Practices of Ethics

Practices of Ethics:
An Empirical Approach to Ethics in Social Sciences Research

Edited by

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To Fernanda and her joy of life, no matter what

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMATIZING A NORMATIVE APPROACH TO ETHICS

ISABELLA PAOLETTI, MARIA ISABEL TOMÁS AND FERNANDA MENÉNDEZ

> Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.
>
> (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics*, 1929/1965, 12)

This book proposes to look at ethical problems in social sciences research from an empirical perspective, describing actual moral problems researchers encountered during data collection and analysis. The different chapters present and discuss very specific ethical problems, the decisions that were taken and the reasoning that led to them, specifying the methodological solutions that were adopted and discussing them critically. First of all, these studies are exercises in documenting practical moral reasoning (Garfinkel 1967; Jayyusi 1984; 1991). Ethnomethodology has highlighted the centrality of moral reasoning in the very organization of social activities:

> A society's members encounter and know the moral order as perceivedly normal courses of action—familiar scenes of everyday affairs, the world of daily life known in common with others and with other taken for granted.

> They refer to this world as “the natural facts of life” which, for members, are through and through moral fact of life. For members not only are matters so about familiar scenes, but they are so because it is morally right or wrong that they are so. (Garfinkel 1967, 35)

Practical moral reasoning is ubiquitous. As Jayyusi (1984, 207) points out: “Logic and morality are the twin guardians of our discourse and activities; they provide our fundamental source of normative criteria for the conduct of our practical human life.” Research activities are no exception. Data collection and analysis in social sciences research are social activities, and moral reasoning is intrinsic to them as in any other social activity.

The studies in this book aim at contributing to the present debate on ethical issues in social sciences research, problematizing a normative approach to ethics, and highlighting the importance of considering the social character of research activities when applying ethical guidelines or Research Ethics Committees’ prescriptive procedures and methodological solutions. Ethical guidelines in social sciences research are normative in character. Established codes of practices define acceptable standards of conduct within the profession in sociology, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, etc. Virtually every social sciences association worldwide has established a professional code of ethics, such as the code of ethics of the International Sociological Association (ISA 2001), the British Sociological Association code (BSA 2002), the American Anthropological Association (AAA, 1998) and, at the European level, the RESPECT code (RESPECT, 2004), just to provide some examples. These codes aim to define general principles and orientations. A large part of the literature in ethics discusses general principles and their applications in practices (see, for example, Mertens and Ginsberg [2009] for an overview).

In many countries, a specific legislation is required to protect human participants in research activities. This legislation protects the rights of research participants in various ways. The institution of ethics committees, the so-called Institutional Review Board (IRB), Research Ethics Board (REB), Research Ethics Committee (REC), subject data collection and other research activities to obtaining authorization, and prescribe specific procedures and methodological solutions to insure that research activities are conducted ethically. These ethics committees appear to materialize professional ethical codes into specific forms, practices and procedures. Ethics are bureaucratized, and institutionally organized activities are designed to define what is ethical and what is not. Conforming to practices, such as obtaining informed consent from participants, anonymizing data, etc. has become part of the ordinary activities of conducting social sciences research. Probably the greatest risk in bureaucratizing ethics is creating the impression that when one has complied with the ethical requirements one is "done" with ethics and can forget about it.

The ethical status of research up until recently was based, and in some countries still is, on the conduct and the professional standing of individual research scientists. It was based mainly on a "'trust us' approach" (Boser 2007), a commitment to be loyal and protect the interests of research participants to the best of one's capacities. Recently, this approach has come to be seen as insufficient and supplanted by institutional control and oversight. As Haggerty (2004, 393) points out:

> The training that academics received in research methods, ethics, and, most importantly, their practical experience in conducting research were previously presumed to offer sufficient protections against unethical behavior. That system has now been supplanted and effectively replaced by a formal process of bureaucratic oversight. This marks a move away from a system based on an assumption of professional competence and responsibility to one based on institutionalized distrust, where researchers are presumed to require an additional level of oversight to ensure that they act ethically.

