

# Open Research for the Humanities and Social Sciences: Editors' Introduction

JENNI ADAMS, MIRANDA BARNES, AND SAMUEL MOORE

**Abstract:** This editorial introduces the special issue on Open Research for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

**Keywords:** open research, open science, humanities, social sciences, peer review, epistemology

Openness has become an increasingly important expectation in academic research. Governments, funders, and universities now call for greater transparency in the work they support, for a range of different scientific, economic, and democratic reasons. As a result, researchers are expected to meet these requirements by sharing their publications, data, methodological materials, and peer review reports, allowing others to access and build upon their work. Humanities and social science (HSS) disciplines are not exempt from these requirements, despite the fact that open research itself is primarily framed around the needs of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Knöchelmann 2019). This means that open research, at least as it is conventionally operationalized, reflects an onto-epistemological worldview of the harder sciences over qualitative and interpretive disciplines.

Resistance to specific practices emphasized within STEM-focused accounts of open science has been voiced from a variety of perspectives in HSS. Preregistration's widespread relevance has been critiqued on the grounds that qualitative research approaches such as grounded theory and participatory action research often proceed in an iterative fashion that cannot be fully specified in advance (Feldman and Shaw 2019; Santana 2024; Steltenpohl et al. 2024). Researchers have expressed concerns about qualitative data sharing as potentially exposing participants to risk (Fox et al. 2021; Monroe 2018); requiring deidentification in ways that may limit the data's onward usefulness (Pratt et al. 2020); presenting greater practical challenges than sharing other data types (Tsai et al. 2016); and requiring time and resources that may disqualify disadvantaged researchers from participating (Dutta et al. 2021; Nordtveit 2018).

Likewise, the broader applicability of concepts of reproducibility (the ability to re-create the existing analysis in a given study to produce the same result) and replicability (the ability to re-create previous research findings in a new study) to HSS research has been challenged on the grounds that HSS disciplines often emphasize the availability of multiple interpretations rather than a single correct “answer”; therefore, there is no expectation that subsequent researchers would or should reproduce the same findings (de Rijcke and Penders 2018; Holbrook et al. 2019; Patton 2025). The intrinsic element of subjectivity in qualitative research, scholars have suggested, limits the relevance of replication in this context, making other practices that pursue openness and research rigor, such as reflexivity, more relevant in these circumstances (Pownall 2022).

It is important to consider open research from an HSS standpoint, not just because of how it is being imposed on HSS research communities but also because an expansive idea of open research may allow these disciplines to experiment with deeply engrained practices and explore alternative approaches to knowledge production. For example, does open research allow HSS communities to move beyond rigid forms of anonymous peer review, experiment with different approaches to authorship, or engage with data sharing practices that reflect their own disciplinary requirements? In trying to move beyond STEM approaches to open research, this special issue explores what open research can mean for the humanities and social sciences.

The 15 articles that make up this special issue explore these questions from a range of angles. Two articles address the **politics and philosophy of open research**, theorizing these from distinctly HSS perspectives. In her article “Open for Debate: Situating Open Research for the Humanities in a Neoliberal Setting,” Beatriz Barrocas Ferreira addresses the underlying politics of open research in the humanities, especially the way open research policies are frequently framed as a “democratizing force” even though their applications to open access publishing and open data are “largely aligned with market-oriented imperatives.” Barrocas Ferreira calls instead for “a reimagining of open scholarship, one that is plural, context sensitive, and grounded in ethical reflexivity,” and the development of a more just and genuinely open knowledge system that values the distinct contributions of different epistemic cultures. Similarly, in her article “Doing Openness Otherwise: Democratization and OA Publishing in HSS,” Rebekka Kiesewetter examines how the existing narratives of democratization surrounding open access publishing “equate openness with technological, legal, or financial access to research outputs” and undermine the realities of openness in practice. Through analysis of three unique open access publishing initiatives, Kiesewetter reveals opportunities for a truly democratized OA publishing landscape by way of situated, collective experimentation.

