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Ethics and feminist research: theory and practice

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Introduction

Ethics concerns the morality of human conduct. In relation to social research, it refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process. General concern about ethics in social research has grown apace. In the UK, for example, from the late 1980s on, a number of professional associations developed and/or revised ethical declarations for their members. The guidelines available from these bodies include: the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth's Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice; the British Educational Research Association's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research; the British Sociological Association's Code of Ethics and Conduct; and the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines. Indeed, it would be interesting to trace the genealogy of these statements as they all seem to acknowledge drawing on each other's declarations. Research funders may also produce ethical statements, such as the Economic and Social Research Council (see www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Framework_for_Research_Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf), which is the UK's largest organization for funding social research. Academic institutions have set up ethics committees to which academics and students should submit their projects for approval, and research ethics committees have been a feature for social (not just medical) researchers working with and through statutory health organizations for some time now (see www.corec.org.uk). In addition, ethical guidelines have been published that address particular social groups on whom researchers may focus, such as children (see Priscilla Alderson and Virginia Morrow, 2004).

Researchers themselves have written extensively on ethics in social research. While feminist researchers certainly have not been the only authors to undertake reflexive accounts of the politics of empirical research practice, it is fair to say that such reflections have done and do form a substantial feature of feminist publications on the research process. Indeed, some have characterized feminist ethics as a 'booming industry' (Jaggar, 1991). These pieces, however, are not usually explicit investigations of ethics per se. In discursive terms, they are posed in terms of politics rather than ethics. Nonetheless,



they represent an empirical engagement with the practice of ethics. As such, they pose the researcher as a central active ingredient of the research process rather than the technical operator that can be inferred by professional ethical codes.

Mary Maynard (1994) has characterized feminist work in this area, in the early stages of second wave scholarship, as being concerned with a critique of dominant 'value-free' modes of doing social research, the rejection of exploitative power hierarchies between researcher and researched, and the espousal of intimate research relationships, especially woman-to-woman, as a distinctly feminist mode of enquiry (see also Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop, Chapter 7, this volume). In particular, detailed attention was given to the empirical process of collecting data for analysis.

In this chapter we are concerned with ethical perspectives on qualitative social research, from a feminist perspective in particular. We start from the position that an explicit theoretical grounding in a feminist ethics of care would enhance many feminist and other discussions of the research process where such discussions are concerned with ethical dilemmas. Such work, however, rarely draws on these theories, although authors may often implicitly work within or towards just such an ethics. In turn, though, few feminist analyses and elaborations of an ethics of care at the epistemological level (a vibrant feature of feminist political philosophy) pay attention to the empirical process of conducting social research. We feel, however, that feminist discussions of the research process and of the ethics of care have a lot of concerns in common.

Our focus is on philosophical theories of ethics and the difficulties we face as researchers in applying these models in our practice when we conduct research projects. There are clear tensions among the range of models of ethics that we can draw on to negotiate our way through the competing demands of research, both practical and theoretical. We are often left in isolation to ponder and plot our decisions about how best to draw on these perspectives. This chapter connects theoretical ethical models with the complex dilemmas we encounter in the 'doing' of research. We begin our exploration of such issues by laying out explanations for the rise of concern about the practice of ethics in social research. We then pinpoint ethical concerns in social research, which subsequent chapters explore in more depth. We review specific ethical models including deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics of skills, rights/justice ethics and the ethics of care. After considering some of the care-based ethical debates we suggest some practical guidelines for researchers to consider rooted in a feminist ethics of care.

Why the rise in concern with ethics in social research?