A heated debate has recently developed on the utility of ethics committees and review boards (Tilley *et al.* 2009) with opponents and defenders. One needs to understand the main features of this debate to grasp the problems inherent to a normative approach to ethics in social sciences research.

Ethics Committees—the Debate

Ethics committees are often criticized for limiting and threatening academic freedom (Bledsoe *et al.* 2007; Lewis 2008; Rambo 2007; Tierney & Blumberg-Corwin 2007; Tilley *et al.* 2009): "institutional ethical oversight has the potential to limit the creative process of scientific enquiry and censor academics" (Taylor & Patterson 2010, 165). They are perceived as infringing on professional autonomy (Taylor & Patterson 2010) and even as being an instrument for harassment in the academic workplace (Mueller 2004; Fogel 2007; Patterson 2008). Many authors describe ethics committees more as institutional instruments for implementing an audit culture in universities than as a means to improve the actual protection of research participants: "Social scientists have been attentive to the rise of institutional ethical oversight specifically, seeing it as one of the more intrusive and demanding instances of audit culture in the university" (Taylor & Patterson 2010, 161–162). The interviews with sociologists conducted by Taylor & Patterson (2010) on the impact of the ethical review process on their work show how sociologists understand and act strategically in relation to it, showing different attitudes, active engagement, "creative compliance" and open opposition. Defenders, instead, tend to highlight the relevance of the review process as offering researchers the opportunity to systematically reflect on the potential risks to participants in relation to the specific research activities at the beginning of their research. Specific problems in the workings of ethics committees may be described, but they are framed as mendable problems (Gunsalus *et al*. 2007). Overall, ethics reviews are constructed as acquired institutional practices.

Opponents

The main arguments among the opponents focus on the difficult and lengthy ethics application process (Fogel 2007, 111) and in the often unnecessary regulation, as Haggerty (2004, 403) points out: "such well-intentioned but onerous regulations are justified on the basis of hypothetical worst-case scenarios and then normalized across a vast range of research." Above all, critics sustain that ethics committees go far beyond regulating ethical practices in academia. They describe ethical review practices often used (or mis-used) as instruments to control the type of research that is funded and developed in the university. In their study on the impact of institutional ethical reviews on research work, Taylor & Patterson (2010, 169) state that: "opposers frame it as an instrument of powerful elites—universities and administrators worried about institutional liability, or local business interests trying to keep nosy researchers at bay."

The ethical review process generally involves defining practices related to the protection of participants during the pursuit of research activities, such as eliciting informed consent from participants and ensuring anonymity, but at times the reviewing process goes far beyond this focus. Taking into consideration the issue of balancing costs and benefits in relation to human participation in social sciences research, the ethical review process often evaluates research "quality." Many opponents strongly object to the use of ethics committees and institutional review processes in this fashion. Tierney & Blumberg-Corwin (2007, 396) affirm that: "The quality of the research design should have nothing to do with an individual receiving approval to do a study as it pertains to human subjects." In this respect, there is at least one important step that could be taken towards ensuring fairer REC reviews—the reviewers should belong to the same disciplinary approach of research examining the research proposals; that is, they should have the expertise necessary to judge the proposal. Many of the complaints to REC come from researchers working with qualitative methods who have to judge a proposal this way and just do not have the right expertise.

Methodological conservatism (Lincoln 2005) and the proliferation of "accommodating strategies," only apparently conforming to review requirements (Halse & Honey 2007; Taylor & Patterson 2010), are described as the direct consequences of institutional ethical review processes. As Haggerty (2004, 412) clearly points out:

> An unfortunate consequence of these developments will likely be that researchers will choose to employ certain types of unproblematic and often predictable research methodologies rather than deal with the uncertainty and delays associated with qualitative, ethnographic, or critical scholarship which do not fit easily into the existing research ethics template.

