Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology

by

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

- There is great variety in research methods in the social sciences and humanities (SSH), yet there are some fundamental ethical principles that are recognised by all. Some methodologies are complex and/or unconventional in their approach and so give rise to difficult ethical decision taking.

- Anthropology is the study of all aspects of human culture. Ethnography is a field-based research method – not unique to anthropology – employing observation and interviewing to investigate social practices and the meanings behind social interaction. Ethnology involves the systematic comparison of different cultures using ethnographic research methods to compare and contrast different cultures. The data produced tend to be descriptive and so require qualitative data analysis.

- In order to 'understand' human behaviour these approaches examine social processes in as natural a way as possible, using several connected research methods that focus on social interaction and communications. A reflexive awareness by the researcher of their effects on the people being studied is encouraged – usually through the use of a reflective journal written by the researcher.

- The basic ethical principles to be maintained include doing good, not doing harm and protecting the autonomy, wellbeing, safety and dignity of all research participants. Researchers should be as objective as possible and avoid ethnocentricity. Any deception of participants should be fully justified. They should not knowingly misrepresent or attempt to prevent reporting of misconduct, or obstruct the scientific research of others.

- The contribution that can be made to advancing human knowledge by the SSH disciplines may be obstructed or undermined if inappropriate ethical review criteria are applied to research proposals. Ethical review should be well informed, fair and transparent while seeking full justification for the proposed research.

- Ethical review should protect researchers, subjects and institutions in field sites from harm. Research ethics committees should ask: who is doing the research, what are they doing it for and how are they doing it? They should help in estimating risks of harm to participants, researchers and organisations and balance those against benefits that might accrue to society as outcomes of the research. Committees should strive to be consistent in their judgments and in the advice they offer to researchers.

They should be as objective and transparent as possible and 'independent' of institutional and professional biases and any form of vested interest.

- Research proposals should never be rejected as a consequence of methodological ignorance, prejudice or the desire to manage a research institution's corporate image. Above all ethical review must recognise that ethical decision making is not a static, one-off exercise. Only the field researcher truly confronts the unanticipated aspects of research as it occurs spontaneously while the project is ongoing.

- Given the intrusive nature of ethnography and anthropology in people's lives there must be 'good reasons' for conducting the research. Managing the 'trust' relationship between researchers and researched is vital. Ethnography is extremely skilled work and so requires competent, well-trained researchers, capable of making reasonable ethical judgments during the research. Researchers have a responsibility to each other and to prevent doing harm that will undermine future research work.

- Ethical codes have to be 'interpreted' and put into practice by the researcher in light of the substantive research topic and methodology employed.

- The manner in which research is commissioned, by whom and how the relationship between researchers and commissioners is managed is a key determinant of ethical practice. Poorly designed research is unethical since it wastes researchers' and subjects' time and energy.

- Concern for the rights and well-being of research participants lies at the root of ethical research. Vulnerability is a prime concern and the very young and the very old, together with those with learning difficulties are seen to be worthy of special attention in most societies.

- In qualitative research it may be impossible to maintain a neat distinction between covert and overt research. Settings are often more complex and changeable than can be anticipated.

- In ethnographic research samples are more likely to be small, purposive and/or theoretical. It would be inappropriate to require a method of sampling more suited to other research styles.

- A clearly written protocol is usually the first indicator of rigorous research but this is much harder to set out in advance in ethnography. The need for flexibility in approach has to be written in to the proposal and fully

understood by reviewers. Anthropologists are frequently engaged in longitudinal studies of their chosen communities and frequently seek return projects in order to investigate changes in the community.

- Anthropologists and ethnographers have to be aware of the range of ways their activities can cause distress to others. Ways of showing respect for research subjects can be embedded in both the content of research questions and the manner in which they are delivered.

- Researchers should detail the steps taken to minimise harm and to maximise benefits. Some overall judgement will then have to be made about the anticipated benefits of the project outweighing the *estimated* potential for harm.

- Anthropologists have to be highly attuned to who the gatekeepers are in different communities. Awareness of the balance of power between researcher and researched is vital. Ensuring participants have, and perceive themselves to have, adequate power to determine their role in the research is seen as ethically necessary. The ultimate test of the enhanced power of research subjects lies in their knowing that they have the ability to withdraw from the study at any point.

- Gaining consent cannot easily be separated from the giving of information. Subjects should be able to choose 'freely' to participate in research. They should have been given enough information about the research for them to know what their participation involves. In anthropological studies participants' consent may have to be treated as ongoing throughout the research engagement. Consent should be gained in the most convenient, least disturbing manner for both researcher and researched. If confidentiality and/or anonymity have been promised then the steps taken to ensure this should be outlined.

- Incomplete disclosure of research aims and methods may be justified if it can be adequately demonstrated that participants should not be told too much. This should only be considered if risks to the subjects are minimal.

- The monitoring of physical safety may be considered during ethical scrutiny – any potential risks to safety for subjects and researchers need to be addressed.

- Research should be conducted in accordance with the principles of the applicable country-specific national data protection legislation.

- Research subjects can act as more active 'participants'. They can become full collaborators or co-researchers, but allowing subjects an active research role is not ethically 'compulsory'. The wisdom of participant involvement very much depends upon the substance of the research, its aims, the proposed design, the methods to be employed and the anticipated consequences for the participants of too active an involvement.

- How to disseminate findings is also an ethical concern. Before dissemination it is important to judge whether or not the information released has benefits or contains the potential for harm. Thought must be given to what to publish, how to release findings and via which media.

- Even at the point of dissemination questions remain about the ownership of the findings and of the source data.

- New social media have given rise to innovative methodological approaches for ethnographers and anthropologists. These have given rise to new forms of community and personal identity for people that pose real challenges to the key ethical research principles of consenting, voluntary participation, and vulnerability. With this interconnectivity, understanding of *public* and *private* space has become more complicated.

- The EC's established and monitored ethical review systems can protect people being researched and help advance research standards globally. Anthropologists who conduct their research in a range of different countries and cultures, while upholding these values are, at the same, time promoting them globally.

- As multi-site, interdisciplinary and cross-national studies grow due to larger corporate commissioning the issues of ethical review become even more complex. Knowledge transfer requires partnership arrangements that may lead to aspects of joint research programmes being beyond the control of any single partner.

Background

This Report was prepared for the Ethics Unit B6, DG Research and Innovation of the European Commission (EC). The primary audience for this Report are ethics review committees or panels who might not be so directly familiar with the methods regularly adopted by ethnographers and anthropologists. There is nothing new here for practitioners of those disciplines, but it is hoped anyone with an interest in ethics review in ethnography/anthropology may also find the information contained here useful. Although there are some fundamental core ethical principles that can be applied to all human subjects research, the operationalisation of those principles varies according to the methodology adopted. A wide variety of research methods can be found within the social sciences and humanities (SSH) – for this reason the contribution that can be made to advancing human knowledge and scientific understanding from the SSH disciplines may be obstructed or undermined if inappropriate review criteria are applied to research proposals. Ethical review should be informed by the underlying theoretical and methodological assumptions of the discipline which frames the research proposal. This requires the provision of a full justification of the research approach from the research proposer, together with a properly constituted and competent review panel and a robust, fair and transparent review process.

Section 1 in this paper deals with basic theoretical assumptions and methodology. Sections 2 and 3 establish the ethical principles by which all scientific research should be assessed. In section 4 those general ethical principles are applied to the 'special consideration' that needs to be given to given to ethnographic and anthropological research, given the nature of its theoretical assumptions and primary research methods. This paper draws on previously published material – Iphofen (2011), Iphofen, Krayer and Robinson (2009). I am grateful for the comments made by a range of experts to improve upon the first draft of this Report and particularly wish to acknowledge the constructive contributions to this final version made by Prof. Robert Dingwall.

1   Terms, Concepts and Definitions:

Disciplines and Method

Anthropology is a long-established 'discipline' with some sub-disciplines. For the purpose of SSH in the European Commission our focus is on what is called social anthropology (for most of Europe) or cultural anthropology (in the USA) or ethnology (in some European countries). It is the study of culture within human populations, and is methodologically based predominantly on ethnography. Ethnography is a field-based/grounded, inductive method that employs forms of observation and interviewing to investigate social practices and the meanings behind social interaction. Since it is a method used in many social sciences in varied ways there needs to be consistency of approach in review.

Social anthropology covers kinship and domestic/family structure, social, economic and political organization, law and conflict resolution, patterns of consumption and exchange, material culture, technology, gender relations, ethnicity, child rearing and socialization, religion, myth, symbols, values, etiquette, worldviews, sports, music, nutrition, recreation, games, food, festivals, and language.

Ethnography entails the study of a group through direct contact with its culture and social interactions. Ethnology involves the systematic comparison of different cultures using a range of ethnographic research methods to compare and contrast patterns within and between different cultures. In addition to covering similar topics to anthropology, ethnology is interested in notions of cultural invariants, universal taboos and concepts of 'human nature'. The topics and fields remain contested.

The discipline of anthropology and the research 'style' of ethnography present one of the more complex methodological and theoretical approaches within SSH. This is due to the range of theoretical assumptions that can inform the different directions research can take, and the multiplicity of methods that can be adopted to conduct the research. This has given rise to considerable disagreement even between researchers and theorists who are operating in these fields.

Ethnography can be simply defined as "…the observation, description, depiction and/or representation of lived social experience." Ethnographic approaches lay stress on the language and meanings that people apply to their own actions in given social settings and processes, assuming that subjects are accurately and authentically observed in their normal social settings when behaving in routine ways. Ethnography is a way of studying peoples' behaviour – language, culture, values, meanings and social organization – in everyday, natural settings rather than in formal research settings. It is best understood as a 'style' of research requiring the observation and description of people in their normal social context. It can entail large costs in time, money and energy but it represents the highest standards in qualitative research only replaced by interviews when resources are considered excessive. So ethical review should seek to prefer ethnography wherever possible.

Researchers vary in the degree to which they choose to participate in these social settings, from joining the groups under study, to observing them in a more covert, detached manner – thus adjusting how 'intrusive' they are in their subjects' lives. The researcher more often plays some part in the ordinary conversations and activities of people being researched, rather than conducting a separate more formal research interview. As a research 'style' it can make use of a variety of different research 'methods' – direct observation, interview, survey, secondary analysis of archival material (such as diaries and letters), focus groups and so on.

Ethnographic research may focus on a single case study, a group or sometimes even on the activity of a single person. This approach can highlight aspects of life patterns that are unique, particular, changing and new for different people and groups. It may allow research to be less dominated by the researcher's own preconceptions and perspectives at the expense of the views of the subjects being studied. This is particularly useful for studying a social group in ways that allow members' perspectives to be seen as "reasonable" or "understandable in their context". In complex societies it can also be useful for discovering *alternative* processes that may explain the apparently unusual behaviour of marginalized or deviant sub-groups in society. Ethnography can also serve to highlight the differences between what people say they do and what they actually do. By observing what people do and not just taking them at their word, we can find out more about the actions that they take, why they take them, and how they interpret their own actions in relation to the actions of others.

The data produced are frequently descriptive and tend to be subject to qualitative data analysis. The numbers of subjects studied depend upon the size of the group or community being studied and the numbers of researchers available to conduct the study. Ethnography tends to be conducted by small numbers of researchers for pragmatic reasons. The prime goal here is the attempt to access authentically produced data – to allow the data to emerge naturally and in an unforced way.

Ethnographic research 'styles' can be contrasted with other research activities that aim to uncover what is general, constant, or predictable for all human beings or members of a general population. Thus the *survey* approach asks fairly large samples of people questions about themselves and the *experimental* style attempts to systematically control social situations and their participants. Surveys are seeking greater generalization about a larger population, experiments seek to identify causal phenomena. But these fundamentally different styles can be used to complement one another and when used together may offer cumulative perspectives and insights into social phenomena.