Martyn Hammersley has argued that what he calls 'ethicism' is one of the four main tendencies operating in contemporary qualitative social research. The others are





empiricism, instrumentalism and postmodernism. Although not explicitly referring to feminist researchers, he perhaps has them, among others, in mind when he points to:

... a tendency to see research almost entirely in ethical terms, as if its aim were to achieve ethical goals or to exemplify ethical ideals ... Whereas previously ethical considerations were believed to set boundaries to what researchers could do in pursuit of knowledge, now ethical considerations are treated by some as constituting the very rationale of research. For example, its task becomes the promotion of social justice. (Hammersley, 1999: 18)

Hammersley sees this posing of research as ethics as leading to the neglect of research technique – the better or worse ways of carrying out the processes of research in terms of the quality of research knowledge that they generate (see also Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). He also sees the dominance of ethicism as attributable to the effects of the tendencies of instrumentalism – the idea that the task of research is to relate to policymaking and practice (on which see also Hammersley, 2004; Simons, 1995) – and of postmodernism, especially the ‘turn’ to irony and scepticism. For Hammersley, they both lead to the down-playing or questioning of the possibility and desirability of knowledge, and he argues that a concern with ethics has expanded to fill this space. We feel, however, that there may well be other factors at work in the rise in concern with research ethics. In its institutionalized form we see this as, at least in part, related to a concern with litigation.

An overt and similar preoccupation in professional ethical statements or guidelines, given the way they draw on each other, is with the contract between research funder, or sponsor, and the researcher. There are two main linked issues here. First, there is a concern that researchers should retain their academic freedom. They should not accept contractual conditions that conflict with ethical practice, such as confidentiality of data and protection of participants’ interests, and should consider carefully any attempt to place restrictions on their publication and promotion of their findings. Indeed, there has been concern about the way that government departments can place restrictions on research that they fund, requiring researchers to submit draft reports, publications and so on, so that the department in question can vet these (for examples, see *Times Higher*, 31 March 2000, 31 March 2001), and the way that government priorities and policy concerns are driving research funding (see, for example, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/cultural-capital/2011/03/society-research-ahrc-cuts>).

Second, and conversely, we can also detect a concern that researchers need to protect themselves from any legal consequences that might arise if they unwittingly contractually agree to research funders’ restrictions and then break that agreement. It is here that we also see the possibility of litigation concerns on the part of the academic institutions that employ researchers: this is why these institutions have a vested interest in these posed ethical issues, for they are implicated in the contractual obligations. Institutional preoccupations with ethics can sometimes appear to be more premised on avoiding potentially costly litigation than with ethical practice itself. Moreover, the pressures of time, bureaucratic administration and funding, our training as social scientists and the prevailing ethos of professional detachment can all militate against





our giving ethical dilemmas the focused attention that they require in the research process.

There are no laws (at least in the UK) requiring researchers to submit their proposals and modes of practice to ethics committees, and professional association guidelines hold no legal status. Like journalists, however, researchers do not enjoy the protection of the law if they seek to keep their data confidential when its disclosure is subpoenaed (see discussion in Feenan, 2002). Furthermore, as Linda Bell and Linda Nutt discuss in Chapter 5, where researchers work within, or are associated with, a welfare professional context where disclosure of certain types of data is mandatory, such as social work and an interviewee revealing child abuse, they may be required to reveal their source.

Institutional concerns about legal redress being pursued by research participants are equally an issue, especially in the UK with untested – in this area at least – copyright, designs and patents acts (<http://www.qualidata.essex.ac.uk/>). This legislation concerns breaching interviewees' copyright in their spoken words in publication of data collected from them. Professional association ethical statements also place an emphasis, in an absolutist way, on researchers' responsibilities for ensuring informed consent to participation in research, protecting research participants from potential harm (and sometimes also wider society), and ensuring their privacy by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. The research ethics policies at UK universities thus usually require researchers to obtain written ethical approval from any collaborating organizations involved in the research and to ask research participants to sign a consent form basically stating that they have had the nature and purpose of the research explained to them and that they fully and freely consent to participate in the study. Such an approach implies an either/or position: either consent is informed, participants are protected, and so on, or they are not, as Tina Miller and Linda Bell (Chapter 4), and Maxine Birch and Tina Miller (Chapter 6) write about in this volume. It also implies that all the ethical issues involved in a research project can be determined at the start of the project being carried out, that any potential harm may be offset by research participants' stated willingness, and that an ethics committee sanctioned project is by definition an ethical one. The aim appears to be to avoid ethical dilemmas through asserting formalistic principles, rather than providing guidance on how to deal with them. Indeed, while some pose codes of ethical practice as alerting social researchers to ethical issues (for example, Punch, 1986), others argue that they may have the effect of forestalling rather than initiating researchers' reflexive and continuing engagement with ethical research practice (for example, Mason, 1996).

