

CHAPTER 6

But Is It Ethical? Considering What's "Right"

Neutrality is not pluralistic but imperialistic . . . reinscribing the agenda in its own terms.

(Christians 2000, 142)

Research in itself is a powerful intervention . . . which has traditionally benefited the researcher, and the knowledge base of the dominant group in society.

(Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 176)

As a group of students entered their second semester together in a qualitative research methods class, they reflected on the role trial and error had played in their best-learned lessons. Ernie wondered, "Can you even consider the possibility of learning research ethics through trial and error?" With increased awareness of ethical issues, they deliberated over perceived ethical dilemmas and wondered about unintended consequences of their work.

This group of students realized that ethical considerations should accompany plans, thoughts, and discussions about each aspect of qualitative research. Ethics is not something that you can forget once you satisfy the demands of university ethics committees and other gatekeepers of research conduct. Nor is it "merely a matter of isolated choices in crucial situations" (Cassell and Jacobs 1987, 1). Rather, ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with research participants and with your data.

Ethical decisions are not peculiar to qualitative inquiry. Guidelines for ethical conduct grew out of medical and other types of intrusive research and led to emphases on informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality. Different epistemological systems give rise to different ethical concerns (Lincoln 1990; Scott 1996). Positivist inquiry emphasizes separation between researcher and researched while, in most interpretivist research, researcher-researched interaction is common. The distance between researcher and participants does not make a study more conducive to meeting ethical standards. Indeed, a neutral stance, in itself, is construed as an ethical issue because it can mean objectification of others.

Much ethical discussion and consideration in qualitative research, therefore, concerns the nature of relationships with research participants.

Many feminist, critical, and indigenous researchers argue that research purposes, themselves, are an ethical issue and that intentions must go beyond bestowing "hope" for future contributions, and glossing over "abuses of power and human need in the present" (Christians 2000, 144). Such perspectives require that the research purposes and processes be constantly negotiated with research participants. What constitutes ethicality then becomes determined through dialog and is heavily contextual. It follows that choosing your topic and designing your methods can be perceived as an ethical issue because what you choose to research and how you design the inquiry relates to your philosophical and ethical stance on the purpose and nature of research.

Generally, this chapter focuses on ethical issues that arise out of the researcher-researched relationship in qualitative research approaches. It does not discuss those ethical issues generic to all types of research, such as falsifying results or publishing without crediting co-researchers. As in previous chapters, unequivocal advice on "right" or "wrong" ways to behave is difficult to provide. Rather, the issues raised here are meant to alert you to areas that need consideration and forethought, so that you can possibly avoid learning ethical lessons through trial and error.

ETHICAL CODES

Nazi concentration camps and the atomic bomb served to undermine the image of science as value-free and automatically contributing to human welfare (Diener and Crandall 1978). Medical research in the United States that resulted in physical harm to subjects (such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study) and social science research that caused, at the least, psychological pain (such as the Milgram shock experiment) led to the formation of codes of ethics by different professional organizations and academic institutions. By 1974, the federal government had mandated the establishment of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at all universities that accepted federal funding for research involving human subjects. Other countries established similar groups (e.g., the University Ethics Committees in Britain, the Human Research Ethics Committees in Australia). Five basic principles guide the decisions of IRBs when reviewing applicants' proposals:

1. Research subjects must have sufficient information to make informed decisions about participating in a study.
2. Research subjects must be able to withdraw, without penalty, from a study at any point.
3. All unnecessary risks to a research subject must be eliminated.
4. Benefits to the subject or society, preferably both, must outweigh all potential risks.
5. Experiments should be conducted only by qualified investigators.

Various professional groups created their own codes of ethics tailored for research in their disciplines. The ethical guidelines adopted by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) address issues that ethnographic researchers in particular face. The AAA Code of Ethics has evolved through several iterations, most recently amended and adopted by the AAA membership in 1998. The following portion is taken from their five-page statement (see <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>) and focuses upon researchers' responsibilities to people and animals with whom they work and whose lives and cultures they study.

1. Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work. These obligations can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge, and can lead to decisions not to undertake or to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities, such as those owed to sponsors or clients. . . .
2. Anthropological researchers must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities . . .
3. Anthropological researchers must determine in advance whether their hosts/providers of information wish to remain anonymous or receive recognition, and make every effort to comply with those wishes. Researchers must present to their research participants the possible impacts of the choices, and make clear that despite their best efforts, anonymity may be compromised or recognition fail to materialize.
4. Anthropological researchers should obtain in advance the informed consent of persons being studied, providing information, owning or controlling access to material being studied, or otherwise identified as having interests which might be impacted by the research. It is understood that the degree and breadth of informed consent required will depend on the nature of the project and may be affected by requirements of other codes, laws, and ethics of the country or community in which the research is pursued. Further, it is understood that the informed consent process is dynamic and continuous; the process should be initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of dialogue and negotiation with those studied. . . . Informed consent, for the purpose of this code, does not necessarily imply or require a particular written or signed form. It is the quality of the consent, not the format, that is relevant.
5. Anthropological researchers who have developed close and enduring relationships . . . with either individual persons providing information or with hosts must adhere to the obligations of openness and informed consent, while carefully and respectfully negotiating the limits of the relationship.
6. While anthropologists may gain personally from their work, they must not exploit individuals, groups, animals, or cultural or biological materials. They should recognize their debt to the societies in which they work and their obligation to reciprocate with people studied in appropriate ways. (American Anthropological Association 1998, 2-3)

The AAA Code of Ethics includes directives on the researcher's responsibilities to scholarship and science, the public, students and trainees, and applied work.

Many of the principles are general and open to interpretation; nonetheless, they provide a framework for reflection on fieldwork, sensitizing you to areas that require thoughtful decisions.

