occur and a set of occurrences that are in principle impossible, they can clash with observation; they are empirically testable. While no number of confirming instances could ever prove a theory to be true due to the problem of induction, one disconfirming instance is sufficient to disprove a theory. If scientific laws are construed as statements of prohibitions, forbidding the occurrence of certain empirical events, then they can be definitively refuted by the occurrence of one such event. Thus, according to Popper, “falsification” provides a mechanism by which scientists can test their conjectures against reality and learn from their mistakes. Falsification also provides the core of Popper’s revised conception of the scientific method.

According to the “hypothetico-deductive model,” the scientist always begins with a problem. To resolve the problem, the scientist generates a theory, a conjecture or hypothesis, which can be tested by deducing its empirical consequences and measuring them against the world. Once the logical implications of a theory have been deduced and converted into predictions concerning empirical events, the task of science is falsification. In putting theories to the test of experience, scientists seek to falsify predictions, for that alone enables them to learn from their mistakes. On this view, the rationality of science is embodied in the method of trial and error, a method which allows error to be purged through the elimination of false theories.

In mandating that all scientific theories be tested, in stipulating that the goal of science is the falsification of erroneous views, the criterion of falsifiability provides a means by which to reconcile the fallibility of human knowers with a conception of objective knowledge. The validity of scientific claims does not turn on a demand for an impossible neutrality on the part of individual scientists, on the equally impossible requirement that all prejudice, bias, pre-judgment, expectation or value be purged from the process of observation or on the implausible assumption that the truth is manifest. The adequacy of scientific theories is judged in concrete problem contexts in terms of their ability to solve problems and their ability to withstand increasingly difficult empirical tests. Those theories which withstand multiple intersubjective efforts to falsify them are “corroborated,” identified as “laws” that with varying degrees of verisimilitude capture the structure of reality, and for that reason are tentatively accepted as “true.” But in keeping with the critical attitude of science even the strongest corroboration for a theory is not accepted as conclusive proof. For Popperian critical rationalism posits that truth lies beyond human reach. As a regulative ideal that guides scientific activity truth may be approximated, but it can never be established by human authority. Nevertheless, error can be objectively identified. Thus, informed by a conception of truth as a “regulative ideal” and operating in accordance with the requirements of the criterion of

¹⁹ The material in this section summarizes key arguments in Popper 1972a; 1972b.

falsifiability, science can progress by the incremental correction of errors and the gradual accretion of objective problem-solving knowledge.

Although Popper subjected many of the central tenets of logical positivism to systematic critique, his conception of "critical rationalism" shares sufficient ground with positivist approaches to the philosophy of science that it is typically considered to be a qualified modification of, rather than a comprehensive alternative to positivism.²⁰ Indeed, Popper's conception of the hypothetico-deductive model has been depicted as the "orthodox" positivist conception of scientific theory.²¹ Both positivist and Popperian approaches to science share a belief in the centrality of logical deduction to scientific analysis; both conceive scientific theories to be deductively related systems of propositions; both accept a deductive account of scientific explanation; both treat explanation and prediction as equivalent concepts; and both are committed to a conception of scientific progress dependent upon the use of the hypothetico-deductive method of testing scientific claims.²² In addition, both positivist and Popperian conceptions of science are committed to the "correspondence theory of truth" and its corollary assumption that the objectivity of science ultimately rests upon an appeal to the facts. Both are committed to the institutionalization of the fact/value dichotomy in order to establish the determinate ground of science. Both accept that once safely ensconced within the bounds of the empirical realm, science is grounded upon a sufficiently firm foundation to provide for the accumulation of knowledge, the progressive elimination of error and the gradual accretion of useful solutions to technical problems. And although Popper suggested that reason could be brought to bear upon evaluative questions, he accepted the fundamental positivist principle that, ultimately, value choices rested upon non-rational factors.

Many of the more common research strategies developed within the natural sciences and the social sciences in the twentieth century – like those advocated by proponents of DA-RT – draw upon either positivist or Popperian conceptions of the scientific method.²³ The legacy of positivism is apparent in behaviorist methods that emphasize data collection, hypothesis formulation and testing, and other formal aspects of systematic empirical enterprise, as well as in approaches which stress scientific, inductive methods, statistical models and quantitative research designs. It surfaces in conceptions of explanation defined in deductive terms and in commitments to the equivalence of explanation and prediction. It emerges in claims that social science must be modeled upon the methods of the natural sciences for those alone are capable of generating valid knowledge. It is unmistakable in the assumption that "facts" are unproblematic, that they are immediately observable or "given," and hence their apprehension requires no interpretation. It is embodied in the presumption that confirmation or verification provides a criterion of proof of the validity of empirical claims, thereby sustaining calls for replicability, reproducible research findings, and data sharing. And it is conspicuous in the repudiation of values as arbitrary preferences, irrational commitments or meaningless propositions that lie altogether beyond the realm of rational analysis.

Popper's insistence upon the centrality of problem solving and incrementalism also resonates in a variety of approaches to scientific inquiry and social analysis. Popperian assumptions surface in the recognition that observation and analysis are necessarily theory-laden,

²⁰ Stockman 1983.

²¹ Moon 1975: 143-187.

²² Stockman 1983: 76; Brown 1977: 65-75.

²³ Other post-Kantian epistemic alternatives grounded in American pragmatism, Hegelian thought, Marxian dialectics, and European phenomenology have influenced constructivism and interpretivism within the social sciences, but they have been largely ignored in mainstream political science. See Bernstein 1976, 1983; and Lukes 1999, 2013.

as well as in the commitment to intersubjective testing as the appropriate means by which to deflect the influence of individual bias from scientific studies. They are manifest in the substitution of testability for verifiability as the appropriate criterion for the demarcation of scientific hypotheses and in the invocation of falsification and the elimination of error as the strategy for the accumulation of knowledge. They are obvious in the critique of excessive optimism concerning the possibility of attaining “absolute truth” about the world through the deployment of inductive, quantitative techniques, in the less pretentious quest for “useful knowledge,” and in the insistence that truth constitutes a regulative ideal rather than a current possession of science. They are conspicuous in arguments that the hypothetico-deductive model is appropriate for scientific research and in appeals for the development of a critical, non-dogmatic attitude among researchers.

Post-Positivist Presupposition Theories of Science

Although Popper’s critical rationalism is a significant improvement over earlier positivist conceptions of science, it too suffers from a number of grave defects. The most serious challenge to critical rationalism has been raised by post-positivist presupposition theories of science.²⁴ Presupposition theories of science concur with Popper’s depiction of observation as “theory-laden.” They agree that “there is more to seeing than meets the eye”²⁵ and that perception involves more than the passive reception of allegedly manifest sense-data. Thus, they raise significant challenges to research approaches grounded in the metaphor of transparency. Presupposition theories suggest that perception depends upon a constellation of theoretical presuppositions that structure observation, accrediting particular stimuli as significant and specific configurations as meaningful. Within this frame, observation is not only theory-laden but theory is essential to, indeed, constitutive of all human knowledge. Thus post-positivist presupposition theorists reject “instrumentalist” conceptions of theory, the view that theories are merely “tools” intentionally created to solve problems, consciously held, fully explicable, and easily abandoned when falsified. Instead they suggest that we live within theories that provide the criteria of intelligibility for the world and for ourselves, structuring our perceptions and understandings in ways that defy our conscious grasp.

Within recent work in the philosophy of science, the epistemological and ontological implications of the post-positivist understanding of theory have been the subject of extensive debate. Arguing that the theoretical constitution of human knowledge has ontological as well as epistemological implications, “anti-realists” have suggested that there is no point in asking about the nature of the world independent of our theories about it.²⁶ Consequently, the truth status of theories must be bracketed. Anti-realists have insisted that theories need not be true to be good, i.e., to solve problems.²⁷ Metaphysical “realists,” on the other hand, have emphasized that even if the only access to the world is through theories about it, a logical distinction can still be upheld between reality and how we conceive it, between truth and what we believe.²⁸ Hilary Putnam has advanced “pragmatic realism” as a more tenable doctrine.²⁹ Putnam accepts that all concepts are theoretically constituted and culturally mediated and that the “world” does not “determine” what

²⁴ Polanyi 1958; Humphreys 1969; Suppe 1977; Brown 1977; Bernstein 1978; 1983; Hesse 1980; Longino 1990; Foucault 1994; Stockman 1983; Gunnell 1986; 1995; 1998.

²⁵ Humphreys 1969, 61.

²⁶ Laudan 1990.

²⁷ van Fraassen 1980; Churchland and Hooker 1985.

²⁸ Harre 1986.

²⁹ Putnam 1981; 1983; 1988; 1990.

can be said about it. Nonetheless, it makes sense on pragmatic grounds to insist that truth and falsity are not merely a matter of decision and that there is an external reality that constrains our conceptual choices. Following Putnam's lead, "scientific realists" have argued that scientific theories are referential in an important sense and as such can be comparatively assessed in terms of their approximations of truth.³⁰

While the debates among realists and anti-realists about the criteria of truth and the nature of evidence are intricate and complex, both realists and anti-realists share convictions about the defects of positivism and critical rationalism and accept the broad contours of presupposition theories of science. On this view, science, as a form of human knowledge, is dependent upon theory in multiple and complex ways. Presupposition theories of science suggest that the notions of perception, meaning, relevance, explanation, knowledge and method, central to the practice of science, are all theoretically constituted concepts. Theoretical presuppositions shape perception and determine what will be taken as a "fact;" they confer meaning on experience and control the demarcation of significant from trivial events; they afford criteria of relevance according to which facts can be organized, tests envisioned and the acceptability or unacceptability of scientific conclusions assessed; they accredit particular models of explanation and strategies of understanding; and they sustain specific methodological techniques for gathering, classifying, and analyzing data. Theoretical presuppositions set the terms of scientific debate and organize the elements of scientific activity. Moreover, they typically do so at a tacit or preconscious level and it is for this reason that they appear to hold such unquestionable authority.

The pervasive role of theoretical assumptions upon the practice of science has profound implications for notions such as empirical "reality," and the "autonomy" of facts, which posit that facts are "given," and that experience is ontologically distinct from the theoretical constructs that are advanced to explain it. The post-positivist conception of a "fact" as a theoretically constituted entity calls into question such basic assumptions. It suggests that "the noun, 'experience', the verb, 'to experience' and the adjective 'empirical' are not univocal terms that can be transferred from one system to another without change of meaning [...]. Experience does not come labeled as 'empirical', nor does it come self-certified as such. What we call experience depends upon assumptions hidden beyond scrutiny which define it and which in turn it supports."³¹ Recognition that "facts" can be so designated only in terms of prior theoretical presuppositions implies that any quest for an unmediated reality is necessarily futile. Any attempt to identify an "unmediated fact" must mistake the conventional for the "natural," as in cases which define "brute facts" as "social facts which are largely the product of well-understood, reliable tools, facts that are not likely to be vitiated by pitfalls [...]. in part [because of] the ease and certainty with which [they] can be determined and in part [because of] the incontestability of [their] conceptual base."³² Alternatively, the attempt to conceive a "fact" that exists prior to any description of it, prior to any theoretical or conceptual mediation, must generate an empty notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable, a notion that will be of little use to science.³³

Recognition of the manifold ways in which perceptions of reality are theoretically mediated raises a serious challenge not only to notions of "brute data" and the "givenness" of experience, but also to the possibility of falsification as a strategy for testing theories against an independent

³⁰ Glymour 1980, Newton-Smith 1981, Miller 1987.

³¹ Vivas 1960, 76.

³² Murray 1983, 321.

³³ Williams 1985, 138.

reality. For falsification to provide an adequate test of a scientific theory, it is necessary that there be a clear distinction between the theory being tested and the evidence adduced to support or refute the theory. According to the hypothetico-deductive model, “theory-independent evidence” is essential to the very possibility of refutation, to the possibility that the world could prove a theory to be wrong. If, however, what is taken to be the “world,” what is understood to be “brute data” is itself theoretically constituted (indeed, constituted by the same theory that is undergoing the test), then no conclusive disproof of a theory is likely. For the independent evidence upon which falsification depends does not exist; the available evidence is preconstituted by the same theoretical presuppositions as the scientific theory under scrutiny.³⁴

Contrary to Popper’s confident conviction that empirical reality could provide an ultimate court of appeal for the judgment of scientific theories and that the critical, non-dogmatic attitude of scientists would ensure that their theories were constantly being put to the test, presupposition theorists emphasize that it is always possible to “save” a theory from refutation. The existence of one disconfirming instance is not sufficient to falsify a theory because it is always possible to evade falsification on the grounds that future research will demonstrate that a counter-instance is really only an “apparent” counter-instance. Moreover, the theory-laden character of observation and the theory-constituted character of evidence provide ample grounds upon which to dispute the validity of the evidence and to challenge the design or the findings of specific experiments that claim to falsify respected theories. Furthermore, post-positivist examinations of the history of scientific practice suggest that, contrary to Popper’s claim that scientists are quick to discard discredited theories, there is a great deal of evidence that neither the existence of counter-instances nor the persistence of anomalies necessarily lead to the abandonment of accredited scientific theories. Indeed, the overwhelming evidence of scientific practice suggests that scientists cling to long-established views tenaciously, in spite of the existence of telling criticisms, persistent anomalies and unresolved problems.³⁵ Thus, it has been suggested that the “theory” that scientists themselves are always skeptical, non-dogmatic, critical of received views, and quick to repudiate questionable notions has itself been falsified and should be abandoned.

The problem of falsification is exacerbated by the conflation of explanation and prediction in the Popperian account of science. For the belief that a corroborated prediction constitutes proof of the validity of a scientific explanation fails to recognize that an erroneous theory can generate correct predictions.³⁶ The logical distinction between prediction and explanation thus provides further support for the view that no theory can ever be conclusively falsified. The problem of induction also raises doubts about the possibility of definitive refutations. In calling attention to the possibility that the future could be different from the past and present in unforeseeable ways, the problem of induction arouses the suspicion that a theory falsified today might not “stay” falsified. The assumption of regularity, which sustains Popper’s belief that a falsified theory will remain falsified permanently, is itself an inductionist presupposition, which suggests that the falsifiability principle does not constitute the escape from induction which Popper had hoped.³⁷ Thus, despite the logical asymmetry between verification and falsification, no falsification can be any stronger or more final than any corroboration.³⁸

³⁴ Moon 1975, 146; Brown 1977, 38–48; Stockman 1983, 73–76.

³⁵ Ricci 1984; Harding 1986; Foucault 1994.

³⁶ Moon 1975, 146–147; Brown 1977, 51–57.

³⁷ Stockman 1983, 81–82.

³⁸ Brown 1977, 75

Presupposition theorists acknowledge that “ideally, scientists would like to examine the structure of the world which exists independent of our knowledge—but the nature of perception and the role of presuppositions preclude direct access to it: the only access available is through theory-directed research.”³⁹ Recognition that theoretical presuppositions organize and structure research by determining the meanings of observed events, identifying relevant data and significant problems for investigation and indicating both strategies for solving problems and methods by which to test the validity of proposed solutions, raises a serious challenge to the correspondence theory of truth. For it both denies that “autonomous facts” can serve as the ultimate arbiter of scientific theories and suggests that science is no more capable of achieving the Archimedean point or of escaping human fallibility than is any other human endeavor. Indeed, it demands acknowledgement of science as a human convention rooted in the practical judgments of a community of fallible scientists struggling to resolve theory-generated problems under specific historical conditions. It sustains an image of science that is far less heroic and far more human.

As an alternative to the correspondence theory of truth, presupposition theorists suggest a coherence theory of truth premised upon the recognition that all human knowledge depends upon theoretical presuppositions whose congruence with nature cannot be established conclusively by reason or experience. Theoretical presuppositions, rooted in living traditions, provide the conceptual frameworks through which the world is viewed; they exude a “natural attitude” that demarcates what is taken as normal, natural, real, reasonable or sane, from what is understood as deviant, unnatural, utopian, impossible, irrational or insane. In contrast to Popper’s conception of theories as conscious conjectures that can be systematically elaborated and deductively elucidated, the notion of theoretical presuppositions suggests that theories operate at the tacit level. They structure “pre-understandings” and “pre-judgments” in such a way that it is difficult to isolate and illuminate the full range of presuppositions that affect cognition at any given time.⁴⁰ Moreover, any attempt to elucidate presuppositions must operate within a “hermeneutic circle.” Any attempt to examine or to challenge certain assumptions or expectations must occur within the frame of reference established by the other presuppositions. Certain presuppositions must remain fixed if others are to be subjected to systematic critique. This does not imply that individuals are “prisoners” trapped within the framework of theories, expectations, past experiences and language in such a way that critical reflection becomes impossible.⁴¹ Critical reflection upon and abandonment of certain theoretical presuppositions is possible within the hermeneutic circle; but the goal of *transparency*, of the unmediated grasp of things as they are, is not. For reflective investigation, no matter how critical, can never escape the fundamental conditions of human cognition.

A coherence theory of truth accepts that the world is richer than theories devised to grasp it; it accepts that theories are underdetermined by “facts” and, consequently, that there can always be alternative and competing theoretical explanations of particular events. It does not, however, imply the relativist conclusion that all theoretical interpretations are equal. That there can be no appeal to neutral, theory-independent facts to adjudicate between competing theoretical interpretations does not mean that there is no rational way of making and warranting critical evaluative judgments concerning alternative views. Indeed, presupposition theorists have pointed out that the belief that the absence of independent evidence necessarily entails relativism is itself

³⁹ Brown 1977, 108.

⁴⁰ Bernstein 1983, 113–167.

⁴¹ Bernstein 1983, 84.

dependent upon a positivist commitment to the verification criterion of meaning. Only if one starts from the assumption that the sole test for the validity of a proposition lies in its measurement against the empirically “given” does it follow that, in the absence of the “given,” no rational judgments can be made concerning the validity of particular claims.⁴²

Once the “myth of the given”⁴³ has been abandoned and once the belief that the absence of one invariant empirical test for the truth of a theory implies the absence of all criteria for evaluative judgment has been repudiated, then it is possible to recognize that there are rational grounds for assessing the merits of alternative theoretical interpretations. To comprehend the nature of such assessments it is necessary to acknowledge that although theoretical presuppositions structure the perception of events, they do not create perceptions out of nothing. Theoretical interpretations are “world-guided.”⁴⁴ They involve both the pre-understanding brought to an event by an individual perceiver and the stimuli in the external (or internal) world which instigate the process of cognition. Because of this dual source of theoretical interpretations, objects can be characterized in many ways, “but it does not follow that a given object can be seen in any way at all or that all descriptions are equal.”⁴⁵ The stimuli that trigger interpretation limit the class of plausible characterizations without dictating one absolute description.

Assessment of alternative theoretical interpretations involves deliberation, a rational activity which requires that imagination and judgment be deployed in the consideration of the range of evidence and arguments that can be advanced in support of various positions. The reasons offered in support of alternative views marshal evidence, organize data, apply various criteria of explanation, address multiple levels of analysis with varying degrees of abstraction and employ divergent strategies of argumentation. This range of reasons offers a rich field for deliberation and assessment. It provides an opportunity for the exercise of judgment and ensures that when scientists reject a theory, they do so because they believe they can demonstrate that the reasons offered in support of that theory are deficient. That the reasons advanced to sustain the rejection of one theory do not constitute absolute proof of the validity of an alternative theory is simply a testament to human fallibility. Admission that the cumulative weight of current evidence and compelling argument cannot protect scientific judgments against future developments which may warrant the repudiation of those theories currently accepted is altogether consonant with the recognition of the finitude of human rationality and the contingency of empirical relations.

Presupposition theorists suggest that any account of science, which fails to accredit the rationality of the considered judgments that inform the choice between alternative scientific theories, must be committed to a defective conception of reason. Although the standards of evidence and the criteria for assessment brought to bear upon theoretical questions cannot be encapsulated in a simple rule or summarized in rigid methodological principles, deliberation involves the exercise of a range of intellectual skills. Conceptions of science that define rationality in terms of one technique, be it logical deduction, inductive inference, or empirical verification, are simply too narrow to encompass the multiple forms of rationality manifested in scientific research. The interpretive judgments that are characteristic of every phase of scientific investigations, and that culminate in the rational choice of particular scientific theories on the basis of the cumulative weight of evidence and argument, are too rich and various to be captured by the

⁴² Bernstein 1983, 92; Brown 1977, 93–94; Stockman 1983, 79-101; Gunnell 1986, 66-68.

⁴³ Sellars 1963, 164.

⁴⁴ Williams 1985, 140.

⁴⁵ Brown 1977, 93.

rules governing inductive or deductive logic. For this reason, the Aristotelian conception of *phronesis*, practical reason, manifested in the processes of interpretation and judgment, is advanced by some presupposition theorists as an alternative to logic as the paradigmatic form of scientific rationality.⁴⁶

Presupposition theorists suggest that a conception of practical reason more accurately depicts the forms of rationality exhibited in scientific research. In contrast to the restrictive view advanced by positivism that reduces the arsenal of reason to the techniques of logic and thereby rejects creativity, deliberative judgment, and evaluative assessment as varying forms of irrationality, *phronesis* constitutes a more expansive conception of the powers of the human intellect. Presupposition theorists suggest that a consideration of the various processes of contemplation, conceptualization, representation, remembrance, reflection, speculation, rationalization, inference, deduction and deliberation (to name but a few manifestations of human cognition) reveals that the dimensions of reason are diverse. They also argue that an adequate conception of reason must encompass these diverse cognitive practices. Because the instrumental conception of rationality advanced by positivists is clearly incapable of accounting for these various forms of reason, it must be rejected as defective. Thus, presupposition theorists suggest that science must be freed from the parochial beliefs that obscure reason's diverse manifestations and restrict its operation to the rigid adherence to a narrow set of rules. The equation of scientific rationality with formal logic must be abandoned not only because there is no reason to suppose that there must be some indubitable foundation or some ahistorical, invariant method for scientific inquiry in order to establish the rationality of scientific practices, but also because the belief that science can provide final truths cannot be sustained by the principles of formal logic, the methods of empirical inquiry, or the characteristics of fallible human cognition. *Phronesis* constitutes a conception of rationality that can encompass the diverse uses of reason in scientific practices, identify the manifold sources of potential error in theoretical interpretations, and illuminate the criteria of assessment and the standards of evidence and argument operative in the choice between alternative theoretical explanations of events. As a conception of scientific rationality, then, *phronesis* is more comprehensive and has greater explanatory power than the discredited positivist alternative.

Presupposition theorists offer a revised conception of science that emphasizes the conventional nature of scientific practices and the fallible character of scientific explanations and predictions. Confronted with a world richer than any partial perception of it, scientists draw upon the resources of tradition and imagination in an effort to comprehend the world before them. The theories they devise to explain objects and events are structured by a host of presuppositions concerning meaning, relevance, experience, explanation and evaluation. Operating within the limits imposed by fallibility and contingency, scientists employ creative insights, practical reason, formal logic and an arsenal of conventional techniques and methods in their effort to approximate the truth about the world. But their approximations always operate within the parameters set by theoretical presuppositions; their approximations always address an empirical realm that is itself theoretically constituted. The underdetermination of theory by data ensures that multiple interpretations of the same phenomena are possible.

When alternative theoretical explanations conflict, the judgment of specific scientific communities is brought to bear upon competing interpretations. Exercising practical reason,

⁴⁶ Brown 1977, 148-152; Bernstein 1983, 54-78; for Aristotle's discussion of practical reason, see *Nicomachean Ethics* III 3.

scholars deliberate upon the evidence and arguments sustaining alternative views. The practical judgment of practitioners in particular fields of science is exercised in examining presuppositions, weighing evidence, replicating experiments, examining computations, investigating the applicability of innovative methods, assessing the potential of new concepts and considering the validity of particular conclusions. Through processes of deliberation and debate, a consensus may emerge among researchers within a discipline concerning what will be taken as a valid theoretical account or, as is often the case, intensive contestation may persist. The decision to accept a particular account is sustained by reasons that are typically articulated and advanced as proof of the inadequacy of alternative interpretations—as the foregoing arguments in the philosophy of science attest. The method of scientific deliberation is eminently rational: it provides mechanisms for the identification of charlatans and incompetents, as well as for the recognition of more subtle errors and more sophisticated approximations of truth. But the rationality of the process cannot guarantee the universal acceptance or the eternal verity of particular conclusions. The exercise of scientific reason is fallible; the judgments of the scientific community are corrigible.

Interpretivist Traditions and the Critique of Transparency

The foregoing discussion of varieties of empirical investigation provides one example of contestation over competing accounts of the nature of knowers, processes of knowing, and the scope of the known. Each of these versions of empiricism differs in its view of how the mind operates, the relation of words to things, the challenges involved in distinguishing between appearance and reality, the demarcation of objects worthy of serious investigation, and the mechanisms required to accredit truth claims. In positing transparency as a regulative ideal for political science, proponents of DA-RT did not engage in deliberation about the comparative merits of these competing views. They did not wrestle with complex arguments in the philosophy of science or with the demands of diverse scholarly traditions within the discipline. They simply asserted the appropriateness of transparency as a regulative ideal, accrediting their own contentious assumptions, thereby validating particular strategies of inquiry while invalidating others. In asserting their ideal of openness as universally valid, proponents of transparency norms masked the controversial character of claims adduced about political research and the contestability of their accredited strategies of data extraction, systematic investigation, and legitimate explanation. Rather than providing a faithful guide for the acquisition of truth, the imposition of transparency logics entrench contentious assumptions and shield them from scrutiny.

Critics of DA-RT and JETS have drawn attention to flawed claims concerning the universality of transparency as an ideal embraced by all political scientists and raised questions about the politics of knowledge illuminated by the swift institutionalization of transparency norms.⁴⁷ In circumscribing the subject matter appropriate to “science,” narrowing the range of analytic practices accredited as empirical inquiry, establishing problematic norms for assessing political inquiry, identifying basic principles of practice for political scientists, and validating one ethos for all scholars, the methodological strictures of DA-RT and JETS sustain particular modes of intellectual life and marginalize others. These concerns lie at the core of objections to transparency as a regulative ideal for all political science research.

One of the barriers to communication about transparency is the imperative to demand certainty when certainty is implausible, invent unity where it often has not existed, and create

⁴⁷ Pachirat 2015; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2016.

continuity out of discontinuities under the banner of “research integrity.” These missteps contribute to a misreading of political science methodology, which asserts there are definitive stable insights from “the history of science, sociology of knowledge, and cognitive psychology” into ontic priors.⁴⁸ This assertion remains an article of faith, which is distilled at best from an ahistorical, depoliticized, and depoliticizing, traditional method of “tragic political science.”⁴⁹ The tendency to address the question of transparency without conceding the highly equivocal nature of its meanings, or to recognize how different conceptions of this concept can easily co-exist within a single argument suggests that “research integrity” is another overly conceptualized bid to integrate scholarship into conventional communities of the life, natural, or physical sciences.⁵⁰ Such a selective approach relegates other post-Kantian epistemic alternatives such as American pragmatism, Hegelian thought, Marxian dialectics, and European phenomenology to the margins of legitimate political research. Like long-established practices of behaviorism, these new research norms would ensure that interpretivist approaches would continue to be ignored in standard “scope and methods” courses taught at research universities in the USA. Yet this exclusion itself, precludes questions about the meaning of transparency within social and political contexts and their implications for political studies.

In social contexts, the language of transparency typically connotes “accessibility” and “availability” in contrast to what is hidden and evasive. But all that is accessible is readily subject to control and surveillance. Under certain conditions, those who prize freedom and resist established power intentionally remain hidden and operate evasively to avoid detection.⁵¹ In political contexts, a transparent society is one frequently characterized as devoid of grey areas and of “moral and economic subgroups” that challenge the state’s purview, precisely because they have been purged by the state.⁵² Within such a political context, transparency loses its luster. As social theorists have long emphasized, no society is ever transparent to itself, any more than an individual is.⁵³ By extension, no research agenda, article, or book has any meaningful claim to transparency, no matter how fervently that norm is proclaimed. Uncritical calls for an impossible “transparency,” then, seem far too eager to police thought about government and politics in a counterproductive, if not destructive, manner.⁵⁴

Once transposed to scholarship, illusions of transparency easily lead to conceits of control that would silence diverse forms of investigation in the name of an ideal that is itself open to contestation. Qualitative and interpretative research is frequently called into question precisely because it is concerned with that which is *not* “accessible” or “available,” whether investigations explore “society,” “the market,” or “the state.” As conceptual constructions or ideal types in the tradition of Durkheim and Weber, these phenomena are never encountered as such, yet, few doubt the existence or significance of these complex realities.⁵⁵ When scholars study discourse and ideology or structures and markets, the object of study is not transparent to the state or the observer. Instead, it requires imaginative reconstruction on the basis of clues and traces available in many places and at various times that by necessity cannot be made transparent, open or accessible to

⁴⁸ Kreuzer and Parsons 2019.

⁴⁹ Ricci, 1984.

⁵⁰ Luke, 1997.

⁵¹ Golinski, 1998.

⁵² Geroulanos 2016; 2017.

⁵³ Adorno 1969.

⁵⁴ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2016.

⁵⁵ Schutz 1967.

anyone. As such, it is imperative for supporters of interpretative perspectives to defend the merits of the non-transparent. Within an interpretive frame, the regulative ideal is critical reflexivity – a propensity to examine, reexamine, and think again. Critical reflexivity toward one’s own scholarship and the scholarship of others, both those within one’s research tradition and those who do not share one’s epistemological assumptions, acknowledges the historicity of one’s position without conflating historicity with relativism or arbitrariness.⁵⁶

To deny transparency as a legitimate benchmark for all political analysis is not to abdicate all judgments of quality.⁵⁷ On the contrary, scholarship is assessed and evaluated on the basis of accuracy of facts, logic of argument, and manifold strictures governing particular interpretive methods. In other words, how accurately the relevant evidence is presented or handled; how much of the existing stock of relevant evidence the work in question accounts for; and how cogent the interpretation or argument offered is—all figure in assessments of quality.⁵⁸ Leaps in logic and mishandling of evidence are considered within frameworks of agreement about what counts as a cogent argument and what constitutes relevant evidence. These are contested questions but not insurmountable questions within interpretive research communities.⁵⁹ Creativity, innovation, and changing theoretical frames add new dimensions to understandings of the operative logic of arguments and the contours of relevant evidence, especially in interpretative and qualitative work that is concerned with what is not readily available and thus remains hidden or constitutes a gray area for which different conceptual and epistemological protocols may be needed. To insist these interpretive processes “must elaborate” standards parallel to the DA-RT agenda is akin to an authoritarian act, normalizing conformity within a research field by providing potent grounds to control resistance—the refusal to publish.

Critical reflexivity affords means to go beyond what is accessible and available and ponder what is hidden and occluded,⁶⁰ while transparency as a regulative ideal precludes such investigations, conscripting heterodox scholarship into terminology that tacitly denies core concerns and undermines the contribution this scholarship seeks to make.⁶¹ Consider, for instance, works concerned with racial domination, or the reproduction of structures of power, or structural violence. The challenge in each case is to probe inequities that often are explicitly denied, glibly downplayed or simply ignored by mainstream approaches. In such cases, new methodologies generate new ways of seeing, measuring, and analyzing in order to provide non-arbitrary criteria to establish the cogency of the claims advanced – criteria that challenge established scholarship. Forcing interpretative and qualitative scholars to conform to axioms and categories such as “transparency” that are institutionalized as the only acceptable professional ethos not only makes contentious knowledge claims impervious to criticism, but derails investigation of pressing political issues.⁶²

As a scholarly discipline, political science has devised complex conceptual practices that are theory-laden and methodologically-driven, which may operate in the service of highly biased, normalizing, and depoliticizing orthodoxies. Interpretivism must depart from demands for some

⁵⁶ Bourdieu 2000.

⁵⁷ Gunnell 1995.

⁵⁸ Said 1983.

⁵⁹ Hawkesworth 1988; Polanyi 1959.

⁶⁰ Dallmayr 1984.

⁶¹ Husserl 1970; Cassirer 2000.

⁶² Foucault 1980; Lyotard 1979.

settled and stable set of epistemic and ontological priors. No categories or concepts ever fully encapsulate and exhaust the spirit and substance of the pre-categorical.⁶³ This reality is what the narrow methodological prescriptions of DA-RT deny. By sustaining notions that knowledge is “discovered” and truth “revealed” through systematic observation and testing, and the replication of findings, transparency norms actively divert attention from diverse theoretical presuppositions and particular institutional ideologies operating within political science itself.⁶⁴ By shoring up mistaken notions of fungible minds, transparency talk misses the sociality of perception, the theoretical constitution of facts and the politics of representation.⁶⁵ Ironically then, in its quest for truth, the transparency talk of DA-RT affords a kind of ideological immunity to conceptual practices of power consolidated within particular reductionist and exclusionary research traditions that seek to narrowly define “Political Science.”

⁶³ Bernstein 1983.

⁶⁴ Gunnell 1986.

⁶⁵ Bernstein 1976.

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Research Ethics and Human Subjects: A Reflexive Openness Approach

Final Report of QTD Working Group I.2

August 2018

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Introduction

The foremost ethical obligation and therefore the first duty of scholars is the ethical treatment of people affected by our research, particularly its human subjects.

In this essay, as members of the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (QTD) Working Group on Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, we discuss the implications of the primacy of the ethical treatment of human participants – our term for “human subjects” -- for empirical research in the social sciences.¹ Although research ethics encompasses a broader range of issues (including honesty, integrity, competence, and the respectful treatment of students and colleagues, among others),² we focus on the primacy of human participants both because the human costs of violating this obligation are likely much higher than, for example, plagiarism, and because this principle may conflict with evolving norms of transparency in the social sciences. We acknowledge that “transparency”, even narrowly interpreted, has benefits in many settings (see the report of Working Group II.2, Section II Assessment of Benefits), but nonetheless focus on the tensions between the primary obligation to human subjects and other ethical obligations in a wide range of contexts, including settings of violence and repression.

To support our ethical positions, we advance a broad and distinct approach of “reflexive openness” that incorporates sustained reflection on ethical research practices, what ethnographers term “reflexivity.”³ This approach has three important elements. First, it promotes ongoing reflexivity by the author vis-à-vis one’s research participants. Second, it encourages all scholars to provide a reasoned justification of their ethical research practices, especially when seeking to publish their analysis and writing. Finally, the ethical expectations guiding reflexive openness are universal, and thus the approach is inclusive of researchers regardless of subfield, methodology, topic, and empirical context.

To begin, we review the history of prioritizing the ethical treatment of human participants in our research. In the second section, we highlight challenges and tensions in conducting ethical research. In the third and fourth sections, we uncover potential ethical risks of adopting narrow notions of transparency and discuss likely inadvertent, yet disturbing, long-term consequences for the production of knowledge. In the fifth, we suggest several potential benefits of adopting the alternative reflexive openness approach, which places ethical practices at the core of the research endeavor. A principal benefit is that all scholars conducting research involving human participants should give reasons for whether and how they can ethically share their data and for the extent to which they can ethically describe its production and analysis. In the sixth section, we provide principles and strategies for researchers to manage ethical dilemmas that arise within diverse settings. In the final section before the conclusion, we propose policy reforms and institutional changes to support ethical research in the discipline.

¹ Throughout the report we use the term “human participant” instead of “human subject” to avoid any connotation of subordination and to suggest the power of humans to choose to participate in social science research.

² See *A Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science* (APSA, 2012). See also, the “Statement on Professional Ethics” (AAUP) at <https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-professional-ethics>.

³ See, for example, Lee Ann Fujii, post “[Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](#),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116>; and Timothy Pachirat, post “Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group III.3.” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, October 2, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=222#p959>. See also Wedeen (2009) and Fujii (2008).

As political scientists who have conducted research with human participants in both democratic and authoritarian systems and in conflict and post-conflict settings, we have faced a wide range of ethical dilemmas. As a group, we draw from many decades of research with human participants in contexts that vary in terms of the geography, level of economic development, political stability, and regime type (e.g., Canada, Colombia, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Israel/Palestine, Kenya, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the United States). In our respective projects, we have employed a diversity of research methods, including archival research, interviews, ethnographic observation, oral histories, focus groups, surveys, and formal modeling. In preparing this document, we also draw on posts by scholars to the online Qualitative Transparency Deliberations, our work with the formal QTD process (including extensive comments from QTD Steering Committee members), and informal feedback received offline, especially from junior colleagues and graduate students who preferred to express their thoughts privately.⁴

I. The Historical Foundation for the Primacy of Respect and Ethical Treatment of Human Participants

Since at least the 1979 Belmont Report,⁵ a near consensus among research scholars holds that the foremost ethical obligation and therefore the first duty of scholars is to the ethical treatment of those who participate in our research, particularly its human subjects (whom we term “human participants”). In 1974, the United States Congress established the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research to establish ethical principles to govern biomedical and behavioral research with human participants. The effort was deemed necessary and urgent in light of the exposure of the four decades-long United States Public Health Service’s “Study of Untreated Syphilis in Macon County, Alabama” (1932-1972), in which hundreds of poor African Americans in rural Alabama were promised free health care for treatment of “bad blood.”⁶ Shockingly, the US investigators did not offer participants penicillin, even after it became available as an effective treatment in the 1940s, but instead chose to continue the study, withholding the diagnosis of syphilis as well as treatment for decades more in order to learn about the progression of the disease.

The Belmont Report, the commission’s final report, delineated three principles to govern research with human participants: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. *Respect for persons* means the recognition of their dignity and autonomy, and entails that each subject must give her/his informed consent to participate in the research. *Beneficence* refers to the “complementary” obligations to do no harm, and to maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms.⁷ It requires the justification of research by demonstrating that the possible benefits (to the subject, associates, society at large) outweigh the harms, and the minimization of a wide range of possible harms, including provisions for the privacy subjects. *Justice* refers to fairness in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of the research.

⁴ We owe special thanks to Tim Bütthe, Alan Jacobs, and Sarah Parkinson for their valuable feedback at multiple stages of the process. We also thank Joe Soss and Jeff Isaac for their insightful comments and suggestions.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1979.

⁶ The revelation of Nazi experimentation during the Nuremberg Trials after WWII and, later, the publicity around other experiments with human subjects, including the Milgram experiments at Yale and the prison experiments at Stanford also reinforced the need for regulatory action. See Jones (1993) for an analysis of the USPS study.

⁷ [The Belmont Report](#), Part B: Basic Ethical Principles, 2. Beneficence.

The U.S. Congress at the same time established regulations for the protection of human participants, principally through mandatory prior review of the ethical implications of federally funded research. The 1991 Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects unified the diverse standards of various federal agencies into a “Common Rule” that now governs Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), the agency at U.S. research institutions that carries out such ethical review using the three Belmont standards. Thus, IRBs routinely ask: How will the researcher gain informed consent from prospective participants? Do the data security protocols sufficiently protect the privacy of participants? Do the possible benefits outweigh the possible harms? Is the researcher minimizing risks to participants? Are selection criteria unduly burdening or benefitting particular demographic groups?

At present, all US institutions require scholars who engage in research (the pursuit of generalized knowledge) with human subjects/participants to submit their projects to review by the IRB.⁸ (The IRB may rule some research exempt from full review and ongoing monitoring, but that designation is made by the IRB after the researcher submits a rationale and supporting documentation to qualify for exemption.) Increasingly, research institutions in other countries mandate similar forms of ethical review but the underlying motivations and requirements are far from uniform. While some more democratic regimes may be attempting to expand human participant protection, other more autocratic ones appear to be constraining the academic freedom of domestic and foreign researchers.⁹ Nevertheless, US IRBs increasingly require scholars to obtain approval from the relevant IRBs in the country hosting the research as well as the scholar’s home institution. In addition, some subnational groups and political organizations have organized and require approval through their own ethical review processes.^{10, 11}

Whether research with human participants is adequately governed by the Belmont principles remains a subject of debate and controversy, including whether those principles and their institutional instantiation in IRBs reflect biomedical dilemmas to such a degree that broader ethical concerns more common to social science research are excluded.^{12, 13} Some IRBs impose standards appropriate for biomedical research methods but not relevant for a particular social science project, for example, insisting on written or highly legalistic consent forms despite research participants being illiterate. Ongoing revelation of violations of the Belmont principles, such as the Get-out-the-Vote (GOTV) experiment in Montana, suggest that IRB review and consideration of the core principles remains important.¹⁴ Additionally, in our experience, the

⁸ Strictly speaking, IRB approval is only required for federally-funded research, but US universities apply the same standards to all research, regardless of the funding source.

⁹ A prime example is post-genocide Rwanda. Since 2010, the government has mandated that foreign researchers must apply for national research ethics approval. A bureaucratic and regulated process, both domestic and foreign researchers will pay up to USD 1500 for a permit while waiting several months, and often longer, for approval to be granted. See Jessee 2012.

¹⁰ Callaway 2017.

¹¹ For example, many American Indian tribal nations, such as the Navajo Nation, have their own IRBs, and frequently bureaucratic agencies within the U.S. government have their own IRBs. More recently, the San people of southern African have declared a code of conduct for ethical research <https://www.nature.com/news/south-africa-s-san-people-issue-ethics-code-to-scientists-1.21684>

¹² Brooks 2013; Schrag 2010; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008.

¹³ Peri Schwartz-Shea, post "[Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group I.2.](#)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 14, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=226&p=988&hilit=let%27s+not+use+the+flawed#p988>.

¹⁴ Desposato 2014.

process of submitting research proposals to the IRB and of responding to their questions can illuminate problems or gaps in research designs and protocols.¹⁵ Federal IRB rules and standards continue to evolve, evident in the dissemination of new regulations in 2017.¹⁶

II. Contemporary Challenges of Conducting Ethical Research in the Social Sciences: Tensions between Ethical Obligations

Conducting ethical research goes well beyond the IRB review process and the Belmont principles, however, which are themselves incomplete and subject to internal conflict. IRB protocols are never able to address all the ethical dilemmas that arise during a research study, particularly those involving field research with human participants. More fundamentally, meeting the requirements of the IRB should be understood as the minimal ethical standard, and the IRB process as the minimal ethical training for conducting research.¹⁷ Ethical dilemmas involve tensions between conflicting ethical obligations and the challenges of implementing ethical practices in a particular setting, including the possibility that ethical research may not be possible and therefore the research discontinued.¹⁸ This section briefly lays out a few general types of dilemmas, which provide context for the next section's discussion of tensions with and consequences of applying a narrow interpretation of what constitutes sufficiently transparent research.

Some ethical dilemmas arise because of the difficulty in realizing the intended protection of the Belmont principles in particular settings. For example, in settings of extreme poverty and unemployment, people may decide to participate despite severe misgivings because they hope for eventual material benefits even though the researcher explicitly disavowed any payment, opportunity or assistance in exchange for their involvement.¹⁹ In some settings, consent from local authorities, not just individuals, is necessary for the ethical engagement with local people. This may pose ethical dilemmas in terms of assuring privacy and confidentiality for individual study participants.

Moreover, assurances of confidentiality are increasingly undermined by legal and technical developments that facilitate access to research data. Complying with requests from the U.S. Department of Justice acting under treaty obligations to the U.K. government, Boston College turned over oral histories gathered from Northern Ireland militants that researchers had promised would be confidential until the sources had died.²⁰ U.S. border authorities can detain and search anyone (including citizens) and their electronic devices as they enter the U.S., copying any files despite their being confidential, academic data gathered solely for research purposes.²¹

The IRB process emphasizes protection of human "subjects" whose information and responses serve as a source of data, but research may also bring harm to others who are indirectly involved in the study, a consideration highlighted by the Belmont principle of beneficence. For example, research assistants may run undue risks in order to work with the researcher,

¹⁵ Thomson, 2013; see also Brown 2014.

¹⁶ See [Final Revisions to the Common Rule](#), January 19, 2017.

¹⁷ Scheyvens and Storey 2003; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2016.

¹⁸ Chakravarty 2012; Wood 2006.

¹⁹ Fujii 2012; Cronin-Furman and Lake 2017.

²⁰ Parkinson 2014.

²¹ *ibid.*

particularly in settings where unemployment is high and research opportunities few. Research may bring harm to the local community as a whole, raising concerns should the community's identity become known to outsiders, including potentially hostile government authorities in some settings. And unethical practices may "ruin the field" for future researchers, who may find themselves unwelcomed by a previously abused community.²²

An acute type of ethical dilemma occurs when the researcher uncovers unanticipated documents or other sources, whose disclosure may bring harm to the individual participants, or to their family members, descendants, or the community at large. The individual may have consented to the research, but on other terms. For example, a researcher may discover that a family, organization or firm had engaged in profoundly unethical practices in the past, perhaps involving egregious human rights violations. Disclosure may bring harm to the study participants and their associates, but, meanwhile, the failure to disclose may perpetuate ongoing harm to rival stakeholders or victims of previous oppression or violence.²³ Nonetheless, except in the case of severe and imminent harm to someone or the perpetuation of an injustice of the most fundamental type (e.g. accountability for genocide), the researcher's ethical obligation to protect the human participants involved in the study remains paramount.

Such ethical dilemmas are often particularly intense in violent, repressive, or politically sensitive settings for several reasons.²⁴ The costs to subjects of an inadvertent breach of data confidentiality may be so severe (i.e., the risk of torture and death) that it is not possible to engage in ethical research.²⁵ Due to extensive surveillance by government authorities, any participation in the research may put subjects at risk.²⁶ In highly repressive settings, not only study participants, but the researcher's colleagues and hosts may also be subject to suspicion and retribution.²⁷ In conflict and fragile state settings, researchers are often able to access vulnerable populations without relying on established ethical procedures, something which researchers must acknowledge and address.²⁸ These issues are explored in more detail in the reports by the relevant QTD Working Groups (IV.1, IV.2 and IV.3) that focus on authoritarian and repressive regimes, settings of political violence, and marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Resolution of "ethical judgment calls," meaning when ethical obligations and/or principles conflict, is one of the most difficult challenges of social science scholarship.²⁹ This is true for all types of studies, including those using aggregate data and archival sources, but is particularly intense when conducted face-to-face with human participants in the field. We offer some principles and strategies later in the essay for how to navigate these ethical dilemmas but first analyze how the deployment of a narrow notion of transparency in our disciplinary institutions may inadvertently spark and exacerbate these kinds of ethical risks and challenges.

²² Civico 2006; Herbert 2001.

²³ Sriram 2009.

²⁴ Wood 2006; Thomson 2009a; Scheper-Hughes 1995.

²⁵ Wood 2006.

²⁶ Thomson 2013.

²⁷ Carapico 2006, Fujii 2012

²⁸ Cronin-Furman and Lake 2017

²⁹ Pearlman 2014.

III. Assessment of Potential Ethical Risks, Dilemmas and Consequences of a Narrow Notion of Transparency for Scholars and Study Participants

In this section, we ask whether and how the promotion of a narrow notion of research transparency might compete with the imperative to protect human participants and explore some of the likely consequences for scholars and research participants. We suggest that some of the previously proposed resolutions to identified tensions may not be practical – or ethical – in some settings.

Transparency in research, including production and analytic transparency and access to data, is an ethical obligation recognized in 2012 by the American Political Science Association in its most recent update to professional ethics: “Researchers have an ethical obligation to facilitate the evaluation of their evidence-based knowledge claims through data access, production transparency, and analytic transparency so that their work can be tested or replicated.”^{30, 31} For many research projects conducted in certain kinds of settings, “transparency” understood in these terms is not only unproblematic but also strengthens the intellectual honesty and integrity of social science research, facilitating its dissemination, evaluation and public access to the analysis.

As much of the QTD conversation suggests, however, there are reasons – not all related to the ethical dilemmas we emphasize – why entire communities of political scientists cannot easily adopt the APSA Guide research transparency recommendations (for analysis, see also the reports of Working Groups II.2 and III.2).³² To give one of the most frequently discussed examples, in some types of qualitative and interpretive research, the data is deeply relational, constructed in the process of the interaction of the researcher with the subject(s). This data is not reducible to a transcript, even if annotated with observations about pauses, tone of voice, body language and facial expressions, but also includes the researcher’s own evolving reaction to the subject and the field site(s). Interpretation of the evidence is thus deeply informed by the process of the data’s co-production. That the quality and meaning of qualitative data depends on the relationship between the researcher and participants applies to ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews in many settings. This perspective suggests that replication (as conventionally defined) should not be the standard by which the quality of qualitative research is judged.³³ Rather, assessment should turn on the depth of the data, the coherence and consistency of the analysis, and the quality of the researcher’s reflections on her position vis à vis participants, how she resolved ethical dilemmas she confronted, and the limitations of the research as well as its strengths. Reflexivity throughout the research project, where a scholar critically evaluates their own role in the production of knowledge, facilitates this systematic assessment of the evidentiary value of the data.

³⁰ APSA Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science, 2012, 9.

³¹ The Data Access and Research Transparency initiative (DA-RT) began in 2010 as an Ad Hoc Committee of the American Political Science Association. From 2010 to 2012, scholars involved in DA-RT worked to incorporate concerns about data access and research transparency into the revised APSA ethics guide. A 2014 workshop led to the Journal Editors Transparency Statement (JETS). See, <https://www.dartstatement.org/>.

³² Several scholars have articulated more fundamental critiques of transparency as a goal in the discipline of political science. See Isaac 2015; Pachirat 2015; and Fujii 2016. See also a related critique of how the “language of science” shapes knowledge production in Carpenter 2012.

³³ Schatz 2009.

Moreover, for many researchers, being asked to meet new, DA-RT-related transparency requirements (see footnote 31) does indeed pose a set of dilemmas that are indeed ethical in nature. First and foremost, making sources and transcripts available may directly or indirectly reveal the identity of a human participant who participated in the research on the presumption of anonymity or confidentiality, exposing her to a long list of potential risks. The list is wide-ranging and includes everything from potential damage to professional advancement to social stigmatization, harassment, intimidation, violence, imprisonment, exile, torture, or death.³⁴ And because a scholar's ethical responsibilities extend beyond research subjects, the list may also apply to colleagues, assistants, interpreters and archivists, especially when these research participants live in the field context, but the lead researcher does not.^{35, 36}

These risks are not hypothetical. In the last decade alone, governments in Egypt, Rwanda, Tajikistan and elsewhere have targeted political scientists in the course of their research. When researchers are targeted, this also puts assistants, informants, and others involved in the process at risk. People can be harassed or detained, passports and interview material seized, and files searched. It is incumbent upon the researcher to ensure that ethical safeguards – consent, confidentiality, and anonymity – are in place, lest those involved in the research process find themselves in harm's way because the researcher or the researcher has been targeted.

Such risks vary sharply across research settings and methods and thus the implications of the fundamental ethical obligations do as well. For example, the extent of data sharing that is ethical depends in part on the regime type. Sharing data is most obviously ethically problematic under authoritarian or repressive regimes. Moments of transition are particularly challenging settings: euphoric activists may eagerly share identities yet, as several postings remind us, currently innocuous data may become dangerous for participants down the road.³⁷ Interview transcripts from research on the Islamic movement in Northern Israel, where activities were suddenly made illegal, is a good example.³⁸ These shifts can make it extremely difficult for researchers to meet demands that their data be available while also living up to their primary obligations to protect research participants.

But even in peaceful contexts under democratic regimes, researchers may need to withhold their data or share only specific sections. This is the case most obviously when participants belong to stigmatized and vulnerable communities – from refugees in Cape Town, to Muslims in the US and Europe today (see the report from Working Group IV.3). It is also true when participants are not especially vulnerable, but have concerns for privacy and are thus

³⁴ For example, see Amy Poteete, post "[Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdbab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64deae67#p430)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, January 1, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdbab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64deae67#p430>.

³⁵ Aremu and MacLean 2016.

³⁶ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, post "[Inviting Input on Specific Transparency Practices](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=56&p=89&hilit=Greitens#p89)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum Stage One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 13, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=56&p=89&hilit=Greitens#p89>.

³⁷ Lynch 2016.

³⁸ Lihi Ben Shitrit, post "[Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&p=864&hilit=human+subjects+and+research+open#p864)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&p=864&hilit=human+subjects+and+research+open#p864>.

cautious about how their comments and personal information are used in research, as Jane Mansbridge and Kathleen Cramer have argued.³⁹

The example about “ordinary” people underscores a core tension precipitated by the promotion of a narrow notion of “transparency:” it does not require a foundational ethical practice, namely, that research subjects give their informed consent to participate.⁴⁰ To secure informed consent, the researcher must explain clearly to the subject the purpose, nature, risks and benefits of the research, which implies transparency about its funding and also whether research materials will eventually become public, as well as the identity and affiliation of the researcher.

In sum, where a researcher has assured subjects that their responses will be confidential or anonymous, there is a clear tension between the obligations to human subjects and to transparency. Of course, as other QTD Working Group reports detail, our ethical obligation for transparency in data production and analysis is important (see the report of Working Group II.2, Section II Assessment of Benefits); a commitment to research transparency in the ways the APSA Guide promotes is simply sound social science, which is why we encourage it, where ethical, in the set of practices we advocate under the label “reflexive openness.” Nevertheless, the need to be transparent in these conventional ways is not equivalent to the ethical obligation to protect human participants and should be pursued only when it does not endanger research participants in the present or foreseeable future (including possible developments such as regime change). The APSA Guide to Professional Ethics indeed recognizes the potential for such dilemmas in that it allows for researchers to be “exempted” from the transparency obligation in order to “address well-founded privacy and confidentiality concerns, including abiding by relevant human subjects regulation....”⁴¹

The dilemmas discussed in this section thus demonstrate that transparency in ethical research will have to draw from a broader and different notion of the concept than the one found in DA-RT and JETS statements that neither take into account the requirement of informed consent of human subjects nor the necessary prohibition of sharing data that might endanger them. We contend that the set of practices associated with reflexive openness, detailed below, can achieve desired research openness while making the protection of participants the core guiding principle. The approach relies on all researchers, regardless of their methodological approach and driven by the imperative to protect their participants, to reflect on their ethical research practices and put forth a reasoned explanation of their judgments with regards to disclosure about the procedures to produce and analyze data.

Before developing these ideas, we show in the next section that current “solutions” to the identified ethical dilemmas, reliant on editors’ caution and flexibility (see Working Group 11.2) and carried out on a case-by-case basis, are generating unwanted and perverse consequences, some of which have ethical implications of their own.

³⁹ Jane Mansbridge, post “[Re: Against “requirements”](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?t=60#p142),” QTD Discussion Board, Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 23, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?t=60#p142>; Kathleen Cramer, post “[Re: Transparency, openness & ethnography in democratic contexts.](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?t=87#p275)” Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 6, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?t=87#p275>.

⁴⁰ See the 2014 Journal Editors’ Transparency Statement (JETS) at <https://www.dartstatement.org/2014-journal-editors-statement-jets>.

⁴¹ APSA Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science 2012, 10.

IV. Troubling Long-Term Consequences of JETS Requirements for the Production of Knowledge

Assuming that JETS-type requirements are in place, what strategies are scholars likely to take when faced with such ethical considerations and what might be the consequences? One possibility would be to seek exemptions from them as recommended by the APSA Guide. Exemptions to established norms of research transparency could come with significant costs, however, even when scholars develop innovative ways to be transparent short of giving access to transcripts.⁴² We underscore what others have noted: that costs associated with such exemptions are likely to be unfairly distributed, in that qualitative researchers would disproportionately be affected, as outlined in the report of Working Group II.2. To make judicious use of exemptions from their journals' rules, editors can be expected to set the bar high, with the burden of putting forth compelling arguments falling on the scholar. Even among qualitative researchers, the costs would be distributed unevenly. Researchers doing work in the least known areas – the more remote, historically marginalized spaces or communities or groups – or the less developed, more impoverished, more unstable, less secure areas such as recently post-conflict areas – could very well face the greatest hurdles. These contexts are less commonly known and understood by editors and reviewers and thus would require more effort on the part of the scholars seeking exemptions. The extra time needed during review processes would be especially burdensome for graduate students and junior scholars who have more compressed clocks to demonstrate normal progress and productivity, and fewer resources.⁴³

In addition, perceptions matter. Relying on editorial exemptions rather than researcher judgment in order to protect human participants could foster biases against data that cannot be made public and create unwarranted categories of more and less credible research. Transparency requirements would thereby inadvertently force a scholar to face a trade-off between protecting human participants and doing research that is prestigious. In this way, the promotion of some transparency requirements may discriminate against qualitatively oriented scholars, particularly those doing human subjects types of field research such as participant observation, focus groups or surveys.^{44, 45} Such an unwanted outcome would be damaging to the discipline as a whole by amplifying divisions between methodological approaches and encouraging further polarization between journals that implement DA-RT and those that do not. It may also affect the publication records of scholars undertaking this kind of research as they may seek to publish in non-political science journals.

A second possibility would be for scholars to make transcripts of interviews public in forms that would not harm participants. Doing so, however, would likely render human participants much less valuable as sources of knowledge. In many domains, such as in smaller communities, it is nearly impossible to de-identify individuals, and attempts to produce de-

⁴² Anastasia Shesterinina, post "[Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdbab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64deae67#p430)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdbab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64deae67#p430>.

⁴³ Robert Kaufman, post "[CP Newsletter: Editorial or Ideology?](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=52&p=359&hilit=kaufman#p359)" QTD Discussion Board, Forum Stage One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 19, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=52&p=359&hilit=kaufman#p359>.

⁴⁴ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Tripp 2016.