Students are often encouraged to avoid primary research to not get stuck in lengthy review processes (Taylor & Patterson 2010).

Some specific research approaches face great difficulties. For example, Wiles and his colleagues (2010) discuss the impact of REC on the use of visual methods, pointing out how an ethics review often makes it practically impossible to use this approach. Vulnerable groups can actually be silenced as a consequence of an ethical board's "protection," as Swauger (2011, 497) points out, describing the difficulties she had in following REC procedures in obtaining consent from parents of adolescent girls:

> The IRB's commitment to fixed procedures and rules and its discourse about the vulnerability of certain populations inadvertently blocks the ability of scholars to represent girls' voices, and homogenizes youth subjects by assuming a shared familial experience, particularly that both biological parents are present and capable of consenting for their child.

A frequent tendency among researchers goes towards an apparent accommodation, or "creative compliance" (Taylor & Patterson 2010, 162), including practices such as formal adherence to ethical guidelines: "The ability to fill forms in the approved way, to deploy 'ethics speak' as required" (Halse & Honey 2007, 344), as well as the minimal provision of information to avoid conflicts with ethics committees. In this way, as Taylor & Patterson (2010, 166) observed, some academics "left the formal ethics regulations unchallenged, while getting around them through informal ‘collusion’ with regulators.”

Some authors describe ethics committees as primarily being instruments for institutional self-protection (Liberman 1999). In Taylor & Patterson’s (2010, 166) study on the impact of ethics committees on sociologists’ research work, an interviewee wittily comments: “If there were any truth in advertising, the university ethics review would be called the how not to get the university sued committee.” Other authors portray ethics committees as accomplishing a double mission—protecting research participants and universities from legal suits, for example. Cloke *et al.* (2000, 138) says that “the raising of ethical consciousness by government agencies is as likely to be a political act of self-defence as a process by which complex discussion of the ethics of self and other is welcomed.” Institutional self protection is certainly nothing to be critical about, and universities have the right to ensure that their staff and students comply with the law and do not put the institution at risk of fines and prosecution. The issue is that institutional self protection should be clearly distinguished from research participants’ protection. Ethical issues in social sciences research are described as complex and context specific (Cloke *et al.* 2000, 149), posing thorny questions with no simple answers (González-López 2011, 457), impossible to predict (Swauger 2011, 498). Are the existing ethical research committees able to assist researchers and students in facing ethical issues emerging from their research work?

Defenders

Among the defenders of the present ethical review system there is a general acceptance of the existing legislation and the desire to improve the ethics review process working with the rules already in place (Ells & Gutfreund 2006; Hedgecoe 2008; Stark 2007; Tilley *et al.* 2009; Tilley & Gormley 2007), in particular, studying and developing specific local practices (Stark 2007). As Taylor & Patterson, (2010, 164) point out: “many of the defenders of ethics policies have advocated local reforms rather than total rejection of ethical oversight.” The ethical review process is seen primarily as a useful occasion for researchers to reflect systematically on the ethical issues involved in their project at its beginning:

> … it can at least be said that procedural ethics offers researchers an ethics “checklist” by reminding the researcher to consider such issues as the potential risks to participants, the balancing of the benefits of the research against those risks, the steps needed to ensure confidentiality of data, and

> the inclusion of consent forms and plain language statements in the material provided to participants. This is a helpful aid in designing a research project that will be ethically acceptable in its broad methodology. (Guillemin & Gillam 2004, 268)

The review process forces researchers to reflect on issues that may be overlooked in research design. It is a useful exercise to make sure that ethical issues are carefully addressed and specific methodological solutions are pondered and evaluated. Most defenders agree on the fact that the researchers "are not the best people to decide on the risks and benefits of their research" (Hedgecoe 2008, 874), and therefore the need for an independent review process. An interesting point that is put forward among defenders is that human subject regulations are not only about preventing harm to research participants, but about "protecting people's rights not to be researched, even when anyone regarded the practices as harmless by any definition" (Stark 2007, 778).