The broad theoretical assumptions of ethnography

These are sometimes referred to as the "special commitments" that are attached to the use of ethnography:

1)   **Understanding and interpretation.** The *verstehen* tradition in the human sciences argues that all human actions are socially constructed and meaningfully intended. People do things for specific reasons and to attain specific outcomes. They are thinking, purposeful creatures communicating their intentions in a variety of ways.

2)   **Social events are processual.** Social meanings are generated in a dynamic process of negotiation; this is not a static phenomenon. Human beings are engaged in movement and change – they sometimes initiate it and always have to respond to it. So meanings and intentions have to be actively established and maintained. (A good example of this is to be seen in the importance of the perception of the passage of time. Most people organise their world and their actions in it in terms of their perception of time. There are negotiations about time and its use.)

3)   **Naturalism.** It is assumed that the artificial manipulation and control of subjects should be avoided – for accuracy and authenticity it is vital to observe them doing what they do 'naturally'.

4)   **Holism.** Along with naturalism the inauthentic fragmentation of social life should be avoided. Scientific analysis sometimes segments peoples' actions and thoughts in ways which take them out of context. Attitudes and behaviour are to be seen as elements in a whole cultural context. Often actions and thoughts can only be understood in terms of the social network that individuals belong to.

5)   **Multiple perspectives.** A fundamental theoretical assumption is that there is always more than one way of looking at or talking about things. This implies the avoidance of any 'dominant hierarchy' perspective. This requires guarding against assuming the necessary superiority of any one scientific perspective or any one 'worldview'. People hold different perspectives according to their particular social situation. This might mean different people holding different perspectives on the same situation or event. It also means the same people holding different perspectives when in different contexts or at different points in time. It suggests a kind of 'relativity' about how we understand the world. It is does not assume that there is only one, rational, efficient, or correct way to do things – attitudes, values and behaviour depend upon social and cultural circumstances.

Ethnographic research methods

The authenticity and humanism of the ethnographic method relies on adopting a research approach which resembles an extension of what we do in ordinary everyday life. The difference is that the researcher is self-conscious and preserves a permanent retrievable record of their observations and activities.

a) **Multiple methods** are used. Mostly these are different forms of participant observation. There will be a 'sampling' of time, people and events since the researcher cannot be everywhere and with everyone. This is not the kind of sampling 'frame' employed in quantitative data analysis – it is still the basis for controlled, systematic data collection. **Triangulation** is often advocated in which a range of different methods are systematically used to avoid the threats to validity which may be embodied in any one method – thus interview, unobtrusive measures, documentary sources and, even, a survey may be employed. This requires full understanding of what it means to adopt a 'multi-methods' or 'mixed methods' approach and there is an extensive and growing literature on the complications of mixing and/or multiplying methods.

b) **Progressive focusing** takes place whereby one begins with broad ideas or observes general spheres of interest. Sensitising concepts may be developed which illustrate general or specific problems within the group. Significant persons and/or significant events are noted. Several 'hypotheses' about what people are doing or why they are doing it may be 'tested' in a speculative sense rather than via a formal statistical probability test. It is more like estimating whether a particular explanation seems to 'work' or be adequate for understanding what is going on. A similar approach is also used in the natural sciences – such as with 'critical' experiments in chemistry.

c) **Reflexivity** is required in which the researcher maintains self-awareness. The researcher must be aware of the consequences of their presence for what may be found out. The findings may be influenced by the researcher's presence either by producing thoughts or actions which are not normally engaged in, or by discouraging people from revealing as much as they normally would.

d) **Establishing a role** which is acceptable in the research setting is essential. The researcher can even be an 'acceptable incompetent' – someone who lacks expertise and knowledge about those being studied but is still treated considerately. The more a researcher participates with a group, the more they will have to confront problems of role conflict. Being both a researcher and a member of the group requires careful management of social interactions. While establishing a role the field of research has to be 'cased'. Casing the field requires establishing the suitability of setting and informants, the feasibility of research, tactics to be adopted, access (to key informants and via gatekeepers), and mapping of the range of social settings in the field.

e)   **Theoretical sampling** takes place in which appropriate conceptual categories are discovered and developed. These might be samples of behaviour or of conversation or of disclosed attitudes and so on. Those are chosen which are most likely to permit the development of 'theory' – that is, good explanations for the behaviour being studied. Theory involves moving from the first order generalizations that account for the specific observations to more abstract second order generalizations that allow those conclusions to be translated to other settings removed in time and/or space.

Cases are analysed until new categories and properties no longer appear – when *theoretical saturation* is reached. Theory is more often generated <u>during</u> the research process rather than anticipated beforehand and 'tested' by the research. (Such an approach is inductive rather than deductive – starting from observation and working towards a theory, rather than beginning with the theory and testing it by observation. Of course this does not preclude hypothetico-deductive work where a series of case studies have developed a second-order statement that can be tested under different conditions to determine whether it remains true.)

This is the key to explanation in ethnography. Generally, although the 'causal' power of experimental or statistical control methods is lost, the explanatory power of ethnography lies in the use of a comparative method called **analytic induction** this entails:

1)   starting from a rough description
2)   developing a hypothetical explanation
3)   studying a number of cases from the same or different comparable settings - searching for both 'typical' <u>and</u> for 'critical' cases
4)   if the initial hypothesis does not explain, it is reformulated or replaced
5)   possible negative cases are continually sought
6)   this proceeds until no new counter examples are found either in the field or by referring to other case study reports and integration into the broader published literature.

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In summary these disciplines and this research method is necessarily processual, dynamic, and usually fairly longitudinal and may employ a range of standard research methods (observations – participant and non-participant/overt or covert, interviews, focus groups, surveys, field 'experiments' etc.) singly or in combination.

2   Basic Principles of Research Ethics:

Codes and guidelines
As with other fields of study in SSH, anthropologists may follow a range of ethical codes and/or guidelines. Adherence to *codes* tends to be treated as a professional requirement that could lead to expulsion from some professional associations if they are transgressed. *Guidelines* are regarded as educative or advisory without institutional sanction but are intended to be used by researchers in support of their own resolution of ethical dilemmas. In all cases they are seen as 'frameworks' within which to consider the frequent conflict and tensions inherent in ethical decision-making.

Most ethical codes/guides are structured in terms of sets of responsibilities or obligations to different sectors of societies or communities. Typically professional anthropological institutions suggest these include the following categories. Responsibilities to…
…those being studied (subjects – human and/or animal – individuals, groups, communities),
…scholarship and science (colleagues within the discipline or profession),
…the public (society at large),
…funders/research commissioners,
…researchers' own and 'host' governments.

Ethical Principles
Underlying these frameworks are some basic ethical principles. These include doing good (beneficence), avoiding doing harm (non-malifice nce), and protecting the autonomy, wellbeing, safety and dignity of all research participants. This means that anthropologists should ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research on, or with whom they perform other professional activities. They must seek to ensure the psychological wellbeing, or even the survival of those they are studying, carefully and respectfully negotiating the limits of the relationship between researchers and those being researched. They should maintain as objective as possible a comparative analytical stance and avoid ethnocentricity. They should not normally deceive their subjects without good reason. Nor should they knowingly misrepresent (i.e., fabricate evidence, falsify, plagiarize), or attempt to prevent the reporting of misconduct, or obstruct the scientific/scholarly research of others. There is an obligation to make use of the results of their work in an 'appropriate' fashion. Individual researchers may choose to move beyond disseminating research results to a position of advocacy on behalf of their subjects. Dissemination and reporting of research findings must be done with a view to the basic principles of beneficence and non-malifice nce. (See the American Anthropological Association, and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth.)

3   Formal ethical review criteria:

Formal ethical review exists in order to protect researchers, subjects and institutions from any harm that may be consequent on a research engagement. In simple terms research ethics committees (RECs) should be asking: who is doing the research, what are they doing it for and how are they doing it? When incorrectly administered ethical review can obstruct or inhibit research and, at worst, has been charged with being anti-democratic and restrictive of academic freedom. To protect research review against these charges there needs to be enhanced professional involvement in it to ensure it becomes facilitative of research and in the raising of ethical awareness amongst researchers. It is especially important that any ethical review committee balances expertise, independence and 'lay' representation so it should contain experts in the research methodology/discipline that is being proposed, representatives of other research disciplines with methodological and ethical expertise, lay members (who might be considered representative of communities being studied) and independent experts in law and ethics. This may be difficult to achieve in anthropology, especially as expatriates or 'leaders' may have agendas of their own which they wish to promote. The committee should be aware of the relevant European legislation and the legislation of the host country or countries in which the research is to be conducted.

Ethical scrutiny can also be seen as crucial in attempting to prevent or reduce fraudulent scientific research. Real damage can be done to an entire field of study from even just a few highly publicised cases of research misconduct. Ethical decisions must be reached in a transparent manner – researchers must be seen to behave ethically for the sake of the goals of the discipline and of the profession of social research. Formalised ethical scrutiny is intended to assist researchers in estimating and balancing risks of harm to participants, researchers and organisations and considering what benefits might accrue to society, groups, individuals, organisations and so on. Ethical review might include the requirement that a full risk assessment has been conducted to ensure the safety of researchers. It can also be a means for clarifying lines of accountability – about who takes decisions, on what grounds and who is responsible for errors and misjudgements. It offers external, independent and collegial mentorship/advice. And, to aid transparency, it provides the means for retaining a systematic record of what decisions were taken and the reasoning behind them. It should also look at procedures for handling complaints and the redress of grievances against researchers and research organisations.

Responsible researchers have to be aware of the process of ethical scrutiny that is required for certain topics, in certain organisations, with certain categories of people and/or in certain geographic locations. Some countries have established genuinely systematic procedural operations through which all researchers must go to gain public funding – but this is by no means universal and presents particular problems for anthropologists operating in communities in which moral values and norms can differ from those of the originating researcher. Similarly legislation might be applied to varying degrees in geographical locations review committees might not be fully versed in.

Committees should strive to be consistent in their judgments and in the advice they offer to researchers. Their judgments should be as objective and transparent as possible and 'independent' of institutional and professional biases and any form of vested interest. Research proposals should never be rejected as a consequence of methodological ignorance or prejudice. A peer supportive collegial dialogue between researchers and ethics committees is necessary. Ethics is about balancing harms and benefits and so the probability estimate should have to do with the chances of harm coming to individuals balanced against the chances of such harm outweighing the potential benefits. This represents an attempt to ensure harm is minimised or avoided and that benefit is maximised. Time-consuming delays due to administrative complexity can be addressed by establishing appropriate procedural mechanisms (such as the availability of self-completed, online review application forms; recommended proformas for consent letters; standardised participant information sheets; and so on). But it is particularly vital in anthropological/ehtnographic research that such mechanisms should not restrict the flexibility of researchers in adopting and introducing novel procedures for giving information and/or gaining consent that might be more appropriate to the people they are studying.

Above all ethical review must recognise that ethical decision making is not a static, one-off exercise. Only the field researcher truly confronts the unanticipated aspects of ethical research as it occurs in a dynamic, spontaneous manner. Ethnography in particular is all about building relationships in the field with people and so it is hard to anticipate what ethical issues might arise at the commencement of a study – they can crop up continually and surprisingly throughout the project. So to be inclusive and reasonable ethical scrutiny needs to allow for such variation in methodological approach.

Good review requires addressing ethical issues at all stages of the research process – from specification, through tender, the ongoing monitoring of a project in action and its final dissemination. But the requirement for review should be proportionate to risk. Some projects clearly present little risk to any of the participants – in which case some form of 'expedited' procedure is advised. This might include allowing the Chairperson to take action alone or offering appropriate review by a sub-committee. As the 'repository of knowledge' held by ethics committees grows – either in formal recorded decision notes or simply through members' experience, so too grows awareness of minimally problematic methods and techniques – in such cases more expedited reviews could be conducted and fuller consideration reserved for evidently more ethically complex projects.