Other authors examine **formal and discursive manifestations of openness in the humanities** and the structures of encounter they facilitate. In her article “Open at the Level of (Para)Text: Critical Intertextuality and Discursive Notation as Open Research

Practices in the Humanities,” Jenni Adams explores how textual and paratextual practices relating to citation and discursive notation support transparency in a situated and epistemically appropriate way. In “A Prototyping Renaissance: Form, Content, and Scale in Open Publication in the Humanities,” John W. Maxwell and Alessandra Bordini consider the concept of prototyping as a way to reframe our ideas of open research in the humanities beyond content-only notions of open access to include both form and audience. By examining the origins of print culture in Europe in the 16th century, and the Aldine press specifically, the concept of prototyping is explored as a means of challenging the taken-for-granted structures and mechanisms of scholarly communication to create new ways to engage emerging publics. Finally, Adeola Eze examines the discourse underpinning open science and reinterprets it for the humanities with close attention paid to the work of Umberto Eco. In her article, “What Does Openness Mean for the Humanities? Redefining Ethical and Reflexive Practices in Open Research,” Eze concludes that “to open research, then, is not simply to expose material to view but to invite others into a structured encounter with it. Openness becomes an ethic of responsiveness in which knowledge is made as an ongoing practice of meaning-making, answerable to context, community, and form.”

The centrality of questions of **ethics, responsiveness, and governance** to open research in HSS is further foregrounded in articles by Judith Fathallah and Lucas L. H. Wong and Tak-Yin Yumi Wong. In “Open Scholarship in the Humanities: An OA Author Intervention,” Fathallah draws on her own experience of open access book publishing to highlight the need for academic responsibility over the move to more ethical forms of publishing that are less beholden to traditional structures of prestige. Wong and Wong, in contrast, focus their examination of ethics and governance on the phenomenon of data sharing, with specific reference to qualitative data gathered within politically precarious or authoritarian contexts. In “Negotiating Openness Under Authoritarian Risk: Feminist Open Data Sharing in Hong Kong,” the authors present case studies of two Hong Kong-based projects to explore approaches to data sharing that are informed by a feminist ethics of care, examining such approaches’ potential to inform situated and community-governed strategies of data management and sharing.

Approaches to the politics, philosophy, ethics, and discursive manifestations of openness are counterbalanced in the collection by articles examining the **perspectives of AHSS researchers on open research** and its dominant operationalizations. Elen Le Foll’s article “‘Well, parts of linguistics is open’: Insights into Linguists’ Diverse Understandings of Open Science” draws on survey data and interviews with linguists across a range of subdisciplines to explore their understanding and perceptions of open science, highlighting field-specific challenges, including issues of copyright and data privacy. Claire Davin, Jess Beck, and Lai Ma’s “Open Practices, Closed Realities? Archaeological Perspectives on Open Research Practices” presents the findings of in-depth interviews

with archaeologists to examine researchers' conceptualizations of and engagement with open research, surfacing the barriers to engagement with openness in this interdisciplinary field. Finally, two articles address debates around open research among HSS researchers in France. Ioanna Faïta's "Tensions et zones d'ombre autour de la science ouverte en SHS en France" (Tensions and gray areas surrounding open science in the humanities and social sciences in France) examines controversies surrounding the adoption of open science within French HSS communities. Candice Fillaud, Chérifa Boukacem-Zeghmouri, Yutong Fei, and Valentine Favel-Kapoian's "The French HSS Community Speaks Out on Open Science: A Top-Down and Bottom-Up Taxonomy Approach" unpacks French HSS scholars' criticisms of the French national open science policy's failures to recognize discipline-specific methodologies and research practices, compiling a taxonomy of critiques that highlights the particular contentiousness of open data among French HSS researchers.

