Transparency in Qualitative Research

Other Entries

SAGE Research Methods Foundations

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Published:2019
Length: 5,000 Words
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036
Methods: Transparency in Qualitative Research
Online ISBN: 9781526421036
Disciplines: History, Political Science and International Relations, Social Policy and Public Policy
Access Date: October 23, 2019
Publishing Company: SAGE Publications Ltd
City: London

Almost all social scientists recognize research transparency—defined as the obligation to make data, analysis, methods, and interpretive choices underlying their claims visible in a way that allows others to evaluate them—as a fundamental ethical obligation. While most quantitative social scientists share some minimum expectations about research transparency, many qualitative or interpretive researchers remain unclear what exactly it means, if anything, for their type of research. Some worry, moreover, that enhancing transparency could undermine ethical protection of subjects, encourage invasive demands from journal editors, or unfairly increase their logistical load. This entry summarizes innovative efforts in the 2010s, based particularly in political science, to refine the general concept of research transparency; to establish precise standards appropriate for qualitative research; to weigh the ethical, legal, and logistical costs and benefits of practical alternatives; and to develop and fine-tune digital delivery systems, so they enhance transparency at a modest cost. Promising solutions, such as active citation (AC) and Annotation for Transparency Initiative (ATI), use independent open-source means to update the traditional discursive footnote for a digital age. Innovative software makes enhanced transparency possible in ways that are logistically simple, nonproprietary, and under the control of authors themselves rather than editors or academic associations.

Why Research Transparency Matters

Across the social sciences, a transparency revolution is underway. Journals, publishers, professional associations, colleagues, foundations, governments, review boards, and the public—all the way up to the White House and numerous European governments—are increasingly pressing academic and policy researchers to make their data, analysis, and methods public. Widespread failures to replicate results and general suspicion of opaque research in an increasingly transparent world are triggering insistent questions about the legitimacy and credibility of empirical scholarship. Today it is becoming more difficult to authorize, fund, publish, justify, and debate research, whatever its methodology, if it is not transparent (Corti et al., 2014; Lupia & Elman, 2014).

Almost all social scientists, whatever their normative, epistemological, theoretical, and substantive beliefs, accept the basic norm of research transparency. Most do so because they view scholarship as a nonauthoritarian conversation involving other scholars and, often, nonacademics as well. Making data, theory, and method transparent invites others to enter the conversation as equals. Readers can more easily appreciate and evaluate a piece of scholarship's richness and rigor. They can debate, improve, and extend it. They can discern how its lessons might shape political and ethical action. Transparency is also a precondition for scholars to demonstrate their excellence and thus to have their contributions recognized and rewarded fairly, inside and outside of academia. For all this to occur, participants in a scholarly conversation must have reason to trust what others say, which in turn rests on an expectation of sufficient openness and honesty about evidence, arguments, and research design to level the discursive playing field.

Research Transparency in Social Science

Research transparency in social science refers to the shared belief that "researchers have an ethical obligation to facilitate the evaluation of their evidence-based knowledge claims" by making their evidence, analysis, and research design public (Lupia & Elman, 2014). This concept has three dimensions: data, analytic, and production transparency.

1. The norm of *data transparency* (or "data access") obliges researchers to publicize the evidence on which their empirical findings rest. Access to data augments and amplifies research by helping readers grasp the richness and diversity of the social activities that scholars study. It empowers them to assess for themselves to what extent (and how reliably) that evidence confirms particular descriptive and causal interpretations and analyses. It permits them to reuse existing data to extend, improve, or launch lines of research.
2. The norm of *analytic transparency* obliges researchers to publicize how they measure, interpret, and analyze evidence. Social scientific evidence does not speak for itself. Instead, scholars use it to infer unobservable descriptive measures and causal processes. For readers to truly appreciate (let alone criticize or extend) a piece of scholarship, they must be able to assess how the author interprets the data to generate descriptive and causal inferences and how precise and unbiased the author claims those inferences are.
3. The norm of *production transparency* obliges social scientists to publicize the broader set of research design and method choices they make. Such choices frame the research, giving rise to the particular combination of data, theories, and methods that a given study employs for empirical analysis. For research to be production transparent, authors must reveal something of the processes and decisions through which they made these choices, how robust they are, and contextual factors that might influence such assessments.