Similarly we expect a great deal from RECs when we expect them to be adequately comprehensive in their judgments when, increasingly, research projects address complex questions drawing upon multidisciplinary perspectives and multi-professional teams of researchers. In practice what we seek from RECs is a balancing of responsibilities between individuals (field researcher and research manager) and institutions (employing organisation and professional association) – thereby achieving a form of distributed collective

responsibility. Ethical research practice becomes a mutual accomplishment of all participants – research subjects, researchers, commissioners, funders and managers (Iphofen, 2011: Ch 13).

4   Ethical Decision Making with reference to Ethnographic and Anthropological Research:

The following sections are drawn from Iphofen (2011) but applied specifically to ethnographic and anthropological research. References have been sought from international professional associations guidelines and 'novel' ethnographic research that makes use of the Internet:

a   Justifiable 'interventions'

Given the nature of the 'intrusiveness' that ethnographic approaches normally adopt, good reasons have to be given for 'interfering' in people's lives to such an extent. The question "Is this research really necessary?" is essentially an ethical one. Primary anthropological research is likely to take up considerable amounts of participants' time, entail a fair amount of intimate questioning and/or observation of their behaviour and attitudes. For these sorts of reasons a full rationale would have to be offered for the research being conducted with those particular people, at the chosen site, with the specified forms of research engagement (research 'instruments' or methods) and for the proposed length of time. Providing such a rationale offers an opportunity to clarify the benefits accruing to the research participants or the communities or groups to which they belong – this is usually termed 'benefit sharing' (e.g. see Peterson 2001, Diniz 2008).

The 'trust' relationship

The focus upon qualitative data that ethnographic research entails implies a different form of relationship with research participants. This relationship can be summarised under the concept of 'trust' and tends to be of a more humanistic nature than research that produces quantitative data (Miles and Huberman 1994: 292). Quantitative data analysis is at one remove from the human nature of the subject from whom it was generated. Qualitative data remain methodologically closer to the values, meaning, intentions, aspirations and goals of the human subject. In that sense this is a more 'personal' kind of research. But this does not mean that those engaged in quantitative data analysis are immune from the need to consider their trust relationship with society and those from whom the data they are analysing were generated. Nor does it mean that qualitative data made available for secondary analysis removes the mutual 'trust' obligations implied in primary research engagements. Thus personal biographies (even if posthumously conducted and published) raise similar ethical considerations as biographical data gathering from live individuals (Roberts 2002).

Researchers have advocated making a very clear statement of the relationship between researcher and researched such that the goals and anticipated consequences of research for those being studied should be clearly stated at the

outset. Howard Becker (1967) argued that it is not that we shouldn't take sides – we inevitably will – what matters is that we make it clear, to ourselves and to others, whose side we are on (see also Hammersley 2000). Some ethical guidelines for research with children in the developing world even suggest that if the proposed research does not directly benefit the children involved or their community then it should not proceed (Schenk and Williamson 2005: 15).

Funders' motives
Who is funding the research and what they wish to do with the findings has long been a key professional issue within anthropology and now concerns the trend toward 'evidence based' policy making. While researchers want to claim benefits for their activity, they are rarely in control of the use to which their findings may be put. Researchers have complained about being commissioned to conduct 'unnecessary' research which a government wishes to have conducted to support its policies – and when the research fails to support a favoured policy it might even be suppressed (Tombs and Whyte 2003, Dingwall 2010). Moreover many researchers take the knowledge of their accumulated research evidence with them when they accept roles on governmental advisory committees. To assume that such evidence is necessarily 'counted' when it fails to fall congruent with government policy is naïve to say the least.

The wide range of theoretical perspectives available to anthropologists, and variations in perspective can influence research design. Consequently the particular theoretical perspective that informs the researchers' work should be made explicit from the start of the project. This need not be rigidly observed of course, since theoretical positions may change as empirical data emerge and some ethnographers will insist that they hold no rigid theoretical position.

b   Researchers' competence
Ethnography is extremely skilled work – balancing being a member of the group as well as collecting data can be quite complex. Researchers should demonstrate that they either have these skills or provision is made for them to acquire them through training and practice. This is particularly important in anthropological studies since the individual researcher has high responsibility for the correct moral behaviour being adopted since only they in practice know the detail about what is going on and where the research is taking them. They will be the first to notice if harm is being done or if there is a potential for harm to be done as the research progresses. Qualitative data gathering, in particular, is a 'coalface' or 'street level' activity. Often the individual researcher is involved in a direct relationship with the respondent or individual or group under study – either in observing them, asking questions or participating in their daily lives in some way. This is an extension of the 'trust' relationship mentioned earlier.

Judgements 'in the field'
Field researchers engaged in collecting and analysing data will be aware of any 'filtering' or 'data reduction' principles they are applying. They will also be aware of whether or not they are putting some pressure on subjects to participate and the kinds of pressure being applied. Furthermore it may be only as they are interrogating data that makes connections between various data sources that

something is disclosed about an individual that might not have been apparent from each of the sources alone. Ethical choices and moral dilemmas may arise at any point during the research process and to attempt to pass the problem on to a supervisor, or any other agency, is to evade it. The researcher 'in the field' and/or data analyst has an insight into the effects of the research process that may not be available to anyone else (Dingwall 1980). Moreover moral views are judgements that change over and through time. What was acceptable behaviour in any one group, community or society some time ago may not be acceptable now. Only the field researcher is actively aware of the implications of such change.

The field researcher's problem is to make a 'live' estimate whether an acceptable balance of harm and benefit is being achieved. And the judgement of the balance of harm and benefit frequently has to be taken in a dynamic, changing situation. A subject of a biographical case study, for example, initially might be flattered to be asked lots of questions about their life. But as questioning persists it might become more of a burden than they had anticipated – and this might present a particular problem for someone who may already be burdened by psychological or relationship problems, an illness, excessive physical pain or disability or, as can be the case in anthropology, is stigmatized or ostracized by the rest of the community for their involvement in the research.

Fluid and flexible decision-making
It is a fundamental assumption of ethnography that people experience life as an ongoing social process and it continues to be so even while they are being researched. What may have seemed straightforward and morally uncomplicated at the outset may turn out to be fraught with difficulty once a project is underway. Qualitative research is particularly characterized by '…fluidity and inductive uncertainty' (Mauthner *et al.* 2002: 2). Whether in surveys, focus groups or one-to-one interviews, unanticipated harm (and benefit of course) can emerge during a study when the only ethical decision-taker available is the researcher themselves. Only they can assess whether a particular set of questions is disturbing a respondent to such an extent that they cannot justifiably continue to ask them.

Of course researchers should not feel alone in coming to ethical decisions. They require the support of their employing organization, their professional associations and the mentoring of the REC that conducted ethical review. Lines of accountability and grievance procedures can offer further support and protection.

Contaminating the field
There has been a longstanding awareness in anthropology that getting ethical decisions 'wrong' can lead to a contamination of the field which has consequences for all other anthropological research. So the moral 'virtue' of researchers must be established and maintained. Researchers have a responsibility to each other, and to ensure their own continuing career and integrity as a researcher, to prevent doing harm that will undermine future research work. It is not that they can always be expected to not make mistakes –

but that genuine errors are admitted, remedied and avoided in future. Contamination of the field diminishes public trust in the act of research and in the actions of other researchers thereby effectively hindering future access to respondents and undermining the value of any knowledge produced.

Codes and guidelines

Similarly professional associations can offer ethical codes and/or research guidelines in the form of generic principles that will have to be 'interpreted' and put into practice by the researcher in light of the substantive research topic and methodology employed. Pragmatic codes necessitate a form of ethical pluralism that reflects and assists 'real world research' (Robson 1993). At base all codes recognise the central dilemma of ethical research – the balancing of the potential benefits to be gained with the potential for causing harm. Most codes address questions such as: what sorts of benefits are we talking about and who actually gains? What sort of harm could be caused and who might be harmed?

For methodological as well as ethical reasons, the use of a reflective research journal or diary has had a long tradition within anthropology. It acts as a retrospective check on reliability and validity but can also aid the researcher in active ethical decision making. By keeping a diary researchers will necessarily reflect on their actions and consequences for research participants.

A major debate within the professional associations has always been about how sanctionable ethical codes or guidelines can (or should) be. What powers of exclusion, reprimand or proscription can be applied by the professional association to any member who transgresses? Some associations have constituted disciplinary committees which can exclude or punish members who bring the association into disrepute. Others believe that ethical guidelines function better in an aspirational manner or as 'educative' prescriptions – advising the researcher on proper behaviour, assisting their judgments, but ultimately leaving the individual researcher to make their own ethical choices.

Professional training

Novice and/or student researchers can represent a threat to the professional standing of social researchers if they are released into the field without adequate guidance, support and preparatory training. The increasing complexity of ethical scrutiny and research governance has led some higher education institutions to prevent students from conducting live research projects – instead rehearsing with families, friends and fellow students. Internship could allow students to accompany trained researchers on their projects and be closely supervised in specific research tasks. Without profound awareness of 'correct' behaviour in some communities, people can be irretrievably offended and research discontinued. This remains a particular concern of anthropological researchers and why they need to spend so much time 'getting to know' the people they plan to study and their customs and values.

A more systematic maintenance of ethical standards would recommend that researchers should be required to attend training courses and continuous professional development in ethical decision-making. At the very least this could

offer a way of ensuring that they have read and considered the available professional guidelines. Training would need to take place at a range of levels of experience – novices may not be able to anticipate all the kinds of things that could go wrong but more experienced researchers may suffer from complacency, the assumption that they are prepared for all eventualities and/or ignorance of the implications of new legislation. Anthropologists returning to communities they have studied for some time may not be fully aware of changes that have taken place since their last visit.

Relationship to research commissioners

Individual researchers can do a great deal to establish their own integrity while in the field and/or when publishing their findings. But the public image of the profession of anthropology as a whole is a much more difficult thing to control. Government agencies have frequently recruited scholars and intellectuals for diplomatic and security services, but there is little doubt that, if known about, this can compromise professional integrity. For example, the CIA has recruited from the American Association of Anthropology (AAA) on the grounds that such professionals would possess vital linguistic and cultural insights into the communities and societies for which 'intelligence' is deemed 'vital to national security'. A US professor of anthropology, Felix Moos, has long advocated the importance of anthropologists supplying state agencies with information about other communities and societies to provide valuable insight into their language and culture. A programme (PRISP) was even set up to sponsor students who would subsequently work for the security agencies (see debate in *Anthropology Today* 2004/5.) This was discontinued when the Association realised that such plans '...threaten to compromise the ethical foundations of the discipline' (See *The Times Higher* December 16 2005: 10).

In 2006 the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) funded a project for the Economic and Social Research Council entitled "Combating Terrorism by Countering Radicalism" which drew letters of protest from major professional research associations on the grounds of endangering both the lives of researchers and future potential field studies. It looked as if researchers were being recruited to act as spies for British intelligence in countries identified by MI5's anti terror unit. As a consequence of the complaints the project was withdrawn but re-launched the following year as: "New Security Challenges: 'Radicalisation' and Violence - A Critical Reassessment", The FCO said it would withdraw its proportion of the funding for the project if the places and topics specified in the first project were not covered - "if its interests (were) not met by the selected projects". (ESRC 'ignores' danger fears, *The Times Higher* 20 JULY 2007 http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/esrc-ignores-danger-fears/209666.article.)