In light of today's codes of ethics, a number of studies from the 1950s and 1960s would never be approved. Generally, subjects were drawn from low-power groups; in some cases, they gave information only to have the findings used against their own interests by people in positions of power (Punch 1986). Ethical codes help to mitigate this occurrence. Nonetheless, as some researchers observe, ethical codes can also protect the powerful. For example, Wilkins (1979, 109) notes that prisoners' rights are rarely a matter of concern for authorities until someone wants to do research in prisons. In effect, authorities can protect themselves under the guise of protecting subjects. Institutions that require explicit consent often have elaborate screening devices to deflect research on sensitive issues. Galliher asks, "Is not the failure of sociology to uncover corrupt, illegitimate covert practices of government or industry because of the supposed prohibitions of professional ethics tantamount to supporting such practices?" (Galliher 1982, 160).

In addition, aspects of ethical research codes are culturally based. Lipson (1994) points out how Western codes of ethics focus on respect for the individual and for individual rights, while "in many other cultures, 'personhood' is defined in terms of one's tribe, social group, or village" (341). She uses examples from her work with Afghan refugees to demonstrate how "Afghans do not think of themselves as individuals who have their own rights or autonomy, but as members of families" (342). Because people in many parts of the world think and act in terms of community, rather than the individual, Howitt and Stevens (2005, 38) suggest that the non-local researcher has the ethical obligation to obtain formal or informal community-based research agreements that may go far beyond IRB guidelines in that the community may become involved in "identifying appropriate research goals and questions, appropriate ways to seek knowledge (culturally specific, appropriate methodologies), and appropriate ways for research findings and knowledge to be shared."

With cross-cultural research dilemmas in mind, a commission raised the issue of whether or not the AAA had the moral authority to create a code of ethics if it also espoused *cultural relativism*. That is, they asked if moral codes of different cultures can be considered as morally equal, how was it that the AAA could develop a code of ethics for conducting research? In their discussion, the commission concluded that although cultural relativism is an important intellectual stance for understanding practices within a culture, it does not mean that the researcher has to agree with any or all of the practices of a people being studied. For example, although slavery is generally considered wrong, the practice continues to exist in some places and is worthy of study. The commission eventually agreed that the development of an ethical code was important as a guide for people doing field research. That ethical codes may preclude certain kinds of research or that they may be culturally based are not grounds for dismissal, but rather indicate how, in qualitative research, standards of ethicality may evolve as your research perspectives grow and your participation increases.

INFORMED CONSENT

Though informed consent neither precludes the abuse of research findings, nor creates a symmetrical relationship between researcher and researched, it can contribute to the empowering of research participants. The appropriateness of informed consent, particularly written consent forms, however, is a debated issue that accompanies discussions of codes of ethics by qualitative inquirers. Through informed consent, potential study participants are made aware (1) that participation is voluntary, (2) of any aspects of the research that might affect their well-being, and (3) that they may freely choose to stop participation at any point in the study. Originally developed for biomedical research, informed consent is now applicable when participants may be exposed to physical or emotional risk.

Sometimes the requirement of written consent is readily accepted, as in the case of obtaining parental consent before studying young children. In other cases, as recognized by IRBs, the very record left by consent papers could put some individuals' safety at risk if discussing sensitive topics (i.e., crime, sexual behavior, drug use). In some cross-cultural situations, consent forms can be seen as part of Western bureaucratic tracking systems. With a heritage of loss through signing names, many in postcolonial countries are understandably mistrustful of forms, especially those requiring signatures. Another quandary is that qualitative research plans often change, particularly in long-term studies, rendering the standard one-time consent at the beginning of the project potentially problematic.

Margaret Mead stated, "anthropological research does not have subjects. We work with informants in an atmosphere of mutual respect" (in Diener and Crandall 1978, 52). Field relationships continually undergo informal renegotiation as respect, interest, and acceptance grow or wane for both researcher and participant. As the relationship develops, the researcher may be invited to participate in ways he or she hoped for, but could not have sought access to in the beginning (from secret ceremonies to executive golfing rounds). When research becomes collaborative, cooperation, active assistance, and collegiality may exceed the demands of informed consent (Diener and Crandall 1978; Wax 1982). Indeed, cooperation and partnership may be more relevant to the ethical assessment of qualitative fieldwork than whether or not informed consent forms were signed.

RESEARCHER ROLES AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

In the beginning stages of interpretivist research projects, novices tend to see their research role as one of data gathering. As they become more involved in fieldwork, they find themselves functioning in a variety of roles depending upon research purposes and procedures, their own characteristics, and personal attributes of research participants. Some of the roles may worry the researcher while others may be attractive but perplexing in relationship to their data-gathering goal. This

section addresses several roles that qualitative researchers easily assume: exploiter, reformer, advocate, and friend. Different ethical dilemmas accompany each role.

Exploiter

Esperanza has given me her story to smuggle across the border. Just as rural Mexican laborers export their bodies for labor on American soil, Esperanza has given me her story for export only. . . . The question will be whether I can act as her literary broker without becoming the worst kind of coyote, getting her across, but only by exploiting her lack of power to make it to *el otro lado* any other way.

(Behar 1993, 234)

Questions of exploitation, or "using" your others, tend to arise as you become immersed in your research and begin to rejoice in the richness of what you are learning. You are thankful, but you may begin to feel guilty for how much you are receiving and how little you seem to be giving in return. Take this concern seriously. Many researchers, as uninvited outsiders, have entered a new community, mined the raw data of words and behaviors, and then withdrawn to process those data into a product that served themselves and, perhaps, their professional colleagues. Research participants usually remain anonymous. In contrast, researchers may get status, prestige, and royalties from publications (Plummer 1983). Researchers sometimes justify their actions with trickle-down promises such as, "Through getting the word out to other professionals (special educators, nurses, social workers), we will be able to help other people like you." Today, some refer to this type of research as *colonial research*.

Exploitation involves questions of power and control. If you are not engaged in collaborative research projects, then how do you decide if you are "using" your participants? Mitzi began to interview homeless mothers about the schooling of their children. She agonized over questions of exploitation:

What am I giving back to these homeless mothers that I interview? It seems so unfair that this middle class privileged person is "using" this needy population . . . Can someone in a shelter tell me they don't have time? Privilege allows my response [of no time] to others to be OK. For them, that response would be suspect.