We are not suggesting, however, that such institutionalized concerns with litigation are necessarily what motivates social researchers in their considerations about, and reflections on, ethics, both here in this book and elsewhere. Nor would we agree with Hammersley that their/our focus on ethics is driven by instrumentalism or by postmodernism in the terms in which he poses the latter, as ironic scepticism. Rather, we would see it as rooted in a genuine and legitimate concern with issues of power. We acknowledge that research is a political, rather than neutral, process – as Val Gillies and Pam Alldred describe in Chapter 3 – in a world that is characterized by awareness of difference and a questioning of the motives and rights of 'experts' to define the



social world and to proscribe templates for what constitutes the 'correct' course of action (see Edwards and Glover, 2001).

Ethical concerns in social research

As we noted earlier, there is an extensive literature on ethics in social research. The Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines, for example, contains over 120 key references (www.the-sra.org.uk/). These cover a range of aspects of ethical practice. There are numerous other examples of publications concerned with ethics in social research as well, including a strand of feminist pieces. Indeed, discussions of the research process related to ethical issues have become a feature of feminist research, especially qualitative empirical work.

Ethical decisions arise throughout the entire research process, from conceptualization and design, data gathering and analysis, and report, and literature on the topic reflects this. Regarding access, the issue of informed consent has been subject to fierce debate among qualitative social researchers generally: in particular the ethics of carrying out covert research (see Calvey, 2008; Spicker, 2011) and the nature and time frame of consent (David et al., 2001; Edwards and Weller, 2012). The time frame involved in assessing the benefits or harm of social research has also been an issue in discussion (for example, Wise, 1987). There have also been debates among feminists concerning the ethical merits and consequences of qualitative versus quantitative methods (see review in Maynard, 1994), and the ethical problems involved in archiving qualitative data for secondary analysis have been raised (Parry and Mauthner, 2008; as well as Mauthner, Chapter 10, this volume).

The epistemologies of the theoretical perspective informing research have also been discussed as generating ethical questions, allied to debates around research as involved empowerment or distanced knowledge production (see Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner, Chapter 8). The issue of the ethics of epistemology has been the focus of much debate within feminism, and feminists have also engaged in debate with other perspectives on this topic (see, for example, Maynard 1994). Feminist work in this vein include arguments that ethical issues are inherent in the researcher's definition of social reality; that is the epistemologies of the theoretical perspective framing research questions, analysis of data, and writing up of findings. Sue Wise (1987), for example, argues that the 'cognitive authority' of the researcher's view in producing knowledge, and assessments as to whether or not that knowledge is empowering, are knotty ethical issues. She poses a series of questions, including: who decides, and how, what counts as knowledge? What if one research group's empowerment is another's disempowerment? Hilary Rose (1994) has unpacked the way the scientific knowledge system is entwined with other power systems, and shaped by a masculinist instrumental rationality that denies emotion. In contrast, Rose puts forward a feminist epistemology that 'thinks from caring' and that is 'centred on the domains of interconnectedness and caring rationality' (1994: 33). Underlying these



sorts of discussions and debates over ethical concerns in the research literature are various models of how to understand and resolve ethical issues.

Ethical models

Professional association ethical guidelines and textbook discussions of social research ethics usually pose the sorts of ethical issues outlined above as being formed around conflicting sets of rights claims and competing responsibilities. Steiner Kvale (1996, 2008) outlines three ethical models that provide the broader frameworks within which researchers reflect on these issues. These are derived from mainstream political philosophy and draw out their implications for conducting social research.