Among the defenders of procedural ethics there are authors who conducted research on ethics committees and on the reviewing process (Connolly & Reid 2007; Hedgecoe 2008; Stark 2007; Tilley *et al.* 2009; Tilley & Gormley 2007). These studies are generally aimed at showing how the ethics review system could be usefully improved (Connolly & Reid 2007; Hedgecoe 2008; Stark 2007). Connolly & Reid (2007, 1032) present two case studies of review process in a Canadian University, showing that "an approach to ethics reviews that attempts to encourage, engage, and support qualitative researchers in their various research initiatives" was adopted. Hedgecoe (2008) conducted an ethnographic study on the review activities of the Research Ethics Committee (REC) in the UK. In his studies, he points out that RECs are not biased against qualitative approaches and it is important to empirically study the review process. Moreover, he enters into a debate contesting Murphy & Dingwall's (2007) claim regarding the difficulties ethnographers have in defining the research design of their studies in advance. However, in discussing his own research he actually appears to have encountered the same difficulties most ethnographers find in designing their research plan. In describing his own research project on research ethics committees, Hedgecoe (2008, 877) affirms: "Interviews were sought with members towards the end of the observation period, when some form of relationship had been established and I had enough experience of the way in which committees went about their work." Only as the research progressed was he able to take decisions about who should be interviewed and on what topic. As an ethnographer, he had difficulties in making these decisions at the beginning of the research. Moreover, he describes how most applicants discussing their project were not even informed of the presence of a researcher in their committee. Although his project received REC approval, its ethicality remains doubtful. In this case, applicants' right not to be researched was certainly not protected, since participants were not even informed about the data collection.

The Main Issues Emerging from the Debate Problematizing Procedural Ethics

Ethics committee procedures appear to be unsuitable for certain types of research, in particular for ethnographic research and participatory research (Boser 2007; Haggerty 2004; Janoviceck 2006; Murphy & Dingwall 2001; Richards & Schwartz 2002; Williamson & Prosser 2002). As Taylor & Patterson (2010, 164) point out: "standard ethical requirements that may fit relatively easily into experimental or quantitative research are far more problematic for qualitative researchers." In general, ethical research committees have difficulties in understanding qualitative research projects (Lincoln & Tierney 2004; Nelson 2004; Pritchard 2002): "The qualitative research process … is less predictable, harder to outline ahead of time, and the projects' risks are more hypothetical in nature" (Taylor & Patterson 2010, 164). As pointed out above, ethnographers are most likely to identify risks for their research participants during the course of the project (Murphy & Dingwall 2007; Cloke *et al.* 2000). It is rarely possible to take all the ethical decisions at the beginning of the research, in particular in the case of providing guaranteed anonymity (Van den Hoonaard 2003) and fully-informed consent (Murphy & Dingwall 2007; Barrett & Parker 2003; Thorne 1980). Each research situation poses its unique contingencies; moreover, ethical issues "are shaped contextually, and therefore need to be addressed in a situated manner" (Cloke *et al.* 2000, 136).

Recent studies (Einwohner 2011; González-López 2011; Czymoniewicz-Klippel 2010; Swauger 2011; Tilley & Gormley 2007) discuss how the very ethical procedures, adopted in compliance with ethical review processes, could create actual ethical problems during data collection and analysis. In her study, based on the testimonies of holocaust survivors, Einwohner (2011) describes how she felt increasingly uncomfortable towards the anonymising procedure she had designed for her project, a procedure approved by the ethical review board. Removing the name of individual holocaust survivors felt inappropriate in a moral sense, and she points out that: "In the case of Holocaust survivors, given the kinds of conditions they endured, maintaining confidentiality may also serve to undermine their dignity" (Einwohner 2011, 425). In her project on incest, González-López (2011) realized that asking research participants to sign informed consent forms would put them at risk: "I had to protect them from the potential consequences of complying with an institutional procedure paradoxically designed to protect them" (González-López 2011, 447–448).