All three normative dimensions contribute to research transparency. If evidence remains inaccessible, analysis remains unclear, or underlying decisions about the choice of data, theories, and methods remain opaque, readers will find it more difficult to appreciate, assess, debate, replicate, or extend a piece of research.

Modern standards dictate, furthermore, that this information (data, analysis, and production details) be FAIR: findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable. This allows readers to use this information to assess an article, conduct a secondary analysis, or teach students and colleagues. To assure this, a consensus has emerged in discussions of transparency that scholars should not house supplementary materials that enhance data, analytic, and production transparency on personal websites but in more stable venues. A range of alternatives exist, including hosting by a journal as supplementary material and depositing the material in a third-party repository. Two recent analysts conclude "The trend is away from supplemental materials because repositories are considered to be better suited to ensure long-term preservation and access to the data (Kratz & Strasser, 2014, p. 5)."

How Qualitative Transparency Is Distinctive

Although scholars across the humanities, social, and natural sciences share the ideal of research transparency, its concrete application varies across methodological approaches. In recent years, statisticians, experimentalists, and formal social scientists have all redoubled efforts to promulgate concrete rules to enhance transparency. Here, however, the focus is on qualitative research—and, more specifically, research that is, from beginning to end, based on narrative case studies grounded in historical and archival sources, ethnographic investigation, interviews, participant observation, and printed secondary materials. (Thus, this entry does not discuss the research transparency of qualitative data analysis used to create or code quantitative data, for which a number of other options exist, including commercially produced databases.) This type of qualitative social science possesses at least two distinctive characteristics that pose obstacles to the enhancement of research transparency.

One is that simply publicizing "all" the data the author consulted is often neither feasible nor desirable. Strict limits exist on the evidence scholars may make transparent (and readers can process) in an ethical, legal, and logistically manageable manner. Many researchers undertake an ethical duty to protect vulnerable research subjects who appear in interviews, details of field notes, and documents either by keeping them anonymous or by keeping the source material entirely confidential. Everyone involved in discussions of qualitative transparency agree that such imperatives take precedence over transparency. Less often remarked, rules governing intellectual property and government confidentiality often restrict republication of previously published or archival sources. Even where no ethical or legal barriers exist, the sheer mass and diversity of textual sources means that publicizing (and, for the reader, wading through) the entire range of data they may have encountered often imposes an insurmountable logistical burden. Any transparency norms must work within these ethical, legal, and logistical constraints.

Second is that researchers generally present case studies in the form of a narrative with dozens or hundreds of theoretically relevant observations intervening between cause and effect. Case study researchers typically array heterogeneous pieces of evidence consecutively, each linked to a distinct step in a complex descriptive, causal, and/or temporal sequence. Such data are termed "causal process observations" (Brady & Collier, 2010; Mahoney & Goertz, 2012). Analysts flexibly assign a role, weight, and meaning to each observation, depending on not just its specific position in the underlying narrative but also its plausibility and appropriateness in a particular real-world setting. This nuanced but rigorous process of contextual interpretation (whether it is termed *process-tracing*, *ethnography*, *narrative history*, or *textual interpretation*) has long been prized in fields such as history, law, and anthropology and is employed in fields such as political science and sociology as well (Bennett & George, 2001). This mode of narrative-based research contrasts with classic quantitative research, in which all the empirical observations (data) are assembled into a single data set (methodologists term such evidence as "data set observations"), which is then manipulated using a single analytic procedure, today almost always in the form of software code.