Dick, in his study of first-year principals, felt he "used" his relationships, his contacts, and his friends all over the state to get data.

Mitzi and Dick ask difficult questions. They were both working on dissertation studies and feeling as though they were receiving more than they were giving. They most likely were. One could ask, however, in what ways were they giving back to the communities? Mitzi and Dick treated interviewees with respect and dignity. That was ethical. They listened carefully, making sure they understood what was told to them. That was ethical. Mitzi worked in social services and Dick in public education. Both planned to incorporate what they were learning in the work they did and to share it with others. That was ethical. Neither made promises

to participants to solve their problems; rather they listened to their stories and resolved to make their voices heard. That was ethical.

If the standard of ethicality is resolving the difficulties of people from whom you collect data, and resolving them right away, then much research is doomed never to begin. Nonetheless, the question of exploitation needs serious attention; a question that has led many researchers to make the choice of more collaborative-based research. Try answering the following questions posed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 173):

- Who defined the research problem?
- For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
- What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
- What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
- What are some likely positive outcomes from this study?
- What are some possible negative outcomes?
- To whom is the researcher accountable?

If your answers clearly show that you do all the decision-making and acquire the most, think seriously about modifying your research design.

Intervener/Reformer

Unlike the exploiter role, which researchers wander into but want to avoid, the intervener or reformer role is one researchers may consciously decide to assume. As a result of conducting research, researchers may attempt to right what they judge to be wrong, to change what they condemn as unjust. Through observations at a zoo, Nancy grew increasingly concerned over what she considered to be inhumane treatment of certain animals and agonized over what to do with her information.

In the process of doing research, researchers often acquire information that is potentially dangerous to some people. Don was interested in the history of an educational research organization. As he interviewed, he lamented, "I'm hearing stuff that I neither need nor wish to know about attitudes and relationships." The process was complicated for Don because he was investigating an organization in which he himself was involved.

As I interviewed young Caribbean farmers about their practices, I unexpectedly learned about the illegal cultivation and marketing of marijuana. And as Peshkin interviewed students in his ethnicity study, he became privy to information like the following:

You know about the corner store, right? No? Gosh. They sell alcohol to anyone. Anyone. My friend and I went there to buy some chips and the guy who was standing behind the counter said, "You guys drink? I'll sell you some wine coolers. I won't tell your parents. Don't worry about it. Want some wine cooler?"

When research participants trust you, you invariably receive the privilege and burden of learning things that are problematic at best and dangerous at worst.

Your ethical dilemma concerns what to do with dangerous knowledge. To what extent should you continue to protect the confidentiality of research participants? If you learn about illegal behavior, should you expose it? If those of us in the above examples informed authorities of our knowledge, we would jeopardize not only our continued research in those sites, but also possible subsequent projects. None of us discussed our knowledge with other research participants, nor personally intervened. If what you learn relates to the point of your study, explore ways to communicate the dangerous knowledge so that you fully maintain the anonymity of your sources. Continual protection of confidentiality is generally the best policy (Ball 1985; Fine and Sandstrom 1988).

In their book *Knowing Children*, Fine and Sandstrom (1988) discuss how preadolescents "not only behave in ways that are unknowingly dangerous, but also knowingly and consciously behave in ways that are outside the rules set by adults" (55). As trust develops between the researcher and children, words and actions of the children may pose ethical dilemmas for the researcher. A child may, for example, act as a bully or make a sexist comment. Fine and Sandstrom conclude that "children must be permitted to engage in certain actions and speak certain words that the adult researcher finds distressing. Further, in some instances, the researcher must act in ways that are at least tacitly supportive of these distressing behaviors" (Fine and Sandstrom 1988, 55).

The question remains, however, of how "wrong" a situation must be before you should intervene on the basis of your unexpectedly acquired knowledge. If, for example, as a researcher you suspect ongoing emotional abuse of a child, do you react differently than if your work puts you in contact with students being offered alcohol at the corner store? Could not the latter also be construed as a case of child abuse? How do you decide where the lines are between a felt moral obligation to intervene and an obligation to continue as the data-collecting researcher?

No definitive answers can be provided for many questions and again, judgments are made on a mix of contextual elements and personal compulsions. Some preventative measures, however, will help avoid such dilemmas. Laurie, a nurse, conducted research in a hospital setting. She worried about what she should do if she observed malpractice while in her research role. Finally, she discussed her worries with her cohorts in a qualitative research methods class. By taking the worry seriously and putting it through a variety of configurations, the class urged Laurie to meet with her gatekeepers and with the nursing staff she was observing and interviewing to get their advice on how she should proceed if she observed malpractice.

Developing some sort of support group to discuss worries and dilemmas is a valuable part of the research process. Some researchers build a panel of experts into their research design. A student's dissertation committee can serve this function, but expert panels and dissertation committees do not necessarily know how to deal with ethical questions that arise in qualitative research. Ideally, the researcher has a support group made up of others who, although perhaps involved in substantively different topics, are all struggling with similar methodological questions.

Advocate

Advocates are like interventionists in that they decide to take a position on some issue that they become aware of through their research. Unlike interveners or reformers who try to change something within the research site, the advocate champions a cause. As Lynne interviewed university custodians, she was tempted to become an advocate:

I keep asking myself to what extent the research should improve the situation for custodians. This is magnified somewhat by my feeling that I have been a participant in the process, raising issues with custodians that many by now have come to terms with or raising expectations that some good will result. Even though my research was for the purpose of understanding and not "fixing," how can one come so close to what is judged to be a very bad situation and walk away? I keep asking myself, "Do I own them solutions or at least some relief?" My answer is always "no," but then I keep asking myself the same question, probably because I just don't like my answer.