The procedures adopted to comply with ethical review boards appear insufficient to deal with ethical problems in social sciences research that may often arise quite unexpectedly in any phase of the research process (Currier 2011; Czymoniewicz-Klippel *et al.* 2010; Guillemin & Gillam 2004). Researchers are practically left alone to deal with complex ethical issues. The same authors highlight the importance of distinguishing between moral responsibility and compliance with institutional regulations; as Koro-Ljungberg and her colleagues (2007, 1075) state: "Research ethical decision making and freedom of choice needs to be separate from discussion related to researchers' compliance, duties and institutional responsibilities." If compliance with the ethical review process can help researchers to systematically reflect on the ethical implications of research activities at the beginning of the project, it certainly does not spare them from having ethical responsibility towards research participants and from the need for self reflection during the whole research process, from the formulation of the research questions to publication and beyond.

Nespor & Groenke (2009), discussing a research on heat death, point out the ethical relevance of the initial framing of the research questions, in particular which questions are asked and which are not. Nespor & Groenke (2009) refer to studies on the Chicago heat wave of 1995 that resulted in more than seven hundred deaths. The case-control designed used by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) focused on individual variables, such as living alone, medical conditions etc. Klinenberg (2002, quoted in Nespor & Groenke 2009) pointed out the limitations of this research design: "If there were risks of living in an impoverished, institutionally depleted, or politically neglected neighbourhood or region, the CDC analysis would not help to identify them. The CDC study directs the attention of public health agencies to the particular set of individuals who are more vulnerable to heat related problems, but not to the places where such problems are likely to be concentrated" (Klinenberg 2002, quoted in Nespor & Groenke 2009, 1001). Nespor & Groenke (2009) strongly appeal to consider problem framing as a key issue when examining ethicality in research, pointing out the importance of taking into account the effects of research, not only on direct research participants but also on extended participants who are affected by research results.

During data collection, researchers become part of the social and institutional settings they are studying and cannot avoid having an impact on those settings, as Cloke *et al.* (2000, 151) point out:

> For good or ill, the very act of entering the worlds of other people means that the research and the researcher become part co-constituents of those worlds. Therefore we cannot *but* have impact on those with whom we come into contact, and indeed on those with whom we have not had direct contact, but who belong in the social worlds of those we have talked to.

The researchers become part of a social world and, as any other professionals, have to constantly work out what is ethically right or wrong within their professional activities. There is no escape from it and there are often no easy answers to ethical dilemmas. Normative ethics appear to conceal the complexity of the ethical dimension of research activities, as Murphy & Dingwall, (2007, 2231) point out: "When ethics become institutionalized, rule-following replaces a commitment to working out the 'right thing to do' as researchers negotiate the complex moral territory of fieldwork" (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007, 2231). In fact, one aspect that has not been sufficiently highlighted in the debate on normative ethics is that ethical guidelines and procedures generally ignore the social dimension of research activities.

Research activities are social activities; issues of face, relevance, pertinence, appropriateness, courtesy, cultural significance, etc. are relevant for research activities as for any other social activity. Activities related to ethical procedures, such as obtaining informed consent, have to be negotiated in actual situations (Paoletti, forthcoming). Presenting the research objectives and obtaining the signature of participants in a consent form has to be managed in relation to the actual situation in which the consent is asked, often during ongoing participants' activities; the consent procedures often appear to be at odds with the participants' order of priorities (Paoletti, forthcoming). Obtaining consent is made possible by the level of trust that has been built in the relationship between researcher and participants (Bhattacharya 2007). The cultural meaning attached to the signing of a document in specific cultural contexts is also a significant aspect of this process (Barrett & Parker 2003). To ask a participant to sign an informed consent form can be very awkward and problematic, as is often pointed out in the literature (Cloke 2000; Haggerty 2004; Murphy & Dingwall 2007; Paoletti, forthcoming; Swauger 2011; van den Hoonaard 2001; 2002) and in some of the studies in this collection (e.g. Gil *et al.*). In some cases, signing an informed consent form is considered dangerous for informants, as was pointed out above (González-López 2011), but is mainly perceived as not appropriate to the character of the occasion. As Haggerty (2004) points out:

> Consent forms can unnecessarily color interview or ethnographic situations, transforming encounters that are routinely more informal and exploratory into unnecessarily official and legalistic exchanges. These apprehensions are particularly germane to research on large groups of people. (Haggerty 2004, 404)

There is an increasing interest and a pressing need towards the study of ethical problems as they emerge unpredictably during research activities, reflecting the complexities of the actual research situation (Goodwin *et al.* 2003; Guillemin & Gillan 2004; Ellis 2007).

Ethics in Practice

Recent studies (Barton 2011; Blee & Currier 2011; Czymoniewicz-Klippel *et al*. 2010; Clark & Sharf 2007; Cloke *et al*. 2000; Conrad 2006; Currier 2011; Dougherty & Atkinson 2006; Einwohner 2011; Ellis 2007; Etherington 2007; González-López 2011; Goodwin *et al.* 2003; Guillemin & Gillan 2004; Hurdley 2010; Irwin 2006; Kohler Riessman & Mattingly 2005; Medford 2006; Poulos 2008; Rupp and Taylor 2011; Stein 2010; Sultana 2007; Wood 2006; Wyatt 2006) empirically describe actual ethical problems researchers face during research activities. “Ethics in practice” (Ellis 2007, 4), “situational ethics” (Ellis 2007, 4), “ethics as a process” (Swauger 2011, 500), “important moments” (Guillemin & Gillan 2004), “microethics” (Komesaroff 2008), “context based ethics”(Kohler Riessman & Mattingly 2005) and “participatory ethics” (Sultana 2007) are some of the labels used to define an approach to ethical problems in social science research based on the detailed description of ethical problems as they emerge in actual research situations: “They point to the need to go beyond general ethical goals and develop an understanding of ethics as an ongoing process and of ethical dilemmas that arise in ways that are impossible to predict” (Swauger 2011, 498). The journals *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Qualitative Sociology* have given a particularly significant contribution to this line of research. A common aspect to all these studies is a concern for ethics as an omnipresent and inescapable component of research in social sciences, from the framing of the research questions to data collection, storage, analysis of data, and publication of research results. Many ethical issues are described as emerging during research activities quite unexpectedly, abruptly confronting the researcher who is often alone when taking a decision in this matter (Guillemin & Gillan 2004). This characterization of ethical practices is in open contrast with the ordinary practices of regulatory review boards. For the ethics committees, ethical problems are generally planned and dealt with at the beginning of the research. Researchers are responsible for adopting the prescribed procedures by the relevant ethics committee and they are then done with it. As Cannella (2007, 316) points out: "This global move towards regulation of research ethics as enterprise (although imposed somewhat differently within various nations) can also result in the belief and the creation of the illusion that moral concerns, power issues, justice, protecting other human beings (and so on) have been addressed with no farther need for concern." Ethical issues involve individual moral responsibility and ongoing self reflection during the whole research process. Empirical studies of ethical problems in social sciences research aim to document this process of self reflection and the actual solutions that were taken in relation to specific ethical dilemmas emerging during research activities. The chapters in this collection contribute to this line of research, documenting empirically specific ethical issues when conducting social sciences research in a variety of social and institutional contexts.

Practices of Ethics—The Forthcoming Chapters

This book is intended for social sciences researchers in a variety of disciplines (sociology, sociolinguistics, psychology, gerontology, ethnography etc.) who, during all the stages of their research, be it quantitative or qualitative, are confronted with ethical dilemmas. As such, the chapters in this book attempt to provide the reader with examples of ethical reflection within the research process. The selection does not cover all the possible ethical issues they may face, but all of the chapters deal with the complex, unexpected but fundamental, ethical questions that arise before, during and after fieldwork, and which do not always find clear guidance from the professional ethical codes they submit to. The dilemmas between mandatory ethical codes practice in the field and intellectual outcomes are particularly salient in chapter two.