In the 'duty ethics of principles' or deontological model, research is driven by universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect. Actions are governed by principles that should not be broken, and judged by intent rather than consequences. As Kvale points out, however, 'carried to its extreme, the intentional position can become a moral absolutism with intentions of living up to absolute principles of right action, regardless of the human consequences of an act' (1996: 121).

The 'utilitarian ethics of consequences' model prioritizes the 'goodness' of outcomes of research such as increased knowledge. Thus the rightness or wrongness of actions is judged by their consequences rather than their intent. This model is underlain by a universalist cost-benefit result pragmatism. In extremis, though, as Kvale notes, such a position can mean that 'the ends come to justify the means' (1996: 122).

In contrast to the two universalist models above, a 'virtue ethics of skills' model questions the possibility of laying down abstract principles. Rather, it stresses a contextual or situational ethical position, with an emphasis on the researchers' moral values and ethical skills in reflexively negotiating ethical dilemmas: 'Ethical behaviour is seen less as the application of general principles and rules, than as the researcher internalising moral values' (Kvale, 1996: 122). Researchers' ethical intuitions, feelings and reflective skills are emphasized, including their sensibilities in undertaking dialogue and negotiation with the various parties involved in the research.

Feminist writers on ethics, however, have put forward another basis for reflecting on ethical issues (although not specifically in relation to research), with an emphasis on care and responsibility rather than outcomes, justice or rights. In other words, this is a model that is focused on particular feminist-informed social *values*. Elisabeth Porter (1999) argues that there are three interrelated features of feminist thinking on ethics: personal experience, context and nurturant relationships. Daily life dilemmas are shaped by social divisions of gender, class and ethnicity: experiences of these dilemmas generate different ethical perspectives. These perspectives are not only obtained in particular contexts, but those contexts also alter and inform the ethical dilemmas that we face as researchers and the range and appropriate choices in resolving them. These dilemmas are not abstract but rooted in specific relationships that involve emotions, and which require nurturance and care for their ethical conduct.





While some, such as Elisabeth Porter, see a clear distinction between the virtue ethics of skills and the value-based feminist model, our own stance is that there are some overlaps as well as distinctions between the two. Both stress context and situation rather than abstract principles, and dialogue and negotiation rather than rules and autonomy. A virtue skills model, however, can imply that the skills that researchers acquire through practice in making ethical decisions are impartial and neutral 'good' (virtue) research standards, even with awareness of particular context. In contrast, a value-based model explicitly advocates a 'partial' stance based on analysis of power relations between those involved in the research and society more broadly, and admits emotion into the ethical process. Here, partiality refers to the importance of acknowledging power relations and taking up a position:

Ethics encourages partiality, the specific response to distinctiveness ... partiality does not preclude impartiality ... partiality varies according to the [relationships] involved ... responding to this particularity is fundamental to ethics. (Porter, 1999: 30)

A contingent virtue and/or value, rather than universalist approach has become predominantly advocated in texts discussing ethics in social research (Blaxter et al., 2010; Davidson and Layder, 1994). Professional association guidelines, however, often weave a difficult balance between various models. So, for example, the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice 'recognises that it will be necessary to make ... choices on the basis of principles and values, and the (often conflicting) interests of those involved'. While difficult balancing acts will always remain, it may be that some awkward tensions would be eased by a theoretical and feminist approach to ethical dilemmas, as we elaborate later.

Tensions between different ethical models or situational shades of grey, however, do not often seem to be apparent on the part of ethics committees who vet research proposals. Moreover, some researchers seem to want them to apply abstract universalistic principles. Ann Oakley (1992), for example, in discussing her experiences with hospital and health authority ethics committees, points to evidence concerning inconsistencies in their judgements. Such criticism may well be fairly made, but it also implies that there are universal principles and abstract criteria that can be applied regardless of situational context. This is a puzzling stance for researchers such as Oakley, whose research practice has been informed by feminism. Indeed, much feminist work addressing aspects of ethical research practice that we discuss below draws on complex situationally informed debates.