Lynne's research heightened her concern for the well-being of the custodians she studied, and the "take-the-data-and-run" approach left her uncomfortable. In the interpretivist tradition, advocacy can take a variety of forms—presentations and publications among the most readily available. Lynne needs to decide whether such formats will serve her concern, or if there are others that are within her competency that would be acceptable to the custodians. She expresses well a motivation of some qualitative researchers who seek out more collaborative or participatory action research.

Finch (1984) experienced a quandary over publishing data she collected through her study of playgroups. She found that child-care standards differed among working- and middle-class women.

This evidence, I feared, could be used to reinforce the view that working-class women are inadequate and incompetent childrearers. Again, I felt that I was not willing to heap further insults upon women whose circumstances were far less privileged than my own, and indeed for a while, I felt quite unable to write *anything* about this aspect of the playground study. Finch (1984)

Finch resolved her dilemma by distinguishing between the structural position in which the women were placed and their own experience with that position. This enabled Finch to "see that evidence of women successfully accommodating to various structural features of their lives in no way alters the essentially exploitative character of the structures in which they are located" (Finch 1984, 84). Thus, she described the child-care practices of the working-class women in a way that would support them in an unfair and unequal society. Finch did not alter her data; she did not explain away the differences she uncovered. Her ethical sensitivity led her to contextualize her findings, so that the behavior of the two groups of women was framed within the differential realities of their lives. Confronting the ethical dilemma resulted in more effective interpretation.

Friend

Researchers often have friendly relations with research participants; in some cases, the relationship is one of friendship. Whether friendship or friendliness is the case, ethical dilemmas can result. You may gain access to intimate information given to you in the context of friendship rather than in your researcher role. Should you use such data? Both Hansen's (1976) exploration of Danish life and Daniels' (1967) investigation within a military setting relied on personal friendships as channels for information. Hansen (1976) expressed her discomfort with her role as researcher and her role as friend: "The confidential information I received was given to me in my role as friend. Yet, I was also an anthropologist and everything I heard or observed was potentially relevant to my understanding of the dynamics of Danish interaction" (Hansen 1976, 127). Hansen refers to a particular confidential story told to her by one woman:

Later that day I would record this conversation, alone, without her knowledge, in my role as anthropologist. In my role as investigator the conversation became "data." Would she have spoken so frankly about this and other more intimate subjects had she understood that I listened in *both* roles, not only as friend? (129)

As she continued to gather data, Hansen grew concerned over how she would protect the anonymity of her interviewees and struggled with thoughts on whether public description of behaviors violates an individual's right to privacy. She and Daniels both experienced ethical dilemmas over publishing findings that would possibly discomfort their friends, if not betray their friendship relationships.

Both Hansen and Daniels need to ask whether their narrative truly needs to include all that their friends tell them. Will the narrative hold up if the troublesome bits are excluded? Can these troublesome bits be presented in less troublesome ways? In the end, should we not let our friends be judges, by submitting to them what we have written, and taking our lead from their decisions?

In Busier et al.'s (1997) article "Intimacy in Research," the authors argue that intimacy can be a "route to understanding" (165) but that it carries with it responsibilities and considerations, including reflexivity on the nature and influence of the relationship, analysis of the role of power in the relationship, and attunement to relational ethics. In relational ethics "the derivation and authority of moral behavior [is located] not in rules and obligations as such, but in our attachments and regard for others . . ." (Flinders 1992, 106). Predicated on trust, care, and a sense of collaboration, relational ethics is at the core of research in which friendship relationships are welcomed.

THE RESEARCHER-RESEARCHED RELATIONSHIP

No matter how qualitative researchers view their roles, they develop relationships with research participants. Unlike the friendship relationships described previously, conventional research relationships are generally asymmetrical, with power

disproportionately located on the side of the researcher. Thus, codes of ethics instruct researchers to consciously consider and protect the rights of participants to privacy, to reflect on and mitigate deceptive aspects of research, and to consider issues of reciprocity.

The Right to Privacy

In discussions of the rights of research participants, privacy is generally the foremost concern. Participants have a right to expect that when they give you permission to observe and interview, you will protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity. Respect confidentiality by not discussing with anyone the specifics of what you see and hear. When a principal asks you what you are learning from the teachers, you respond with something like the following:

I am really enjoying talking with your teachers. They seem to take both their jobs and my research seriously and are therefore helping me tremendously. It's too early yet to know what I can make of all the information I'm receiving, but a couple of themes have been emerging and I'd like the opportunity to discuss them with you. Do you have the time?

Such a response leads away from particular individuals and toward the discussion of general concepts, which respects the principal's interest in your findings without violating any of your commitments to teachers. Such discussions must balance your unqualified obligation to the teachers with your appreciation of the principal's natural interest in your findings. It also makes use of an opportunity for participant feedback or a "member check" (Lincoln and Guba 1985) on your analytical categories.

Researchers sometimes argue over whether unobtrusive methods, even in public places, invade rights of privacy. This discussion usually includes debates on the use of covert observation (to be discussed in the next section, "Deception"). One position is that covert observation in public places is permissible because people ordinarily watch and are watched by others in public places. Accordingly, social scientists should be able to observe as well. A counterpoint is that when such observations are systematic, recorded, and analyzed, they no longer are ordinary and thereby violate rights of privacy.

Similar arguments develop around less discussed means of unobtrusive data collection. Diener and Crandall (1978) describe a study in which researchers used both surveys and the contents of garbage bags to discover what people bought, discarded, and wasted in different sectors of Tucson, Arizona. The findings concluded that poor people waste less food than higher-income people, and that there is a marked discrepancy between self-reports on alcohol consumption and evidence from bottles and cans in the garbage. Although garbage content was not linked to particular households, the examined bags often included envelopes with names on them. Do such studies violate privacy rights?