The US military employed anthropologists during the conflict in Iraq to map what they call the 'human terrain system' (HTS) and to advise commanders on local culture and social networks. Those anthropologists who support such collaboration argue that the military can do its job better – even if that means that they are assisted in targeting the insurgents better. Others complain that this merely means supporting the US Government in conducting a bad mission

better. The AAA recently formally discouraged its members from taking part (Jacobsen 2008). But the temptation is the offer of secure employment and some may even be motivated by a sense of patriotism. The overall US governmental research budget for social science, influenced by the Pentagon, has increased substantially. The risk is of a public perception of all social scientists as potential spies and supporters of armed aggression (See for further detail: Price 2004, 2008, 2011).

So the final determinant of the trust that can be accorded to a researcher and/or their research project is related to who is funding the exercise. The responsible identity and moral worth of a researcher is certainly compromised in the eyes of the public and research subjects if their work is being financed by an 'untrustworthy' commissioner. Such a perception is certainly in the eyes of the beholder. For example, those opposed to smoking will distrust the motives of any research funded by tobacco companies, in spite of claims to its objectivity. Whatever one's moral judgement on the examples of military-inspired funding offered above they at least relate to funding sources within a country linked to that nation's own goals in international policy. Interesting dilemmas have to be confronted when researchers accept funding from internationally proscribed regimes on the grounds that they should be allowed the 'freedom' to choose research appropriate to their own professional and theoretical interests. For example, the School of Oriental and African Studies, within the University of London, has received funding in the past both from the military dictatorship in Burma and the ultra-conservative Iranian regime (Baty 2000). The manner in which research is commissioned, by whom, and how the relationship between researchers and commissioners is managed is a key determinant of ethical practice.

c   *Research Quality and Design*
It is generally accepted that poorly designed research is inherently unethical since it wastes researchers' and subjects' time and energy if the results are less than useful. It may produce more disbenefits such as a contamination of the field by discouraging participants from future research engagements which may be of better quality. Concerns for quality represent an attention to the 'scientific' standards of the project. Undoubtedly there are overlaps between scientific quality, methodology and research ethics.

Authentic qualitative data
Qualitative data gathering necessarily 'sacrifices' control over potentially influential variables in favour of accessing the authentic and natural behaviour and attitudes of those being studied. This means methodologically seeking not to deprive participants of their power to act as they would even if they were not being studied. Fortunately, this is consistent with the broader ethical purpose of seeking not to take away power from subjects, to preserve their autonomy and to behave as democratically as possible in the conduct of the research. But it would be dishonest to imply that the qualitative researcher needs no power to direct the research. They will choose to adopt methods or practices that are intended to help seek answers to the set research questions and, therefore, entail some form of intervention into and direction of the lives of the people being studied.

Assessing 'vulnerability'

Concern for the rights and well being of research participants lies at the root of ethical review. Vulnerability is a prime concern and the very young and the very old, together with those with learning difficulties are seen to be worthy of special attention in most societies. Vulnerability is linked to the problem of routinely socially excluded participants and one might ask whether or not the potential for social exclusion in research was an ethical or methodological concern (or both). If we exclude individuals or groups from research we are limiting their access to 'normal' social relations, customs and activities that the majority of the population enjoy (i.e. they should have as good a chance of any other member of a target population of being included in research). So a 'right to participate' might be accorded to individuals/groups to avoid 'disprivileging' them. However if by including them we increase their vulnerability and expose them to risks they would not otherwise have experienced then we would be morally right to exclude them. So to reduce risks to the vulnerable we may intentionally exclude them. This is a particular problem for anthropologists studying societies with clear, rigid social hierarchies. The 'vulnerable' sector might be low down on the social hierarchy and the researcher may be tacitly challenging the social structure when taking vulnerable groups into consideration – and so not regarded as behaving 'objectively'. Balancing a 'right to participate' against a 'right to be excluded' illustrates, as most of these points do, the implicit paternalism of much ethics review. The ethical point is to have good reason for inclusion/exclusion and not to forget, ignore or exclude them only for research convenience or because it would be too difficult to find ways to include them.

Covert observation

When methods are compared there does seem to be a view amongst some observers that there are inherently unethical procedures. Covert observation is seen by some as particularly problematic since it necessarily implies deception – yet to let people know they were being observed might result in an alteration of their behaviour. In qualitative research it may be impossible to maintain a neat distinction between covert and overt research. Settings are often more complex and changeable than can be anticipated (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 342).

Sampling

Asking whether a design is appropriate is the overarching research quality question since it incorporates most of all the other elements that go into making up a 'do-able' research project. This requires clearly stated research questions and clarification of the aims and objectives of the research. So the techniques of data collection, sampling and so on must be clearly appropriate to the methods adopted. To illustrate: one question that is invariably asked to test the rigour of a research design is the size of the population sample and how it will be selected. There is often an implicit status judgement that random samples are superior to convenience samples due to the level of inference and the assumed quality of the statistic that can be employed with different forms of sample selection. But all samples are 'samples of convenience' – the issue has to do with preventing the 'inconveniences' of sampling from impeding the collection of the appropriate data. Thus a street social survey taking a random sample must, once the

randomising criterion has been established (every 'nth' person being questioned) not choose to avoid the 'nth' person if they happen to be disabled (see Iphofen, 2009: Ch.10). Similarly it makes no sense to randomise a sample for a phenomenological study of what it means to be disabled – the design should ensure that the rationale for a 'purposive' selection of disabled people fitting a theoretically-justified category is made. In ethnographic research samples are more likely to be small and purposively sampled. Sampling design does depend on the budget and the research question – so random sampling is not necessarily 'excluded' in anthropological research. The point is that it would suggest ignorance of qualitative research methodology on the part of reviewers to insist upon forms of sampling more appropriate to other research styles.

Previous research

All research, whether primary or secondary, must demonstrate the ways in which it builds upon or adds to existing research findings. Only by doing this can the rationale for conducting the current project be justified. Primarily for reasons of 'quality' then researchers must demonstrate that, by conducting an 'adequate' exploration of the literature, they can show the need for conducting the current study and the remaining research questions that it is worth seeking the answers to and the ways the current proposal will add to the present state of knowledge. To replicate unnecessarily existing studies would be wasteful of time, money and energy. It does not mean that replication is never justified – the grounds for doing so must be made clear such as changes in the situational context leading to the existing data being outdated, or errors in the existing research subsequently coming to light or the need to replicate the research in successive historical periods, or alternative geographical or cultural locations for comparative and/or longitudinal analysis. Anthropologists are frequently engaged in longitudinal studies of their chosen communities and frequently seek return projects in order to investigate changes in language, values and norms and the external and internal factors leading to change.

Threats of non-completion

As a quality measure of insight into their design and methods researchers are usually asked to show ability to anticipate the threats to successful completion of a proposed project. Budgetary omissions represent such a threat and key items in a budget should be seen as clearly essential to the design. Costs of travel, subsistence and accommodation are vital to ethnographic studies since they can last for some time and may require repeat visits for reliability checks. An additional cost of anthropological research might be culturally expected 'gifts' to significant community members to secure participation or even allowing the researcher to be resident in a community. The same can be said of realistic timescales. A researcher that claims completion within an evidently difficult to achieve time is as suspect as one who underfunds the project. Establishing realistic project timetables requires demonstrable skills in project management. Evidence of this quality may be provided by a skilled design and the application of conventionally applied project management charts and programmes of study. This may be difficult to anticipate with anthropological research, especially if access to a community proves more difficult than originally anticipated.

Subjects reacting to research

All SSH research is now acutely aware of the 'Hawthorne effect' deriving from a series of studies conducted in the late 1920s and 1930s. The special lesson from this work for ethical anthropological research is related to how the subjects' awareness of being observed affected their behaviour. The information they received lead to such a degree of 'subject reactivity' that their behaviour could not be considered 'normal' – which undermined the value of the research. Another major criticism was of the developing friendship and therapeutic relationships between researchers and subjects. This was something actually encouraged within the project team on ethical grounds, and in terms of the quality of the responses they received. From the 1940s to the 1960s however this was perceived as lacking rigour and a source of empirical error. Interestingly the growth of ethnographic feminist research methodologies from the 1980s has led to a re-thinking of the value of sustained researcher/researched relationships – albeit as part of a critique of more *experimental* research styles (See Madge 1965, Oakley 2000 Ch.11).

The most noted example from anthropology is that of Margaret Mead's study – *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Under the influence of the eminent anthropologist Frans Boas, Mead had been led into offering the example of adolescence in Samoa as an example of a "negative instance" which could disconfirm the growing biological determinism of the day and which had fuelled the eugenics movement. She made some crucial methodological and interpretive errors in her investigations and subsequent analyses. Primary among them was not realising that the adolescents she had gathered data from had invented some outrageous sexual fantasies due to their own boredom and her obsessive interest in their behaviour. This essentially combines the error of too dominant a theoretical perspective with a Hawthorne effect leading her to 'discover' just what she was looking for (see Freeman 1983). In scientific research this is generally referred to as 'confirmation bias' or 'motivated reasoning'.

A clear protocol

Most ethical review committees will deem a clearly written protocol as the first indicator of rigorous research. They will seek to find the stages in the research project clearly flagged together with the precise ways in which each of the elements in the research question are to be addressed. Such protocols contain clear justifications for the steps and actions, for the time taken to achieve each of the essential tasks, when the 'deliverables' might be expected and in what form they will appear.

All this is much harder to set out in advance in ethnographic research. The particular skills required in seeking qualitative data include balancing the control necessary for systematic and rigorous observation against allowing genuine attitudes to be revealed and the behaviour of interest to occur naturally. In this instance what is assumed within so-called qualitative theoretical perspectives neatly meets ethical requirements – it requires that researchers don't interfere too much! The problem is how to do that in practice and ensure that the required data are actually generated – researchers cannot wait around forever for people to authentically reveal their views and/or spontaneously

engage in the behaviour of interest. Many research methods are precisely designed for the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour to be generated when researchers are around to collect them. Anthropology is not like that. One of my first supervisors told me of his work in studying the Sami people (Lapps) of sub-Arctic Northern Europe. He thought he had acquired a key position in the group when they appointed him chief reindeer herdsman. Unfortunately the reindeer and the tribe parted company for nine months of the year as the herd travelled the tundra. He learned a great deal about reindeer but much less about the Laplanders. So a carefully written research protocol in ethnography needs to clarify the areas of uncertainty as well as those that can be reasonably anticipated. Most importantly the need for flexibility in approach has to be written in to the proposal and fully understood by reviewers.

In all cases the 'quality' researcher is one that can judge the best balance between the data it is necessary to generate in order to properly answer the research questions against the prospect that the gathering and reporting of such data could result in 'measurable' harm to the research subjects. Justifiable design adjustments to minimise the potential for harm can still produce high quality research – but it takes a competent researcher to do that.

d   Minimising Harm, Maximising Benefit
The heart of ethical scrutiny is the attempt to balance the risk of harm against the potential for benefits that can accrue to individuals, groups, communities, organisations and even societies from research participation. Consideration has to be given to the different kinds of harm, the likelihood of their occurrence and the ways in which they can be minimised. Concurrently ways of maximising both short and long-term benefits have to be explored.

Researcher/subject relationships
Roger Sapsford (1999: 41) quotes the feminist scholar Shulamit Reinharz who likened conventional research to the process of rape by their intrusion '...into their subject's privacy, disrupt their perceptions, utilise false pretences, manipulate the relationship and give little or nothing in return. When the needs of the researchers are satisfied they break off contact with the subject' (Reinharz 1979: 95). In part this may be due to an attitudinal problem with researchers and how they reveal that to their subjects. In brief encounters field researchers may have to collect a rapid response from many subjects – but they could still adopt a demeanour that leaves the respondent feeling valued. In longer term encounters the researcher may wish to go back to their office to add the data and continue their analysis, while the subject may need some 'closure' time and some opportunity to come to terms with a relationship that appeared to have friendship at its core but was, in fact, highly instrumental.