⁴⁵ Aili Tripp, post "[Research in Non-Democratic Countries](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=57&p=88&hilit=tripp#p88)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum Stage One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 13, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=57&p=88&hilit=tripp#p88>.

identified data sets are likely to create “meaningless” data that is decontextualized and devoid of its richness and the insights it actually holds.⁴⁶ The point is that there could be a paradoxical tradeoff between making transcripts accessible and the degree to which interviews contribute to a given body of knowledge. Likewise, knowing what they say will be made public is likely to make some potential human subjects reluctant to participate and to reduce what others are willing to reveal and indeed the questions we as researchers may be prepared to ask. The latter case is the most likely scenario for scholars conducting interviews with elites who are accustomed to anonymous, confidential and off-the-record interviews. Such participants may comply with consent requests but not actually feel comfortable sharing much information of value.⁴⁷

A third, and arguably the most far-reaching and disturbing possibility, is that the new transparency norms may divert scholars from pursuing challenging and sensitive questions. To the extent that answering such questions requires research in contexts where sharing data ethically cannot be done or cannot be done without significant costs and challenges (typical of much qualitative field research), avoidance seems a likely strategy for professional advancement. Given the incentive structure to publish, the high costs of creating sharable data from human participants, and the potential stigma of doing research that might need exemptions from APSA best practices, it is easy to understand why scholars, particularly graduate students and untenured colleagues, might opt for projects that make use of existing aggregate data that can easily be shared without ethical concerns. The potential loss is hard to exaggerate as the result would mean skewed political science research that foreclosed the investigation of a whole range of important political topics and the systematic narrowing of the discipline’s production of collective knowledge.

V. Reflexive Openness Facilitates Ethical Research and Broader Benefits

To address the identified ethical dilemmas associated with the DA-RT-promoted notion of research transparency as well as the unwanted consequences of editors trying to manage them and scholars seeking to avoid them, we advance here an approach called “reflexive openness” that facilitates ethical practices, while having the appeal of universal applicability.

Reflexive openness has three main components. First, the approach hinges on *continuous reflexivity* whereby scholars constantly consider the ethical nature of their research, especially concerning the effects on the people involved. The idea is for scholars to reflect on the relative risks and benefits of the project (including the effects of their own position within it) in an ongoing negotiation with human participants, including those indirectly touched by the study. Second, the reflexive openness approach encourages scholars to present a *reasoned justification* of the ethics surrounding their research practices, including whether, how and which data could be shared during the review and publication process. (We discuss in more detail below the implications for journal editors and reviewers.) Finally, the research practices encouraged by the

⁴⁶ Elisabeth Jean Wood, post “[Data access-human subjects protections](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=40&p=63&hilit=wood#p63),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum Stage One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016 1:14 pm., <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=40&p=63&hilit=wood#p63>.

⁴⁷ Eleni Tsingou, post “[Is There a Tension Between the Principle of Research Openness and the Willingness to Pursue Tough Questions?](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169)” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169>.

reflexive openness approach *universally* apply to political scientists regardless of epistemology, methodology or subfield, as all of us share the same ethical obligations.

It is important to acknowledge that this approach reflects a paradigm of knowledge creation that differs in important ways from other established ones long dominant in the discipline of political science. In the reflexive openness approach, ethics is profoundly intertwined with the process of knowledge production in the ongoing negotiation of social relations essential to research with participants. It is equally important to emphasize that reflexivity itself is a contested concept that has evolved through extensive discussions and scholarly debates in anthropology, sociology, geography and certain sub-subfields of political science.

Despite its potential for stirring controversy and contention within and beyond our discipline, however, we contend that our approach of reflexive openness can help scholars to avoid some of the above-mentioned costs and will facilitate ethical practice. Indeed, the potential benefits of increased openness extend beyond ensuring the DA-RT initiatives' aims of more credible scholarship. Designed to preserve the primacy of our commitments to human participants, the promotion of reflexive openness will have multiple benefits to our readers, editors, reviewers, and community of scholars, but above all, to the individuals who have chosen to participate in or are touched by our research, whether in the moment, during write up or after publication. An important benefit of such increased openness is that every member of the discipline of political science might be urged to think more systematically about ethical practices and the effects of their work on human subjects. The ethical principles governing research are relevant for all scholars – whether or not their research plan is evaluated by an IRB, regardless of their methodological approach, and whether they generate original data through long stays in the field or use data that others have created. A commitment to openness would remind scholars that ethical research practice is much more than a one-shot IRB approval on their respective campuses,⁴⁸ or what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) term “procedural ethics.” Engaging thoughtfully with campus or other research approval processes in the early design stage of a research project is a crucial first step.⁴⁹ But, ethical practice involves an ongoing negotiation of the project with the human participants that is dynamic and contingent, often necessitating the consideration of potential risks and benefits at all stages of a project, from design, data production, analysis, writing and outreach.⁵⁰ These ethical dilemmas require scholars to think carefully about the potential tradeoffs and make thoughtful decisions that are appropriate for the particular context of their research study.⁵¹

As scholars develop a more nuanced understanding of the ethical challenges in the context where they are working, and as they become more reflexive and attentive to how they produce and analyze their data, they will be better positioned to make decisions about what data, if any, is possible to be shared. Scholars will be empowered to reflect critically on the short and long-term ethical costs of data access and be able to articulate the issues in order to protect the short and long-term interests of the human participants in their projects.⁵² For example, data sharing might be particularly unethical due to especially high levels of risk to human subjects in

⁴⁸ Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2016; Brooks 2013.

⁴⁹ Thomson 2013; Brown 2014.

⁵⁰ MacLean 2013; Thomson 2013; Fujii 2012.

⁵¹ Wood 2007, 139-140; Wood 2006.

⁵² Parkinson and Wood 2015.

contexts of violent conflict, political instability, and repressive authoritarianism, as discussed above. Often less visible, but, nonetheless real risks might be posed to human subjects living in post-colonial contexts of poverty, inequality, illiteracy, or experiencing other forms of vulnerability and marginalization.

A disciplinary commitment to this broader type of openness and ethical practice would subsequently generate additional indirect benefits over the longer-term. For example, scholars would be encouraged to include explicit methodological discussions in their published works detailing the nature of their ethical practices throughout the data production, data analysis, and writing of their projects. Currently, few journals or book publishers explicitly require any statement about the nature of ethical practices during the study.⁵³ At most, a few outlets might require authors to self-report that they have received the official IRB stamp of approval at the beginning of their projects, but almost no one seeks a more detailed description of how researchers actually upheld ethical practices throughout all stages of the study.

Moreover, this positive feedback loop would stimulate the strengthening of new norms allowing scholars to acknowledge their own positionality in the production of knowledge in their publications. Scholars would be encouraged to be reflexive, thinking critically about in what ways their own social position may have shaped how their data was generated and interpreted. Research practices that have often been hidden from public view and only discussed informally in private spaces would now benefit a larger audience. As a result, scholars in all subfields would become more aware of the considerable time, effort and resources required to carry out ethical research with human participants. Academic departments and universities could develop institutional mechanisms to acknowledge and reward these efforts as an integral and valued part of scholarly productivity.

This broader sense of openness with its emphasis on ethical practices and reflexivity could also enable a more equal distribution of the benefits of social science research across stakeholders and across geographic space. Existing inequalities in knowledge production and of the global digital divide could be lessened as scholars focused more on their ethical commitments to the human subjects, collaborators, and colleagues in their field sites, striving to provide them with equitable access to the benefits of the research, rather than thinking first of the editors and reviewers.⁵⁴ Scholars would be motivated to move beyond a minimalist ethical commitment to “do no harm” to the individual human subjects who participate directly in their studies, and begin to adopt a more maximalist ethical commitment to the provision of benefits,⁵⁵ thereby realizing the Belmont principle of beneficence. The promotion of benefits, not simply for the immediate gain of the research subjects, but for the betterment of society at large is what the National Science Foundation now calls “broader impacts”.⁵⁶

The benefits described above are generated through an engagement with a much broader form of openness than has been conceptualized thus far in the DA-RT initiative. Of course, there are some potential benefits to be gained from the narrower conceptualization of transparency outlined by DA-RT, but they cannot be promoted in the abstract or assessed in a vacuum of “best practices”. These benefits need to be evaluated in the real world, which means juxtaposing them

⁵³ Jordan and Hill 2012. Although this analysis was conducted a few years ago, it appears that little has changed.

⁵⁴ Aremu and MacLean 2016.

⁵⁵ Kapiszewski et al. 2015, 146.

⁵⁶ In addition to “intellectual merit”, the second criterion for NSF funding is “broader impacts” that are seen as improving society. See the discussion at: <https://www.nsf.gov/od/oia/special/broaderimpacts/>.

against other more pressing benefits, like ethical concerns for human participants, which may be compromised by the pursuit of narrower forms of transparency. In the next section, we discuss principles and strategies that individual researchers might use to navigate the ethical dilemmas of political science research.

VI. Principles and Strategies for Making Ethical Research Choices in Political Science

Scholars will confront often knotty ethical dilemmas at all stages of their research project, and even well beyond the publication of their books and articles, as discussed above. Unfortunately, no ready-made blueprint exists for individuals to make ethical research choices. And, worse, many ethical problems involve agonizing tradeoffs. For example, protecting the interests of one group might harm the interests of another. Rarely does an ideal solution exist that perfectly reconciles all competing interests, risks and benefits for all of the human subjects involved and affected by the study. Frequently, researchers must make hard ethical choices, where the ultimate outcomes are not crystal clear.

Given the daunting scope of these challenges, other researchers have attempted to develop ethical guidelines for conducting research in particular kinds of contexts, such as post- conflict settings.⁵⁷ Building on these initiatives, we offer several general principles and strategies for how individual researchers can begin to navigate ethical predicaments. It is impossible to provide highly specific and concrete pointers because ethical dilemmas are powerfully shaped by the particularities of the study context. Hence, we also urge the reader to consult the reports of other QTD Working Groups for more substantive suggestions and principles. In the final section of the essay, we highlight institutional and policy changes that would support these kinds of ethical practices at the individual-level.

To begin, scholars should engage wholeheartedly with the relevant research ethics boards at their home institutions and in their fieldsites as early as possible.⁵⁸ While these types of formal research approval processes would be grossly inadequate if they served as the only ethical checkpoint, they do constitute a useful beginning. Researchers are usually required to think through in specific detail how they plan to recruit human subjects, obtain voluntary and informed consent, and protect their confidentiality and security over the immediate and long-term. At the same time, researchers must continue to educate their IRBs on the challenges and opportunities of context-specific ethical practice, for example, explaining why verbal informed consent more effectively protects human subjects who are not literate. Thomson (2013) contends that the extended process of review by her campus Research Ethics Board enabled her to act quickly and effectively to protect the human subjects that had participated in her study when the Rwandan government sought their names, searched her residence, revoked her research permit, and even put her under house arrest for two months. Participants in Thomson's research were protected through careful use of pseudonyms and daily digitization of fieldnotes and interviews to allow her data to be stored in encrypted- and password-protected files.

While participating actively throughout the IRB process may help scholars to anticipate some of the potential risks and worrisome scenarios, researchers will inevitably face ethical challenges that were completely unexpected. In these instances, a deep understanding of the overarching principles of the Belmont Report -- of respect, beneficence, and justice -- may

⁵⁷ Thomson 2009a; Campbell 2017; Cronin-Furman and Lake 2017.

⁵⁸ Thomson 2013; Brown 2014.

provide valuable perspective to adjudicate new problems that arise during the conduct of a study. Central to this process is a commitment to reflexivity^{59, 60} in carefully navigating the management of ethical dilemmas while in the field, and during the write up and dissemination of findings.

In order to carry out reflexive processes that result in appropriate resolution of the ethical dilemmas and tensions discussed above, however, scholars must possess a nuanced understanding of the particular context for the study. Researchers can enhance their knowledge of the context by reading broadly in other relevant disciplines, such as anthropology, economics, geography, history, and sociology. Of note, this multidisciplinary scholarship is usually produced and disseminated in a variety of scholarly communities and outlets, which may not be readily available online or in English.

Political scientists will further deepen their understanding of the context by expanding their networks of knowledge brokers beyond the usual academic circles. Researchers can read and develop connections with a range of contacts, including journalists, activists, and leaders of youth groups, women's groups, community organizations, NGOs, businesses, unions, political parties, and government. Each of these actors might offer a different understanding of the study context and enhance the researcher's ability to think through and respond to ethical issues.⁶¹ These local brokers will also facilitate the recruitment of skilled and knowledgeable local research assistants, translators, and collaborators who, as part of the research team, will equally be tasked with mediating ethical problems in the field.

Researchers can also initiate and nurture more enduring institutional relationships with relevant organizations in their fieldsites. These longer-term institutional affiliations likely deepen the trust with the widening network of colleagues in the research site beyond the single project, improving the quality of the information provided about the context as well as the support to reflect critically on emergent ethical quandaries.

Reading, networking, and building institutional relationships all take considerable time; thus, scholars also need to build in time for these necessary ethical practices into their work plans and budgets. Researchers should resist overscheduling and leave time for careful information gathering and thoughtful reflection and discussion. (Of course, if scholars make these adjustments then universities and grant agencies also need to recognize the time necessitated to do ethical research when evaluating proposals and productivity.) Importantly, scholars need to take the time to remember that human subjects, research assistants, and other collaborators in the research site may not have the mobility or freedom to exit if and when the situation becomes risky. Our ethical responsibilities continue even when we have the opportunity to exit.

VII. Policy Reforms and Institutional Changes to Support Ethical Research with Human Participants

Given our commitment to and belief in reflexive openness, we advocate for an ethical reset in political science research with human subjects, regardless of epistemological or methodological

⁵⁹ Fujii, 2008 and 2012; Sriram 2009.

⁶⁰ Lee Ann Fujii, forum "[Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116>.

⁶¹ Paluck 2009.

approach. Openness is more than meeting the minimum IRB requirements. As such, we advise that political science departments, professional associations, journals, publishers, and grant programs should not rely on Institutional Review Board approvals to assure the protection of human subjects. Instead, we should use IRB processes as a starting point to critically reflect on the protections we offer the subjects with whom we work, informants and assistants alike. Our understanding of openness must eschew one-size-fits-all templates, erring instead on the side of respect for ethical research practice on a case-by-case basis rather than potentially restrictive commitments to transparency.

Our fundamental position is straightforward: the researcher – not IRB committees, editors or peer reviewers – is ultimately responsible for protecting the human beings participating in her project, including the assurance of physical safety and emotional security.⁶² Moreover, the researcher bears this ethical responsibility from a project’s very beginning and throughout the data-collection and -analysis, writing, and publication stages. These norms about ethical research conduct are a source of agreement across a tremendously diverse range of political science scholars. The disagreements tend to be over how the discipline’s institutions might engage to support such conduct. As a way forward, we advocate for a more flexible and practical set of openness guidelines – nonetheless with a universal process of accountability as we explain below – rather than a specific and idealized transparency statement.⁶³

Reflexive openness thus has an immediate implication for “who decides” whether data and/or details of its production should be withheld to protect human subjects. When submitting their work for publication, *all* authors should be required to make a reasoned argument justifying whether and how their data should be shared or withheld. The default expectation should not be that all data would be shared unless exempted. We have highlighted above the potential short and long-term costs of this norm. Some critics of the current standard have proposed that we ought to simply reverse it: that all data would be protected unless determined by the author to pose no risk to any human subject now or in the foreseeable future.^{64, 65} We believe that disciplinary institutions should avoid a single standard from which some scholars will inevitably need to deviate and appeal for exemptions. Instead, we call for a dialogue between the researcher and journal editors. All authors would be expected to justify their decisions and thereby enter into such a dialogue with editors who might well be in a position to reveal misjudgments or unscrupulous conduct vis-à-vis the wellbeing of research participants.⁶⁶ That said, as the one ethically obliged to protect participants, a researcher would also be expected to withdraw a manuscript when negotiations failed to find common ground and required compromises that, in the author’s judgement, violated promised confidentiality or provided inadequate protections to participants. Through such sequences, all researchers would be treated equally. The process would be universal; and, yet, the subsequent procedures at publication would be highly

⁶² Jane Mansbridge, forum "[Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64dae67#p430),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64dae67#p430>.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Le Bas 2016.

⁶⁵ In contrast, the JETS asserts that cited data must be shared at the time of publication (in practice editors often require that it be shared with reviewers) unless an exception is granted by the editor, rather than by the scholar.

⁶⁶ Macartan Humphreys raised the later possibility in his post, "[Comments on Draft Report of Working Group I.2](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169)” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 14, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169>.

contextualized. This policy would err on the side of protecting the wellbeing of human participants rather than of promoting scholarly careers or journal reputations.

The standard for such justification, we suggest, should be that of “rational basis review,” namely, that an author, whether seeking to withhold or release data, must advance a reasoned argument based on the rational implications of their proposed action.⁶⁷ Thus, in the case of withholding data, the author conveys that there is a conceivable link between sharing data or details of its production and a risk of harm to some subject immediately or in the foreseeable future, and that, conversely, in the case of releasing data, there is no such link. Among other benefits, this standard would preclude the possibility that an author might simply assert an ability or inability to share without giving any grounds; the researcher’s intention to share or refusal to disclose data thus would not be arbitrary but based on reasoned judgments.

If the editor finds the author’s argument insufficient, the editor must also provide a reasoned justification why in her/his opinion the author has *not* shown a conceivable link between data disclosure and risk to human subjects immediately or in the foreseeable future. In the case that the editor and scholar continue to disagree whether such a reasonable link had been shown, the disagreement should be adjudicated by a senior scholar who is an expert on the research setting and acceptable to both author and editor. If, after adjudication, a scholar continues to disagree with an editor's insistence that data be shared, the scholar is ethically obligated to withdraw the work from further consideration to protect her subjects.

This standard reaffirms the position in the APSA Guide to Professional Ethics, which is clear that it is the researcher who is best placed to make these ethical and methodological decisions.⁶⁸ In contrast, journal editors would be more likely than the researcher to make errors that could lead to the exposure of human subjects to retaliation by regimes, communities, or individuals. As we saw above, such exposure may lead to harsh consequences, ranging from social stigmatization to violence, imprisonment, and death. Regardless of research setting, the researcher may need to make decisions at odds with editorial requests for data access and transparency, but our ethical obligations to participants takes precedence over any obligations to editors, reviewers, and the research community to share data and to specify how the data was

⁶⁷ We thank Alan Jacobs and Tim Büthe for this suggestion. “Under the rational basis test, a law will be upheld [in our case, the author’s refusal to share data] if it is rationally related to any legitimate government purpose [to protect human subjects’... In fact, the goal need not be the actual purpose of the legislation, but rather any conceivable legitimate purpose.” See Chemerinsky 2016, 2.

⁶⁸ According to the JETS (2014): “The editor shall have full discretion to follow their journal’s policy on restricted data, including declining to review the manuscript or granting an exemption with or without conditions.” In short, editors claim the authority to judge whether “confidentiality protections” justify an exception, but it is the scholar who is the expert in the particular risks that her subjects would face if data is disclosed.

The Guide continues: “Decisions to withhold data and a full account of the procedures used to collect or generate them should be made in good faith and on reasonable grounds. Researchers must, however, exercise appropriate restraint in making claims as to the confidential nature of their sources, and resolve all reasonable doubts in favor of full disclosure.” *APSA Guide*, 2012, p 10.

produced and analyzed.⁶⁹ As Lahra Smith ably summarized, “Bad research published in major journals is nothing compared to the harm that can come to real human beings.”⁷⁰

In addition to articulating a policy that embraces a flexible approach to research openness during the publication review process, disciplinary organizations should consider several other institutional changes that would support individual researchers as they pursue ethical research. Academic departments, research centers, and professional associations should include more extensive graduate training and professional development on research ethics. This should include modules, short courses, and roundtable discussions. Practicum sessions could showcase the use of technology and other data management techniques to facilitate the security of data, researchers, and human subjects in a variety of political contexts.⁷¹ Departments might need to reevaluate curriculum requirements and consider exemptions for normative time and tenure clocks for graduate students and faculty who work in high-risk ethical climates. These accommodations would acknowledge the labor and time-intensive nature of this kind of research and validate the importance of conducting research in an ethical manner.

Universities or professional associations should also invest resources in developing technology to connect researchers facing similar ethical issues or working in comparable contexts. An interactive website, perhaps linked to existing social media platforms, could amplify an individual researchers’ efforts to expand their professional networks and facilitate ongoing discussions about particular ethical issues.⁷² This website might also post a range of “ethical briefs”⁷³ and even host webinars on common ethical problems in political science research.

Journal and book editors should provide institutional support for this renewed attention to ethical practice in political science by relaxing word count limitations for manuscripts.⁷⁴ Increased word count limits would allow for detailed consideration of one’s ethical protocol, and discussion of challenges and opportunities confronted and resolved (or not). Editors and peer reviewers should encourage authors to engage in a reflexive discussion of their ethical practices, data security and author positionality in the primary text, rather than in footnotes or a methodological appendix.⁷⁵ The advent of Field Notes and other practice-oriented peer-review publishing outlets is welcome, with the goal of ethical openness in mind.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Regina Bateson, post “[Data access – human subjects protection](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=40&p=66&hilit=Bateson#p66),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum Stage One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=40&p=66&hilit=Bateson#p66>.

⁷⁰ Lahra Smith, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 12, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?t=116#p811>.

⁷¹ For those scholars working in conflict or post-conflict settings, universities might consider providing support to faculty and graduate students to attend a short course on trauma counseling either at home or in the field site (Thomson 2013).

⁷² Similar types of interactive websites are already under construction for scholars who conduct field research.

⁷³ Thomson 2009a.

⁷⁴ Gerring and Cojocaru 2017.

⁷⁵ See Aisha Ahmad, post “[Transparency in Security Studies](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=47),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum. Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=47>; Sheena Chestnut Greitens, post “[Inviting Input on Specific Transparency Practices](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=56&p=89&hilit=Greitens#p89),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum. Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 13, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=56&p=89&hilit=Greitens#p89>. However, we ask for cautious editorial practice in availing additional word count to explain ethical choices. Our concern is that the requirements

Conclusion

Ensuring the ethical treatment of human research participants is the primary duty of every scholar. This is an inviolable obligation that supersedes all others except in the most extraordinary of circumstances. From this starting assumption, we have systematically evaluated the risks, dilemmas and consequences of a narrower notion of transparency as compared to our approach of reflexive openness. We argue that a shift to this concept yields great potential benefits and should be the foundational assumption of our future models and practices. We urge political scientists to maintain our ethical commitments through the full range of our disciplinary institutions – from the revision of APSA guidelines, the submission and review policies of our journals, and expectations of our respective academic departments. Of particular urgency are the incorporation of ethical training in doctoral programs and endorsement by APSA leadership of more high-profile activities at association events. Lives and livelihoods of our subjects are at stake, as well as methodological pluralism and access to top journals by colleagues at less- resourced institutions.

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of asking for longer and more detailed provision of primary data sources may unduly burden researchers to explain their work in ways that make compliance to editorial demands too onerous, and are, at a minimum shared across researcher rank, methodology and field site (Anastasia Shesterinina, post "[Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdbab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64deae67#p430),” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116&sid=1fbdbab8ed2e4eb10d34d2ee64deae67#p430>; Aremu and MacLean 2016).

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Power and Institutionalization

Final Report of QTD Working Group I.3

May 2020

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The work of the QTD working groups was supported in part by the U.S. National Science Foundation's Political Science Program under Grant No. 1644757. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and/or participations in the QTD deliberative process and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. For comments on drafts of this report, we thank Zlatina Georgieva, Mehmet Gurses, Alan Jacobs, Ege Ozen, Tobias Rommel and Gunes Tezcur.

Introduction

Working group I.3 was established to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of fostering research explicitness.² We sought to foster discussion of questions such as: What are the goals of institutionalizing research explicitness? For what kinds of challenges are different modes of institutionalization (including voluntary social norms, explicit standards, and mandatory rules) best suited? How do the costs and benefits of the different forms of institutionalization differ? And in particular: How do different institutional modes for advancing research explicitness interact with power and resource differentials between scholars at different career stages, undertaking different kinds of work, or located at different kinds of educational institutions? Who should make judgments about trading off openness or explicitness against other intellectual, social, or ethical goals? Working group I.3 was also called upon to deliberate the appropriate role of particular institutional actors—editors and reviewers, IRBs, funding agencies—in enforcing/promoting research explicitness.

This report addresses these questions by describing different possible models of institutionalization surrounding research explicitness. Our report does not advocate for any particular form of institutionalization, consistent with our reading of the deliberations, but rather focuses on spelling out key pros and cons of alternative approaches. The four models are ideal-type, which allows for a more informed debate and decision making by those in positions of differential power and particular research communities, to help clarify the dimensions on which the institutionalization of norms for the explication of one's research methods differ. The report also applies these models to different elements of the research production process, from planning and production transparency to analytic transparency, to data sharing. We then consider ways of approaching research explicitness from differing perspectives embedded within power and resource hierarchies.

² Contributors to the QTD deliberations, especially those scholars who participated in the online deliberations of the working groups on ontological and epistemological priors (I.1) and interpretive methods (III.2), as well as participants of discussions elsewhere, have pointed out that the very word "transparency" has problematic associations for many non-positivist scholars of politics, as noted in the overview essay by Jacobs and Büthe et al. (2019). Some working groups have therefore decided to avoid the term transparency in their reports. Other reports, following a compromise proposal by the steering committee, use "openness" and/or "explicitness" in lieu of or alongside "transparency" without drawing a distinction. Others differentiate research transparency explicitly from related terms such as research openness, research explicitness, or research integrity. For purposes of this report we have decided to use "research explicitness" even when discussing what on various QTD threads and in a large number of bilateral and small group offline exchanges was often discussed as "research transparency." We do so partly in deference to arguments by interpretivists and others that the specific words we choose can have political consequences, but also in light of the case Craig Parsons made during the early days ("Stage 1") of the deliberations for replacing "research transparency" with "research explicitness" because explicitness is "definitional of scholarship" and makes it less likely to be mistaken for endorsing a simplistic notion of "truth," which we have found to be compelling (Thread "'Truth' or DARE", starting with Parson's post of 11 April 2016, 7:43pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=83>). A focus on research "explicitness" might have the added advantage of facilitating engagement with related debates in neighboring disciplines (see, e.g., Bissell 2013; Connors et al 2019; Resnick et al 2015; Snel 2019; Vraga and Bode 2018; Wager 2015). That said, we retain the terms "production transparency" and "analytical transparency" for consistency with other QTD reports.

Four Models of Institutionalization

Norms governing how scholars gather information, how they analyze that information, *what and how they communicate about these important elements of the research process* to various scholarly and non-scholarly audiences, and whether or how much of one's records or "raw data" to share with others, can be institutionalized in a variety of ways.

Prior to institutionalizing any such norms, of course, is their initial emergence. Scholarly norms can emerge, like other norms in the social and political world, through regularized social inactions,³ through deliberative, possibly even conflictual processes,⁴ or through more or less inclusive, explicit standard-setting or rule-making processes.⁵ Such processes may take place informally or as a formal initiatives of a professional association; within broad scholarly networks or highly specialized scholarly communities; at the local, regional/national, or international level. Moreover, processes of developing or articulating norms, standards, or rules can be inclusive, participatory, bottom-up or tightly controlled top-down.

Given the central importance of scholarly publications (and, at least for some research, intra- and extramural funding), journal editors, publishers, and funding agencies are often seen as playing a central role in the *institutionalization* of research explicitness. But even the leading journals, publishers, and funding agencies within our discipline differ greatly in what they require of scholars, particularly when their research involves diverse methods of gathering information, various "qualitative" analytical techniques, and research records beyond datasets. We therefore seek to contribute to a better understanding of the institutionalization of such scholarly norms as a distinct phenomenon.

To help clarify the dimensions on which various ways of institutionalizing norms for the explication of one's research methods differ, we begin by sketching four starkly different ideal-typical scenarios. They differ, in particular, with respect to codification, responsibility of implementation, and incentivization/enforcement. For each scenario, we also briefly discuss the implications it has for existing power structures and the often vastly unequal access to material resources among scholars of politics. We explore how these different approaches interact with other forms of inequality in the final section of our report.

1. "Let 100 Flowers Bloom":

Strictly Voluntary Individual Practices Without Institutionalization

One possible approach is to consider it a strictly discretionary, individual decision by each scholar what information to disclose about (and from) her or his research. To the extent that there are widely shared understandings of good practices, this approach might still lead authors to commonly report certain information about the research design and process, but there is no presumption of a shared understanding here. Consequently, any form of codification would be antithetical to this approach. It implies leaving it entirely to the individual scholar to decide whether to implement any particular practices in her or his own research and what to communicate about the research process. The creation of incentives for, or enforcement of, compliance also is antithetical to this approach (as well as arguably impractical), which implies that reviewers

³ See, e.g., Ostrom; Axelrod 1984; Sikkink 1986; 1993a; 199b.

⁴ Habermas 1962; Risse 2000.

⁵ See, e.g., Büthe and Mattli 2011.

also must not demand nor use methodological information in their assessment of research proposals and manuscripts.

Implications: This radical libertarian approach is appealing in that it maximizes scholarly freedom. It might thus be expected to be conducive to Kuhnian scientific revolutions, since it reduces incentives to stick to "conventional" or established ways of thinking about, and conducting, research on politics. On the face of it, this approach also seems to provide a strong safeguard against the exercise of power, as well as against experiencing unintentional consequences of scholarly hierarchies and of the sometimes vastly unequal access to material resources.

The absence of formal power structures, however, may be a highly imperfect safeguard against undesirable effects of power or inequality. Research funding and pages in prestigious journals and publishers' portfolio, for instance, are bound to still be scarce, so funding and publishing decision still need to be made. If reviewers, editors, and program directors were not to use (appropriately differentiated) methodological criteria in the assessment of research projects and manuscripts, then the seniority of the author, the status of his/her university, the size of a scholar's network and debts colleagues owe to her or him (which are bound to be at least partly a function of resource inequities) all might be expected to play a larger role in funding and publication decisions than they do in current practices or under any of the other ideal-typical approaches discussed below.

Complete discretion with regard to the information a scholar is expected to share about her or his research process also would impede assessment and learning by one's colleagues. And the lack of requirements to disclose the sources of the scholar's funding, her or his positionality vis-à-vis research subjects, as well as how s/he has dealt with ethical obligations and dilemmas or possible conflicts of interest that have arisen in the course of the research, would seem to obfuscate consequential inequalities rather than provide a safeguard against them.

A number of scholars, including contributors to various QTD discussion boards, have expressed positions seemingly endorsing this radical libertarian approach.⁶ And taking this approach is certainly conceivable, but we actually see little support for the radical steps that would be implied by taking this approach to its logical conclusion, such as diminishing or even abolishing peer review – possibly for the reasons noted above.

2. Social Norms with Individual Responsibility for Implementation

In a second ideal-typical scenario, common understandings regarding scholarly explicitness about the research process are assumed to exist as social norms, understood as "expectations about appropriate behavior" that are "collective"⁷ in the sense of being widely "shared among a community of actors."⁸ Such social norms play an important role in politics and governance from the most local level (within families, in groups of friends, among colleagues in a particular firm or workplace) to the international or global level.⁹ At the same time, scholarly social norms may be

⁶ ... [Reference here specific QTD posts]

⁷ Katzenstein, Jepperson and Wendt 1996: 54.

⁸ Finnemore 1996: 22.

⁹ See also: March & Olson 1989; Keohane 2009; ...

quite specific to particular scholarly communities and potentially different quite a bit across scholarly (sub-)communities What does a social norms approach to research explicitness imply?

Noting that social norms are by definition widely shared within a community of actors does not imply harmonious agreement on all aspects of research explicitness within that community (nor, of course, vis-à-vis other communities). Engaging in explicit, open debate over community expectations – i.e., debate over what exactly the norms are and require – can help clarify not only what is widely agreed but also what the limits of that agreement are. And those limits may be substantive as well as possibly geographic-physical or a function of social networks, as (sub-) communities might be constituted by sharing and articulating a common understanding of "appropriate" research practices while differing in their understanding from other (sub-)communities.¹⁰ In fact, deliberations such as the QTD – i.e., public debates in advance, inclusive of, or at least open to, all who will be affected by the decision(s) that might follow the deliberations, involving "argumentative exchanges" and "reciprocal reason giving"¹¹ – are arguably valuable, at least in part, because they facilitate *identifying the differences* that cannot be bridged through compromise (as well as enabling the articulation of common understandings and thus the formation of social norms).¹²

Viewing norms regarding research explicitness as "social norms" implies that they are not codified, though codification of such "widely shared understandings" would not change much. It certainly would not necessarily decrease the likelihood of norm-violation. To be sure, widespread violation of any norm by members of a community raises questions about whether that community really shares the supposed understanding and thus undermines the norm.¹³ But occasional violations of social norms – and the resulting opportunities to observe community reactions to such violations – can help clarify what the locally effective social norms are.¹⁴ Observing, for instance, that a person who crosses the street at a crosswalk during the red light gets chided or clearly frowned upon, even when doing so poses no immediate risks to anyone, suggest that there is a strong social norm against such jay-walking. Observing that the chiding and frowning only occurs when children are present at the crosswalk is highly informative about the scope conditions for which the social norm is supposed to govern appropriate behavior. Conversely, regularly seeing parents with small children be the first to cross the street at a red light – as in parts of New York City – suggests that the norm is not widely shared in that particular community. In sum, widespread compliance with a social norm, as well as occasional violations and the community reaction to them, help affirm and "reconstitute" the social norm through practice within communities that may in part be defined or circumscribed by those shared understandings or expectations.

Even when understandings are widely shared, the implementation of social norms is first and foremost an individual responsibility. Norm-compliant behavior is, however, in this scenario, reinforced by enforcement as a community task – this is what distinguishes *social* norms from the strictly voluntary individual practices at the core of the "Let a 100 flowers bloom" approach. In the social norms scenario, such enforcement is carried out, above all, through the decentralized assessment of the completed research by a scholar's peers – though possibly in

¹⁰ See, e.g., Risse 2000.

¹¹ Elstub (2019:193) based on Florida (2014:305).

¹² See also Carraro et al 2018; Dryzek *et al* 2019; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Mutz 2006; Warren 1996.

¹³ Carr 1964; Nosek et al 2015; Sikkink 2009(?)

¹⁴ Bull 1977.

addition and in extreme cases through refusals to fund or (recommendations of) decisions not to publish.

Implications: Governance through social norms involves a diffuse exercise of power (by definition, no single actor can change social norms unilaterally), yet this long-established practice nonetheless situates the individual scholars in potentially very strong power relationships, balanced only by the ease of leaving a given scholarly community.¹⁵ At the same time, since social norms are not fully explicitly (not codified), it may be quite hard for new entrants to join a research community. Also: editors (and program officers at funding agencies) exercise substantial power in selecting, through their choice of reviewers, the research community or communities whose norms should govern.

The social norms ideal type approximates the long-standing practice at most journals, publishing houses, and funding agencies until recently – and for most forms of non-algorithmic research approximates the practices at journals such as *World Politics* and *Comparative Political Studies* to this day. To the extent that reviewers raise concerns about certain aspects of the research process (or the lack of information about specific steps or practices in the research practice), particularly if two or more reviewers note concerns consistently, the editors are much more likely to ask the author(s) to elaborate or more fully explain, and they are more likely to reject a manuscript if the underlying research appears to violate the pertinent research community's social norms regarding research practice or the author fails to comply with the community's research explicitness norms.

3. Standards

with Various Incentives for Adoption and/or Possible, Decentralized Enforcement

In the third scenario, understandings regarding scholarly explicitness about the research process are institutionalized as standards, i.e., explicit norms that are codified through some kind of standards-development process and recognized (at least by some in a given research community) as guidance for practice. Occasionally, an individual socio-political actor single-handedly develops a "standard,"¹⁶ but usually, developing a standard is a social process involving multiple, possibly many stakeholders in a public or private forum.¹⁷

In principle, anyone – including any subset of any scholarly community – can explicitly articulate any number of prescriptive principles for scholarly practice without necessarily affecting anyone outside the participating group itself. Erik Bleich's and Robert Pekkanen's proposal that research publications based on interviews be accompanied by an Interview Methods Table, for instance, may be considered such an explicit articulation of a scholarly norm,¹⁸ which has little or no effect on (discussions of) research practices outside the community of scholars conducting interview research. And even within that community, the proposal as such obliged no one and left anyone else free to articulate alternative proposals, including a norm *not* to provide such tables.

¹⁵ REFs

¹⁶ To provide a QMMR example: In the early years of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), sociologist Charles Ragin, who essentially came up with the idea of using set theory in this way as a technique for social and political analysis – and who for several years was its predominant promoter, who explained the technique and its underlying logic to a generation of doctoral students, before others started to join him in further developing this analytical toolset – might be said to have single-handedly set the initial standards for which results of a QCA to report and how.

¹⁷ See Büthe and Mattli 2011, esp. chapter 2.

¹⁸ Bleich and Pekkanen 2013; 2016.

As a matter of politics and governance, the key questions are: What allows some explicit norms to become standards in the sense of becoming recognized and effective as prescriptive guidance for practice? And if so, who had or has – de jure and de facto – a chance to participate in setting and/or selecting the standard?

In many realms of contemporary life, there are multiple, at least partly competing standards. When the (often commercial) stakes are high, this can lead to fierce contests – in the technological and commercial realm also known as "standards wars" – in which market- and nonmarket-tactics may be brought to bear to achieve dominance.¹⁹ In the governance of various professional practices, by contrast, multiple different and even incompatible standards can co-exist for a long time, each guiding the behavior of subsets of the "targets"²⁰ whose behavior the competing standards seek to govern, as illustrated by the multitude of standards for organic agricultural goods or corporate social responsibility standards.²¹ To the extent that we similarly developed multiple standards of research explicitness among which scholars could at least initially freely choose, the process of selection, through which some standards might ultimately become dominant, would also need to be considered in assessing the implications of an institutionalization of research explicitness norms as standards.

Moreover, for some standards, there is, at least *de facto*, a pre-determined institutional focal point for developing the standard, such as maybe a section of a professional association, if a scholarly community generally considers the association's section appropriate and without alternative as the governance institution for research practices. Such a "unitary" institutional structure for selecting a particular prescriptive proposal as "the" standard (which may also consist of several hierarchically related institutions for jointly making decisions), raises the questions regarding who has or exercises power in the standard-setting process even more forcefully.

Considering these aspects is particularly important because governance through standards involves – under all but the most exceptional of circumstances – the exercise of power, even if such exercise of power may not be apparent and is virtually never overtly coercive. As standards, prescriptive statements are by definition not mandatory, that is, implementation and compliance are – at least *de jure* – voluntary. Their explicitness, however, facilitates a decision by others – in their respective jurisdictions – to require the implementation or compliance with a particular standard. Therefore, a threshold or practice is codified as desirable, with likely costs or additional risks, procedures, hoops for those who opt not to meet the standard for any set of reasons they may hold. In the United States, regulators and legislators have for many years relied on the "technical" standards developed by various non-governmental expert bodies, including professional associations, to govern various "technical" aspects of public life from building codes to radiological safety – to human subject protection in research.²² In more recent years, the OECD

¹⁹ See, e.g., Augerau et al 2006; Brookey 2007; Crane 1979; Dranove and Gandall 2003; McNicholl 2006; Shapiro and Harian 1999.

²⁰ Büthe 2012.

²¹ REFs.

²² See, e.g., Hamilton 1978. In the United States, universities and research institutes that receive research funds from the federal government are required to have an "Institutional Review Board" (essentially a university-internal committee of non-governmental experts) to conduct an advance review of all research involving "human subjects" to ensure that it does not violate ethical principles – as discussed in greater details in the reports of QTD Working Groups I.2 and II.1.

has more generally advocated this approach to regulatory governance to allow governments to benefit from private expertise and deal with the often fast pace of technological change.

Research on the political aspects and consequences of standards shows, moreover, that even when a standard is not subsequently rendered mandatory through regulatory or legislative measures, targeted users may feel that they have de facto little choice but to implement and comply with the standard. Some of the reasons for such de facto obligations, observed among commercial actors with regard to technical standards, rarely if ever apply to scholarly work.²³ Yet, whenever a standard succeeds in being widely perceived as specifying "best practice," it shifts the burden of proof (or at least the burden of "reason-giving") from reviewers or editors who might demand certain things from an author to scholars and authors who might wish to behave in ways that are not consistent with those postulates. And as Büthe (2012) shows, whenever the "targets" of a standard – those whose behavior is intended to be governed by the prescriptions contained in the standard – are not fully included among those who "supply" such governance by setting the standard (and the more the decision making procedure for adoption of the standard diverges from unanimity) the more does governance through standards inherently involve the exercise of power.

In comparison with strictly voluntaristic individual practices or social norms, the institutionalization of research explicitness as a set of (suitably differentiated) standards has advantages but also downsides. The more explicit articulation of such norms is surely pedagogically valuable in that it helps scholars who are new to a given research community (as graduate student or as more advanced scholars seeking to expand their analytical toolkit or learning how to conduct a different kind of research) figure out what the members of that community consider best practice. Standardization thus also lowers the barriers to entry – an important counterweight against an abuse of concentrations of power. At the same time, codification is likely to constrain and discourage innovative yet unconventional practices, all the more when traditionalists attain gatekeeping functions, e.g. as editors or funding agency program officers.

Finally, note a related, important implication of institutionalizing research explicitness norms as standards: One of the widely recognized benefits of codifying such norms in standards-developing processes is the increased clarity and predictability of expectations – an especially important issue if others are to rely upon the resulting findings or methods. Accordingly, well-regarded standards developing organizations often have a general or standard-specific period of assured stability, during which a standard, once it has been adopted, may not be changed. At the same time, standards developing bodies that are focused on their long-term institutional viability and relevance want to avoid ossification. Leading SDOs therefore provide regular opportunity for review whether an existing standard meets all users' needs and/or may need to be revised in light of new technological or other developments. This suggests that the institutionalization of research explicitness norms as standards might need to be accompanied by mechanisms for review and revision of any such standards at regular intervals.

²³ As political scientists, we generally do not have to worry about courts holding us liable for malfunctioning products simply because we failed to follow "best practices" in production or liability insurance companies therefore demanding higher premia (see Büthe 2010).

4. Rules:

Obligatory Prescriptions with Centralized Enforcement

Rules differ from standards, above all, by being de jure mandatory, at least for a specified target group. When journal editors set a word limit for submissions to the journal, they are not just setting a standard but a rule – though journals differ in the extent to which (and the stage at which) they enforce the limit, as some journals, for instance, refuse to review manuscripts that, at the time of the initial submission, exceed the limit (but might raise the limit substantially afterwards), whereas others are willing to review substantially longer manuscripts but will require authors of accepted manuscripts to keep to the limit for the main article before final submission (often while allowing substantial appendices and supplemental materials). Journal A's rules for length, formatting, bibliographic style, etc., as such only applies to submissions to that journal, but may also become a de facto standard for others, for instance by creating incentives for authors to follow the standard long before a decision on where to submit the manuscript, so as to make it easier to possibly submit to journal A, as well as incentives for other journals to adopt the same (or at least compatible) rules if they want manuscripts written for submission to journal A to be also submittable to them with maximum ease. The literature on regulatory competition²⁴ suggests that such considerations could lead to a race to the bottom, but given the characteristics of scholarly publishing and the incentives for being recognized as having the "highest standards," the leading journals in a given discipline or subfield probably have the capacity to initiate races "to the top" following the logic of David Vogel's "California effect" for environmental regulation in the United States.²⁵ Alternatively, the competition among journals may lead to greater "sideways" differentiation, including in the applicable rules.

A number of journals have gone beyond adopting rules for length, formatting, etc. and adopted rules for research explicitness as well. Indeed, the DA-RT proponents' efforts to commit political science journal editors to the DA-RT principles via the Journal Editors' Transparency Statement ("JETS") is an effort to turn standards into rules and very probably has prompted so much pushback for exactly this reason. Many "JETS" journals, however, have adopted such rules for quantitative and algorithmic analyses, only. Current practices of the *American Journal of Political Science* comes closest to taking a full-fledged rules approach and imposing those rules on qualitative research, too (though not necessarily to the qualitative components of seemingly quantitative research).

In sum, all the considerations noted for standards apply, often a fortiori, when prescriptions for research explicitness get institutionalized as rules. And especially where there is little or no meaningful competition, rules entail an overt and arguably more pervasive exercise of power than the alternatives. Standards and especially rules might be more helpful for achieving replicability of the reported empirical findings (whenever replicability is meaningful for the research at hand) but at the same time make scientific "revolutions" successively less (and "normal science" successively more) likely.

²⁴ See, e.g., Barrows 2009; Cary 1974; de Sombre 2005; Drezner 2000; Murphy 2004; Revesz 1992; Schneiberg and Bartley 2008.

²⁵ Vogel 1995.

II. How Different Approaches to Institutionalization Interact with Power and Inequality

Institutional settings across higher education, not only in the US but also across the world, provide an unequal social, political and financial context for scholars to engage in producing academic works. The ideal types introduced above also have differential consequences for scholar-researchers for a variety of other reasons. To better understand how different ways of institutionalizing explicitness might interact with power structures, as well as other forms of inequality among scholars, we begin by identifying the differences about which scholars who participated in the QTD (and colleagues with whom we have discussed these matters in various fora) have expressed concerns as possible sources of inequities prompted or exacerbated by research transparency demands:

- seniority and rank (from graduate student to faculty in adjunct or temporary employment status to tenure-track and tenured faculty),
- type of institution (from community colleges to liberal arts colleges to major research universities; as well as public versus private),
- epistemological tradition,
- methodological approach (including qualitative versus quantitative but importantly also concerning the differences between distinct modes of qualitative analysis, such as constructivist interpretation, ethnography, formal modeling, experiments, surveys, interviews, etc.),
- gender,
- under-represented minority status (resulting in barriers to networks, resources, and expression of social norms that may vary among different communities),
- geographic locations (including "domestic" scholars, who are socialized to meet the cultural expectation of the dominant (mostly US) communities of reviewers for the leading journals, versus international/foreign scholars, especially from developing countries),
- availability of funding for producing and disseminating data (incl. conditional vs. contractually guaranteed, unconstrained funding; short-term/uncertain versus long-term/sustained),
- research environment (including security concerns for researcher and/or research subjects).

It is impossible to discuss in fairness, in this short report, differences across subdisciplines and along all of these dimensions. We therefore discuss here consequential differences along some of these dimensions.

Funding

Extramural research funds exist, but they are not independent of scholars who may work in academic settings with differential resources. Some disciplines may rely on internal or extramural resources more than others, which then pose a disparity in resources in producing and disseminating data.

Differences in Context

Not only data gathering process may differ but also the content of the data. And these data may reveal identifying information about informants even though researchers may do anonymization at their best. The deposition of data into a journal's archive or other archives may disclose some vital information about researchers and the subjects and in many countries. In many non-liberal democracies and authoritarian countries, there is a symbiotic relationship between academia and policy-makers. If they are reviewers and access to the transparency data, they may identify this as well as the informants. Informants may be formally charged or can be blacklisted by the regime. Most spectacularly, there are about one thousand academics blacklisted and being sentenced/purged because they signed an online petition that calls for the end of urban warfare in southeastern Turkey in 2016. Furthermore, there is expectation in many countries is that they have to produce the research outputs in line with the national interest. Not only in Turkey, if editors and reviewers recall what happened in Central European University in Budapest that decided to leave Hungary, but the perils of authoritarian context and problems associated with doing fieldwork and archiving can also be appreciated.

Scholars at Different Career Stages

Those who are concerned about the replication of qualitative works emphasize that long field notes, interviews, participatory observation, and subjective and sometimes sensitive information add extra financial burden over scholars. This may have devastating consequences on those on tenure-track. If they are tenure-track, the risk is higher for them. This will put them into a disadvantageous position relative to those at universities with more resources. The result will be that those with resources have advantages over the have-nots to complete their works, access to more materials and produce more.

Type of Institution

Geographic locations also matter. The research funds and grants vary across developing countries where political and economic stability create significant volatility in their resources. They may be further disadvantaged in terms of publishing, depositing and transparency process compared to their colleagues at North American/European universities. Such trend implies that academia outside of North America/West may give up targeting the major journals in our field and turn to their national academic journals or a particular set of journals that do not accept the DA-RT guideline.

Research or teaching universities have different priorities, which endow academicians with unequal resources. Research funds have diminished, in no small extent, for most academics, while funds for organizing book or article workshops do exist only for a small number of universities. The grant and scholarship opportunities outside of academia exist, but the number and focus do not help to fix the growing disparity in academia. Those with resources have advantages over the have-nots to complete their works, access to more materials and produce more

A number of institutions do not assist junior or senior faculty members; providing no or insufficient/symbolic research funds/conference funds. Resources will vary across teaching and research universities as well. While this may be the case at least for at some scholars, now they need additional burden on their "have-not" situations. Those who do qualitative works need funds or extra time for encrypting their interviews and field notes. If a journal editor or reviewer wants

a full translated and transcribed interviews, they may create an enormous burden on a scholar specialized in a qualitative study.

III. Power, Institutionalization, and Types of Research Explicitness: Data Production Process Transparency, Analytic Transparency, and Post-Analysis Data Availability

Here we examine how the different characteristics across the spectrum of institutionalization interact across different types of research explicitness. We suggest that full transparency has many components do not always hang together in practice in institutionalization, or in the values surrounding explicitness. Transparency includes the process of research design, data gathering (including what was observed and what was not; what was allowed to be made public and what was not), and the analytic process of meaning-, as well as questions of data distribution post-publication. With attention to inequities in resources and power hierarchies, we discuss the degree of enforcement and preferences in providing unequal incentives and constraints across data production process transparency, analytic transparency, and post-analysis data transparency. For example, there are often unclear and unequal expectations surrounding whether scholars should make clear and transparent the process of data production, in addition to the actual data collected and used in the publication. Such implications, moreover, might be more serious at some stages of the research process (or stages of the project life cycle) than at others – given their associated different forms of explicitness (production transparency in research design and data collection stages, analytical transparency in interpretation, and post-analysis data sharing following publication of some portion of the project). We focus on two dimensions along which research explicitness varies, in interaction with inequality and power: enforcement, and heterogeneity of preferences surrounding different kinds of explicitness.

Enforcement

In a context of low institutionalization, such as ideal type 2 via social norms, enforcement is at work at some levels that are observable and less so at others. Norms about research design explicitness and data production explicitness are likely to infuse the review process, because reviewers can easily see whether a manuscript is “sufficiently” (in their own assessment) explicit about how the data were gathered. This empowers and perpetuates reviewers’ preferences in these observable domains. Post-analysis data sharing is not as enforceable in a context of low-institutionalization, because a reviewer cannot observe whether a researcher will post their data until after acceptance. Therefore, editors would have to play a role in requiring posting, and this is not in the domain of social norm enforcement. However, long-term promotion processes are another mechanism of norm diffusion: if strong norms held at the point of promotion reviews, such as tenure evaluation, junior researchers will have incentives and information that will increase post-analysis data sharing.

In a context of high institutionalization, post-analysis data sharing could easily be enforced by journal editors. Research design and data production explicitness could also be strongly enforced by requiring iterations of pre-analysis plans for all methodological approaches to be submitted prior to data collection, and the congruence between the pre-analysis plan and data production could be an important element of review in this ideal type model. Analytic transparency may be

the most difficult to regulate across varied methodological approaches even within a highly institutionalized regime given the difficulty of fully comprehensive external review or evaluation of input and output points.

The key point here is that some kinds of research norms are enforced through existing evaluation processes, because those assessing the work can observe compliance at the point of review, while others are not easily enforced because compliance is not observed at this point.

There are clear tradeoffs in relation to scholars with different levels of power and resources. Those with recognized power and status in the discipline regularly enforce norms on data production transparency through reviews and committee selections (hiring, awards, publishing, etc). Preferences are perpetuated without clear guidelines about the nature and extent of explicitness necessary. This can disadvantage scholars without access to these networks and informal knowledge. However, a lack of standardization can also offer avenues for alternative norms and practices to flourish, decentralizing power and access.

High institutionalization in enforcement imposes costs across the discipline, with little regard for distinctions in data, context, process, and resources. Yet high institutionalization also potentially increases access to shared knowledge of standards and expectations of explicitness, as well as known data repositories where all scholars can have access to well-resourced data collection outputs.

Heterogeneity of Preferences

Scholars are not in agreement on the value of research explicitness, and this varies in both degree and in type. For example, some scholars may value data production explicitness, but have little concern for analytic transparency or data sharing. Within each type of explicitness, there are further complexities that vary across resources, inequities, types of research questions and contexts. This heterogeneity of preferences imposes greater costs it makes centralized standard-setting or rule-making more difficult and less adapted to the entire discipline. Additionally, there may be more consensus around some forms of explicitness, such as data-sharing, and less around others, such as analytic transparency or explicitness about processes of generating evidence) and this has unequal effects among researchers. Those who can more easily share data outputs are advantaged whereas those who can more easily be explicit about analytic transparency are potentially disadvantaged. Given different models of institutionalization and norms of transparency, there are often unclear and unequal expectations surrounding whether scholars should make clear and transparent the process of full data production, in addition to the actual data collected and used in the publication.

Further, within each area of explicitness, there are contextual variations. Within data production explicitness, for example, there are variations in what can be observed, and what can be made public, depending on research question, social, and political context.

Data production process transparency for some types of scholars and some types of journals might include providing a description on the process of data gathering, including steps from the researcher's decision making about what types of data to collect, where, how, and through what lens it will be analyzed. This may be included in a pre-analysis plan, along with description of the actual implementation of a data-gathering process, the number of interviews among which type of informants, subjects, and experts, survey sample descriptions, the process by which survey

samples were designed, and so forth. Some see this information as necessary to be able to assess the testing technique, the scope of the explanation, explanatory depth, explanatory breadth, theoretical unification, internal validity, and external validity. Others may not, and in a low institutionalization environment, scholars may benefit from this ambiguity or may find it costly in terms of time, preparation, and mismatched expectations between author and reviewer.

While we might see advantages to high institutionalization of this data “production process” description, it may also impose real costs and constraints across different types of scholars and categories of scholarship. We can predict that this type of reporting is certainly most problematic in cases where human subjects’ anonymity and well-being are of concern (in authoritarian regimes, contexts of violence, marginalized populations, etc.), as noted in working groups 1.2 (Ethics) and 2.1 (Research with Human Participants). In some cases, full production transparency will make it too obvious which populations were informants, which populations were surveyed with minority positions or demographics, etc. This is of greatest concern to researchers working in sensitive or insecure contexts, and doubly problematic when the number of observations is smaller, as might be the case in qualitative research, given that it makes each data point potentially more identifiable (where unique).

These issues create unequal priorities, risks, and costs between researchers and editors or reviewers, given that the editors and reviewers may require such information to fully assess the analytical transparency process, but researchers bear full responsibility of the protection of their subjects and have better contextual knowledge of how to best protect in the particular circumstances of each case.

These issues also create unequal burdens for different types of methodologies and data generation processes. In some data gathering, the sampling frame may be pre-determined, for example, whereas in others it may not. In some data gathering, the type of observations sought for analysis may be tightly proscribed, whereas in others the valid forms of observations may be fluid and open to interpretation throughout the data gathering process. In sum, the constraints to doing certain types of data production and in certain contexts would be much higher depending on the level of institutionalization and expectations surrounding the *types* of transparency under consideration. The ideal types listed above may be more or less feasible, beneficial, or constraining for particular types of research if we are only discussing post-analysis data transparency, compared to the costs and opportunities of including production process data transparency as well.

Strict adherence to production transparency may have advantages for describing data collection that was not used, where data collection and analysis produced null results, and where it was conflicting to the original theory but helped shape new hypotheses later tested, for example. Including full production transparency can help accumulate knowledge and can help other scholars learn about what data has been collected and where different types of data exist. The benefits from full production transparency may accrue in particular to junior scholars or those with less research funding to identify existing data. But there is also a high potential cost to scholars and journals in time and publication length to exhaustively describe all they have done.

There are also heterogeneous preferences regarding best practices in assessing production transparency for editors, reviewers, authors, and funders. At what stages is production transparency assessed? In the grant application and project proposal stage? By the researcher throughout the stages of the project? By the editors and reviewers in publication stage? In a highly institutionalized environment, one can imagine that transparency is assessed at all stages.

However, even in a norms-based environment, unspecified and heterogeneous norms shape the evaluation of new projects. The costs of assessing production transparency also vary by power and resource hierarchies in funding agencies, internal institutional capacities to assess research pre-analysis plan, and in journals' editor and reviewer resources and expenses.

Finally, heterogeneity in preferences around analytic transparency poses a distinct set of challenges for qualitative researchers. Analytic transparency calls for radical honesty about how political scientists infer conclusions from their data. Two issues are of particular concern. First, "honesty about one's research practices often means discarding the linguistic template of deductive proceduralism that structures most writing" and publication norms make it difficult to include the "messier, iterative, and open-ended nature of political science scholarship."²⁶ When the value of this openness is not well codified, scholars may fear that radical honesty will not positively be evaluated in review and publication. In a highly institutionalized environment, quantitative scholars may log keystrokes for statistical programs, and qualitative scholars may increase real-time recording of research activities as a logged register, address positionality in stating what work has been done and how, and journals can provide authors with protected space to reveal research practices, which could contribute pedagogically to methods training in this domain. Yet, in a low level of institutionalization, these practices may not be valued or needed, causing a burden of time and text. Additionally, contextual accuracy is needed by both the scholar and the reviewer/replicator to interpret the data. Even when several interviews and sources coincide to triangulate the data itself, interpretation is still key to (mis)represent reality.²⁷ In addition to understanding the research context, there is also a particular interpersonal interaction between the researcher and participant which can be specifically relational and deeply intersubjective in which "no data is truly raw or unfiltered."²⁸ Therefore, researchers and readers alike must be attentive to analytic transparency while endeavoring to clearly define positionality and the process of knowing. Even in a highly institutionalized environment, this type of interpretation and attentiveness to context is difficult to standardize, and attempts at doing so may limit the production and circulation of innovative research.

