# Ethics in Fieldwork: Reflections on the Unexpected

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*Research involving fieldwork can present the researcher with ethical dilemmas not anticipated in institutional ethics approval processes, and which offer profound personal and methodological challenges. The authors' experiences of conducting qualitative fieldwork in four distinctly different contexts are used to illustrate some of these unexpected consequences and ethical dilemmas. Issues encountered included: compromised relationships with informants which develop in unforeseen ways; engagement with traumatized informants which lead to unexpected roles for the researcher such as confidante, dealing with new information that is critical to informants' futures but could undermine the research project, and the implications of ethical decisions for research design and analysis. In our shared reflection on the four case studies in this paper, we examine anticipatory rather than reactive ways of dealing with such ethical dilemmas. Preparation and critical reflection are found to be key tools in relating to field informants, dealing with the personal challenges of undertaking field work, and developing useful research outcomes after returning home. We conclude by suggesting some issues for field researchers to consider in addition to the concerns addressed in a standard university ethics approval process. Keywords: Fieldwork, Qualitative Research, Research Ethics, University Ethics Guidelines, Fieldwork Design*

*"Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did…"* (Portelli, 2003, p. 67).

The process of capturing oral sources through fieldwork is an important but "messy" part of research, as it is people's experiences, opinions, and perspectives which constitute the data. It can produce stresses for both the researcher and participants that have the potential to compromise the research relationship, the researcher's and participants' well-being and the research project itself. The personal and methodological challenges of fieldwork often arise from, and are addressed within, discourses about ethics. University Ethics protocols are intended to pre-empt and provide cautionary advice about ethical issues in fieldwork. Typically in Australia, and for example at the authors' university, seeking ethics approval for doctoral fieldwork involves a recognition of the debt, and hence respect, owed to those people who agree to be subjects or participants of research (UTS Governance Support Unit, 2013). Accordingly the approval process asks questions about the risk of harm to participants (and the researcher) and the ways such harm will be minimised, about the need for deception, and how the data will be analysed in a way which is useful. Annual reports by the researcher to the Human Research Ethics Committee are required to include a record of any unexpected ethical difficulties or adverse effects on participants, and how these were addressed. While the Ethics Approval Process (EAP) will vary from country to country, the discussion below suggests it is likely that, in addition to the EAP, other processes will be needed to manage all of the unexpected dilemmas which can arise in the field and all of the ethical decisions that have methodological and psychological consequences.

Four case studies of doctoral field research undertaken in Bahia (Brazil), Aceh (Indonesia), Hai Duong (Vietnam), and Yarra Valley (Australia) are used below to illustrate some of these dilemmas, the impacts while in the field, and ways of better dealing with the impacts on both the research design and personal well-being. Through shared reflection on the four case studies which represent our own experiences, we provide a basis for developing anticipatory rather than reactive ways of dealing with ethical dilemmas in fieldwork.

## Defining Fieldwork

Hyndman asks her readers: "Is [the field] merely a physical location, conveniently cordoned off from the life of the researcher?" (2001, p. 263). Her answer is that it is neither cordoned off nor "exotic," but a network of power relations, which may be a community, a refugee camp or an organisation such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

However despite issues about the boundaries between "home" and "the field," the "baggage" which the researcher brings to the field (Hyndman, 2001, p. 265), and the ethical dilemmas discussed below, such empirical (or experiential) research adds value to theoretical debate by grounding it in (at least one) reality: "Imperfect engagement is better than no engagement, or a paralysing angst" (Hyndman, 2001, p. 265). Gayatri Spivak (1988) discusses the problem of First World researchers constructing the Third World "subject" in fieldwork, but nonetheless notes that "information retrieval" is welcome in areas that are silenced in existing discourse (1988, p. 295).

For the purpose of this research paper, fieldwork is the kind of information retrieval that frames both researcher and participant (informants, interviewees, institutions, communities) as joint constructors of the data. As such, it is never "raw" data but already coloured by the ways in which this co-construction relationship is established and conducted. Moreover, fieldworkers "never return 'home' quite the same" (Hyndman, 2001, p. 265), so that the researcher's analysis of the data back "home" is also affected by this relationship. The four case studies that follow demonstrate that the "imperfect engagement" between researcher and researched, and its outcomes both in the field and back "home," require the researcher to respond to complex ethical issues.