The issue of privacy arises again during the writing-up phase of the qualitative inquiry process. To protect the anonymity of research participants, researchers

use fictitious names and sometimes change descriptive characteristics such as age or hair color. Fictitious names, however, do not necessarily protect participants as demonstrated by two frequently cited cases: West's (1945) *Plainville, U.S.A.* and Vidich and Bensman's (1968) *Small Town in Mass Society*. Despite made-up names, the towns were easily identified by descriptions of their characteristics and locations, and people in the towns easily recognized themselves in the descriptions of individuals. In both cases, research participants were upset by the portrayals of the towns and their inhabitants. Critics (see Johnson 1982, 76) point out that West, for example, focused on the negative, that he looked with an urban perspective, and that he used offensive and judgmental words such as "hillbilly" or "people who lived like animals."

Plummer (1983) states that although "confidentiality may appear to be a prerequisite of life history research, it frequently becomes an impossibility" (142). He cites several examples: Fifty years after the original study, Shaw's (1930/1966) Jack Roller was located for reinterview, and after a month of detective work, a reporter tracked down Oscar Lewis's (1963) *Children of Sanchez*. In addition to breaches of privacy, these examples also illustrate potential difficulty in observing the ethical principle of "doing no harm." Although "no harm" may be done during the research process, harm may result from making research findings public. In publishing findings, the researcher needs to consider how the manuscript could potentially affect both the individual and the community. If specific information about an individual were released, would it cause him or her pain? If collective information about a community were published, does it harm its reputation or social standing? If the researcher's analysis is different from that of participants, should one, both, or neither be published? Even if respondents tend to agree that some aspect of their community is unflattering, should the researcher make this information public? In sum, what obligations does the researcher have to research participants when publishing findings?

Scott (1996) distinguishes between *open autocratic research* and *open democratic research*. In the open autocratic case, the researcher is open with research participants about all aspects of the research and invites their feedback on research interpretations, but does not give the respondents the rights of veto. In open democratic research, participants have the right to control not only which data are collected but also which data are included in the research report, through a series of negotiations between researcher and project participants. In the first situation, power resides with the researcher; in the second situation, community power and politics affect what gets researched and reported. Both positions can be problematic.

Despite justified worry about protecting anonymity, researchers may also have to deal with anonymity declined. Jacobs (1987) tells of an anthropologist who wrote about a community in Melanesia; she disguised villagers and their location through use of pseudonyms. Three years later, she returned to the field to distribute copies of her manuscript to those who had been most helpful and to ask permission to conduct further study. People liked the book and felt the accounts were correct, but told her that she had gotten the name of the village wrong and the names of the individuals wrong. She was told to be more accurate in the next book.

When her second book was completed, she sent a copy to the village and asked for comments as well as whether they still wanted actual names used. When she did not get a direct reply to her question, she used the same pseudonyms in her second monograph.

In another case of anonymity declined, an applied medical anthropologist worked for three years in an urban African American community. Before she published her articles, she asked community members to read, comment on, and criticize them. They complimented her on her accuracy, but questioned her use of pseudonyms for the town, the health center, and the individuals who "struggle to improve the healthcare for our people" (in Jacobs 1987, 26). The anthropologist explained the reasons for privacy conventions and how disclosing names could result in possible harm. In the end, she omitted the actual name of the center and its location, but she acknowledged the names of staff members in footnotes. This decision was made collaboratively.

The emphasis on confidentiality may, in itself, reflect a Western bias. In some countries, such as Tanzania, the prevailing expectation for research projects is that names of interviewees will be published in an appendix, and "to deviate from this procedure may be perceived as either confusing or arrogant" (Ryen 2007, 221). Yet, as indicated above, publishing names of all participants can be problematic, particularly if the research is dealing with sensitive issues in which statements by participants conflict with perspectives of people in positions of power.

Privacy and the Internet

The use of Internet communications as a forum for data gathering raises new ethical challenges to the right to privacy (Marrn and Stewart 2000; Robson and Robson, 2002). The use of such technology makes it relatively easy to gather data from a widespread population and removes the time and money-consuming task of transcription. Also, a researcher can easily share and receive feedback on research findings with participants. No clear ethical guidelines pave the way, however, for researchers using computer-mediated communications. One problem is that contexts are neither private nor public, but rather on a kind of continuum between private and public (Elm 2009). For example, some investigators have observed online communities or conducted interviews in chat rooms. Are such places public venues? Should consent be obtained from all participants in chat rooms, newsgroups, or mailing lists? If researchers are using information from such sources and want to gain consent, they must consider how they will do so since participation can be sporadic and change frequently. It is also more difficult to promise confidentiality in Internet communications, particularly to users of chat groups. You can use pseudonyms in your published text, but if you include quotations, it is easy to track down the source by conducting a search for the quote.

Robson and Robson (2002, 95) advise researchers to pay attention to not only ethical codes for doing social science research but also to codes of conduct, or *netiquette*, developed by online communities. For example, the Computer

Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) has produced a set of privacy guidelines that include the need for individuals to be made aware of any collection of personal information and of how the information will be used. In 2000, the Association of Internet Researchers appointed a working group with the task of creating ethical guidelines for Internet research (see www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf). This is a useful guide, but technology changes quickly, and the Internet context is so varied that many questions regarding its use remain.

More computer-related privacy and consent issues arise with the increased possibilities of archiving and making widely available all aspects of research—from interview transcripts to videotapes. Consent may be released for current use of research data, but can consent be given for some unknowable future use by someone the participant has never met? These kinds of quandaries posed by technology and Internet research make it imperative that researchers carefully consider not only ethical guidelines but also the ethical treatment of participants in light of the context of their particular studies (Baym and Markham 2009).

Deception

It is interesting, and even ironic, that social scientists espouse some of the techniques normally associated with morally polluted professions, such as policing and spying, and enjoy some of the moral ambivalence surrounding those occupations.

(Punch 1994, 91)

Chris was interested in researching the gay community on a university campus. He attended a meeting of the Gay/Lesbian Alliance as a participant observer, jotting notes unobtrusively. Because the meetings were open to the public, he originally saw no reason to proclaim his role as researcher. As that first meeting continued, however, he struggled with feelings of deception and guilt. Finally, he quit taking notes and decided to meet with the organization's officers and obtain permission to attend meetings in the role of researcher.