In sum, given the heterogeneity of preferences in type and degree of research explicitness and overall lack of consensus, researchers face uncertainty in allocating time and resources. Those facing more scarcity in these domains are particularly hampered, as are those who attempt to cross implicit boundaries by asking new questions and through new forms of analysis and interpretation. The heterogeneity itself may decrease the attention to and value of explicitness in some forms, but not others, and therefore give greater value to certain types of work that are deemed more observably transparent or explicit.

²⁶ Yom 2018

²⁷ QTD Post Vicky Murillo Thread Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness and Aili Tripp II.C <http://tinyurl.com/gwtox3v>

²⁸ QTD Post Robin Turner and Tim Pachirat I.1 <http://tinyurl.com/j9wp6a2>

IV. Implications for Journals, Researchers, and Universities

In lieu of a conclusion, we highlight and discuss in this final section a few additional distinctions – among journals, among scholar-researchers, and among the "institutional review boards" (IRBs) that have come to exercise enormous power over research endeavors but also can be a figleaf substituting for research ethics in universities in the United States and some countries strongly influenced by U.S. academic practices, such as Canada. Our goal here is to raise awareness of and among these key actors (along with funders, which we do not discuss separately here) regarding the critical role they play in making research explicitness as compatible as possible with the differentiated, ethical, and tolerant study of politics

Journals and their Differentiated Types

Journals may, for their respective subfield, develop guidelines that does not replicate one another but reflect their ontological, epistemological and methodological priors and priorities. For good reasons, then, the *American Journal of Political Science*'s approach to DA-RT and the larger debate over research transparency in our discipline will differ from the approach taken by the editors or editorial boards of *Middle Eastern Studies* or the *Journal of North African Studies* or *International Security*. Since the particular incarnations of many of the issues pointed out in the deliberations in the various QTD working groups and in the reports of this symposium differ by sub-fields, methodological approach, and specific type of scholarship, it is appropriate for political scientists to have a variety of approaches to research explicitness, consistent with the differentiated logics and approaches of our various research communities.

Rather than simply stop with this observation, however, we want to highlight two further differences among journals, which may have a bearing on their approach to research explicitness. First, journals may have unequal resources to support whatever research explicitness norms scholars might develop. Specifically, journals may need new resources and staff if they are to review research materials, check whether sources support the authors' claims, examine submitted materials to ensure that they are safe and legal for dissemination, and to fund data repositories. Monitoring and possibly enforcement of transparency norms will not only require resources (including time!) but intensify the power relationship between journals/editors and authors and create tensions between the journals and authors. Even if the norms are suitably differentiated, some journals and editors might not be able to afford these added costs; others will consider them insufficiently matched by benefits. Yet, post DA-RT and JETS, some journal editors feel forced to sign on to a vigorously orchestrated dynamic that they do not fully support or fear introduces incoherence in a diverse or multi- or interdisciplinary journal.²⁹

Second, all editors are gatekeepers; some are also trustees. Editors have a responsibility – and they are therefore empowered – to ensure that the work they publish is of high scholarly quality and possibly also that it has other characteristics deemed appropriate for the journal in question. It is therefore to some extent inevitable (and should be welcomed) that editors exercise power, including by considering differences in approaches to doing research as well as enforcing *some* norms about sharing/disseminating data (even if the norm might be that sharing data is entirely optional). At the same time, those who edit the major "generalist" or flagship journals on behalf of an association with a highly diverse membership (or the leading field journals for major, broad subfields) are not just quality control gatekeepers but also "trustees" for the

²⁹ Not-for-attribution interviews with multiple editors of three different journal at various times during 2019.

members of the association or of the subfield. Editors who are appointed as trustees should avoid adopting uniform rules and regulations that do not take into account vast differences in disciplines, methods, locations. Journal editorial teams may create a division of labor in which those specialized in particular approaches can assume responsibilities for any particular manuscript's research explicitness practices, but no editorial team is so large and diverse that it has experts for everything.

Researchers/scholars/authors – as differentiated types

Qualitative or quantitative research methodologies have different procedures as well as difficulties in producing and dissemination. The journals and publishing houses may provide resources for these tasks, but the commercialization of academic journals may remain an obstacle for this. This may bring more burden on researchers who do extensive field work; do recording their interviews and who use their analytical thinking when they are in the fieldwork. Translating their interviews from particular languages into English and/or transcribing them, coding them so that anonymity is provided pose important financial and effort on them. Interpretivist scholars may have obstacles revealing how they produce and reveal their research. However, it does not mean that quantitative research-oriented scholars have easy tasks, but researchers with different methodological approaches face various difficulties. Each group may need to develop social norms over time to deal with these difficulties, and the challenge may be a little higher for those scholars who use both quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analyzing. Therefore, the editors and reviewers, in particular, should take into account these varying perspectives and challenges in making research possible and disseminate.

Institutional Review Boards

Institutional review is often an integral part of planning and launching a major research project, encouraging scholars to comply with research ethics. However, even among major research universities in the United States, IRBs do not all have the same standards and procedures, for instance in their approach to deception; many countries do not have IRBs; and in the countries where they exist, they may differ in their definition of protected/vulnerable subjects. IRBs in some countries, moreover, may not allow researching particular topics/subjects (e.g., corruption, genocide, ethnic and religious issues). And as pointed out above, universities and research institutions in the authoritarian context may violate not only the privacy of researchers but also privacy/anonymized informants.

For researchers (and reviewers and journal editors, if they take on monitoring and/or enforcement functions with regard to research integrity), this means that they cannot absolve themselves of thorny ethical aspects of transparency and research explicitness by delegating them to an institutional review board. For members of institutional review boards, changing norms for research explicitness, including possibly data sharing etc., complicate the task of assessing research proposals for compliance with ethical norms. At a minimum, they should seek greater awareness than is currently common, what the norms, standards, or rules are that may apply to the project under review.

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Text-Based Sources

Final Report of QTD Working Group II.1

December 2018

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Introduction and Defining Text-Based Sources

Much research considered “qualitative” relies, at least in part, on analyzing documents, or what we refer to as text-based sources. These often include documents already gathered and culled by public officials (i.e., state archives) or those of political organizations or social movements, correspondence, diary entries, speeches, court rulings, transcriptions of news media, and secondary sources. Multi-media sources, such as photographs, transcripts of radio broadcasts, videos and websites, can also be considered to be documentary. Both of these types of documents – whether text-based or multi-media sources – are examples of “non-reactive” or non-obtrusive measures “that do not require the cooperation of a respondent and that do not themselves contaminate the response.”¹ Researchers do not introduce bias in the process of collecting the data because text-based sources are inanimate objects that are pre-existing to researchers, that is, they are not produced by researchers themselves.² This type of data entails a relatively lower level of bias through the data collection process than do more interactive data collection techniques, such as interviewing or conducting focus groups (although the fact that researchers must select which text-based sources to use can introduce bias, as we will discuss below). Our report applies to text-based portions of all social-scientific research, no matter what (combination of) methods they might employ in their empirical work.

Deliberations on the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (“QTD”) website were informative and diverse. We posed the following questions to structure deliberations regarding text-based sources:

- 1) What are the benefits of increasing transparency for how we obtain our text-based and non-text-based sources, and how we use these sources to make analytical, descriptive or causal claims?
- 2) What are the costs of increasing transparency for how we obtain our text and non-text-based sources, and how we use these sources to make analytical, descriptive or causal claims?
- 3) Do you have suggestions for practices that can help mitigate the costs of increasing data transparency for text-based and non-text-based sources?

This report draws on these deliberations, on existing scholarly work on the topic of transparency in qualitative and multi-methods research, on consultations with a wide range of scholars, and on deliberations among the authors of this report. In it, we discuss various opportunities to make the use of such sources more transparent, which for us is consonant with research openness and explicitness about methods and evidence being used. Recent discussions of transparency in our discipline have centered on dissuading scholarly misconduct or augmenting the “replicability” of political science research. This report is intended to focus instead on how research explicitness can help us “stand on the shoulders” of giants, providing more tools with which to evaluate claims, build on prior research, and produce better knowledge in qualitative research. However, implementing strategies for augmenting transparency come with a range of costs – some are quite trivial, while others are more substantial. Whether these

¹ Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest 1966, 2.

² Kapiszewski, MacLean, & Read 2015, 151–160.

costs outweigh the benefits of increased transparency depends on differing views of the costs *and* the benefits, and scholars engaging in qualitative work often disagree about these.

While discussing the range of views appearing in our Working Group deliberations, we also highlight below something we think that skeptics of greater transparency often omit: a description of the status quo. In our view, there are real deficiencies in current practices in various knowledge communities; familiarity with these problems is likely to lead one to assess the costs and benefits of transparency differently compared to a context in which one does not perceive current practices to be problematic. Such assessments also hinge on *which* scholars are adjudicating the relative merits of increased transparency. As we discuss, the costs of meeting higher levels of transparency in the use of text-based sources are felt *very* differently by scholars at different stages of their careers and who receive often vastly different levels of research support from internal and external funding. After discussing these issues – including the status quo in the use of text-based sources, dimensions of transparency relevant for text-based sources, the benefits of increased transparency, and the costs – we close with a number of recommendations of particular transparency practices as they affect a range of constituencies, including researchers, journal and book editors, and others.

The Status Quo of Transparency with Text-Based Sources

One of us (Mickey) published *Paths Out of Dixie*, a book on the twentieth century democratizations across America's Deep South. In the course of attempting to explain spatial variation in the allocation of resources by black protest organizations, Mickey claims that the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) “had little presence in South Carolina, in part because of successful efforts by the state's NAACP to prevent SNCC's involvement in voter registration work, and in part because of effective repression of SNCC activists (as in Rock Hill in 1961).”³ For support, Mickey, in an endnote, offers the following:

SNCC, “Summary of SNCC Staff,” 1964, Reel 1, frame 630, SNCC Papers. In a characteristic field report from Orangeburg, SNCC staffer Reginald Robinson reported that the NAACP has “given me nothing but the run around,” and had refused to permit the town's local NAACP branch to work with SNCC. Robinson, “Field Report: Orangeburg, S.C.,” Feb. 23, 1963, Reel 40, frame 542, SNCC Papers; also see SNCC, “Current Field Work, Spring 1963,” Reel 17, SNCC Papers.⁴

Mickey's practice could have been improved in several respects. First, there is no discussion (here or elsewhere in the book's text or endnotes) about the “data-generating process”; i.e., how did SNCC decide to include or exclude materials for their collected papers? Second, Mickey fails to give the reader a sense of the representativeness of Robinson's Field Report, on which he leans heavily to sustain his inference of NAACP interference. Third, it is unclear how the other reports mentioned in this citation support either descriptive or causal inferences made in the text. While the work of many qualitative scholars, including those relying primarily on archival research, does not feature these deficiencies, we note that Mickey's practice is commonplace among political scientists working with text-based sources. Related norms and practices differ

³ Mickey 2015, 275.

⁴ Mickey 2015, 499 fn. 74.

even within subfields. Indeed, the variation in what constitutes research explicitness is staggering.

Relevant Types of Transparency for Text-Based Sources

Qualitative researchers engaged in debates about research transparency often talk past one another, largely because there is little consensus about what researchers should be transparent about. While a dominant typology for DA-RT initiatives emphasizes “data access, analytic transparency and production transparency,”⁵ it is often unclear to qualitative scholars precisely what this means and how it should be applied, and, importantly, for what sources or claims. We propose five types of transparency-enhancing practices that are relevant for scholars working with text-based sources. These concern increasing explicitness about 1) where sources are located, 2) how sources were produced, 3) why the researcher chose the source, 4) how the source provides evidence for the scholar’s claim, and 5) access to the source material. Because the objective of transparency for qualitative research is for others to be able to critically evaluate key claims being made, we encourage researchers to consider applying these standards, where appropriate and feasible, not for every single sentence in a scholarly work but rather for claims being made that undergird key analytical, descriptive or causal claims central to a scholar’s main argument.

1. Source Location

The first transparency-enhancing measure for text-based sources is clearly identifying the source’s location. Explicitness about a source’s location is a component of what has been described as data transparency, yet it has not received systematic attention. It requires providing exact information for publicly available sources such that another person could locate the source. If the document is not publicly available, scholars should say so, and identify whether the author privately holds it. The status quo for this practice seems to be that scholars give enough information for the reader to trust that the author is not committing academic dishonesty; that is, most scholars provide enough information to signal the use of a particular source, but unfortunately not enough information for someone else to find the source. Additionally, authors often do not provide full information for a newspaper article such that someone else could find it online (if it is so available). In the case of online newspapers, this often means providing the title of the article, the newspaper, and the month, date, and year in the exact language in which it was printed. Perhaps most commonly, when scholars rely on secondary sources for evidence, the use of page numbers should be the status quo so that scholars can locate the evidence being leveraged. In sum, explicitness about a source’s location shifts the focus from only ensuring minimal academic honesty standards to “findability” or discoverability.

2. Source Production

A second concern when working with text-based sources is explicitness about how a source was produced. We have noted that text-based sources are pre-existing to the researcher, which presents unique challenges to researchers evaluating a source’s evidentiary value within a particular research context. Nevertheless, when deciding what sources to use, scholars typically strive to learn some “production”-related information about their source. For example, what actor

⁵ APSA 2012, 9–10.

or institution produced the source? When was the source produced? What was the provider's perspective, context, or motivation in producing the source? Was a source created, for example, by a state-run media outlet, a paid consultant, or a political dissident? These would represent different perspectives and implications for interpreting a source. Providing information about a source's production helps readers evaluate the evidentiary value of a particular source vis-à-vis the broader context in which it was created.

Thus far, we have been thinking about “qualitative” research as efforts in the discipline to develop descriptive and causal inferences about politics. But we should also discuss here interpretivist approaches to politics, which often center on “meaning making” regarding text-based sources. Interpretivists and positivist qualitative researchers, as Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea argue, “increasingly do not live under the same philosophical umbrella when it comes to their respective procedural enactments of assumptions about the reality status and knowability of their subjects of inquiry.”⁶ Still, the centrality of text-based sources for many types of interpretivist research (a leading discussion of interpretivism lists more than thirty such types)⁷ suggests it might be useful to include interpretivist research in the discussion of the five components of transparency outlined here.

As discussed below, many interpretivists may think quite differently than us about the goal of research openness, as well as about some of its components. However, we think most interpretivists would agree that – issues of confidentiality aside – stating clearly source location and source production are important goals (but see the Report of the Working Group on Interpretivist Approaches for a much more thoroughgoing consideration of these matters). Understanding source location and source production – and reporting it to the reader to facilitate evaluation of research – is of course crucial for scholars especially sensitive to and grappling with intertextuality. Here, in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, each text “tastes of the [...] contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.”⁸ Stated differently, source location and source production help establish the context in which texts – and their interpretations – are “coproduced in and through interactions rather than as objectified, free-standing entities available (“given”) for “collection” from the field setting.”⁹ Thus, we think that many interpretivists would agree about the importance and feasibility of research transparency in terms of these first two components of research openness; however, there may be lesser consensus regarding the following three components reviewed below.

3. Source Selection

Explicitness about the approach researchers used to select among text-based sources is the third component of research openness. Proponents of augmenting transparency in qualitative research note that researchers should avoid selection bias or cherry-picking sources.¹⁰ However, they provide little guidance as to what the process of selecting credible, non-biased sources may entail. Researchers might select one source over another because someone authored it with a first hand as opposed to it being a second-hand account of the phenomenon under study, or because it was authored by an actor with more expertise than the alternative source. Similarly, sources from

⁶ Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2006, xv.

⁷ Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2006, xx.

⁸ Quoted in Weldes 2006, 180.

⁹ Yanow 2006a, 80; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2006, xvii.

¹⁰ Moravcsik 2014, 49.

a particular archive, newspaper, or government agency may be used because they are considered more descriptive, accurate, or accessible than alternatives. Sometimes a particular source is used because, even though it is imperfect, it is the only available option. When explicitness about how a text-based source was created is combined with explicitness about why that source was selected for a particular evidentiary claim, readers are better able to evaluate the quality of evidence being used and the appropriateness of its use in support of descriptive or causal claims or interpretations being made.

Interpretivist scholars are likely to think differently about this component of research openness. First, because they are less focused on descriptive and, in particular, causal inference-making, the representativeness of texts found, say, in an archive may be of much less importance. Second, they might see sources – the texts in question – as not existing prior to the researcher. Rather, the text-as-source becomes a source only when married with the scholar’s schema. Here, texts as scholarly sites of inquiry are “co-generat[ed]” data; a text as “data has no prior ontological existence as data outside of the framework of a research project [...] rather than being given, data are created [...] [T]he frames or lenses in one’s mind’s eye filter out those elements of the perceptual world that are not central to concern in a given moment.”¹¹ In this sense, far from existing prior to the scholar, the text comes into being through the act of interpretation. Thus, the “data-generating process” of such concern to positivist scholars is fundamentally dissimilar. The goal of research openness, while also shared by interpretivists, takes on a changed meaning, and interpretivist knowledge communities may think about it differently.¹²

4. Source Analysis

A fourth component of research openness with text-based sources concerns providing information about how the chosen source supports the claim being made; this is often called “analytic transparency.”¹³ This component of transparency allows readers to understand how inference is being drawn from a collection of sources. The status quo regarding this practice is mixed; some scholars engage in this aspect of research explicitness more carefully (as in the use of “meaty footnotes”) than others. This variation often tracks publication outlets (which feature widely different word-count limits) and subfield norms. Understanding a scholar’s reasoning for why a document (or a “triangulated” aggregate measure of documents) supports a claim seems to be a foundational component of research explicitness.

“Analytic transparency” also may play out very differently for interpretivists. Seeking to make sense and interpret rather than justify inferences from textual evidence, the interpretivist likely will not separate a discussion of how texts are deployed from interpretations of them. The analytic transparency is thus enacted through the interpretation itself, not separately through a discussion of methodology.

5. Source Access

A final aspect of research openness involves sharing an excerpt of a source or the entire source. APSA guidelines refer to this as “data access,”¹⁴ yet we stress that this is only one of five aspects

¹¹ Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012, 79.

¹² For further reading, see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009, 63-75.

¹³ Moravcsik 2014, 48–49.

¹⁴ APSA, 2012.

of research openness for text-based sources. We believe that research openness is not synonymous with data sharing; in fact, there are many dimensions of research explicitness or openness that do not involve sharing a source either in part or full, as we have outlined above. Nevertheless, sharing excerpts of sources can clarify the source's authorial intent and meaning, and verify that scholars are leveraging sources as evidence for arguments in a way that is consistent with sources' actual content.

Here, interpretivists may reject the idea that sources actually "say" anything in some objective state that exists prior to, and independent of, the interpreter's own apparatus. Most interpretivists would likely reject the idea that the sharing of texts would allow for anything approaching replication, or that different readers would come to similar conclusions. It is from the marriage of text and interpretive apparatus that meanings are made. That does not mean that interpretivists will not value the sharing, where possible, of the texts they interpret. It does mean, however, that the aims of sharing these texts are likely different, and the technologies of research openness in the sharing of texts may in turn need to differ as well.

Benefits of Forms of Transparency

Based on our internal deliberations and surveys of current practices in our respective fields (international relations, comparative politics, and American politics), we believe that qualitative scholarship that is explicit, or transparent, about its use of text-based sources provides substantial benefits.

First, transparency about source location helps other researchers locate one's data and evaluate it, expanding the scope and reach of one's research.¹⁵ Some argue that replication is a critical aspect for social science research,¹⁶ while others believe that making replication a goal of qualitative research is undesirable and problematic (as we observed from discussions with colleagues). While we believe that replication is worthwhile and feasible in some settings, it is always critical that our scholarship be evaluable by others. For appropriate assessments of research based on texts, it is necessary to provide detailed information about where sources are located if they are publicly available. Providing careful page numbers when sources are used as empirical forms of evidence, or providing specific archival location information down to the last identifier, is an important first step towards "findability" and external assessment and engagement. For example, Elizabeth Saunders provides excellent identifier information in her archival research on President John F. Kennedy in her active citation compilation for the Qualitative Data Repository, when she specifies "JFK, Speech to Massachusetts Federation of Taxpayers Associations, April 12, 1951, Pre-presidential Papers-House Files, Box 95, JFK Library, p. 6."¹⁷

Second, explicitness about a source's production allows readers to better understand the quality of the data being used and its appropriateness for a particular evidentiary claim. For example, in her study on climate change activism, Jennifer Hadden details how she was

¹⁵ "[A]rchival research would benefit from systematic and consistent footnoting practices that identify all of the pieces of information another researcher would need to find the documents him or herself." Guest, post "Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non-Text Based Sources," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, March 3, 2017 7:11 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&p=919&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing#p919>.

¹⁶ For example, King 1995.

¹⁷ Saunders 2015, fn. 12a.

subscribed to a number of internal email listservs of climate activists during the time period under study.¹⁸ By showing that she was privy to insider debates among climate change activists and did not rely solely on publicly available documents, Hadden boosts the evidentiary strength of her assessments about climate change activism. While another reader would not likely be able to “replicate” this same study because of the nature of the data collection procedure (particular to a specific time period and set of actors), we can still assess its evidentiary basis because of the information provided about how sources were produced.

Third, explicitness about how sources were selected also has important benefits. It allows readers to understand a scholar’s methodology, the degree to which they “cherry-picked sources,” and assess whether measures that are aggregated present different types of bias such that when taken together, they more comprehensively capture the phenomenon under study. For example, in his study of the origins of the legacies of colonialism in the Spanish Americas, James Mahoney does an excellent job of making clear his reasoning for adjudicating between competing estimates of the population size of Aztecs in pre-conquest central Mexico. In a footnote, he provides four competing figures of population size, explains his process of selecting a figure (which was an approximate average of several numbers), and provides full references for seven sources for further background reading.¹⁹ Note that unlike the more complex case of measuring climate change activism, the example of assessing the narrower indicator of population size is one in which it would likely be more plausible for readers to “replicate” Mahoney’s estimates.

Fourth, transparency about how a researcher interprets a source facilitates assessment by other scholars, as it explains why the documentary sources being evaluated are actually evidence for claims being made. For example, Marcus Kreuzer creates an appendix with concisely noted in-depth historical knowledge of labor market activity in European countries as an evidentiary basis to dispute the coding practices in influential quantitative studies. When explaining why he found evidence to reverse prior studies’ depiction of France as not having widespread rural cooperatives to indeed having them,²⁰ Kreuzer’s appendix cites a source²¹ and explains that France “experienced a rapid growth of agricultural associations from the 1890s onward. Their orientations varied, with some being syndicalist, others imbued with Catholic social thought about cross-class collaboration, and still others served to provide self-help. Their growth continued throughout the interwar period.” Here Kreuzer is providing his reasoning about why prior research mischaracterized historic European labor markets and makes a convincing argument in favor of reassessing prior coding schemes.²²

In addition, explicitness about how the researcher is deploying a source can offer the researcher a detailed documentation of what route they themselves took from data source to analytical claims. Over time, this can serve as an important record for researchers who may otherwise not be able to recreate this analytical route retroactively (and, if data archiving occurs, this can be a useful back-up for researchers’ own data).²³ More fundamentally, as one of us

¹⁸ Hadden 2015, 194.

¹⁹ Mahoney 2010, 289, fn. 41.

²⁰ Kreuzer 2010, 372.

²¹ Cleary 1989, 40-50.

²² Kreuzer 2010, Appendix A, 385.

²³ Ingo Rohlfing, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 4, 2016 2:21 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing. Producing and>

(Herrera) found in her own experience developing a Transparency Appendix (TRAX) (described below), transparency enacted “in the moment” (rather than retroactively) actually facilitates research and writing by providing an as-you-go organizational structure.

Finally, sharing text-based source excerpts or full sources can provide a number of benefits. Providing a full source can constitute a public good when scholars make publicly available sources that are otherwise not easily findable. Providing full sources can also help readers understand more comprehensively the source authors’ intent. For example, Elizabeth Saunders, in her study, *Leaders at War*, examines JFK’s military interventions and argues that Kennedy came to office with a preconceived transformative agenda against both communist and repressive anti-communist regimes. In her active citation compilation for the Qualitative Data Repository, she shares a complete, one-page copy of a January 22, 1959 letter from Kennedy to Paul Jameson. The letter describes Kennedy’s views on Castro after he came to power and notes that “there is very little that the United States can do of practical benefit in this situation” but also that “it is a fact that the previous government was a cruel and oppressive one.”²⁴

There are other benefits as well. For example, transparency practices discipline authors’ own use of sources during the process of analyzing and writing. Transparency with respect to source access (through sharing data excerpts or full sharing of source) or source analysis (analytical note) also disciplines one’s management of sources because it forces scholars to organize and index sources carefully. Most scholars will already be using some sort of organizational system to keep track of their sources, but doing so in order to share information is likely to strengthen existing habits. This can improve the quality and rigor of the data production and analytical production process for qualitative researchers.²⁵

As Saunders notes, “transparency cannot substitute for good research.”²⁶ Still, there are important benefits to research transparency for text-based sources. For example, signaling scholarly rigor to reviewers and readers, better communicating evidence and findings, actively helping to develop research subfields and research topics (as more data and primary sources become more widely available), improving graduate training in qualitative research, and facilitating scholarly exchange.²⁷ Finally, given the proliferation of DA-RT journal guidelines for

updating a TRAX *during* the actual research process is also less burdensome than retrofitting one after publication (Saunders 2014, 696). This was very much Veronica Herrera’s experience creating a TRAX for the Qualitative Data Repository (QDR). She notes that for online data archiving this can be a highly useful device for keeping files organized, especially if one’s computer *and* backup crash (which happened to her in 2015, although she was able to restore her files because they were stored in a QDR TRAX).

²⁴ Saunders 2015, 77.

²⁵ Sam Handlin, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, October 17, 2016 12:47 am; Ingo Rohlfing post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 4, 2016 2:21 pm; and Jane Mansbridge, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, October 26, 2016 10:46 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

²⁶ Saunders 2014, 694.

²⁷ Ingo Rohlfing, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 4, 2016 2:21 pm; and Sam Handlin, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, October 17, 2016 12:47 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

quantitative work, TRAX or other manifestations of transparency by qualitative researchers would help establish something like parity in terms of expectations about research openness for qualitative and quantitative political science.²⁸

Technologies of Transparency

Transparency for text and non-text-based sources can take different forms. Minimal citation norms require attributing claims to source documents. The addition of page numbers to references are key to helping guide readers to specific sentences or paragraphs within the cited text, although – as we discuss below – page numbers are far from common in contemporary citation practices. Beyond that, more detailed footnoting practices can provide additional nuance to a cited reference. Historians, for example, use “meaty footnotes” (or endnotes) to discuss contextual information about the sources used and to address conflicting points of view or alternate interpretations of the evidence cited. A different technology of transparency is the qualitative “research note,”²⁹ which can take the form of “methodological appendices or narratives.” The purpose here is to give researchers an opportunity to describe the methodology used in particular analyses and to clarify how their experience, background knowledge, and scope of authority inform the overall project. The TRAX using active citations provides an alternate vehicle for scholars seeking to improve transparency. A key requirement for active citations is that any “critical and contested substantive empirical point in a scholarly case study should be backed by a precise and annotated citation to one or more presumptively primary sources.”³⁰ Additionally, annotated citations can be hyperlinked to the original source documents, although this is not necessary for creating a TRAX; scholars may choose if, when, and how much of original sources to share.

One particular manifestation of a TRAX is the “Annotation for Transparent Inquiry” (ATI), which builds on active citations by providing digital annotations to clarify the data and analysis on which research relies.³¹ ATIs contain the following features: full citations to underlying sources; analytical notes on the data generation processes; source excerpts; and excerpt translations for sources in foreign languages. Finally, each of the above-mentioned technologies could be accompanied without data sharing, or with some or full data sharing.

Assessing Costs, Risks, Appropriateness, and Constraints

Here, we draw on the QTD deliberations and our experiences with TRAX and other efforts to enhance the transparency of our own use of text-based sources to discuss the potential costs and risks to researchers and others of various manifestations of transparency. We also note some of the conditions under which the disadvantages of transparency can be exacerbated or mitigated,

²⁸ Taylor Boas, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 22, 2016 10:43 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128&hilit=documenting+use+of+text>; Ingo Rohlfing, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text-Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 4, 2016 2:21 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

²⁹ Saunders 2014, 692.

³⁰ Moravcsik 2010, 31.

³¹ Qualitative Data Transparency, Annotation for Transparent Inquiry (ATI) At a Glance: <https://qdr.syr.edu/guidance/ati-at-a-glance>.

and comment on potential constraints that researchers might face in pursuing these forms of transparency.

First, resource constraints are paramount in discussions of costs that various forms of transparency can impose on researchers. Scholars point out that collecting extensive backup materials from archives, digitizing and reproducing archival sources for online consumption, and creating digital replication archives potentially impose large time and financial commitments on researchers. Comparativists may face an even higher burden than others when they seek to publish: many of their sources are not translated into English, but reviewers and other readers could demand to have snippets (or more) of a range of text-based sources translated into English as a condition for publication. Generally, meeting these transparency standards also means additional opportunity costs for researchers, as complying with them likely crowds out time that could be spent on new research endeavors.³² Such constraints are especially binding for graduate students and junior faculty facing publication-related pressures surrounding the job market, tenure process, and career advancement opportunities.³³

Certain types of transparency standards and replication requirements may, some worried, impose higher research costs on scholars with fewer available research sources, such as those at institutions providing fewer (or no) research budgets, and graduate students. While senior faculty or scholars in universities with resource advantages might be able to hire research assistants to photograph and scan vast quantities of archival materials, or might have access to technology and online storage space, scholars lacking access to such resources would, in the face of discipline-wide transparency requirements for text-based research, face much higher barriers to publishing.³⁴ Some observers mentioned that the time spent creating detailed qualitative replication archives, as well as the lack of clarity on what types of backup meet replication norms, can discourage students from pursuing qualitative research.

That said, there is consensus in the QTD deliberations that certain forms of transparency standards are less costly than others. For example, participants agreed that requiring the inclusion of page numbers with citations should not impose undue burdens on authors. We note below a range of practices that were considered by scholars to be relatively less disruptive to research and publishing norms in the discipline.

A related but distinct issue pertains to the “right of first use” associated with qualitative data collected through highly labor-intensive research methods.³⁵ Some scholars argue that authors who collect original data during fieldwork should be allowed the “right of first use” due to the upfront costs associated with these kinds of research endeavors. Without such protections, scholars engaging in original data collection endeavors might be at a distinct disadvantage compared to those using “off-the-shelf” data, at least with respect to data replication norms.

³² Jane Mansbridge, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, October 26, 2016 10:46 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

³³ James Heilman, post “Graduate Student concerns,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 30, 2016 12:08 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=86#p223>.

³⁴ Shamira Gelbman, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

³⁵ Giovanni Capocchia, post “Data access and “right to first use” of newly collected quantitative data,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 19, 2016 8:34 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=106&p=377&hilit=data+access+and+right#p377>.

Establishing consistent standards across journals about the “right of first use” could help align the incentives of scholars working with qualitative and multi-methods approaches. For example, if journals uniformly permitted scholars the “right of first use” related to original data, then scholars might be more likely to embark on labor-intensive data collection efforts.

Second, participants in QTD deliberations voice a concern that is perhaps unique to text-based and other qualitative sources: copyright and other legal restrictions that scholars face. However, note that “fair use” in American copyright law allows scholars to comment on a work with “a few lines” (somewhere between 50-150 words) that, when cited correctly, are lawful. Data-sharing strategies that rely on such excerpts allow for a small portion of data in an appendix without creating concerns about copyright law infringement.³⁶

On the other hand, many archives across both the developing and developed world do not permit the reproduction of archival materials and place restrictions on the dissemination of archival materials. In extreme cases, archives prohibit any form of reproduction, but in many instances restrictions on the total number of pages that can be copied and reproduced are common. However, when legal restrictions exist, scholars could, in their publications, point to the archives’ publicly documented policies regarding these constraints. Even if archives do not make their policies publicly available, or if archives change their policies without maintaining a public record of such policy changes – concerns raised on the QTD fora³⁷ – authors could be allowed to inform journal editors of their understanding of the archives’ policies during the publication process. As a general rule, however, scholars can reasonably strive to provide reproductions or explanations of restrictions when that is not possible. We recognize, of course, that unique circumstances are bound to arise in the course of disparate research processes. For example, scholars might be able to access particular types of private archival materials only after developing bonds of trust with conservators,³⁸ or by committing to not reproducing the sources that they access.³⁹ In such instances, we believe that a reasonable set of policies by publication outlets would include sufficiently generous exemptions that allow researchers to abide by archive-specific rules or wishes.

Third, scholars are concerned about the logistical and technical constraints involved in reproducing, digitizing, and tabulating text- and non-text-based sources. While reproducing specific pages or references to quotations is surely feasible for most researchers, reproducing the entire corpus of materials considered over the course of research, or large quantities of documents used to generate scholarly conclusions or insights regarding particular claims, can produce substantial logistical or technical constraints.⁴⁰ Such constraints might be especially

³⁶ See Stanford University Libraries, “What is Fair Use?”, available online: <http://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>.

³⁷ Shamira Gelbman, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 1, 2016 10:08 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

³⁸ Jacques Hymans, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 13, 2016 8:30 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>.

³⁹ Shamira Gelbman, post “Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 1, 2016 9:52 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128&hilit=documenting+use+of+text>.

⁴⁰ Guest, post “Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 9, 2016 10:56 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128&hilit=documenting+use+of+textq>.

binding in low-capacity settings.⁴¹ Yet, as we discuss in detail below, transparency practices can be ordered in terms of how demanding they are, and commonly acceptable proposals need not require the reproduction of *all* materials considered by scholars. With regard to providing context to particular claims, a scholar citing and relying on a particular document could provide the necessary context in the text surrounding the citations of the document. Readers could then refer to the critical document cited to obtain more detail.

Relatedly, commentators also made the point that poorly organized archives may make it hard to cite a document in a way that would make it easier for others to find. For example, some types of archives, especially those that are situated in developing countries, are not organized in ways that are conducive for systematically reporting, collecting, and replicating data. On the other hand, some would argue that this would make it even *more* beneficial to reproduce cited documents for other researchers (where feasible), who would have trouble locating these documents themselves. In cases where researchers draw materials from unorganized archives, editors and reviewers could permit citations that are somewhat imprecise, while asking authors to make a good faith effort in citing sources clearly or reproducing materials.

Fourth, and more fundamentally, some scholars have raised concerns about the appropriateness of different modes of transparency for the ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches central to their research endeavors. Some maintained, for instance, that several of the proposed DA-RT guidelines do not seem relevant to the type of work that they conducted, especially in cases where research relies upon an interpretivist analysis of vast and disparate types of observations.⁴²

Fifth, while text-based sources usually involve fewer ethical concerns than interviews or participant observation, ethical quandaries nonetheless can arise. For example, researchers might need to protect the identities of human subjects whose documents they rely upon in archives or other settings.⁴³ Researchers working with particular types of ethnographic or otherwise sensitive data might be concerned that data disclosure risks undermining trust between subject and researcher.⁴⁴ We agree that these concerns are valid, yet they would appear to apply only to certain types of textual evidence collected in sensitive contexts. Exemptions could easily be applied for the sharing of textual data in these circumstances. Additionally, transparency guidelines should establish clear standards regarding human subjects risks, even in the case of text and non-text based sources. In other cases, ethical concerns can easily be mitigated by procedures requiring all researchers to anonymize the identities of their subjects.

A separate ethical concern pertains to making vast quantities of documents available from underfunded archives in developing country settings. Where archives themselves do not have the

⁴¹ Kristen Harkness, post “Re: [From Steering Comm.] What might qualitative data access look like?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum one: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 27, 2016 4:36 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=70#p209>.

⁴² Margaret Keck, post “No place for my work in this debate,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 8, 2016 9:08 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=70#p209>.

⁴³ Chloe Thurston, post “Re: [From Steering Committee] Active citation versus the meaty footnote,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations May 17, 2016 9:14 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=101&p=416&hilit=active+citation+vs#p327>.

⁴⁴ Elisabeth Wood, post “Re: Data access—discourage original data production?” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016 1:18 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=41&p=64&hilit=run+the+risk+that+the+narrow+conception+of+research+transparency#p64>.

capacity to control the dissemination of their materials, is it ethical to incentivize the mass reproduction of these archival sources? We agree that this is an important concern. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that increased transparency might offer a promising way to “give back” to research communities, for example, by making source materials available to scholars in resource-constrained contexts. These complex issues will need to be addressed by scholars working in these specific settings, but, ultimately, it is important to follow archives’ rules, where they exist.

Other concerns voiced in the deliberations include tensions between increased transparency – which many participants support – and the need to adhere to publication outlets’ word limits. In particular, the ‘meaty footnote’ seems incompatible with current word-limits in journals. Finally, the deliberations featured a debate regarding how to implement and enforce replication standards. Some thought that it is impractical for editors – often lacking experience with particular research methods – to ensure transparency norms, and that reviewers (who are more familiar with the standards of different subfields and epistemic communities) should serve as gatekeepers for publications. But others disagreed, worrying that reviewers cannot consistently maintain transparency norms.⁴⁵ We discuss approaches to address these concerns below.

Recommendations

Our support for (some) transparency initiatives is based in part on our assessment of the benefits and the costs relative to the status quo. The recommendations below proceed from those that are the least disruptive to current research and publishing practices and generate the least controversy to those that are increasingly demanding and lacking in consensus support by QTD’s fora.

1. Require that footnotes or endnotes have page numbers, unless the writer actually refers to the cited work’s entire argument. This requirement is, of course, fundamental to the **source location** component of text-based research transparency (and relates closely to data transparency). Even when scholars refer to a broader argument, it may be appropriate to require a page number where that argument is recapped; thus, only in exceptional instances would the provision of page numbers not be required. The practice of not citing page numbers was noted as problematic by many scholars in our QTD deliberations, and appears common.⁴⁶ Moravcsik, for example, observes that in his graduate seminar, students found that even the most highly praised mixed-methods work had sources that could not be located (often twenty percent or more of sources cited),

⁴⁵ Regina Bateson concludes, “[W]hy not leave the question of transparency and data access to the reviewers, not editors?” Post “Who are the gatekeepers? Editors or reviewers?” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016 12:25 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=42>. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2016, 11) concur. However, Mala Htun doubts that reviewers can fulfill this task. Post “Re: Who are the gatekeepers? Editors or reviewers?” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 10, 2016 8:14 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=42>.

⁴⁶ Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, September 9, 2016 9:52 am; Nancy Hirshman, post “Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, November 4, 2016 5:19 am; Marcus Kreuzer “Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, September 13, 2016 3:31 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128&hilit=documenting+use+of+text>.

even after contacting the author.⁴⁷ Authors, even if wanting to be helpful, tend to forget or not be able to recreate retroactively their use of sources in incomplete citations. This requirement is about as low-cost as an enhanced transparency standard could be.

2. Journals could increase word limits for notes and allow for longer, more information-rich endnotes or footnotes.⁴⁸ Severe (and arbitrary) word count limits present a number of problems for augmenting research transparency and academic honesty.⁴⁹ We are particularly concerned with word count limits on footnotes, endnotes and citations, as they limit the ability for authors to implement research openness and transparency. These limits are especially problematic for delivering on the components of clarifying **source selection** (production transparency) and how the researcher is using evidence in **source analysis** (analytic transparency). They also hamper efforts to promote academic honesty vis-à-vis citing others' work. As Gerring and Cojocaru point out, tight word count limits often force authors to cite others minimally or not at all, and reduce readers' ability to evaluate the study in light of prior research.⁵⁰ They also make it difficult for scholars to engage in comprehensive literature reviews.⁵¹ These issues impact qualitative researchers in particular, who are often aggregating sources – both primary and secondary – within and across cases in diverse ways in the same body of research.⁵² Journals committed to facilitating research transparency for qualitative scholars could demonstrate this commitment by increasing word count limits for manuscripts relying heavily on text-based sources as well as encouraging the use of some other vehicles such as online appendices that we discuss in detail below.
3. Require that when substantiating key claims undergirding the argument, authors include information about both **source location** and **source analysis**. Identifying a source's location (pertaining to data transparency) could provide initial information about where the text-based source originated from, and how it is being used to support an author's claims. If publicly available, another researcher should be able to locate it based on the information in this citation. Source analysis in the form of analytic notes that explain how sources back up key claims being made seems to be the most important aspect of increasing research openness with text-based sources. There are many excellent examples of this practice in the discipline, but it is not currently the status quo that we believe it should be.

⁴⁷ Moravcsik 2014, 48.

⁴⁸ Amy Poteete, post "Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, January 1, 2016 2:17 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140&hilit=benefits+and+costs+of+increasing>. As Marcus Kreuzer writes, "This is one of the ironies of the DA-RT initiative. Quantitative scholars are encouraged to submit their data files and codes, while qualitative scholars are actively discouraged from using substantial footnotes. Analytical transparency for un-standardized qualitative evidence will never be reduced to a singular code, but needs to be address on a case-by-case basis with the help of footnotes. If only somebody could let journal editors know." Post "Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, September 13, 2016 3:31 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128&hilit=documenting+use+of+text>.

⁴⁹ Gerring and Cojocaru 2016, 2.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 7.

⁵¹ Dunleavy, 2014.

⁵² See Herrera and Delaney (2017) on triangulation techniques in qualitative research.

- a. One proposal would be to create a required online note that is activated or otherwise synchronous with the published article. For example, authors could include a brief note with a summary of their text-based transparency practice and a spelling out of two of the five components of transparency within the text of a manuscript; we would recommend identifying the **source location** and identifying how the source is supporting the claim being made by providing a **source analysis** (in the form of an analytic note).
4. Require that, in addition, authors provide information about how sources were produced (**source production**) and why they were selected (**source selection**). Authors can reflect on what actors or institutions provided the source(s), what bias or perspective they may represent, and why they as researchers selected the source as opposed to other available sources. Authors can respect archive rules and the confidentiality of relevant parties but still provide information about how the source was produced and selected for use in the study. We propose two options for this aspect of production transparency.
 - a. Include this information in a research note pertaining to the entire project⁵³ or in a methodological appendix or narrative. This could also be offered through an online appendix. For instance, Tasha Fairfield offers an appendix that walks through her most important process-tracing claims and links them online to causal-process observations.⁵⁴ The active citation project does not have room in an obvious way for incorporating background knowledge or context that underlie our claims. This was a concern in the QTD deliberations. However, researchers' clarity in a methodology section or, better yet, a methodological narrative as an appendix can satisfy the first four components of transparency (all except reproducing some or all of the source) and also spell out their experience, background knowledge, and scope of authority that informed the overall project. This type of detailed explanation is incredibly helpful in general, and will in particular be useful to researchers evaluating the work. We see this sometimes in books, but less often in journal articles due to word limits. Journal editors could make research notes have no word limit, or otherwise provide easy-to-use online portals for research notes linked to published articles.
 - b. Embed this information within citations through activated notes when substantiating particular claims. The author would choose which claims were most central to the argument being made and therefore necessitated a complete four- or five-dimension transparency note (source location, production, selection, analytical note and optional excerpt or source sharing), and which ones were more tangential and could suffice with just a two-dimension note (e.g., source location, analytic note). The activated online note could be much longer than what appears in the printed text. Journals could offer examples and modules regarding this two-fold option. The choice of how to share this remaining information (in the aggregate research appendix, or as a synchronized active citation format for each claim being cited) could be left up to the author.

⁵³ Saunders 2014, 692.

⁵⁴ Fairfield 2013, 55–56.

5. Require or recommend a TRAX⁵⁵ but *without* data sharing. There are many options here regarding how the TRAX should be formatted, what it would include, and who decides these matters. One option would be to offer the aforementioned format, not for all sources but only those most critical for sustaining the author's most important descriptive and causal inferences. Another complex issue concerns where the TRAX would be "hosted," and several options present themselves. These include an author's website,⁵⁶ or institutional repositories like Syracuse University's Qualitative Data Repository (QDR) or Harvard University's Dataverse system.⁵⁷ "Hypothes.is" is another option, and one to which QDR might transition. This service allows researchers to annotate anything, whether their own work or the work of others.⁵⁸ Annotations are laid on top of the existing article's interface, and do not interfere with the written text.⁵⁹ Finally, scholars could standardize their practices by using qualitative software (such as Atlas Ti) that allows researchers to annotate and print results and that could be used to provide a format for transparency practice descriptions.
6. QDR recommends an ATI, and we suggest that it is a promising option. As discussed above, ATI's have three main elements.⁶⁰ First, they require a full citation to the underlying data source. Second, they feature an analytic note illustrating how the data were generated and how they support the empirical claim or conclusion being annotated in the text. Third, ATI's require a short (100-150 word) excerpt from a textual source or an excerpt from the transcription of other data sources and, if necessary, a translation of key passages. This last element thus delivers on the fifth component of transparency: **source access**, or making clear what the source actually says. Sharing the entire source is optional, but not required.
7. TRAX with data sharing. This most demanding standard delivers on all five components of research openness for text-based sources. Our view is that data sharing is beneficial for scholars themselves as well as consumers of research both within and outside academia. In most cases, providing backup for directly cited claims should not be too onerous a burden for scholars. This is especially the case if scholars approach and begin research projects keeping data sharing goals in mind. Of course, there will be many reasons – like the ones we discussed above, as well as other unanticipated ones – why data sharing will not be feasible, and in these cases,

⁵⁵ Moravcsik 2014.

⁵⁶ Rick Valelly, post "Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, November 4, 2016 1:24 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128&hilit=documenting+use+of+text>.

⁵⁷ Taylor Boas, post "Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based Sources, December 22, 2016 10:43 am. Marcus Kreuzer (2016) points out that details in appendices will be less accessible than footnotes; this is true, but one can minimize the burden with a) a short footnote (or textual mention) in the article stating that more detail is in the Appendix; b) a clearly stated location for the Appendix (e.g., URL of the author's website) in the article's "page 1" footnote alongside acknowledgments and such; or c) a detailed table of contents in the Appendix itself.

⁵⁸ <https://hypothes.is/>.

⁵⁹ Examples of ATI pilots using hypothes.is are found here for Sam Handlin's article (not behind a paywall): <https://via.hypothes.is/https://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/401.pdf#annotations:gRUqqIpvEeaUmgsyrdDKdg> and for Veronica Herrera's article (2014) (behind a paywall) <https://via.hypothes.is/http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X13002209>.

⁶⁰ <https://qdr.syr.edu/guidance/ati-at-a-glance>.

exceptions should be granted on reasonable grounds. In short, it need not be one-size-fits-all approach. Moreover, online data repositories offer differentiated sharing options – more or less can be shared with different audiences or users.⁶¹ ATIs from the QDR are one option for creating transparency appendices with optional data sharing, but it is likely that there will be other fora that will become available to scholars in the future.

Conclusion

The goal of increasing research transparency when relying on text-based sources is not a universal one.⁶² Understandings of what this goal might mean – let alone how best to implement it – are many, varied, and complex. Moreover, depending on the type of qualitative research at stake, and how a scholar is situated both in terms of their career and institutional status, they are likely to evaluate very differently the unavoidable tradeoffs that emerge when attempting to improve research openness.

That said, this goal is one that we share. And we think that many – maybe even most – qualitative researchers would agree that, if the costs are not too onerous, some of the five broad components of transparency described in this report are both laudable and implementable. We share this goal in part because we think current practices are both deficient and can be improved on. Given the fact that different scholars would bear the burden of producing more transparent research practices, we first emphasize less costly components, such as clarifying source location as well as source production. We also stress the importance of authors' specific sharing of their source selection process as well as making clear statements about how researchers use texts to help sustain their inferences or interpretations. Indeed, these two components are in our view perhaps most important in helping researchers better evaluate and build on one another's qualitative work.

We are committed to qualitative and multi-methods research. If the adoption of onerous standards or even requirements by publication outlets – especially those related to the goal of replication – were to discourage qualitative research, our discipline would be much worse off. In contrast, and based on a reckoning with its costs, we deemphasize perhaps the most controversial component of transparency, the mandatory sharing of sources. We think scholars should be able to choose which – if any – sources they would like to share, and in what format. Still, in making these choices, they should be willing to explain to the consumers of their research the rationales for their particular decisions.

There are a wide variety of types of text-based sources, of research goals, of types of qualitative research, and of types of institutionally situated scholars. One-size-fits-all is neither appropriate nor fair. Still, we think it is productive for scholars to reflect on the components of text-based transparency described here. In so doing, they can consider how they – as researchers, reviewers, and publication gatekeepers – think through the goal of research transparency, the status quo in transparency practices in their knowledge communities, and the benefits they can gain by pursuing this goal.

⁶¹ Qualitative Data Transparency, A Guide to Sharing Data, available at <https://qdr.syr.edu/guidance/sharingdata>.

⁶² Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2016.

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Evidence from Researcher Interactions with Human Participants

Final Report of QTD Working Group II.2

December 2018

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Introduction: Researcher Interaction with Human Participants

According to the American Political Science Association’s (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science, “Researchers have an ethical obligation to facilitate the evaluation of their evidence-based knowledge claims through data access, production transparency and analytic transparency so that their work can be tested and replicated.”¹ This disciplinary commitment to Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) was first added to the APSA Ethics Guide in 2012² and then further reinforced by the signing of the Journal Editors Transparency Statement (JETS) in 2014,³ which set the stage for the implementation of the data access and research transparency guidelines in the discipline.

The APSA Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (QMMR) Section initiated the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (QTD) to engage the scholarly community in considering the meaning and the implications of transparency guidelines for scholars utilizing qualitative methods.⁴ The QTD included a series of Working Groups (WGs) to consult and deliberate on these issues.⁵

This Community Transparency Statement presents a summary of, and recommendations based on, the deliberations of Working Group II.2: Evidence from Researcher Interactions with Human Participants.⁶ Our consultations with scholars in the discipline, combined with insights drawn from contributions to the QTD online forum as well as published materials, reveal broad support for transparency in social science research. Yet, the meaning of transparency is debated across different traditions in the discipline and the principle should be understood in light of disciplinary diversity. This suggests the need to broaden the notion of transparency to research integrity writ large, including a discussion of transparency as reflexivity not covered by the focus on data access, production transparency, and analytic transparency in the DA-RT and JETS initiatives.

Our consultations and deliberations also reveal that transparency, as DA-RT and JETS articulate it, raises important concerns for human subjects research, where the imperative of transparency comes into tension with competing priorities, including, but not limited to, the ethical obligation to protect vulnerable human subjects, the epistemological diversity within the discipline, the workload imposed on scholars using qualitative data, and intellectual property concerns.⁷ Above all, transparency should be understood in relation to the paramount principle of human subjects protection in the profession, especially in settings of authoritarian or repressive regimes, political violence, and marginalized populations where we should be particularly cautious with regard to transparency. This priority of human subjects protection has implications not only for making one’s data available (data access), but also for explaining how it was collected and analyzed (production and analytic transparency).

¹ American Political Science Association 2012.

² For background on the DA-RT, see Lupia and Elman 2014. See also Golder and Golder 2016.

³ Data Access & Research Transparency 2015.

⁴ On the QTD, see Büthe and Jacobs 2015.

⁵ Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: About.

⁶ QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewforum.php?f=18> .

⁷ References to contributions from individual scholars in the QTD forum are hyperlinked in footnotes.

This report identifies a range of transparency practices that researchers, editors, and reviewers can apply on a case-by-case basis to mitigate these concerns. Some of these practices include:

- Providing extended interview excerpts
- Quoting interviews in a contextualized way
- Presenting interview protocols
- Writing a clear methodology section and/or appendix
- Explaining case, site, and respondent selection
- Being reflexive about how the research unfolded
- Including thick description, background knowledge, and meta-data
- Justifying why empirical material supports alternative arguments
- Reviewing the research of colleagues working in the same tradition and area

These tools, however, should only be requested by editors and reviewers and used by researchers when they are ethically, epistemologically, and practically appropriate given human subjects protection and disciplinary diversity concerns. In other words, these various tools will be suitable to some, but not other research traditions, subjects, and contexts. No one researcher can be expected to have the time and resources to engage in all transparency practices. This is a particularly significant recommendation for those editors whose journals have adopted or are in the process of adopting JETS, which intensifies the existing information asymmetry between researchers and editors who have to make judgements on transparency often without sufficient knowledge of the research context.

This report is organized in five parts. The first section summarizes deliberations regarding the meaning and conceptualization of data access and research transparency as applied to human subjects research. The second discusses the many benefits of transparency in human subjects research, while the third discusses the ethical and other concerns raised by data access and transparency with respect to data generated from human subjects. The fourth section identifies a number of recommendations coming out of the QTD consultation, including specific practices for consideration of journal editors, graduate instructors in the profession, and scholars seeking to advance transparency in ways that are consistent with epistemological foundations, practical realities, and ethical commitments of human subjects research. A brief fifth section concludes.

I. Meaning and Conceptualization of Transparency

This section presents comments regarding three aspects of transparency proposed in the DA-RT and JETS initiatives as applied to human subjects research. While data access, production transparency and analytic transparency constitute the notion of transparency in these initiatives, the deliberations show that transparency has multiple meanings depending on the researcher's epistemological position and research design. These differences suggest the need to be open about one's epistemological assumptions and research goals as part of transparency.

Data access

The 2012 APSA Ethics Guide (6.1) states that, “Researchers making evidence-based knowledge claims should reference the data they used to make those claims. If these are data they themselves generated or collected, researchers should provide access to those data or explain why they cannot.” Drawing on this statement, conversations on transparency in qualitative research have often “equated ‘full transparency’ with the depositing of field notes or interview materials,”⁸ such as transcripts. Some scholars, for example, advocate for a general norm of archiving qualitative data to facilitate evaluation, replication, and secondary data analysis.⁹ Of the three inter-related principles of data access, production transparency, and analytic transparency, it is data access that raises the largest challenges for human subjects researchers, many of whom expressed concerns about the tensions between data access and competing ethical commitments, or reservations about the conception of replicability embedded in data access, as formulated by the APSA Ethics Guide, DA-RT, and JETS.

One concern reported by several scholars, and further discussed below, is that the transparency generated by full access to data must be weighed against other values, including, most notably, the protection of human subjects. In “ethnographic and interpretive methods, ‘transparency’... isn’t linked to sharing these materials (which would often break confidentiality agreements with interlocutors and thus be unethical). Rather, it’s about ‘giving a recipe’ that lets the reader evaluate how one generated evidentiary material.”¹⁰ Many QTD participants, therefore, expressed serious concerns about the prospect of sharing field notes or interview transcripts based on confidential interviews, although a number expressed support for the sharing of data, such as extended quotations from an interview to support key inferences and interpretations.¹¹

A second critique focuses on the criterion of replicability, positing the infeasibility of replicating fieldwork-based scholarship in the same way as quantitative research. As Aili Tripp notes, “No one is realistically going to replicate interviews that are done either with groups of people or specific individuals. Obtaining data often depends on serendipity (accidentally running into a terrific interviewee), or taking part in specific opportunities provided by events like conferences or observing happenings like a demonstration.”¹²

⁸ Sarah Parkinson, post “Re: Is there a tension between the principle of research openness and the willingness to pursue tough questions?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169#p753>.

⁹ Elman, Colin, Diana Kapiszewski, and Lorena Vinuela. 2010. “Qualitative Data Archiving: Rewards and Challenges.” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 43(1): 23-27.

¹⁰ Sarah Parkinson, post “Re: Is there a tension between the principle of research openness and the willingness to pursue tough questions?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Human Subjects and Research Openness, April 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169#p753>.

¹¹ Guest, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

¹² Aili Tripp, post “Pursuing transparency in qualitative research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 8, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=176#p635>. See also the post by William J. Kelleher, who notes that participant observation research is not strictly speaking replicable – nor can it be made so by greater transparency. William J. Kelleher, post “An Example of Non-Replicable Good Science: Alice Goffman’s On the Run,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, December 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=200#p846>.

A third critique concerns replicability's exclusion of a range of ontological and epistemological traditions in the discipline that are premised on non-test-based knowledge production models. As Markus Kreuzer explains, "the discourse on transparency seems to imply a popular, albeit problematic, positivistic conception of objectively-similar knowers seeking truth."¹³ As Kreuzer summarizes, "the three transparency dimensions... cover only the small, test-related stage of the broader knowledge production [to exclude] theorizing, philosophy of science, and sociology of knowledge."¹⁴

From the perspective of interpretive research, in particular, field notes and interview materials are not meant to facilitate replication. They do not "constitute a form of raw 'data' that can then be checked against any 'analysis' in the finished ethnography" or replicated without the background or contextual knowledge (or "metadata") that guided the original researcher's interpretations.¹⁵ As Samantha Majic explains, "If someone else were to access these notes and use them as 'data,' I am not sure how much sense they would make to the person who did not conduct the ethnography/observation firsthand, as the secondary user was not *there*."¹⁶ Aili Tripp concurs: "Providing selected interview transcripts is inadequate because the reviewer does not have the full context of the interview in relation to other interviews, survey data, and other sources based on living and experiencing the situation. The interview is still only partial evidence and cannot be taken on its own as evidence of something."¹⁷

Data access, therefore, extends to include not only (i) interview excerpts, (ii) observations, and (iii) partial or full transcripts or field notes, but also (iii) meta-data. These can only be requested and provided where ethically, practically, and epistemologically appropriate given human subjects protection concerns and disciplinary diversity.