## Case Studies from the Authors' Experience

The authors are all current or past doctoral students at the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF), a research and consultancy arm of the University of Technology Sydney. ISF is intentionally transdisciplinary and focused on change creation and addressing real world issues: "Prospective research students must demonstrate from either their past research or course work, employment or community activities their capacity to solve whole problems, integrating knowledge from several disciplines" (Institute for Sustainable Futures, 2013). The doctoral program in Australian universities is typically 3-4 years of full-time research (generally approaching the upper limit when fieldwork is involved), which is expected to make "through original investigation… a distinct and significant contribution to knowledge" (UTS, 2013). Doctoral students at ISF are encouraged to undertake research in cross-cultural and community settings; the case studies below arose from fieldwork conducted by the authors between 2006 and 2011 in, respectively, Brazil, Australia, Vietnam and Indonesia. The Institute has also developed a sophisticated support program for postgraduates (C. A. Mitchell, 2009), including Groups for Accountability and Support (each group involving three to four students reflecting upon, challenging and supporting each other's research), Institute-wide roundtable discussions which are led by students, and theme-based student and supervisor retreats which take place off campus over a period of several days.

The discussions which led to this paper began in a reflective meeting of a Group for Accountability and Support involving three of the authors. Months later, after we had all completed our fieldwork, the four authors met at a party and discussion was resumed about the ways that "data collection" in the field was a changeable, complex process affected almost daily by our experiences, and in particular by our interactions with our "subjects." It became clear to us that much of this changeability and complexity derived from ethical considerations – the value of the "data" versus the livelihoods of participants, versus minimising harm, versus compliance with an approved research plan. We agreed that there would be some value in placing on record our reflections of fieldwork experience so that it might begin useful conversations between researchers undertaking work in other "fields."

## Case Study 1 (Sarina Kilham)

Before beginning her doctoral studies, Sarina worked in Timor-Leste in a range of development positions with the United Nations, international NGOs and the Government of Timor-Leste.

Our small research team consisted of one Australian doctoral researcher (the author), one Brazilian permaculture/rural development specialist and a Brazilian videographer. We interviewed farmers in the interior of the one of the poorest states of Brazil. The farmers were all participants in a government program promoting cash crops for small farmers. The research team had learned informally from Government staff of many economic and technical "barriers" in the program that therefore seemed doomed to collapse without the current government subsidies. However, the farmer participants had high expectations of the program and were taking bank loans and making significant investments (financially and on-farm). The research team was faced with the ethical dilemma: how much information should we release to the farmers about possible collapse of the program? Can information revealed informally by government staff be considered "legitimate?" How would this shift the role of the research team from "interviewer" and "information collector" toward "informer?"

I felt that informing the farmers of the technical/economic problems would influence the "data," which was farmers' perceptions of the program to date. In contrast, the Brazilian researcher who had worked for several years as a community organizer and permaculture teacher felt that it was unethical to withhold important information from farmers who were borrowing large amounts of money and changing their farming practices in expectation of an expanding government program.

We undertook shared reflections after each interview, and addressed the dilemma by accepting that it was a grey and uncomfortable area. We agreed that rather than directly informing each participant of our concerns about the program that we would use strategic questioning and negotiate information sharing during each interview.  We asked farmers about past experiences with government programs and bank loans, which have a history of failure in the region. We also asked participants hypothetically what they would do if the program collapsed, and how they planned to protect themselves against possible losses. This process allowed us to engage with farmers about benefits and risks of the program, but retain the role of "researcher" rather than informant.

## Case Study 2 (Dena Fam)

Dena's doctoral research and project management work has involved piloting urine diversion systems in collaboration with communities, industry and government partners in New South Wales and Victoria**.**

In 2009, one of the most devastating bushfires in Australia's history destroyed over 175 homes and caused over 75 fatalities. In the process of rebuilding homes in the semi-rural community of Kinglake, Victoria, a state-funded intervention provided residents with innovative on-site water and sanitation systems never before installed in Australia. As part of the water authority's management plan for the installation of these systems and acknowledging the need to support traumatised residents throughout the process, qualitative research was commissioned to determine how the installations were being accepted within the community and to capture resident's perceptions and experiences throughout the process.