Conventionally, we regard deception as wrong. Nonetheless, its role in research has been debated over time. Deception easily enters various aspects of research, and it can take the form of either deliberate commission or omission. For example, in covert studies, participants never know that they are part of a research project. Some researchers have misrepresented their identities and pretended to be people they were not; others have presented themselves as researchers but have not fully explained what it was that they were researching. This latter practice is called omission, or *shallow cover* (Fine 1980). The decision to deceive generally rests on a concern to ensure the most natural behavior among research participants.

Punch (1986, 39) raises two questions concerning the role of deception in research: (1) Are there areas in which some measure of deception is justified in gaining data? and (2) Are devious means legitimate in institutions that deserve exposure? These questions summarize the debate over the use of deliberate deception in research.

Covert research gets its strongest support from those who advocate research of the powerful. As in investigative journalism, access to the workings of some groups or institutions with power would be impossible without deception. Van den Berge says of his research in South Africa, "From the outset, I decided that I should have no scruples in deceiving the government" (in Punch 1986, 39). If you, like Van den Berge, view an institution as "essentially dishonorable, morally outrageous and destructive," do you ignore it and study something more publicly acceptable in order to avoid being deceptive? Jack Douglas, a strong supporter of the *utilitarian* or "ends justify the means" approach, states,

The social researcher is . . . entitled and indeed compelled to adopt covert methods. Social actors employ lies, fraud, deceit, deception, and blackmail in dealings with each other. Therefore the social scientist is justified in using them where necessary in order to achieve the higher objective of scientific truth. (in Punch 1986, 39)

From the utilitarian perspective, deception in research has been justified by potential benefits to the larger society. Ethical decisions are made on the basis that moral action is that which results in the greatest good for the greatest number. This perspective went hand in hand with the positivistic belief that value-neutral science was possible and that rational thought and science could solve the world's problems. Critics of this position argue that although costs and benefits may be estimated, both are impossible to predict and to measure. Furthermore, who is to set the standards that determine when something is for the greater good of society? Who defines what is "good?" This approach overlooks the power and ideology of institutions (from pharmaceutical labs to the U.S. Congress) that support much of the research that is done and therefore get to decide what is "good" (Christians 2000).

For most interpretivists, the utilitarian position—that one does what is necessary for the greater good—is overshadowed by the *deontological* ethical stance, which posits that moral conduct can be judged independently of its consequences. The deontological framework holds up some standard, such as justice or respect or honesty, by which to evaluate actions. This position changes the nature of the researcher-researched relationship and readily makes it unethical for researchers to misrepresent their identity to gain entry into settings otherwise denied to them or to deliberately misrepresent the purpose of their research. Bulmer (1982), for example, argues that covert research is not ethically justified, practically necessary, or in the best interest of social scientists. He views the rights of subjects as overriding the rights of science, thereby limiting areas of research that can be pursued. Bulmer suggests that the need for covert methods is exaggerated and that open entry may more often be negotiated than is commonly supposed (Bulmer 1982, 250).

Even when you are as honest and open as possible about the nature of your research, you will continue to develop ethical questions concerning your fieldwork. Many of the questions will be context-bound, arising out of specific instances in each study. For example, informed consent regulations indicate that

you should disclose to potential participants all information necessary for them to make intelligent decisions about participation. Yet doing so is difficult in qualitative research because often you are not fully aware of what you are looking for, among whom, or with what possible risks. "The researcher is in a perplexing situation," states Erickson. "He or she needs to have done an ethnography of the setting in order to anticipate the range of risks and other burdens that will be involved for those studied" (Erickson 1986, 141). Although the partial nature of your knowledge does not obviate the propriety of informed consent, it does make implementing it problematic.

Reciprocity

In some kinds of research, reciprocity is assumed to be a matter of monetarily rewarding research subjects for their time. Although participants in qualitative research sometimes receive payment, the issue of reciprocity becomes more difficult because of the time involved and the nature of relationships developed. The degree of indebtedness varies considerably from study to study and from participant to participant, depending upon the topic, the amount and type of time researchers spend with participants, and the degree of collaboration.

Glazer (1982, 50) defines *reciprocity* as "the exchange of favors and commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community." As research participants open up their lives to researchers—giving time, sharing intimate stories, and frequently including them in both public and private events and activities—researchers become ambivalent, alternately overjoyed with the data they are producing, but worried by their perceived inability to adequately reciprocate. As I wrote up my Caribbean work, I reflected:

Cultural thieving is what ethnographers do if their written product is limited in its benefits to the gatherer and, perhaps, his or her community. Also known as "data exportation" or "academic imperialism" (Hamnett and Porter 1983, 65), the process is reminiscent of past archaeologists carrying stone, pottery, and golden artifacts away from "exotic" places of origin to the archaeologists' homeland for analysis and display. What is owed to the people observed is the question. Are the terms of trade more than glass beads? (Glesne 1985, 55–60)

Researchers do not want to view people as means to ends of their choosing. Nonetheless, in non-collaborative qualitative work, they invariably cultivate relationships in order to gather data to meet their own ends. In the process, researchers can reciprocate in a variety of ways, but whether what they give equals what they get is difficult, if not impossible, to determine.

Equivalency may be the wrong standard to use in judging the adequacy of your reciprocity. What can you do for those teachers who let you spend hours at the back of their classroom, or for those nurses who come to your interview sessions week after week? Literally, their time is invaluable to you. Is there anything within your means to deliver that your research participants would perceive as invaluable to them? Probably not. Often they do not have a relationship with you

that puts you in a position to have something that, typically, is of such consequence to them. What you do have that they value is the means to be grateful, by acknowledging how important their time, cooperation, and words are; by expressing your dependence upon what they have to offer; and by elaborating your pleasure with their company. When you keep duty teachers company, assist participants in weeding their gardens, or speak to the local rotary club, you demonstrate that you have not cast yourself as an aloof outsider.