Forms of distress
Researchers have to be aware of the range of ways their activities can cause distress to others – even in ways that might seem surprising to themselves. To seek someone's opinions in a community merely because they fit a category of 'marginalised person' could lead to their lowered self-esteem. One can never anticipate the emotional effects an apparently innocent question can have and

which might even catch the respondent by surprise. Again questions which a researcher considers harmless or uncontroversial may cause embarrassment to a respondent – particularly so if they were not expecting such a question. Questions carelessly framed subtly show disrespect for respondents by placing them in embarrassing situations.

Misperceiving the purpose of the research could raise false expectations about something being done, say, to 'solve' a problem facing a community. This might be connected to subjects failing to understand how research evidence becomes the property of a commissioning or funding body – it might not be in the interests of such agencies to effect the change the respondents might have been hoping for. Hence there is a responsibility on the part of the researcher to make clear the limits on action that can be taken as a consequence of conducting the research.

Psychological distress might be more likely to be a consequence of social research than physical harm or illness but the dangers of physical exertion in, for example, standing too long to answer questions must be considered. Sometimes it is equally difficult to identify the social harm that might be consequent on participating in research. Some communities might ostracise or even physically harm an individual who had taken part in research which they might perceive to have put the rest of the community at risk. Other social harms are much more diffuse. For example merely by deciding to research some topics and subsequently reporting them brings them into public prominence and either encourages the 'spread' of the practices being investigated or produces an adverse societal reaction to a marginal group who wished to be quietly allowed to get on with their marginal or socially deviant activity since it was doing no harm to others.

Material harm
The most common economic deprivation to be suffered by research participants is their giving of 'free' time. This is frequently compensated for with gifts or other material rewards – all of which may have consequences in the larger community. Participants' very livelihood could even be put at risk.

The legal consequences of research participation are likely to inhere in the respondents offering information that implicates them in illegal activity or discloses their involvement in criminality.

All of these harms can arise out of participation while others may be consequent on certain categories of people being excluded. If a research project fails to explore the situation of illegal immigrants in employment, for example, by excluding such subjects on the grounds of protecting their anonymity and fearing legal obligations to disclose their identity, the true facts of their situation may fail to be disclosed and the production of policies designed to resolve their situation thereby hampered.

Having research subjects participate in the research design and in advising about the dissemination of findings may protect researchers from the charge of not adequately attempting to anticipate the harms that may come to them as a

consequence of participation. That in itself is no guarantee of their subjects' protection since subjects are no more able to anticipate some harms than researchers are able to do.

But risk of harm can be reduced by thinking through the consequences of the varieties of distress listed above. Psychological distress can be minimised by debriefing subjects after the research is completed to reassure them about the value of their contribution and also acquainting them with appropriate ongoing support. For physical damages or discomfort the possibility of reparation via insurance indemnity schemes should be prepared for. Both of these eventualities are unlikely to apply in more remote communities so researchers would need to think of alternative appropriate forms of compensation.

Respecting the subject
Ways of showing respect for research subjects can be subtly embedded in both the content of research questions and the manner in which they are delivered. The potential for social distress can be minimised by controlling the dissemination of research findings in ways that do not lead to community concerns about the contributions made by individual participants. Careful selection and use of language while conducting the research, ethnic and gender matching between researchers and subjects can all contribute to minimising communal consequences for individuals. Individuals might be just as culturally sensitive as they are personally so similar care should be taken over cultural differences – this in itself requires considerable awareness for what such cultural sensitivities might be and in anthropological research careful pre-knowledge of the community becomes vital.

Tacit benefits cannot be assumed to be understood and accepted by all. They might have to be indicated anew with each project proposal and for each new scrutiny committee. Benefits from social research accrue differentially to individuals, groups, organisations and society. Currently there appears to be general cultural acceptance that enhanced knowledge can contribute to the community and society if the accumulated evidence is sensibly applied. The generic pursuit of valued 'scientific progress' can be claimed and clarified to gain the support required and the understanding of the general public. While this might be evident in 'high income' societies, it may not be so in the kinds of low-income societies frequently studied by anthropologists. Indeed some kinds of 'knowledge' might even be seen as challenging existing forms of authority within the community and so disruptive of ordinary social life.

It is a researcher's responsibility to detail the steps taken to avoid or minimise harm and to maximise benefits. Some overall judgement will then have to be made about the anticipated benefits of the project outweighing the *estimated* potential for harm. If ways of reducing the potential for harm and/or maximising the benefit cannot be identified then doubts as to whether to continue the project have to be raised. Similarly if the balance of harms over benefits is seen to increase during the lifetime of the project the ethical researcher should consider discontinuing the work. (This might not be inevitable since the discontinuance itself devalues the contributions already made by the research

subjects. Discontinuing could be wasteful of resources, energy and commitment and so could be unethical.)

The only realistic way for researchers to conduct an assessment of this balance is to adopt a continual reflexive stance in order to conduct an ongoing estimate of harms and benefits and make both research and personal action judgements accordingly (Gokah 2006).

e   Selecting, Recruiting, Retaining and Releasing Participants

The relationship with research subjects must be carefully managed and controlled at each stage of the research process. This means thinking about how subjects are chosen and encouraged to join a research project, how they are encouraged to remain in the project for the duration and how their withdrawal from a project is facilitated. The key questions include the equitable selection of subjects, resisting placing undue pressure on them to join and, equally, avoiding undue pressure in discouraging them from leaving. Awareness of systematic inclusion and exclusion of specific socio-demographic categories for reasons that are not linked to research design must be maintained and such systematic distortions avoided. The designed research focus may allow for the exclusion of certain categories of respondent – if so this must be achieved in as open and transparent a manner as possible. There may be explicit benefits accruing from being included in a research project, and these should be made clear at the outset – just as warning about disbenefits is essential.

Targeting the subjects

'Who' to access is largely a problem of choosing the most appropriate sample from the population and so is predominantly a methodological issue. All samples are, in fact, chosen more or less for convenience and/or purposively – even when randomized as discussed earlier. But 'how' people are accessed for research purposes remains both a practical and an ethical problem. It is hard to separate issues associated with accessing participants in the first place, re-accessing them as part of a continuing study, and remaining unimpeded in that access from 'gatekeepers' who may seek to control what participants may actually contribute to the study.

Anthropologists have to be highly attuned to who the gatekeepers are in different communities. Sometimes they can be formal authority figures and at other times appear to lack 'official' status but turn out to be the most influential member of the community. Such distributions of authority can operate entirely independently of matrilineality/patrilineality (sex-related inheritance lines) or matrifocality/patrifocality (power distributed according to gender) or other forms of social or economic structure.

Balance of power

Awareness of the balance of power between researcher and researched is vital. This may be even less clear in qualitative research studies (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 344). When subjects make themselves available for study there is an implied loss of power in even allowing a researcher into one's life. The focus of the relationship is determined by the researcher's criteria, not by the research

subject – otherwise the relationship would not exist. By their interpretation and re-presentation of their subjects' lives, researchers are necessarily maintaining or challenging those subjects' location in the social hierarchy (Becker 1967).

To some extent exploitation of the subject is inevitable. People, opportunities, situations and meaningful spaces are all exploited to derive the 'rich, deep data' that is sought in qualitative research (Birch and Miller 2002). The establishment of rapport is an accomplished research skill and even friendship can be faked as part of the management of consent and the encouraging of continued participation. There is also a danger that researchers may expose themselves to unwanted personal consequences if they disclose too much about themselves as a rapport-generating strategy (Duncombe and Jessop 2002: 118-9). However, while there is a sense in which friendship is necessarily implied in the establishment of rapport and the development of trust, it is important to remember that the relationship is one of 'formal informality'. In all likelihood the relationship would not have existed without the need for one party to secure a research goal. There is a danger in the researcher seeking to avoid exploiting the subject to such an extent that no research goals are accomplished – that would be a waste of everybody's time!

Ensuring participants have, and perceive themselves to have, adequate power to determine their role in the research is seen as ethically necessary. This is a particular problem for children, old people, marginalized groups, or those with learning difficulties – all who may perceive themselves as possessing less power in ordinary relationships anyway.

In fact many research respondents assume that researchers are necessarily agents of 'the authorities' and may only reveal such information as they wish those presumed authorities to know. So researchers who are actually conducting projects on behalf of such authorities have a tricky balance to maintain. They have to gather the required information without being 'duped' by the subject or without misleading the subject as to the potential value of the research.

Finding and securing respondents, participants and interviewees for research projects raises the primary ethical concern of 'compliance'. Did subjects feel obliged to participate in any way? Were deceptive or unreasonable methods adopted to ensure a reasonable response rate? If subjects are reluctant to participate, what can legitimately be done to encourage their response? Many research ethics codes and guidelines warn against applying 'undue pressure' to recruit and to retain subjects. There is though an ethical judgement to be made about how much pressure is 'undue'. In some respects it might be best if the subject could be the final arbiter of that, however, if they were able to be so, then the pressure can hardly be said to be excessive – one more dilemma in the moral minefield.

Establishing rapport
Researchers are often trained in appropriate language for securing compliance. Anthropologists commonly have to learn an entirely new language to secure participation of their subjects and enhance the value of any information gained.

Using an interpreter is seen to merely add at worst another 'gatekeeper' and at best 'filters' the data in translation. But it is not enough to gain literal competence in the research subjects' language – the researcher also requires colloquial and idiomatic skills. Such skills largely rely upon a combination of verbal/rhetorical techniques together with more subtle non-verbal communicative resources. Having an interviewer attempt to 'persuade' a subject to answer questions in a face-to-face setting cannot in itself be regarded as coercion. Indeed standard interviewer instructions will offer guidance on how to convert an initially reluctant subject into becoming a respondent, plus standard practice on re-accessing some refusals for possible conversion into a response. The legitimacy of such approaches can only be called into question when the subject 'feels' forced into compliance. So mechanisms need to be available for a subject to report such concerns. It might be a testimony to the compliance skills of a researcher to secure a high response rate – and without excessive complaints being made we would never know if they were too 'forceful'. If research subjects strongly do not want make themselves 'accessible' then there is little a researcher can do about it.

The problem is that research subjects may not value a project as much as the researcher themselves does. The researcher might then attempt various methods of gentle persuasion – by offering a range of good reasons for them being involved. One could demonstrate the specific gains to their community from involvement – which could range from direct payment to the provision of external services to meet community needs. Familiarity and trust are essential compliance criteria, so researchers may occasionally use agencies already embedded in the community to effect an introduction to research subjects.

Inclusion and exclusion
While elements of the research design may allow the systematic exclusion of certain categories of research subject, it would be unethical for such groups to be left out simply because it would be inconvenient to include them. If there are genuine benefits to be sought for research participation, then it would be unfair if only those who were easily available were consistently to be chosen. One legitimate ground for exclusion would be that participants should not be selected from groups unlikely to be among the beneficiaries of subsequent applications of the research. In the same way subjects ought not to be systematically selected from groups for reasons not directly related to the research focus of study – again that they are easily available, in some sort of compromised position (such as prisoners or other captive populations) or that they are particularly manipulable. In all cases 'convenience' and 'inconvenience' should neither count as a methodological nor an ethical criterion.

The ultimate test of the enhanced power of research subjects lies in their knowing that they have the ability to withdraw from the study at any point. No matter how inconvenient this may be to the researcher, they will have fulfilled their ethical obligations if they not only permit such withdrawal when it is sought, but facilitate it in terms of ensuring no harm comes to the subjects as a consequence of their withdrawal from the study. This may mean going out of

one's way to ensure they receive the same treatment, attitudes and services they would have done had they not taken part in the study in the first place.

f   Giving Information and Seeking Consent

The use of the phrase 'informed consent' makes it clear that gaining consent cannot easily be separated from the giving of information. The phrase 'voluntary informed consent' implies that subjects should be able to choose 'freely' to consent to participate in research. The notion of 'voluntary' participation assumes the individual has the competence or mental capacity to make such a judgment. It also assumes they have been given enough information about the research and that they can understand what that information implies for their involvement.