I conducted interviews with 28 residents within the community in 2010. Developing a relationship of trust with residents included providing assurances of confidentiality and a non-judgemental approach. It also involved developing rapport with residents through time spent within the community, interviewing residents in their own homes and becoming familiar with their circumstances. In the course of this rapport-building process, ethical issues arose when boundaries between personal and professional roles became blurred. Tangible evidence of this included gifts from residents, and requests for further interaction beyond the research.

The vulnerability of many residents in losing loved ones, falling into financial hardship, unexpected unemployment and/or suffering post-traumatic stress disorder resulted in my feelings of guilt for behaving more as a "friend" than a researcher in discussing issues beyond the scope of research. As Marlene de Laine notes, "…the roles of researcher and friend intertwine in the practice of qualitative research, sometimes resulting in a 'conflict of interest' and ethical and moral dilemma" (2000, p. 97 quoting Judith Stacey). Attempting to meet the various conflicting demands of the researcher's role in the field could result in the researcher's experiencing a "conflict of consciousness."

Kvale (2009) notes that while interacting with another person who shares a common interest, is genuinely interested and uncritical can be a satisfying experience, there may also be the risk of emotional distress for the interviewee in later regretting discussing particular issues. This was my experience in the field where the boundary between research and participant were fuzzy. One example of this crossing of boundaries was an interview which involved a resident feeling comfortable enough to share graphic detail of how neighbours and family members had died during the bushfires. I was unprepared for, and disturbed by, the situation.

Trust and conversational intimacy are both a potential threat to personal-professional boundaries in qualitative research and at the same time essential to the process of collecting valid qualitative data. This case raised the ethical question of whether to discuss personal issues beyond the scope of the prescribed research project. How does the researcher decide the point at which an interview, or at least the recording of it, should end?

**Case Study 3 (Tanzi Smith)**

Tanzi spent a year working in Ho Chi Minh City as part of the Australian Youth Ambassador Program before undertaking her doctoral fieldwork in Vietnam**.**

The Green Productivity for Integrated Community Development program is a well-established community development and environmental management program in Vietnam. This program was the subject of my action-research-based doctoral field work, while working for a local non-government organisation intending to expand the program. My field work aimed to achieve multiple objectives: helping to expand the program, suggesting improvements, and generating insights for sustainability theory and practice. Balancing these multiple objectives in a cross-cultural context raised some ethical and hence methodological issues.

One of the key early questions was how to conduct research that was rigorous and at the same time contributed to expansion and improvement of the program. Action research frameworks were useful in designing the research, but I sought additional guidance in the ethical principle of "beneficence:" "How can I design and conduct the field work so that it benefits people participating in the research?"

My approach was to adopt an evolving methodology, with constant adjustments as I learned more about what was needed to meet the ethical objective of "benefit to participants." In the end I conducted 15 interviews with practitioners, 3 interviews with community participants, and 5 workshops and a 4-day field trip involving between 15-25 people from five different villages and relevant government departments. These workshops were designed to contribute to learning outcomes for the participants as well as capture responses, perspectives and opinions relevant to my research.

Several of the host organization's objectives were met or partially met. For example, the trial we conducted generated interest from the National Government which had offered to fund expansion of the program. While it is less clear whether another objective, improvements in government departmental practice, was realized, participants in the research made new connections which may have proved useful to them. My surveys suggested that some village leaders gained some new insights to apply in their community.

From the point of view of research rigor, the approach I took had significant implications for data analysis and research findings. Although I spent nine months in the field, and collected lengthy transcripts, sheets of butchers paper and piles of feedback forms, in the end the data I collected played only a supporting role to the theoretical concepts I developed. I felt that the complexity and heterogeneity of my "data," and other confounding factors, meant that the conclusions I could draw from my data were quite limited.

This experience raises questions about the relationship between theory and practice in fieldwork and the influence of ethical objectives on research design, the kinds of questions that are asked and the nature of the research findings. From my experience I believe there would be value in placing more emphasis on beneficence in the University Ethics Approval process, but it would require a more adaptable approach to methodology in the field. It also requires a method for resolving conflicting expectations and objectives either in advance of the research or during the research process.