Rosalina Pisco Costa, in her chapter for this volume entitled "Ethics on the Move. Methodological Dilemmas on the Qualitative Scientific Writing Process," focuses on the issues at the end of project stage, when writing reports, papers and theses, or preparing publications, communications or any other forms of intellectual outcomes result in a conflict with anonymity prescriptions, in data deriving from studies in small communities.

The mandatory procedures in ethical codes concerning informed consent are often problematic for researchers dealing with special subject groups who are in a vulnerable position because of age, victimization, illegality or marginality. José de São José and Ana Rita Teixeira, in their study of a vulnerable group in a particular context, "At the 'Ethical Crossroads' of Ethnography—Observing the 'Care Encounter' at the Elder's Home," centre their discussion on the issues of "informed consent": from whom (primary and/or secondary participants) should it be obtained, how much information should be given and when? The authors also discuss their decisions when faced with other "ethical crossroads"—the social and moral responsibility of the researcher and the legal issues of reporting negligence or violence.

A discussion of the issues brought forward when obtaining consent from other types of fragile or disadvantaged subjects is also the focus of Jessica Nina Lester and Abraham Barouch's chapter entitled "Inviting the Assent of Children Described as Functionally Nonverbal." How do researchers acquire the assent (or dissent) of young children, many of whom do not use words to communicate in a society that privileges (and assumes) verbal communication as the norm?

Ana Paula Gil, Ana João Santos and César Santos, in "Ethical and Methodological Issues in Violence against Elderly People in Portugal—an Intersection between Sociological and Epidemiological Research," deal with the difficulty of balancing ethical procedures within a national regulatory ethical review system and the challenges faced when working with vulnerable research subjects, particularly informed consent and confidentiality in a victim survey.

In some contexts, research subjects may feel insecure or threatened because of their illegal or marginal status in the society they live in. Their insecurity and the real or perceived threat their participation may bring to them can affect the research data. Georgiana Anton and Marian Preda in their contribution to this volume, "Ethical and Methodological Dilemmas in Researching Vulnerable Groups in Romania," outline some of the ethical issues they had to deal with in two studies, one with refugees and immigrants, and the other with young drug users and sex workers. Informed consent "by the book" was again put into question by insufficient knowledge of the language, illiteracy and fear of disclosure of personal information.

The three last chapters focus on researcher roles and their ethical implications. Larissa Kosygina, in "The Researcher in the Field—Navigating Networks of Relationships," describes how researcher identity and positionality may be construed and misconstrued by participants, in this case the heads and staff of NGOs and migrants without citizenship in Russia. The complex network of relationships already existent in the field often affects trust from participants, while dissemination of research outcomes may influence those who remain in the field, as anomymization may not guarantee preservation of anonymity in small towns.

Dominika Baran, in “Working with Adolescents—Identity, Power and Responsibility in Sociolinguistic Ethnography,” supplies a look at the complex construction and reconstruction of the researcher identity and roles in a different research context, that of adolescents in a high school in the Taipei City area. Baran discusses the ethical management of researcher roles, the ethical impact of the researcher’s everyday actions and choices on research participants, the researcher’s “divided loyalties” and the misperceptions of cultural gender roles and status.

The context described by Yutaka Sato, in the chapter entitled “Exploitation versus ‘Going Back’ to the Field—The Ethics of Doing Participatory Research in India’s Urban Slums,” is a diverse one. His research subjects are slum dwellers in Ahmedabad, India, and the staff of a local NGO. His research framework presents different challenges and limitations, such as the often-present conflict between interests and expectations of the different participants (NGO policies, NGO staff, researcher and slum dwellers), the misconstruction of researcher identity and roles, and the reliance on gatekeepers (NGO staff) hindering trust from participants.