¹³ Marcus Kreuzer, post "SETTING THE STAGE," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, September 7, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=134#p449>.

¹⁴ Marcus Kreuzer, post "Topic 2: Placing DA-RT in the Broader Knowledge Production," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, October 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=156#p501>.

¹⁵ Timothy Pachirat, post "Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p751>. See also Rachel Ellett and Mark Fathi Massoud, Post, "Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, November 7, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=119&p=632&hilit=ellett#p632>. Ellett and Massoud note that "even the most faithful transcriptions cannot capture the depth of silences, confusion, laughter, or hostility during an interview.... Collecting interview metadata may prove equally as important as collecting interviewees' reflections."

¹⁶ Samantha Majic, post "Re: Limits to Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132#p536>.

¹⁷ Aili Tripp, post "Pursuing transparency in qualitative research," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 8, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=176#p635>. On reflexivity as an aspect of transparency, see also Alice Kang, post "Re: Let's Focus on Research Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 29, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=168&p=880&hilit=best+practices#p728>: "Analytic transparency might/should include a discussion of how the researcher's position, funding, and training affect the questions that are being asked and how the answers are being interpreted, and so on."

Production transparency

WG contributors generally agree that accurately reporting the process by which evidentiary material is generated remains a core aspect of transparency across research traditions. The 2012 APSA Ethics Guide (6.2) states that, “Researchers providing access to data they themselves generated or collected, should offer a full account of the procedures used to collect or generate the data.”

Many contributors to the WGs expressed support for this notion of production transparency, provided that it is interpreted broadly to include not only logistical details about the recruitment of human subjects and the methods used to solicit and record their views, but also the more general questions of research process and reflexivity that are common to scholars from multiple epistemological perspectives.

With respect to the narrower question of recruiting, interviewing and recording data from human subjects research, contributors noted potential dangers to human subjects if production transparency might (perhaps inadvertently) reveal the identities or personal details of human subjects. “I think that transparency should mean transparency with regard to *you the researcher,* not with regard to potentially vulnerable subjects,” notes Amanda Fulmer. “We as researchers need to be clear as much as possible on what work we've done, and how, but we have no obligation to be transparent about the details of others' lives, if that might cause subjects harm or distress.”¹⁸

This suggests that emphasis should be placed on the practical question of how researchers might be as transparent as possible in reporting aspects of data production such as the identification and recruitment of research participants, response rates, and potential non-response bias, while still protecting the confidentiality of human subjects who had been promised such confidentiality.¹⁹ This is likely to be a delicate exercise, subject to broad guidelines but requiring case-by-case determinations by both researchers and editors in an effort to balance the professional duties of transparency and human subjects protection in practice.

Other contributors concur that production transparency should be interpreted broadly. Genuine production transparency, they argue, requires not simply a narrow reporting of methods, but reflexivity about the research process itself. “To be reflexive,” Lee Ann Fujii specifies, “means to discuss explicitly what the original research plan was, how things actually unfolded, including the ethical dilemmas that arose and how the researcher responded to them.”²⁰ Contributors suggest that research ethics, specifically “reporting of reflexive processes concerning the protection of human participants,” should be part of production transparency.²¹

¹⁸ Amanda Fulmer, “Re: What Do We Mean by Transparency in Human Subjects Research?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 20 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=118#p685>.

¹⁹ Bleich and Pekkanen 2013.

²⁰ Lee Ann Fujii, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p548>.

²¹ Elliot Posner, post “Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, September 5, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p430>.

Production transparency, therefore, expands beyond to include (i) reflexivity, (ii) transparency about changes to research plans, and (iii) transparency about responses to ethical dilemmas.

Analytic Transparency

According to the 2012 APSA Ethics Guide (6.3), “Researchers making evidence-based knowledge claims should provide a full account of how they draw their analytic conclusions from the data, i.e., clearly explicate the links connecting data to conclusions.” At the heart of analytic transparency is whether “researchers [can] provide a mapping from the sort of evidence they might see (and seek) to the sorts of conclusions they might draw.”²² A number of contributors expressed general support for this conception of analytic transparency, suggesting that it further institutionalizes transparency practices that are widely implemented in the discipline.²³

Other contributors, however, took issue with the DA-RT and JETS-based notion of transparency, which they argue fails to acknowledge the diversity in the approaches and subfield-specific practices to evaluating research. “Diverse epistemological assumptions inform research excellence and subfield-specific practices with profound effects on the construction of the objects of research.”²⁴ Not only are evaluative criteria often specific to the epistemic communities generating certain types of research, but their respective strategies for documenting research processes also tend to evolve over time.²⁵

Analytic transparency, therefore, includes not only (i) connection between data and conclusions, but also (ii) transparency about the back and forth between theory and evidence, which is linked to production transparency in fundamental ways in some research traditions in the discipline.

II. Assessment of Benefits

The notion of transparency is associated with a number of benefits by participants in WG discussions. This section identifies six benefits broadly identified by contributors. Many of these benefits are evident in the examples of transparency practices discussed below.

First, transparency could *help make research stronger* and, second, make *research from different traditions more understandable* by “making sure that others can fully evaluate your claims, that they can find your sources, that they could potentially replicate your work.”²⁶ Working in the interpretive tradition, Kathy Cramer argues, “transparency in the sense of explaining in detail

²² Macartan Humphreys, post “Re: What problem does access to evidence and transparency address?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 19, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=142#p532>.

²³ Rudra Sil, post “Transparency and Common Sense in the Face of Diverse Models of Social Science,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=192#p756>.

²⁴ Marcus Kreuzer, post “Topic 1: Competing Epistemological Assumptions,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, September 7, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=136#p451>.

²⁵ Schwartz-Shea 2014.

²⁶ Sam Handlin, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p517>.

my data collection and analysis procedures, as well as my epistemological approach, has been a professional necessity for me.”²⁷

Third, and more specifically, transparency could *help better assess evidence and guard against bias* across a range of research approaches²⁸ and for both positive and negative (null) findings.²⁹ For some contributors, this benefit stems from data access. As John Gerring says, “the main problem facing us is surely not fabrication of data. It is the difficulty of interpreting that data. And in this respect, it seems to me that access to field notes might be helpful.”³⁰ For others, the production and analytical aspects of transparency can “provide consumers of research with contextual information that can, in turn, help them evaluate evidence or consider sources of bias in the data used to buttress evidentiary claims.”³¹

Fourth and fifth, data access and transparency could *allow for replication*³² in the instances where this is possible, and *provide access to data for future researchers*.³³ Although data access to human subjects research can raise ethical and practice issues (considered below), sharing such data where possible (including, perhaps, after an extended period of embargo) may constitute a valuable resource to future researchers that might otherwise be lost in a researcher’s private files.

A few contributors suggest that transparency could *help guard against dishonesty* in the discipline, though there is significant disagreement on the extent to which such “policing” is useful.³⁴ Although frequently raised in discussions of DA-RT, detecting and deterring dishonesty is only one of multiple potential benefits of transparency, and many of the others focus on how transparency can improve research in more positive ways. As Nancy Hirschmann notes, “insofar as data posting can help *stimulate discussion and debate* among scholars, that is productive.”³⁵ Such expanded debate is a final way in which transparency can benefit the profession.

²⁷ Kathy Cramer, “Re: Limits to Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132#p547>.

²⁸ Ben Reed, post “The benefits of transparency in ethnography,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=204#p874>.

²⁹ Hillel Soifer, post “Re: Presenting our evidence,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, September 24, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=124#p484>.

³⁰ John Gerring, post “Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p833>.

³¹ Nikhar Gaikward, “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 4, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p502>. Andrew Moravcsik (2010)’s proposals for the widespread adoption of active citation, although explicitly couched in the language of replicability, might also be interpreted as facilitating the careful assessment of empirical claims based on qualitative evidence, as well as the identification of possible bias.

³² Guest, post “Re: Question 2: Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3 Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p544>.

³³ Guest, “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, September 25, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p486>.

³⁴ Cf. Tom Pepinsky, Deborah Avant, Sandra Resodihardjo, and Jane Mansbridge’s comments in the topic “Dishonesty in research raises concern,” <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p518>.

³⁵ Nancy Hirschmann, post “Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological Priors, November 4, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p619>.

III. Assessment of Costs, Risks, Appropriateness, and Constraints

Despite the frequently acknowledged benefits of transparency, the QTD deliberations revealed widespread concerns about the impact of DA-RT on human subjects research – concerns that many contributors felt had been ignored or underestimated in the initial DA-RT and JETS documents. This section discusses WG contributions focused on five major concerns associated with transparency: human subject protection, access to human subjects, effort and time, effects of power differentials, and epistemological diversity in the discipline.³⁶

Human subjects (and researcher) protection

The primary concern related to data access and research transparency is human subjects protection, the foundation of research ethics in the discipline.³⁷ Standard training for scholars conducting qualitative fieldwork requires them to anticipate the various forms of harm that might affect their informants, especially when promised confidentiality,³⁸ and warns researchers that calls for transparency must be weighed against the potentially competing imperative of human subjects protection.³⁹ This is a perspective widely shared among WG contributors. “To force researchers to hand over notes that might endanger their sources... is a serious ethical concern,” Cathy Schneider notes “[a]s a former member of our institution’s IRB and as a long time ethnographer, who works in at risk communities.”⁴⁰ This concern is of particular relevance to scholars who must protect the anonymity of sources in authoritarian and violent contexts.⁴¹ It is a concern that extends to scholars working in elite settings in which “officials, ruling party members, etc. who may not be authorized to give interviews, or say things that deviate from the official line.”⁴²

³⁶ Guest, post “Transparency as it relates to power differentials,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=191#p734>. See also Ben Read, post “The benefits of transparency in ethnography,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=204#p874> and Ingo Rohlfing, post “When do costs of transparency outweigh the benefits?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1 Comparative methods and process tracing, November 5, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=170#p624>.

³⁷ Guest, post “Transparency as it relates to power differentials,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=191#p734>.

³⁸ Rubin & Rubin (1995, 96-97) instruct readers: “You should be prepared to destroy your notes rather than allow access to them by people who would hurt your conversational partners.”

³⁹ Mosley 2013.

⁴⁰ Cathy Schneider, post “Re: Is there a tension between the principle of research openness and the willingness to pursue tough questions?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169#p740>.

⁴¹ Guest, post “ Re: Privileging Quantitative Methods and Challenging Field Work conditions,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/repressive political regimes, December 12, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=174#p808>. See also Fujii 2012; Parkinson and Wood 2015.

⁴² Guest, “ Re: Risks and Practices to Avoid?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/repressive political regimes, November 15, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=148#p656>. See also Alan Kuperman, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of Political Violence, December 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p863>; Abbey Steele, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of Political Violence, November 24, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p698>; Guest, post “Question 1: Marginalization and vulnerability,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=122#p545>.

The 2012 APSA Ethics Guide (6.4) explicitly addresses the question of weighing data access and research transparency against ethical imperatives, such as human subjects protection, by stipulating that scholars may withhold data and a full account of research process when there are “well-founded privacy and confidentiality concerns.” It further specifies that, “Decisions to withhold data and a full account of the procedures used to collect or generate them should be made in good faith and on reasonable grounds. Researchers must, however, exercise appropriate restraint in making claims as to the confidential nature of their sources, and resolve all reasonable doubts in favor of full disclosure.”

This formulation, however, leaves open multiple questions, including what constitutes “good faith,” “reasonable grounds,” and “reasonable doubts.” Deliberation within the QTD process focused in large part on the potential dangers to human subjects posed by DA-RT requirements, and to the importance of ensuring that DA-RT is implemented in practice in a way that respects researchers’ commitments to their human subjects.

Perhaps the most frequently expressed concern is that the sharing of anonymized or partially redacted interview transcripts or field notes could result in the unintentional violation of confidentiality promised to human subjects.⁴³ Such “deductive disclosure” can result when descriptions of field sites and study participants make them identifiable in shared reports.⁴⁴ “No matter how sure I feel that I have disguised identifying markers in these documents, or that there’s no substantial risk to participants, circumstances can change to completely transform the risk calculation,” Lihi Ben Shirit stresses.⁴⁵ Another contributor agrees: “Simple redactions of crucial words or pages will often not be adequate to prevent a regime agent from re-tracing the steps of a researcher to identify a potential leaker or dissenter.”⁴⁶ For this reason, another contributor notes,

⁴³ Cathy Schneider, post “Re: Is there a tension between the principle of research openness and the willingness to pursue tough questions?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169#p740>; Guest, post “Re: Challenges to Transparency in Authoritarian/Repressive Settings,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1 Authoritarina/repressive political regimes, November 25, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=146#p702>; Sherrill Stroschein, post “Danger, harm and change,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/repressive political regimes, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=187#p729>; Joseph Brown, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 2, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p894>.

⁴⁴ Kaiser 2012.

⁴⁵ Lihi Ben Shirit, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p864>. See also Guest, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, October 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p531>: “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...)”

⁴⁶ Guest, post “Re: Privileging Quantitative Methods and Challenging Field Work conditions,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/ repressive political regimes, December 12, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=174#p689>. See also Dara Strolovitch, post “Re: Question 1: Marginalization and vulnerability,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, December 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=122#p849>; Ricky Price, post: “Re: Question 2: Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, December 29, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p870>; Eva Bellin, post “Re: Risks and Practices to Avoid?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1 Authoritarian/repressive political regimes,

“Keeping and making transparent a repository of research can make scholars and research participants vulnerable to heightened visibility and targeting.”⁴⁷ These concerns are mostly expressed with respect to the publication of interview transcripts and field notes, but they apply also to efforts at production transparency because descriptions of sampling techniques or characterizations of the pool of interviewees could potentially provide clues as to the identities of subjects.⁴⁸

Concerns about violating confidentiality arise most strikingly among scholars who engage in human subjects research among vulnerable populations, including dissidents, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and citizens of authoritarian regimes, all of whom face potential persecution or retaliation if identified from publicly released data.⁴⁹ Anastasia Shesterinina, summarizing one exchange among WG contributors, points out that human subjects in authoritarian and conflict settings are especially at risk of retaliation from government officials and other interested parties: “Even when the researcher works to de-identify 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.”⁵⁰ In the current political climate in the United States, one participant argued, “undocumented immigrants, Muslims, members of Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ, and perhaps even dissidents may face real danger.”⁵¹ Making materials available can also put in danger and under government scrutiny the researcher, especially if “increased openness [impacts] perceptions of researcher ties to US intelligence and other agencies.”⁵²

Ethical considerations may argue against complete transparency even when subjects explicitly grant consent to being identified. Alison Post asks, “Even if individuals give permission

November 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=148#p598>; Matt Wood, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, September 28, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=119&p=494&hilit=matt+wood#p488>.

⁴⁷ Guest, post “Re: Risks and Practices to Avoid?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1 Authoritarian/repressive political regimes, November 15, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=148#p656>.

⁴⁸ Jesse Driscoll, for example, argues that “Thick description of life in places like Mogadishu or the North Caucasus, if complete with proper nouns, can be an intelligence asset.” Jesse Driscoll, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p736>.

⁴⁹ See the posts by Aili Tripp and Calvert Jones, in the topic “Pursuing transparency in qualitative research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants. The burden of protecting the confidentiality of human subjects, moreover, is not limited to vulnerable populations. Elite interview subjects, including those in established democracies, frequently participate in academic research only on condition of anonymity, fearing political retribution or damage to reputation.

⁵⁰ Anastasia Shesterinina, post “How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, September 5, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p434>.

⁵¹ Cathy Schneider, post “Re: Is there a tension between the principle of research openness and the willingness to pursue tough questions?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169#p740>.

⁵² Elliot Posner, post “Openness and Perceptions of Researcher Ties to US Intelligence and Other Agencies,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 6, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=171#p626>. See also Jesse Driscoll, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p736>.

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?”⁵³ As Aili Tripp notes, “Even if there are no security issues involved, there are privacy issues, issues of reputation, of pride, of not wanting to malign other people needlessly, and even of libel to consider.”⁵⁴

Access to human subjects

A number of WG contributors worry that excessive transparency might destroy the trust established with research participants, and endanger future access to human subject populations of all types.⁵⁵ “[A]ny weakening in confidentiality,” Janice Bockmeyer points out, “will discourage vulnerable populations from participating in research.”⁵⁶ This concern was expressed by a number of scholars with respect to data access, and particularly the specter of journals implementing DA-RT by requiring access to or publication of interview transcripts of field notes as a condition of publication. One commentator notes that securing access to hard-to-reach key actors, such as elites, could become “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.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Alison Post, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p673>.

⁵⁴ Aili Tripp, post “Pursuing transparency in qualitative research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 8, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=176#p635>.

⁵⁵ See the contributions by Jane Mansbridge, Carolyn Warner, and Stephen Brooke, on the topic “How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants; Kristen Monroe, post “DA-RT and qualitative interview data,” Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, January 8, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=207#p906>; Jacques Hymans, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1 Text-based sources, December 13, 2016.

⁵⁶ Janice Bockmeyer, post “Challenges and Risks of Research Openness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, November 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=182#p688>. See also Lise Howard, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 5, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p904>; Lahra Smith, post “Re: Privileging Quantitative Methods and Challenging Field Work conditions,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/repressive contexts, December 12, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=174#p808>; Sandra Resodihardjo, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/ Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p672>. As a result, “Association for the Study of Nationalities released a statement that DA-RT poses a danger to our ability to conduct research.” Sherrill Stroschein, post “Ethnic / religious tension settings,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of Political Violence, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=188#p730>.

⁵⁷ Guest, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, October 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p531>.

Requiring the sharing of interview transcripts or field notes, as Dara Strolovitch explains, could unintentionally introduce bias into research by driving away potential participants. “Doing so will almost certainly make it more difficult to earn people’s trust, to make them comfortable speaking with us, to get them to allow us to observe meetings and events, etc. But the corollary to *losing* those potential interviewees is that, in addition to making it more likely that people will ‘parrot official positions,’ those who *will be* willing to speak with us, who *will be* willing to allow us to observe their events, etc. are likely to be quite different from those who will refuse to allow our notes, the text of our conversations. etc. to be shared.” Such rules, she notes, seem “very unlikely to produce better knowledge or insights about the political world.”⁵⁸ For all of these reasons, an overwhelming number of contributors agree that journal editors should implement DA-RT standards, not with across-the-board rules mandating full transparency and data access, but consider on a case-by-case basis how authors can maximize transparency consistent with both human subjects protection and access considerations.

Effort, time, and resources

One concern among WG contributors is related to the effort, time, and resources necessary for providing access to data and detailed accounts of how they were generated and analyzed. A number of WG contributors pointed out that “transform[ing] the data... generate[d] through interviews, meeting observation, and other field interactions into transcripts,”⁵⁹ “render[ing one’s] notes legible,”⁶⁰ “photograph[ing], sort[ing], and process[ing] all of the images,”⁶¹ or writing methodological appendices⁶² place large and potentially overwhelming burdens on researchers.⁶³ As Sam Handlin points out, “[g]iven that it often only takes one reviewer to sink a paper, it is not

⁵⁸ Dara Strolovitch, post “Re: Pursuing transparency in qualitative research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, December 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=176#p847>.

⁵⁹ Robin Turner, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, December 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p871>.

⁶⁰ Ken Eaton, post “Re: When do costs of transparency outweigh the benefits?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, January 1, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=170#p888>.

⁶¹ Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, November 15, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p657>. See also Guest, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, November 7, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p627>.

⁶² Anastasia Shesterinina, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p831>; Sam Handlin, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p517>; Amy Poteete, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, January 1, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p887>.

⁶³ Guest, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, December 10, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p799>, noting that full transcription of interviews is often unnecessary for the purposes of research, and that transcription of dozens or hundreds of interviews could be extraordinarily time-consuming.

completely obvious to me that offering up an additional 30-40 pages of extended quotations from textual sources and commentary on my interpretation and use of them is actually going to increase the likelihood of getting a paper accepted. Writing a thorough and careful [transparency appendix] involves a lot of work for relatively uncertain rewards, [p]articularly for junior faculty.”⁶⁴ One question that emerged in this context is “whose responsibility it is to provide a digital repository of materials, particularly if the materials come from an unorganized archive.”⁶⁵

Exacerbating power differentials in the discipline

The questions of effort, time, and resources raised concerns of power differentials among scholars in the discipline. The burdens imposed by new transparency rules “affect different members of the discipline in different ways.”⁶⁶ Labor-intensive transparency requirements are likely to fall particularly heavily on less established scholars as well as those at less well funded universities or independent scholars.⁶⁷ “The less well-resourced the institution the scholar works in, the more that scholar is underfunded,” Jane Mansbridge points out. “Having to incur costs to convert field notes or interviews into the appropriate forms for deposit... might well prove impossible for such researchers.”⁶⁸ Many thus conclude that, “for under-resourced scholars, DA-RT only sharpens their inability to compete... when it comes to publishing their work in top journals.”⁶⁹

A closely related concern has to do with the scholar’s intellectual property and right of first use. Even if a researcher were able to overcome ethical issues and fully share her field notes and/or interview transcripts, the common requirement that the underlying data be publicly shared within

⁶⁴ Sam Handlin, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p517>. For example, Diana Fu “spent several weeks writing up an extensive appendix that discusses ethnography and its advantages as well as limitations in the context of [her] study.” Diana Fu, post “Reporting Ethnographic Data in Journals,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, November 14, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=178#p646>.

⁶⁵ Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1 Text-based sources, December 9, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p786>; Vicky Murillo, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3 Power and Institutions, December 16, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p826>; Maria Victoria Murillo, post “Re: Topic 2: Placing DA-RT in the Broader Knowledge Production,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=156#p832>.

⁶⁶ Shamira Gelbman, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p741>.

⁶⁷ Hall 2016.

⁶⁸ Jane Mansbridge, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, October 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p571>.

⁶⁹ Guest, post “Transparency as it relates to power differentials,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=191#p734>. See also Guest, post “Non-tenured faculty research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, December 9, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=194#p785>; Mneasha Gellman, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 28, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p716>.

one year may be insufficient to allow scholars to make full use of data – which may take years of fieldwork to collect – before releasing it for use by others.⁷⁰

Transparency standards and diversity in the discipline

A broader concern arising from this discussion is that an editorial insistence on transparency will limit diversity in the discipline by holding qualitative researchers to a different standard, by marginalizing researchers working in epistemological and ontological traditions incompatible with the notion of transparency as formulated by DA-RT and JETS, and by exerting a chilling effect on scholars who might be directed away from sensitive areas of qualitative research towards “safer” topics for which DA-RT compliance may be more straightforward. Mark Beissinger summarizes the first point as “requirements to publish research notes place a burden on qualitative researchers that is way beyond what anyone else in the profession is being asked to fulfill.”⁷¹ Zoe Marks further notes “the perceived double standard of quantitative researchers not justifying every coding interpretation made in constructing a dataset.”⁷²

Second, uniform transparency rules – particularly those requiring extensive data access – may impose limits on the conduct and publication of specific forms of qualitative research, such as those that “use field interviews,”⁷³ “multi-source, multi-method data,”⁷⁴ or extensive background materials that are “simply not feasible to list;”⁷⁵ research where note-taking may disrupt observations that are most critical to the findings;⁷⁶ and “developing country research [which] usually necessitates another layer of disorganization and complexity in organizing historic

⁷⁰ Kristen Monroe, post “DA-RT and qualitative interview data,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, January 8, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=207#p906>.

⁷¹ Mark Beissinger, post “Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, November 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p676>. See also Marcus Kreuzer, post “Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, October 24, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p553>; Nikhar Gaikward, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 4, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p502>.

⁷² Zoe Marks, post, “Re: Topic 3: Elaborating Multiple/alternative Journal Criteria,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 27, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=137#p867>.

⁷³ Catherine Boone, post “Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p518>.

⁷⁴ Zoe Marks, post, “Re: Topic 3: Elaborating Multiple/alternative Journal Criteria,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 27, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=137#p867>. See also William J. Kelleher, post “How the Rule of Transparency Can Become Self-Destructive for Political Science,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors December 23, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=201#p858>.

⁷⁵ Tasha Fairfield, post “Re: Presenting our evidence,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=124#p496>. See also Maya Tudor, post “Re: When do costs of transparency outweigh the benefits?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, December 12, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=170#p805>.

⁷⁶ Sherrill Stroschein, post “Practical problems in the field,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=189#p731>;

or relevant info.”⁷⁷ From the perspective of some scholars, the very notion of knowledge is challenged by the current debate on transparency. As Rudra Sil argues, “adding new layers of procedures and regulations requires uniform understandings of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’... [A]n effort to create and impose uniform procedures across journals that have historically showcased diverse approaches and arguments for diverse audiences will create unevenness in submissions, acceptance rates, and costs in terms of time and resources.”⁷⁸

Third, DA-RT standards may have a diverting effect on important research for which codified transparency may be more difficult to meet. The concern is that “we are going to collectively sacrifice interesting questions and deep knowledge in order to valorize ‘openness’.”⁷⁹ If a project does not abide by the new transparency rules, should it be pursued?⁸⁰ Here, we find a concern that “the proposed transparency rules will remove the context sensitivity that many of us develop in favor of blanket rules.”⁸¹ These rules may, furthermore, prevent researchers from engaging with certain questions and areas where they cannot be followed, such as in “non-democratic and war torn settings.”⁸² Steven Brooke elaborates, noting 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.”⁸³

⁷⁷ Veronica Herrera, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, November 28, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p718>. See also Abbey Steele, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, November 24, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p696>.

⁷⁸ Rudra Sil, post “Transparency and Common Sense in the Face of Diverse Models of Social Science,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=192#p756>.

⁷⁹ Guest, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p594>.

⁸⁰ Mneesa Gellman, post “Re: Is there a tension between the principle of research openness and the willingness to pursue tough questions?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 27, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=169#p711>.

⁸¹ Scott Straus, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 3, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p901>.

⁸² Aili Tripp, post “Re: Privileging Quantitative Methods and Challenging Field Work conditions,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/repressive political regimes, November 12, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=174#p640>.

⁸³ Steven Brooke, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, December 15, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p823>. See also Alison Post in the same topic: “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.” Alison Porter, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p673>.

Other concerns

Among other concerns raised in WG discussions are journal word limits that do not accommodate detailed accounts of research processes,⁸⁴ copyright issues as “[m]any archives have strict limits on the number of documents that any one scholar can photocopy or reproduce,”⁸⁵ and potential misuse of disseminated data.⁸⁶

IV. Transparency Practices and Ways Forward

WG contributors identified a number of practices for journal editors, for the profession, and for researchers to consider as a way forward in achieving and managing transparency in the discipline.

A number of WG contributors emphasized the key role already being played by journal editors who are in an authoritative position to make calls about what constitutes transparency with respect to any given study.⁸⁷ Indeed, much of the important work of promoting transparency in published scholarship, and balancing transparency against other legitimate professional and ethical values, will fall in practice to journal editors working together with authors. Proposals for journal editors include: inviting authors to “explain why they cannot reveal certain attributes of their informants and/or research sites;”⁸⁸ “promot[ing] *adaptive* transparency policies that prioritize: (1) intellectual clarity... and (2) ethical rigour;”⁸⁹ demonstrating flexibility with respect to the

⁸⁴ Jessica Teets, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas; Guest, Refining Norms/Practices in Publishing,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 23, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p855>.

⁸⁵ Nikhar Gaikward, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p526>. See also Ecaterina Locoman, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p733>; Shamira Gelbman, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p741>; Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, September 9, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p463>.

⁸⁶ Mala Htun, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 9, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p789>; Sherrill Stroschein, post “Reviewer gets files, disappears,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=190#p732>; Alison Post, post “Cybersecurity and work with human subjects,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human subjects, November 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=181&sid=21b7b5f38ef7f0ac37ca9f9697314334#p675>.

⁸⁷ Yashar 2016.

⁸⁸ Ana Arjona, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p749>.

⁸⁹ Zoe Marks, post “Re: Topic 3: Elaborating Multiple/alternative Journal Criteria,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 27, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=137#p867>.

word limits of articles and online appendices;⁹⁰ and “mak[ing] space for online storage of appendices or data-sets.”⁹¹

The lively debate that has taken place within the QTD forum indicates the need for the profession to incorporate training for future generations of scholars, not simply about the generic transparency provisions of the APSA Ethics Guidelines, but also about the diverse ways in which scholars can address data access and transparency concerns in practice, consistent with other concurrent, and sometimes competing, practical and ethical considerations. Contributors pointed out that professional standards exist “to incentivize scholars to lay bare the basis for their knowledge claims and to lay bare the principles informing different aspects of an argument,”⁹² in other words, to “document their material”⁹³ and explain how they arrived at and assessed their claims,⁹⁴ while not sharing materials where it is problematic.⁹⁵ This is standard advice in the texts used to train social scientists in field methods, one that could only be strengthened and further systematized in the future, and included in methods training at the graduate level in the discipline.⁹⁶

WG contributors offered a range of transparency suggestions for researchers that include:

- Writing a “clear research/methodology section;”⁹⁷
- Explaining “the process by which cases were identified and included in the analysis;”⁹⁸
- Being explicit about decisions involved in selecting field sites and how much time to spend at each site or with each interlocutor;⁹⁹

⁹⁰ Alison Post, post “Re: How and when can and should we make available, in part or in full, evidence from research with human participants?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, November 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=120#p673>.

⁹¹ Rudra Sil, post “Transparency and Common Sense in the Face of Diverse Models of Social Science,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=192#p756>.

⁹² Rudra Sil, post “Transparency and Common Sense in the Face of Diverse Models of Social Science,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=192#p756>.

⁹³ Mark Beissinger, post “Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, November 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p676>.

⁹⁴ Samantha Majic, post “Re: Practicalities of Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=133#p535>.

⁹⁵ Sarah Parkinson, post “Re: Limits to Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132#p757>.

⁹⁶ See Kapiszewski, MacLean, and Read 2014; Dewalt and Dewalt 2011.

⁹⁷ Sandra Resodihardjo, post “Re: Power and the Institutionalization of Research Transparency/Openness/Explicitness,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.3: Power and Institutions, November 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=149#p672>. See Aaron Schneider, post “Re: Presenting our evidence on the Bayesian updating process,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, December 19, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=124#p838> for example.

⁹⁸ Tasha Fairfield, post “Re: Transparency in case selection,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=115#p497>. For a useful list of transparency practices in case selection, see Andy Bennett, post “Re: Transparency in case selection,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 14, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=115#p511>.

⁹⁹ Ben Reed, post “The benefits of transparency in ethnography,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=204#p874>.

- Presenting interview protocols;¹⁰⁰
- Being “reflexive about how the research actually unfolded as opposed to what the research design called for;”¹⁰¹
- Including background knowledge/meta-data;¹⁰²

Providing thick description of research where it does not expose research participants;¹⁰³

- Giving “more attention to weighing alternative arguments;”¹⁰⁴
- “[J]ustifying why a given piece of empirical material means what we believe it means;”¹⁰⁵
- Quoting interviews in a contextualized way;¹⁰⁶ and
- Reviewing the research of colleagues working in the same area.¹⁰⁷

The following sections outline a number of these practices with examples from published articles presenting the results of human-subjects research. The transparency tools include in-article discussions contrasting one’s approach against other more familiar approaches,¹⁰⁸ appendices

¹⁰⁰ Lise Howard, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 5, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p904>.

¹⁰¹ Lee Ann Fujii, post “Re: Question 2: Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, November 19, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p679>. See also Paul Staniland, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p844>.

¹⁰² On background knowledge, “any highly relevant background knowledge that informs our analytical judgements, along with key pieces of evidence on which we base our analysis, should be highlighted in the text of an article. Additional material could be placed in an appendix.” Tasha Fairfield, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, November 19, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p683>.

¹⁰³ Guest, post “Re: Question 2: Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p544>. Some contributors suggested confirming with research participants what can and cannot be included in publication (Lama Mourad, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 11, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p802>).

¹⁰⁴ Jessica Teets, post “Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 23, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p854>.

¹⁰⁵ Derek Beach, post “Re: Presenting our evidence,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, December 19, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=124#p840>.

¹⁰⁶ Guest, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>: “developing a standard that scholars report the question asked as well as the answer provided by the respondent when quoting from an interview. Or, similarly, that scholars provide a longer, de-identified excerpt from the interview for each quote used.”

¹⁰⁷ Sherrill Stroschein, post “Practical problems in the field” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics, Human Subjects and Research Openness, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=189#p731>.

¹⁰⁸ Kathy Cramer, post “Re: Limits to Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132#p547>. See also Erica

detailing aspects of the research process¹⁰⁹ or systematizing interview data¹¹⁰ while protecting research participants,¹¹¹ footnotes,¹¹² self-reflexivity in writing,¹¹³ and pilot projects on active citation and data collections.¹¹⁴

Contributors like Jillian Schwedler warn against “the idea of ‘best practices,’ not because there aren’t better and worse practices, but because ‘interpretive methods’ are very diverse and I am concerned about a one-size-fits-all set of standards against which diverse approaches will be

Simmons, post “Re: Best practices in interpretive Social Science?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.2: Interpretive methods, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=155#p521>.

¹⁰⁹ Tasha Fairfield, post “Re: Transparency in case selection,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=115#p497>; Diana Fu, post “Reporting Ethnographic Data in Journals,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, November 14, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=178#p646>; Sam Handlin, post “Re: Benefits and Costs of Increasing Transparency for Text and Non Text Based Sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=140#p517>; Anastasia Shesterinina, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p831>; Taylor Boas posting as Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, December 22, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p851>.

¹¹⁰ Guest, post “Re: Presenting our evidence,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=124#p498>.

¹¹¹ Sarah Parkinson, “Re: Limits to Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132#p757>; Guest, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 25, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p594>; Amrita Basu, post “Re: Question 1: Marginalization and vulnerability,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations November 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=122#p708>; Crystal Jackson, post “Re: Question 1: Marginalization and vulnerability,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, October 31, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=122#p589>; Lisa Vanhala, post “Re: Question 1: Marginalization and vulnerability,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, December 28, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=122#p868>; Guest, post “Re: Question 1: Marginalization and vulnerability,” QTD Discussion Board, IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, December 9, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=122#p782>.

¹¹² Marcus Kreuzer, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, November 4, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p621>.

¹¹³ Lee Ann Fujii, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p548>; Crystal Jackson, post “Re: Question 2: Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, October 31, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p590>. See also John Gerring, post “Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 18, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p833>. On Alice Goffman’s study, *On the Run*, see Timothy Pachirat, post “Re: Dishonesty in research raises concern,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=157#p751>; William J. Kelleher, post “How the Rule of Transparency Can Become Self-Destructive for Political Science,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.1: Ontological/Epistemological Priors, December 23, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=13&t=201#p858>.

¹¹⁴ Andy Bennett, post “Re: Exemplars of process tracing and historical analysis,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.1: Comparative methods and process tracing, October 15, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=114#p512>.

assessed.”¹¹⁵ Others note limits to the applicability of some practices across traditions in the discipline.¹¹⁶ Hence, these examples are provided with the caveat that transparency practices for one research tradition might not be suitable to another and that different transparency tools might be used for different components of the research.¹¹⁷

In-article Transparency Discussion

The most obvious way in which authors can be transparent about their research is by taking the time in an article “to explain how and why we did what we did [to] make our work more accessible.”¹¹⁸ Katherine Cramer Walsh’s (2012) article in the *American Political Science Review* (APSR), “Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective,” is an example.

A scholar of public opinion, Cramer studies how people understand politics, which involves observation and interpretation of how people talk with others about politics. As this approach is unusual in her field, Cramer emphasizes that “transparency in the sense of explaining in detail my data collection and analysis procedures, as well as my epistemological approach, has been a professional necessity for me.”¹¹⁹ This includes clarity about Cramer’s focus on the process rather than causality and how it contrasts with the more familiar positivist approaches.

In her article, Cramer makes it clear on the first pages that “this is a constitutive analysis (an examination of what this thing, rural consciousness, consists of and how it works) versus a causal analysis (e.g., an examination of whether living in a rural place predicts rural consciousness).”¹²⁰ As a result, the reader is better equipped to understand the value of this research.

Transparency Appendices

Methodological appendices provide the space to expand on the data collection and analysis procedures. As Taylor Boas puts it, “online appendices... have become almost de rigueur in quantitative research given the vast number of alternative specifications... that scholars are expected to present, but which don’t fit in the main body. The same could... be done for... qualitative sources.”¹²¹ Anastasia Shesterinina’s (2016) APSR article “Collective Threat Framing and Mobilization in Civil War” offers an example.

¹¹⁵ Jillian Schwedler, post “Re: Best practices in interpretive Social Science?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.2: Interpretive methods, October 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=155#p499>.

¹¹⁶ Tasha Fairfield, post “Re: Let’s Focus on Research Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, December 31, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=168&p=880&hilit=best+practices#p880>.

¹¹⁷ Filiz Kahraman, post “Re: Question 2: Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, November 3, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p617>.

¹¹⁸ Erica Simmons, post “Re: Best practices in interpretive Social Science?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.2: Interpretive methods, October 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=155#p521>.

¹¹⁹ Kathy Cramer, post “Re: Limits to Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, October 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132#p547>.

¹²⁰ Walsh 2012, 518. In an online appendix Cramer provides additional information, including the details of observed groups and question protocol.

¹²¹ Taylor Boas posting as Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, December 22, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p851>.

A scholar of mobilization, Shesterinina examines how people come to perceive threat and arrive at a range of decisions from fleeing to fighting in civil war. This study is based on in-depth interviews supplemented with observations and additional primary and secondary data. Because these materials were collected in a highly politicized setting on a war that took place over two decades ago, Shesterinina had to explain how she collected and analyzed them. This included clarity about how she selected her research sites and participants, addressed the issues of memory and potential bias in first-person narratives through interview strategies and triangulation, and weighed her findings against alternative explanations.¹²²

In addition to the methodological discussion and presentation of extended, paragraph-length interview excerpts in the text of her article, Shesterinina's online appendices discuss in detail her fieldwork logistics, interview protocols, participant observation sites, and coding and process tracing procedures, which could not be included in the text of the article.¹²³ Focusing on her choices in and out of the field, rather than personal details of participants, the appendices clarify the research process needed to evaluate the findings while maintaining commitment to human subjects protection.

In her *World Development* article "Going Where the Money Is: Strategies for Taxing Economic Elites in Unequal Democracies," Tasha Fairfield (2013) further demonstrates the usefulness of appendices by linking particular interview materials to process-tracing tests that underpin the study.¹²⁴ Fairfield lists observations supported by interview excerpts for each of her hypotheses, making clear how she arrived at her conclusions and giving confidence in the method's rigor.

Finally, systematizing interview data in ways that demonstrate the transition from all interviews to a selection presented in the article has been another critical use of appendices for achieving transparency in human subjects research.¹²⁵ Where appropriate, for example, interview tables might include "the type, character, and extensiveness of the limited set of interviews... [and] the scholar's approach to using interviews as part of a well-planned research strategy."¹²⁶

Footnotes

While transparency appendices can be useful in increasing the clarity of the research process in some projects, WG contributors point out that appendices can "be less accessible than foot-

¹²² Anastasia Shesterinina, post "Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas," QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics, Human Subjects and Research Openness, December 17, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p831>.

¹²³ Shesterinina 2016. Supplementary Materials available at <https://static.cambridge.org/resource/id/urn:cambridge.org:id:binary:20170412070549178-0276:S0003055416000277:S0003055416000277sup001.pdf>

¹²⁴ Fairfield 2013.

¹²⁵ Guest, Presenting our evidence.

¹²⁶ Bleich and Pekkanan 2013, 104. See 99-101 for an example of the interview methods table.

notes”¹²⁷ or more fundamentally “artificially divorce the method from the analysis.”¹²⁸ Footnotes can be used to include necessary information on the method in the article. Sarah Parkinson’s (2013) *APSR* article “Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War” is an example.

A scholar of militant organizations, Parkinson studies organizational adaptation through ethnography “in both ‘organizational spaces’ and ‘private spaces’ across generations” and advocates “a more integrated, less linear evidence-gathering/analysis process... [that is] loyal to how ethnography often works.”¹²⁹ Along with the methodological discussion in the text of the article, Parkinson uses footnotes to elaborate on her research site selection and confidentiality procedures.¹³⁰ She uses footnotes to support her claims by pointing to multiple interviews that conveyed similar information, to indicate how she triangulated her interviews with those of other researchers, and to explain her participants’ background in the organization.¹³¹ This approach lends credibility to the argument.

Discussion of Reflexivity

Transparency about the integrated data collection/analysis process is evident in researchers’ discussions of reflexivity. “My movement from one position at the slaughterhouse to another,” Timothy Pachirat illustrates in his ethnography, “structured not only what I saw but also how I it and how I gave meaning to it”¹³² Lee Ann Fujii’s (2010) *Journal of Peace Research* article, “Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence,” is another example. A scholar of genocide, Fujii calls attention to contextual knowledge in human subjects research and finds that “[t]o be reflexive means to discuss explicitly what the original research plan was, how things actually unfolded, including the ethical dilemmas that arose and how the researcher responded to them.”¹³³ Fujii’s article supplements the discussion in her book, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*, by expanding on the ways in which her background and position affected how she was seen in the field, what information she was able to access, and what she learned as a result.¹³⁴ The article is clear about how Fujii incorporated people’s perception of her

¹²⁷ Taylor Boas posting as Guest, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, December 22, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p851>. Marcus Kreuzer suggests that footnotes “assure data access by pointing the reader to the precise location of evidence..., production transparency by discussing the broader context from which the piece of evidence was taken..., [and] analytical transparency by clarifying how the tangible piece of evidence supports an inference to a broader, and usually not readily observable claim” (Marcus Kreuzer, post “Re: Documenting use of text-based or non-text-based sources,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.1: Text-based sources, September 13, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=128#p465>.)

¹²⁸ Sarah Parkinson, post “Re: Practicalities of Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=133%20-%20p448#p760>.

¹²⁹ Sarah Parkinson, post “Re: Practicalities of Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and participant observation, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=133%20-%20p448#p760>.

¹³⁰ Parkinson 2013, fn. 3-4, pp. 422, respectively.

¹³¹ Parkinson 2013, fn. 17, 7, 6, pp. 424, 422, respectively.

¹³² Pachirat 2011, 16.

¹³³ Lee Ann Fujii, post “Re: Human Subjects and Research Openness: Tensions and Dilemmas,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum I.2: Research Ethics: Human Subjects and Research Openness, October 21, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=116#p548>.

¹³⁴ Fujii 2009, 34-35.

in the collection and analysis of materials, including by giving access to some of the most difficult topics, such as ethnicity.

Active Citation and Data Collections

Pilot active citation and data collection projects are an important addition to the transparency practices discussed above. Available on the Qualitative Data Repository, these projects show how qualitative data can be shared with attention to human subjects and copyright concerns.¹³⁵ Rachel Ellett's active citation compilation for a chapter in her 2013 book, *Pathways to Judicial Power in Transitional States: Perspectives from African Courts*, is an example. In support of the claims in the chapter, Ellett provides anonymized information on interviewees and location of the interview, annotations explaining why the citation is important or presented in this particular context, and specific location of the supporting materials, such as documents and news sources.¹³⁶

Other pilot projects have included active citations with longer excerpts as they were recorded at the time of the interview¹³⁷ and data collections in support of the analysis that involves human subjects, for example, videos.¹³⁸ These innovative transparency tools help clarify what data was used and how to arrive at the findings and gives access to its source, where appropriate.

These examples point the way towards a series of scholarly, editorial and professional practices in which the aim of transparency is pursued with care and with attention to competing ethical concerns and to the nature of the research in question. With each of these practices, drawn from different traditions in the discipline, the scholar was able to effectively use strategies for making aspects of the data collection, analytical approach, and positionality clear within the broader research process. These practices have helped journal editors, reviewers, and readers to understand the value of the research, evaluate the findings based on a close reading of how the data were collected and analysed, and gain appropriate access to the data itself, including through the use of extended excerpts.

V. Advancing Research Integrity

This Community Transparency Statement has sought to contextualize the benefits and concerns associated with transparency in human subjects research. The report has drawn on insights shared by an intellectually diverse set of scholars—through in-person discussions, posts to the QTD online forum, and numerous publications—who support transparency in broad terms. The scholars we consulted were nearly unanimous in emphasizing the importance of openness and explicitness—e.g., specifying how information from interview subjects is collected and analyzed or interpreted—for the integrity of the research enterprise. Simply put, research involving human subjects is perceived to be more reliable when scholars make the design and analytical procedures of their studies more understandable to their readers.

In reflecting on the importance of transparency to research, this report has also summarized key concerns identified by scholars representing distinct analytical traditions. The critiques advanced by both positivist and interpretivist scholars suggest that generic requirements for data access and replicability should be avoided. Standardized rules imposed on all submissions to any

¹³⁵ See <https://qdr.syr.edu/discover/pilots>.

¹³⁶ Ellett 2015.

¹³⁷ Rich 2015.

¹³⁸ Boas 2015.

given journal are unlikely to adequately accommodate the array of ethical and practical dilemmas that researchers must confront when turning information from human subjects into publishable knowledge. Moreover, it remains in doubt whether the imposition of standardized rules for data access, especially to prevent deception or fraud, would appreciably increase the reliability of human subjects research.

This report has sought to meaningfully advance transparency discussions in human subjects research by describing specific practices that scholars can employ as appropriate for their particular research to overcome transparency concerns, all while ensuring ethical and professional obligations. The variety of practices discussed, ranging from the design to the write-up phases, can be readily implemented by most scholars to make their findings easier to evaluate in peer review. Greater recognition by journals of these practices as being consistent with transparency guidelines would facilitate the case-by-case determinations that editors and reviewers inevitably need to make when assessing the reliability of scholarship.

DA-RT has been adopted by the professional association and JETS by many of the leading journals in political science, yet the QTD consultation reveals a number of practical and ethical issues that arise when applying the criteria of data access and research transparency to human subjects research. Furthermore, the consultation suggests that transparency practices that are suitable to one research tradition in the discipline may not be appropriate for others. In light of these concerns, it is incumbent upon editors, graduate instructors, and scholars to implement DA-RT and JETS in cautious and flexible ways that acknowledge and accommodate the specific practical and ethical demands of human subjects research and diversity in the discipline. We hope that this report represents a step in that direction.

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Comparative Methods and Process Tracing

Final Report of QTD Working Group III.1:

January 2019

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I. Introduction

Process tracing and cross-case comparisons are widely used in qualitative research. Process tracing is generally understood as a within-case method for drawing inferences on mechanisms. Understandings of the logic of inference differ across the methodological literature, from approaches that emphasize invariant causal mechanisms to those that take a probabilistic approach to assessing alternative explanations. Likewise, understandings of cross-case comparison vary widely; many treatments are grounded in a logic of approximating experimental control, while others see comparisons as useful for inspiring theory and producing strong tests of theory without necessarily providing a distinct logic of inference from process tracing. We aim to largely sidestep methodological debates by articulating a list of broadly desirable transparency objectives; however, we note that appropriate transparency practices may differ depending on the particular methodological understanding espoused. We discuss these issues as they relate to four approaches to process tracing that have arisen over time and that are currently practiced by researchers: narrative-based process tracing (including traditional methods of using evidence to make causal arguments about historical outcomes of individual cases), Van Evera's (1997) tests, Bayesian process tracing, and process tracing focused on mechanistic approaches.

II. Clarity and Analytic Transparency

Below, we present a set of core practices that are valued because they have the important benefit of providing readers with the information they need to understand and evaluate qualitative research that draws on process tracing and comparative methods. Since each practice provides different types of information, we address the benefits of each in turn. We then discuss a number of research exemplars that illustrate various of these practices as they have been successfully applied in substantive research.

Core Recommended Practices

(1) Clearly define concepts and describe how they have been operationalized and scored across cases.

Clear concepts and sensible measurement strategies are critical for any research project. Scoring cases on key causal factors and outcomes is a major component of qualitative research that often involves close scrutiny of cases (even substantial fieldwork) and in-depth analysis. Providing readers with clear and consistent definitions for concepts as well as discussing how these concepts were operationalized and scored across cases is essential for analytic transparency.

This aspect of transparency may arise in two different portions of the research project: (i) explaining how cases score on key variables that are used to carry out and justify case selection, and (ii) a more detailed and nuanced 'scoring' of the cases chosen for investigation on a wider range of characteristics, including background conditions and the context in which the causal relationship is theorized to hold.

(2) Present the rationale for case selection and the logic of comparison.

This related point is common practice in qualitative research. While the details of what information should be provided will depend on the aims and methodological grounding of the research, some rationale for why a given case or cases deserve close attention and why they constitute an analytically informative set for comparison should be provided. This has the benefits, as discussed below, of allowing the reader to evaluate the choices made by the researcher, and to assess how compelling any claims of generalizability might be.

(3) Clearly articulate the causal argument.

This is an obvious point not just for transparency but also for good scholarship more fundamentally—readers cannot understand and evaluate research if the argument under consideration is ill-specified. Yet there is of course substantial variation in the extent to which scholarship achieves this goal. Ideally, we would like our hypotheses to include a careful discussion of both causal mechanisms and scope conditions, so that readers understand how and to what range of cases the argument should apply when bringing their own knowledge to bear on the question. If the latter are not well known, some discussion of uncertainty regarding the range of conditions and contexts under which the theory should apply is merited. The more clarity can be achieved on this front, the better the prospects for theory refinement and knowledge accumulation through subsequent research. This includes being transparent about whether a qualitative case study is case-centered without aiming for generalization, or centered on theory that applies more broadly, and a discussion of the breadth of application of a more generalized theory.

(4) Identify and assess salient alternative explanations.

As a matter of common practice, qualitative research identifies and assesses alternative explanations, to show how the argument proposed builds on previous approaches and/or provides a better explanation than rival hypotheses. Scholars are advised to, and generally do, locate alternative explanations in salient literatures and explain why they deem these explanations inadequate, based on prior knowledge and/or evidence uncovered during the investigation. Readers themselves should also be expected to contemplate salient alternative explanations that the author may have overlooked and assess how well the argument at hand holds up against those alternatives.

(5) Explain how the empirical evidence leads to a given inference.

Linking evidence to inference lies at the heart of analytic transparency. Good scholarship presents the evidentiary basis for the analysis and takes the reader through some explanation of how the evidence has been collected and interpreted, as well as why and to what extent the evidence supports the author's argument and/or undermines rival explanations. As part of this process, authors should address any consequential evidence that runs counter to their overall conclusions, not just the supporting evidence. Discussion of absence of particular evidentiary findings may also be relevant, depending on the reasons for the absence. Generally speaking, some pieces of evidence will have greater inferential weight than others. Inference does not proceed by simply counting up clues for and against a claim, and scholars should aim to assess and explain why certain findings carry more substantial import.

Different methodological approaches will give rise to different prescriptions for connecting evidence to inference. For example, mechanistic understandings of inference emphasize tracing out the causal mechanism of the argument and linking each piece of evidence to each specific step in the theorized causal processes.¹ In contrast, Bayesian inference derives from the extent to which the observed evidence--which may be partial and incomplete--fits better with one hypothesis compared to one or more rivals. Evidence consistent with the author's causal mechanism may or may not provide inferential weight in support of that hypothesis, depending on whether that evidence is more or less plausible in the world of a rival hypothesis. Other approaches include application of Van Evera's (1997) process tracing tests, where a hypothesis tends to be either confirmed or infirmed upon passing or failing tests of varying strengths.

In most methodological approaches, it is important to link evidence to the observable implications predicted by alternative explanations. In narrative accounts, this entails asking how well the evidence fits with alternative explanations. In Van Evera's (1997) framework, this involves identifying whether evidence constitutes a "smoking gun" or another of the three tests relative to rival hypotheses (see below, and Van Evera, 1997, Bennett 2010). These tests have sometimes been misunderstood as being discrete and categorical, whereas they actually are intuitive shorthand labels for points along a continuous spectrum of Bayesian inferences on evidence with different degrees of probative value in discriminating among alternative explanations. In a fully Bayesian framework, authors treat evidentiary tests more precisely by identifying their strength in specific probabilistic terms. They do so by estimating priors on rival explanations and likelihood ratios for different pieces of evidence, although as we discuss below, the degree of formalization may vary.² In approaches focused on causal mechanisms and explanatory completeness, evidence contributes to an "event history map" that documents the realized values in the case of the theoretical variables outlined in the causal model.

Disagreements persist on whether it is important or even relevant for an author to clarify whether observable implications of alternative explanations were assessed prior to looking at a piece of evidence. Some approaches to the philosophy of science emphasize that "heuristic novelty," or theoretical predictions made prior to observing evidence, is important to assessing the status of evidence relative to theory.³ Many Bayesians, however, argue that the only thing that matters is the logical relationship between a hypothesized theory and observed evidence.⁴ We encourage scholars to review these debates and to proceed according to the position they find most compelling, providing an accompanying justification for their epistemological position.

(6) Identify and discuss background knowledge that plays a central role in how the evidence is interpreted.

The author is generally in a unique position to interpret and assess his or her evidence in light of extensive and highly specialized knowledge acquired about the case(s)

¹ e.g., Beach & Pedersen 2016, Waldner 2015.

² Authors can also make their estimates less confining by using upper and lower estimates of probabilities to avoid conveying a false sense of precision).

³ Elman and Elman, 2003.

⁴ Fairfield and Charman 2019.

studied. While it is neither possible nor desirable to expound every detail of accumulated background knowledge, key elements therein that matter to the author's interpretation of the evidence should be shared with readers.⁵ Because everyone comes to the table with very different background knowledge, based on familiarity with different bodies of literature, different countries, different political phenomena, etc., this guideline can make a big difference for establishing common ground and fostering consensus on inferences, or at least for identifying the reasons for divergent interpretations of evidence.

(7) Present key pieces of evidence in their original form where feasible.

Qualitative research is at its best when it showcases salient evidence in its original form, for example, direct quotations from documents and informants. Of course, this is not always possible; in many instances an indirect summary of information from an interview or a primary source will be preferable for clarity and conciseness, and in some situations this may be the only feasible option given the conditions of research (e.g. concern over human subject protection). Nevertheless, when it is possible to present the evidence directly, readers have the opportunity to assess whether the author's interpretations and inferences are convincing. Given the ambiguities inherent in written language, small changes in wording from an original source can make a big difference to the meaning and import of the information. While it may not be necessary to provide full text quotations from a secondary source, it follows that when working with such sources, page numbers must be included so that readers can locate the original statements.⁶

Research Exemplars

The above practices find expression in many excellent books and articles. Wood's (2000, 2001) research on democratization from below is a benchmark that illustrates many of these virtues. Wood clearly articulates the causal process through which mobilization by poor and working-class groups led to democratization in El Salvador and South Africa, provides extensive and diverse case evidence to establish each step in the causal process, carefully considers alternative explanations, and explains why they are inconsistent with the evidence. Wood's use of interview evidence is particularly compelling. For example, in the South African case, she provides three extended quotations from business leaders that illustrate the mechanism through which mobilization led economic elites to change their regime preferences in favor of democratization: they came to view democracy as the only way to end the massive economic disruption created by strikes and protests.⁷

Among many other exemplars, we would also call attention to the following list of works. Most of these works highlight multiple practices discussed above, while a few are chosen to showcase effective use of a particular practice.

⁵ For discussion with respect to Bayesian process tracing, see Fairfield & Charman 2017.

⁶ This element of transparency has been thoroughly discussed and debated in the initiative for transparency appendices (See e.g. Moravcsik 2014) and we refer readers to that scholarship for a presentation of the benefits as well as the costs therein. Readers might also explore the recent Annotation for Transparency Inquiry; see <https://qdr.syr.edu/guidance/ati-at-a-glance>

⁷ Wood 2001, 880.

- Taylor Boas, *Presidential Campaigns in Latin America: Electoral Strategies and Success Contagion*. (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

This book showcases careful work on conceptualization and measurement of different dimensions of electoral campaign strategies.⁸ It is also noteworthy in providing an excellent discussion of case selection for assessing the scope of the author's "success contagion" theory. In particular, Boas concisely takes the reader through the criteria by which he arrived at the final set of secondary country cases that he examines.⁹ Moreover, he articulates theoretically compelling scope limitations for his theory upon concluding this analysis.¹⁰

- Brian Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change* (Princeton University Press, 1992)

This comparative historical study of political development in early modern Europe is particularly notable for its precise and explicit elaboration of scope conditions within which war financing led to absolutism. Its elaboration of a set of permissive conditions within which war operated as a critical juncture is notable in its clarity and provides transparent guidelines about the types of cases to which the theory should be expected to generalize.

- Tasha Fairfield, *Private Wealth and Public Revenue in Latin America: Business Power and Tax Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)

In its study of the power of business in Latin America to protect its interests and prevent taxation, this book provides a model of the precise development of concepts and measures that lies at the heart of our discussion of research transparency. It also, as discussed further below, marshals process-tracing evidence in a strikingly effective and transparent way to evaluate the role of business power against alternative explanations for variation in tax policy.

- Alisha Holland, *Forbearance as Redistribution* (Cambridge University Press, 2017)

In seeking to explain why public officials in Latin America (sometimes) tolerate squatting and street vending, Holland digs into different stages of the policy process to identify and evaluate evidence that allows her to distinguish between rival explanations centering on state weakness and those centering on the political choice not to enforce. This book is notable for the precision with which process-tracing hypotheses are evaluated.