One implication of reliance on causal process observations embedded in a narrative is that simply archiving data in a “database,” unconnected with a particular spot in the narrative, does relatively little to enhance *de facto* data or analytic transparency. Qualitative research’s distinctive epistemology implies that to track the interpretation and analysis, a reader requires more than just access to a source. One must specify where within a descriptive or causal narrative each piece of evidence fits, and which specific textual passage in the source is critical. As historians, legal academics, and interpretivist social scientists insist, an informed reader needs to know not just what a scholar cites, but why.

How Current Disciplinary Trends Are Undermining Qualitative Transparency

A half century ago, fields such as political science, sociology, anthropology, education, and media studies were far more hospitable to rich and rigorous qualitative work than they are today. For centuries, the discursive footnote has been an effective instrument for rendering qualitative scholarship transparent. It typically contains a textual quotation, an interpretation by the author, and a complete citation. In disciplines with rigorous qualitative transparency norms such as law and history (as well as some humanities), discursive footnotes live on. They work remarkably well, in that they provide a substantial level of data, analytic, and production transparency, while allowing readers to move efficiently and in real time from a point in the main text directly to the source and the scholarly interpretation that explains its significance, and back again. In a discipline like law, making *verbatim* text and annotation available is essential since lawyers rely on legal scholarship to help prepare submissions in court that can have a substantial real-world impact—and the power of an argument in court can turn on a single word or contextual fact.

Yet recent trends in the format and style of social scientific research have rendered it almost impossible for qualitative scholars to employ discursive footnotes, or any other instrument, to publish even minimally transparent research in article form. While journals in a few disciplines continue to permit scholars to publish discursive footnotes, most social sciences have gone in the opposite direction. Recent trends in the format and style of social scientific research favor mathematic analysis instead. For example, almost all journals now use in-text (“scientific”) citations, designed for nonqualitative scholarship that cites only other secondary scholarship, or simple citations that sometimes lack detail (e.g., page numbers), almost never include quotations or interpretation and require that any curious reader track down the original source. The decline of standard word limits from 10,000 to 14,000 a few decades ago to 8,000 words (and trending further down) means that such omissions cannot be offset with more extensive discussion in the main text. These changes make it essentially impossible for qualitative scholars to quote sources and interpret them in any detail at all, let alone in a fully transparent manner. While books sometimes provide more space, most social sciences have witnessed a recent decline in the importance of books vis-à-vis articles (Moravcsik, 2010).

This degradation of transparency impoverishes qualitative social science by diluting richness, undermining rigor, dampening empirical debate, blunting policy relevance, impeding the reuse of evidence, and diminishing cumulative disciplinary progress. To engage the textual evidence on which a specialized article is based, today's readers must literally reenact the research conducted by the author, visiting libraries and archives, or examining interview, ethnographic, or documentary material held solely by the author—options that are usually infeasible. Even if they do this, the lack of specific quotations and interpretive annotations undermines analytic transparency: Readers learn little about how and why the author contends that the source material supports the main argument.

Declining transparency also undermines the viability of robust qualitative research communities. In many social scientific fields, it has now become nearly impossible for readers to distinguish rich and subtle case studies that rest on deep and genuine local knowledge, reliable sources, and compelling interpretations from those that are thin, inconclusive, or empirically unpersuasive. Virtues readers cannot see, they cannot acknowledge or reward. This means that today, exceptional qualitative researchers in many disciplines gain less attention or credit for the intrinsic quality of their empirical work. This systematic devaluation of the quality of case studies in the eyes of readers incentivizes younger scholars to invest more in transparent skills, such as mathematical prowess, and less in opaque qualitative skills, such as familiarity with foreign languages, history, cultural context, complex functional and institutional issues, and modern process tracing or small-*n* comparative techniques.

Given the technological and institutional constraints on journals, especially multimethod ones, any future enhancement must be digital. Yet the most widespread approach today, namely hyperlinking to online sources—commonly used in journalism, blogs, policy analysis, and quantitative scholarly research—is no solution. In these other domains, sources are usually other secondary sources or official statements available online, whereas most of the sources cited by serious qualitative researchers tend to be unavailable online. The scholarly discussion of qualitative transparency focuses, therefore, on two other digital options: data archiving and digital annotation. The former is what many scholars think of first, yet the latter seems to hold more promise as a general instrument to enhance qualitative transparency.