By necessity, the issues discussed in this volume are by no means exhaustive and do not present the full range of ethical challenges and choices researchers face in the practice of research. We hope, however, that reading about the “practices of ethics” offered by the authors of these chapters may provide researchers with an opportunity to reflect and learn about themselves, as social and moral beings, and as researchers, because it is in those moments that:

> ... the researcher’s ethical competence comes to the fore. By this we mean the researcher’s willingness to acknowledge the ethical dimension of research practice, his or her ability to actually recognise this ethical dimension when it comes into play, and his or her ability to think through ethical issues and respond appropriately. (Guillemin & Gillam 2004, 269)

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CHAPTER TWO

ETHICS ON THE MOVE: METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS ON THE QUALITATIVE SCIENTIFIC WRITING PROCESS

ROSALINA PISCO COSTA

> *Naiveté* [about ethics] *itself is unethical.*
> (Mirvis & Seashore 1982, 100)

Introduction

There are many historical explanations (and examples) that justify current interest in ethics research. The new millennium has brought with it a wave of ethical challenges, as methods of data collection, analysis and dissemination have become more and more sophisticated and widespread in recent years (e.g. software development, internet-based research, and data dissemination via ICTs). The words of Mirvis & Seashore, the motto of this text, are not only as true as ever; they also invite us to rethink ethics as crosscutting and a global issue in the twenty-first century (Tilley & Woodthorpe 2011).

Ethical issues are pervasive along all dimensions of scientific practice. Since the very beginning of any research project, from the choice of a topic until the publication of research findings, ethical issues are a matter of constant thought, discussion and, finally, decision. Just as it is understood that scientific research truly engaged with social responsibility cannot overlook the ethical implications of its practice, so widespread is the understanding that any complete research proposal will have exhaustively anticipated the ethical issues involved, as well as shown ways to deal with them (Creswell 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Denscombe 1998; Patton 2002).

Given that, as Berg points it, "social scientists delve into the social lives of other human beings" (Berg 2009, 60), social sciences raise special issues concerning ethics (Punch 1986; Punch 1994; Miles & Huberman 1994). Such excursions into private lives raise general awareness and concerns over the ethics of research and researchers, namely of how researchers must ensure the rights, privacy and welfare of people and communities, both as the basis and focus of their studies.

Research literature on ethical issues in social sciences agrees with major topics to be addressed.[1] Punch (1994) summarizes five key concerns: harm, consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality of data. In greater detail, Miles & Huberman (1994) discuss a variety of specific ethical issues and their implications for analysis: worthiness of the project; competence boundaries; informed consent; benefits, costs and reciprocity; harm and risk; honesty and trust; privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity; intervention and advocacy; research integrity and quality; ownership of data and conclusions; and use and misuse of results. At the same time, authors briefly outline each issue, pose key questions, illustrate with examples and suggest analysis-related implications, as well as presenting conflicts, dilemmas and trade-offs within and beyond the presented topics, thus raising awareness and making questions more visible to researchers.

Ethical issues are also pervasive within the social research paradigms of quantitative, qualitative or combined design study. Notwithstanding the general agreement on this, specific implications for practice are a matter of endless discussion in methodology books, scientific articles and conference debates. Lipson, for instance, argues that "ethical issues in qualitative research are often less visible and more subtle than issues in survey or experimental research" (Lipson 1994, 333). Punch, by contrast, remembers how those ethical issues are "more likely and more acute in some qualitative approaches" (1998, 281). Punch adds:

> This is because, while all social research intrudes to some extend into people's lives, qualitative research often intrudes more. Some qualitative research deals with the most sensitive, intimate and innermost matters in people's lives, and ethical issues inevitably accompany the collection of such information. (*Ibid*., 281)

After data gathering, ethical concerns expand to data analysis, regarded as being "more than a technical matter" (Miles & Huberman 1994, 288). In fact, the qualitative researcher cannot focus only on the quality of the

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[1] See Punch (1994) for a better understanding of this area and its recent developments after moral and ethical questions raised by a number of notable studies.