There are, nonetheless, contrasts and tensions between positions within any virtue or value based ethical approach – although what they have in common is an ethical approach that calls for attention to specificity and context. These range from complete postmodern relativism through to post-traditional positions (such as feminist, communitarian, new critical theory) that have a particular set of ethical values underlying their situated approach. Even with feminist or feminist-inspired value approaches to ethics there are significant debates around issues of care and power, focused around relationships with 'the Other', as we address below.



There are also debates about the extent to which justice-based ethical models and an ethics of care are in conflict, interrelated or can be reframed (see Porter, 1999; Ruddick, 1996; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Eva Feder Kittay (2001) summarizes the main elements of an ethics of care in contrast with an ethics of justice, which we have adapted from a medical/health environment to a research context (see Table 1.1).

In contrast, Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998) has gone further to argue for a reformulation of the concept of justice so that it is no longer opposed to or separate from, and thus does not require reconciling with, an ethic of care. Feminist criticisms of justice from care perspectives, she says, have been directed towards a specific variety: that of liberal, rational, distributive models of justice. In her view, discussion about the compatibility of care and justice can usefully be freed from these parameters. There is a need to have concepts of justice that are not framed exclusively in distributive, sameness or universal terms, but which take into account situations and consequences. Thus Sevenhuijsen fundamentally reframes justice to see it as a process rather than

Table 1.1 Ethical models

Kittay's discussion, however, poses the two ethics as if they were in opposition to one another. Sarah Ruddick (1996) has taken a similar position, arguing that ethics of care and justice cannot be subsumed under each other and that they cannot be integrated, because in her view justice depends on a notion of the individual as a detached rather than relational being. Nevertheless, Ruddick also argues that justice as well as care applies to the moral domain. Others regard justice and care as complementary, and argue that they need to be integrated in thinking about moral issues (see review in Porter, 1999). This proposition retains the integrity of each ethical framework, as laid out in the Table 1.1, but sees them each as providing enabling conditions of moral adequacy for the other ethic.

<i>Care</i>	<i>Justice</i>
Self as self-in-relation	Autonomous self
Characteristic of informal contexts	Characteristic of formal contexts
Emphasis on contextual reasoning	Emphasis on principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situations as defining moral problems and resolutions • Use of narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchy of values • Calculation of moral rights and wrongs
Emphasis on responsibilities to others and ourselves	Emphasis on rights and equality
Acceptance of inevitable dependencies	Emphasis and valuing of independence
Moral importance of personal connections	Impartiality valued
Values and attempts to maintain connections among individuals	Protects against or adjudicates conflict between individuals
Temptations:	Temptations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacrifice or loss of self • Failure to recognize autonomy of other • Over-identification with other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to be merciful • Over-reliance on impersonal institutions • Overly rule-bound
Harm when connections are broken	Harm when there is a clash between individuals

rules: a process involving an ethics of care in a situated way based on values of reconciliation, reciprocity, diversity and responsibility, and with an awareness of power. Justice thus does not stand alone but is simultaneously incorporated into, and informed by, care. It is within this understanding of justice as part of care that we proceed to examine care-based ethical debates and then generate our own guidelines for ethical research practice.

Care-based ethical debates

Kittay (2001) refers to care and caring as a labour, an attitude and a 'virtue' (or value in our terms). A central catalyst to writings on a feminist ethics of care was the work of Carol Gilligan. She first used the concept in her work on gender differences in moral reasoning between boys and girls (Gilligan, 1983), in which she argued that girls and women deliberate in a 'different [ethical] voice' to boys/men because they find themselves dealing with dilemmas over their own desires and the needs of others, and the responsibilities that they feel for those within their web of connections in ways that are gendered. Other feminist work addressing a feminist ethics of care includes Nel Noddings' (1984) discussion of the central places of responsibility and relationships as an empathetic way of responding to others in an ethical manner; and Joan Tronto's (1993) analysis of the way that the practical, relational, caring work primarily undertaken by women is excluded from mainstream moral and political philosophy and theorizing because it is regarded as instinctual practice rather than willed action based on rules.