Finally, four articles explore the ways specific **infrastructure and policy** can be used to facilitate openness in HSS. Corina MacDonald's "Mobilizing Knowledge in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Exploring Competing Articulations of Openness in Policy and Practice" considers how knowledge mobilization (KMb) requirements in Canadian higher education institutions play an important role in the expression of public value by the publicly funded university. MacDonald examines the tensions between openness in practice, which is "dynamic, reflecting changing epistemic commitments, technological imaginaries, research and communication practices, and academic labor conditions," and openness as policy, which can frequently constrain open practice by way of increased focus on "excellence, impact, and innovation." Turning to infrastructure, Simon Dumas Primbault's "Do Infrastructures Have Epistemologies? Studying an Open Access Infrastructure for SSH from Within" examines the socio-epistemic features of HSS infrastructures with specific reference to OpenEdition Lab, a team of researchers hosted by the French open access infrastructure OpenEdition, and the "epistemic frictions" encountered by this initiative. Graham Jensen, Sajib Ghosh, Archie To, and Ray Siemens's article "Open Infrastructure and the Threat of 'Vanishing' Journals: Leveraging Open Knowledge Commons, Open Source Software, and DIY Solutions to Preserve Humanities and Social Sciences Research" explores the potential of low-budget, DIY-style interventions to address the vulnerability of digitally published research—and HSS research in particular—to the threat of "vanishing" online journals. The article details an experiment with open methods and tools for the (re)publication of open access scholarship via the HSS Commons repository, bolstering such scholarship's long-term preservation in the face of these vulnerabilities.

The final article in this category, Timothy W. Elfenbein, Andrew S. Hoffman, and Marcel LaFlamme's "Emerging Forms of Open Research in Social/Cultural Anthropology," presents selections from interviews with key contributors to three emerging open

research infrastructures in social and cultural anthropology: the Platform for Experimental Collaborative Ethnography (PECE); Experimental Methods for Ethnographic Research, Gathering, and Exchange (EMERGE); and the xcol inventory. What crystallizes across these diverse conversations is a sense of openness in anthropological research as centered in generativity and a proliferation of interpretations facilitated by acts of sharing. This vision of openness is reflected in the process by which the article was created: After the interviews were conducted and the article drafted, representatives of all three projects met with the article's authors to discuss points of intersection and issues arising from the interviews, generating further insights that were integrated into the article's final version.

## Review Process

This special issue was itself shaped by the use of innovative collaborative review processes. The issue arose out of the three-year research project Materialising Open Research Practices in the Humanities and Social Sciences (MORPHSS), which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Wellcome Trust, and UK Research and Innovation's Research England Development (RED) Fund. MORPHSS aims to build an alternative conception of open research that is appropriate to HSS disciplines, while showcasing innovative and experimental research practices that may realize this vision. The project aims to engage research communities in the turn to openness and encourages them to take ownership of it in order to sustain these approaches in the longer term. One of the MORPHSS work packages is dedicated to piloting an alternative approach to peer review that seeks to "open up" publications through a structured collective review process. For this issue, we devised a two-stage review process that sought to harness the generative power of reviewer collectives while ensuring the process remained sensitive to the expectations of HSS research communities.

First, we invited all the authors that submitted to the special issue to read and annotate each other's work. These articles were staged on a Google Docs platform and opened up for comment by other authors (who were not anonymized). We asked commenters to consider themselves critical friends, making connections between other articles, suggesting better ways to explain a point, highlighting where a text was not clear, and offering additional references or points of discussion where appropriate. Over the course of six weeks, authors commented on each other's work, and a series of lively discussions took place. Many authors thanked their fellow special issue authors for their helpful feedback and praised the generous nature of the process.

Second, more substantive discussions were convened with groups of two to three experts per article. These groups were given time to read the article independently and

were then invited to an hour-long online meeting to discuss their comments on the article and produce a collaborative report for the authors (signed by each reviewer). The first half of each meeting was dedicated to discussion, and the second half was dedicated to crafting the comments for the authors. The process was designed to be discursive and generative with the aim that conversations on each article would lead to more helpful feedback. Reviewers were not required to agree unanimously on all the feedback that was communicated, although in practice there were few disagreements, and most reviewer groups were easily able to summarize their comments on each article. We are also grateful to Rebekka Kiesewetter for letting us use and adapt the code of conduct she designed for the review process of her recent *Culture Machine* special issue (which is discussed in Rebekka's article in this issue).

