

Power and Institutionalization
Draft Summary of the Final Report of QTD Working Group I.3

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Working group I.3 was established to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of fostering research explicitness.¹ We sought to foster discussion of questions such as: What are the key differences between distinct ways of institutionalizing research explicitness? For what kinds of challenges are different models of institutionalization (including social norms, explicit standards, and mandatory rules) best suited? 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? Working group I.3 was also called upon to consider the appropriate role of particular institutional actors in promoting (or possibly "enforcing") scholarly norms of research explicitness—in particular editors and reviewers, IRBs, and funding agencies.

Our report addresses these questions by setting out four ideal-typical models of institutionalizing research explicitness, ranging from strictly voluntary individual practices without institutionalization to obligatory prescriptions ("rules") with centralized enforcement. Based on the deliberations that took place on the various threads of our working group's online forum and elsewhere on QTD website, as well as numerous bilateral and group discussions that we have undertaken via email and in person with a highly diverse set of colleagues, we do not currently consider any one of these models to have overwhelming support. We therefore focus on two tasks: (1) clarifying the dimensions on which these alternative approaches to institutionalization of norms for the explication of one's research methods differ and (2) spelling out key pros and cons of the alternative approaches, so as to allow for a more informed debate and decision making by particular research communities, individual scholars as authors and reviewers, editors and funding agency officers.

As the report makes clear, the different models of institutionalization have differing implications for different elements of the research process or at different stages of project life cycles. The report analyzes the challenges and opportunities inherent in research explicitness from planning a research project and gathering empirical information (to which positivistically inclined scholars often refer as "production transparency") to drawing inferences or conclusion ("analytic transparency"), to data sharing – often in turn conditional on a scholar's position in various power and resource hierarchies. Providing a sub-set of post-analysis data for replication, for instance, (whenever replicability is meaningful as part of the assessment of existing research) poses unequal challenges to different types of researchers, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. Full research explicitness might also include transparency about the process of research design, data gathering, and the analytic process of meaning-making. The discussion of these disaggregated types can productively further shape social norms and even standards *within* subgroups of scholarly communities and methodological approaches.

¹ For reasons spelled out in our full report, we 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 conclude with a discussion of how different forms of research explicitness have differential consequences and provide unequal incentives and constraints for scholars across a variety of dimensions of inequality, including:

- seniority and rank (from graduate student to adjunct professorships to tenure-track/tenured professors),
- type of institution (from community colleges to leading research universities),
- epistemological tradition
- methodological approach
- 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),
- sources or types and temporality of funding research for, e.g., producing and disseminating data (external and intra-mural grants, short-term/uncertain versus long-term/sustained), and
- research environment (including security concerns for researcher and/or research subjects).

In light of resource inequalities, for instance, the burden of full research explicitness across all the stages of the research process can be extremely and even prohibitively high. At the same time, the relationship between any particular inequity and the institutionalization of research explicitness is often complex: Many colleagues are concerned, for instance, that more demanding requirements by the leading journals, funding agencies, etc. work like barriers to entry, e.g., for younger and less well-resourced scholars. Such concerns should be taken very seriously, but it also should be noted that, the more standards are spelled out, the easier it is for newcomers to join a given research community. Put another way: highly implicit social norms can also be very exclusionary – all the more when those norms are highly effective in shaping insiders' expectations, as such effectiveness is indicative of the power of those norms even if power is here not exercised by any particular person.

Throughout, our report also considers the special role(s) of journal editors and reviewers, funding agency program officers, and institutional review boards (IRBs), as distinct institutional nodes of power that shape the larger context for research explicitness. We recognize – as many colleagues do – that these actors have rights and indeed obligations to uphold high standards of research integrity (or more narrowly research ethics in the case of IRBs), which might warrant articulating standards (and maybe even setting and enforcing rules) for research explicitness that go beyond the social norms that are widely agreed across a broad range of political science research communities. At the same time, such power to set the rules ought to be accompanied by the responsibility to be attentive to the potential for certain rules to exacerbate social, political, and financial inequity, marginalization and exclusion (and to minimize such adverse side-effects). Generalist association journals, moreover, carry a special responsibility to avoid transparency requirements that in effect marginalize or exclude certain of the association's research communities. May the discussion of the trade-offs inherent in the four ideal-typical models of research explicitness in our working group's report help them.