Why Data Archiving Is Inadequate

Social scientists who do statistical and experimental work customarily achieve data transparency primarily by archiving a data set in digital repositories. At first glance, it might seem that qualitative scholars should do likewise. Yet this is not generally so.

In a limited number of cases, to be sure, archiving qualitative data in (digital or hard copy) repositories can serve as a useful—even essential—means to enhance transparency. An important responsibility of any member of a scholarly community is to help other scholars access data, especially new data. Archiving allows the researcher to preserve complete collections of new and unique interviews, ethnographic notes, primary document collections, field data, web searches, and other field research material. Digital data repositories for qualitative sources have come online to help scholars do this, such as the Qualitative Data Repository (QDR) at Syracuse University and the Henry Murray Data Archive at Harvard University. Data archiving also provides, at least in theory, a useful degree of production transparency. Often readers worry that historical or social scientific case study researchers consciously or unconsciously introduce bias by “cherry picking” data: emphasizing confirming textual evidence, while suppressing disconfirming evidence. In principle, archiving “all” the data would encourage researchers to be more careful and permit readers to draw their own conclusions.

Yet, while data archiving is often useful, it is dangerous to conclude that it can serve (as in statistical work) as a viable baseline transparency strategy for qualitative scholars. This faulty analogy to quantitative research has helped to engender much misplaced criticism of qualitative transparency. Despite its essential role in a small percentage of cases, four disadvantages have led scholars to conclude that archiving data is at best a partial solution appropriate to a thin subset of qualitative research. This is true for four reasons.

First is *lack of analytic transparency*. Archiving qualitative data without interpretive analysis tells us little. We do not learn which passage within a source text the author deems essential, how the author interpreted it, or where and how it fits within the main narrative presented in the case study. This undermines a major comparative advantage of qualitative research backed by discursive footnotes, namely that analysts can interpret a specific piece of evidence with subtle attention to real-world context and the precise stage it occupies in a descriptive or causal narrative. Thus, even where data archiving is feasible and illuminating, it cannot be a sufficient means of assuring research transparency.

Second is *insufficient protection of human subjects.* Protecting human subjects is a key ethical responsibility of scholars. Yet doing so through confidentiality or redacting text is more difficult in a collection of archived documents than in short verbatim quotations or general summaries. Sanitizing and policing access to masses of data is often extremely difficult and may even require (as in medical research) impractically long-term involvement of the author to approve future access on a case-by-case basis. Thus, even quantitative scholars often decline to make transparent the underlying textual evidence coded to generate a numerical data set.

Third is *insufficient protection of intellectual property.* Many qualitative scholars use secondary sources. Yet intellectual property law imposes limits on the reproduction of recently published text. In almost all legal jurisdictions, under some provision akin to “fair use” in the United States, scholars may reprint short quotations from published sources, but reproducing documents as a whole for public use is often illegal. Even archival materials are often subject to *de facto* restrictions of this kind. Researchers themselves, moreover, have a legitimate “first use” right to limit access to new data temporarily—an especially salient concern for younger scholars.

Fourth is *incomplete process transparency.* Even where it is feasible, data archiving often fails to make good on its major promise, namely to provide meaningful protection against data selection bias through the cherry picking of evidence. In many cases of archival-, interview- and secondary-source research, the domain of potential evidence is often enormous and it would be logistically impractical, both for the author and the reader, to archive all the documents an author did see, let alone might have seen (Moravcsik, 2016).

For these four reasons, data archiving can be an effective transparency instrument only in the limited number of cases where no major human subject and intellectual property constraints exist, the underlying body of data (e.g., a discrete set of interviews, field notes, or documents) is both clearly defined and logistically manageable, and analytic and process transparency are otherwise provided. For the foreseeable future, this will not be the norm.