The interviewing process particularly provides an occasion for reciprocity. By listening to participants carefully and seriously, you give them a sense of importance and specialness. By providing the opportunity to reflect on and voice answers to your questions, you assist them to better understand some aspect of themselves. If your questions identify issues of importance to interviewees, then interviewees will invariably both enjoy and find useful their roles as information providers. By the quality of your listening, you provide context for personal exploration by your interviewees.

Although researchers do not wittingly assume the role of therapist, they nonetheless fashion an interview process that can be strikingly therapeutic. Obligations accompany the therapeutic nature of the interview. Self-reflections can produce pain where least expected, and interviewers may suddenly find themselves face to face with a crying interviewee. Tears do not necessarily mean that you have asked a bad or a good question, but they do obligate you to deal sensitively and constructively with the unresolved feelings, without taking on the role of analyst. If appropriate, you might suggest people, organizations, or resources that may be of help. Follow up through letters or conversations to assist such interviewees in feeling comfortable with their degree of personal disclosure. When Dick interviewed

Reciprocity can take many forms. Here a student is helping members of the National Trust of Great Britain clear non-native vegetation out of a coastal area. Consider ways in which you could reciprocate in your work.



first-year principals, one began to cry as he expressed his stress and frustration with the job. When Eileen interviewed students of color about their experiences on a predominantly white campus, a young man began to cry as he talked about leaving his home community. At first, both Dick and Eileen were stunned, but they sympathetically listened. Finally, they suggested people and organizations that might be of interest and assistance to the interviewees.

The closer the relationship between researcher and research participants, the more special obligations and expectations emerge. For example, Cassell (1987) tells of an anthropologist who, during her initial fieldwork and successive summers, was accepted as granddaughter of an elderly Southwestern Native-American couple. Their children and spouses treated her as a sister. One summer, when the anthropologist returned to the reservation, she learned that her "grandfather" showed signs of senility, was drinking heavily, and was hallucinating. His children and their spouses left soon after her arrival saying that they had cared for him all year and that it was now her turn. Although his care took full time and her planned research work did not get done, the anthropologist felt she had no choice but to honor her "occasional kin" status. She also felt, however, even more a part of the family and free to bring with her an emotionally and educationally challenged nephew the next summer. Her "kin" helped tremendously in dealing with him. In another example, biographer Rosengarten wrote about his work with Ned Cobb and the form of his reciprocity: "There was one special reason why Ned Cobb's family agreed to busy itself with me, apart from the feelings between us. My work with Ned revived his will to live" (Rosengarten 1985, 113).

Interviews and other means of data collection can contribute to raised expectations in less intimate relationships as well. When researchers spend days and months asking people about their problems and aspirations, they elicit voices of dissatisfaction and dreams. In the process, they may encourage people to expect that someone will work to alleviate their plight. If, as a researcher, you plan only to publish your findings, then you must find a way to make that clear to research participants throughout the data-gathering process. Through written reports, however, qualitative researchers frequently convey reciprocity by their tales of injustice, struggle, and pain. Reciprocity may also include making explicit arrangements to share royalties from publications.

Cultural Considerations

Patricia Martin and I met in Oaxaca, Mexico. As we shared research stories, we found ourselves independently focusing on three concepts important to Oaxacan society—community, communal autonomy, and hospitality. We had observed ways in which these cultural values guided people's actions and interactions in Oaxaca and as we talked, we began reflecting upon how these concepts could serve as ethical frameworks for our research processes specifically and qualitative research generally (see Martin and Glesne, 2002). I'll use "hospitality" as an example.

Patricia and I began by discussing how we had responded to the hospitality offered to us by the communities that served as our research sites. Conscientiously

incorporating greater reciprocity (sharing food and time, in particular) within the daily process of fieldwork was undoubtedly one step for us to better respond to hospitality. As we tried to imagine hospitality as an ethical framework for doing research, we began seeing differently our previous emphases on the role of power in research relationships. Rather than focus on trying to equalize power in relationships, a lens of hospitality would compel us to attend to exchanges of care, compassion, and generosity. Hospitality asks us to see aspects of relationship that include and then go beyond inequities in power. It also demands that we, as researchers, act in culturally hospitable ways. A code of ethics for research in New Zealand's Maori communities (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 120) supports this notion. It includes culturally specific ideas that relate to being hospitable:

- Show "respect for people."
- "Present yourself to people face to face."
- "Look, listen . . . speak."
- "Share and host people, be generous."
- "Be cautious."
- "Do not trample over the *mana* [fundamental duties and rights] of people."
- "Don't flaunt your knowledge."

The lens of hospitality also suggests that, as Western researchers, we need to go beyond the terrain of individual research to the academic communities within which our work is enmeshed. How do we transform our own communities to make them more hospitable? If hospitality were an ethic for Western academia, in which the foreigner, the stranger, the "other" is given a place within the "we" (Esteva and Prakash 1998, 87), then other knowledge standpoints would have to be more fully welcomed within academic communities.

ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION

As researchers write up and make public their work, they need to take into account ethical aspects that have already been mentioned such as promises of privacy and anonymity, as well as ways in which to reciprocate and possibly collaborate. This section addresses representing research in artful ways (e.g., drama, short stories, poems, videos) which can have particular ethical implications for research participants, audiences, and presenters (Sinding, Gray, and Nisker 2008). In arts-based representations, participants' words and images are more likely—than in academic publications—to be seen by the public, including those who live in the same communities as research participants. A general ethical guideline is that research participants should be able to read, observe, or somehow engage with the art and to discuss its representation before it goes to a wider public. Researchers need to "anticipate ways that their representations may harm people witnessing them, especially people most affected by the subject matter" (Sinding, Gray, and Nisker 2008, 462). For example, a dramatic portrayal of people who have

lost a family member to cancer could be quite distressful to not only the respondent whose story provided the impetus for the depiction, but also for others in the audience with similar experiences. Researchers in these situations could consider providing opportunities for audiences to participate in postperformance discussions or other forms of engaging with the material. Performers themselves can be affected by the process of representation: "There is, it seems, something about the process of representing things artistically—of undoing the familiar language, of reaching for new words, of distilling the experience into an image, of embodying it—that is especially powerful, and especially disruptive" (Sinding, Gray, and Nisker 2008, 460). Presenters can be particularly vulnerable if they identify personally with the issue at hand. Arts-based research encourages us to delve further into issues of ethics than items specified by IRBs.