While we have not yet had time to write up the results of this experiment, we were very pleased with how the review process went. Reviewers entered into the process with collaboration and the need to provide careful feedback in mind. These meetings felt rigorous and critical yet lacked the kind of combative tone that we have come to expect from peer review processes. Our feeling is that this well-structured process incorporates many of the positive features of open approaches, including collective feedback on preprints and open identities and reports in peer review, while doing so in a way that is sensitive to the working practices of HSS researchers. As with other instances of interactive and collaborative review in HSS, such as the review processes used in *Fennia: International Journal of Geography* (see Kallio 2023) and the *Public Philosophy Journal*, this approach also illustrates the extent to which productive forms of openness in AHSS are not necessarily universal but may take place within and between specific groups and communities. In turn, this highlights the potential of such open practice to foreground a view of knowledge production as inherently collaborative rather than individualistic or competitive. Furthermore, the entire process was swift, both because individual reviewers did not have to produce separate reports and because the review meetings presented a firm deadline that could not be missed without inconveniencing other reviewers. This meant that the time from assignment of reviewers to first decision took approximately six to eight weeks. We have asked reviewers and authors to write up their impressions of the process and plan to publish a longer report about the outcomes of the experimental review process in due course.

What emerges from this collection, we feel, is a distinct sense of the specificities of practice across HSS disciplines of which overarching discourses and operationalizations of open research must take account. But what also emerges is the fact that HSS researchers have a rich set of tools at our disposal with which to theorize what open research is and can be for our disciplines. HSS researchers must be given the space to explore and flexibly define what open research means for our work—and must also actively embrace this task in order to contribute to an emergent pluralistic agenda around openness in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

## References

- De Rijcke, Sarah, and Bart Penders. 2018. "Resist Calls for Replicability in the Humanities." *Nature* 560 (7716): 29. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-05845-z>.
- Dutta, Mohan, Srividya Ramasubramanian, Mereana Barrett, et al. 2021. "Decolonizing Open Science: Southern Interventions." *Journal of Communication* 71 (5): 803–26. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab027>.
- Feldman, Shelley, and Linda Shaw. 2019. "The Epistemological and Ethical Challenges of Archiving and Sharing Qualitative Data." *American Behavioral Scientist* 63 (6): 699–721. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218796084>.
- Fox, Jesse, Katy E. Pearce, Adrienne L. Massanari, et al. 2021. "Open Science, Closed Doors? Countering Marginalization Through an Agenda for Ethical, Inclusive Research in Communication." *Journal of Communication* 71 (5): 764–84. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab029>.
- Holbrook, J. Britt, Bart Penders, and Sarah de Rijcke. 2019. "The Humanities Do Not Need a Replication Drive." *CWTS* (blog), January 21. <https://www.cwts.nl/blog?article=n-r2v2a4&title=the-humanities-do-not-need-a-replication-drive>.
- Kallio, Kirsi Pauliina. 2023. "The Vital Importance of Being Open: Reflections on Peer Reviewing in Scholarly Publishing." *Scottish Geographical Journal* 139 (1–2): 150–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702541.2023.2187447>.
- Knöchelmann, Marcel. 2019. "Open Science in the Humanities, or: Open Humanities?" *Publications* 7 (4): 65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications7040065>.
- Monroe, Kristen Renwick. 2018. "The Rush to Transparency: DA-RT and the Potential Dangers for Qualitative Research." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (1): 141–48. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759271700336X>.
- Nordtveit, Bjørn H. 2018. "Data Sharing in Comparative and International Education." *Comparative Education Review* 62 (1): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695838>.
- Patton, Chloe. 2025. "Replicability and the Humanities: The Problem with Universal Measures of Research Quality." *Research Evaluation* 34 (December): rvaf052. <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvaf052>.
- Pownall, Madeleine. 2022. "Is Replication Possible for Qualitative Research?" Preprint, PsyArXiv, June 14. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/dwxeg>.
- Pratt, Michael G., Sarah Kaplan, and Richard Whittington. 2020. "Editorial Essay: The Tumult over Transparency: Decoupling Transparency from Replication in Establishing Trustworthy Qualitative Research." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 65 (1): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839219887663>.
- Santana, Carlos. 2024. "The Value of Openness in Open Science." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 54 (4): 251–65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/can.2024.44>.
- Steltenpohl, Crystal, Hilary Lustick, Melanie S. Meyer, et al. 2024. "Rethinking Transparency and Rigor from a Qualitative Open Science Perspective." *Journal of Trial and Error* 4 (1): 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.36850/mr7>.
- Tsai, Alexander C., Brandon A. Kohrt, Lynn T. Matthews, et al. 2016. "Promises and Pitfalls of Data Sharing in Qualitative Research." *Social Science & Medicine* 169 (November): 191–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.08.004>.