- Alan Jacobs, *Governing for the Long Term: Democracy and the Politics of Investment* (Cambridge University Press, 2011)

This book is notable for the precision with which it develops and operationalizes the concept of policy investment, theorizes the necessary conditions for their adoption, and specifies causal mechanisms to connect cause and outcome. It is a particularly useful example of how one might study the effects of ideas, exploring

⁸ Boas 2016, 3-10.

⁹ Boas 2016, 34.

¹⁰ Boas 2016, 205-207.

their causal power in a nuanced framework that also includes political conditions and the policy process. Finally, it strikes a balance between effective narrative presentation and the explicit evaluation of theory in the empirical chapters that highlights the potential of transparent process-tracing accounts to also be readable.

- James Mahoney, “Long Run Development and the Legacy of Colonialism in Spanish America.” *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (1) (July 2003): 50-106.

This article pays careful attention to concept formation and operationalization. As a useful transparency practice to that end, Mahoney includes a series of tables that present information about the sources used to operationalize each variable in each of his cases.

- Kenneth Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- This multimethod work uses a formal model, statistical analysis, and process tracing to assess whether democracies’ superior ability to send credible diplomatic signals, due to the ability of opposition parties to reinforce threats or reveal bluffs, gives them an advantage in coercive diplomacy. The case study of the Fashoda crisis does an excellent job of testing the alternative explanations with evidence about the timing and content of British and French parliamentary statements and diplomatic moves.
- Dan Slater, “Revolutions, Crackdowns, and Quiescence: Communal Elites and Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia.” *American Journal of Sociology* 115 (1) (July 2009): 203-254.

This article is noteworthy for its careful treatment of alternative explanations. Slater (220f) clearly identifies four salient rival explanations for the advent of mass popular protest against authoritarian regimes that differ from his argument that emotive appeals to nationalist or religious sentiments spark and sustain popular collective action. The case studies present compelling pieces of evidence that not only support Slater’s argument, but also undermine the rival explanations, as the author clearly explains in the context of his case narratives.

III. Emerging Practices

This section examines emerging and evolving practices with respect to two of the areas discussed in Section II: case selection, and connections between evidence and inference, in accord with growing interest in the methodological literature on these issues.

Case Selection

Our general recommendation as noted above entails providing a rationale for why given cases were chosen for close analysis. Common practices to this end vary depending on the research goals and the methodological approach espoused.¹¹ Beyond explaining why the studied cases are substantively or theoretically salient, comparative historical analysis and

¹¹ Seawright and Gerring, 2008; Seawright, 2016: 75-106; Gerring & Cojocar 2016; Rohlfing 2012, chapter 3.

comparative case study research generally describes relevant similarities and differences across the chosen cases that facilitate multiple structured, focused comparisons. These studies often aim to encompass variation on the dependent variable and key causal factors of interest, as well as diversity of background conditions, for the purposes of testing the theory or explanation in multiple different contexts and assessing its scope and/or generalizability. In addition to Boas (2015) as noted above, examples of effective case selection discussions in this tradition include Amengual (2016), Boone (2014), and Garay (2016).

One potential transparency practice that is less common in existing literature could entail being more explicit about what information was known during the case selection process. In some instances, little salient information is available for case selection, and strategies in the methodological literature that assume broad cross-case knowledge about key independent and/or dependent variables will be inapplicable.¹² As a rule in such situations, scholars should not falsely imply that cases were selected prospectively on the basis of knowledge that in fact was only available after in-depth research on the selected cases was undertaken. In line with Yom's (2015) discussion of iterative research, we recommend that scholars be up front when case selection occurs through an iterative process in conjunction with theory development and concept formulation.¹³ How much information about the iterative process should be provided for readers is a matter of some debate and depends on the framework within which one makes inferences. Yom (2015) advocates providing substantial details about how the process unfolded over time. If one takes a Bayesian perspective, Fairfield & Charman (2019) argue that what matters for making and evaluating inferences is simply the evidence uncovered from the cases studied, not what was in the scholar's mind when choosing the cases or the timing of when a given case was added to the analysis.

A second possible transparency practice that scholars might consider entails identifying cases that were almost chosen but ultimately not included, and providing reasons for why those cases were excluded. This can include pragmatic considerations such as language skills or data availability. Advantages to this practice could include addressing reviewers' and readers' concerns about potential confirmation bias or potential selection bias (the latter will be more salient for multi-methods research designs that aim to assess population-level effects within an orthodox statistical framework). For example, specifying that cases were selected for compelling pragmatic reasons can justify why the researcher did not choose other possible cases that might strike readers as appropriate options. Relatedly, such information could help ease the way for other scholars to conduct follow-up research and further test the generalizability of the theory. In particular, communicating practical considerations in case selection can alert readers to future opportunities for analyzing new cases, for example if previously inaccessible archives are made public, or political changes in a country facilitate interview-based research, or if scholars possess language skills that allows them to investigate theoretically optimal but unstudied cases. Disadvantages of this approach could include allocating valuable time and space to details

¹² For a practical discussion of these issues, see Fairfield (2015a: Appendix 1.3).

¹³ e.g. Glaser and Strauss 1967; Ragin 1997.

that many readers might find irrelevant and/or distracting from the flow of the book or article if included in the main text.¹⁴

Linking evidence to inference and clarifying background knowledge

Our discussion below considers emerging practices associated with three approaches: (1) application of Van Evera's (1997) process tracing tests (smoking gun, hoop, straw in the wind, doubly decisive), (2) Bayesian reasoning, where initial views about the plausibility of explanations/hypotheses are updated in light of evidence gathered during the investigation, and (3) the conceptualization of a mechanism as a chain of entities and activities,¹⁵ possibly anchored in a set-relational framework.¹⁶

We will first address Van Evera's tests and Bayesian process tracing, given that in some senses, the former approach, which highlights that evidence may support or undermine a hypothesis to different degrees, can be considered a precursor to the latter approach.¹⁷ We then turn to mechanistic approaches. For each, we discuss specific empirical examples that have sought to implement these approaches more explicitly, with attention to practices that entail low to moderate effort as well as practices requiring higher costs for the author. We highlight advantages with respect to analytic transparency along the way, and then turn to some salient caveats.

Van Evera's Tests and Bayesian Process Tracing

Van Evera's (1997) process tracing tests have occupied a prominent place in recent qualitative methods literature.¹⁸ The logic of this approach is that causal process observations may provide more or less decisive evidence in favor of or against a causal hypothesis. For example, passing a smoking-gun test is viewed as strongly supporting the hypothesis in question whereas failing does not significantly undermine that hypothesis; for a straw-in-the-wind test, passing (failing) only weakly supports (undermines) the hypothesis. Applications in empirical research range from occasional references to smoking gun evidence or hoop tests in process tracing narratives, to work that explicitly recasts inference in the language of process tracing tests.¹⁹

McKeown (1999) was one of the first to propose Bayesianism as a methodological foundation for qualitative research, with his analogy of "folk Bayesianism" whereby intuitive, narrative-based analysis roughly resembles Bayesian updating.²⁰ Simply put, this process entails using prior knowledge to assess how much confidence we initially hold in a given hypothesis relative to rivals, and updating our views about which hypothesis provides the best explanation as we gather evidence by evaluating likelihood ratios, which

¹⁴ As for other issues mentioned before, the details of the case selection process could be part of a transparency appendix.

¹⁵ Beach & Pedersen 2016.

¹⁶ Goertz 2016; Beach & Rohlfing 2018.

¹⁷ See Bennett 2015 and Humphreys and Jacobs 2015 on correspondences between Van Evera's tests and Bayesianism.

¹⁸ e.g. Bennett 2008; Collier 2011; Mahoney 2012.

¹⁹ Fairfield 2013, Handlin 2017.

²⁰ See also Bennett 2008.

entails asking which hypothesis makes the evidence more plausible. Bayesian process tracing has become an active area of methodological research, with a recent turn toward efforts to explicitly apply Bayesian analysis in qualitative research.²¹ Empirical applications of this approach range from appendices that qualitatively discuss a few illustrative pieces of evidence and two main rival hypotheses, to analyses that quantify degrees of belief in multiple rival hypotheses, assign likelihood ratios for each piece of evidence under these rival hypotheses, and derive an aggregate inference using Bayes' rule.

(i) Low–Moderate cost practices

A relatively low-cost emerging practice for journal articles entails providing a structured explication of the evidence-to-inference logic, usually (for reasons of space and narrative coherence) in an appendix. The idea is to briefly illustrate how the method of choice underpins analysis in the case study narratives presented in the main text.

Van Evera's Tests:

- Tasha Fairfield, "Going Where the Money Is: Strategies for Taxing Economic Elites in Unequal Democracies," *World Development* 47 (2013): 42-57.

The process-tracing appendix (roughly 2000 words) explicitly casts the author's analysis of one of the article's three case studies in the framework of Van Evera's (1997) process-tracing tests.

Bayesian Analysis:

- Tasha Fairfield & Candelaria Garay, "Redistribution Under the Right in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Organized Actors in Policymaking," *Comparative Political Studies* (2017).

Drawing on Fairfield & Charman (2017), the online process-tracing appendix (roughly 3300 words) explicitly but informally applies Bayesian reasoning about likelihood ratios to a few case examples from the main text of the article, without quantifying probabilities or discussing every piece of evidence from the case narratives.

These kinds of appendices are valuable for clarifying the logic of inference and illustrating how specific pieces of evidence contribute to the overall inference without interrupting the flow of causal narratives that aim to paint a more holistic picture of the events and sequences studied.

As a practical matter, these appendices can be especially useful when authors and reviewers disagree on inferences and/or do not share a common methodological understanding of inference in process tracing; both of the example appendices above were elaborated in response to reviewer queries about the extent to which evidence weighs in favor of the arguments advanced and/or about methodology more broadly.

The book format, where space constraints are less stringent, offers more room for experimentation with these practices, above and beyond the appendix approach.

²¹ Bennett 2015; Humphreys and Jacobs 2015; Fairfield and Charman 2017.

Van Evera's Tests:

- Samuel Handlin, *State Crisis in Fragile Democracies: Polarization and Political Regimes in South America*, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 intersperse sections that provide narrative analysis with sections that explicitly apply process tracing tests, following a similar template to that used in Fairfield (2013).

Several PhD dissertations have also included explicit applications of Van Evera's tests.²²

Future work might also experiment with the degree to which informal Bayesian reasoning about prior probabilities of hypotheses and especially the weight of evidence (an intuitive concept that is related to the likelihood ratio) can be incorporated into the main text, without making the analysis inaccessible to a broad audience

(ii) Higher-cost practices

The practices we classify as higher-cost entail fully formal Bayesian analysis where degrees of belief are quantified, and Bayes' rule is explicitly used to draw an aggregate inference. Quantification is necessarily approximate but may entail estimating ranges for probabilities.

- *Qualitative research*: Fairfield and Charman, "Explicit Bayesian Analysis for Process Tracing: Guidelines, Opportunities, and Caveats," *Political Analysis* (2017): Online Appendix A.

Appendix A re-analyzes the Chilean tax reform case that was previously treated with process tracing tests²³ from a fully Bayesian perspective. This 14,600 word appendix was elaborated to serve as a detailed pedagogical tool and to highlight technical challenges and pragmatic workarounds for applying explicit Bayesian analysis to qualitative evidence in case study research.

- *Multi-methods research*: Humphreys and Jacobs, "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Approach." *American Political Science Review*, 109:4 (2015): 653-673.

These authors provide a Bayesian potential-outcomes model for combining within-case clues with cross-case dataset scores. The article contains two applications of formal Bayesian analyses to real-world data.

Fully formal treatments offer the advantages of allowing the authors to (1) more carefully and explicitly assess and communicate their prior level of confidence in rival hypotheses and the inferential weight of distinct pieces of evidence, (2) explicitly use the mathematical framework of Bayesian analysis to derive a replicable aggregate inference

²² Lengfelder 2012; Schwartz 2016.

²³ Fairfield 2013.

from pieces of evidence that may pull in different directions, (3) assess how sensitive the findings are to different interpretations of the evidence, different prior views, and/or other starting assumptions (other approaches to process tracing also include attention to this third issue; the point here is that formal Bayesianism includes a specific mathematical framework for sensitivity analysis).

The drawbacks of fully formal treatments include the substantial time, effort, and training required, as well as inherent limitations in that probabilities cannot be unambiguously quantified in qualitative social science, and practical difficulties that arise when handling large amounts of complex evidence and multiple nuanced hypotheses.²⁴

In practice, there is flexibility in how formally or informally Bayesian analysis is employed, how extensively it is used, and how it is integrated alongside narrative accounts.

Mechanistic approaches

As it is a within-case method of analysis, process tracing, including the Bayesian approaches outlined above, is grounded in philosophical approaches that focus on the role of causal mechanisms in the causal explanation of individual cases. Debates continue, however, over how exactly to define causal mechanisms and over what constitutes a satisfactory explanation, and process tracing approaches vary in the level of detail they seek regarding causal mechanisms and the degree of explanatory completeness to which they aspire.

A widely-used minimal definition of a mechanism is that it links a cause (or combination of causes) to the outcome.²⁵ Based on developments in philosophy of biology, an emerging understanding of mechanisms decomposes them into a sequence of entities and activities in which the activity of one entity is causal for the next entity performing its activity and so on. The advantage over the minimal definition and other definitions such as the covering-law model of explanations is that it achieves productive continuity and can satisfactorily answer why-questions.²⁶

One mechanism-focused approach outlined by David Waldner aims at a high level of explanatory completeness. In this approach, explanatory accounts are adequate or complete to the extent that: 1) they outline “a causal graph whose individual nodes are connected in such a way that they are jointly sufficient for the outcome;” 2) they provide “an event history map that establishes valid correspondence between the events in each particular case study and the nodes in the causal graph;” 3) they give “theoretical statements about causal mechanisms [that] link the nodes in the causal graph” ... in ways that “allow us to infer that the events were in actuality generated by the relevant mechanisms;” and 4) “rival explanations have been credibly eliminated, by direct hypothesis testing or by demonstrating that they cannot satisfy the first three criteria listed above.”²⁷

²⁴ See Fairfield & Charman 2017:§5.1.

²⁵ Gerring 2008.

²⁶ Machamer et al. 2002.

²⁷ Waldner 2015, 129.

While Elizabeth Wood's book *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador* does not explicitly follow Waldner's framework or produce a causal graph, Waldner cites it as an exemplar. Wood argues that insurgent collective action in El Salvador depressed the economic returns to elites of existing institutional arrangements, changed elite preferences over institutions in a democratic direction, and led to elite-insurgent bargaining and a democratic transition. Waldner shows that this argument can be represented as a causal graph (Waldner, 2015:138).²⁸ Moreover, Wood meets Waldner's call for the equivalent of an event history map by providing empirical evidence for each step in the hypothesized process. Wood also gives evidence against alternative explanations, thereby satisfying all four of Waldner's criteria for a convincingly complete explanation of the democratic transitions in her two cases.

A high-cost analysis theorizes and operationalizes the mechanism in a very detailed manner. The level of detail can be understood as the number of steps in the mechanism and, by implication, the spatio-temporal proximity of entities. The more steps, the more complex the theory, the more voluminous the evidence needed to instantiate each step in the theory, and the greater the amount of evidence about which an author needs to be transparent. Productive continuity is generally easier to establish the more proximate two entities are. Theorizing a fine-grained mechanism requires substantial theoretical effort and extended theoretical discussions that might only be possible in book-length form. However, proponents argue that this approach does not necessarily devolve into infinite regress. First, more fine-grained mechanisms are not necessarily always better. What matters is that the level of detail specified by a researcher allows her to convincingly claim that productive continuity is achieved and the why-question answered. Second, the research question should also determine the *level* on which the mechanism is located. In political science, it is usually possible to specify a mechanism on a lower level of analysis.²⁹ In practice, the level of analysis "bottoms out"³⁰ at the level on which the research question is located.

Caveats

We advocate for scholars to try out the types of practices described above while the methodological literature continues to evolve. At this point in time, however, we caution against making any of these practices a norm for publication or requisite components of what research transparency entails, for two central reasons.

First, *case narratives* are central to what we generally recognize as comparative historical analysis and process tracing, and they serve a vital role in communication by making our research broadly comprehensible to a wide audience.³¹ As such, for most research agendas, case narratives will be the *basis* for add-on applications of process tracing tests or formal Bayesian analysis. Others have argued that case narratives in and of themselves do substantial analytical work by cogently conveying temporal processes.³² As

²⁸ Waldner 2015,138.

²⁹ Gerring 2010

³⁰ Machamer et al. 2000.

³¹ Mayer 2014.

³² Crasnow 2017; Büthe 2002; Sharon Crasnow (in press), "Process Tracing in Political Science—What's the Story?" *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*.

such, explicit Bayesian analysis and even the application of Van Evera's tests can entail investing substantial time and effort above and beyond constructing a written-language account of the research, which in itself already tends to be a time- and effort-intensive endeavor. As Hall writes:

Efforts to weigh the importance of every observation quickly make the text of an article cumbersome, rendering studies that might otherwise deserve a large audience virtually unreadable.... Demanding that such efforts be included in an online appendix, in effect asking qualitative researchers to write their articles twice—in short and then extended form—does not make the task any more feasible.³³

Moving forward, finding a middle ground between coherent narrative and highlighting the inferential weight of key pieces of evidence is an important methodological agenda.

Second, given that methodological literatures on Bayesian process tracing and more ambitious mechanistic approaches are still in their infancy, making definitive best-practice recommendations, let alone imposing standards for how these approaches should be implemented in empirical work, is premature. There is not yet a clear technical consensus among methodologists on how to apply these approaches. Moving toward specific standards or requirements on transparency would require not only such a consensus, but training for both authors and reviewers. The training that is needed to apply formal Bayesian analysis or to use formal means of diagramming causal arguments is not yet widely available, and in the absence of substantial training, efforts to apply these approaches may result in inferences that are worse than those that scholars would obtain based on less formal or more intuitive practices. Moreover, what seems like a reasonable standard today might be superseded by new, better practices in one or two years. For example, while Van Evera's labels for "smoking gun," "hoop," and other tests are intuitively appealing for conveying some basic Bayesian insights on the strength of evidence, authors should not deploy them without reminding readers that they are points on a continuum of strong to weak evidentiary tests and that Bayesianism does not allow for 100% certainty that an explanation is true.

Journal editors should thus proceed with an abundance of caution regarding any specific requirements for transparency in process tracing. Authors, whether they employ narrative, Bayesian, or other kinds of mechanism-focused process tracing, have a range of practices to choose from, representing various tradeoffs of transparency, effort, and ease for readers and reviewers. Whatever approach they use, scholars should aim to ensure that their narratives are written in a manner that prioritizes analytical coherence over purely narrative storytelling, such that readers can follow the logic of inference as clearly as possible.

³³ Hall 2016, 30.

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Interpretive Methods

Final Report of QTD Working Group III.2

January 2019

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Proponents of the Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) initiative, the Journal Editors' Transparency Statement (JETS) and indeed the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations have tended to assume that "transparency is a universal value and that its institutionalization does not trouble, challenge, reorder or impose an explicit or implicit hierarchy of worth on the ontological and epistemological diversity of existing research communities and traditions [...] [transparency is cast] as a strictly neutral vessel, which scholars from every research tradition can implement and enforce."¹ Yet the considerable discussion among scholars that culminated in a petition signed by 1,173 political scientists to delay journals' implementation of DA-RT policies draws attention to well-known and widely publicized concerns about the adequacy of conceptions of transparency informing these initiatives. (For a full discussion of these issues, see Htun 2016, 32).

What Transparency Ocludes

The transparency impulse in political science was generated by specific concerns, most notably a failure to replicate findings published in leading journals – a concern especially central to positivist approaches to empirical inquiry. The emphasis on replicability tends to assume that "all evidence-based social science is about the extraction of information, which is then subsequently processed and analyzed as data in order to produce knowledge [...] [yet] the ontological framework of data extraction is anything but neutral with regard to other logics of inquiry."² Interpretive approaches are not as focused on replication and would certainly *not* tie replication to the extraction of information or see either of those endeavors as value-neutral. There are ways to understand replicability, moreover, that the transparency discussions ignore. Because meaning-making is a social activity, its practices are "replicable" in the sense that some social scientists care about replication. Subsequent researchers can go to the field and even if they do not talk to the same people or have different experiences talking to the same people, they can nevertheless be attentive to a given range of possible interpretations relevant to a particular phenomenon under study. One's own individual experience of marriage to man X may not be replicable, for example, but the social convention of marriage is. Such scholarly interpretations, which are always less (as well as more) than the experience of the subjects themselves, also make sense only within socially accessible (and *therefore* contestable) standards, including standards for what counts as a fact and what does not. "Facts," as the literary theorist Stanley Fish puts it, "emerge only in the context of some point of view."³ Even something as seemingly straightforward as George Washington having died on December 14, 1799, presumes a specific world of language in which the Gregorian calendar has authority and death is understood to mean the cessation of life on earth. Or, to return to Hanna Pitkin, "empirical investigation presupposes conceptual definition,"⁴ and conceptual definition requires what Wittgenstein calls a "life world" (See Wedeen 2002; and In Preparation).

Interpretive methods encompass diverse traditions including critical theory, hermeneutics, existential phenomenology, genealogy, ethnography, deconstruction, decolonial and postcolonial analysis, critical race theory, feminist theory, semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, science and technology studies, among others. Although huge differences shape the research methods of these diverse approaches, they all challenge the notion of raw data extracted by neutral methods designed to control the subjectivity of the scientific observer. Attuned to the politics of

¹ Pachirat 2015, 27f.

² *ibid.* 29.

³ Fish 1980, 338.

⁴ Pitkin [1972] 1993, 178.

representation, interpretive scholars analyze how concepts, definitions, measurements, and methods that produce data are themselves structured by power and incorporate unexamined social values.

Standards of evidence, levels of analysis, types of explanation, and forms of argumentation deemed appropriate vary across diverse forms of analysis and investigation. Knowledge production involves deliberative processes that require individual and collaborative efforts to assess the merits of contending views; yet the rich intellectual exchange involved in these assessments cannot be captured by the notion of transparency. Acknowledgment that nothing is manifest or self-evident requires scholars to attend to the theoretical frameworks that construct and accredit evidence within particular research practices. Knowing how particular theories structure perception and construe relevant evidence is crucial for the evaluation of evidentiary claims. Researchers often contest the parameters of debate within and across academic disciplines. They interrogate existing categories, question how boundaries have been drawn between one phenomenon and another, challenge the “operationalization” of terms, probe omissions and distortions, examine metaphors and analogies that structure understanding, develop new concepts, introduce new modes of argument, and appeal to different registers of experience. Debating the evidence relevant to a particular inquiry, then, is a markedly creative endeavor that involves the collective efforts of networks of scholars who engage one another in the identification and justification of, as well as contestations about, innovative analytic strategies.

Rather than acknowledging the multiplicity and complexity of these research traditions, DA-RT forces “rich research communities and traditions...into two tired but tenacious proxies of ‘qualitative research’ and ‘quantitative research,’”⁵ then asks qualitative researchers to explain and justify their research practices in terms of the very transparency notions they reject.

A brief discussion of several analytic approaches central to interpretive methodologies may help to explain why transparency notions are inadequate for assessment of nonpositivist, or indeed anti-positivist, research.

Analysis of texts is a staple of interpretive scholarship, but what exactly counts as a text? Different theoretical frameworks afford different answers to this basic question.⁶ Hermeneutics originated as a mode of biblical interpretation. With secularization, the Bible lost its place of privilege and the great works of philosophy and literature were deemed the texts worthy of scholarly attention. Historians of various stripes expanded the range of texts appropriate for analysis to include historical documents, speeches, diaries, letters, newspapers, interviews, pamphlets, even cartoons. Psychoanalysis conceived texts warranting analysis to include everyday speech, digressions, “slips-of-the-tongue,” dreams, and recollections from childhood. Discursive analysis extended the meaning of “texts” beyond books and documents to utterances and embodied practices of any kind, privileging the work categories do, for example, while attending to the omnipresent power relations and micro-processes of rule. Inspired by Derrida’s famous quip that “there is nothing outside of the text,”⁷ scholars of deconstruction too had a capacious understanding of what a text was, suggesting that everything – art, architecture, films, bodies, institutions, social practices – was potentially open to textual analysis.

⁵ Pachirat 2015, 28.

⁶ The methodological discussion in the following section is drawn from Hawkesworth (2006), particularly chapter 4, “Evidence.”

⁷ Derrida 1997, 2.

If the question of what counts as a text can be the subject of lively contestation, so too can questions of how texts (broadly construed) get interpreted. Debates about interpretive strategies have been rife within and across generations of scholars, and the position one takes concerning modes of interpretation dictates what counts as textual evidence. “Intentionalists” stipulate that the meaning of a text is determined by the intention of the author; “formalists” insist that interpretation focus exclusively on the formal characteristics intrinsic to the “literariness” of texts; “historicists” argue that the meaning of any text can only be understood in the context of the historical, cultural, and linguistic practices and connotations at the time of its creation; “psychoanalytic” approaches suggest that meaning is connected to longings, desires, drives, and fantasies that are only partly available for conscious inspection; semioticians construe meaning in terms of cultural codes or myths through which ideologies and counter-ideologies circulate in a particular society; reader response theorists argue that meaning must be understood in terms of prevailing popular culture and a particular audience’s reception of a text; and deconstructionists posit the ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning in all texts.

To analyze a text, then, requires very different kinds of evidence depending upon the interpretive theory that guides the analysis. For an intentionalist, evidence of authorial intent might be found in the structure of argument in the text itself, in autobiographical and biographical writing, the author’s letters, diaries, notes, marginalia, or other published works, interviews with the author, or even students’ notes of lectures given by the author. Formalists bring markedly different concerns to their analyses of texts. Seeking to understand and explain the aesthetic qualities of particular works, formalists seek evidence in the particular literary devices (figures of speech, genres, rhetoric, symbology) deployed by an author to achieve novelty, creativity, originality. For historicists, texts provide a window into specific cultures at determinate points in history. Correct interpretation of texts, then, demands immersion in the specificities of history: evidence drawn from other writings of the period such as religious, philosophical, political, literary, and scientific documents illuminate the worldview or “spirit of the age,” which shapes the connotation of language used in a particular text.

In marked contrast to historicists’ call for socio-cultural specificity in the understanding of evidence, some psychoanalytic interpretations posit a structure of human psychology that transcends particular historical contexts. Others do not. Whether embedded in Freud’s theory of psycho-sexual development,⁸ Winnicott’s theory of object-relations,⁹ or Lacan’s account of the subject’s entry into the Symbolic Order (a reformulation of Freudian theory in the context of structural linguistics),¹⁰ psychoanalytic interpretation claims some level of universality, suggesting that it can provide interpretive mechanisms that move beyond cultural specificity. Because these are insights into unconscious psychological processes insulated, in part, from conscious reflection, evidence within this theoretical framework is always indirect. Psychoanalytic theory maps the range of defense mechanisms (repression, sublimation, projection, introjection, displacement, reaction formation) and the task of the analyst is to search texts for symptoms that provide clues to these unconscious psychological processes.

Semiotics, derived from the Greek *semeiosis*, involves the “observation of signs.” Although Locke referred to semiotics as “the science of signs and signification,” contemporary theories of semiotics are more typically drawn from the pragmatic philosophy of Charles Peirce,

⁸ Freud 1905.

⁹ Winnicott 1957.

¹⁰ Lacan 1966.

the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, and the literary and cultural theory of Roland Barthes. Peirce identified three dimensions of semiotics that constitute evidence somewhat differently: pragmatics, which investigates the ways that humans, animals or machines, such as computers, use linguistic signs; semantics, which examines the relation between signs and their meanings, abstracting from their use; and syntax, which explores the relation among signs themselves, abstracting both from use and meaning.¹¹ Saussure focused on the latter dimension in developing his account of structural linguistics.¹² Challenging notions that there is an essential relation between words and things, “signifiers” and “signified,” Saussure argued that meaning is established by relationships of difference and distinction within a linguistic system, which is itself a system of opposites and contrasts. Rejecting referential theories of language that suggest that words are labels for independently existing things, Saussure suggested that language is constitutive: signifying processes create meaning through the interplay of relationships of selection and combination, through the juxtaposition of similarities and differences within a grammatical structure without necessarily referring to anything outside of the language. For Saussure, the task of structural analysis was to reveal the rules and conventions that structure meaning within particular linguistic systems. Barthes appropriated Saussure’s structural account of signification to probe the means by which dominant meanings or “myths” are produced and circulated in culture.¹³ Barthes construes myth or ideology as a body of ideas and practices that defend and legitimate the status quo, actively promoting values that serve the interests of the dominant groups in society while operating outside the intentions of any particular writer or author. Indeed, in “The Death of the Author,” Barthes insists that the meaning of texts cannot be conflated with authorial intention, for a text is “a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture.”¹⁴ Within Barthes’ theoretical framework, evidence emerges from interrogation of “the falsely obvious,”¹⁵ and the unmasking of the “bourgeois norm”¹⁶ to reveal the cultural codes that sustain modes of domination. The analytic task of the “mythologist” is to demonstrate the means of ideological production, to reveal how oppressive images and meanings are naturalized and rendered morally unproblematic.

Providing a bridge from structuralism to post-structuralism, Barthes’ proclamation of the “death of the author” laid the foundation for reader response theory, which posits that it is the reader who defines the meaning of a text. In the act of reading, the reader brings a temporary unity to the text, momentarily fixing meaning that is otherwise fluid. Celebrating the free play of signifiers in the contradictory readings of texts by multiple readers, proponents of reader response theory emphasize that there can be no such thing as an “authoritative interpretation” of a text. The methodological consequence of this relativist stance is manifest in the conception of evidence that surfaces in reader response theory. As the focus of analysis shifts from the text to individual interpretations of a text, relevant evidence becomes sociological. The reader response researcher must gather evidence of how readers are actually interpreting texts. Reader response theorists adopt methods, such as focus groups, interviews, and surveys to generate quantitative data about popular reception of particular texts.

¹¹ Peirce [1883] 1982.

¹² Saussure [1916] 1974.

¹³ Barthes 1967; 1973.

¹⁴ Barthes 1977, 146.

¹⁵ Barthes 1973, 11.

¹⁶ Barthes 1973, 9.

Derrida's theory of deconstruction moves the site of fluidity in meaning from multiple readers to the ambiguity of language itself. Deploying a notion of "différance," Derrida suggests that meaning is elusive, always deferred, never fully present, but rather simultaneously absent and present. In contrast to the structuralist focus on the relation between the signifier and the signified, Derrida's post-structuralism suggests that the continual deferment of meaning establishes relations only among signifiers: "the indefinite referral of signifier and signifier [...] gives the signified meaning no respite [...] so that it always signifies again."¹⁷ Neither context nor connotation can fully control the meaning of signifiers, which carry with them traces of meanings from other contexts. If meaning is always unstable, the task of deconstruction cannot be a futile effort to fix meaning. On the contrary, critical interrogation of binaries is intended to supplement meaning, illuminating flawed attempts to constrain interpretation within the binary formation, decontextualizing and recontextualizing terms in order to disrupt dominant frames of reference. Within this deconstructive framework, evidence itself is linguistic, unstable and unfixed, but attention to contradictions, lacunae, false totalities, and homogenizations within particular relations of signification, can provide an opening for efforts to trace multiplicities of meaning, deconstruct binary oppositions, and overthrow the hierarchies and privilege they attempt to establish.

Genealogy has been described as a diagnostic "history of the present," traced in order to undermine the self-evidences of the present and to open possibilities for the enhancement of life. Unlike traditional techniques of historical analysis, genealogy rejects any search for origins, notions of progress or unilinear development, and assumptions concerning definitive causes and unbroken continuity. Genealogy's 'unit of analysis' is not 'the past' as it was lived (which is taken to be unknowable), but the historical record, the documents and narratives with which people have explained their past. Following Nietzsche, genealogists problematize such established discourses, insisting that historical narratives are framed by questions that reflect the preoccupations and concerns of the writers who are themselves embedded in a social world. Thus, the genealogist attempts to identify the conditions under which particular discourses arise; to illuminate multiplicity and randomness at the point of emergence; to interrogate the interests and presuppositions that inform the narrative, and to question the values that sustain a discursive formation. In an effort to trace complexity and disparity, genealogists begin their analysis with particularity, chance, disjuncture, accidents, dredging up forgotten but often exemplary documents, windows into a world worthy of elucidation.

Genealogy is a unique form of critique premised on the assumption that what is taken for granted – objects, ideas, values, events, and institutions – have been constituted contingently, discursively, practically. The genealogist attempts to lay bare that constitution and to probe its consequences. In seeking to reveal the arbitrariness of what appears 'natural' and 'necessary,' the genealogist aspires to open possibilities, by stimulating reflection on and resistance against what is taken for granted about world and about ourselves. In this sense, genealogical narratives are oriented toward the enhancement of life through critique. Foucault's version of the genealogical method includes examination of the discursive practices that produce particular fields of knowledge – power-knowledge constellations or "epistemes" constitutive of a particular historical period. Foucault suggests that these power-knowledge constellations structure the criteria of intelligibility across disciplines (in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities). They structure how questions are posed and answers made tenable, organizing the very strategies of

¹⁷ Derrida 1978, 25.

inquiry through which we are made subject to and subjects of complex power relations.¹⁸ Foucault enjoins scholars to examine the historical conditions of possibility that have generated the discourse under study, and then to investigate the “work” the discourse does. “Work” here is two-pronged, requiring an account of the discourse’s logic(s) (its underlying assumptions; the ways in which concepts within a discursive formation relate to one another, and the kinds of imaginings that are foreclosed in the discourse’s reproduction). “Work” also refers to the discourse’s effects, the consequences it has generated in the world.

Phenomenologists focus their analysis on characteristics distinguishing human existence from the existence of other forms of organic life and inanimate objects. Chief among these is intentional consciousness, which is the source of the concepts and categories that humans produce to bestow meaning on our existence. Thrown into a world of ambiguity and contingency, humans create “lebenswelt,” intersubjective “life worlds,” that organize experience, make sense of conscious sensations, and provide the categories through which actions become meaningful. Phenomenological analysis seeks to identify and explicate the structures of the life world constituted in and through intentional consciousness. Insisting that the life world is the domain of the “lived body” or “embodied consciousness,” phenomenologists reject the mind/body dualism of Cartesian philosophy. Acknowledging the intersubjective constitution of the life world, they also reject forms of radical individualism and solipsism that deny the social constitution of lived experience.¹⁹

Phenomenologists have developed a range of techniques with which to analyze the structures of meaning constitutive of the life world and of embodied consciousness. “*Verstehen*,” the complex process by which we interpret our own action and the actions of those with whom we interact, is perhaps the best known of these. *Verstehen* is a hermeneutic technique that differs from introspection and from psychological inference in important respects. As a way of understanding the “stock of knowledge at hand” that each person uses to make sense of the world, *verstehen* excavates the socially constituted, intersubjective conceptual frameworks acquired in the course of socialization. Because the life world is shared, it is amenable to interpretive efforts to analyze its most basic modalities. Thus, for example, phenomenologists might explore how “common sense” is constructed and naturalized, how it structures expectations and typifications (attributions of particular properties to categories of objects), and how it lends an air of inevitability to particular modes of action. Beliefs, values, intentions, motivations, explanations that we offer for our actions and the complex assumptions that inform these forms of intentionality constitute the evidence in phenomenological analysis.²⁰

In short, interpretive methods are keyed to a range of philosophical positions and debates, none of which are consonant with the transparency norms currently on offer in the discipline. Transparency norms do not fit the interpretive methods described above because they assume “a particular view of social science that seeks a veridical understanding of the world as a set of objective processes [...] To codify uniform expectations for the handling of “data,” and indeed to reduce all questions of evidentiary argument to the language of “data,” does a disservice to many kinds of political science inquiry.”²¹

¹⁸ Foucault 1973; 1977; 1980.

¹⁹ Bernstein 1976.

²⁰ Bernstein 1976.

²¹ Isaac 2015, 276.

Transparency as Political Concept

As part of an effort to “make political science a science,” transparency norms are designed to certify a realm of autonomous facts separated from values.²² Yet in couching objectivity in terms of a dichotomous division of the world between facts and values, mainstream political scientists have failed to see certain connections between their research practices and liberal politics.

The insistence of separating fact from value [...] has excluded viewing science as a value in itself, indeed as a metaphysics. Political scientists do not tend to ask how scientific knowledge operates to cultivate passionate belief or why science is inherently the most valuable form of knowledge [...] the split between fact and value has prevented thinking through how epistemological assumptions and national political commitments coalesce to defend the stability of liberal politics – how liberalism is itself ideological or ‘hegemonic’ and how political science helps make it so. Epistemologies have a politics, and knowledge production in political science tends to shore up certain liberal assumptions and aspirations even while overt prescription and ‘bias’ are seen to be outside the objectivist goals of science [...]. The split between fact and value allows methodology, in particular, to be viewed as value neutral, as a technique devoid of normative assumptions. This view permits positivist political science to occupy the position of authorized (because disinterested) discoverer, teacher, enforcer of what counts as true or justified statements about politics – a position congenial with liberals’ tendency to see liberalism as neutral as well.²³

When proponents of transparency invite “qualitative scholars to demonstrate the power of their inquiry” but insist the evaluative criteria fall within positivist frames,²⁴ they replicate decades of marginalization of non-positivist, anti-positivist, and post-positivist scholarship. The very framing of the DA-RT initiative – whereby “data” is presumptively positioned as the privileged currency of research – is symptomatic of the marginalization of political theory in the profession more generally. Within the terms of DA-RT, qualitative research and interpretive approaches register as an exception, as a problem to be solved by creating data “lite” requirements that simultaneously discipline non-quantitative scholars while highlighting their inherent inability to fully live up to professional standards of research integrity.

We propose to flip this script. Rather than treating political theory as superfluous to the “scientific” study of politics, we suggest that the transparency debates present a prime example of the impoverishment of a political science in which empirical research proceeds in ignorance or denial of insights drawn from theoretically-informed investigations. Here, we highlight two main points about transparency that are well-established in the critical literature, and that challenge the way transparency has been framed in the DA-RT debates.

First, professional deliberations on the transparency imperative have largely presumed transparency to be an *apolitical* value. In contrast, political theorists generally have treated transparency as an ideological construct, one premised on the fantasy of truths that are not only self-evident, but self-enforcing. This ideology has been diagnosed as having distinctively

²² Wedeen 2016, 33f.

²³ Wedeen 2016, 34f.

²⁴ Elman and Kapiszewski 2014, 46.

detrimental effect in democratic contexts by encouraging counter-critical attitudes that undermine the practice of self-government.²⁵

Second, within the profession, the transparency debate has focused on proposals to impose new burdens on individual scholars pursuing publication and funding opportunities. This appropriation of transparency represents a startling reversal of the concept's more familiar usage within democratic theory to designate the idea that the state legitimacy depends on making the existence and justification for exercises of power visible to those who are subjected to it. Put otherwise, transparency is understood as a constraint on the powerful, not the relatively powerless. From this perspective, rather than encouraging journals to impose more obligations and constraints on would-be authors, we believe the transparency imperative must be applied first and foremost to journal editors as a demand to address the ideological and other biases of gatekeepers to academic publishing. Indeed, if there is a problem with transparency in the profession, the rigors of the peer review process lead us to conclude that it lies not in the unwillingness of authors to make their data known, but rather in the implicit standards that journal editors and anonymous peer reviewers use to define meritorious work.

The emergence of transparency norms in political science in the second decade of the 21st century just a few years after the publication of the *Report of the APSA Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century* (2011) raises additional questions about the politics of transparency. Appointed by APSA President Diane Pinderhughes, the task force documents that “studies conducted since the 1980s have consistently shown a bias against the study of race and inequality within political science as compared to most other social science disciplines [...]. Flagship journals have, on the whole, rarely addressed issues of race, ethnicity, and gender [...] [and] text books treat race, ethnicity, and gender [...] as marginal aspects of the political system, rather than as woven into the fabric of American politics.” As a consequence of such sustained neglect, the *Report* concludes that the discipline is “ill-equipped to address in a sustained way why many of the most marginal members of political communities around the world are often unable to have their needs effectively addressed by governments [...] [and] ill-equipped to develop explanations for the social, political and economic processes that lead to groups’ marginalization.”²⁶ The Task Force also concluded that “Political Science tends not to be self-reflective about the analytical limitations of many of its traditional methodological approaches. The tendency to accept its approaches as ‘objective’ science, for example, tends to inhibit the development of a more critical debate about the potential phenomenological bases of much empirical social science.”²⁷ Rather than engage these troubling issues, DA-RT reasserts commitments to openness and transparency while burying substantive concerns about political bias in the discipline under guidelines for data archives and adherence to methodological strictures. In an era when the cynical manipulation of facts has become the new normal (as evidenced by the OED’s selection of “post-truth” as the international word for 2016), what does it mean for political science to be doubling down on transparency? Such a public display of fealty to transparency runs the risk of being perceived not simply as an act of extraordinary naïveté, but as an ethical failure – insofar as political scientists seek the comfort of the authorizing cloak of transparency while failing to confront the inherently political nature of knowledge production, which the transparency discourse functions to obscure.

²⁵ Dean 2002; Žižek 2002.

²⁶ APSA 2011, 1.

²⁷ APSA 2011, 18.

Reframing Priorities

There are real questions concerning transparency in the profession – but is data access chief among them? One might, for example, prefer making transparent scholars’ un-interrogated beliefs “about the inherent value of science as a method of producing objective truth about the real world,” on the one hand, or scholarly commitments to “the value of preserving liberalism,” on the other.²⁸ Or one could attend to the ways in which these two sets of norms have coalesced to produce and maintain a dominant epistemological community that supplies and enforces what may and may not be asked.²⁹ Although contestation within political science has entailed criticizing fact/value distinctions, the reduction of politics to calculations of expedience, and the desirability of objectivity (to name a few subjects of critique), the embrace of diversity and recent calls for institutional change on those grounds have tended to revive efforts to unify the discipline. The current transparency initiative can be seen in this light, as an effort to discipline the discipline by making qualitative data more legible to scholars of quantitative political science, thereby riding roughshod over potentially fecund areas of epistemological, methodological, and political discovery and disagreement. The very justification of transparency’s merits as a way for the discipline to enjoy “legitimacy” or “credibility” in Washington, D.C., moreover, might be read as symptomatic of a problem in our disciplinary thinking, an inattention to the ways in which scholarly production is tied to our “aspirations to the kind of power that is presumed to accompany [...] science,” to borrow Foucault’s felicitous phrase.³⁰

Thus, while there are transparency issues to confront, JETS is completely irrelevant to addressing them. The problem of fixating on data transparency is not limited to opportunity costs, however – doing so is also harmful insofar as it perpetuates the false belief that the profession currently lacks standards to ensure research integrity. In reality, such measures do exist and appear to be working well. This is not to say that there have not been lapses, but it is to question whether these lapses are due to a lack of adequate standards, or rather to individual instances of failure to uphold them. Viewed in this way, JETS provides a solution that simultaneously misidentifies the relevant problem, while creating a whole host of new ones.

Recommendations

Although QTD initially privileged transparency in the very title of its intellectual project, it has become increasingly clear through ongoing discussions that “QTD should *not* presume the primacy of the intellectual value of transparency – both because there are other important, sometime competing values and because transparency may not be a meaningful intellectual value from some epistemological and ontological perspectives. The QTD should speak to broader end-goals such as knowledge production, research excellence, research integrity, and ethics, while placing transparency in the context of a range of values and mechanisms for achieving those values.”³¹ One valuable resource for apprehending the perspectives of interpretive scholars on this topic is the [Dialogue on DA-RT](#) website.

²⁸ Wedeen 2016, 31.

²⁹ Wedeen 2016, 35.

³⁰ Foucault 1980, 84.

³¹ This view was articulated by multiple participants in the QTD working group and steering committee planning session held in conjunction with the 2016 APSA meeting in Philadelphia. The quotation is drawn from a summary of those discussions prepared by Steering Committee co-chairs Tim Büthe and Alan Jacobs (2016, 1)

In recent years, symposia on DA-RT have been hosted by both *the Comparative Politics (CP) Newsletter* and the *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (QMMR) Section Newsletter*. Several authors included in the *CP Newsletter* symposium underscore the ethical quandaries engendered by the transparency impulse. These issues range from the risk of compromising the anonymity of vulnerable interviewees to concerns about the dehumanizing effect of reducing complex human interactions to an archivable form of data.³² Across the profession, scholars have demonstrated that transparency as it is defined in the DA-RT statement is conceptually inadequate, and that researchers should not be required to submit their data as a condition of publication.

We did not find support for DA-RT amongst interpretive scholars. Indeed, many made compelling arguments in favor of its retraction. Given the lack of manifest support approaching anything close to a consensus, we are deeply troubled by the adoption of the DA-RT guidelines, which many have expressed could do real harm. Naïve notions of transparency are dangerous because they elide the interpretive moments that undergird every research interaction with the research world in favor of a non-relational and anonymized conception of information and data.³³

Some scholars have proposed that the QTD offer specific recommendations for a “clear, strong alternative to DA-RT standards and the specific editorial politics and reviewer demands spawned by those standards.”³⁴ Our recommendation is that the peer review system, already in place, is sufficient to insure research integrity.³⁵

Rather than defending transparency norms, the APSA should embrace a plurality of standards for research excellence carefully suited to the diverse methodologies within the profession. Indeed, APSA should take seriously the inclusive practices of *Perspectives on Politics*, its second flagship journal, embracing diverse “Scholars whose work has met demanding standards of double-blind peer review – deploy a perspective that they consider to be most illuminating for the purposes of understanding a problem at hand; explain why this perspective ought to be considered illuminating; employ methods and techniques, and present evidence, to support their explanation; and offer an account of why the perspective that has been presented is interesting, important, and fruitful for further thinking about things that matter. In every case these authors challenge some existing interpretation. And in every case, it can be assumed that at some future point another author will come along and renew the challenge.”³⁶

³² Bütthe and Jacobs 2015; Fujii 2016; Hall 2016; Htun 2016; Pachirat 2015.

³³ Pachirat 2015, 31.

³⁴ This proposal also was included in the summary document prepared by Bütthe and Jacobs (2016, 2).

³⁵ Isaac 2015; Trachtenberg 2015.

³⁶ Isaac 2015, 279.

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Ethnography and Participant Observation

Final Report of QTD Working Group III.3

August 2018

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Introduction

Ethnographers routinely engage in important practices of research openness. For instance, ethnographers often describe how they accessed field sites or research interlocutors and what roadblocks prevented other potential research paths.¹ Ethnographers consider the ways in which their subject position – for example, one’s gender, racial, or ethnic background, class position, or nationality – and enmeshment in webs of power may shape the kinds of insights they produce.² They may discuss their prior theoretical assumptions and discuss how the experience of field work changed these assumptions.³ They may describe the emotional strains, challenges, or dangers they or their interlocutors experienced during research.⁴ They will typically discuss why and how they went about protecting research participants, potentially including choices for anonymization, data protection practices, data destruction after a certain period, and reasons why data may not be available for sharing.⁵

Yet even as ethnographers do engage in certain practices of research openness, as we discuss in greater depth below, such practices are rarely framed in terms of transparency. This is because the concept of transparency, as it is typically elaborated in positivist research traditions, often sits awkwardly against the practice of ethnography, which tends to require heavy amounts of improvisation in the field and usually privileges ethics protections for human subjects. Emblematic of this mismatch in our efforts to elicit a broad discussion among ethnographers about questions relating to transparency as a general concept, we were met with much resistance as to whether such a conversation should even take place. Some expressed that they were unwilling to participate in this process because “transparency” is not a meaningful concept for ethnography, at least not in the sense it is used in much positivist and quantitative research.⁶ Many also felt that participating in this conversation, and particularly engaging the terms of the DA-RT debate, would legitimize a set of critiques that are not only irrelevant to ethnographers, but also potentially destructive to the kind of work ethnographers do.⁷ Thus this statement aims to capture the full range of views on the issue, building from the open online discussions but including concerns and reservations expressed to us privately.

Defining the Method

There are important disagreements among ethnographers about what the method entails. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus that ethnography’s core activity is participant-observation, meaning “immersion in a community, a cohort, a locale, or a cluster of related subject positions.”⁸ That is, ethnography is more than just in-depth interviewing or visiting a given field

¹ Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012.

² Shehata 2006; Pachirat 2009; Lichterman 2017; William J. Kelleher, Post "Re: Limits to Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, December 26, 2016 8:43 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132&p=865&hilit=limits+to+transparency#p865>.

³ Cramer 2015.

⁴ Sanjek 1990, 398–400.

⁵ Parkinson and Wood 2015.

⁶ On the difficulties regarding the relationship between the language of transparency and ethnography, see Pachirat 2015.

⁷ On the knowledge politics of DA-RT and the challenges it poses for ethnographers, see Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2016.

⁸ Schatz 2009, 5.

site for an extended period, although it likely involves such activities. Rather, the researcher pays attention to not only specific questions the researcher seeks to answer but also immerses herself in the broader meaning-laden context in which her interlocutors live. This could include participating in rituals, attending rallies, ceremonies, or other important events, joining interlocutors for daily activities like meals or errands, and generally engaging deeply with the daily life of one's subjects. Such immersion is guided by an "ethnographic sensibility"⁹ that challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about the categories and practices that make up the world by trying to see those categories through the eyes of one's interlocutors. The effect is for the researcher to distance herself from the etic categories through which she sees the world and adopt an emic perspective – both to understand the locality she is researching and to reflect back on the categories through which she sees the world.¹⁰

What Might Research Openness Look like for Ethnographers?

Ethnographers do not share a single understanding of what research openness means or what such openness should look like. While there may be some shared understandings and expectations, specific questions of openness "for whom," and "how" best to engage in research openness might change from question to question or site to site with the answers changing accordingly. Furthermore, ethnographers grapple not only with questions of openness vis-à-vis the scholarly community, but also in our research sites and with our interlocutors when we are in the field.

With that in mind, there were a number of practices that participants in our discussion highlighted as being part of their understanding of openness in ethnography. They should not be assumed to be universally shared or applicable to every project. They do not establish a standard set of "best practices." Instead, we hope the practices outlined below will offer some insights into how and when ethnographers can make their research process open, as well as the challenges that some understandings of openness or transparency pose to this particular research method.

The first theme involved communicating the goals and designs of our research projects to the audiences for our scholarship.¹¹ Much good scholarship clearly states its goals. However, the goals of a work of ethnographic political science might look a little different from the goals of research using other research methods. When ethnographers clearly communicate their goals – what they seek to explain, uncover, or explore and how those insights help us understand politics in other times or places – it is easier for other scholars to evaluate the work on its own terms. If ethnographers can head off questions like: "but how much variation can you explain?" or "what are the scope conditions of analysis?" with clearly stated research goals their analysis might be more comprehensible to others. For example, an ethnographer might clearly state that they aim to make causal claims but that they are not identifying "necessary" or "sufficient" conditions. Or, they might say they are developing conceptual frameworks that can travel to other times and places, but that the precise relationship between processes and events evidenced in their case is unlikely to appear again.¹²

⁹ Pader 2006.

¹⁰ Other scholars have offered excellent, extended discussions of the method that do not require repeating here. For particularly good examples, see Schatz 2009 and Wedeen 2010.

¹¹ Ben Read, post "The Benefits of Transparency in Ethnography," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, December 30, 2016 8:16 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=204&p=874&hilit=benefits+of+transparency#p874>.

¹² See Simmons 2016 for a discussion of both examples.

Ethnographers might also want to be clear about the motivations for or origins of their project (a practice not limited to ethnography, but certainly suggested by other facets of the method).¹³ Transparency around motivation or origins might help other scholars understand the context that shaped the project. This kind of openness might add important information to enhance a reader's understanding of why some decisions in the field (or in the research design process) were made. It might shed light on how and why a researcher was able to have the conversations that she had and why she sought to have them in the first place. Similar questions apply to research design. A discussion of process of selection of field sites – why particular sites and not others were chosen for research – is often not only possible but also desirable. For example, such a discussion might help readers better understand the context in which the ethnographer was working, highlight the challenges of accessing possible research sites, illuminate why unexpected paths for designing research may have been taken, and why initial choices of research sites changed in response to access issues or unexpected findings in the field.¹⁴

A second theme that emerged in the discussion related to openness about the process of conducting research. In particular, how researchers got access to particular sites can often offer valuable information.¹⁵ For example, access can come through formal requests, personal connections, or chance encounters, and that information can be very useful in helping the reader evaluate the research. Ethnographers can also often detail how much time they spent in particular places and with particular people and why.

Ethnographers can also often be open about their daily routines in the field, as well as how they interacted with interlocutors.¹⁶ How a researcher recorded his or her observations in the field can usually be shared (did they take notes while interacting with interlocutors? Notes afterwards? Tape recordings? A mixture of methods?). What the researcher shared with his or her interlocutors about the goals of the research is also often something that can be included. Additional information on what the researcher told the people with whom he or she was interacting about him or herself, about the research project, and potentially about the sources of funding can help readers understand the research and analysis process.¹⁷

Finally, ethnographers also often have an opportunity for transparency in discussions of how they analyzed and engaged with the data they gathered. Ethnographers could, for example, describe how they ensured that they were constantly challenging their own assumptions or tentative conclusions. Similarly, ethnographers might want to discuss the aspects of the work that structured their interpretations, including relationships, power, and processes of reflexivity.¹⁸ They could also discuss how their insights might translate beyond the specific research sites in which

¹³ Ben Read, post "The Benefits of Transparency in Ethnography," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, December 30, 2016 8:16 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=204&p=874&hilit=benefits+of+transparency#p874>.

¹⁴ See Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012.

¹⁵ Useful examples of discussions of how research access challenges sheds light on theoretical work include Pachirat 2011 and Fassin 2013.

¹⁶ Samantha Majic, post "Re: Transparency and Day-to-Day Fieldwork," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, October 20, 2016 8:24 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=129&p=540&hilit=transparency+and+day#p540>.

¹⁷ Useful examples of discussions of how daily research routines shaped research findings include Cramer Walsh 2009 and Cramer 2016.

¹⁸ Shehata 2006; Pachirat 2009.

they were immersed and suggest what the limits of those findings to other research areas might be. Lastly, they can explain how and why their thinking changed over time.

As should be clear, there are many ways in which ethnographers are open about their work.¹⁹ Yet ethnographers face a number of challenges when thinking about how to make their research process visible to others. Perhaps the most critical challenge is posed by the challenge with which we opened this section – transparency can mean different things to different scholars. When ethnographers adopt understandings of transparency that are not necessarily appropriate for the method, they often find themselves unable to fit themselves into a mold that might work for other approaches to studying politics.

Assessing the Validity of Ethnographic Research

Indeed, while the positivist language of transparency and replication is inappropriate for much ethnographic work, that does not mean that claims cannot be challenged, nor that there are not standards for evaluating ethnographic research. One standard could be called “research validity”: does the research show what it claims it does and is it presented in a cogent manner that shows the logic of the argument in a compelling light?²⁰ Do the findings find support in the ethnographic data provided in the article or book? Do the interpretations match the data presented? Could the data reasonably be interpreted in another way? If so, does the ethnographer account for why she has interpreted the data as she has, as opposed to from a different perspective?

Research validity, particularly when considered through a positivist lens, is often considered next to a second key term: verification.²¹ This presents a potentially difficult challenge for ethnographic work: How does one verify the veracity of research typically performed by a lone researcher in a specific, potentially anonymous location? Yet forms of verification – and many ethnographers will bristle at both the term and the idea²² – by other researchers typically come at two stages in the ethnographic research process: first, in the review process and, second, after publication, when scholars knowledgeable about the field site and topic weigh in on whether the research findings comport with their own experience and the extant literature. New ethnographic work often contributes to building a richer picture of what is happening, and particularly of what different peoples understand to be happening. If it “disproves” an earlier study, it typically does so by revealing that other process, practices, or meanings were at work in a different time, rather than falsifying outright the findings of a previous study that may have been conducted in a different temporal, political, or social context.

As such, ethnographic work is constantly subject to processes that positivist epistemologies might recognize as “evaluation” and possibly “verification.” That is, it must convince numerous experts on the same topic and field site of the validity of their claims. They do so by presenting rich empirical material, which is then evaluated by others in terms of whether it fits with their knowledge and experience. The presentation of this material could come in many forms. For some projects, extended quotations of an exchange with interlocutors accompanied by a detailed

¹⁹ For examples, see Soss 1999; Pachirat 2011; Fujii 2009; Cramer 2016.

²⁰ Sanjek 1990, 395; see also Yanow 2006, 102.

²¹ Pool 2017.

²² Van de Port 2017.

description of context is appropriate.²³ For others, lengthy descriptions of experiences or exchanges are better suited to the analysis.²⁴

This is not to say, though, that such processes of verification necessarily produce “correct” interpretations or inferences. Indeed, other scholars evaluating the material might disagree with the researcher’s interpretation of events or utterances, and ethnographers often accept the possibility of multiple, potentially contradictory understandings of the same data. This possibility of multiple interpretations stems in part because subjects with whom an ethnographer might interact in given field site might themselves have conflicting views or disagree with one another. Arguably, a hallmark of good ethnographic work is to represent disagreements subjects in a field site have with one another (to the extent that they exist) and highlight how and why such disagreements impact the ethnographer’s arguments or theories.