NO EASY SOLUTIONS

By their nature, ethical dilemmas defy easy solutions. Researchers continue to debate whether or not some people or areas should be researched and, if so, how. They question whether or not fieldwork is inevitably deceitful. They argue over the role of conscious deception or omission in fieldwork. They raise ethical questions about the use of power in relationships, particularly with economically poor and "deviant" groups. And they question whether codes and regulations can successfully shape research ethics. Concern for ethics and research relationships have, in fact, led many qualitative researchers to include in their research procedures processes that surpass those of IRB regulations. Conscious, ongoing reflections on intentions, the researcher's role, relationships, and political implications are all part of this.

Plummer (1983) identifies two ethical positionings: the ethical absolutist and the situational relativist positionings. The absolutist relies heavily on professional codes of ethics and seeks to establish firm principles to guide all social science research. The relativist believes that solutions to ethical dilemmas cannot be prescribed by absolute guidelines but have to be "produced creatively in the concrete situation at hand" (141). Pointing out weaknesses in both positions, Plummer suggests a combination: broad ethical guidelines with room for personal ethical choice by the researcher. Ethical codes certainly guide your behavior, but the degree to which your research is ethical depends on your continual communication and interaction with research participants throughout the study. Researchers alone must not be the arbiters of this critical research issue.

The tradition of ethics that set the standards for IRBs and committees is undergoing challenge by a new social ethics, sometimes referred to as "feminist communitarianism." Described as "communitarian, egalitarian, democratic, critical, caring, engaged, performative, social justice oriented" (Lincoln and Denzin 2008, 542), this new ethic creates a community characterized by "moral obligation on the part of qualitative researchers, responsibility and obligation to participants, to respondents, to consumers of research, and to themselves as qualitative

field-workers. . . [and mandates] a stance that is democratic, reciprocal, and reciprocating rather than objective and objectifying" (Lincoln and Denzin 2008, 543). Rather than strive to create neutral principles for moral judgments, as utilitarian ethics has done, this new perspective calls for an ethics rooted in human relations, care, and socio-historical context: "What is worth preserving as a good cannot be self-determined in isolation, but can be ascertained only within specific social situations where human identity is nurtured" (Christians 2008, 201). From this perspective, "the mission of social science research is enabling community life to prosper" (Christians 2008, 201), and purpose and methods become collaborative and participatory.

This new ethic and the accompanying trend for researchers to take moral activist stances on issues involving power and injustice, raise new questions for research ethics. In particular, we must ask on what basis can activist stances be taken and to whom and how is the researcher accountable? Such discussions take us into terrain that is more complicated than meeting the requirements of IRBs. As we, in the social sciences, embrace multiple ways of critiquing, researching, and knowing, we have to forge new ways of constructing ethics, focusing on specific contexts, participants, and relationships among all involved.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Christians, C. 2008. Ethics and politics in qualitative research. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (pp. 185–220). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Flinders, D. 1992. In search of ethical guidance: Constructing a basis for dialogue. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 5(2), 101–115.
- Howitt, R., and S. Stevens. 2005. Cross-cultural research: Ethics, Methods, and relationships. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. (pp. 30–50). New York: Oxford University Press.

EXERCISES

1. Choose one of the following ethical dilemmas (either individually or as a group in class) and reflect upon what you would do if you were the researcher.
 - a. You are interviewing college women who are anorexic, but whose anorexia is no longer active, about their schooling experiences. You have arranged to interview each of your participants at least five times over two consecutive semesters. During the third interview with one participant, just after the winter holidays, you begin to suspect that her anorexia is active again because of her obvious weight loss and a few of her comments. When you ask her how her health is, she replies that she is feeling great. What do you do?
 - b. You are working on an intellectual biography of a well-respected university president. Most of your interviews are with the president who has obviously consented to your request to compose an intellectual biography, including some attention to his formative years. You are reading all of his published works and

interviewing some family members as well as significant colleagues. In the process, you uncover some potentially damaging or, at the least, unflattering information about his private life. What do you do?

- c. You are inquiring into a refugee resettlement program in a small southern city, with particular interest in educational aspects and community involvement. Through development of rapport and time spent volunteering with the program, you begin to learn how an early immigrant is seemingly taking financial advantage of recent refugees. He is charging for information and services that should be provided through the settlement program and people are going to him, rather than trying to get their needs met through the program. You want to protect the new refugees from exploitation and to report the behavior of the earlier immigrant, yet you also worry that perhaps you don't fully understand what is happening culturally. What do you do?
2. In small groups, look up the code of ethics for a particular discipline or organization (with each group taking a different association). Think about different philosophical orientations for approaching research (e.g., positivism, interpretivism, critical). How do the codes reflect various orientations? As a large group, discuss similarities and differences among the codes.

Following are some sites you might want to check:

- American Anthropology Association: www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm
 - American Psychological Association: www.apa.org/ethics
 - American Sociological Association: www2.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html
 - American Folklore Society: www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/ethics.cfm
 - Association of Internet Researchers: www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf
 - British Educational Research Association: www.bera.ac.uk/files/guidelines/ethical1.pdf
 - British Sociological Association: www.socresonline.org.uk/info/ethguide.html
 - Society of Professional Journalists: www.spj.org/ethics.asp
3. Reflect in your field log on potential ethical issues that might arise during your study. What can you do to minimize their potential? What would you do if faced with your ethical concerns? Discuss with at least one classmate.