Digital Annotation

Given that social science journals are suppressing discursive footnotes, sources often do not exist online, and data archiving is of limited practical utility, advocates of qualitative transparency in social science are now converging on a different “best practice” approach: digital annotation. Disciplinary standards, journal practice, university presses, and exploratory projects are moving in this direction, led by the field of political science. Two slightly different but complementary instruments to enhance transparency exist: AC and ATI.

AC

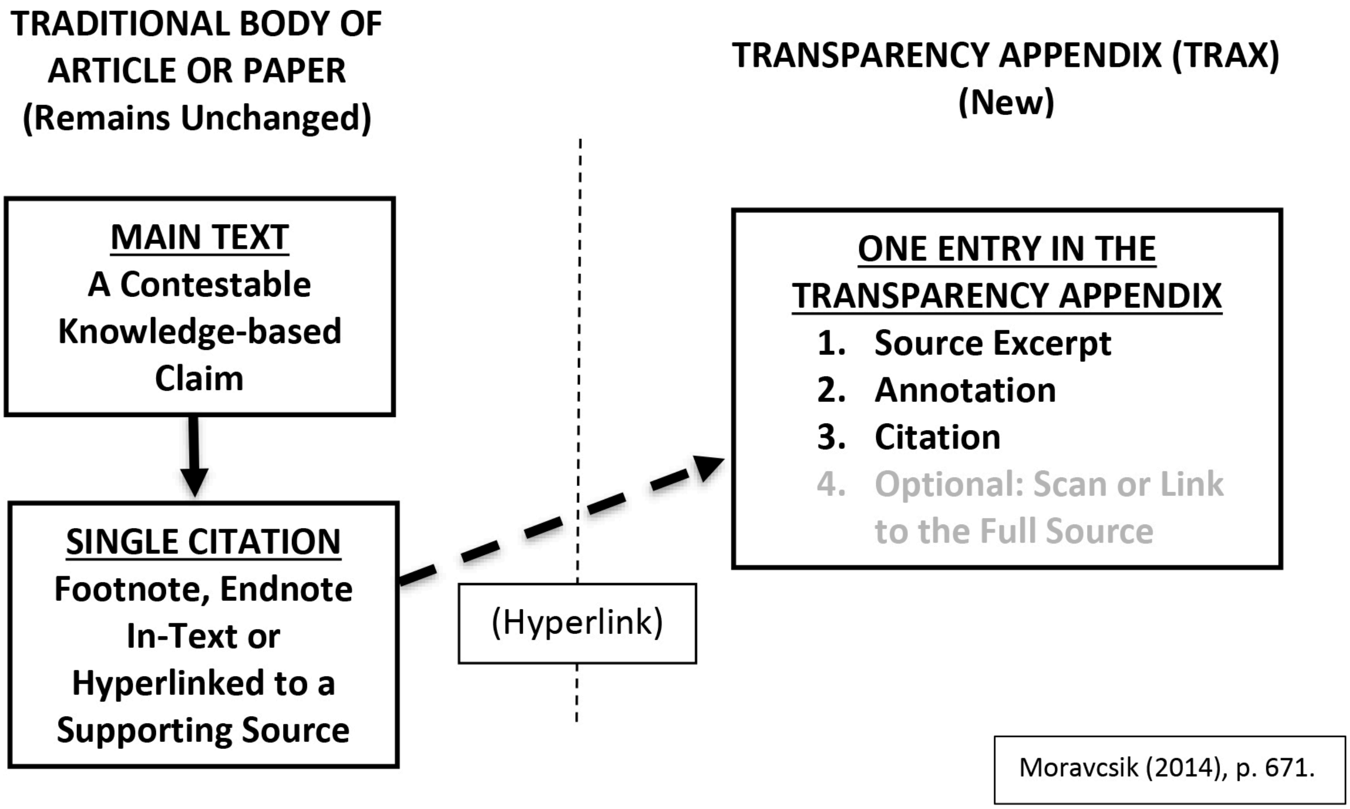
AC is a digitally enhanced format and set of standards for rendering qualitative analysis transparent through a supplementary appendix, which creates unlimited space for authors to present data and interpretive/analytic commentary (Moravcsik, 2010, 2014). AC seeks to move qualitative research “back to the future”; it restores the equivalent of traditional discursive footnotes—with their impressive ability to enhance data, analytic, and production transparency—in an unprecedentedly convenient digital form.