For scholars adopting positivist and particularly quantitative approaches, such “testing” for “validity” will not feel adequate because it is so dissimilar to what they do. But it bears stating that all interpretivist approaches, including ethnography, have well established standards of evidence and agreed-upon means of evaluating whether claims are valid and have been adequately substantiated with evidence.²⁵ Ethnographers do not simply make claims and ask their readers to trust them. They make claims that must persuade others in the know, while highlighting processes or ideas that could not be unearthed through other methods. The level of knowledge about a particular locale is extraordinarily high in ethnographic research, so that any fabricated story would be quickly discovered by those possessing expertise in that area. The ethnographic work that other researchers engage all meets this bar; scholarship that does not is quickly critiqued and forgotten, if it is published at all.

What Transparency Cannot Achieve in Ethnographic Research

Even as ethnographers engage in certain practices of research openness and validation, “transparency” is a concept that generally does not travel well into interpretive epistemologies.²⁶ The most common concern expressed by ethnographers, in this regard, concerned the effects of elevating “transparency” to a desired objective or norm for ethnographic research, particularly over issues of confidentiality and the ethics of protecting our sources and interlocutors. But before discussing these issues, it bears mentioning that many of the ethnographers who participated in our discussion and shared their concerns with us felt that complicated “data transparency” procedures may present unnecessary roadblocks to ethnographic work because concerns about data falsification are overstated (notwithstanding recent controversies over certain works of urban ethnography [discussed below]). That is, if the impulse for data transparency is driven by concerns over falsified data or hidden data sets that enable some nefarious “scholars” to publish bad research, ethnographic research has not faced any such crisis.

Moreover, ethnographers generally do not equate data verification with the ability of one scholar to scrutinize the field notes and interview transcripts of another scholar.²⁷ If the concern is

²³ E.g., see Cramer 2016.

²⁴ E.g., Wedeen 2008.

²⁵ See e.g., Yanow 2006; 2009; 2014.

²⁶ E.g., Pachirat 2015.

²⁷ See e.g., Cramer 2015.

with data falsification,²⁸ reviewing field notes is unlikely to provide a solution; a scholar could simply falsify notes or interview transcripts while sitting in their university office. If the concern is checking whether a scholar is “cherry picking” data to support a predetermined hypothesis, scrutiny of notes is similarly unlikely to provide an effective solution. Ethnographers encounter, absorb, and process more data than could ever appear in field notes. So, for instance, a tabulation of utterances for and against a given proposition in notes would be a poor measure of the veracity of a scholar’s work. An ethnographer’s interpretations of their data are couched in a broader web of data, typically including deep background knowledge of a field site’s history, knowledge of the cultural context in which a specific utterance is made that provides the context for properly interpreting its meaning, and a raft of experiences that did not make it into field notes that inform the interpretation (what some scholars refer to as “headnotes”²⁹). Moreover, although there may not be other scholars working in a given ethnographer’s specific field site, there are often are. And even if there are not other scholars in the specific location, there may be scholars working in analogous locations in a given country. Such scholars can act as a very real check on the validity of a scholar’s data. While scholars working in analogous areas may disagree (sometimes vehemently) about the interpretation of data, such disagreements can also shed light on the underlying reliability of the data upon which they are arguing.

These are some of the practical issues connected to research openness and research validity. However, there are epistemological issues also. Specifically, the epistemology underpinning most ethnographic work is explicitly interpretive, so artifacts such as field notes and interview transcripts are not objective “data” in the sense understood by positivist epistemologies. Rather, they are better understood as pieces of a long process of sorting out what the ethnographer thinks her field interlocutors understand to be happening and how she interprets their understandings. Ethnography is a set of research practices getting at meaning, not objective facts, so the meaning of items recorded in field notes will evolve as the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the topic. Notes taken early in a project will take on different meaning or be superseded as the research progresses; indeed, notes may convey far more about the researcher’s evolving understanding of their subject than they do about the subject itself. In many instances, field notes make sense only to the person who wrote them, because they are explicitly written for that purpose. As one commenter to the discussion noted, sharing research notes can be valuable if the purpose is to understand how a particular project or ethnographer’s thinking evolved over time. But they are less useful for outsiders to understand the subject of inquiry because they reflect not data but the researcher’s thought processes and ideas. Moreover, field notes are not raw accounts of a set of events. They are products of an ethnographer’s conscious and unconscious bias about what to observe, remember, and record.³⁰ Thus, sharing of field notes or long excerpts from notes may be better evidence of these biases (potentially an important thing to know) than of the fieldwork that went into producing evidence-based claims.

Similar practical and epistemological concerns attach to replication as research transparency. Ethnographic work cannot be replicated. It is, by definition anchored in the particular time and place of the field research and thus even efforts to return to an earlier study will not result in replication.³¹ If a quantitative study fundamentally challenges findings of earlier studies, for

²⁸ E.g., Lubet 2018.

²⁹ Ottenberg 1990, 144–146.

³⁰ Sanjek 1990, 385f.

³¹ Sanjek 1990, 394.

example, then scholars will want to see that data to determine whether the data themselves are valid or review the methodology to replicate the analytical procedures. But this analogy does not hold with ethnographic research, because challenging existing ethnographic work with new ethnographic work happens by bringing in a new piece of the story that was missing, and not by producing new results that disprove earlier results because the earlier results were themselves anchored in a different time and, therefore, a different context.

Limits to Data Access for Ethnographers

The ethical sharing of material is arguably shaped more by the research being conducted than the ethnographic method itself. For instance, when scholars engage in ethnographic work in situations of violence or among vulnerable or marginalized populations those situations limit the kinds of data that an ethnographer can share. As the ethnographer knows her research site and research subject best, along with the attendant risks for her subjects that would come with sharing research material, the ethnographer should determine what can or cannot be shared ethically, possibly in consultation with her research subjects as appropriate. These conditions necessarily limit what material can be shared and how it should be shared, with ultimate discretion being left up to the researcher.

With that said, common areas of concern emerge from discussions among ethnographers about “red lines” for sharing, suggesting there are practical, ethical, and safety challenges to transparency. Multiple participants in the QTD discussions voiced clear opposition to the idea that sharing fieldnotes was a useful exercise or that it would work to make ethnography more transparent.³² We agree for epistemological, ethical reasons, and practical reasons.³³ First, as we discussed above, from an epistemological point of view, fieldnotes are highly contextual. They cannot be used by others as “data” in the way we used them ourselves in the research process. Sharing fieldnotes does not make replication possible, nor does it make our work transparent.

Second, from an ethical standpoint, sharing fieldnotes can have unintended consequences for subjects – unintended consequences that could be devastating. Because ethnographers come to know many of their interlocutors well, gaining access to their private lives, practices, and thoughts, the protection of their confidence is paramount. One participant in the QTD discussion invoked

³² Samantha Majic, post "Re: Limits to Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, October 20, 2016 7:56 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132&p=865&hilit=limits+to+transparency#p865>; Kathy Cramer, post "Re: Limits to Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, October 20, 2016 5:18 pm <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132&p=865&hilit=limits+to+transparency#p865>; Aili Tripp, post "Publishing Fieldnotes," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, November 12, 2016 5:07 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=177&p=719&hilit=publishing+field#p719>; Lee Ann Fujii, "Re: Publishing Fieldnotes," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, November 19, 2016 10:27 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=177&p=719&hilit=publishing+field#p719>; Amanda Fulmer, post "Re: Publishing Fieldnotes," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, November 20, 2016 12:41 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=177&p=719&hilit=publishing+field#p719>; See also Cramer 2015.

³³ For partially contrasting views, see Pool 2017; Guest, post "Re: Publishing Fieldnotes," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, November 23, 2016 12:37 pm; Jeffrey Paller, post "Re: Publishing Fieldnotes," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, November 28, 2016 5:44 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=177&p=719&hilit=publishing+field#p719>.

“the imperative of protecting people who have invited you into their confidence or their environment.”³⁴ While this is particularly critical when we work in situations where any breach of confidence could lead to direct personal, physical harm, it is important in every research situation. Ethnographers may record potentially damaging or embarrassing information about interlocutors in fieldnotes, which they may decide to leave out of published work because of potential harms for an interlocutor, even as such data may inform the ethnographer’s analysis. Making fieldnotes widely available would potentially undermine the ability of ethnographers to guard against breaches of confidentiality or harm.

To this end, ethnographers note numerous potential issues that could create harms for either research subjects or researchers themselves should sharing field notes become a norm. One issue is that anonymization has limits. Subject or location identities can be revealed by details that may seem innocuous when recorded – for instance, the color of a house or the food at a restaurant. Such concerns are not merely hypothetical. Journalists and scholars were able to use such details to identify the specific research site and individual research subjects in Alice Goffman’s (2014) much-discussed ethnography of young men escaping the law, *On the Run*, despite the fact that Goffman had anonymized her subjects’ names and the name of the neighborhood in which she conducted her fieldwork.³⁵ The more material that is shared, the greater the likelihood that identities may be revealed, which could create risks for research subjects. This raises concerns for researchers about sharing even anonymized field notes in many cases.

Third, a related practical concern is that the informed consent procedures which would be required should data sharing become a widespread practice may lead subjects not to participate. There are at least two issues. First, subjects may be uncomfortable with interview transcripts or field notes that record their words or actions being shared widely to individuals or organizations unknown to the subject. Ethnographic research is founded upon trust between a researcher and her subjects – trust that is difficult to extend beyond the personal relationships typically developed during ethnographic research. Relatedly, ethnographers bear an ethical responsibility for how their subjects are portrayed and can check with their subjects about the accuracy and manner of presentation before publication. With required data sharing to a repository or similar site, that responsibility would be difficult to maintain, as other researchers may take field notes as raw data that can be used for publication without the responsibility or ability to check with subjects about how the information is being used. A possible consequence is that subjects may be less likely to participate. If our interlocutors come not to trust us because we have shared our notes (or simply because we tell them we will have to do so) we may find that we no longer have access to important people, key sites, and some research may never be possible in the first place.

The ultimate effect of data sharing, therefore, may be that there could be unintended consequences for subjects, which undermines the ability of researchers to faithfully apprise subjects of the risks they may face in participating in a project. Political or social circumstances can change radically such that what might appear as comparatively low-risk data today may become high-risk data tomorrow - for instance, if a country undergoes regime change. Researchers will not be able to anticipate these changes. As a result, for even seemingly low-risk projects,

³⁴ Jane Masbridge, post “Re: Limits to Transparency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, October 26, 2016 11:30 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132&p=865&hilit=limits+to+transparency#p865>.

³⁵ Campos 2015; Singal 2015.

ethnographers caution that modesty in sharing data is often the best practice rather than open sharing given potentially future increases in risk for research subjects.

Yet, unintended consequences of data sharing do not only extend to individuals who have consented to participate in a project; they may extend to those uninvolved in a research project. Scholars point to a case from Boston College in which historians took oral histories about violence in Northern Ireland. Although the researchers promised the transcripts would not be made available until after participants had passed away, British authorities subpoenaed the tapes and arrested individuals for alleged crimes mentioned on the tapes, even though those individuals had not participated in the Boston College project. In other words, the project unintentionally created risks for individuals who had not participated in the project and, therefore, had not consented to the risks involved in participation. Scholars are concerned that such risks may emerge should sharing ethnographic data become a standard practice in the discipline.

Unintended consequences of data sharing can also accrue for researchers themselves. The case of Giulio Regeni, an Oxford PhD student who was murdered – some suspect by Egyptian security forces – while conducting fieldwork on labor unions in 2016, looms large over ethnographic research. It shows, in particular, the risks that researchers themselves take on in pursuing their work and how those risks are not necessarily apparent during its conduct. The potential risks, ethnographers are concerned, would be increased should widespread data sharing become the norm given that revealing too much might alert authorities to the methods a researcher used, places a research was, or security measures a researcher took.³⁶ With that information, authorities might be able to keep researchers from returning to a field site – or worse.

Such unintended consequences for researchers, ethnographers worry, might ultimately have consequences for the discipline with ethnographers potentially avoiding topics that might put them or their subjects at risk should sharing field notes or interview transcripts become the expected practice. Relatedly, ethnographers worry that different data sharing requirements at different journals may lead ethnographers to publish only in certain journals where they can protect their data, with the effect of segregating ethnographic research to certain outlets. In other words, there may be negative consequences for knowledge production as researchers become uncomfortable with pursuing risky topics should widespread data sharing become the default practice.

Recommendations for the Peer-Review and Publishing Process

Specified procedures for what research openness is or should look like for ethnographers would require that we adopt particular meanings for what research openness is. We recognize that transparency and research openness have multiple meanings depending on the researcher, the question, the methods, and the methodological commitments. We hope, however, that the discussion above offers some insight into how ethnographers are open and clear about their research practices. The discussion is meant to both encourage reflection among ethnographers and offer some insights to journal and book series editors who want to publish ethnographic work. To allow ethnographers to engage in many of the practices we discuss, editors will need to accommodate the differentiated needs that will likely arise in reviewing and publishing

³⁶ Sarah Parkinson, post "Re: Limits to Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, December 2, 2016 3:01 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132&p=865&hilit=limits+to+transparency#p865>.

ethnographic work. To that end, we do have specific guidelines for journal editors reviewing ethnographic research and for authors preparing their work for peer review.

First, we suggest that journal editors seek out two categories of reviewers (1) those who are skilled ethnographers themselves and (2) those who know the field site(s) that inform the research. This is, of course, in addition to reviewers who know the theoretical literature to which the research speaks. Second, we suggest that editors let ethnographers explain how they pursue research openness in their particular study. This requires that ethnographers take the time (often difficult in a 10,000 word journal submission, so appendices may be necessary) to be explicit, open, and candid about everything from research design, to interactions in the field, to analytical processes, depending on what is relevant for the particular piece of research.³⁷ Even then, it may be appropriate for some scholars to not be forced to report all research activities in a single article or appendix (if that is even possible). Rather, articles and books might be best considered not as “100% self contained” and instead have methodological issues, challenges, or insights elaborated over a series of separate publications.³⁸

We encourage ethnographers to continue to be open and explicit in the work they do and hope that this document offers some suggestions not only for ethnographers but also for scholars seeking to better understand what some of the meanings of transparency might be for those who practice the method.

³⁷ For a description and an example of how ethnographic data has been reported in a journal context, see Diana Fu, post "Reporting Ethnographic Data in Journals," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, November 14, 2016 8:16 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=178&p=848&hilit=reporting+ethnographic#p848>.

³⁸ Sarah Parkinson, post "Re: Practicalities of Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Observation, December 2, 2016 5:17 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=133&p=760&hilit=practicalities+of+transparency#p760>. For examples, see the relationship between Lee Ann Fujii's books 2009, 2010, 2012 on the Rwandan genocide and subsequent publications on interview methods and research ethics.

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Set-Analytic Approaches, Especially Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

Final Report of QTD Working Group III.4

January 2019

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Introduction¹

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), introduced to the social sciences by Charles Ragin², is a formalized set-analytical method and approach for conducting systematic qualitative cross-case analysis. The goal of QCA is to identify (minimally) sufficient and necessary conditions for outcomes, and their derivatives: INUS and SUIN conditions.³ As Schneider and Wagemann note, “almost by default, QCA reveals conjunctural causation (i.e., conditions that do not work on their own, but have to be combined with one another); equifinality (where more than one conjunction produces the outcome in different cases); and asymmetry (where the complement of the phenomenon is explained in different ways than the phenomenon itself).”⁴ While still in development, QCA is increasingly applied in the social sciences – particularly in political science and sociology – and is turning into a “mainstream” approach.⁵ At the same time, QCA is also more and more criticized,⁶ though such studies have received their fair share of criticism in turn.⁷ More importantly for the present piece is that the criticism of QCA does not imply controversies over the general need for, and the form of, transparency. QCA is often depicted as both a research approach and a data analysis technique.⁸ Transparency issues that arise during the QCA-as-an-approach phase of research – e.g., the collection of data, the construction and selection of cases, and the specification of the universe of cases – are similar to issues in non-QCA qualitative research. Conversely, transparency issues that arise during the QCA-as-a-technique phase of research – the computer-based analysis of a truth table – are similar to issues in quantitative research. Though transparency criteria related to QCA-as-an-approach seem less well developed and more contested, they are not unique to QCA, and we refer to the other QTD-working groups’ reports for a discussion of these aspects.⁹ So this report focuses on QCA as an analytic technique.

As a data analysis technique, however, what sets QCA apart from almost all other qualitative methods is the computer-based analysis of a truth table – the “algorithmic-analytic” part. In this report, we therefore focus especially on the transparency issues that arise in the technique – that is, the algorithmic-analytic phase of QCA. By and large, many, if not most, transparency issues related to QCA-as-a-technique¹⁰ are uncontested and a lot of progress has been made in recent years on this front. In a way, the analysis of the truth table by means of software is not so different from the “analytical moment” in statistical analysis, meaning that while the issues that warrant addressing differ, transparency can likely be achieved in much the same way.

In this report, we make use of the rich and constructive online discussion on transparency in QCA that took place on the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (QTD)

¹ We thank Tim Büthe, Alan Jacobs, and the participants of the QTD online discussions for their helpful and constructive comments on earlier versions of this report.

² Ragin 1987, 2000, 2008; see also Rihoux & Ragin 2009; Schneider & Wagemann 2012.

³ ‘INUS stands for “Insufficient but Necessary part of a condition which is itself Unnecessary but Sufficient for the result” (Mackie 1965, 246). SUIN stands for “Sufficient but Unnecessary part of a factor that is Insufficient but Necessary for the result” (Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu 2009, 126).’

⁴ Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 78ff.

⁵ Rihoux et al. 2013.

⁶ e.g., Lucas & Szatrowski 2014; Paine 2016.

⁷ e.g., Fiss, Marx, & Rihoux 2014; Ragin 2014; Schneider 2016; Thiem & Baumgartner 2016.

⁸ e.g., Rihoux & Ragin 2009; Schneider & Wagemann 2012; Wagemann & Schneider 2010.

⁹ This includes, for instance, working groups on research ethics, text-based sources, evidence from researcher interactions with human participants, and non-automated content analysis.

¹⁰ Because the report focuses on QCA-as-a-technique, for the sake of simplicity we will henceforth refer to “QCA-as-a-technique” as “QCA.” Virtually all of the transparency requirements we identify equally apply to Coincidence Analysis (Baumgartner, 2009).

website.¹¹ We ourselves did not (or did only moderately) intervene into the discussion. Once the forum was closed, we carefully analyzed the contributions and identified recurrent themes and suggestions. Those topics that were not strictly related to transparency issues vis-à-vis set-methods are not included in this report. Additionally, we make extensive use of our own research experience and the existing literature on QCA, whereby we take Wagemann and Schneider's (2015) article on transparency in QCA as our starting point.

1. Meaning and Conceptualization of Transparency in QCA

What does it mean to be transparent about research?

We agree with Büthe & Jacobs that being transparent about research means “providing a clear and reliable account of the sources and content of the ideas and information on which a scholar has drawn in conducting her research, as well as a clear and explicit account of how she has gone about the analysis to arrive at the inferences and conclusions presented – and supplying this account as part of (or directly linked to) any scholarly research publication.”¹² Adopting this definition by no means implies that transparency is the only or the most important issue for social scientific research; it is an important issue, which can be in a trade-off relation with other important goals.

About what aspects of the QCA research process or its outcomes might scholars seek to be transparent?

Broadly speaking, many of the issues researchers might be transparent, or open, about when conducting QCA do not differ from other qualitative (and to a large extent also quantitative) techniques. Here we introduce these issues at an abstract level; in section 4 we discuss them in more detail.

- An issue that likely relates more to QCA-as-an-approach than to QCA-as-a-technique that we concentrate on here is transparency about where the data came from and how that data was coded.
- More specific to QCA-as-a-technique is how researchers subsequently calibrated the “raw” data into crisp, fuzzy, or multi-value sets to be used in QCA.
- With respect to the analysis itself, researchers need to be transparent about which specific analytical choices they made and why (e.g., the consistency and frequency thresholds).
- Regarding the results, researchers need to be comprehensive yet as concise as possible in presenting them.
- They also need to link their cases to these results, present the robustness tests they have conducted and, finally,
- Discuss to what extent these different analytical choices influence the results.

To whom might scholars want to be transparent about these things?

The audiences to whom QCA-researchers might want to be transparent about the issues listed above are diverse and not all transparency issues apply equally to all audiences. A – possibly non-exhaustive – list includes:

¹¹ See <https://www.qualtd.net/>.

¹² Büthe & Jacobs 2015, 2.

- Readers of QCA-based research;
- Reviewers of QCA-based manuscripts;
- Journals editors;
- Methodologists;
- QCA software developers.

2. Assessment of Benefits of Transparency in QCA

The potential benefits of being transparent about the issues mentioned in the previous section and discussed in more detail in Section 3a under (a) through (h) are high, with dividends paid to the QCA research community, other, non-QCA researchers, and QCA as a technique itself. In all cases, QCA researchers that adhere to these transparency guidelines provide other researchers (including critics, reviewers, and editors) with enough material at hand to evaluate whether the research has been conducted properly and whether there are other, equally plausible analytic decisions that could be made. Reporting and discussing these matters provides openness about what researchers have done, and why. All this facilitates the further development and improvement of QCA-as-a-technique.

There are five main benefits to this openness: interpretability, replicability, clarity, articulation, and methodological development. We will discuss each in turn.

(1) Transparency enables the *interpretability of the study's findings*. Openness about how a researcher went about arriving at his or her conclusion can be invaluable help in “making sense” of the results obtained.

(2) Openness allows for *replication* of the study, which aids evaluation. In line with our focus on QCA-as-a-technique, we limit the notion of replication to the reanalysis of the original data. In Section 4, we discuss several ways in which the benefit of replicability can be obtained (for example, by making available the script of a QCA analysis).

(3) Transparency or openness compels researchers to clearly communicate their research more generally, achieving another goal of research – *clarity*. Transparency concerning the calibration of raw data, the assumptions made in regard to the truth table analysis, the robustness checks conducted, et cetera, compels researchers to be clear about the conceptualization of various components of the research project, improving communication of their research in the process.

(4) Transparency or openness can contribute to the *articulation* of QCA itself. Being a young technique that is still not well and widely known – and contested among some social scientists (see Section 1) – QCA as a method stands to profit from transparent applications that enable everyone to better understand how the method works when applied to real data.

(5) For those interested in further developing, improving, and/or teaching QCA as a method (course instructors and software developers), openness in applied QCA provides valuable material.

Still, let us reiterate here that transparency is a means towards an end. We agree with Hall that “in its various dimensions, transparency is a means toward [research that reflects an honest and systematic search for truths about society, the economy, or politics]. But it is only

one of several such means and, like most of them, its various modalities come laden with trade-offs.”¹³

3. Practices and Models of Transparency in QCA

How can researchers go about pursuing transparency in their QCA studies along the lines we identified before?

3a. What are valued current practices of transparency in QCA?

There is wide agreement in the QCA-community that all QCA-studies should be transparent about a series of points, which we list below under (a) through (h). All these points contribute to the five benefits mentioned above (interpretability, replication and evaluation, clarity, refinement, and development).

QCA-studies should be transparent about:

(a) *The “raw” data that are used.* These data can be included in an (online) appendix, preferably in a machine-readable format in the case of standardized raw (or calibrated) data.

(b) *The way these “raw” data are calibrated into crisp, fuzzy, or multi-value sets.* The crucial information to be provided here is where the qualitative anchors have been placed – in particular the 0.5 anchor – and why that decision has been made. Without this information, especially the interpretation, replication, and clarity of the study are hampered. Therefore, this information should be included in the main text.

(c) *The resulting membership scores of cases in sets.* Oftentimes, it will suffice to include these data also in an (online) appendix, again preferably in a machine-readable format.

(d) *The truth table that is derived from the calibrated data,* and

(e) *The choices made with respect to the truth table analysis,* such as the cut-offs chosen for case frequency and consistency of each row and the assumptions on logical remainders that have been made. There are three decisions researchers should be transparent about relating to the truth table and its logical minimization:

(1) *How consistent the empirical evidence needs to be for a row to be considered sufficient for the outcome,* that is, where to set the cut-off point for raw consistency (consistency of a truth table row). Researchers should be clear about the guiding decision here – namely, whether the cases that are inconsistent with the statement of sufficiency are deviant cases in degree or kind. The latter are cases whose fuzzy set membership score in the condition X not only exceeds that in the outcome Y, but whose membership in X is bigger than 0.5 and in Y smaller than 0.5.¹⁴ Further information beyond consistency should be gathered, such as the issue of simultaneous subset relations, that is one and the same set (e.g., truth table row) passing the consistency threshold for both the outcome and its negation. Therefore, the PRI value – which provides a measure to assess this phenomenon, which can only occur with fuzzy sets and not with crisp sets – should always be reported, too. These practices contribute both to the interpretability of the results and – by demonstrating how these decisions are made regarding real data – to improving the articulation of QCA for the social science research community.

¹³ Hall 2016, 32.

¹⁴ Schneider & Rohlfing 2013.

(2) *The frequency cut-off* – that is to say, the minimum number of cases that are needed for a truth table row not to be considered as a logical remainder row. While most applied QCA sets this frequency threshold to 1, there are plausible scenarios of (larger-N) QCA in which this threshold could, and perhaps should, be higher. Reporting the frequency cut-off improves the replicability of the research.

(3) *How the researcher has treated the so-called logical remainders*, that is, those logically possible combinations of conditions for which there are no empirical cases (empty truth table rows). A researcher's choice influences the solution formula obtained, usually labeled as complex or conservative (no simplifying assumptions on remainders), most parsimonious (all simplifying assumptions), and intermediate solution (only "easy" simplifying assumptions).¹⁵ When making use of simplifying assumptions, researchers should always indicate explicitly why the simplifying assumptions used are warranted. Without this information, it is "difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to gauge whether the QCA results are based on difficult,¹⁶ unwarranted, or even untenable assumptions.¹⁷ Untenable assumptions run counter to common sense or logically contradict each other."¹⁸ Along the same lines, researchers should also report explicitly the so-called directional expectations or arguments behind the assumptions made. Wagemann & Schneider stress "(...) that lack of transparency in the use of logical remainders not only runs counter to transparency standards, but also leaves under-used one of QCA's main comparative advantages: the opportunity to make specific decisions about assumptions that have to be made whenever the data at hand are limited in their diversity."¹⁹ Researchers should be explicit about why the type of solution (conservative, most parsimonious, intermediate) selected is suitable for the research goal at hand. This practice contributes to the replicability, interpretability, and clarity of the research and the development and teaching of QCA.

(f) *The parameters of fit of the solution formula obtained*. These should be reported in the main text, including the solution formulas themselves, expressed in Boolean notation.

(g) *The cases covered by each solution term, the cases that contradict each term, and the cases that remain unexplained by the entire solution formula*. If space constraints allow it, this information can be provided in the main text. Otherwise, it can be reported in an (online) appendix. This information greatly facilitates the combination of QCA with follow-up case studies and as such provides an invaluable tool for integrating QCA-as-a-technique with QCA-as-an-approach.

(h) *The robustness tests that have been conducted*. The importance of reporting the robustness tests that have been conducted is an issue that most QCA-researchers agree on, as well as that conducting such tests is important in the first place. Obviously, robustness tests can be assessed only when researchers report them and are transparent about them. What the appropriate robustness tests for a "typical" QCA are is less obvious, though, since QCA-applications vary widely in terms of, for instance, the number of cases included, the type of data, the researcher's knowledge of the cases, et cetera. All these factors influence which robustness tests are or are not useful to conduct.²⁰ In general, we agree with Wagemann & Schneider that the crucial point of robustness tests is "to demonstrate that equally plausible

¹⁵ Baumgartner & Thiem 2017; Ragin 2008, 147ff; Schneider & Wagemann 2012, 167ff.

¹⁶ Ragin 2008, 147ff.

¹⁷ Schneider & Wagemann 2012, 198.

¹⁸ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 40.

¹⁹ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 40.

²⁰ See e.g., Baumgartner & Thiem 2017; Thiem, Spöhel, & Duşa 2016; Wagemann & Schneider 2015.

analytic decisions would not lead to substantively different results.”²¹ Whether the appropriate robustness tests have been conducted is a matter for debate, and cannot be codified in transparency guidelines. We only argue that robustness tests ought to be conducted and faithfully reported.

We also concur that a meaningful robustness test is a transparent one that stays “true to the fundamental principles and nature of set-theoretic methods and thus cannot be a mere copy of robustness tests known to standard quantitative techniques.”²² Depending on, among other factors, the type of data used and the researchers’ knowledge of the cases, relevant robustness tests for QCA may include the following: assessing the effect of changes in the calibration of the conditions and/or the outcome (e.g., different qualitative breakpoints or functional forms); or in the raw consistency levels, examining what happens when cases or conditions are added or dropped.²³ Researchers should report, preferably in an (online) appendix, what are “the effects, if any, of different analytic choices on the results obtained.”²⁴ We want to stress that while the results of the robustness tests can thus be presented in (online) appendices, the researcher must include a summary of these results in the main text, too. By performing and reporting robustness tests, researchers reap all of the five benefits mentioned above.

3b. What are low-cost improvements of transparency in QCA?

There are also some issues about which it is less common to be transparent, but which do warrant transparency and where this transparency can be achieved at minimal cost.

- Provide the script used in the analysis. The benefit hereof is two-fold: it allows others to evaluate a study’s analysis and it enables other researchers to take the (raw) data and replicate all analytic steps of the analysis.
 - If a command-line software such as R is used, the script consists of a list of commands, which should be accompanied by comments explaining each analytic step and information on which package R package version (and operating system) have been used. Most QCA-researchers using R already provide such scripts.
 - For the majority of QCA-researchers that use graphical user interface (GUI) software, the ‘script’ can instead consist of a series of screenshots and verbal description of the steps taken. Providing this material is needed to allow for easy replicability of a study.
- Report software package used (including the version number). With the increasing number of available packages to conduct QCA analyses this is becoming ever more important, especially since some packages vary in the algorithm used to minimize the truth table and in their default settings for crucial operations, such as calibration and logical minimization.²⁵
- Report model ambiguity. For one and the same truth table, there can be multiple logically equivalent solution formulas. Even though these formulas are *logically*

²¹ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 41.

²² Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 41; see also Baumgartner & Thiem 2017.

²³ See, e.g., Baumgartner & Thiem 2015; De Block & Vis 2018; Marx 2010; Skaaning 2011; Thiem et al. 2016.

²⁴ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 41.

²⁵ Referencing software packages also gives credit to the enormous amount of time software developers spend on developing (open access) packages, without which QCA could not be conducted. In this report, we do not discuss the issue of whether and how software developers should be transparent in all regards (for instance, by keeping a log of all changes that are made from one version to the next).

equivalent, the *substantive* implications a researcher draws from them can differ. Baumgartner and Thiem (2015) show that the phenomenon of model ambiguity is probably more common in applied QCA than currently recognized, partly because researchers tend to not report model ambiguity. We agree with Wagemann & Schneider that “transparency dictates (...) that researchers report all different logically equivalent solution formulas, especially in light of the fact that there is not (yet) any principled argument based on which one of these solutions should be preferred for substantive interpretation.”²⁶ All this requires that software and software settings are chosen such that all possible solution formulas are revealed.

- Improve transparency regarding the analysis of necessity. Regarding the analysis of necessity there is something to be gained in terms of transparency. If researchers postulate a specific set (be it a single condition, a disjunction, or conjunction) as necessary for the outcome, then all other minimal supersets of that outcome that pass the researcher’s empirical test criteria (consistency, relevance) should be reported and arguments be provided as to why those other minimal supersets are not interpreted as necessary conditions.²⁷
- Be transparent about the process of “going back and forth between theory and evidence.”²⁸ This low-cost improvement regarding transparency in QCA is an issue that is at the border between QCA-as-an-approach and QCA-as-a-technique. As Wagemann & Schneider indicate, “there is nothing bad nor unusual about updating beliefs and analytic decisions during the research process – as long, of course, as this is not sold to the reader as a deductive theory-testing story.”²⁹ This process becomes problematic when it is unclear what key decisions that substantively influence the study’s findings have been taken by a researcher. The challenge here is “figuring out how scholars can be explicit about the multi-stage process that led to their results without providing a diary-like account.”³⁰ The specific choices that are relevant to report vary from study to study but these are some of the pieces of information that may be worth reporting in many QCA-based studies:
 - The initial theoretical hunches, if a researcher starts from such hunches.
 - How the empirical information gathered has altered these initial theoretical hunches.
 - Why the initial case selection was changed due to empirical knowledge gained throughout the analysis.
 - Why initial conditions were dropped, integrated into “super conditions”, or why new conditions were added.

Note that it, of course, does not add to transparency if researchers summarize the research process by turning it upside down pretending that they started with complex (equifinal and conjunctural) hypotheses that are then ‘tested’ with, and confirmed by, their QCA. If anything, such a misrepresentation of the study’s purpose and design undermines transparency (see Section 3a).

²⁶ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 41.

²⁷ On analyzing necessary conditions in QCA, see Bol & Luppi 2013; Schneider, 2018.

²⁸ Ragin, 1987, 2000.

²⁹ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 39.

³⁰ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 39.

3c. What are practices for cautious assessment or selective use regarding transparency in QCA?

The possible drawbacks of transparency in QCA depend to a large extent on the type of data used in the analysis. If these are quantitative data, the costs are comparable to those of traditional statistical analysis and thus not that large.³¹ If these data are mainly qualitative, or a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the costs are much higher.³² The latter, however, is not specific to QCA-as-a-technique. When the data used for QCA are qualitative, researchers should proceed with caution in making that data available, taking into consideration ethical, proprietary, and logistical concerns. Here we refer QCA researchers to the best practices delineated in the appropriate QTD-working group reports, particularly the groups on Text-Based Sources and on Evidence from Researcher Interactions with Human Participants.

3d. What are inadvisable practices regarding transparency in QCA?

Inadvisable practices regarding transparency in QCA revolve largely around those that would introduce more information at the expense of transparency. There is a danger that transparency standards become so extensive that, paradoxically, they contribute to non-transparency. This could happen, if, for instance, appendices become too long and thus difficult to identify the main points. Producing hundreds of different QCA solution formulas without condensing or interpreting what they show would certainly not contribute to transparency. Therefore, researchers should always include in the main text a summary of the material in an (online) appendix.

QCA researchers should not pretend that they engaged in hypothesis testing when they followed the ‘dialogue between ideas and evidence’ approach to QCA.

Unless it is the explicit analytic goal of the researcher to compare the different QCA solution formulas, (conservative, intermediate, most parsimonious), only one should be used for substantive interpretation, not all of them.

- *Can a researcher discuss calibration in sufficient detail if they cannot make their data available?*

Generally, it is advisable to use examples from the data to demonstrate how the raw data was calibrated into the sets used for algorithmic analysis. However, some raw data cannot be discussed in such detail. This constraint holds especially for qualitative data (such as material from archives, interviews, or observations), as there may be privacy, proprietary, or logistical considerations that prevent the researcher from making the data public (see Section 3c). Though these considerations may inhibit making such data publicly available, researchers could still discuss how they went about collecting them and what the data entail. For QCA studies using qualitative data, it is possible to indicate in general terms how the data have been calibrated. One way to do so would be to use a fictitious example to this effect instead of the regularly used examples from the real data.³³

4. Discussion

All of the above listed points (a to h) seem uncontested and thus qualify as best “practices” – in this case regarding transparency in QCA – in the sense of “(...) transitory condensations of

³¹ Hall 2016.

³² Hall 2016.

³³ On how to calibrate qualitative data for QCA, see Basurto & Speer 2012; Tóth et al. 2017; and De Block & Vis 2018 for a discussion.

a shared understanding that are valid until improved.”³⁴ Any given QCA-study will be able to put more emphasis and energy on some of the transparency or openness requirements than on others, but the consensus seems to be that all of them should be addressed to a minimum degree by all published QCA.

There are at least two issues that are contested in QCA more generally – the treatment of logical remainders and the analysis of necessity – but these issues do not influence how researchers should deal with transparency in QCA.³⁵ In terms of transparency or openness, there is little to no substantial disagreement in the QCA-community. Adhering to the guidelines discussed above should improve interpretability, replicability, clarity, articulation, and methodological development to the benefit of journals editors, QCA software developers, methodologists, as well as producers and consumers of QCA-based research.

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³⁴ Wagemann & Schneider 2015, 38.

³⁵ The first contested issue is the treatment of logical remainders. While some scholars argue that researchers are free to choose between the conservative, intermediate, and the most parsimonious solution, others claim that only the latter is eligible, for only the most parsimonious solution can be interpreted in causal terms. Second, and relatedly, the majority of QCA-researchers perform separate analyses of necessary conditions and of sufficient conditions. Some scholars argue, instead, that only the most parsimonious solution is needed because the minimally sufficient conjunctions form a minimally necessary disjunction – that is, the most parsimonious solution formula as a whole constitutes a necessary condition.

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Non-Automated Content Analysis

Final Report of QTD Working Group III.5

December 2018

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1. Non-Automated Content Analysis

Non-automated content analysis as an analytical approach, methodology, or style of research has no fixed or legislated boundaries – for either producers or consumers. We understand it as a type of research that involves the analysis of text, audio, or video and the human (as opposed to machine) coding of those textual sources. The prototypical study in this genre entails the structured and systematic coding of historical documents and media products. Scholars who see themselves as engaged in "content analysis" also *tend* to start with at least weakly positivist ontological and epistemological priors. We do not consider such priors as required for this style of research,¹ but they seem common among most who have contributed to this report by participating in the QTD debate over transparency in content-analytic research. This approach stands in contrast to those who conduct the related but distinct "discourse analysis," which is generally seen as an interpretivist methodology and accordingly is not covered here.²

The content under consideration for "content analysis" varies considerably across (and sometimes within) the various sub-fields of political science. Among the participants in the QTD discussions, a noticeable group of mostly IR researchers analyzes treaties and other legal documents, international and domestic. Other examples mentioned in the QTD discussions were party manifestos, newspaper and other media reports, and parliamentary deliberations – typical content examined in content-analytic work in Comparative Politics. In American Politics, hand-coded research tends to focus on media reports or elite rhetoric (broadcast news abstracts; newspapers; presidential speeches; congressional record; etc.). Working with such documents or materials that are in most cases already in the public realm creates some distinct transparency issues but also allows most content analysts to avoid key challenges faced by other qualitative researchers, such as those who work with sensitive private information.

2. Background and Working Group Mandate

The Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (QMMR) section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in winter 2015/16 fielded an inquiry focused on the meaning, costs, benefits, and practicalities of research transparency for a broad range of qualitative empirical approaches in Political Science. To that end, the section solicited comments from political scientists involved in diverse methods of research across diverse substantive and methodological interests, first in an at-large consultation in spring 2016 and then in differentiated working groups.

The authors of this report were tasked with coordinating a discussion of researchers with experience and interest in conducting content analysis that prominently involves human interpretation of the textual sources (as opposed to computer-assisted or entirely algorithmic "automated" content analysis, such as natural language processing techniques). These projects may require knowing and understanding the selection and classification decisions that scholars

¹ Content analysis has, for instance, been used to examine and provide empirical support for constructivist arguments in International Relations, see, e.g. Büthe, Major and de Mello e Souza 2012.

² See, in particular, the report of Working Group III.2 on Interpretive Methods. For a discussion of the distinction between content and discourse analysis, see, e.g., Herrera and Braumoeller 2004; Boreus and Bergström 2017.

must make when manually coding those qualitative source materials.³ Group members participated in an on-line forum on the QTD discussion board, which was fielded from September 2016 through April 2017.⁴ Based on the participants' contributions, informal conversations with colleagues, and our own experience with this kind of research, we presented a preliminary report at the 2017 Annual Meeting of the APSA. During the fall of 2017, we received extensive and useful feedback on the report through posts on the QTD forum and direct communications. This final report reflects an effort to integrate this valuable feedback.

Our group was particularly interested in soliciting comments on four different aspects of transparency in non-automated content analysis:

- 1- What published content-analytic work do you consider to be exemplary with respect to research transparency? What makes this work exemplary?
- 2- For the particular kind of content-analytic work that you "produce" or "consume," what is the information about research methods and decisions, which you find most helpful to allow you to understand and assess the research? In other words, what kind of documentation about content-analytic work do you most appreciate when it is provided? What do you consider indispensable but at times don't find included in content-analytic work you read? And *how* is such information best provided?
- 3- What are appropriate standards for other researchers' access to datasets built on hand-coded material (possibly including source materials and coding decisions)?
- 4- How can and should scholars be transparent in their use of these methods? What documentation in terms of source materials and coding decisions is reasonable for journals to demand? What are the costs, challenges, and limits of such transparency? What is unreasonable to demand?

Via the forum on the QTD website, we received a number of comments from scholars about suitable standards for data access -- focused on how to make data for and from hand-coded content analyses accessible, and when to make it accessible (and for how long). We also received substantial commentary on the kinds of documentation for source materials and coding decisions that the scholarly community believes is reasonable for journals (and university press books) to require and for others in the content analysis community to expect.

Given the scarcity of posted comments on a standard of exemplary research transparency, and on the most useful ways that these kinds of research data have been made accessible, it was important for us to move beyond the QTD online comments. We therefore also pro-actively solicited input from a broad range of colleagues bilaterally, in person or via email. Another reason to do this was that the dominant voices in the online discussion came from researchers in two subfields: Comparative Politics and International Relations. Our working group's informal conversations with colleagues therefore also served the purpose of broadening the conversation by drawing on the views of scholars from other subfields. For the same reason, we drew on our own experience in conducting this kind of research.

³ Note also the report by Working Group II.1 on transparency when working with, and referencing, textual source materials generally. For a discussion of the evolving norms of transparency for automated or algorithmic content analysis, see Romney, Stewart, and Tingley 2015.

⁴ See comments posted on the QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.5: Content Analysis, non-automated, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewforum.php?f=24>.

In general, we were able to identify an often unstated and yet apparently broad consensus in this research community about what scholars should be expected to communicate about the process of generating their data and to what extent and under what conditions scholars can be expected to make data from hand-coded content analyses available to the research community. We were also able to identify an ideal set of standards to which most in this scholarly community aspire whenever possible.

3. Meaning and Conceptualization

What, exactly, does it mean to be transparent about research in (non-automated) content analysis?

Content analysts understand transparency, in essence, as providing readers, reviewers, students, etc. with information to aid them in a fuller understanding of the selection and classification decisions that these scholars must make when manually coding qualitative "raw" source materials and when subsequently analyzing the resulting coded data. The primary forms of transparency have to do with the process of "generating" and organizing evidence. To understand and assess content analyses, readers need to know, for instance, what content has been analyzed. Scholars engaged or interested in such research therefore understand transparency to involve, at a minimum, explicitly describing the kinds of source materials used – and for research in a positivistic tradition the sufficiently detailed specification of the particular sources to allow for replication of the analysis. Being transparent in content analysis also entails noting whether all the texts of the specific type or source were used (and if so, how "all" were identified) or only a selection. For instance, in an analysis of the *New York Times*' coverage of the 2016 election, readers would need to know if all *NYT* articles, editorials, etc. between date T1 and date T2 were used, or if a sample of articles was studied? If it was the latter, then what was the sampling procedure? Other pertinent information that content analysts often provide to be transparent includes their coding rules and the specific procedures followed when encoding their sources. In the rest of this section, we discuss each of these ways of boosting transparency in greater detail.

Note that many of the concerns of researchers using content-analytic methods are the same, or at least very similar to, the concerns of researchers using other analytic approaches. However, there are certainly elements — such as copyright protection and the sometimes large volume of source material — that seem to represent special concerns and challenges for the content analyst. Also, the content under consideration in this domain is often historical and public, which means that some of the concerns that arise when researching human subjects are not as relevant in this context.

Access to What?

Based on the QTD discussions and our own work, we distinguish between the following kinds of information and materials that a researcher might make available to the scholarly community (and others). We list and describe them here, in an order following an approximate chronology of the research process. In later sections of this report, we elaborate on the challenges and extant practices in several of these areas.

- 1- *Raw (Primary) Source Material*. We think of this as the full corpus of raw material (usually text) analyzed by the researcher. It may be organized as a repository of

documents, or as some other analytical unit (paragraphs, sentences, chapters/articles, etc.). For example, Elkins, Ginsburg, and Melton (2015) have deposited (at the Qualitative Data Repository) a dataset of “excerpts” that pertain to some 300 constitutional concepts. They have also deposited the full texts of the constitutions themselves in a separate, public repository. Similarly, Kernell has a separate repository for his ongoing research using Statements of Administration Policy (SAP) (hdl:1902.1/10199).

- 2- *Bibliographic References for Source Material.* In lieu of, or in addition to, the texts themselves, researchers may choose to provide, simply, the bibliographic references to such texts. This considerably easier way of specifying the source materials should be possible even if copyrights inhibit making the raw source materials available. Presumably, private or otherwise sensitive documents could be protected in this way as well. For example, a researcher could identify the archive or private collection where other researchers could presumably qualify to view the documents. A number of Americanists use this method when conducting analyses of presidential rhetoric, or media coverage. For examples, see Azari (2014); Iyengar (1991).
- 3- *Sampling Plan.* One of the more important research challenges in pursuing this type of research concerns the *selection* of documents under analysis, which is, of course, also a concern in other fields. Researchers might describe the universe of documents, their sampling criteria and procedures, and some sense of the representativeness of their sample. Typically, this information would be included in a codebook. However, it may also be provided in a detailed research methods section of the publication or an appendix.
- 4- *Commentary and Deliberative Process Notes Regarding Coding Decisions.* Non-automated textual analysis almost always involves human interpretation of texts. Researchers may choose to release their interpretive guidelines for coding particular aspects of the content. They may also choose to release their notes on particular cases. Typically, large coding projects generate notes on the details of particularly thorny cases. Indeed, one commentator in the QTD debate sees transparency in the adjudication of these “grey area” cases as something of a “litmus test of transparency in data production.”⁵ It seems to us that researchers rarely release these notes. Researchers may see these notes as private, unsystematic comments that are not written to be comprehensible even to other subject matter experts if they have not been involved in the project and thus would not reflect well on the project unless the content analyst invested substantial additional time and resources in to preparing a fully documented, properly copy-edited version of the notes. Of course, transparency advocates would probably see such costs as worthwhile given the trade-off for enhanced legitimacy. Elkins, Ginsburg, and Melton (2005 [2017]) record their deliberations about interpretive matters in a message board that has run continuously throughout the project. They have analyzed and reported some findings from these discussions,⁶ but they have not released the discussions themselves. Instead, the authors include a comment field for each and every variable in their dataset, which describes any interpretive ambiguity. Often researchers in American politics will include endnotes that provide a discussion of recurring interpretive

⁵ Gary Marks, post “Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group III.5,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.5: Content Analysis, non-automated, August 28, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=212#p981>.

⁶ Melton et al. 2013

challenges and how they were resolved, or particular examples of coding decisions that had a significant impact on the overall results.⁷

- 5- *“Chapter/verse” References for Each Coding Decision.* For reasons we describe above, it may not make sense or be possible to release the primary documents themselves. One alternative, or complement, to such a release would be to precisely identify the part (page number, section, chapter, etc.) from which the interpretation was derived. For example, Elkins, Ginsburg, and Melton include this information for each variable in their dataset. Iyengar (1991) refers to specific examples of media coverage in narrating his study, though without providing each segment in full (chapter 5 and accompanying notes).
- 6- *Codebooks.* Content-analysts will typically release some documentation along with (or even instead) of their data. At a minimum, the documentation will include some description of the variable and the response categories employed in its coding, along with any description of the structure of the attending data files. The practice in content analysis does not differ appreciably here from that of other approaches, except as it relates to the documentation the corpus of content (typically, text), as we describe above.
- 7- *Coded Data.* Here we mean any data files that record the systematized interpretation of the content. So, for example, a data point in comparative constitutional data might be whether or not a Constitution includes the right to privacy. As we note below, there is some debate among researchers about how much, and in what form, these data would be released. For example, should researchers release only those data necessary to reproduce a particular analysis, or some more extensive version? Many of these concerns are not at all unique to content analysis.
- 8- *Estimates of Reliability.* Researchers, especially those who employ multiple coders, may have information about systematic and unsystematic errors in their data. For example, it seems reasonable that those who employ multiple coders and redundant coding might want to report rates of intercoder correspondence.
- 9- *Concept Mapping.* Sometimes researchers want to clarify their use of concepts and their relationship to the data. This involves specifying the meaning of a concept, how it breaks down into multiple dimensions, and how the concepts relate to other concepts in the “semantic field.” Some of this sort of delineation might occupy space in a codebook. However, researchers now have the opportunity to describe their concept mapping in a more formal and systematic way. For example, researchers can record concepts, their keywords, defining attributes, and dimensions as a formal ontology, often released as an OWL (Web Ontology Language) file. An OWL file allows other users (and machines) to read these concept maps in order to discover, reveal, and combine data. Elkins et al. have released an ontology for a set of concepts and constitutions in this form.⁸

⁷ e.g., Gilens 1999, 249f, note 42.

⁸ For more information, please visit <https://www.constituteproject.org/ontology?lang=en>.

Transparency Toward Whom?

An important question concerns the intended audience for the materials. We conceive of two different audiences: the scholarly community or reviewers, editors, and program officers of journals, presses and funding agencies. Our inventory of current practices, discussion of alternatives, and recommendations for the future will vary depending on the audience demanding and gaining access to information and materials.

Much of the QTD conversation has taken place in the context of anticipated demands by journals for replication files and documentation. In the case of content analysis, it is hard to imagine journals requiring anything more than the coded data used in an article's analysis. By "more," we mean one or more of the other eight kinds of information listed above. Indeed, our recommendation here will be that journals maintain the same set of minimal standards for content-analytic research, in order to maintain consistency across domains in the costs for researchers.

For the scholarly community at large, there are currently few established standards, but potentially also more to gain from increased sharing of content-analytic material among researchers. While the provision of the kinds of documentation that we describe above currently is at the discretion of the researcher, our recommendation here will be that more ambitious transparency would be beneficial. Clearly, some natural incentives are in place for researchers to make their research methods more transparent.

As a backdrop for our later discussion of practices, alternatives, and recommendations of transparency in relation to these two audiences, we address first potential benefits and costs of transparency.

4. Benefits of Transparency in Content Analysis

Generally, transparency should lead to increased research integrity and accessibility. More specifically, transparency in this realm will facilitate the replicability of the analysis, interpretability of findings, evaluability of findings, and encourage spillover contributions to the collective good. While these benefits are collective benefits, many of them redound to the individual researcher as well in terms of increased credibility and impact of the research.

- *Interpretability of the Findings*: transparency benefits researchers seeking to make sense of presented findings.
- *Evaluability of the Findings*: transparency benefits researchers seeking to examine the consistency of coding decisions and the accuracy of presented findings.
- *Contribution to Collective Good*: transparency makes it easier for researchers to build on earlier coding or "raw data"-gathering, efforts, which improves resource contributing to efficiency and cumulativeness of scientific findings.
- *Replicability of the Analysis*: transparency benefits researchers seeking to verify and build on previous analysis.

Note also that, in order for transparency to benefit the individual contributing researcher, it is essential that users properly cite the material and acknowledge their benefit from using it.

5. Costs, Risks, Appropriateness, and Constraints of Transparency in Content Analysis

Making accessible the types of material used for content analysis can be quite costly and may involve taking risks. Discussions on the QTD Forum point to five such potential costs or risks.

- 1- *Protection of “Intellectual Property Rights”*: There is a legitimate interest of the researchers who develop the data to maintain an embargo for private use for a certain period of time, in order to have an edge in publishing from this resource. Not respecting this right could lead researchers to invest less in novel data collection in the future, which would be to the detriment of scientific progress and the academic community. Not recognizing this right might particularly hurt younger researchers or researchers who for other reasons take longer to publish from their data.

In addition, much of the source material used for content analysis, such as newspaper articles, are protected through copyright law. Uploading and making publicly available such material would entail a violation of copyright rules.

- 2- *Time and Resources*: It takes time and resources to prepare, upload, and maintain documentation and data from a content analysis. In this respect, expanding transparency by putting source material, coded data, etc. online ought to be balanced against the time and effort this requires. For example, while many see the benefits of providing notes on adjudication of particular cases, producing such notes for public consumption involves a significant investment of time. Some sense that this investment misplaces priorities. One commentator wrote that “expectations on the systematism of these documents should be kept in check.”⁹
- 3- *Confidentiality Issues*: Some source material involves confidentiality issues. Interviews may have been conducted with the promise of maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of interviewees and the specific contents of their interviews. Documents may have been obtained that are protected by confidentiality clauses. In these cases, making the material accessible for others would entail a violation of confidence and confidentiality agreements.
- 4- *Perverse Effects: Less Data Collection?* The most frequently mentioned risk of imposing stringent transparency requirements is that it could produce perverse effects, as scholars adjust their behavior systemically to these requirements. A commonly shared fear is that tough transparency requirements – particularly if complying with those requirements required scholars to give up their intellectual property rights in the coded data or required extensive time and resources – could lead to less ambitious data collection efforts in the future. One astute commentator in the QTD debates pointed out, however, that such increased demands could lead to more careful coding and decrease the probability of indefensible subjectivity and confirmation bias, which render this “risk” a possible benefit, a hope shared by some others.¹⁰

⁹ Jofre Rocabert, post “Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group III.5,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.5: Content Analysis, non-automated, November 13, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=212#p984>.

¹⁰ Jofre Rocabert, post “Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group III.5,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.5: Content Analysis, non-automated, November 13, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=212#p984>.

6. Practices and Models I: How to Achieve Transparency vis-à-vis the Academic Community

How, concretely, can scholars be transparent about their content analysis? Non-automated content analysis is a type of research for which there are few or no generally agreed transparency principles or requirements. In the following, we therefore outline possible alternative transparency standards, discuss pros and cons of these alternatives, and suggest what we consider reasonable principles. This section centers on practices and models of transparency vis-à-vis the academic community, for whom transparency is an issue for all types of material and where common standards are least developed. The next section discusses practices of transparency vis-à-vis journals.

An interesting, recent development in this area that could offer greater transparency to content-analytic materials is the creation of repositories, such as the Qualitative Data Repository (QDR), funded by the National Science Foundation and hosted by Syracuse University (www.qdr.syr.edu). Generally, online repositories make sharing content-analytic material considerably more efficient and cheap. Specifically, the QDR is a dedicated online archive for storing and sharing digital data and accompanying documentation generated or collected through qualitative and multi-method research. The repository contains various types of data: from “active-citation” compilations, to audio-visual files, to textual data and everything in between. Given the wide variation in qualitative data and the frontier-like stage of the repositories, standards for data deposited in them are evolving.

The creation of online repositories means that there are three main alternatives in terms of whether and how to share content-analytic material:

- a) Material is stored privately by the responsible researchers, who decide whether and how they want to share this material.
- b) Material is shared with the academic community through websites set up and managed by the responsible researchers or their universities.
- c) Material is shared with the academic community through open, community-based repositories, such as the QDR.

We organize the following discussion along the types of material that researchers would most likely release, and thus focus on four main types: source material, coding decisions, code books, and coded data.

Qualitative source material

There is, at present, no established norm as to whether and how to share the qualitative raw material underpinning any particular content analysis. The dominant approach historically appears to have been *not* to make this type of material accessible. It is unclear whether this neglect reflects a deliberate decision not to share this material online or is a legacy of the days when source material was physically preserved in offices, basements, and archives. For new and recent work in political science, the QDR seeks to archive much of the raw material that researchers have used in their analysis. For example, Kapiszewski’s (2015) study of the Argentine Supreme Court analyzes a large set of newspaper accounts of court cases, each of which are deposited at QDR. Some researchers have made public a sample of their material, especially audio-visual files. Boas (2015), for instance, has deposited 45 digital files with a

sample of video advertising used in his analyses of campaign advertising in Chile, Brazil, and Peru. In American Politics, groups of scholars have joined forces to make available and then analyze large collections of publicly available documents that were previously only available in hard-copy format, but which are now available online, such as the Public Papers of the Presidency.¹¹

Arguments in favor of alternative (a)—i.e., in favor of a more discretionary approach to sharing source materials—are primarily two. First, making all of the raw source materials accessible online can be resource demanding, especially if it also involves setting up an electronic infrastructure. Second, some source material may be protected by confidentiality clauses (e.g., interviews) or copyright law (e.g., articles), in which case online access would entail rule violations. Researchers may face significant uncertainty in determining their compliance with copyright restrictions. As one commentator explained, “given cross-national variation in copyright law and fair-use rules I often face high legal uncertainty in publishing source materials.”¹²

Arguments in favor of alternatives (b) and (c) pertain to the value of transparency for the academic community. First, open access to the source material enhances the interpretability, evaluability, and replicability of the findings, in case other researchers wish to track the process leading to the findings of a particular project. Second, and probably more relevant, offering access to source material makes it possible for the academic community to benefit from earlier data collection. Collecting material such as constitutions, treaties, annual reports, and policy documents typically involves considerable effort. If access can be provided to such material, this saves time and funding, even when the material may be publicly available elsewhere, and makes it possible for researchers to instead invest their effort in completing the material by filling potential holes and in analyzing the material. Finally, it should be noted that costs of online storage are low and declining, so this should not present a large barrier.

Compared to alternative (b), alternative (c) of using repositories has two further advantages. First, repositories reduce the resources required, since they offer a ready-made platform for the storing of source material. Second, established repositories become go-to places, making it easier for other researchers to find source material in which they are interested.

