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The Ethics of Researching Marginalised Groups



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Research ethics - Agenda



- Moving beyond research ethics guidelines to addressing power in the research process
- Discussing ethical research dilemmas activity
- 6 examples of ethical issues – researching marginalized groups; insider/outsider; liking and disliking participants; rapport; research generating possibility and my experiences researching Roma.

[Break somewhere in the middle]

- Designing ethical research projects activity



Research ethics?



- Voluntary and informed consent
- Openness and Disclosure
- Right to withdraw
- Safety of researcher and researcher
- Children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Privacy
- Disclosure
- Respect for knowledge



Issues with research codes



- **Achievable?** e.g. avoidance of harm
- **Compatible?** e.g. fully informed consent vs. pursuit of knowledge
- **Desirable?** e.g. anonymity

Researchers must make choices to produce an *ethically and methodologically defensible position.*



Dilemmas



- A) You are researching generational attitudes towards sexual health in a small Roma settlement. A senior leader in the community wants their name to be made public in the research to support a bid for additional funding.
- B) You are researching Roma school children's reading development and visit a family who do not speak the same language as you. You explain the research as best you can, they sign a form and the interview takes place. A week or so later the head teacher explains that the parents were very worried about the visit – they didn't know who the researcher was, and that a neighbour told the parents that the researcher was probably a social worker.



‘I have never known an interviewer to be completely honest with their respondents ... Neither does any researcher ever have adequate insight for a perfect representation of their identity; it is always a matter of greater or lesser misrepresentation... The researcher must also keep in mind that no method can ever be completely safe for himself or his respondents ... The ethics of social science are situation ethics’

(Humphreys, 1970).



Beyond ethical approval



- Complete a research ethics application to ensure that the benefits of the planned research outweigh the costs and to protect the interests of all those involved in or affected by research.

BUT ALSO

- Codes of ethical or professional conduct are only ever relatively finished products (Small, 2002)
- Ethical concerns should be at the forefront of any research project and should continue through to the write-up and dissemination stages (Wellington, 2000: 3)
- Each research project will generate unique ethical dilemmas (e.g. between interesting data and participant's' rights to privacy) often with a spectrum of possibilities – not always easy answers.



Power in the research process

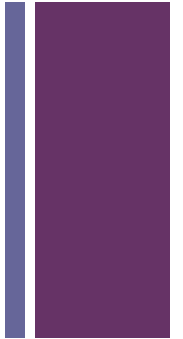


- Whose interests are served by your research?
- What things influence what you see/say about your research?
- How will you get your participants to talk to you/ trust you/tell you the truth?
- What are the power dynamics at work between you and the researched?
- How might these be intensified with marginalized/vulnerable populations?
- What are your responsibilities when you leave the field?
- What are the ethics of telling someone's else's story?



1. Researching marginalised groups

- Reflections on research with Asian and Gypsy women in the UK (Bhopal, 2010)
- Shared ethnicity did not necessarily guarantee access to respondents but did *encourage* respondents to open up and trust to be established.
- Shared gender was crucial in building trust and *rapprochement* with Gypsy and Asian women.
- 'Shared cultured' but also an outsider (middle-class academic) power shifted and was not always in the hands of the researcher.
- Concerns about exploitation:
Sometimes when people ask to do research here [with the Gypsy and Traveller communities] I have to question their motives. I don't know if all they want to do is to reproduce the stereotypes that exist. I don't know if they just want to exploit them.





2. The researcher: insider/outsider



- Mason (1996) suggests researchers manage multiple identities and moving between a variety of roles e.g. Roma researchers occupy multiple identities when researching Roma.
- What do we presume to know about ourselves and about those we research as an 'insider' or 'outsider'?
 - Shared/different histories?
 - Shared/different values?
 - Shared/different ideas about the research topic`/



3. Favourites and others (Bott, 2010)



- Researching young working class British migrants to Spain and their transitions to 'exciting' lives
- Time share boys as 'unlovable group' – reluctant to take part and hostile to researcher. Use of sexist and racist language – *'the richer the data became, the harder it was to stomach'* (167)
- Lap dancing girls –uncomfortable dynamics of the research interview due to power differentials of occupation and fear of moral judgments.
- Sense of 'favourites and others'. 'Good data' became that which confronts researcher's own assumptions/political ideologies.
- Feelings of liking and being liked by participants as an everyday methodological concern. This challenges 'neutrality of' fieldwork space as well the 'happy talk' about building rapport.



4. Building rapport



- **Using participants ethically?** Finch (1984) – ethical issues of interviewing other women and mothers. Difficulties of using private information given away so easily on the basis of ‘trust’. Importance of participatory, reciprocal interviewing.
- **Going beyond rapport and becoming?** Venkatesh (2009) – built rapport with gang leader as part of research on race, poverty and crime in Chicago and became ‘gang leader for a day’. Witnessed crime and violence but could go home to his college dormitory outside the housing estate.

+ 5. Generating possibility

- Interviewing, class and reality TV (Skeggs, Thumin & Wood, 2008) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xqRlY307dc>
- Research findings cannot be separated from their production
- Some people more comfortable in the interview situation than others
- Research does not 'capture' the world but generates conditions of possibility – people respond to these differently



6. Researching Roma: My experiences

- The contradictions of being positioned as an 'expert' on Roma
- My identity as a non-Roma and a white woman from the UK
- A need for a politics of speaking 'nearby' (Trin Minh-Ha, 2008) rather than 'research tourism' (Mohanty, 2003).





Activity



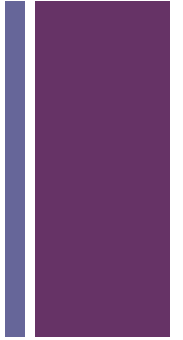
Work in groups of 3. Think of a research topic about Roma that you would like to complete. Consider what some of the ethical concerns might be and how you could address them.

You could focus on topics such as:

- What is my position as a researcher?
- What aspects of unequal power are there in the research process?
- How can I think more ethically to address these?
- What can I say about these people's lives in reports and research papers?



Conclusions



- Research ethics are about developing an ethically 'sensitivity' rather than adhering only to what is required through ethics applications
- It is about recognising the complexities involved in doing research with people and asking difficult questions, which do not always have straightforward responses.
- Working specifically with marginalised groups such as Roma involves thinking deeply about unequal power in the research process

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