AC leaves the main text and citations of a scholarly article, book, or chapter just as they are, no matter what their format but for a few hyperlinks. The difference lies in a new digital transparency appendix (TRAX) appended to the work—either by the journal itself or by separate software running alongside the article. AC prescribes that citations to any source backing a “contestable empirical claim” should be hyperlinked to a corresponding entry in the TRAX. Each of these entries contains four elements:

1. a verbatim excerpt from the textual source (if ethical, legal, or logistical limitations require it, a description may be substituted);
2. an annotation explaining how the author interprets the source to support the corresponding claim in the main text;
3. a complete citation; and
4. optionally, a link to or scan of the full source.

In addition, AC dedicates the first TRAX entry to a discussion of general issues of production transparency.

Figure 1. Active citation.



Source: Moravcsik (2014, p. 671).

As compared to current practices, AC enhances research transparency significantly. The source excerpt delivers *data* transparency while mitigating or avoiding ethical, logistical, and legal constraints. Even where sources must remain confidential, authors may redact or replace quotations with a short description. Where feasible and informative, the optional scan or link adds extra transparency. AC delivers basic *analytic* transparency by offering researchers an unlimited space in which to provide an annotation that explains how they interpret the source to support the corresponding claim in the main narrative, as well as how that source should be understood in a broader cultural, evidentiary, or linguistic context. The exceptional first entry delivers *production* transparency by offering an open-ended space in which to address data selection bias, choice of theories, and other general research design concerns insufficiently elaborated elsewhere.

AC achieves all this while deferring to each author's own assessment of valid ethical, legal, and logistical constraints, as has traditionally been the case with discursive footnotes. In AC, primary responsibility for critical decisions about transparency—for example, which items are "contestable" and "empirical," the length of the excerpt, and the nature of the annotation—remains in the hands of the author. Often the author is the only person in a position to weigh the importance of additional information, the precise nature of competing ethical, legal, and logistical concerns, and other critical concerns. Similarly, the length and content of the first entry discussing production transparency remains at the author's discretion. The scan remains optional because it is often more tightly constrained by ethical, legal, and logistical considerations, again subject to the author's judgment. Indeed, journal boards can easily elect to take editors and reviewers out of the loop entirely, a decision that could be reinforced by using dedicated software that independently overlays them onto online versions of articles and places the appended material in an open-source digital repository—as in the ATI format discussed later.

AC offers qualitative researchers substantial hidden benefits. Because any additional text resides in the appendix, AC eliminates the ever-tighter limits imposed by journal word limits, citation formats, and such—a source of constant frustration to qualitative researchers, for whom data and analysis come in words. It also promises to render articles more readable: Those who want more detailed information can find it just "one click away," whereas those who don't can simply read the main text as they do today, ignoring the additional data and analysis. AC requires few institutional reforms to implement since journal procedures can remain unchanged. The supplementary material can remain "open source," whatever the status of the article.

AC's flexibility renders it robust to a wide range of future trends in social scientific publishing. It can be used with unpublished papers, submitted manuscripts, online articles, e-books, and other forms of scholarship—and even, to a substantial extent, with hard-copy materials. It can easily be adapted to visual, audio, cinematic, graphic, and other media sources. The supplementary materials can reside at any permanent, third-party site: either a journal website, as is customarily the case with appendices and supplements today, or an independent digital data repository.