Suggestion: Confidentiality agreements and copyright law impose legitimate restrictions on the types of source material that can be freely shared. However, where such restrictions are not present, we would recommend that scholars make their source material accessible to the academic community through designated online repositories.

Coding decisions

Similarly, there is currently no established practice on whether to make coding decisions publicly available. All scholars conducting research involving content analysis make hundreds or thousands of coding decisions in a project and confront situations in which coding decisions are not straightforward. Documenting the basis for making coding decisions, and how particularly challenging coding decisions are made, is standard in many projects. The question here is

¹¹ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php>

¹² Christian Rauh, post “Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group III.5,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.5: Content Analysis, non-automated, December 5, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=212#p1008>.

whether, and how, internal deliberative processes and source references for coding decisions should be made accessible to others.

Some change in the area of coding decisions appears to be under way. For years, scholars in comparative politics and international relations have coded aspects of different jurisdictions and events without releasing notes of internal deliberations that led to coding decisions. By contrast, Tanisha Fazal and Page Fortna (2015) have preserved and published their notes on their coding decisions regarding war initiation, a project complementary to -- and integrated into -- the Correlates of War family of projects.

Short of providing comprehensive coding decision notes, scholars may elect to provide insight into particularly important coding decisions in a separate explanatory footnote, or provide explanations and criteria for making regularly recurring decisions in coding content in a separate section or an appendix, when these decisional rules are not readily captured in a codebook or methodology section.

Arguments in favor of not sharing coding decisions are mainly two. First, coding decisions are a type of material that is not of the same immediate public interest as hard-to-get source materials, code books, or datasets. They are rather the kind of material a researcher might want to consult if he/or she is curious about a particular coding decision when replicating, evaluating, or directly building on an analysis. Second, it may be quite resource-demanding to edit and present internal deliberations on coding decisions in such a way that they become fully comprehensible to external users. One commentator put it this way: “My own notes on coding are solid but messy. The time it would take to make them non-messy would be enormous and that is a large deterrent to transparency for me and, I imagine, for other researchers.”¹³

Arguments in favor of freely making coding decisions available are primarily two. First, it enhances the interpretability, evaluability and replicability of the findings to allow other researchers to track the process generating the coded data and ultimately leading to the findings. Second, the expectation that coding decisions will need to be made public encourages better documentation of coding decisions and internal deliberations. This would also be useful to the individual researchers, who more easily can reconstruct how they reached certain coding decisions and be consistent in their coding.

Suggestion: It appears reasonable that other researchers should have the possibility to assess whether a certain coding decision was appropriately made in view of code book principles. However, it is less obvious that this would require coding decisions being made public online. Instead, we recommend that researchers keep careful records of their coding decisions and make them available upon request.

Codebooks

The current practice – as we interpret it – is to make codebooks available online following the conclusion of a project.

We cannot identify any serious argument against making codebooks public – not even resources, since all it takes is uploading the codebook used in a project.

¹³Ron Mitchell, post “Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group III.5,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.5: Content Analysis, non-automated, November 19, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=24&t=212>.

By contrast, there is an obvious argument in favor of making them public along with the data. Releasing datasets without at least a minimalist code book makes little sense, since other scholars could not use and build on the data without one.

Suggestion: In line with current practice, researchers should make code books available online together with the datasets necessary to reproduce published findings.

Coded data

For coded data, we perceive the emerging norm to be that researchers share their datasets online after the conclusion of a project. The specific ways in which datasets are made available vary, but most scholars recognize the collective value of sharing datasets and the private value of getting dataset citations.

Rather, the central issue is the balance between dataset creators' legitimate private interest in using the data they have invested heavily in for publications versus the scholarly community's collective interest in using and expanding datasets. This issue breaks down into two: the timing and forms of access for the scholarly community (note that journals' access to coded data is discussed under a separate heading below).

In terms of *timing*, posts on the QTD discussion board point to a range of alternatives for when researchers should be expected to release their coded data. At the restrictive end of the spectrum, some suggest that it should be up to researchers themselves to decide, since they have invested heavily in these datasets and should have no obligation to share them unless they want to. At the maximum-transparency end of the spectrum, others suggest that datasets should be released immediately when completed. Reasons given for this position include: these data should be considered a public good for the discipline, large data collections often have been publicly funded, publicizing the data can generate interest and feed-back, and dataset developers typically have an edge in publishing anyway because of their familiarity with the data. However, the position that appears to gain most support is a compromise solution, suggesting that datasets should be released no later than two to three years after the completion of a dataset (and possibly earlier). This time horizon would give dataset developers sufficient time to reap private gains from their investment before the data become public. Even if publishing takes time, this should give dataset developers a strong competitive edge, since it puts them a full project cycle ahead of others.

Suggestion: We recommend that researchers observe a practice of sharing their coded data publicly no later than three years after the completion of a dataset.

In terms of *form*, an issue of debate among researchers is the extent to which dataset developers should have any type of control over those who download and use their coded data. The reasons for maintaining some level of control are the fears that the coded data would not be responsibly used and that credit for data development would not be adequately given. Again, there is a spectrum of alternatives in the debate and current practices. At the restrictive end, some researchers prefer a procedure whereby dataset developers need to give explicit permission to others to use their data. At the transparent end, others maintain that there should be no restrictions on access once data have been made public. A third, in-between position suggests that dataset developers have a right to be informed about who is downloading and using their data by way of registration.

Suggestion: We recommend that the public release of data is not associated with the introduction of new barriers, such as permission to use the data.

7. Practices and Models II: Transparency vis-à-vis Reviewers and Editors for Journals etc.

Having discussed practices and models of access to material for the scientific community at large, we conclude by briefly turning to the specific case of journals. What are reasonable requirements on transparency on the part of journals in relation to our four main types of data: source material, coding decisions, code books, and coded data?

The current expectation – and sometimes even a journal requirement – is that researchers make available the coded data necessary to replicate the analyses published in an article - data which subsequently are made available on journal homepages or other homepages, such as Harvard Dataverse (dataverse.harvard.edu). The replication data are typically a subset of a full dataset. By contrast, there are no expectations that researchers would provide to the journal or a depository source material, documentation of coding decisions, or code books as such when submitting work for review and publication.

In our view, current practices reflect a reasonable balance. Whenever the ontological and epistemological approach underpinning the authors' claims suggests that the content analysis should be replicable, journals should have the right to demand and publish coded data used for a particular article (replication data). However, it does not appear reasonable and practical for journals to automatically require submission and publication of the three other main types of materials generated in non-automated content analysis. Preparing, providing, and publishing such material may be time consuming, infringe on “intellectual property rights,” and violate copyright laws, while most reviewers and readers likely take a limited interest in these materials. However, should a journal (possibly based on a request from reviewers) deem it necessary to examine particular content-analytic material to evaluate the rigor of the research and the accuracy of the findings, then it appears reasonable that the journal editor should have the possibility to access *select and specified* source materials, coding decisions, or code books.

Suggestion: We recommend a continuation of current practices: journals should have the right to demand and publish replication data, but not an equivalent right to demand all source materials, coding decisions, and code books. However, if a particular content-analytic material is deemed necessary to evaluate an article submission, then journals should have the prerogative to request *select and specified* material.

Conversely, we should recognize that journals may need to change their practices in order to accommodate the greater demand for transparency on the part of researchers. Assuming that the collective benefits of transparency are considerable, journals should offer more space for the publication of research notes or articles that introduce new datasets. While some journals, such as *Conflict Management and Peace Science* and *International Interactions*, frequently publish dataset articles, many journals currently do not. This likely reduces the collective benefits from the development of new datasets and may even be sub-optimal from the journals' perspective, since dataset articles frequently generate attention and citations.

Suggestion: We recommend that journals offer more space for articles introducing new datasets based on content-analytic material.

8. Conclusion

Research practices in Political Science seem to be at something of a crossroads. Dramatic improvements in information technology have enabled researchers to make their data and procedures widely and deeply available to the research community and the public. Commensurately, the demand for -- and expectations of -- access to such materials has grown. Scholars understandably face some tensions in meeting these demands and expectations, including sometimes trade-offs against other priorities.

In the area of content analysis, these issues may be especially acute. Digital technology means that boxes of material, which were until recently inaccessible to all but one or a few researchers, can now be easily shared. Apart from these primary source materials, scholars also have the ability to share many of the secondary data resources and documentation that emerge in the analytic process. Nevertheless, non-automated content analysis is a domain of research with few established standards thus far. As such, developing common reference points and expectations could be useful.

One clear reference point derives from the increasing demand for replication materials among most journals. That standard appears to be to require authors to provide access to the coded data used to generate specific published results. We consider this a reasonable baseline standard, and see no reason why journals should want or need access to additional material (e.g., source material, coding decisions, and code books), unless there are issues with the coded data that require an in-depth look. These sorts of decisions can be productively negotiated with authors on a case by case basis.

Current standards and practices of transparency vis-à-vis the scholarly community are more diffuse and underdeveloped. In our assessment, there is much to gain for individual researchers and the academic community by expanding access to all main types of material used in non-automated content analysis. We expect that this sort of distribution would and should occur naturally, given the incentives for authors to increase the impact and credibility of their research. In this report, we have identified the various kinds of information and materials that researchers might share to increase transparency in content-analytic research. We have also discussed the challenges and benefits of making such information and materials freely available. We stress that such distribution should be voluntary, since research projects differ and since there are already substantial incentives to share materials.

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Research in Authoritarian and Repressive Contexts

Final Report of QTD Working Group IV.1 on:
Authoritarian/Repressive Political Regimes

December 2018

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Authoritarian and repressive conditions prevail in well over half the world today. The distinctive challenges faced by researchers working in such settings follow from the fact that in authoritarian and repressive contexts, opinions are not freely exchanged nor is information easily accessible. Locally-based interlocutors – be they fellow scholars, activists, or ordinary citizens – face considerable risk of imprisonment, torture, or worse for sharing information that is considered politically sensitive or potentially compromising to those in positions of political authority. To generate data, achieve real understanding, and stay true to research ethics in this data-poor and often dangerous environment, researchers must place a premium on measures that: safeguard human subjects, build networks of trust, protect confidentiality, clarify contextual meaning, and specify their own positionality. These imperatives have important implications for the meaning of “research transparency” as practiced in this difficult setting.

I. The Meaning and Benefits of Research Transparency

Extensive dialogue within the community of researchers who work in repressive and authoritarian contexts suggests five different interpretations of research transparency. Some of these interpretations are focused on serving the larger academic community; others are focused on respecting and protecting the human subjects under study. The first four command near consensus within this research community; the last elicits disagreement.

a. Transparency of Method

The first interpretation of research transparency concerns transparency of method. Transparency of method charges the scholar with making the research process explicit – describing the procedures adopted and the choices made in collecting data. To be fully transparent, the researcher ought to describe the inferential challenges faced, the ethical and security challenges encountered, and the impact these challenges have had on the selection of interviewees, location, and even questions pursued. The goal is to make explicit the biases and distortions that may have been introduced into the research process by the repressive character of the environment. Revelation of these biases will enable the research consumer to “adjudicate the validity and limitations” of the results presented.¹

b. Transparency of Position

The second interpretation of research transparency concerns transparency of position. In every research context, the positionality of the researcher introduces particular biases about the kind of data that can be collected and the way that data is interpreted. (Positionality refers to the individual’s placement in the larger power structure and his/her situation in terms of identity markers. Examples of factors that shape one’s positionality include the

¹ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, post “Welcome, and inviting your comments,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/ Repressive Political Regimes, September 14, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=144&p=469&hilit=welcome+and#p469>; Shih 2015; Aisha Ahmad, "Transparency in Security Studies," QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=47&p=68&hilit=transparency+in+se+transparency+in+security+studies#p68>.

individual's nationality, race, class, gender, religion, and funding sources.) In authoritarian and repressive contexts, where the development of networks of personal trust is often essential to accessing information, the researcher's positionality often proves pivotal in shaping the research process. For example, a researcher studying the dynamics of Islamic radicalization in Jordan might get access to a very different distribution of informants if s/he were identified as an American graduate student funded by the US Department of Defense than if s/he were a Canadian freelancer. Similarly, a researcher exploring gender discrimination in provincial politics in China might gain a very different angle on the question if said researcher were of Chinese descent and female rather than Caucasian and male. To evaluate the limitations and validity of such research, transparent reflexivity by the researcher is essential.²

c. Transparency as Clarity of Context

The third interpretation of research transparency conceives of transparency as the clarity that comes from contextualization. To grasp the true meaning of "raw data," the researcher must place that data in context and interpret it through contextualization. As Clifford Geertz argued long ago, accessing the meaning of an eye twitch – is that one-and-the-same physical act a knowing wink or just a blink? – requires interpretation and a close understanding of context. Contextual knowledge is crucial to the accurate interpretation of data in any environment but it is especially important in environments made opaque by repression, where people must disguise their true feelings, where code language is often used to convey sensitive views, where a pause, hesitation, or even the absence of a response may convey as much as something actually said. Only a seasoned interpreter can access this meaning and deliver true and transparent *understanding* of the data gathered. Verbatim reproduction of interview transcripts, for example, will not deliver transparent understanding.³

d. Transparency of Commitment

A fourth interpretation of research transparency concerns transparency of the researcher's commitment to the safety of all human subjects. Commitment to confidentiality, and explicitness with one's interlocutors about what can be promised in order to ensure their safety, is especially crucial in repressive and authoritarian environments, as will be explored below.

² Ahmad, Aisha, post "Transparency in Security Studies," QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One-Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=47&p=68&hilit=transparency+in+se+transparency+in+security+studies#p68>; Singerman, Diane, e-mail message to Eva Bellin, February 28, 2017.

³ Bellin, Eva, e-mail message to Authoritarian/Repressive Context Group, February 21, 2017; Charles Kurzman, post "Re: Risks and Practices to Avoid?" QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/Repressive Political Regimes, November 1, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=148&p=656&hilit=risks+and+practices+to+avoid#p656>; Mala Htun, post "Re: [From Steering Committee] Active citation versus the meaty footnote," QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 17, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=101&p=345&hilit=active+citation+vs+the+meaty#p345>; Kathy Cramer, post "Re: Limits to Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum III.3: Ethnography and Participant Information, October 20, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=132&p=547&hilit=limits+to+transparency#p547>.

e. Transparency of Purpose and Funding

A fifth interpretation of research transparency concerns transparency of the researcher's purpose and funding vis-à-vis interlocutors in the field. Here there is disagreement within the research community. Some argue that researchers ought to make clear to their contacts in the field both the political questions motivating their research as well as their funding sources. Others argue that frankness about research intentions and funding may preclude meaningful research on difficult but important subjects. Local contacts may refuse to engage on abashedly political subjects; those who agree to share information might be endangered by implication. Better to be less than fully frank about one's political curiosity and pursue sensitive issues in an indirect, non-threatening way. This might be achieved either by asking "proxy questions" highly correlated with more sensitive queries, or by exploring tangential topics that permit inferences about political issues. The research community is divided here because there are significant trade-offs between frankness, access, and interlocutor safety with regard to this aspect of research transparency. (Note that revelation of one's funding sources to one's research audiences is always recommended in the write-up of the research).

f. What Research Transparency Does NOT Mean: Data Access

Scholars in this research community expressed near unanimity on the view that research transparency in authoritarian and repressive contexts does **not** mean making raw data (such as interview transcripts and field notes) publicly accessible. This is true for three reasons. First, there is almost universal concern that no manner of "scrubbing" of identifiers would be sufficient to secure the anonymization and confidentiality of this data. Even access to just the date of an interview might be enough for state security agencies to retrace the steps of a researcher and reveal the identity of a contact. Public accessibility of this data would compromise the safety of interlocutors. Second, distributing raw field data without contextualization (who said what, when, and in what sort of tone...) would make it meaningless, if not misleading, to most consumers. Providing such contextualization, however, is in direct tension with interlocutor safety. Third, for many colleagues field notes are places where scholars work out their ideas, seek to understand unfamiliar terrain around them, and reflect on the research process and all it entails. They are often a very personal 'safe' space for intellectual exploration. Archiving these notes would be a violation of privacy. All in all, as one researcher put it, "turning over field notes is a red line I will not cross."⁴

In addition, many scholars feel that, in a profession characterized by diverse approaches, we "should not impose one interpretation of what counts as 'research' and what counts as 'data.' Data access is relatively easy to facilitate if the 'data' consist of an Excel spreadsheet or Stata file. But for a significant number of scholars, research does not

⁴ Lisa Wedeen, post "Reflections on DA-RT (three points)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One-Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=46>. See also: Aili Tripp, post "Pursuing transparency in qualitative research," QTD Discussion Board, Forum II.2: Evidence from Researcher Interactions with Human Participants, November 8, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=18&t=176&p=635&hilit=pursuing+transparency#p635>; Singerman, Diane, e-mail message to Eva Bellin, February 28, 2017; Chestnut Greitens, Sheena, e-mail message to Eva Bellin, February 23, 2017.

consist of ‘extracting’ information from the social world but is rather an “embodied, intersubjective, and inherently relational enterprise.”⁵ It is hard to facilitate sharing raw data when ‘data’ exist, not in field notes or transcripts, but “in the act of spending time with and listening to people.”⁶

Overall, this community of researchers is deeply committed to the goal of research transparency, so long as it is transparency properly understood. Transparency is embraced as openness about the researchers’ methods, position, context, and commitments. Such openness will yield many important benefits including research clarity, evaluability, understanding, as well as interlocutor safety.

II. Distinctive Challenges, Risks, and Constraints Posed by Authoritarian and Repressive Contexts

The most distinctive challenges posed by authoritarian and repressive contexts for political researchers follow from the fact that in this context political opinions are not freely exchanged nor is information easily accessible and that local interlocutors face considerable danger in sharing information with researchers.

Four major difficulties follow from these conditions.

a. The Challenge of Ensuring the Safety of Interlocutors

Given the dangers that local interlocutors face for sharing sensitive information in this context, researchers must guarantee **strict confidentiality** to these sources to protect their safety. This is an inviolable ethical obligation. Researchers must, first and foremost, not harm human subjects. Further, they have an ethical duty – beyond that covered in the IRB – to protect interlocutors who may not technically qualify as subjects but who might nevertheless be placed at risk if their identities were revealed. This list might include (but is not limited to) interpreters, field assistants, survey enumerators, drivers, colleagues at host institutions, and archivists. Journal editors should therefore be aware that IRB requirements are a *minimalist* interpretation of what is needed to protect the safety of interlocutors and that professional ethics often demand additional safeguards and confidentiality provisions for a much broader set of contacts than those who typically qualify as “subjects” under the IRB. We recommend that journal editors engage in conversation with authors to understand the research context and decide, on a case-by-case basis, how much of this information to include in final publication.

Guaranteeing strict confidentiality is not an easy task. In the field, researchers confront this as ever more sophisticated electronic spyware makes it difficult to keep laptops, cell phones, and email communication inaccessible to prying authoritarian regimes. After field work is completed, demands to make field notes and interview transcripts publicly available in “trusted repositories” exposes sources to possible disclosure, given the difficulty of completely anonymizing this material and the lack of researcher control over disclosure after depositing the materials. (The recent case at Boston College that led to disclosure of IRA interviews makes this clear.) The distinctive

⁵ Pachirat 2015, 30.

⁶ Cramer 2015, 32f; Fujii 2016, 26.

challenges of ensuring the safety of interlocutors in repressive and authoritarian contexts points to a clear tension between an unsophisticated conception of research transparency and the research ethics of our profession.⁷

b. The Challenge of Building Networks of Trust Necessary to Generate Data

In this data-constrained environment, access to sensitive information can only be achieved through the cultivation of networks of trust with local interlocutors. As one colleague pointed out: “Because political processes in authoritarian regimes often remain hidden, interviews continue to be a key step in researching (them).”⁸ However, the only way to build the trust necessary to get local contacts to agree to interviews, share information and **be candid** in their views, is to promise them anonymity. As one researcher put it, “lack of transparency is the only protection I can offer a local official.”⁹ Without the promise of strict confidentiality researchers in authoritarian and repressive contexts will at best get access to “canned responses”¹⁰ and “the party line.”¹¹ Self-censorship of interlocutors will lead to dis-enlightenment. The distinctive challenge of accessing information in repressive and authoritarian contexts points to a clear tension between knowledge production and perfect transparency.

c. The Challenge of Unpredictability Over Time

In repressive and authoritarian contexts, where many regimes hover in “grey zones,” it is impossible to predict what will be deemed politically sensitive when. As one colleague put it: “legality shifts, repression changes shape, research access changes, regimes are overthrown, informants move from protestor to prisoner to legislator or president and vice versa.”¹² Another said: “conditions in such countries can change rapidly and protections that seem exaggerated today may be essential tomorrow. In Egypt alone at least three dozen people I have interviewed for research are currently in prison on political charges for critical statements or protest activities that seemed bold but safe during a revolutionary period of open politics but were criminalized following the July 2013 military coup. It is

⁷ Chestnut Greitens, Sheena, e-mail message to Eva Bellin, February 23, 2017; Sheila Carapico, post “Re: Risks and Practices to Avoid?” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/ Repressive Political Regimes, November 1, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=148&p=656&hilit=risks+and+practices+to+avoid#p656>; Shih 2015; Sarah Parkinson, post “[From Steering Committee] What is openness/transparency/explicitness in violence/contentious politics research?” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 16, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=100>.

⁸ Jessica Teets, post “Re: Data access--human subjects protections,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 8, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=40&p=373&hilit=data+access#p373>.

⁹ Shih 2015.

¹⁰ Michelle Jurkovich, post “Re: Against ‘requirements’,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 25, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=60>.

¹¹ Sherril Stroschein, post “Harms in study of identity, and forgotten agency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 25, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=80>.

¹² Singerman, Diane, e-mail message to Eva Bellin, February 28, 2017.

impossible to predict which comments will prove fatally incriminating when.”¹³ In this context of uncertainty, as a pair of researchers writes, “There is really no way to provide [informed] consent given that it is unknown and unknowable what will happen in five years.”¹⁴ Given this uncertainty, researchers must be especially careful about guarding the anonymity of their sources for the long term.¹⁵

d. The Challenge of Cost

Some of our colleagues in the discipline have conceded the necessity of guaranteeing the anonymity of interlocutors in authoritarian and repressive contexts. To reconcile this with the position that field data should be made public for the sake of replicability, some have recommended that all notes and transcripts be stripped of identifying markers before dissemination, but that these sanitized materials must still be posted. A large number of scholars in the authoritarian/repressive research community object to this approach. They argue that meticulous redaction of all notes and transcripts would be a) very costly, b) time consuming, and c) likely imperfect (compromising interlocutor safety, as discussed above). Furthermore, anonymization and de-contextualization of this material would strip it of much of its meaning (thereby compromising the understanding that can be gained from this exercise).¹⁶

All told, this obligation would place a special burden on field researchers working in authoritarian and repressive contexts, raise the perceived risks of their work (both to them and to their interlocutors), and further deter scholars from undertaking this difficult and often dangerous work. As one colleague said, this extra burden “would push knowledge of authoritarianism further to the margins [...]. Perversely it gives strength to authoritarian regimes’ agnotological tendencies, granting them a veto over research agendas and specific scholars that they do not consider politically acceptable.”¹⁷

¹³ Jessica Teets, post “Re: Challenges to Transparency in Authoritarian/Repressive Settings,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/ Repressive Political Regimes, December 23, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=146>.

¹⁴ Parkinson and Wood 2015, 26.

¹⁵ See Dina Bishara, post “Re: Challenges to Transparency in Authoritarian/Repressive Settings,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/ Repressive Political Regimes, November 25, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=146>; and Sherril Stroschein, post “Harms in study of identity, and forgotten agency,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 25, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=80>; Lynch 2016.

¹⁶ Many scholars working in authoritarian and repressive contexts DO quote from interviews in their written work. However, this quoting is SELECTIVE and its goal is either to ILLUSTRATE a point with a specific example or to ANCHOR an insight in the voice of a local interlocutor. This practice is very different from wholesale reproduction of interview notes. The latter seems to be advocated in order to facilitate replication of the researcher’s analysis and to enable other researchers to test the validity of his/her inferential logic. The practice of selective quoting is consistent with protecting interlocutor safety. The proactive of wholesale reproduction of interviews is not.

¹⁷ Ariel Ahram, post “Re: Privileging Quantitative Methods and Challenging Field Work conditions,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.1: Authoritarian/ Repressive Political Regimes, November 22, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=174>.

III. Best Practices: The Route to Insightful, Credible, Evaluative Research in Authoritarian and Repressive Contexts

Members of this research community made several recommendations for best practices in this context. They also highlighted several practices that should be avoided, as detailed below.

a. Recommendations for Best Practices

1. Make the research process **transparent and evaluative** by composing a short *methods* appendix describing the procedures adopted and the choices made in collecting data. This will make clear the biases that may have been introduced into the research process by the repressive character of the environment. An excellent example of this is modeled in Edward Schatz's book, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond*. Schatz provides a methodological appendix that describes in detail how the work was carried out, the profile of interviewees, in addition to the questionnaire used in formal interviews. Similarly, Karrie Koesel's book *Religion and Authoritarianism* provides a model research appendix that outlines research design, how interviewees were selected and assessed, which interviews led to what kinds of information and where this information was supplemented with other, publicly accessible sources of information. It also provides useful information such as the acceptance rate of interview requests in the two countries, the way the researcher interpreted this information, and the role that participant observation and ethnographic methods played in complementing formal interviews.

2. Reinforce **credibility** by complementing the findings drawn from (non-replicable) interviews with other sources of data: public sources such as news reports, speeches, official documents, social media; and non-human sources (economic and financial data, historical data, biographical data). This is standard practice in most political studies undertaken in authoritarian and repressive contexts. For example, see Tamir Moustafa's *The Struggle for Constitutional Power: Law Politics and Economic Development in Egypt*, which makes complementary use of interviews, court rulings, and various primary and secondary historical records to dissect the power exercised by constitutional courts in the authoritarian context of Egypt. See also Sheena Chestnut Greiten's book *Dictators and Their Secret Police* which uses a combination of interview and archival evidence to explore the mechanisms driving the reliance on repression by authoritarian regimes in East Asia, as well as the biases and incentive structures that govern the production of political violence in that context.

3. Enhance **understanding** of political life in authoritarian and repressive contexts by embracing the value of immersive fieldwork. In this difficult and opaque environment, it is necessary to build relations of trust with local interlocutors in order to generate knowledge. This obliges an investment of time and psychological energy at great personal expense. For example, Diane Singerman's *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics and Networks in Urban Politics in Cairo* involved a multi-year commitment of living with families in a poor neighborhood in Cairo, and delivered incomparable understanding of how the poor navigate the "politics of the personal" in Egypt. Similarly, Sarah Parkinson's article, "Organizing Rebellion," draws on extensive immersive fieldwork in Lebanon to show how quotidian social networks catalyze women's mobilization into logistical support structures that sustain armed conflict.

4. Bolster **research ethics** by providing explicit incentives for scholars to protect the confidentiality (and hence safety) of their interlocutors in the field. For journal editors and university presses, this means, as one pair of scholars notes, that “the ethical default should be caution and confidentiality rather than “exemption” from mandatory disclosure. The discipline should not construct reward structures that fundamentally contradict confidentiality protections.”¹⁸ To that end, researchers should be asked to include in their research appendix a brief account of how they ensured the confidentiality of their data. This will provide explicit professional incentives to all researchers to protect the personal security of their contacts and not view anonymity as secondary to transparency.¹⁹

b. Research Practices to Avoid in Authoritarian and Repressive Contexts

Broad consensus has emerged in this research community around the view that publication/distribution of “raw data” (field notes and interview transcripts) must be avoided at all costs. No repository can be sufficiently trusted to guarantee the confidentiality of the data. Meticulous redaction of the data would be extremely burdensome, likely insufficient to guarantee the safety of interlocutors, and certain to render much of the data misleading due to its de-contextualization. The discipline must recognize that the validity of immersive research in authoritarian and repressive contexts is not best checked through “replication” via the publication of field notes and interview transcripts. Rather, the validity of this research is best achieved through the production of more research – independent accounts that confirm or contradict prior research. Placing prohibitive barriers to such research only disincentives inquiry into authoritarian and repressive contexts and shrinks the possibility of checking the validity of this work.²⁰

The cultivation of trust with local interlocutors is an essential precondition for researchers to produce credible and illuminating research on politics in authoritarian and repressive contexts. Similarly, trust must prevail among researchers in the larger discipline for ethical and illuminating research to be produced. As Sarah Parkinson and Elisabeth Wood said so well, “Accountability must rest on other principles... Not in (data) replicability.”²¹ Otherwise we are certain to foreclose certain avenues of research crucial to our understanding of contemporary politics in many parts of the world. We will be much the poorer for it as a discipline.

In conclusion: Transparency is a valued objective for the research community working in repressive and authoritarian contexts. But it is not the only objective. In repressive and authoritarian contexts, transparency in the sense of making data and sources publicly accessible comes with intolerable trade-offs since it compromises access to information, the generation of knowledge, and the safety of both interlocutors and

¹⁸ Parkinson and Wood 2015, 36.

¹⁹ Sarah Parkinson, post “[From Steering Committee] What is openness/transparency/explicitness in violence/contentious politics research?” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 16, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=100>; Aisha Ahmad, post “Transparency in Security Studies,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 7 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=47>; Milli Lake, post “Do no harm,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum 1: Stage One- Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 25, 2016 <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=79>.

²⁰ Isaacs 2014.

²¹ Parkinson and Wood 2015, 36.

researchers. If one of the major goals of transparency is “to make claims credible and evaluable to others” then the path to credibility and evaluation in authoritarian and repressive contexts lies less in enabling many scholars to pore over the same set of shared data and more in encouraging multiple scholars to generate independent accounts of a given phenomenon. Beyond this, it should be recognized that transparency is not only a matter of “making claims credible and evaluable to others.” It is a matter of delivering clarity and understanding of complex and inaccessible environments. In authoritarian and repressive contexts this requires intimate engagement with phenomena that will not be accessible to scholars exposed only to uncontextualized data. In short, there are different paths to and meanings of transparency. The research community must embrace this diversity and seek to balance them rather than endorse one path and meaning exclusively.

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Research in Violent or Post-Conflict Political Settings

Final Report of QTD Working Group IV.2

December 2018

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Introduction

Like other sensitive fields of study, research on political and criminal violence evokes specific concerns related to the issue of research openness in general and transparency in particular. Scholars who work on questions of violence face several interlinking challenges related to the accessibility of data, risks to both the researcher and the research subject, and the political implications of the research itself.

In order to reflect on these challenges, we solicited feedback from the broader research community regarding four major areas of interest. In this essay, we summarize the numerous insights we gleaned from the community feedback process, adding our own insights derived from firsthand work on the subject where relevant.

This process led us to identify four interrelated themes that we deal with in separate sections below. First, recognizing that all scholars do not agree upon the terms within which the debate unfolds, we describe and define the specific concerns articulated by scholars regarding research on violence (these characteristics are not uniform, nor are they unique only to this subject). Second, we unpack the meanings of openness and transparency in relation to conducting research on political and criminal violence. The third section explores the costs and risks of adopting various forms of openness and transparency as well as identifying the appropriateness and constraints of different approaches. The final section offers concrete examples and recommendations for improving openness in the sensitive context of violence research.

Our goal is to offer constructive approaches to increase research openness while remaining cognizant of the particular challenges researchers on violence confront. Transparency in violence research entails a trade-off between the intellectual benefits of openness and the potential costs for any individuals and communities involved. The goal of this essay is to present, disentangle, and assess these trade-offs. As the study of political and criminal violence, even in its qualitative forms, draws on diverse epistemological assumptions and methodological approaches, we do not attempt to offer a universal synthesis nor to adjudicate between different positions. Rather, we lay out the different views that animate the field and demonstrate the utility of a pluralistic approach to transparency and openness. We hope that an exploration of how some researchers have thought about and addressed these issues may assist other researchers as they make decisions about how to conduct their work, and thereby help the community at large advance the production of knowledge and understanding in this field.

I. Conceptual Introduction and Definitions

We embrace a broad emphasis on research openness as a general value shared by political scientists of various methodologies and epistemologies. We regard “research openness” as the idea that to the degree fair and feasible, information pertinent to the research process should be made public and accessible to others rather than kept private. The more that scholars disclose the information, assumptions, logic, and analytical techniques entailed in their research process, the more others will be able to understand their work, assess its quality and credibility, and ultimately learn from and build upon their contribution. Openness is thus a basic principle for the production and accumulation of knowledge, regardless of research method or epistemology.

Scholars can actualize and implement the general principle of research openness through a range of different practices and premises. We use the term “transparency” to refer to practices through which researchers can be open about their work. We posit that transparency carries a range of different possible meanings and implies a diversity of forms. Maximalist practices of data sharing are only one such form, and thus we explore a range of other practices that also allow researchers to show their evidence or thinking.

Throughout the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations, scholars discussed the ethical, practical and epistemological constraints of practicing transparency. These constraints are especially salient for research on political and criminal violence. In this essay, violence includes a range of phenomena and settings in which the use, threat, or legacy of physical coercion imbues upon struggles over power, resources, and meaning. The related topics on which there have emerged sizable literatures in political science include civil wars and intra-state conflict, rebellion and armed groups, post-conflict transitions, high-risk contentious politics, repression, organized crime, vigilantism, and civilian experiences of violence, among many other subjects.

While many topics of political life are sensitive, research about political and criminal violence carries particular sensitivities that bear upon every aspect of the research process. As an anonymous participant expressed it, “Political violence is unique in that it is often considered illegal and treasonous by governments, communities, or both, and those who commit it or support it are subject to scrutiny, harassment, imprisonment, or death.”¹ The same can be said of criminal violence, as Eduardo Moncada (Barnard College)² and Benjamin Lessing (University of Chicago)³ noted.

This transgressive characteristic of violence, in addition to the threat of physical or other harm that it inherently carries, generates special concerns and challenges for conceptualizing research openness in general and practicing data transparency in particular. Research in this field demands careful thinking about how to avert danger to research participants, to non-participants linked in any number of ways to the subject of research, and to researchers themselves. Pursuit of the goal of research openness must also take into account these constraints and the paramount obligation of doing no harm in a context in which the potential for harm is heightened and the consequences of unwittingly committing harm can be grave.

Throughout this essay, we combine both a conceptual discussion on research openness as well as some practical recommendations for the discipline at large. In moving from the conceptual to the practical, we realized that many of our recommendations, as well as those from commenters, assume that interview transcripts are the primary form of data concerned. This tendency to build practices from perhaps the dominant form of data associated with qualitative research is understandable. Nevertheless, we also want to highlight the limits inherent in such an approach.

Specifically, one scholar spoke about the “emotional” connection to his research and how transcripts cannot be detached from such personal connections. The scholar pointed out that “the

¹ Guest, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p762>.

² Eduardo Moncada, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, QTD Discussion Board, January 5, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p905>.

³ Benjamin Lessing, direct, written communication with the authors on December 11, 2017.

process of conducting interviews in person, establishing personal relationships with interviewees (sometimes over long periods of time), and the general emotional toll fieldwork takes on scholars makes it harder for us to part with the data to strangers...” In short, “because there is some personal intimacy in the data collection process itself, scholars who do interviews etc. may have higher emotional costs to sharing data.” This helps account for some of the hesitancy that some qualitative scholars felt about the DA-RT recommendations. Quantitative scholars certainly have emotional connections to their data as well, especially because collecting quantitative data often requires a lot of time in the field and working closely with locals. Still, qualitative scholars’ relationship to the “data” itself (though not necessarily with the place and its people) may be different.

Yet even while acknowledging this emotional connection, none of the commenters argued that this implies that interview transcripts are fully comprehensible only to the interviewer and it is thus meaningless to share them with others. Rather, qualitative scholars simply requested acknowledgement of the relationships built with their interview subjects that may shape their understanding of specific data. For qualitative scholars in particular, interviews may be part of a long conversation rather than a snapshot of a specific time and place, and hence require a deeper appreciation of context.

Qualitative scholars often suggest the importance of “meta-data” beyond the specific words uttered during the interview. Such meta-data may include the tone in which an interviewer responds (angry, sad, resigned, nervous, etc.), their physical behavior (sweating, relaxed, laughing, pacing, etc.), and/or the physical space in which the interview unfolds (calm, protected, unsafe, violent, etc.). A truly reflexive understanding of research openness would entail a greater engagement with how such meta-data shapes qualitative analysis. This would open up other reasons for the appropriateness of limiting requirements on data sharing beyond the risks to research subjects and researchers emphasized below. A full discussion about the handling of meta-data lies beyond the scope of this essay, which primarily focuses on written transcripts. Nevertheless, we acknowledge this issue as one meriting further consideration in the discipline’s ongoing discussions about the meaning and practice of transparency.

II. Forms of Transparency and Their Benefits

Researchers of political violence come from diverse epistemological and methodological traditions. Although this diversity often translates into different scholarly values, three emerged as broadly shared among qualitative scholars in the QTD violence forum: (i) the ethical treatment of research participants; (ii) the possibility that research can be evaluated by others in our research community; and (iii) the accumulation of knowledge. The specific ways in which scholars understand each of these values vary and, with them, their views about what research openness and transparency entails.

In this section, we discuss several forms of transparency that scholars of political violence recognized as important in the QTD violence forum. Some are related to the process of data collection and are closely linked to concerns about the ethical treatment of research participants (*transparency towards research subjects*). Other forms of transparency are related to sharing with the research community information about how evidence is collected and providing access to such evidence (*data transparency*). And finally, other forms of transparency entail sharing information about the ways in which evidence is assessed or analyzed to yield findings (*analytical*

transparency). Data and analytical transparency are critical to the evaluation of research and the accumulation of knowledge. In what follows, we discuss each of these types of transparency and explain why some scholars of violence consider it beneficial.

Transparency Towards Research Subjects

Commenters consistently stated that research integrity requires being transparent towards research subjects. Even though this form of transparency has not been prioritized in discussions of research transparency, it is clearly very significant to scholars of violence who participated in the forums.

Several commenters emphasized that given the risks often present in contexts where political violence is prevalent, they have an obligation to protect the identity of participants. They also believe that they need to fully disclose to their research subjects whether and how information about them or their testimonies will be shared with others.

The strong emphasis on protecting subjects distinctive among scholars of political and criminal violence could lead to greater trust between researchers and research subjects, improving the reliability of data. As research subjects are made aware of a strong and encompassing notion of transparency that protects their interests to the same degree as it demands accountability to the discipline, they are less likely to be concerned about whether their interests are at risk through participation. In this sense, taking seriously the concerns of qualitative researchers of violence can also improve quantitative work on the subject and potentially political science research writ large.

Some commenters emphasized that transparency towards research subjects also requires a full disclosure of funding sources. To these scholars, participants should be able to decide whether they want to participate in a project funded by specific agencies or institutions because such agencies may pursue research goals that participants disagree with. Some scholars noted that, in this sense, the intermingling of scholarship with security agendas is especially problematic for scholars of violence, and they expressed concern about fieldwork funded by agencies whose goal is to oppose (or even attack) specific local actors. Sarah Parkinson (Johns Hopkins University), for example, noted: “how can we claim ‘transparent’ research if people's research subjects aren't aware that they're being written into research as ‘the bad guys’ or even ‘targets’?” She also noted that:

My interlocutors (members of militant organizations) used to ask about my funding directly—they would not have worked with me if I had taken certain grants/fellowships. I felt that my honesty in this realm was part of their ability to give informed consent.⁴

These comments call for an important and difficult debate about whether and to what extent research participants should be informed about the normative agendas of the researchers as well as of their funding sources—a debate that is not only relevant for scholars of violence but for social scientists generally. Insofar as disclosing normative agendas can lead to collecting biased evidence, there is an important tradeoff between transparency towards research subjects and the possibility of advancing knowledge. As we explain in the final section, the field would benefit from a larger discussion about acknowledging funding sources as well as other potential conflicts of interest *regardless of the sources of funding*.

⁴ Sarah Parkinson, post “Re: Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=163#p761>.

Finally, reflecting on transparency opens new questions to our field. Some commenters debated, for example, whether we should share the outcome of our research with our research subjects, and whether we should give them the opportunity to engage with it. Abbey Steele said:

I think we owe [research subjects] the possibility to disagree with our inferences, or even with our representation of their story. In practice, of course, this is so difficult, and especially in the context of political violence, where retribution and harm are possible.⁵

Other scholars of violence wondered whether transparency towards research subjects might entail writing for more general audiences (and for local sources when possible) in order to share the outcome of our research. These are complex issues worth discussing as we reflect on the meaning and benefits of different forms of transparency.

Data Transparency – Data Sharing and Transparency About Data Collection Processes

For evidence-based research to be evaluated by others and to contribute to knowledge accumulation, scholars have to provide information about the process of data collection and the content of such data. Different epistemological and methodological positions among scholars of political violence lead to distinct views on what information should be shared, with whom, and how.

Regarding data sharing, several commenters stated that encouraging authors to provide more of the evidence at their disposal would allow readers to use additional information in order to judge the validity of the analysis. Others recognized that sharing evidence is important for replication, which they view as essential in social science.⁶ Overall, participants recognized advantages in increasing data sharing within the research community. As noted below, however, none of the scholars of violence who participated in the discussion expressed support for requiring qualitative scholars to share all transcripts of interviews or all details about participants due to the risks such information sharing could entail for research participants as well as for researchers themselves.

Turning to transparency about data collection processes, commenters discussed the importance of describing with great detail different aspects of the methods used to gather evidence. Such aspects include, among others, how we select and approach our research sites and research subjects, the context in which our interactions take place, and the specific ways in which we ask questions. This information can allow readers to take into consideration how the process of data collection can affect our conclusions, therefore contributing to the ability of others to evaluate our research as well as to the accumulation of knowledge.

This discussion spurred an interesting debate about the different criteria that scholars who embrace distinct methodological traditions rely on in order to assess data quality. Some scholars who use ethnographic methods noted that the quality of evidence is affected by the type of relationships a researcher creates with research subjects. Evaluating data quality can therefore require addressing positionality in the data collection process. For example, in a discussion with the authors of this report outside of the online forum, Sarah Parkinson noted:

⁵ Abbey Steele, post “Re: Question 4: On to whom transparency is owed,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 24, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=163#p697>.

⁶ Guest, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p762>.

A researcher who engages in forms of interpersonal transparency with their subjects (e.g. by discussing funding sources, by sharing article drafts, whatever) or on a personal level (e.g. by introducing friends and family to research subjects) may generate more valid and reliable data as a result of these relationships. This type of relationship has led some to challenge researchers' objectivity, but we rarely make the opposite argument, which is that without these relationships the data may well be invalid or extremely limited due to the conditions under which it was produced (transfer rather than exchange)... The implication would be that discussing those relationships and how they were generated is crucial in published work.⁷

This form of transparency would also be important for positivist scholars insofar as positionality affects data collection. If data quality is affected by the relationship between researcher and research subject, the problem is similar to that caused by interviewer-generated bias in survey research. For decades, survey researchers have been aware of the effect that the attributes and behavior of interviewers or enumerators—such as gender, ethnicity, age, social status, or conduct during the interview—can have on survey responses. Data transparency requires that both qualitative and quantitative scholars—positivists or interpretivists—are more thoughtful in articulating the potential implications of the ways in which sensitive data are gathered.

Other participants in the forums noted that as with transparency towards research subjects, data transparency requires disclosure of funding sources. When research subjects have particular beliefs about, or expectations from specific funding sources, or suspect that the researcher is somehow associated with military, police, or intelligence actors, the quality of data collection could be affected. For example, certain persons could be less likely to agree to participate, and those who do agree may share different information than they would otherwise do (in interviews and surveys) or behave differently (in experiments or sites where researchers engage in participant observation). Explaining to the research community how these forms of bias could affect data collection is another form of transparency that contributes to the evaluation of research.

Data transparency can also entail explaining how participants were protected and what ethical dilemmas were confronted. Commenters noted that these issues are relevant because they impact the risks for research subjects as well as the processes by which evidence is collected. As a consequence, this form of transparency is important for the three research values identified at the beginning of this section: the ethical treatment of subjects, the possibility that research can be evaluated by other researchers, and the accumulation of knowledge.

Analytical Transparency – Transparency About Data Analysis

Commenters in the forums also emphasized the importance of transparency about how researchers analyze their empirical evidence in order to yield findings—that is, analytical transparency. Given that scholars of violence embrace diverse epistemological positions, the debate centered on various approaches to transparency.

Some commentators believed researchers should make explicit the epistemological premises underlying their work. Scholars of political violence conduct descriptive, interpretive, and causal inference work, and each of these types of research may be evaluated with different criteria. The practice of clearly stating the epistemological assumptions and research goals of our work would allow other scholars to better understand and evaluate it.

⁷ Sarah Parkinson, Personal communication with the authors, August, 2017.

Clearly communicating to other researchers how we conduct our analyses and showing how we arrive at our conclusions is essential to transparency. When scholars rely on qualitative evidence in order to develop new theories, they should make this explicit and, as Paul Staniland (University of Chicago) suggests, “systematically [work] through how theories were built.”⁸ Providing such information about how theories are constructed, he argues, can be a “complementary solution for transparency.”

Sharing “failures” is another form of transparency that could contribute to knowledge accumulation. Staniland suggests that the field could have more open discussions about “theories that died in the face of evidence, cases that simply don't work, and research strategies that turned out to be inadequate, inefficient, or wildly unrealistic.” In particular, reporting whether there was contrary evidence is to several commenters a key form of transparency that can improve the strength of causal claims in qualitative work.⁹ These forms of transparency can better allow others to evaluate the quality of our research and compare our findings to those of other researchers, all of which contributes to the accumulation of knowledge.

Other scholars of violence do not deploy positivist reasoning and do not seek to establish causal relationships. For them, understandings of transparency should not simply be imported from natural science models but should account for concerns and approaches more associated with interpretive traditions. Of crucial importance is discussing the ways in which our own subjectivity and positionality may have influenced not only our interactions with participants, as discussed before, but also our analysis. Zachariah Mampilly (Vassar College) posed the question, “What would it look like if political scientists were expected to reflect on their own positionality as a form of transparency when conducting research?”¹⁰

In other disciplines like anthropology and sociology, a clear norm has emerged for scholars to frankly and critically discuss how their own race, class, gender, nationality, or other salient characteristics might affect both the data that they gather and their interpretation of that data. For example, in his award-winning book, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, sociologist Matthew Desmond productively reflects on how his positionality as a white, male scholar influenced his research in a poor black neighborhood in Milwaukee. A guest commentator emphasized the importance of considering how other positionalities may influence data collection and analysis. In this regard, it is important to note that researchers are not always in a position of power, such as when they interview powerful elites. This can impact the kind of evidence they obtain in interviews and the ways in which they analyze it.¹¹

Increasing transparency about a researcher’s own positionality vis-a-vis the people and topics that they study could provide the research community with additional tools to evaluate the

⁸ Paul Staniland, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p844>.

⁹ Paul Staniland, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 20, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p844>; Yael Zeira, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

¹⁰ Zachariah Mampilly, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 5, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p771>.

¹¹ Anonymous, direct, written communication with the authors on November 20, 2017.

quality of empirical evidence and analysis. It would also provide new tools for thinking about replicability and the accumulation of knowledge.

These debates merit more consideration than they have typically received in political science. A commitment to transparency can serve as the vehicle for opening them and encouraging thoughtful attention to them. This, we believe, could generate fruitful conversations in our discipline with potential benefits for deepening our understanding of both substantive and methodological issues.

III. Costs and Risks

Among the issues and concerns raised by contributors, perhaps none was more significant than the potential costs and risks of adopting transparency standards that fail to appreciate the specific context of research on political and criminal violence. These concerns are primarily ethical but would also entail intellectual costs: scholars of violence may choose to make contributions outside the discipline rather than breaching their ethical values, impoverishing the field overall.

Scholars raised concerns that they were being forced to make a tough choice regarding to whom openness is owed. Some posed it as a choice between transparency to the research community and an obligation to protect the research subject. Sherrill Stroschein (University College London), for example, suggests that there are at least two related types of harm that could result from the DA-RT requirements: “The first type involves harm to individual sources who provide interviews or materials to researchers, and the second the potential harm to researchers in terms of their continued ability to conduct research.”¹² Below we disaggregate these into three categories and discuss each in turn.

Costs and Risks to Research Subjects

The foremost ethical concern was the possibility of putting research participants in danger, even unintentionally. While the duty to protect human subjects is essential in any research setting, scholars suggested that investigating violence might entail heightened dangers. As one anonymous post expressed it, “Political violence is unique in that it is often considered illegal and treasonous by governments, communities, or both, and those who commit it or support it are subject to scrutiny, harassment, imprisonment or death.”¹³ The same applies to violence perpetrated by criminal organizations.

In this context, Abbey Steele (University of Amsterdam) voiced what emerged as a consensus among participants that “the risk of identifying informants is an obvious and serious one in settings of political violence” and researchers’ “priority has to be on protecting informants’ safety over transparency to the broader public.”¹⁴ Alan Kuperman (University of Texas) made abstract safety concerns concrete when he discussed how two of his informants were subsequently killed. He elaborated:

¹² Sherrill Stroschein, post, “Ethnic / religious tension settings,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 30, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=188#p730>.

¹³ Guest, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p762>.

¹⁴ Abbey Steele, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 24, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p698>.

Although I do not believe that my interviews, or publications based on those interviews, contributed to their demise, these deaths underscore the potential vulnerability of interviewees in research on political violence, and our responsibility not to gratuitously publicize information that could endanger them simply to satisfy questionable demands by certain methodologists...¹⁵

While anonymizing full transcripts to protect human subjects is often proffered as a solution to the above, several commentators explained why such an approach would continue to pose unacceptable risks for research subjects. Kuperman continued his thought above explaining the ethical difference between quoting a statement in the body of a text versus publishing the entire interview transcript:

It is possible that publishing a statement made on the record by an interviewee could provoke retaliation against the interviewee. I accept that responsibility because I believe it is justified by my research endeavor – whose ultimate goal is to facilitate reduction of violence against non-combatants. But I believe that publishing the remainder of interview transcripts or notes would gratuitously endanger interviewees since there is no comparable research justification. I am unwilling to accept that responsibility.¹⁶

Most discussion board posts echoed the sentiment that the potential costs of disclosure of full interview transcripts outweighed the expected benefits of such disclosure. To be clear, scholars never suggested that releasing full transcripts was impossible or never desirable. Under certain conditions, releasing anonymized full transcripts could certainly increase research openness without jeopardizing safety to anyone. For example, when the sample size is sufficiently large or the questions sufficiently narrow so as to make it possible to preserve anonymity, most would agree that greater transparency is a desirable quality.

Yet, in the context of violence research, the line between safety and risk is not always easily discernable and most contributors felt the potential for unintended risks necessitated both deference to the scholar (who presumably knows the most about the research context) and a norm that would err on the side of caution. Many suggested that the publication of full transcripts, even if anonymized, presents risks quite distinct from careful, select quoting of statements from interviews. Joseph Brown (University of Massachusetts, Boston) noted that, “The release of transcripts (even to an archive) undermines any promise of anonymity or confidentiality that we make to any individual.”¹⁷

Releasing full interview transcripts risks exposing not simply interviewees themselves but also other individuals mentioned in the interviews either directly or through implication. Ana Arjona (Northwestern University), for example, added that anonymity often “does not only require keeping names and attributes of informants confidential but even the names of neighborhoods and

¹⁵ Alan Kuperman, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p863>.

¹⁶ Alan Kuperman, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 26, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p863>.

¹⁷ Joseph Brown, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 2, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p894>.

villages, as the details we have to give in order to present our evidence can be enough for a local to identify the identity of key players and/or informants.”¹⁸ For Lessing, “even the slang or expressions an interviewee uses can be a giveaway.”¹⁹

Several participants on the discussion board referenced a dramatic illustration of these unforeseen harms: Boston College’s Belfast Project.²⁰ With the goal of creating an oral history archive, Boston College-commissioned researchers recorded lengthy interviews with dozens of individuals active during the Northern Ireland Troubles. The understanding was that these testimonials would not be released without the permission of the interviewees or until after their deaths. The 2010 publication of a book based on these interviews alerted the Police Service of Northern Ireland to the project leading them to demand full interviews relevant to their criminal investigations. Acting under the terms of a mutual legal assistance treaty with the United Kingdom, the United States Department of Justice issued subpoenas to Boston College. After lengthy legal battles, the college surrendered the interview tapes.

Brown elaborated on the multiple negative consequences of this “fiasco” and its significance for transparency in qualitative research on violence:

The subpoena of interview materials (full transcripts and audio tapes) led to the arrest of at least two ex-conflict participants, neither of whom had any involvement in the interviews -- or any opportunity to offer “consent” to the release of materials implicating them in murders. Northern Ireland residents will generally attest to the destabilizing impact of the Boston College fiasco on the peace process, since one of the arrestees (Gerry Adams) is himself a major figure in the peace deal of 1998...The [U.S] Supreme Court ruled that we, as academic researchers, have no immunity to resist subpoena of interview materials -- even if the requests are being made at the request of foreign governments, for their own purposes...Making transcripts available exposes those we interview AND any other individuals identified in our interviews (even elites). I believe that these non-interviewed individuals should also be part of our ethics concerns.²¹

Here it is important to note that the investigators went beyond simply examining scrubbed research transcripts to demanding researchers turn over the unedited interview tapes themselves. In other words, this is not an illustration of transparency rules going awry. But there is a connection between the two, as releasing full transcripts—even if scrubbed—provides potential investigators with additional information upon which to request access to academic research. Put simply, it is easier to assess the risks of sharing carefully curated selections around narrow topics and hence less likely to trigger investigator interest than publishing lengthy full transcripts.

A guest commentator who further elaborated on the Boston College’s Belfast project argued that “the problem was less that the data wasn’t sufficiently protected, but that they sought out such sensitive data to begin with.” For him, “just like politicians are told, ‘assume you are

¹⁸ Ana Arjona, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December, 1, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p749>.

¹⁹ Benjamin Lessing, direct, written communication with the authors on December 11, 2017.

²⁰ On this issue, one discussion participant recommended: Beth McMurtrie, “Secrets From Belfast,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 26, 2014. <http://www.chronicle.com/interactives/belfast>.

²¹ Joseph Brown, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 2, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p894>.

never off the record,’ we should tell ourselves something similar: ‘assume your data is never protected.’”²² In a similar vein, Lessing noted that these transcripts can be dangerous in the future in ways we do not anticipate. For example, laws that currently protect subjects in the home country (or the researcher’s country) may be revoked, and political actors may gain or lose power.²³ The increased ease of access to transcripts in repositories makes such risks even more unforeseeable.

A final concern is that research subjects may discover full transcripts online, introducing or exacerbating conflict in communities that we write about. While scholars may have once assumed that a strict barrier exists between research subjects and the final published output of a research project, recent technological advances have destabilized the information firewall. Instead, even marginalized communities are increasingly able to access online resources, including research repositories that may discuss in intimate detail their beliefs as well as those of their rivals. Unintentionally, this may introduce conflict as individuals discover the unspoken beliefs and values of other community members.

Costs and Risks to Researchers

In addition to threats to research subjects, participants on the discussion board articulated concerns that transparency demands could present undue risks for researchers themselves. For example, one commenter explained how those who research violence in the Middle East need to post anonymously because even knowledge that they visited one country—much less interacted with people connected to political violence there—might result in being denied entry into another country. The guest added that just as discussing violence puts research subjects at greater risk, researching political violence exposes scholars to risks “beyond what scholars face in most other areas.”²⁴ Of course, scholars of violence are aware of these risks and choose to pursue this research for a variety of personal and professional reasons. But the point remains that conducting research into political and criminal violence, as with other sensitive topics, is demonstrably more dangerous than many other topics that capture the attention of social scientists.²⁵

Numerous scholars expressed concern that these dangers, while perhaps always a part of research on violence, are substantially heightened by across-the-board demands for disclosing raw qualitative data. As Scott Straus (University of Wisconsin-Madison) wrote, “I am concerned that the proposed transparency rules will remove the context sensitivity that many of us develop in favor of blanket rules. That in turn might create new, unforeseen risks that could jeopardize people’s safety, trigger legal action, or curtail future research access.”²⁶

²² Anonymous, direct, written communication with the authors on November 20, 2017.

²³ Benjamin Lessing, direct, written communication with the authors on Dec 11, 2017.

²⁴ Guest, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p762>.

²⁵ We note with sadness the deaths of political scientists Michael Bhatia and Nicole Suveges who were killed during separate incidents while conducting research on political violence in Afghanistan while embedded with the United States Army. More recently, in 2016, Giulio Regeni, a Ph.D. Student at the University of Cambridge, was killed while conducting research in Egypt. In 2018, Matthew Hedges, a Ph.D. Student at Durham University, was imprisoned and then sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of spying, before an international campaign helped result in his being pardoned. Many others have faced physical violence, mental trauma, and legal troubles while conducting research in difficult locales.

²⁶ Scott Straus, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 3, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p901>.

Though Straus does not raise it explicitly, a division between two distinct epistemological conceptions of “field research” emerged throughout the discussion. In one, generally associated with qualitative scholars operating in a positivist vein, fieldwork is often deployed to confirm or disprove an existing hypothesis and does not necessarily require an extensive engagement with local contexts (though many such scholars do choose to build close ties, of course). In the other, often associated with interpretive or ethnographic approaches, the purpose of research—including the research question itself—may not be discernable without an extended engagement with the society in question. While we believe both epistemological positions are valid, encouraging openness may require crafting distinct approaches that appreciate the differences between the two.