Formal consent

Research ethics committees often seek proof of consent having been properly sought and given by requiring the completion of a written, possibly signed and, in some cases, independently witnessed form. Such a highly formalised requirement seems sensible when a risk of harm to the participants may be anticipated. But it is also clear that such formality could alienate some potential participants who might fear the researcher is a representative of 'officialdom' and who might be wary of such engagements. Indeed some anthropologists complain that they are aware that asking for a signature would be seen as offensive in the communities they study. In such communities it implies that the respondent is not trusted. While formal consenting may protect the researcher against any future charge of not giving adequate information, it is by no means legally binding and might not even guarantee the respondent's continued participation in a project.

There is considerable 'fluidity' in consenting – it is not an event, it is a process. Particularly in anthropological studies consenting may have to be treated as ongoing throughout the research engagement. This has consequences both for the nature and flow of information as well as the potential for changes in the subject's capacity to consent. Both the amount of information provided in an ongoing research project and the relationship between researcher and researched is liable to fluctuate – and so too might the subject's view of their consenting.

Relationships between researcher and subject will vary in duration, intensity, tone and depth. A fundamental change in the relationship, and therefore the informed and voluntary nature of consent, occurs when some high-risk intervention is proposed and/or the subject's capacity to consent changes. In SSH research the questioning in an open-ended interview might begin to touch upon topics the interviewee did not expect, was not warned about and which they might regard as sensitive. When that happens consent must be amendable or, if necessary, removed by the participant. If they fear harm may come to them from continuing the study they should be able to easily withdraw. The ongoing consenting process may best be seen as episodic with distinctive 'markers' throughout – only one of which may be a signed, witnessed, written consent

form – but this requirement so alters the research design in ethnographic work that it should not be deemed essential.

Implicit contracts

Thinking about informed consent leads on to thinking about the vulnerability of research participants, the use of deception, the degree of disclosure of information, human rights, and the flexible nature of the relationship between researchers and researched. In some ways the information provided by the researcher is like an informal contract between researcher and subject. This is why it is important that the researcher and the organization(s) they work for is seen to be 'safe' or 'worthy' by their research subjects. Subjects may know little about funding organisations so the researcher may have to inform them. RECs put great store in giving information leaflets to participants – but this assumes a lot about how best to communicate information to people. Not all communities have adequate literacy levels, some prefer messages in the form of pictures while others put more store in face-to-face communications. Anthropological work necessarily requires good understanding of how the different communities being studied prefer to receive information.

It is also vital to be clear about why a particular participant was selected for the research. Power hierarchies in some societies might be such that trying to explain the importance of a random selection or a quota sample might simply be unacceptable. Powerful and influential members of a community might be offended at not being selected – somehow their exclusion being interpreted as a form of 'dishonour'. Snowball sampling could be seen as a more common sense rationale. When subjects are selected more purposively this has to be fully explained and trust in the researcher's honesty and intentions incrementally established. The statement that only 'they' have the answers to the questions the researcher is interested in could elevate their status. In such cases researchers have to be aware of disturbing the existing balance of power within the community.

Consequently an appropriate explanation of the aims or purpose of study will justify the researcher's need to derive information from them. Similarly subjects are entitled to know just what will be expected of them if they agree to take part. The nature of the research process, what form it will take and how long it will last, are all essential elements within informed consent. If any risks or potential harm or discomfort is anticipated it is at this stage that the subjects should be informed. But this should also be balanced against the judgment of anticipated benefits. Subjects might be willing to take known risks if they too perceive the benefits to be worthwhile – even if not to them but to their community in general.

Right to withdraw

Given that all research contains some element of risk, no matter how minimal, subjects do need to know the conditions under which a study may be discontinued or how they may withdraw if anything concerns them or some untoward event occurs. This emphasizes the voluntary nature of consent – they should be made aware of their ability to refuse to participate, that they can

withdraw at any time and this will have no adverse consequences for how they will subsequently be treated by anyone involved in the study.

Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity

If confidentiality and/or anonymity have been promised then the steps taken to ensure this should be outlined. If there are any limits to confidentiality/anonymity or threats to their maintenance, these should be disclosed. In particular subjects should be clearly informed about how the data will be reported and the study findings released. Targeted feedback to participants is a way of demonstrating both the value of subjects and a concern for their wellbeing. This can vary widely in the kinds of communities anthropologists study – from highly 'advanced' to much less literate and lower income communities. Feedback has varied from 'executive summary' type reports, to photographic essays or videos. But participants should also be informed of the other avenues through which the research will be disseminated. In advanced societies the provision of researcher and institutional contact names and numbers acts as a form of reassurance that the subject has alternative routes through which to have questions answered, to make complaints, announce withdrawal or resolve a grievance. In less advanced societies such contacts are less likely to be available but some opportunity to air any grievances could easily be offered by researchers re-visiting the community and listening to any concerns in a face-to-face setting.

The importance given to gaining consent and supplying subjects with information can vary greatly. Ethnography draws on extensive comparative anthropological experience across cultures and so tends to be highly ethically aware. But even ethnographers can resent subjects being resistant to taking part in their study: 'Further problems for ethnography can be related to the *illegitimate* and *private* character of observed activities and the possibilities for local members to *hide* such activities, or for gate-keepers to prevent or obstruct observations in various ways, especially by *denying access* to the field' (ten Have 2004: 132). The giving of oral consent in a face-to-face situation does appear more natural and consequently more consistent with the ethos of qualitative enquiry so, to ensure that as much information as necessary/possible can be demonstrated to have been given, researchers have taken to audiotape recording the consenting process.

With high-risk projects the signed and witnessed consent form may be the only way of establishing the correct contractual relationship between researchers and researched. The less separation between the giving of information, say in a leaflet, and the taking of consent then the more certain the researcher can be that consent was informed and voluntary. But key decisions have to be made about the design and content of consent forms and information leaflets to ensure the details are presented clearly and in a format suited to the subject's needs and abilities.

Flexibility and adaptability

It is hard to be too prescriptive about both consenting and information-giving since how they are done will depend upon the combination of the topic of the

research, the nature of the subjects and the chosen research methods and instruments. Offering no absolute prescription does not mean that there is no 'right way' to do it – the correct procedure requires the provision of 'adequate' information and 'adequate' consent – what constitutes adequacy being very much dependent on the nature of the researcher-researched relationship.

Capacity to consent

Judging that a subject has the capacity to consent is to make an assessment of their cognitive and communicative competence. The researcher is being asked to assess that, assuming full and clear information has been given, the subject has the ability to understand, retain and analyse that information, come to an independent decision, and express that decision clearly and effectively to the researcher seeking consent. It should be immediately evident how difficult a judgment that must be. While we generally assume such cognitive competence in adults, we tend to assume it to be diminished in the very young, the very old and those self-evidently disabled in mental function as judged, usually, by their behaviour.

Evidently judging the capacity to consent is a contentious area. There are two basic problems here – it assumes that only some (i.e. let's say mentally disabled) people lack the capacity to consent when more of us lack this capacity than we care to admit. We cannot all know or anticipate what precisely we are consenting to – sometimes the researchers do not know either! Secondly it assumes that those with 'less capacity' do not wish to be free to choose themselves whether to participate in research – once again we patronise in making their decisions for them and assume that their disability limits their engagement with the world (in this case in research) that they may wish to be free to choose to engage in. We cannot and perhaps should not protect everyone 'from themselves'. The point is not that we should not judge capacity to consent – we should only have to recognise that we have to make a judgement and that we could be wrong. Anthropologists face the added challenge that in some cultures the very notion of 'research' itself is an alien concept.

The general principles should be that consent should be gained in the most convenient, least disturbing manner for both researcher and researched. This also implies that it should be accomplished competently; which, in turn, suggests that researchers should be fully trained in taking consent. Errors in consenting could account for a considerable degree of disenchantment with the research experience and thereby contaminate the field for future research.

Ongoing management of informed consent

However consent is gained initially it must be managed and negotiated in an ongoing manner throughout the course of a research project. Gaining their consent to taking part is only one of the ways in which harm to participants can be avoided on the assumption that they too must participate in the anticipation and recognition of its potential. If they are to be able to consent they need to know fully what their participation entails. They will need information but here the ethical concern may conflict with a methodological one: How much information should they be given and in what form?

Too much information could act as a disincentive to participation by implying an excessive commitment of time or an inhibiting amount of emotional investment. Or it may be too 'leading' in revealing too much about the researcher's interests. Too little information could be seen as deceptive and result in participants' early withdrawal from the study when they find out more about it.

A greater difficulty with gathering qualitative data in particular is that while the participant might not fully know what they are agreeing to, the researchers may know only a little more since the research can be allowed, or even encouraged, to move in directions that only become appropriate when the research is under way. This means that consent has to be ongoing, and information-giving conceived as dynamically integrated into the life of the project (see, for example, Miller and Bell 2002).

Managing the consenting process can become even more complicated if third parties or gatekeepers are involved. In some cases, for example when researching children under the legal age of consent, consent will need to be taken from both the child subject and the parent/guardian, or in highly authoritarian communities consent to interview a subordinate may be needed form a superior – in both cases a major problem arises if the former consents and the latter objects. The researcher will probably have little choice but to respect the parent/superior's objection and there may be a reasonable assumption that the parent/superior is acting in what they perceive to be the child/subordinate's best interests. But there are real complications to sustaining consent throughout the project if matters of concern arise to either and not both of the consenting parties. Hence the need for a researcher to be a skilled diplomat and negotiator in ensuring the fairest outcome to all stakeholders – and, in order to maintain transparency, able to record fully the rationale upon which the decision was based. Similar complications can befall gatekeepers acting on behalf of, say, subjects with learning difficulties or older people who are residents of care homes. In both cases the agents responsible for their care might have their own reason for the discontinuation of a project which is not necessarily congruent with the interests of the subjects.

Chih Hoong Sin's (2005) work studying dementia across a range of different ethnic groups, with a mixed methods approach and a large team of researchers illustrates the difficulties involved in the complex management of a multi-level and repeated consenting process. He challenges the formulaic requirements of ethical review committees: 'The fluidity of consent demands a more reflexive approach to its engagement' (Sin 2005: 277).

Restricting informed consent
There may be times when information about the full nature of a study may have to be restricted in order to comply with a particular research design. This is particularly likely to occur with covert observational studies or ethnographic field research in which the researcher's role is not fully disclosed – also known as immersive fieldwork. To seek consent in such a situation would nullify the research method and the rationale for its adoption. But any exemptions to

seeking consent must be detailed together with an explanation of why they have occurred. Thus there may be broad methodological justifications and more specific, strategic reasons to do with the safety of researchers and/or research subjects.

Incomplete disclosure may be justified if it can be demonstrated that participants should not be told too much – or anything – in order to accomplish the research goals. This could only be considered if it entailed minimal risks to the subjects, also if some way of debriefing them could be made available, and, perhaps, if there were a way to provide for the appropriate dissemination of findings to subjects. In fact it may be the case that subjects could suffer from 'information overload' if they are told too much. After all they are not the professionals whose careers are dependent upon satisfactory outcomes.