## Case Study 4 (Jane Palmer)

Before commencing her doctoral studies, Jane practised as an architect in Australian indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and far north Queensland**.**

In 2009 I interviewed 24 older people in rural Aceh Indonesia who were between 65 and 90 years of age. All had lived through chronic conflict since World War II, including a 30 year civil conflict which officially ended in 2005. Four of the five villages where I conducted interviews had been inundated and destroyed by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. As a result the old Acehnese had suffered physical and psychological trauma, prolonged periods of fear and anxiety, overwork, exhaustion and physical debility from a young age, as well as loss and grief. My interviews, aimed at obtaining each person's life story, called forth recollections of these events, and many interviewees became either visibly distressed or were unable to find the words to express what happened in the past: "I don't know how to describe this anymore, because it's too sad."

I had only briefly considered during the University EAP process the possibility of causing distress by asking people to remember the past. Using the most basic ethical principle of "do no harm," I had decided that if this occurred, I would "guide" the interview back to topics on which the interviewee appeared more comfortable. To some extent this succeeded;

consequently interviews were often shorter than I had planned, concerned work practices or community issues as well as a "life story," and occasionally involved family members where this seemed more comfortable for the interviewee.

However the most disconcerting aspect of the interviews was the effort which people made to meet the needs of my research project. No-one declined to answer questions, many checked (via my interpreter) that they had understood the question and that I had understood their reply. They provided detailed anecdotes even when distressed, thanked me at the end of the interview, and wished me well in my research. I realized that my assumption that I would "guide" the process did not take account of the seriousness with which each person approached the interview and my research, and that the needs and interests of the researcher also become a factor in those of the interviewee.

Even in post-traumatic environments, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is a negotiation between two agents whose awareness of their own and the other's needs and interests will inform the research outcomes and the costs which each is prepared to pay.

## Discussion

In these four Case Studies, the ethical issues in fieldwork produced at least two kinds of consequences. Firstly, they potentially compromised the relationship between researcher and participant, or researcher and team member. In Case Study 1 this arose because the researcher withheld an informed opinion which may be useful to participants and there was consequent disagreement among team members; in Case Study 2 it was the blurring of professional boundaries when building rapport which caused emotional distress to both participant and researcher; in Case Study 4, the researcher assumed responsibility for participants' re-living of suffering as they tried to meet the needs of the research project. Such ethically loaded decisions have personal consequences for the researcher, as well as for the methodology or viability of the project.

The other consequence is potentially compromised research integrity. In Case Study 3, this could occur because the researcher took home data that was difficult to use, because of her effort to meet multiple (and ethical) objectives; in Case Study 1 the researcher could have influenced participants' views through either disclosing or withholding an informed opinion; in Case Study 2, the researcher may have failed to obtain data if rapport had not been established, or obtained unusable data through too close a rapport. For doctoral students, the consequences of data that appears to be inadequate or resistant to analysis may result in negative reports from examiners. Examiners typically are required to assess whether a candidate has, inter alia, identified the research problem, presented results cogently, exhibited sufficient knowledge of the area, made an original contribution to knowledge and shown "mastery of techniques of analysis and/or synthesis and/or evaluation appropriate to the research topic" (UTS Graduate School, 2007). Balancing research objectives with ethical objectives, as occurred to some extent in all of the case studies above, can risk questions from examiners about the validity of data or the rigor of the research process, as occurred for two of the authors of this paper. We note nonetheless a shift towards a deeper understanding of data as not only co-constructed by researcher and researched, but changing as it moves across disciplines, across different ontologies, epistemologies and politics: "[E]ach discrete 'body' of knowledge interacts and decomposes something of the other, opening new epistemological, ethical, and political questions about the uncontrollability of data" (Holmes & Jones, 2013, p. 2). We found that data were more akin to a dialogue, or a process which drew in the researcher rather than the other way around:

> Am I a researcher now? Collecting my data? Answering my questions? I ask:
> How dare I assume control of this process? It is the data that collects me.
> Possesses me. Inscribes onto me the stories that it wishes me to tell.
> (Amatucci, 2013, p. 3)

Our "data" too became a process, shaped in part by the kind of ethical dilemmas exemplified in the case studies. These dilemmas, and their impact on the researchers, the researched, the data and the research plans, raise at least the following questions:

- How can we make ethical decisions about what information to disclose to/withhold from interviewees?
- How do we address discrepancies in ethical approaches between team members?
- How do we assess the impact of those decisions on data validity?
- How do we manage the risk of breaching professional boundaries and causing "emotional distress" in discussing personal issues with interviewees?
- How do we identify the limits of rapport needed to obtain data?
- How do we deal with the emotional consequences for ourselves as researchers of confronting and dealing with such ethical dilemmas?
- How do we deal with the potential for complex research objectives to result in "messy" data, for example where objectives include "benefit to participants?"
- How does this affect the validity and value of data in the research project?
- How can ethical principles such as "do no harm" be negotiated between researcher and participant when the needs and interests of the researcher become a factor in those of the participant?

While the university ethics approval process can open up some of these questions for the researcher at an early stage of the research, the kinds of dilemmas described in our case studies arose after fieldwork had started, were difficult to anticipate, and, as we argue below, required decisions and responses on very specific issues for which the EAP provided only very general guidance.

### Responses to Ethical Issues in Fieldwork:
### The Limits of University Ethics Approval Process

Ways of dealing with unexpected in-field relationships and the integrity of the research project remain largely unaddressed in University Ethics Approval (EAP) processes for doctoral research. An assessment of potential risks or harm (to both participants and researcher) is part of the EAP, along with a proposal to minimise risk. "Unexpected adverse events" of an extreme kind are likely to involve a halt to the research on advice from the candidate's supervisor.[1] However the EAP has limited means for dealing promptly with the less extreme, unexpected and often complex ethical dilemmas and associated stresses described in our case studies. The discussion below of relevant aspects of ethics approval processes is based on the authors' own experiences of university ethics processes for doctoral research.

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[1] EAP is used throughout this paper to refer to those University Ethics Processes applicable to doctoral research.

*Participation must not be the result of "undue or improper inducement" (the spirit of which might be extended to include "false pretences" where there is an issue of deception).* The EAP expects that participants will at some point be "debriefed" about any deception. "Informed consent," especially in the case of economically or socially vulnerable participants from whom information is withheld, is a complex issue which may require a more sophisticated ethical analysis than that generally available to a non-ethicist or expected as part of an EAP (refer Case Study 1).

*The impacts of existing relationships between participants and the researcher are to be considered in an EAP.* However those relationships that evolve over the course of the project, and that may well influence participants in their decision to remain involved, are not discussed (refer Case Study 2 and Case Study 4). Similarly, existing relationships between participants and an interpreter (or other team members (refer Case Study 1)) require ethical attention beyond the EAP, for example when disagreements arise over treatment of participants.

The EAP seeks information on community ownership and/or approval of a research project, and the effects of the project on the community, but offers no way of connecting this with other ethical issues such as deception (refer Case Study 1), the impact of evolving relationships between the researcher, interpreter or others and the community (refer Case Study 2), opportunities for the community to assess risk or potential harm (refer Case Study 4), or the impacts of ethical decisions on the methodology and kinds of data available to the research (refer Case Study 3).

Some of the issues raised in the Case Studies about validity of data can be addressed at a preliminary level in the EAP through early provision of sample questionnaires, surveys, interview formats etc., and responses to questions such as "How do you plan to transform data into material which is valid and reliable?'" or "How will you analyse or interpret your transformed data?" However the potential impact on data validity of ethical decisions made "in the field" (refer Case Studies 1, 2 and 3) is not addressed in an EAP, and the research culture in which much fieldwork takes place (e.g., pressures to complete a project on time and with readily verified methodological validity) makes it difficult for researchers to openly acknowledge or reflect upon such "validity" issues.

Similarly, while the EAP alerts the doctoral researcher to the "special sensitivity" required in cross-cultural research, and the need to observe local rules and customs, it does not address ways of dealing with differing assumptions and expectations about the research project (e.g., between a "field" community and a research organisation), while maintaining research integrity (refer Case Studies 1 and 3).