The work of these and other feminist theorizers in the field, however, has rarely been applied to a consideration of ethics in social research. Norman Denzin (1997) provides a notable exception here. He has put forward a strong argument for feminist theorizing to inform ethical research, expressly in relation to ethnography and specifically addressing the writing of it. As part of his critique of traditional voyeuristic and utilitarian knowledge-making protocol, Denzin takes issue with those who, such as Martyn Hammersley, want a focus on 'better' techniques, and who pose the 'turn' to postmodernism as if it is a choice or an option (see also Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Rather, for Denzin, we inhabit and *live* in just such a cultural moment, and one in which morality and ethics are central issues:

The ethnographic culture has changed because the world that ethnography confronts has changed. Disjuncture and difference define this global, postmodern cultural economy we all live in ... Global and local legal processes have problematized and erased the personal and institutional distance between the ethnographer and those he or she writes about ... We do not own the field notes we make about those we study. We do not have an undisputed warrant to study anyone or anything ... The writer can no longer presume to be able to present an objective, noncontested account of the other's experiences ... ethnography is a moral, allegorical, and therapeutic project. Ethnography is more than the record of human experience. The ethnographer writes tiny moral tales. (Denzin, 1997: xii–xiv)



Denzin castigates modernist ethical models as resting 'on a cognitive model that privileges rational solutions to ethical dilemmas (the rationalist fallacy), and it presumes that humanity is a single subject (the distributive fallacy) ... This rights-, justice-, and acts-based system ignores the relational dialogical nature of human interaction' (1997: 271, 273). The universalist ethical models of duty and of utilitarianism are rejected and replaced by a personally involved care-based ethical system, based on a body of work Denzin refers to as the 'feminist, communitarian ethical model'. He sees this work as defined by its contention that:

... community is ontologically and morally prior to persons, and that dialogical communication is the basis of the moral community ... A personally involved, politically committed ethnographer is presumed and not the morally neutral observer of positivism ... In this framework every moral act is a contingent accomplishment measured against the ideals of a feminist, interactive, and moral universalism. (Denzin, 1997: 274)

Denzin explicitly draws on the work of feminist political theorists and philosophers such as Patricia Hill Collins (1991) and Syela Benhabib (1992). From a Black feminist position, Hill Collins critiques the traditional, positivist, masculinist and Euro-centric knowledge-making enterprise. She offers four criteria for interpreting truth and knowledge claims of social science: the first focuses on the primacy of concrete lived experience; the second on the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the third on the ethic of caring; and the fourth on the ethic of personal accountability. Hill Collins' ethical system for knowledge validation is concerned with ethics of care and accountability that are rooted in values of personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy. These are made accountable through an interactive 'call-and-response' dialogue. In such a mode, there is no need to 'de-centre' others in order to centre our own 'expert' voice and arguments adversarially. Rather, the centre of discussion is constantly and appropriately pivoted, so that participants can all exchange wisdoms, and acknowledge that experience and knowledge are partial at the same time as they are valid. Benhabib reworks Habermas' ideas around discourse ethics (including through her notion of 'open-ended moral conversations' which Maxine Birch and Tina Miller refer to in Chapter 6), to reject traditional liberal, abstract, autonomous and rights-based justice reasoning as the basis for moral deliberation. She argues that ethics is about concrete rather than generalized situations, in which relations of care belong at the centre rather than the margins. What is moral and ethical is arrived at through an active and situationally contingent exchange of experiences, perspectives and ideas across differences (particularly around gender, but also in terms of other social divisions). She puts forward 'moral respect' as 'symmetrical reciprocity', comprising a relation of symmetry between self and other that involves looking at issues from the point of view of others or putting ourselves in the place of others.