Relatedly, a scholar who builds their career through multiple visits to the same research location may be putting their access at risk if the release of full transcripts is required, as it is impossible to foresee how changing social and political landscapes may shape the reception of such materials at different times. It may also pose risks for those who hope to conduct secondary analyses on such transcripts without first developing the deep contextual knowledge necessary to do so, causing them to fail to appreciate the shifting political landscape and take risks that are no longer acceptable in a different time period. In addition, asking scholars who continuously visit a single research locale to share their interview transcripts immediately may hinder their capacity to glean new insights for future projects by revisiting transcripts from prior visits.

Finally, junior researchers expressed concern about the costs that some forms of transparency may impose on those in an early phase of their career. Requiring qualitative scholars to reveal all their data before it is published, for example, would be even more costly for a junior scholar than for a senior scholar who is already established in the field.²⁷ Likewise, if these new demands are not retroactive—for example applying to previously published books—then junior scholars would be losing their exclusive access to data when publishing their work, whereas senior scholars would be able to benefit from new data collection while retaining exclusive access to their own data. In addition, senior scholars likely have greater resources, such as budgets with which to hire research assistants, with which to take advantage of that new data. In exploring the costs and risks of transparency demands for researchers, therefore, it is important to consider how these costs affect different research in different ways and keep in mind the implications of those differences for fairness in the profession.

Costs and Risks to Research

Apart from costs and risks for researchers and research participants is the cost for research itself. An anonymous commenter spoke for many in describing the chilling effect that demands for data transparency would have on her/his work:

I cannot (and would not) do the work I do if I had to always produce the names or full transcripts of my interviews for public consumption. This would put my interviewees and myself at significant risk (not to mention that IRBs would not approve it and individuals often would not talk to me).²⁸

²⁷ Anonymous, direct, written communication with the authors on November 20, 2017.

²⁸ Guest, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, Dec 2, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p762>.

Lise Howard (Georgetown University) added that, were these transparency demands known to her research informants—sometimes elites to whom she has returned to repeatedly over the course of years—they would refuse continued conversations:

If (*research subjects*) thought that I might make all of our conversations public—even anonymously—they would probably no longer talk to me. The breach of trust would be broken. The quest for transparency, even if not lives, would kill the research.²⁹

Yael Zeira (University of Mississippi) agreed, framing the issue as a matter of trust:

When I have conducted interviews in the past, I discussed with my interviewees (as per my IRB) that I would use their interviews to draw conclusions about my research question and possibly quote parts of those interviews but I would not publish the interviews themselves. If I had instead informed interviewees that I would be making anonymized versions of their interviews public, I wonder if some of my interviewees would have declined to be interviewed or would have self-censored their responses ... It can be difficult to gain interviewees' trust in a setting where, if the information shared in the interview were to be exposed, they would face real and significant risks (e.g. arrest, retaliation, etc.). Requiring researchers to make available anonymous versions of interviews requires another layer of trust from respondents and, I worry, could mean that researchers are less able to conduct high quality research on the most important and difficult research questions.³⁰

These concerns echo those raised in Section I about transparency with regard to the potential connections between scholarship on violence and security agencies. The sheer scale of grant money flowing from sources like the U.S. Department of Defense's Minerva Research Initiative to violence researchers as well as grants from the intelligence and law enforcement communities could systematically taint data collection efforts if "human subjects" share different information, not just in interviews but also through answering surveys in a different way. These financial flows could also impact other aspects of data collection, such as who agrees to cooperate, which places are viable for data collection, and so on. This concern is relevant for both qualitative and quantitative scholars and the future of research on criminal and political violence more broadly.

Just as research subjects may be wary of sharing information with researchers who view them as being on the wrong side of a conflict, they are unlikely to share information with those who cannot or will not (due to professional guidelines that govern publishing) fully guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. Should political science scholarship on conflict and violence gain a reputation for being connected to either kind of practice—political agendas or inadequate protection of human subjects—it could greatly inhibit our ability to do meaningful field research. This could have enormously detrimental effects on the discipline as a whole.

Beyond costs and risks to researchers, research subjects, and research, contributors raised concerns about risks to the discipline at large. Straus commented that if harm to research subjects

²⁹ Lise Howard, post "Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 5, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p904>.

³⁰ Yael Zeira, post "Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 01, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

“were even a remote possibility, I would avoid publishing in a venue that would require that I release transcripts or otherwise provide raw data that could have negative, unforeseen outcomes.”³¹ He suspected others would do the same, which would ultimately reduce the ability of political science as a discipline to meaningfully address the subject of political and criminal violence.

IV. Evaluation and Recommendations for Violence Research in Practice

Given the complex factors outlined thus far, how can qualitative scholars pursue research transparency? Scholars researching violence answer this question in varied ways; indeed, if there is one consensus in the field, it is that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for balancing the pursuit of research openness on the one hand and the serious ethical and practical constraints on transparency on the other. Based on our assessment of the field, we offer the following points that we believe represent something akin to basic principles on which there appears to be broad agreement. We offer these recommendations to violence researchers with the aim of thinking with them about how our field can improve transparency. No less, we pitch our recommendations toward the discipline of political science at large in order to enrich its understanding of the concerns and conditions facing violence research in the hope that others will take them into account in their advocacy of transparency.

General Principles

Research communities should be “open” to multiple conceptualizations and forms of openness.

The sections above outline many of the diverse ways that researchers can be open about what they have found and how they arrived at those findings that do not require complete disclosure of raw data itself. We believe it is neither feasible nor desirable simply to ask qualitative scholars of violence to post all of their interviews and notes online. Nor is it necessary for them to do so in order to advance the broader and more fundamental goals sought by transparency advocates, such as allowing for peer evaluation and, more generally, enhancing the quality and credibility of research.

To advance the shared value of research openness, scholars with different approaches to the value of transparency should work together to understand each other’s concerns and develop collaborative solutions that can help violence researchers be more open without putting them or their subjects at risk. If journal editors and other disciplinary gatekeepers insist upon maximalist notions of full data disclosure, they risk eliminating qualitative work on political and criminal violence from wider publication. On the flipside, if qualitative researchers feel so excluded by maximalist notions of transparency that they rebuff the principle of transparency altogether, they miss important opportunities to increase the quality of their work and the field at large. We believe that the best path for the discipline is to find a middle ground. All qualitative researchers can be encouraged to do what they can to achieve research openness. Transparency advocates, in turn, can be encouraged to be more sensitive to the imperatives that keep qualitative researchers of violence from replicating practices largely developed for quantitative work.

³¹ Scott Straus, post “Re: Question 2: On the specificity of political violence research,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, January 3, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=165#p901>.

Research Subject Transparency

Transparency toward research subjects is no less important than transparency toward other scholars.

Much of the discussion about data transparency in political science assumes that the audience of transparency is other scholars and its goal is promoting the replicability of research and the credibility of findings. Many qualitative scholars of conflict insist that transparency toward research subjects themselves is at least as important. The requirement of informed consent for interviews and other participation is a kind of transparency, insofar as it entails full disclosure of how one will handle an informant's information before a researcher can ask for agreement to participate. Beyond insisting upon informed consent, researchers can be more thorough when disclosing to human subjects their funding source(s). Sources of funding may affect the nature of a particular research project, and research subjects have a right to know the parties and interests that stand behind a project before they consent to participate. Such disclosure might take a variety of forms. Many IRBs already require this kind of disclosure. In complying with this stipulation, researchers ought to think about it not only as a matter of the protection of human subjects, but also as an issue of transparency.

Data Transparency

Qualitative researchers can explore options for sharing interview transcripts “scrubbed” of identifying information, but the benefits of doing so must be weighed against the costs and risks it entails.

While we emphasize the importance of deepening transparency about data analysis and not simply data, we also recognize the disciplinary call for greater sharing of evidence itself. Given that full disclosure of raw data is often impossible, researchers can be encouraged instead to think about what selections of data they might be able to share without incurring risks.

The discussion board revealed a lively exchange about how this might be achieved in practice, offering both creativity in brainstorming data-sharing techniques and awareness that most techniques carry serious drawbacks. For example, Zeira suggested that scholars of violence might consider creating “de-identified versions of ... interviews,” deleting all information that could be an identifier, including information on individuals and specific places like villages or neighborhoods.³²

Nevertheless, scrubbing transcripts might be an inordinately burdensome task. Zeira acknowledged this directly, suggesting that such an approach might involve high costs that could “have a chilling effect on our research.”³³ Lessing added that producing de-identified versions of interviews is often not only burdensome, but also risky because researchers are unlikely to perceive “all the minute ways a transcript gives away the subjects’ identity.”³⁴

We agree. If researchers are expected to publish scrubbed transcripts simultaneously with their research articles that use those transcripts, publication would be delayed considerably. It is

³² Yael Zeira, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 01, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

³³ Yael Zeira, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 01, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

³⁴ Benjamin Lessing, direct, written communication with the authors on Dec 11, 2017.

not in anyone's interest to lengthen the already-long time between data collection and publication of findings, especially when those findings relate to pressing issues of violence and can contribute to policies ameliorating its destructive consequences.

Moreover, we fear that preparing and publishing de-identified interviews imposes a burden on qualitative scholars that is out-of-balance with that adopted by our quantitative colleagues. There is no doubt that creating a dataset is highly labor-intensive. However, transcript sharing might impose costs upon future research in a way that quantitative data sharing does not. When quantitative scholars share the data necessary to replicate their analyses, it typically entails only the fraction of a large dataset related to the specific tests presented in their publication. It does not entail disclosure of the entire dataset. By contrast, a qualitative scholars' sharing of a complete transcript is more akin to sharing data in its entirety. Expectations that citing from a single interview be accompanied with disclosure of the entire interview is thus extremely prejudicial against the researchers' abilities to extract full analytical and theoretical value of the data that they collected before making that data available for others.

Again, we do not present these points to get qualitative scholars "off the hook" of conforming with norms of openness. Rather, we encourage disciplinary gatekeepers to consider how seemingly neutral and universal transparency expectations might affect quantitative and qualitative researchers differently and disproportionately.

In light of these issues, Zeira suggested that we consider other strategies that are less time consuming than sharing "scrubbed" excerpts. For example, researchers could make the whole response to a question available or provide longer excerpts from the interviews that are being quoted. To Zeira, "These approaches could help give readers more insight into the wider context of the interview and the scholar's interpretation of the interview material without compromising respondents' security or having a chilling effect on research."³⁵

While there are surely situations in which even excerpts could carry human subjects' protection concerns, they are less risky and less onerous to share than full transcripts. Carefully reviewing a respondent's entire interview and scrubbing any potentially identifying information might be a Herculean undertaking for a full set of transcripts. However, it would be much more manageable to do this for select excerpts speaking to key points in the text. In turn, the intellectual benefits of providing excerpts from our interviews to support or illustrate arguments might be considerable.

An anonymous commentator also suggested that the field could consider more innovative ideas that reduce the costs and burdens to scholars while improving transparency.³⁶ Transparency, he argues, might not necessarily involve a scholar revealing his or her data to the *entire community*." Alternatively, he proposes a system whereby researchers share transcripts exclusively with a trusted board of scholars who are knowledgeable about the case and who are "well-respected for their research ethics." The commenter recognized the possible negative ramifications of such a system, such as its risk in creating cliques or reinforcing disadvantageous power structures in the discipline. Beyond this, it entails other difficulties, including how to select such a board and who has the authority to decide whom is trustworthy. Nevertheless, this idea

³⁵ Yael Zeira, post "Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 01, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

³⁶ Anonymous, direct, written communication with the authors on November 20, 2017.

illustrates that there are many creative ways to improve transparency beyond simply making transcripts available on the Internet.

In closing our recommendations on data transparency, we emphasize two points. First, we believe the field should approach qualitative data sharing as a norm, not a requirement, no less a blanket requirement. Making publication of qualitative research contingent upon disclosure of data sources has the potential to do damage to the production of knowledge about political and criminal violence that far outstrips its benefit. Even as a norm, encouragement of data sharing is not equally appropriate for all research on political violence. To the degree that research communities endorse this norm, therefore, we urge that they do so with flexibility, attention to context, and appreciation for researchers' own understandings of the complexities that it entails for their particular cases.

Second, and most importantly, the duty to protect human subjects must always remain paramount. We are concerned that the larger the body of interview data that researchers are expected to share publicly, the more difficult it will be for them to prepare that data in a way that truly guarantees no harm to research subjects. De-identifying data is costly in terms of researchers' time and resources; doing a poor job of de-identifying data because the task is so large or time is too tight, however, can put people's lives in danger. On this principle, we stand firm: avoiding costs to those who live in settings of political or criminal violence is of far greater importance than minimizing costs or maximizing replicability.

Analytical Transparency

Researchers can pursue openness by increasing their transparency about research decisions and analytical processes.

Disclosure of data, especially that related to human subjects in violent settings, can carry grave costs. This fact causes dilemmas for transparency only when it is narrowly reduced to complete data-sharing. Luckily, transparency takes many forms, and not all improvements and innovations cause risk.

We believe that violence researchers can devote more serious and systematic consideration to widening the margin for transparency practices in those realms of the research process that do not entail risks. As developed more precisely below, without disclosing more raw data, we could offer more openness than customary regarding the processes, premises, and logics entailed in the analysis of our data. Without identifying sources, we could be more explicit about our relationships with those sources and the possible biases produced by using those sources rather than others. Without relaying testimonies, we can discuss our criteria for deciding which testimonies to consider or weight more or less heavily.

In general, we could articulate better why we make the decisions that we do in evaluating and interpreting evidence as well as the beliefs and assumptions that underlie those decisions. We can discuss how our own positionality might affect different aspects of the conduct of research. Relatedly, we can be more transparent about funding sources and how those sources might affect the nature of a particular research project. Many journals in the natural sciences require disclosure of such potential conflict of interests in all publications; work in the social sciences should consider making this a standard practice as well.

To enhance knowledge and guard against concerns of sharing only “cherry-picked” evidence, researchers should be encouraged to share elements of the research process that are inconsistent with their arguments.

One of the appeals of making available “scrubbed” transcripts or interview excerpts is that it promotes a main goal of data-sharing: to allow others to gauge the degree to which scholars “cherry pick,” or present only that evidence consistent with their hypotheses, thereby discouraging biased inference. Still, we worry that even sharing larger parts of interview transcripts might not completely resolve the problem of “cherry-picking.” When we quote excerpts from interviews we “show” our evidence, yet we do not necessarily give readers a sense of how representative that quote is or the criteria we employed in trusting interviewees or weighing their testimony relative to those of others. A similar problem of bias exists when quantitative scholars pick one proxy rather than another in statistical analysis.

Acknowledging the seriousness of this problem, we encourage researchers to be creative in thinking of ways to increase transparency and counter bias by directly and actively presenting information that does not support their hypotheses—and in fact, might even contradict it. In this spirit, we endorse Staniland’s above-cited intervention, in which he calls for increased “theory-building transparency” in openly disclosing hypotheses, cases, or other aspects of a research project that failed or otherwise did not work as expected. Lessing invokes Stathis Kalyvas in suggesting that explicit discussion of “theoretic outliers,” or cases that were not predicted by one’s theory, can also improve analytic transparency in the field. Along similar lines, researchers can discuss how their ethnographic projects transformed in the field in addition to other ideas, concepts, and approaches that changed throughout the course of research.

Offering another concrete application of this principle, Zeira proposed that scholars report the number of interviews that were consistent or inconsistent with the proposed hypothesis and provide quotes (or excerpts) from both. Zeira notes that, “Like efforts to encourage quantitative studies with null results (e.g. as in the recent issue of the journal *Comparative Political Studies* using results-blind review),³⁷ such a standard could help to mitigate publication bias that exists in qualitative as well as quantitative studies.”³⁸

Along similar lines, scholars can improve transparency by reporting how they are coding whether an interview is consistent or inconsistent with the proposed hypothesis. At the same time, researchers do not necessarily weigh all interviews equally in their analyses. Conducting repeated interviews of the same subject often leads to higher-quality evidence. In addition, deep contextual knowledge allows scholars to identify reasons why certain interviewees may be more likely to misrepresent an event or provide false information. In order to allow scholars to take into consideration the reliability, validity, and representativeness of different interviews, they could note which interviews they weighed in specific ways and why. Doing so for qualitative work is analogous to a quantitative researcher discussing why they decided to use one proxy variable over another.

³⁷ Vol 49, Issue 13 of *Comparative Political Studies*, published in 2016.

³⁸ Yael Zeira, post “Re: Question 3: On innovation and examples,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, December 01, 2016, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=164#p752>.

Putting Principles into Practice

Researchers should learn from and build upon the plethora of exemplary models of openness already in existing literature.

In weighing competing imperatives and making difficult research choices, scholars of political violence and conflict fortunately do not have to reinvent the wheel. Published works offer a range of thoughtful ways of pursuing openness and transparency. While it is impossible to give due consideration to all worthy works, below is a sample of valuable examples with the goal of showcasing the variety of strategies available for current and future work.

- 1) Romain Malejacq and Dipali Mukhopadhyay, “The ‘Tribal Politics’ of Field Research: A Reflection on Power and Partiality in 21st-Century Warzones,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (4) (December 2016): 1011-1028.

A reflection on conducting fieldwork in violent political contexts. The scholars reject the possibility of “impartial” field research and instead call for greater attention and nuance regarding researcher subjectivity and positionality.

- 2) Kristen Renwick Monroe, *The Hand of Compassion: Portraits of Moral Choice during the Holocaust*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Analysis of interviews with five ordinary people who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, probing why people undertake mortal risk to help others. In two appendices, the author offers a lengthy discussion about both narrative analysis as a method and background on how she conducted it for this work.

- 3) Program on Middle East Political Science Studies, *The Ethics and Research in the Middle East*, POMEPS Studies No. 8 (2 July 2014), http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/POMEPS_Studies_8_Ethics.pdf.

A collection of ten short essays by scholars of Middle East politics on a range of issues related to research openness, many of which relate to contexts of political conflict or risky and contentious politics.

- 4) Elisabeth Jean Wood, “The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones,” *Qualitative Sociology* 29 (2006): 307-341.

One of several important contributions to a special issue on political ethnography. The author pulls upon her extensive research to reflect on such issues as the imperative to “do no harm,” the concept and practice of fully informed consent, data anonymity and confidentiality, dissemination of research findings, and questions related to researchers’ own role, limitations, self-representation, and emotional challenges.

Conclusion

In writing this report, we came to recognize that transparency means different things not only to different scholars but also to any specific individual, depending on the role that he or she is occupying at a given time. How one engages or even perceives the debate about research openness is shaped by whether one is writing, reviewing or editing, the three essential functions for any scholarly community to exist. Our goal has been to reflect the richness of this debate while also providing substantive recommendations for journal and press editors regarding how to think about

research openness in relation to qualitative data. Our decision to advocate for a middle ground in the peer review process should be understood not as a refutation of any specific position, but rather as our attempt to find a pragmatic resolution toward a challenge that threatens to divide our scholarly community.

Rather than attempt to summarize our essay in this conclusion, we would like to raise two related issues that the prior discussion was not able to address: transparency's relationship to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and its role in the peer review process.

IRB was established to oversee biomedical research and ensure that individual projects meet standards for ethical behavior with regard to the protection of human subjects. Over time, its mandate has grown to include social scientific research. Most political scientists based at U.S. universities must at least consult with their institutional IRB before engaging in a scholarly project that involves gathering information from persons in some ways. While most social scientists may only require cursory engagement with the IRB board, scholars who work on political and criminal violence (among other sensitive topics) have particular ethical concerns related to data collection, as detailed above. This raises the possibility that standards of research openness adopted by the discipline at large may conflict with the ethical concerns or standards of the IRB of the particular institution at which a researcher is based (or the government of the country in which the researcher resides or conducts research). As the discipline moves forward in its thinking about transparency demands, it will have to consider how to address such potential conflicts.

Going further, Peri Schwartz-Shea (University of Utah), raised another concern. As IRB boards are comprised of scholars drawn from across departments, they often lack the "resources for addressing the sorts of complex ethical problems faced by political scientists."³⁹ She worries that this can discourage scholars from focusing on certain contentious topics that are deemed unacceptable by groups incapable of appreciating the complex research contexts in which such scholarship unfolds. That risk becomes even greater when the potentially dampening effect of IRBs on research is combined with disciplinary demands to meet transparency standards that are not always sensitive to the concerns of scholars of violence.

The peer review process similarly raises issues that we did not address directly, but deserve greater consideration. Any introduction of new standards inevitably raises the question: what were the limitations of the old standards and how does the new approach overcome them? Schwartz-Shea provided a useful contrast between peer review and data-sharing, as systems of public scrutiny of research, writing, "The major advantage of peer review is that it involves the application of quality assessment standards by expert readers in a project-centered manner. DA-RT and JETS encourage researchers and, especially, graduate students to aspire to general, abstract standards if they want to escape the exemptions stigma and the possibility that their work cannot even arrive at the peer review stage."⁴⁰ In other words, implicit in the adoption of general transparency standards for all submissions is the notion that this is an improvement upon the prior reliance on the judgment of peer reviewers as a standard for research openness and community assessment of research. Should general transparency standards continue to go forth, what should be the role of peer reviewers in assessing openness? Relatedly, what are the consequences of

³⁹ Peri Schwartz-Shea, post "Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group IV.2," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 15, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=216#p997>.

⁴⁰ Peri Schwartz-Shea, post "Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group IV.2," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.2: Settings of political violence, November 15, 2017, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=216#p997>.

imposing one standardized expectation on all researchers, as opposed to more individualized assessments for which the peer review system has heretofore allowed?

A full treatment of these and other questions are outside the bounds of this essay. Research openness is a complex and continually evolving debate and requires a sustained engagement by as many members of the research community as possible. Our hope is to offer a preliminary snapshot of the thinking of a cross-section of scholars with the goal of fostering continued conversation in the years ahead. What is clear is that DA-RT has stimulated a wide-ranging discussion in the field with the potential to improve the research practices of quantitative and qualitative scholars alike and, hopefully, enrich the discipline of Political Science more broadly.

Research on Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations

Final Report of QTD Working Group IV.3

December 2018

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I. Conceptual Introduction and Definitions:

Marginalization and vulnerability are not fixed or given categories in social science research, and in political science research in particular. In this section, we indicate that relying on university Institutional Review Board (IRB) definitions of these terms is insufficient, as they do not account for the range of research participants that political scientists may encounter, and they are often not familiar with the context in which political science research is conducted. Therefore, we do not posit a universal or all-encompassing definition of vulnerability and marginalization; instead, we suggest that these terms vary depending on the context of each study.

In the United States, University IRBs generally define vulnerable and marginalized populations as those listed in the Code of Federal regulations (Title 45, Code 46). Members of these populations generally include pregnant women, human fetuses and neonates, children, cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, students and employees, persons with HIV/AIDS, and educationally disadvantaged individuals. While members of these populations may indeed participate in political science research, the variety of persons who may fall within the category “vulnerable and marginalized populations” is far broader than IRBs often suggest for the following reasons.

First, when studying politics, there are many other groups and individuals that could be rendered vulnerable in the course of the research. For example, informants or political activists living under authoritarian regimes would not fit any of the above definitions of ‘vulnerable subjects’ but could face significant danger if any compromising information about their identities were published. Even in liberal democracies, political activists who challenge authorities or break the law as part of their practice may also face legal and other dangers. Moreover, subjects may also be vulnerable and marginalized because of their position in the social and political hierarchy, and may face a range of possible reprisals even for perfectly legal actions. Being attentive to the ways in which vulnerability and marginalization are constituted vis-à-vis specific research questions is crucial in order to mitigate risk.

Second, while IRB-defined (and other) identity groups face specific forms of vulnerability relevant to social science research, their particular forms of vulnerability and marginalization are contingent on the research context and objectives. The specific ways in which populations are rendered vulnerable also shifts with changing political climates or changes to the research. For example, pregnant women are unlikely to be considered vulnerable for the purposes of much political science research, whereas adult males might be targets of political surveillance and monitoring.

Given this more fluid and context-dependent understanding of vulnerability and marginalization, scholars working with marginalized and vulnerable populations have largely defined research transparency in ways that are fairly consistent with the JETS statement. Drawing from the qualitative transparency deliberations, there is broad consensus that:

"Transparency requires making visible both the empirical foundation and the logic of inquiry of research" (<http://www.dartstatement.org/2014-journal-editors-statement-jets>).

The subsequent section delineates precisely what researchers mean by research transparency as it pertains to this broad population. The data used to compile this report draws from a broad range of scholars who participated in multiple stages of the qualitative transparency deliberations. These

include reflections from scholars working across a broad range of subfields and epistemological traditions.

II. Forms of Transparency and their Benefits:

Research transparency is crucial for furthering scholarly knowledge, and in this section, we elaborate three different forms of transparency (and their benefits) that are relevant to work with vulnerable and marginalized populations: transparency about the research process (including data analysis); transparency about research ethics and researcher positionality; and transparency with regard to sharing primary source data.

Transparency about the research process and data analysis

The most frequently referenced form of transparency that emerged from the qualitative transparency deliberations was transparency regarding the **research process**: namely, providing clear and extensive details about the project's conceptualization, implementation and data analysis to readers (including journal, book and other editors, reviewers, and any readers of published work). Specifically, this means explaining the original project design (what the researcher planned to do, and why) and the details about "how the research actually unfolded."¹ This explanation should describe the initial research plans and also provide an "exhaustive account of what we [actually] did, how we made our choices, and justify those choices within a broader research literature."² Here this account would clarify how data was *actually* collected and detail the choices made to this end, including any changes made during the research process. Furthermore, given the risks that marginalized and vulnerable populations may face when participating in research (detailed in subsequent sections), the researcher should also discuss any "ethical dilemmas, 'mistakes,' or missteps and surprises that the actual process entail [ed]"³.

In addition to detailing the plans for data collection and how these plans actually unfolded, it is important for researchers to also explain how their evidence/data/observations about marginalized and vulnerable populations were assessed/analyzed to yield findings. Essentially, researchers must explain how they came to their conclusions.⁴ For example, imagine a researcher is conducting interview to learn how residents of halfway houses in the US participated in government-sponsored job training programs. Here the researcher may describe, for example, whether and how she coded interview transcripts with half-way house residents in a particular way. To illustrate: was she looking for how frequently these interviewees referenced a certain government program for formerly incarcerated people? Or was she looking for how they described the programs' impact on their lives? Or some combination of both? This description would clarify to the reader the goals of the research and how the researcher used the data (as it relates to the researcher's question). Describing the analytic process would show the reader that the researcher is not simply "cherry picking" from the data that is not publicly accessible to other scholars.

¹ Lee Ann Fujii, post "Re: Question 2: Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, November 19, 2016 10:14 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p679>.

² Ricky J. Price, post "Re: Question 2: Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, November 19, 2016 10:14 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p870>.

³ Lee Ann Fujii, post "Re: Question 2: Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, November 19, 2016 10:14 am, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p679>.

⁴ Tanya Schwarz, post "Re: Question 2: Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, October 20, 2016 3:22 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p544>.

On this subject, Clemens notes that data-sharing can potentially make possible two particular forms of evaluation.⁵ One is *verification*: can I generate the same finding by following the same analytic steps as the author did using the author's data? A second is *reanalysis*: can I generate the same finding by analyzing the author's data in a different way? While original data can, under some circumstances, be useful for these purposes, it is not necessary. Instead, knowing how, specifically, a researcher conducted her study gives one the tools to critique and evaluate the basis on which its claims were made. Further still, it enables scholars to replicate, extend and reproduce. If another scholar studies a different set of cases (say, different individuals) from the same population in a research study, is she able to follow their analytic steps to see if she arrives at the same finding as you did? If she studies a different population, using similar analytic procedures, is she able to compare her findings with those presented in the research? For each of these forms of evaluation, we need to know quite specifically how scholars approached their research, but we do not need to see primary source data. Altogether, a number of scholars have noted that being transparent about the research process—from conception to data analysis, as described above-- should allow others to evaluate the basis of the analytic claims, and to “reasonably replicate the study from what is shared in the publication.”⁶

When reviewing work involving at-risk populations, therefore, factors such as the relationship between the time a scholar spent in their field site and their stated methodological approach; knowledge of the geographic variation/specificities; language skills and embeddedness; the use of local labor in the form of RAs, or facilitators; and discussion of how the political environment might have influenced their work, are each meaningful and illuminating sources of information and transparency that allow others to critically assess the claims made.

*Transparency with research participants (about project, risks and benefits)
Transparency concerning ethics and researcher positionality*

In addition to emphasizing transparency with regard to the research process, scholars working with vulnerable and marginalized populations must also be open and honest about **the project's risks and benefits** with both their readers *and* their research participants. In short, transparency about a project's risks and benefits means that researchers must detail for their participants and readers how these participants were protected and explain any ethical dilemmas that arose and how these were confronted in the course of their research.

Before explaining this particular form of openness further, we would like to clarify that this element of transparency must go beyond what IRBs typically require. As we note above, IRBs tend to have a very limited conception of what constitutes of a vulnerable population, and their understanding of “research openness” is generally limited to the researcher explaining to research participants who she is (i.e. her university affiliation), the goals of her study, and the particular risks the participant may face, as enumerated on any consent documents. While this process may be sufficient for many projects, it does not encourage (although it does not foreclose) the researcher from clarifying her position of power further, or, by extension, encourage participants to engage with and challenge the researchers about aspects of the study.

⁵ Clemens 2017.

⁶ Crystal Jackson, post "[Re: Question 2: Transparency](https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p590)," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, October 31, 2016 3:30 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p590>.

We therefore recommend a more *dialogic* approach to sharing and discussing risks and benefits with participants. As Jackson explains in her comments on QTD discussion forum IV.3, this means being open about one's subject position as a researcher by both explaining the risks, benefits, etc. of the study to the research participants *and* acknowledging the researcher's own privilege/position of power in relation to them.⁷ This acknowledgement involves more than explaining to participants that the researcher will most likely have the final say over how the data from their interaction is presented (for example) – it also means working to redistribute power by encouraging participants to ask questions at any time about the research process, procedures, etc., and challenge the researcher about his or her work. This dialogic approach is particularly important when researchers are working with vulnerable/marginalized populations because, oftentimes, members of these populations are “spoken for” and/or acted up in the research process, with little say in how their communities are studied and, subsequently, represented in research to policymakers, advocates etc.⁸

The following example of Samantha Majic's study of sex worker rights activists in the San Francisco Bay Area will, we hope, explain the benefits of going beyond the IRB requirements regarding openness towards participants for both readers and research participants.⁹ In this study, Majic recruited sex workers through two community based non-profit organizations to learn about how they used the services at these organizations and, by extension, how this shaped their political participation. As Majic explains, to recruit sex workers for her study, she offered a financial incentive (\$20) to sex workers in exchange for interviews. Many readers may be curious about why she made this decision: would this not constitute bribery of sorts? In response to such a query, Majic explains that the nonprofit organizations asked her to offer this incentive to compensate the sex workers for their time, as other researchers had done – a suggestion with which Majic strongly agreed. The organizations suggested the dollar amount which, as a (then) graduate student, was also the most money that she was able to offer from the small grant that funded her research. Majic clarified that this amount tended to attract more marginalized, street-based sex workers to her study (as opposed to, for example, those who conducted potentially more lucrative indoor escort work).

Explaining her position of power to readers is important, but it was also important for her to explain this incentive to her participants. Here Majic realized that while she offered a relatively small incentive, it was large to many of the sex workers she interviewed, who would use it to purchase basic necessities, such as food. As a result, she adopted a dialogic approach to explaining her study's risks and benefits that included her being honest with her participants about the purpose of her incentive, as she did not want interview participants to feel that they had to provide answers that they hoped Majic wanted to hear (whatever those may be) because they did not want to risk losing their incentive. Therefore, she explained to participants that the incentive was their compensation for participating in the interview, and, by extension, *not* for offering certain answers. This explanation, she believed, helped put her participants at ease so that they could be as honest as possible in their interviews with her. As a result, her interviewees felt comfortable enough with her to ask questions, mainly about her research process (for example, what she would do with interviews when she was done), and they also had conversations with her afterwards, outside of the context of the interview.

⁷ Crystal Jackson, post "Re: Question 2: Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, October 31, 2016 3:30 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123#p590>.

⁸ For example, see discussion in Bowen and O'Doherty 2014.

⁹ See for example Majic 2011 and Majic 2014.

Altogether, this example indicates the importance about being clear with readers and participants about the power relations in this category of research: to show that data was not coerced in some way, readers and participants need to know – and researchers need to clarify – the strengths and limits of their position of power vis-à-vis research participants. By encouraging researchers to acknowledge their own subject positions to readers and research participants, our understanding of transparency further reinforces notions of research integrity by acknowledging the power relations in the research endeavor and how these may shape data collection and findings. In so doing, we can clarify how all of this may generate one set of results, while those who approach our topic differently and/or from different subject positions may achieve different results (for example, had Majic offered a larger cash incentive, she may have attracted more upper-income sex workers to her study, as this would offer more compensation for their time).

Transparency with regard to sharing data

With regard to data sharing, we – as scholars who work with marginalized and/or vulnerable populations – believe that that transparency **does not necessarily** mean providing primary research materials, including interview transcripts and field (and other) notes, to journal editors, scholars, or other readers. In short, when working with marginalized/vulnerable populations, our ethical obligation to protect human participants has to take priority over any transparency benefits that might arise from making all research materials fully available. The reasons for this position are explained in more detail in sections below, but they are somewhat obvious: researchers should not be expected to share materials, given the risks this would pose to interviewees. Sharing “raw” field notes, interview transcripts, etc. may expose members of marginalized/vulnerable populations’ identities and compromise their safety, livelihoods, etc.

At the same time, there may be cases where or conditions under which sharing primary data may be desirable; however, this is certainly context specific and depends heavily on the type of research conducted, and the researcher’s relationship with his or her participants. As Sarah Parkinson writes regarding research about violence, for example, making primary data widely available may not even be very useful to readers, particularly for conveying the depth of the research:

Due to the intellectual, political, and physical difficulty of much violence research, I’d infer that many of us are most interested in the evaluating the conditions of possibility for a scholar’s claims rather than reviewing their “data” in the form of transcripts. Data—including interviews and field notes--can be faked by those intent on doing so. It’s much harder to convincingly fake depth of field experience/knowledge or an ethical sensibility.¹⁰

We therefore offer some examples where data sharing may be acceptable for scholars working with marginalized/vulnerable populations:

¹⁰ Sarah Parkinson, post “[From Steering Committee] What is openness/transparency/explicitness in violence/contentious politics research?,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum Stage One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, May 16, 2016 7:39 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=100&p=335&hilit=parkinson#p335>.

- If research is conducted in a dialogic manner, as discussed above, there may be cases where participants ask that their transcripts be released to a broader public so that they may share their stories more widely and fully with other researchers.
- A scholar may determine that some forms of data collected during the course of this research is sufficiently anonymous and/or public that sharing it will not compromise participants' safety, etc. in any way. For example, copies of pamphlets distributed by political dissidents at a public protest.

This list of examples is clearly not exhaustive, but it indicates some cases where data collected in the course of research with marginalized/vulnerable populations may be “share-able.” But in these (and any other) cases, it is ultimately up to the researcher to determine the extent to which this is advisable or desirable.

III. Costs and risks

This section outlines the costs and risks associated with the distinct forms of transparency discussed above. Broadly, we are concerned that sharing primary source data, or sharing specific details of how primary source data were collected, can impose undue costs on vulnerable and marginalized populations with no clear gains. However; in addition to posing risks to vulnerable and marginalized research participants, we also offer a discussion of the costs and risks that are – and would increasingly – be posed to researchers, and to the field more broadly, given more explicit demands from journals for researchers working with vulnerable and marginalized populations to share sensitive primary source data.

Sharing primary source qualitative data and details of data collection: Costs and risks for vulnerable and marginalized populations

While there are considerable benefits to promoting and ensuring transparency with regard to the research process, approach and analysis, particular care must be taken for research with vulnerable and marginalized populations. Protecting research participants' privacy, confidentiality, and identity is of paramount importance and no pursuit of transparency should be undertaken that risks jeopardizing participants' security and peace of mind.

The risks associated with sharing primary source data are not uniform. Indeed, while data sharing does not always pose risks to research subjects and participants, the types of risks faced depend greatly on the specific forms of vulnerability and marginalization research participants face. If participants face political persecution or are rendered vulnerable *through* their disclosure of sensitive information, risks of being identified in any form must be taken extremely seriously. If participants are identifiable in any way through the release or discussion of research materials, or even through the discussion of data collection methods or presentation of anonymized data, they and/or their families, communities and other networks may lose their jobs, be stigmatized and/or criminalized, or face any number of other risks. Some forms of vulnerability are immediately visible to researchers and reviewers (members of political opposition parties in authoritarian regimes, armed combatants in rebel organizations, or victims of violence and persecution). Others, however, are less visible. Ordinary civilians with knowledge of corruption, for example, are one population who are made vulnerable by knowledge or information they possess. Others still may not be vulnerable in the political climate in which the research was undertaken, but a change in regime or a changing political environment may suddenly pose new and unanticipated risks to

research subjects. Information that was shared in good faith, and with peace of mind at one point in time, may be highly sensitive in a different political climate. It is thus the duty of the researcher herself to determine the fluid potential for risk and make transparency decisions accordingly. The shifting nature of vulnerability and risk warrants attention from the researcher, even when subjects themselves do not perceive themselves at risk.

Although advocates who favor sharing research materials argue that primary source data could be anonymized, anonymization poses its own problems. While it is relatively straightforward to securely anonymize an isolated quotation in an article or book manuscript, it is much more challenging to thoroughly anonymize large batches of data.¹¹ When the community is small and the researcher herself is known to local populations, those familiar with the subject population, or government officials who have undertaken surveillance of the researcher during her time in the field, may be able to identify participants whose names have been removed by virtue of phrases they use, events they reference or context they provide. When Lake was conducting research on war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Democratic Republic of Congo, often interviewees spoke to her about the specific military dynamics of war crimes incidents and human rights violations that only certain individuals were privy to.¹² Should she have published these details, or described to events or pieces of information explicitly, it would have been feasible for interested and knowledgeable parties to identify where the information came from, no matter how thoroughly primary source data was anonymized. Elsewhere, in conducting research with victims of violent crime, many women confessed to Lake that they had been raped but that their husbands were unaware of the fact. While data appears anonymous to the study's broader readership, in a small community where people knew who Lake interviewed and when in a given research period, it would be hypothetically possible to draw links between interview transcripts and admissions or testimonies such as this, even if visible identifiers were removed.¹³

In addition to political or physical risks to research subjects' security, researchers must also consider the peace of mind of her participants and the stress that requests to publish data or transcripts might cause to them. This has two related implications. First, research subjects might feel unnecessary stress or worry, causing them anguish or emotional harm. They may feel social pressures to participate that are not always apparent to researchers, they may already feel anxious due to the political environment they are operating in, or they may have conflicting feelings about participation. Opening the researcher-subject interaction with questions about data transparency can serve to undermine trust that has been built. Researchers operating in highly politicized research environments, for example, frequently rely on an implicit understanding that the researcher knows the context well enough to not need to make requests that could pose risks.

Second, in addition to creating added anxiety by bringing such questions to the fore of the interaction, questions about data sharing can have implications for the quality of the data generated. If the researcher-subject conversation opens with an interaction that undermines trust, or demonstrates that the researcher is unfamiliar enough with the terrain that they are unaware of the risks posed by this type of transparency, research participants may more cautious and less

¹¹ Cramer 2015. See also Filiz Kahraman, post "Re: Question 2: Transparency," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, November 3, 2016 7:59 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=123&p=617&hilit=kahraman#p617>.

¹² Lake 2017.

¹³ Lake, Muthaka, and Walker 2016.

candid in their responses. Once the subjects' trust in the researcher has been compromised, it is difficult to recover. Demonstrating poor knowledge of the potential risks can jeopardize the data quality.

In order to mitigate these dynamics, researchers should feel confident going into research with vulnerable and marginalized populations that there will be no undue demands for greater transparency than the researcher deems appropriate in her initial interactions with her research subjects.

It is not the case that all research subjects are equally vulnerable. In some circumstances, the release of primary source data, or sharing the nature and specifics of data collection may be deemed appropriate by the researcher. Importantly, research subjects that institutional review boards typically deem vulnerable (for instance, prison populations, pregnant women, etc) may be no more vulnerable or marginalized in the context of the research than other populations. If the topic is uncontroversial, is unlikely to ever be controversial, and bears no relationship to the specific forms of vulnerability and marginalization faced by research populations, researchers may deem some primary source materials appropriate for release to a wider audience. We urge researchers working in delicate or sensitive research environments to err on the side of caution and, specifically, to evaluate the particular forms of vulnerability and marginalization faced by different research populations vis-à-vis the subject of study.

Costs to researchers of explicit demands to share data (as encapsulated by JETS)

Finally, we would like to consider some of the costs of institutionalized primary source data-sharing for researchers working with vulnerable and marginalized populations specifically. Scholars working with such populations could face tremendous barriers to publication if their work is not even considered for peer review because they will not share the details of their primary data and the editors do not consider their reasons for restricting the data to be legitimate. The DART Journal Editors Statement (JETS) statement claims: "If cited data are restricted (e.g., classified, require confidentiality protections, were obtained under a non-disclosure agreement, or have inherent logistical constraints), authors must notify the editor at the time of submission.¹⁴ The editor shall have full discretion to follow their journal's policy on restricted data, including declining to review the manuscript or granting an exemption with or without conditions. The editor shall inform the author of that decision prior to review." This potentially places a striking disincentive on the decisions of junior scholars to embark on research with vulnerable and marginalized populations for whom data cannot be disclosed, and face the risk of producing potentially unpublishable work.

As Sheena Greitens notes,

my strong impression from the [graduate qualitative methods] seminar is that the existence of this debate and the resulting lack of clarity over standards seems to *already* be having a non-trivial deterrent effect on their willingness to pursue qualitative research (or even to invest in further training in it). The peer review process seems uncertain enough to them without the added question of what a particular journal will consider sufficient transparency -- particularly when journal editors appear to have wide discretion on standards that have a large impact on them (are interview notes going to be ok? or are full transcripts the only acceptable

¹⁴ JETS Statement, available at: <https://www.dartstatement.org/2014-journal-editors-statement-jets>

option? how would they know ahead of time?), including over whether to accept protocols that the University's IRB has required them to follow. And given finite time and perceived high job market pressure, the extra time required to transcribe/scan/upload interview or archival material is seen as enough of an added cost that concentrating on quantitative work that can be produced more efficiently with fewer questions seems like a much better strategy for success in the field.¹⁵

On this point, scholars may be disinclined to pursue work with vulnerable and marginalized populations for whom they know that satisfactory details cannot be released but cannot be confident that journal editors and reviewers will have a deep enough knowledge of the field site to share this sense of potential risk. This may be especially true where particular forms of vulnerability – such as the potential for future political regime change – is unforeseen by the research participant herself in addition to editors, readers and reviewers. Readers may question why transcripts cannot be released, while the researcher herself has a strong sense of why.

Parkinson and Wood observe that, due to the risk of non-publication, researchers may face a conflict of interests in the field. The chances of publication are greater if researchers convince interlocutors to agree to digital deposit regardless of the topic of inquiry.¹⁶ They ask, “how could the Middle Eastern activists referenced above give informed consent for a researcher to publicly deposit interview transcripts, given that they could not possibly know in 2011 that they would be targeted by a future regime in 2015?”¹⁷ Given that subjects themselves may not be aware of the present and future risks associated with the information they are providing, this places an even greater burden on researchers to protect research subject confidentiality at all costs, even, sometimes, in spite of so-called informed consent offered by research subjects who have limited understanding of the dangers they might face. Parkinson and Wood note that a guarantee of security is impossible given that it is unknown and unknowable what will happen in five years. They add: “To the extent that journal editors and reviewers widely endorse the DA-RT principles, early career scholars face a kind of Sophie’s choice between following long- institutionalized best practices designed to protect their subjects (thereby sacrificing their own professional advancement), or compromising those practices in order to get published in leading journals.”¹⁸ These incentives are likely to have a crippling effect on violence research and research with vulnerable populations, given that it is often graduate students who face the strongest incentives to need to publish their work in leading journals in order to advance professionally. It is also graduate students who are able to spend long periods of time conducting embedded ethnographic fieldwork. Discouraging early-career scholars from investing in risky or contentious research with vulnerable and marginalized populations is likely to severely impede the field’s substantive knowledge of violent contexts.

The JETS statement indicates that there is a procedure in place for acknowledging that some data are confidential. In addition, this statement leaves wide discretion for the journal editor to determine which types of data are worthy of being restricted and which populations can be considered vulnerable or at-risk. Concerns were raised in the online discussion board about

¹⁵ Sheena Greitens, post “DA-RT: effect on graduate training,” QTD Discussion Board, Forum One: Substantive Dimensions of the Deliberations, April 20, 2016 10:14 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=67&p=129&hilit=my+strong+impression+from+the#p129>.

¹⁶ Parkinson and Wood 2015.

¹⁷ Parkinson and Wood 2015, 26.

¹⁸ Parkinson and Wood 2015, 26.

examples of editors pressuring authors to provide confidential data because they were not convinced that the security of research participants could be jeopardized. It is understandable that editors seek discretion over editorial standards. However, editors must take into account the varied sources and forms of vulnerability and marginalization, and the range of reasons for restricting data access on these bases. Given that researchers themselves have the greatest knowledge of the sites in which they are working, editors should defer to researchers' judgment whenever a researcher can make even a speculative case that risk or harm might result from sharing primary data. Editors should be wary of substituting their own assessment of risk for the researcher's; as long as there is *some* plausible or hypothetical link to a potential form of harm, strict confidentiality should be guarded at all costs.

IV. Recommendations for Practice:

Valued current practices

Our goal in this section is to describe current norms and practices and then move on to possible innovations.

Explaining the empirical foundation & logic of inquiry. The prevailing wisdom concerning the meaning of transparency rests on making visible both the empirical foundation and the logic of inquiry of research. There is already a dominant norm within political science scholarship to do just that. Indeed, if a researcher fails to make visible the empirical foundations and logical inquiry of her work, it is unlikely to be taken seriously by journal editors, and certainly not by reviewers. With some obvious exceptions, the peer review process is generally fairly effective at vetting and evaluating claims on the basis of evidence gathered. This works differently in different epistemological traditions. For instance, for the vast majority of quantitative work, transparency means offering a detailed description of how the data were collected, and sharing the data and code used to analyze the data. Many journals have in place procedures for replicating models once raw data is submitted.

The standards are similar for qualitative work, although the particular details of implementation may vary. For qualitative work, transparency almost always requires a detailed description of the argument and/or its testable implications. Almost always, it includes a detailed description of the evidence on which the claims were developed. Almost always, it includes a justification of case selection; a clear description of the methods used; and why those methods were most appropriate for evaluating the claims made or for generating new theory.

Peer Review. Peer review is a widely-used way of vetting academic work. It is also generally considered a higher standard than non-peer-reviewed publications. Peer review typically requires researchers to devote significant attention to explaining each step of the research process, and the decisions researchers made along the way. In theory at least, reviewers are attentive to the planning and preparation undertaken for the study, the methodological rigor demonstrated in any chosen research method, the substantive and area expertise of the author, and the care taken in engaging involving the ethical considerations of the research. Given that there is widespread recognition that researcher positionality, experience and knowledge often contribute to the conclusions drawn, there is an implicit assumption that it is important to be transparent about the decisions taken at each step of the research so that other scholars can follow the process.

IRB. In theory, University Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) require researchers to be transparent about how they will select, recruit, and work with human participants. Although IRB procedures and requirements are in no way standardized across institutions, they generally require researchers to explain in detail how participants will be recruited, how information will be presented to them, and how data will be treated while the study is ongoing and after its conclusion. IRBs also typically require that particular care and attention is given to vulnerable or marginalized populations, described above, including minors, pregnant women and prisoners. Ideally, these IRB practices can help research communities to ensure that research studies are grounded in rigorous and well-thought through research designs that are appropriate for the questions asked, and they endeavor to protect research subjects from harm. These practices are central to the advancement of scholarly knowledge and to the integrity of academic research.

However, we also must view IRBs' capacity to ensure research transparency and protect potentially marginalized and vulnerable participants with caution. As noted in Section I, IRBs often do not account for many potentially marginalized and vulnerable participants who may emerge in the course of much political science research. As well, as Peri Schwartz-Shea notes, since IRBs were developed for and specialize in mainly reviewing biomedical and (related) experimental research, many IRB board members almost inevitably lack the expertise of bona fide political science peer reviewers. Therefore, IRBs may be less adept at assessing the factors contributing to vulnerability and marginalization for social science projects using interviews, participant-observation/ethnography, and surveys. In short, assuming that an IRB's approval of a project confirms the researcher was transparent about his methods and the risks and benefits of the project to participants (especially those who are potentially marginalized and vulnerable) "undeservedly legitimizes a system designed by medical professionals for medical research and extended without cause or consultation to the social sciences."¹⁹

Altogether, while IRB approval for a research project can, to a degree, offer reviewers, editors, and readers some confirmation that researchers have explained how they engaged research participants and considered the attendant risks and benefits, IRBs have varying degrees of rigor and expertise, and their review process (like peer review) is subject to the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of the particular individuals involved therein. In short, IRB approval does not guarantee research transparency for a project, particularly in the context of research about marginalized and vulnerable populations, as IRBs vary in their operations, membership and, hence, expertise about political science research methods.

Low-cost improvements/innovations. Given that scholarship in political science is so varied in scope, method and substance, it is evident that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to research transparency. Any innovation or improvement is therefore highly contingent on the type of research being undertaken and the nature of the question under investigation. Nevertheless, given this variation, there are a number of low cost improvements that build on the broader objectives of fostering transparent and ethical research articulated in the previous section. Improvements fall to a variety of stakeholders, including journal editors; authors; readers and reviewers; and the broader scholarly community (for example, faculty and graduate student colleagues, graduate mentors; conference discussants; and audience members).

¹⁹ Peri Schwartz-Shea, post "Re: Comments on Draft Report of Working Group IV.3," QTD Discussion Board, Forum IV.3: Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations, November 15, 2017 7:23 pm, <https://www.qualtd.net/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=218#p996>

Towards the goal of advancing transparency in qualitative research, we recommend the following low-cost actions that journal editors, reviewers, and readers can take to maintain research integrity:

- **Note the conditions of research.** Journal editors and reviewers should pay close attention to the conditions under which qualitative research was undertaken. All submissions should be sent to at least one, if not two, area specialists, and at least one, if not two, subject matter experts. We recognize that this is no easy feat. Scholars can help in making area expertise clearly known on their websites. APSA could host a database of area studies experts. While the peer review process certainly has its flaws, area experts are often easily able to identify whether the premise of the research and the methods employed are credible. In addition, area experts are well-suited to assess authors' ethical, epistemological, or practical reasons for withholding or sharing data. The selection and availability of appropriate area and subject-relevant reviewers is therefore the most important action that can be taken to advance the goals of research transparency.
- **Determine if the researcher is transparent towards human participants in the research.** Second, with the goal of advancing a broad understanding of transparency, journal editors and reviewers should also consider the transparency of the research towards human participants. Currently, editors do very little to enforce ethical norms for the research they publish (even as far as asking whether authors received IRB approval). However, editors should be engaged in asking questions such as: “did the researcher make clear the goals of the study to her research subjects and participants?”; “did she make clear the goals of her study to the broader community in which she was working (and of not, why not)?”; “to the extent possible, was the researcher clear in her explanations of the costs and benefits of the research to her research subjects? How did research subjects respond to the perceived costs and/or benefits of the research?” “How did researchers’ subjects evaluate the positionality and objectives of the researcher?” “How did interviewees’ or research participants’ perceptions of the researcher likely affect the conclusions drawn?”

While we do not mean to suggest that editorial discretion should override the researchers’ judgment, ensuring that the researcher has clearly thought through the implications of her research, and is able to respond compellingly to these questions builds trust in the integrity of the project. These types of questions hold the discipline to a higher ethical standard overall, and they aid readers in understanding the premises under which data were gathered. They also help shed insight into how transparent the research was to those participating. Subject-focused transparency is important for empirical and ethical reasons. For empirical reasons, it helps readers to understand the context in which information was obtained (and how subjects understood the nature of the information given). For ethical reasons, it broadens the field’s conceptualization of transparency to include research populations and promotes the overarching value of research integrity. This is crucial for advancing knowledge and understanding over the long term, since trust from research populations is crucial for continued research.

- **Accountability outside of peer review.** Third, graduate mentors, discussants, and readers and audience members more broadly can hold researchers to account for the work that they produce. This means asking these same questions outlined in the previous bullet point with regard to all qualitative research. Readers and audience members more broadly should also pay close attention to the academic value of the research vis-à-vis potential harm posed to

research subjects, populations and communities. Questions to be asked by consumers of research include: “what are the benefits of the research project in furthering scholarly knowledge?” “In what ways is the research likely to lead to harm for participant populations and communities and how can these harms be mitigated?” Responsibility for asking these questions should not fall to IRBs alone, given that IRBs vary significantly from institution to institution and their existence similarly imposes constraints on researchers. Therefore, in a world with plentiful online resources, publishers should consider the submission of comments on each article’s official webpage (as is already done in the American Economic Association’s (AEA) *American Economic Journal*, for example).

- **Expand understandings of “vulnerability.”** Readers, editors and IRBs should expand their understanding of vulnerability to include a broad range of circumstances and populations. Limiting vulnerability to IRB-driven definitions noted above – e.g. minors, pregnant women and prisoners – is deeply damaging for the goals of understanding potential harm that might arise. There are a variety of ways in which harm can come to research subjects and populations, and conditions of vulnerability can change with changing political climates. Authors, reviewers, editors and consumers more broadly should consider all ways in which the research in question could create vulnerabilities, either in the present and in the future. Research that poses a harm to research subjects or populations in any capacity should not pass peer review unless its benefits can be clearly demonstrated to outweigh the potential harm. Harm need not be physical or immediate: it could be psychological, and it could be cumulative. For instance, if the same research population has been visited time and time again by researchers, while no individual study poses a significant risk of harm, the cumulative effects of researching particular populations should be taken into account.
- **Researcher honesty.** Researchers themselves should continue to be up front and transparent about the ways in which they describe and present their research to a variety of different audiences, including, most importantly, subject populations and readers. Authors should make crystal clear the goals of the research and should be transparent in the ways in which they recruited participants, the information they communicated to them, and the nature in which the research was conducted. Recruitment materials and research materials can be provided in supplemental appendices where appropriate.

Inadvisable practices

Scholars working with marginalized and vulnerable populations largely agree that sharing raw interview data, field notes or observational materials should be treated with extreme caution, noting the damaging repercussions that raw data may have, for research subjects, research communities, for researchers and for the future advancement of knowledge. While in certain very specific cases, the sharing of raw data to a data repository or in an online appendix could be appropriate, this depends heavily on the nature of the research question and the context in which the research was undertaken. Therefore, in the interest of both protecting research participants (especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized) and maintaining transparency, we *discourage* the following practices:

- **Assuming that all data may be made public.** A blanket expectation that data should be made public except where exempt sets an unreasonable, unrealistic and unfair threshold

for scholars engaging in sensitive research, particularly in challenging research climates or involving vulnerable or marginalized populations. For many populations, the mere mention of making data public will be enough to render an entire interview or interaction closed or redundant, by radically altering the content of any future conversation. If a researcher understands so little of the community in which she is working that she poses the question of publishing research transcripts to a research subject, this could be sufficient to render the entire research conversation meaningless. Moreover, such a practice discourages the most ethical of researchers from undertaking sensitive research (for fear that they will not be able to adequately protect the confidentiality of their sources) and creates incentives for those less concerned with ethics to place their research subjects at unnecessary risk or in positions of discomfort.²⁰

- **Having one standard (norm) for data disclosure.** A uniform standard of disclosure, with exemptions for sensitive research, is deeply discouraged. In addition to incentivizing research with certain subject populations, vulnerability and marginalization are contingent and incredibly hard to assess or define in isolation of the specific research project. Further, because of the absence of a clear definition of vulnerability and marginalization, editors, reviewers and researchers may disagree about the need to release primary source materials to an online platform. As we have recently observed in the context of our own changed political climate, or that in Turkey or Egypt, research subjects who are not considered vulnerable at one point in time, might face exposure or increased risk once the political context changes. This undermines the idea of informed consent as a basis for transparency or disclosure of primary source materials. Researcher discretion is paramount, and any nature of sensitive research should err on the side of protecting the identities of subject populations rather than on meeting a predefined and decontextualized norm of transparency.
- **Placing the burden of exemptions for sensitive research on scholars.** The issue of exemption also places an unfair burden on junior scholars. Junior scholars, or those facing publication pressures, may be disinclined to engage in sensitive research that stands a lower chance of publication given the need to request an exemption from journal editors. Given that exemptions must be obtained ex-poste, such research is incredibly risky from a publication stand point. Perhaps one of the most damaging consequences of this, is the risks posed to graduate students. While it is typically graduate students who have the time to devote to extended embedded field research, it is also graduate students who are likely to face intense pressure to get work published in advance of the job market. Many graduate students will be disinclined to engage in work they perceive as risky. Some of the most careful and important work with vulnerable populations has come from graduate students who have the time to build trust in communities and become deeply embedded in research communities. Closing down this avenue of scholarship would do a great disservice to knowledge.

²⁰ Wood and Parkinson 2015.

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