EAP privacy principles require that collection of information should be "by fair means," and that people be informed about what information is being collected and why. However more preparation is needed by the researcher to manage the ethical aspects of an "in-field" situation where some deception or withholding of information is required in order to obtain useful information (Case Study 1). While the EAP requires that information collected should be both "relevant" but not be "too intrusive," identifying the point at which information-gathering reaches this latter threshold can be a complex matter of judgment (Case Studies 2 and 4).

### Responses Beyond University Ethics Approval Processes

The responses of the doctoral researchers to the ethical issues raised in the Case Studies above reinforce the need for preparation and reflection in fieldwork beyond the University EAP. As noted above, the discussion also suggests that a deeper understanding of the nature

of "fieldwork" and "data" may be required by the researcher as both the research plan and the data develop and change form throughout the research project.

It was important to all of us to accept that research methodology or direction may need to change in order to respond to ethical and other issues outside our early expectations or assumptions. Research in the field requires of the researcher constant ethical vigilance, and intellectual agility. For example, Scott et al. found "the use of surveys and formal, structured interviews which directly broached sensitive topics to be ineffective. Instead, we gradually devised other more culturally and politically appropriate strategies for gleaning useful information" (Scott, Miller, & Lloyd, 2006, p. 35).

The post-fieldwork analysis and reflection, which occurred for most of us within a complex transdisciplinary ethical and theoretical framework, helped to make sense of data even where it had been obtained in unconventional or "messy" ways. Transdisciplinary research has been described as drawing not only on a range of disciplines but on multi-layered analysis; this includes explicit positioning of the researcher, and ethical and critical reflection throughout the research process (Max-Neef, 2005; Mitchell & Willetts, 2009; Wickson, Carew, & Russell, 2006). Research design becomes an iterative and evolving process incorporating these reflections throughout the project: "Transdisciplinarity is simultaneously an attitude and a form of action" (Thompson Klein, 2004). In transdisciplinary research, material from oral sources can be seen more broadly as not merely "data" but an expression of a community's culture, desires and imagination (Passerini, 2003, pp. 53-54; Portelli, 2003, p. 67). Such sources "are credible but with a different credibility … [T]here are no 'false' oral sources" (Portelli, 2003, p. 67). Different methodological approaches, and the exercise of special forms of care, are required in eliciting and analysing such 'data'.

Reflexivity was an important aspect of the authors' analysis and reflection, and of the methodological agility required in the field:

> … reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher. Indeed reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions… (England, 1994, p. 82)

Till (2001, p. 46) notes that our understanding of ourselves as researchers changes as we move between "home" and "the field," in unpredictable ways. The unease this produces may, however "also lead to new insights and more empathetic geographies and histories" (p. 46).

The ethical "grey areas" referred to in Case Study 1 above may be addressed, although never fully resolved, through rigorous reflection and discussion with peers, or may require input from others, for example supervisors or practitioners with greater experience in qualitative research and fieldwork. Very complex or risky ethical questions may require input from professional ethicists. "[F]ieldwork is…an exercise in communication, trust, and timing" (Hyndman, 2001, p. 265), and hence often a precarious exercise requiring emotional intelligence.. The stresses induced by these processes may result in the researcher's need for professional psychological or ethics assistance.

Acknowledgement is also needed of the participant's agency in the interview, as noted in Case Study 4. Unlike participants undergoing a clinical research trial, over which they will have very little control, "in qualitative research, especially those using unstructured interactive interviews, participants retain considerable control over the process. To make the assumption that all interviews are potentially harmful takes away participant agency and control…" (Corbin & Morse, 2003, p. 337). The dilemma confronting the researcher in Case

Study 4 arose from just this agency on the part of participants in a context where harm also appeared to be present.

To enable ethical responses in the field, preparation is needed. This might include, before fieldwork, reflecting on expectations and assumptions, or learning more about the "other" culture (e.g., through a cross-cultural awareness program and discussions with others who have worked in the area). The kinds of commentary offered by Till (2001), Hyndman (2001), England (1994) and many others might also act as a form of "bibliotherapy;" reading about both the difficulties and value of fieldwork may assist researchers in more clearly reviewing and anticipating their own emotional and ethical issues.