As Denzin (1997) conceives it, the personally involved care-based ethical system for social research that he derives from feminist communitarianism, privileges emotionality in the ethical decision-making process. It presumes a dialogic rather than autonomous view of self, and asks the researcher 'to step into the shoes of the persons being





studied' (Denzin, 1997: 273) and build connected and transformative, participatory and empowering relationships with those studied. Researchers need to be what is often termed 'with and for the Other'. Ethnographic writing should be 'a vehicle for readers to discover moral truths about themselves' (Denzin, 1997: 284) and should be judged for its ability to 'provoke transformations and changes in the public and private spheres of everyday life' (Denzin, 1997: 275).

This view necessarily is a simplification of the complex and valuable arguments that Denzin makes, as well as those of the 'feminist communitarian' thinkers upon whom he draws. Parts of them, however, may be subject to the sorts of questions Sue Wise (1987) directed at previous feminist work (see earlier). What if one research group's empowerment is another's disempowerment, especially where both are considered oppressed groups? What happens if, as Donna Luff (1999) experienced in her study of women in the moral lobby, we find ourselves researching individuals or groups whom we dislike and/or consider socially damaging even if oppressed? And what if what is beneficial at one moment turns out to be the opposite in the long-run? Indeed, Denzin seems to imply that research following the feminist communitarian ethical model will not face these sorts of ethical questions:

This framework presumes a researcher who builds collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relations with those studied. This individual would not work in a situation in which the need for compensation from injury could be created. (1997: 275)

Other feminist theorists have criticized the approaches on which Denzin's work is based. Iris Young (1997), for example, challenges feminist and other ethical frameworks that imply a relation of symmetry between self and other, which involve looking at issues from the point of view of others or putting ourselves in the place of others (including Benhabib's notion of symmetrical reciprocity). The 'stepping into each other's shoes' that Denzin recommends assumes an easy reversibility of positions that is neither possible nor desirable according to Young. This is because individuals have particular histories and occupy social positions that make their relations asymmetrical. Young points out the difficulties of imagining another's point of view or seeing the world from their standpoint when we lack their personal and group history. Instead, Young argues for 'asymmetrical reciprocity', which means accepting that there are aspects of another person's position that we do not understand, yet are open to asking about and listening to. Asymmetrical reciprocity involves dialogue that enables each subject to understand each other across differences without reversing perspectives or identifying with each other. In other words, rather than ignoring or blurring power positions, ethical practice needs to pay attention to them. (See also Maxine Birch and Tina Miller, Chapter 6, for a further critique of attempting open-ended moral conversations.)

Selma Sevenhuijsen's (1998) work on an ethics of care also raises shortcomings in Denzin's particular feminist-derived position on ethics in social research. Like Denzin, she also regards postmodernism as a social condition based on diversity, ambiguity and ambivalence, which brings moral and ethical issues to the fore. Like Young, however,



she does not accept 'being with and for the Other' as a sufficient basis for formulating ethics. For her, though, this is because this stance does not capture the concrete relations of dependency and connection that are central to an ethics of care.

First of all, the ethics of care involves different moral concepts: responsibilities and relationships rather than rules and rights. Secondly, it is bound to concrete situations rather than being formal and abstract. And thirdly, the ethics of care can be described as a moral activity, the 'activity of caring', rather than as a set of principles which can simply be followed. The central question in the ethics of care, how to deal with dependency and responsibility, differs radically from that of rights ethics: what are the highest normative principles and rights in situations of moral conflict? (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 107)

So, while Denzin calls for a care-based ethical system to shape the research process, he slips away from fully recognizing its implications back towards the autonomous separateness he rejects.

Furthermore, while Denzin seems similar to Sevenhuijsen in seeing emotionality and empathy as central to ethical judgement, unlike her he does not also stress the need for caring and 'careful' judgement to be based on practical knowledge and attention to detail in the context of time and place. Within Sevenhuijsen's version of an ethics of care, ethics thus needs to be interpreted and judged in specific contexts of action – it is fundamentally contingent practice-based.