Observational studies in which the participants are not aware that they are being observed offers the best examples of exceptions to fully informed consent. There have been many such 'classic' ethnographic studies in the history of SSH research and they usually cover the fringe areas of society – criminality, social deviance, the sex industry, terrorist groups and religious cults. Moser and Kalton describe observation as '…the classic method of scientific enquiry' (1971: 244) and express surprise at the relatively infrequent use of observational methods by social scientists when one reflects that '…they are literally surrounded by their subject matter'. However, they exhort that: 'The method must be suitable for investigating the problem in which the social scientist is interested; it must be appropriate to the populations and samples he (*sic)* wishes to study; and it should be reasonably reliable and objective' (Moser and Kalton 1971: 244). Of course, observation entails the direct focus upon behaviour un-mediated by the 'subject's' views on and potential distortions of that behaviour. Instead the potential for bias rests with the observer's recording skills and their interpretations of the meanings or intentions behind the behaviour. Thus it is not necessarily any more 'objective' than any other method of social enquiry in that: '…observers are so much part of their subject matter that they may fail to see it objectively; …their vision may be distorted by what they are used to seeing or what they expect to see; and …they may find it hard to present a report in which observation is satisfactorily distinguished from inference and interpretation' (Moser and Kalton 1971: 253).

Covert studies
A recent example is the work of Sidhir Venkatesh who could not have conducted his research on hustlers, prostitutes and drug dealers in any detail if they had been aware of his status as a researcher. His analysis of a drug dealing gang's accounts demonstrated how it adopted a business model successfully employed by many other modern businesses – such as McDonald's (see Levitt and Dubner 2005, Ch. 3.) What Venkatesh explains well is how inappropriate and ineffective conventional research instruments, such as questionnaires and interview schedules, can be in such an environment, in fact, how self-defeating they are in trying to learn about the lives of poor and marginalised communities. He came to see how just as his research subjects were 'hustling' for money, drugs, sexual favours etc., he was also hustling for the data that he saw as vital to his research

goals. He had to become imaginative and devious in gaining information – otherwise he would be seen as an agent of the authorities and a threat to his respondents' access to services (Venkatesh 2008).

Occasionally research ethics committees have accused SSH researchers of adopting inherently immoral methodologies. These include covert observation – participant or otherwise – and research designs in which some form of deception is employed. But the use of deception should not be necessarily ruled out as inherently morally unacceptable. The use of deception has been more than comprehensively debated throughout the social sciences for many years (see Bok 1979: ChXIII). And I would argue that there is nothing inherently 'wrong' with deception since it is ubiquitous in modern life (Feldman 2010). In research terms deception is routinely employed in a mundane fashion in the blind randomised control trial in biomedicine now seen as almost 'ethically secure'. The question facing an ethics committee should not be: 'Is deception wrong?' To answer that in the affirmative would be to deny practices that are central to human civilisation. Rather the committee should ask: 'Would the form of deception proposed here harm the research participants, the researchers and/or society in general in any way?' This is not an easy question to answer since that would have to be balanced against the benefits accruing to all of those constituent groups if the research was conducted successfully. As Robert Rosenthal has pointed out: '...the...researcher whose study might reduce violence or racism or sexism, but who refuses to do the study because it involves deception, has not solved an ethical problem but only traded it in for another' (cited in Bok 1979: 192).

The key question about deception has to do with whether or not it damages the trust the general public (and so future potential research participants) have in researchers. If deception leads to an undermining of trust and so a reluctance to participate in research, there is then a risk to the success of future research projects (Bok 1979: 205 *et seq.*). The benefits to society of future research are thereby equally harmed. 'Thus, we are always confronted with a conflict of values. If we regard the acquisition of knowledge about human behaviour as a positive value, and if an experiment using deception constitutes a significant contribution to such knowledge which could not be very well achieved by other means, then we cannot unequivocally rule out this experiment. The question for us is not simply whether it does or does not use deception, but whether the amount and type of deception are justified by the significance of the study and the unavailability of alternative (that is, deception-free) procedures' (Kelman 1967 in Bynner and Stribley 1979: 190).

Another way of addressing this is to consider it alongside the issues of consent and vulnerability. Thus if the form of deception proposed in a research project minimises the research subjects' capacity to consent and makes them more vulnerable to harm without substantially contributing to societal benefit then it becomes harder to ethically justify it going ahead. It is a complex question – but not simply dealt with by suggesting that deception in research is inherently wrong.

Intrusiveness
Finally, ethical review committees often ask whether a piece of research is likely to be excessively intrusive and so 'disturbing' the subjects' normal life routines. Of course research is inevitably intrusive, but that intrusiveness is variable – dependent upon how much of the respondents' time, energy and so on it takes up. It also needs to be balanced against the concerns addressed above – thus, ironically, the more covert a piece of research, the less intrusive in ordinary lives it is likely to be. It might become more intrusive depending upon how and where research findings are published – but that merely raises another set of ethical concerns.

RECs have been criticized in the past on the grounds of the lack of sophisticated understanding of the balance of ethics with appropriate methodologies. That critique is certainly justified when review committees fail to think through the moral complexities that are routinely a part of human life in any case and charge SSH with lacking moral awareness. As was made clear earlier, they fail in their duties if they seem happy to mechanically insist upon the provision to research subjects of an information leaflet and a written, signed (possibly witnessed) consent form. That represents a complete failure to recognise that consent can never be simply given or 'gained' it has to be managed and negotiated in a continuous fashion – whatever the research design. Some of the concerns of ethics reviewers may be met if a promise is made that retrospective consent will be sought. But even this must be carefully considered. If subjects remain ignorant of the research having taken place, and no harm came to them during the process, then more harm than good could be done by subsequently informing them that they have been the subjects of research of which they had no knowledge. They may merely be upset at their activities having been 'secretly' observed, or disturbed by the researcher's findings about and reflections upon their actions. They may not like the idea that their ostensibly 'private' behaviour has been assumed to be 'public' and open to a stranger's gaze. But if such work were excluded social science would lose the advantage of such classic insights gained from, say, the ethological studies of how people behave in public found in the work Erving Goffman (e.g. Goffman 1971) or Jack Douglas (e.g. Douglas 1977) or the kind of semiology conducted by Roland Barthes (1972).

Addressing consent and capacity together shows the extent to which they overlap. Thus we judge those lacking the capacity to consent as being more vulnerable. But that is only our perception – our subjects certainly may not see it that way and we may be doing them more harm by making the assumption that they are made vulnerable by consenting to participate. It is disingenuous to ever claim fully informed consent when even the researcher may not, indeed cannot, be fully informed. They cannot anticipate all the things that could go wrong in research so how can the research subjects be expected to? Even to get the subject to be 'as informed as' the researcher would theoretically require that they be educated/trained to the same level of competence. So the requirement ought to be that the subject is as informed as is necessary to ensure they remain as free as possible in making their own judgements about how engaged in the research they wish to be – from 'not at all' to 'fully', with no obstructions to their discontinuance in the research that could harm them.

g   *Monitoring Safety*

The monitoring of physical safety should not be separated from ethical scrutiny – any potential risks to safety need to be assessed and if the researcher feels unsafe or anticipates risk of harm to themselves or the potential for harm to their subjects this concern must be addressed. The safety both of participants and field researchers has to be monitored since there may be some mutual dependence – in terms of environmental threats or changed local conditions.

An awareness of the risks (physical and emotional) to field researchers is **both** an ethical and a practical managerial concern to do with danger on the job (Lee 1995). Dangers in research may arise from interviewing or observing in potentially threatening locations such as in hostile crowds, where a high degree of militancy is present or from the discussion of topics emerging which the researcher had not anticipated in interviewing in domestic environments, or in foreign urban environments or unfamiliar districts at night (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000). While there might be some degree of professional 'duty' to accept some personal risk in the interests of science, there is now awareness that consideration for the safety of subjects should be matched by a consideration for those doing the 'subjecting' (See Craig, Corden and Thornton 2001). In any case while a researcher might accept risks in the pursuit of their science, there may be a reciprocal harm to subjects/participants arising from researchers that do not take enough care of themselves. For example, a researcher studying active conflict might put themselves at risk of violence which a participant might feel they have to protect them from – thereby increasing their own potential for harm. Any ethics review that saw a potential for harm and said nothing about it would surely be not behaving in an ethical manner.

Illegal activity

In certain types of research the risk of harm to the researcher is occasioned by the topic of study and the actions of the researchers themselves. This is the case for those carrying out covert participant observation in fields where the committal of criminal offences is the norm for the participants and might be expected of the researchers in order to protect their covert identity. It might be argued that the maintenance of 'normal appearances' requires the participation in illegal activity and if the researcher were not to comply they might then be subjecting themselves to the risk of physical harm. On the other hand there is a risk of a distortion of the field in that the researcher has become so active in the activity being researched that they are, in part, only studying themselves. Ethnographic studies of football hooliganism offer illustrative cases. The difficulties in gaining and maintaining access in such spheres are used to excuse the researcher's participation in violent and potentially criminal conduct. It is hard to see how such research could ever be conducted without allowing the researcher to operate their own judgment about whether to engage in the research and to conduct their own assessment of the risk to permit judgment about its continuance (see for example Pearson 2007).

The nature of anthropological field research is such that it probably poses the greatest danger primarily to the researcher, but also potentially to the subjects

being studied. More often than not anthropologists are studying different, 'alien' or strange cultures – ones with value systems and moral orders vastly different to the anthropologist's. They are faced with moral dilemmas when, for example, marginalised members of the society they are studying are threatened with violence and/or death during their field observations. Their scientific objectivity is certainly compromised if they intervene and there is an assumption of moral superiority by doing so. Examples include the ways in which some societies treat females as inferior citizens or societies in which AIDS is rampant blame certain individuals for the spread of the disease as sorcerers or witches. Intervention to prevent mistreatment of such individuals becomes a political and ethical act which cannot be methodologically justified and so any claimed 'objectivity' for the research project becomes undermined. Researchers expose themselves to danger if they record such maltreatment (for instance by photography) or attempt to bring it to some kind of formal/legal resolution. On the other had to stand by and merely observe may appear to condone such actions and, by doing so, may even increase the conviction of the perpetrators that it is justified. An anthropologist working with the US military in Iraq was killed 'incidentally' by a roadside bomb (Jacobsen 2008). Both action and inaction, as always, can have moral, even fatal, consequences.

'Scoping' for danger
One of the great advantages of the Internet and the World Wide Web is the ability to check on safety issues worldwide quite quickly and which tend to be fairly up-to-date. One of my Nigerian postgraduate students planned to conduct a study in the village in Nigeria where her family comes from – a quick check by her supervisor was made on the Internet only to discover there had been some recent local violence in that region over oil rights. Prior to conducting the study she was able to ascertain how serious the situation was and whether or not it had subsided.

Researchers cannot always ascertain in advance where and what the risks might be – even when conducting research in their home country. Recent localised events can alter the character and ambience of a district and its attitudes to 'strangers'. So the first lesson is to be forewarned, the next is to be prepared. Research managers and the researchers themselves have a responsibility to anticipate risks and benefits to field researchers for participating in the activity, together with meeting any study-specific needs for researchers. Managers should establish and follow a set of safety checks or a full risk assessment in preparation for each project they conduct. Some concerns are generic and apply to all projects while others will be study-specific.

Police checks might be advisable to ensure in the first place that researchers pose no perceivable threat to their subjects. The fact that police checks are conducted may also offer respondents further reassurance about promises of privacy and data protection. (On the other hand sub-groups engaged in illegal activities might be even more suspicious of researchers who have been 'cleared' by the police. And in many communities the police may be distrusted due to corruption fears.) In order to protect researchers, provision must be made for monitoring their safety throughout a project, together with awareness of any

threats to subjects and researchers that might arise out of their specific research engagement. Reviewing some of the following issues might lead to advising that a project should not go ahead – not only should such consideration be seen to be an ethical one but it ensures a degree of methodological rigour. One might have cause to doubt the validity and reliability of data secured from an insecure setting or relationship.

Careful record keeping
Keeping careful notes of all engagements (if they can be audio- or video-recorded then that is even more helpful), in order to record what happened and what was said by all parties can offer some protection against subsequent charges. The practice of maintaining a reflective research journal or diary could be seen as a professional 'standard' which helps secure the researcher's integrity to some degree since it might include the researcher's perspective on a difficult situation or problematic respondent.