EAP guidance may be expanded by considering personal ethical principles, developing a code of conduct for interviewers, more explicitly identifying power imbalances and potential abuses of power, exploring the implications of deception (e.g., through discussions with an ethicist, supervisors, someone from the community where the fieldwork will be conducted, or others who have done fieldwork elsewhere). Researchers can develop processes for reflection in the field, such as making careful notes to be reviewed at the end of each day, along with reflections on participant responses, team members' concerns, disagreements, sources of the researcher's own discomfort.  These reflections can then be incorporated into fieldwork notes for later analysis, and into modified methods for the next day, or the next stage of the project.

It would be useful, where possible, to develop in advance of fieldwork, some ideas about what might constitute information-gathering which is "too intrusive," how to finalise an interview that has moved beyond this threshold, and ways of briefing team members, interpreters etc. on these protocols.  Sometimes, the need for this work will only become apparent in the field.

During fieldwork, the researcher can prepare for each interaction with a participant by reviewing guidelines and agreed strategies (including with any other team members), and reviewing each interview or set of interviews afterwards. The researcher also needs to monitor their own emotional reactions, anxieties or concerns and review their source, and make a judgement about whether, and when, to seek advice on the project, or seek psychological support. Regular scheduled discussions with a supervisor or "project monitor" can provide a valuable external perspective for making decisions about the need for further support.

Changing methodology or research design may be a way of addressing ethical questions or furthering important ethical objectives.  The advantage of qualitative research involving interaction with participants is that it "can actually prevent researchers from engaging in the ethical self-delusion that can occur when researchers have little contact with participants. This is because researchers and participants actually co-construct ethical realities during the course of the interviews" (Corbin & Morse, 2003, p. 348).  Changing methodology midstream in a project requires a researcher who is both reflexive and capable of mobilizing those resources (in themselves, other members of the team, or from an external adviser) which are needed to undertake critical review and realistic modifications to the research design.

In the analysis phase of research, generally after returning from "the field," the researcher has the opportunity to reflect upon the issues such as "necessary deception," power imbalances, blurring of professional and personal boundaries, and the ways these were addressed through changes in research design, adapting methodologies, or simply accepting the decision of a participant to proceed despite discomfort. These are also "research findings" and optimise the value of "messy" qualitative data. Below we offer some suggestions for getting the most out of both the university EAP process and the research process itself.

Researchers about to undertake fieldwork may wish to consider keeping the following questions by their side before, during and after their fieldwork:

1. How can I get the most out of the process of applying for University Ethics approval? Can the Ethics application questions be interpreted in broader ways to help me be prepared for unexpected ethical dilemmas?
2. Can the dilemma and adaptive process I am going through become part of my research? What tools of analysis are required as a result?
3. If the ethical issues I need to deal with lead to changes in my methodology, what will the implications be for analysis and write up? Is there new literature I need to consider and measures I need to take to maintain or monitor the validity of my research?
4. What strategies do I have in place to deal with potential feelings of guilt, uncertainty, rejection etc. whilst doing my fieldwork? From whom can I seek support if I am confronted with this situation?

These four questions summarise some of the lessons we learned about maintaining the integrity of our research while responding ethically to unexpected events and conditions. We hope they may be useful for other researchers.

## Conclusion

The stated priorities of university ethics procedures "can give the false impression that ethics is about 'what we do to others'" rather than the wider moral and social responsibilities of simply being a researcher" (Kellehear, 1993, cited in de Laine, 2000, p. 214). Fieldwork appears as a series of resolvable problems when in fact this is not the reality. "Each step in fieldwork is affected by the development of interpersonal contingencies in the setting. Being in the subject's world means being surrounded by the real life contingencies, as an enduring problematic of fieldwork" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, pp. 68-69). These contingencies have the potential to make the researcher vulnerable and cause personal stress, ethical uncertainty and intellectual confusion.

Ongoing reflection and responsiveness are needed throughout all stages of qualitative human research. The objectivity and "intellectual distance" which ethical guidelines aim to codify in advance (Hill, Glaser, & Harden, 1995, p. 23) are generally not realizable in the interactive and mutually constructed world of the field.

In the field, the researcher is likely to occupy the complex role of responsible research leader as well as co-participant and co-constructor of "data." We hope that, in the midst of ethical uncertainty and the anxiety that arises from caring about both participants and research outcomes, other researchers can be better prepared and resourced through thinking about some of the strategies proposed in this paper.

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