AC appears slowly to be taking root. Published articles, presentations at disciplinary and interdisciplinary conferences, and modules at training institutes and graduate seminars have elaborated on AC in detail. Extensive consultation with field researchers, particularly those who work with vulnerable populations and sensitive data, have developed workable standards and text articles and chapters. "Active citation compilations" have appeared as pilot projects, retrofit classic articles, and new research to the active citation format (QDR, 2012–2019, 2018–, 2018). AC may allow enhanced digital transparency to become a *de facto* norm in academia, as it has become outside of it.

Annotation for Transparent Inquiry

Annotation for Transparent Inquiry (ATI) is an innovative "open annotation" software solution developed in partnership with the nonprofit technology firm Hypothesis (QDR, 2018). ATI builds explicitly on AC, and the two are compatible, though ATI can also support more experimentally open-ended modes of supplying supplementary material.

ATI is based on software designed to run in parallel with a digital copy of a scholarly publication. The software allows the author to link supplementary material to any specific point in a scholarly publication. An author simply highlights any portion of his or her article, paper, or chapter and links "evidence, information, and interpretative/ analytical commentary that go beyond what is included in the text" (QDR, 2018). ATI stores the additional material in an appendix (here termed an "ATI Supplement"), which is linked directly to and can be read simultaneously with the main article, paper, or book chapter. When readers click on the highlighted area, the annotation the author has created appears as a box in an overlay to the web page, normally at a journal site, where the research is published.

ATI can be viewed in two ways. From one perspective, it is simply a technologically sophisticated vehicle for delivering the substantive content recommended by a more substantively detailed transparency standard, such as AC. Indeed, since ATI is entirely open-ended annotation system, to enhance research transparency, some additional rules, guidelines, protocol, practices, or expectations emerge would logically be necessary. Used in this way, ATI has various advantages. It allows supplementary materials to be stored, managed, and delivered entirely separate from the journal article or book chapter itself—either by the journal website itself or by a trusted open-source digital repository, such as the QDR. It does not require that journals alter their current format, even by adding hyperlinks to an appendix. Indeed, journals need not approve or review these materials at all—which should assuage those who worry that editors and reviewers will dictate arbitrary conditions. Neither need ever see transparency material, even if the journal requires that authors submit it.

ATI annotations could also, however, be employed in support of a more open-ended and experimental approach to transparency. Since ATI annotations need not be linked to any specific source or citation in the text, one could relax AC's minimal content standard of a textual quotation or description, an annotation and a citation. Dozens of scholars in many academic disciplines have taken part in projects that employ ATI in this open-ended manner, both to retrofit published articles and to augment and amplify existing ones (QDR, 2012–2019, 2018). Overall, ATI offers journals and individual scholars considerable leeway for innovation and experimental learning in coming years.

Critiques of Qualitative Transparency

In recent years, scholars have intensely debated qualitative transparency, particularly within the discipline of political science. A number of prominent criticisms have arisen, to which advocates of transparency have responded (Isaac, 2015; Moravcsik, 2016; Various Authors, 2015–2018). Four concerns have been prominent.

First, some critics worry that transparency standards might force researchers to reveal confidential information. Social scientists universally recognize that the ethical duty to vulnerable subjects is legitimate and overriding concern. This is why no current proposal to enhance transparency suggests that it take precedence over ethics or intellectual property law, and advocates of qualitative transparency have worked closely with social scientists who study vulnerable communities to avoid any such perception (QDR, 2016). Some such worries may nonetheless arise from the mistaken impression that qualitative transparency necessarily involves data archiving, which involves masses of undifferentiated data. Yet one of the strongest arguments for AC/ATI is that it softens any trade-off between ethical responsibility and transparency because redacting or summarizing relatively short quotations is far easier than doing so for all the data collected in a project. As a result, we may reasonably expect that some branches of scholarly research will simply remain less transparent because of an overriding need to protect vulnerable populations or confidential information.