Feminist ethics of care and practical guidelines

Feminist political theorists, who advocate an ethic of care perspective on issues, argue that a feminist approach to ethics should not seek to formulate moral principles that stand above power and context. Ethics is about *how* to deal with conflict, disagreement and ambivalence rather than attempting to eliminate it. A feminist ethics of care can help researchers think about how they do this by 'illuminating more fully the sources of moral dilemmas and formulating meaningful epistemological strategies in order to deal with these dilemmas, even if only on a temporary basis' (Sevenhuijsen, 1998: 16). The importance and centrality of attention to specificity and context means that ethics cannot be expected to be a source of absolute norms. It has to connect to concrete practices and dilemmas, as the chapters in the rest of this book illustrate. It is attention to these issues that can provide the guidelines for ethical action.

Thus we conclude with a – contingent – attempt to generate some guidelines for ethical research practice arising out of a feminist ethics of care, indicating where they are elaborated empirically in following chapters by our co-contributors. Importantly, it should be noted that when we refer to 'the people involved' below, we include the researcher as well as participants, funders, gate-keepers and others. We suggest that these guidelines framed as questions can be useful for researchers to consider in deliberating dilemmas, choosing from alternative courses of action, and being accountable for the course of action that they ultimately decide to pursue.

- Who are the people involved in and affected by the ethical dilemma raised in the research?
Maxine Birch and Tina Miller address these issues in their chapter on participation in the research process (Chapter 6).
- What is the context for the dilemma in terms of the specific topic of the research and the issues it raises personally and socially for those involved?
Andrea Doucet and Natasha Mauthner consider this in their chapter on how we come to produce ethical knowledge (Chapter 8).
- What are the specific social and personal locations of the people involved in relation to each other?
Linda Bell and Linda Nutt explore these elements in their discussion of professional and research loyalties (Chapter 5), as do Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner in the context of analysing data (Chapter 8).
- What are the needs of those involved and how are they interrelated?
Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop delve into this issue in their examination of emotions and 'rapport' in interviews (Chapter 7).
- Who am I identifying with, who am I posing as other, and why?
Linda Bell and Linda Nutt tackle this question in their chapter on divided loyalties to professional considerations and research etiquette (Chapter 5). Pam Alldred and Val Gillies' chapter on the implicit notion of the modernist subject that researchers work with in interview-based research also touches on some of these issues (Chapter 9).
- What is the balance of personal and social power between those involved?
Val Gillies and Pam Alldred address this question explicitly in their chapter about research as a political tool (Chapter 3), as does Tina Miller in her chapter on reconfiguring research relationships (Chapter 2). This question is also addressed by Linda Bell and Linda Nutt in their chapter which focuses on conflicting expectations when researchers are also working professionals in other spheres – health, welfare and social work in particular (Chapter 5).
- How will those involved understand our actions and are these in balance with our judgement about our own practice?
Both Val Gillies and Pam Alldred (Chapter 3), and Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop (Chapter 7) write about these issues in their chapters in relation to the intentions researchers espouse for their research on the one hand, and regarding the intimacy between researcher and respondent that can resemble friendship on the other.
- How can we best communicate the ethical dilemmas to those involved, give them room to raise their views, and negotiate with and between them?
Both Tina Miller and Linda Bell (Chapter 4), and Maxine Birch and Tina Miller (Chapter 6) consider these issues in the context of seeking access to participants and gaining their consent to taking part in research projects.
- How will our actions affect relationships between the people involved?
Both Linda Bell and Linda Nutt (Chapter 5), and Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop (Chapter 7) address this question in their respective chapters: in relation to professional and research motivations, and to forms of friendship that are created in the research process.

We hope that other researchers will find these guidelines useful for consideration in deliberating ethical dilemmas in their research practice. We are not claiming that this list of guidelines for working with a feminist ethics of care in social research constitutes a definitive model. Rather, we see it as work in progress. We offer it here in the spirit of working towards a means of implementing a feminist ethics of care as a guide for how ethical dilemmas in empirical research may be practically resolved.

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