Second, some critics worry that enhancing transparency might bias qualitative scholars toward rigidly positivist or politically uncritical research. Jeffry Isaac, a noted critic of transparency, charges that the promotion of "positivism" and "methodological purity" and the suppression of "interpretivist" and "politically engaged" scholarship is the explicit aim of some scholars who advocate enhancements in qualitative transparency (Isaac, 2015, p. 275). If it were true, this would be a significant concern since many social science disciplines are split among factions wedded to different philosophies of science.

Yet supporters of transparency explicitly eschew any such intention. In their view, qualitative transparency is a philosophically neutral goal or, perhaps, one that subtly leans toward validating an "interpretivist" worldview. AC and ATI's emphasis on verbatim quotations obliges scholars to permit social actors to "speak" to readers "in their own voices." Their notion of analytic transparency acknowledges the bedrock interpretivist premise that evidence does not "speak for itself." Rather, researchers interpret it—and those interpretative choices should be an explicit part of the scholarly conversation. Qualitative transparency norms recognize, moreover, that qualitative scholars express themselves in the form of descriptive, causal, or temporal narratives that deserve an appropriate format and more space. Finally, none of this blocks critical engagement. Many of the disciplines that practice the most rigorous qualitative transparency, such as legal academia, also speak most directly to contemporary issues (Moravcsik, 2016).

Third, some critics worry that enhancing transparency might empower editors and reviewers to impose inappropriate standards on qualitative researchers. Particularly in those disciplines with prestigious multimethod journals, they fear, editors unfamiliar or unsympathetic to their method could exploit transparency rules to impose unrealistic, unethical, or arbitrary standards, or to exclude qualitative research entirely. While this is obviously not what proponents of qualitative transparency intend—they stress the independent discretion of authors—perhaps it could be an unintended consequence. Thus, efforts to implement transparency in contexts where this concern exists can and should avail themselves of various options to prevent arbitrarily editorial control: set clear rules, exempt supplementary materials from editorial review, and deliver transparency entirely independently of the journal process, as does ATI (Moravcsik, 2016).

Finally, some critics worry that enhancing transparency might impose an unrealistic or unfair burden on qualitative researchers. Scholars must often do a bit of extra work to render an article transparent, and critics wonder if this might inhibit publication of qualitative research. Those who favor enhancing transparency respond that the increase is manageably small—and to the extent the workload does increase, the result may actually advantage qualitative researchers. The overall workload seems manageable since historians, legal academics, and scholars in other disciplines already employ more stringent transparency rules—as did social scientists in articles a generation and in books to this day. Now word processing and digital databases further ease the workload. Finally, AC/ATI proposals empower authors to decide how extensively to quote, annotate, or explain research methods—if authors do not consider an argument "contested" or "empirical," they need not provide additional information (Moravcsik, 2014).

Even if some increase in workload results, qualitative researchers are likely to be net beneficiaries. Transparency empowers them to demonstrate the quality of their research to all members of a scholarly community and to encourage others to appreciate and engage with it. This occurs in a number of ways. Qualitative scholars chaff under existing word limits because most conduct far more detailed underlying research than they can publish. AC/ATI would allow them to write longer and more richly detailed articles than are currently allowed by multimethod journal formats, and thereby to share the local knowledge and interpretive nuance of thick description and careful process-tracing. To the extent this is true, one might expect that those most likely to find more enhanced transparency onerous are not dedicated qualitative researchers, but multimethod scholars who focus primarily on some other method and then add a thinly documented "illustrative" case study. Making the details transparent is likely to increase the visibility, respect, and reward accorded the former vis-à-vis the latter, which would be advantageous for serious qualitative researchers. The boost will be felt particularly by the younger, lesser known, and more energetic among them (Moravcsik, 2016) who must make a name for themselves on the substance of their work. Overall, in exchange for a modest commitment of time and energy, transparency offers qualitative scholars a rare chance to win back what disciplinary practices have solely taken from them: the opportunity to make their case publicly.

Further Readings

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