The safety of social researchers is of particular concern for those conducting research in the field on their own and in unfamiliar surroundings. But some of these concerns apply also in familiar surroundings where surprising things can happen. Professional bodies hold some responsibility for ensuring awareness of risks to researchers and do offer guidance to their members on their conduct in potentially unsafe surroundings. But research funders, employers, research managers and researchers themselves carrying out fieldwork should pay attention to these concerns – indeed they may even have a legal obligation to do so.

There are many sorts of threats to the safety of social researchers when gathering data that require proximate social interaction. There is the straightforward risk of physical violence and/or verbal abuse. This might be linked to the characteristics of the subject or the nature of the topic of the research or the subject's perception of threat from a researcher; it may even be provoked by something unexpected emerging from the research. The researcher's safety may be threatened not by actual violence but by the threat of it – causing some psychological trauma.

Safety checklist
The following list of procedures that can be adopted to establish minimal protection:
- ensure projects are adequately staffed (this might mean having another researcher accompany the primary researcher for safety, researchers could work in pairs or shadow each other);
- keep regular communications with a research base monitoring the researchers' activities and whereabouts;
- accommodation away from the researchers' homes should be vetted for security and convenience to location;
- careful attention paid to the time allowed for interviews etc. to ensure researchers are not overstressed and so remain alert to risks;
- conduct risk assessment of the fieldwork site – travel facilities, pedestrian environment (well-lit and 'defensible' spaces) including routes in and out

of densely populated areas, local 'escape' rendezvous for researchers, check police authorities' and community groups' views of risks, check specific local tensions such as religious, cultural or racial divisions, any public health issues, possible language support needed, study maps of the area to enhance geographical familiarity and so on;

- formally notify relevant groups of the researchers' presence in the area;
- avoid cold-calling in areas where proper reconnoitring has not been accomplished;
- do not enter houses when the number and nature of residents is unknown;
- dress in an inconspicuous and culturally sensitive manner;
- keep valuable equipment out of sight;
- take particular care in buildings where security staffing is unknown;
- carry a personal alarm;
- stay in public rooms in houses avoid private locations to avoid the risk of being in a compromising situation, or in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour and/or where one's person could be at risk;
- carry authorised identification;
- inherently dangerous research methods/sites/topics/times/respondents should not be imposed on researchers;
- risks in any of the latter areas need to be addressed in project proposals and by prior risk assessment of respondents and research sites;
- brief field researchers on local cultural and gender norms in behavioural interaction and forms of language use and appropriate dress;
- researcher preparation and training should include techniques for handling conflict, threats, abuse or compromising situations;
- debriefing after field research should include an assessment of fieldwork safety and any incidents recorded with violent incidents reported to the employer's health and safety officer and to the local police force if necessary and advisable.

Research organisations and researchers themselves should seek to remain up-to-date on emerging safety risks and be prepared to amend protocols accordingly (Kenyon and Hawker 1999, Paterson *et al.* 1999). Despite all of these precautions it will never be possible to fully predict where risk might arise for researchers, so it is vital to be alert to possible danger in all fieldwork encounters. And while a full background risk assessment can help, researchers should also avoid making stigmatising assumptions about a research site or a community that could equally prejudice their fieldwork (Ritchie and Lewis 2003: 70).

'Dangers to fieldworkers come in all shapes and sizes. Probably more common than physical risk is the danger of emotional damage as one mingles – and empathizes – with research participants in sometimes desperate and distressing circumstances. Researchers may find themselves victimized or harassed because of their gender or perhaps their ethnic status. The heavy demands of fieldwork can cause problems with partners and with family. Like any other work, fieldwork can damage your health if it's not conducted thoughtfully.' (Bloor and Fincham 2006: 19)

h   Privacy and Confidentiality (strategies)

There are ethical tensions even in what appears at first sight to be an uncontentious area – that is, protecting the privacy of research subjects and keeping any information they provide as confidential. It is also here that the risks to a research organisation are heightened as a consequence of growing legal requirements to protect the data held on research subjects. Striving for anonymity and confidentiality adds complications since they are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily entirely congruent. In offering both anonymity and confidentiality the amount of useful data that can be disclosed might be severely limited. Moreover one might be able to retain anonymity while not treating information given as confidential; but breaches of confidentiality are also likely to undermine attempts at anonymity. This area of debate also challenges us to think more clearly about the ethical implications of the difference between the public and private spheres of social life and how concerns for privacy limit the critical insights that social research offers in democratic societies. This could mean that it might not always be in the public interest to maintain the privacy of research subjects when matters of public policy are being investigated.

Confidentiality

One can think of confidentiality as a variable dimension: it can be 'high' or 'low' with some information being treated as a mundane matter while others so 'private' that the research subject might request it being treated highly confidentially. A researcher might choose to use and/or disclose only some of the information gained and this might be done in concert with research subjects. They might ask for certain parts of the data to be ignored or kept secret. Of course, confidentiality could never be 'complete' since it would be hard to know what useful data could be collected from a subject if everything they say or do has to be kept secret.

Anonymity

Anonymity cannot be seen as a continuous variable, it is dichotomous – one either keeps an identity secret or one does not. It is true, of course, that controlling anonymity depends upon factors beyond the researcher's control. A determined enquirer could, usually by a process of elimination, guess at or even discover the identity of research subjects if enough geographical and/or biographical information is available in the published research report. Indeed modern data mining techniques make this a much more problematic topic.

The researcher's responsibility is to bear all of these considerations in mind and do their best, in terms of their agreement with the research subjects, commissioners and other relevant stakeholders, not to compromise pre-agreed levels of confidentiality and anonymity. They have an obligation to remove, as far as possible, the opportunities for others to deduce identities from the compiled data. Confidentiality must be 'contracted' for in the initial encounter between researcher and subject(s) and, as indicated earlier, this is more likely to be a verbal agreement in anthropological studies. Researchers must also strive to operate within the constraints of the law (originating country, local law and

maybe even international law) on how data on private individuals are to be held, managed and, if required by law, disclosed to the appropriate authorities. This latter requirement may, of course, be resisted on moral grounds – such as when 'protecting' the individuals or communities being studied from corrupt official agencies.

Protecting data
Signing a consent form immediately compromises anonymity and, possibly, confidentiality. In order to formalise the agreement to a research engagement and, theoretically, protect both parties signed consent forms set up a contradiction between consent and anonymity. What this means is, simply, that one cannot assume that signed consent is always ethically both necessary and desirable.

These issues also have to be considered in light of the current data protection legislation of the country in which the researcher is operating – that is, in the research site where the data is being collected and, if elsewhere, where the data is being analysed and stored. Since this is such a complex problem most large-scale research organisations will have a data protection officer whose responsibility it is to advise researchers on what is possible and what must be achieved within the law. They are also likely to have a data protection management policy which all researchers should be trained in and subscribe to. No claims for the maintenance of confidentiality and/or anonymity can be sustained if primary source data are not adequately protected and kept secure.

[Extensive information on data protection policies and regulations across Europe can be found on the RESPECT project website: www.respect.org]

Information that might enable data to be linked to individuals has to be kept in a secure locked file with restricted users, in a specific location and with access restricted to named, accountable members of the research group. If held in a computer the same criteria should apply – the key file must be password protected. Preferably the data must be encrypted restricting access to only those with the requisite codes.

Separate identifiers
An immediate problem is revealed here in the 'portability' of computerised data files. They can be e-mailed, transferred to disc or flash drive or, even, left on the hard drive of a laptop computer. Either way their physical nature enables them to be lost, mislaid or stolen and the information contained accessible to others. The first principle of anonymity and confidentiality with generic data is the need to separate identifiers from responses – the identity of the respondents being separated from the information they have provided. So the data in themselves must not reveal the link to whoever provided them. Thus cases are often assigned numbers and the numbers linked to the originating individual is stored separately and securely. The temporary suspension of this requirement may be allowed for the identification of responses for subject matching in the short term and for the necessary reliability checks from the generalised analysis to the raw data – thus it may be necessary to keep the data linked to the 'case' (i.e.

individual) to which it applies for the sake of the integrity of the data. This would also be necessary, again in the short term, in order to track response rates. But this is a precarious period of the data gathering process during which data could be linked to specific individuals and both anonymity and confidentiality compromised. Consequently data security measures must be heightened during this period. Moreover it is necessary to have a policy about how identifiers are to be destroyed if confidentiality is under threat.

Given the growth of collaborative international research it is possible that identifying information could be further separated from raw data by being kept in a different country. (One would have to bear in mind the vulnerability of such data in different countries where alternative legislation might apply.)

Pseudonyms or names?

Of course another way of separating identifiers from responses is the application of pseudonyms or aliases to link data from the same source. For the smaller data sets typical of qualitative research the assignment of a pseudonym sustains the humanising nature of this research style. There may be a temptation to select pseudonyms that appear particularly well suited to some of the characteristics of the research participant in ethnographic studies. If anonymity is to be successfully retained, no matter how appealing, this temptation should be resisted as it may offer subtle and latent clues to a respondent's identity.

In ethnographic studies, as long as there is some pre-agreement, the disclosure of the identities of the research participants in their cultural contexts might not only be seen as apt but as vital to the insights gained from the research. This might not be free from risks. For example, after being released after five months imprisonment in Indonesia for violating her tourist visa and conspiring with separatists, the anthropologist Lesley McCulloch admitted she lied during her trial to protect her contacts in the Aceh separatist movement in Sumatra. At her trial she claimed she had been ambushed by separatists and forced at gunpoint to go with them. She later admitted that she had gone to South Aceh to do research and collect information for her studies of the Indonesian military, their human rights abuses and illegal businesses in Aceh. 'The story we gave [during the trial] was to protect our sources, not so much ourselves, but those who'd set up the trip for us and arranged the meetings.' Although her fellow prisoners regularly bribed the guards to be allowed home for the night, neither she nor her lawyers ever handed over any money in return for favours. McCulloch was not banned from returning to Indonesia (Aglionby 2003).

This case raises several issues. The researcher did not respect the laws of the country nor the system of justice in operation. She even lied – claiming to be a tourist – to gain entry to the country. However without such deception it is unlikely she could gather the material necessary to investigate injustices, corruption, violence, bribery and so on. Ironically it appears she is not even banned from returning to Sumatra – one wonders whether or not, no matter how vital the data, the researcher would be wise to take a chance on returning.

Deceiving to protect

More importantly the researcher has contravened some basic ethical principles. By lying to achieve her research goals she has 'contaminated the field'. Thus, if she can lie to gain access to her research subjects, why should we assume she will not lie about her research findings or in her concluding report? If she is capable of lying once, might she not be capable of lying again in order to 'colour' her research in a direction favourable to her perspectives, opinions and research career? So who can trust her now? Her anthropological colleagues, the Sumatran authorities or, even, her research subjects – the people she claims to be wishing to help? The problem with such deception is that outside observers cannot know the moral limits the researcher has set herself – whatever her claimed intentions, doubt has been cast on her real motives. Even if we share her view of the corruption of the Sumatran authorities, can we trust anyone who has chosen to be corrupt to achieve her research goals? The claim that no attempt to bribe the prison guards to achieve special favours might either be disbelieved or even suspected to be a deliberate ruse to persuade external observers of her moral integrity. It is a classic ethical and logical dilemma – once the lie has been told, and the observer knows that, nothing the liar says can be treated as truth.

Of course, one could argue that the only mistake she made was to admit to the lie – a really good and seasoned liar without honourable intentions would know not to do that and could continue in their deceptions while claiming good intent. Thus supporting the view that good liars succeed and honourable people are condemned for their moral naivety. Once again, though, we must take care not to rush to judgement in condemning the lie and liars. As was touched upon earlier deception is neither an artificial, deviant nor even dispensable feature of social life. It holds a key place in history and can even be seen as a productive element in human success and intellectual enlightenment (Campbell 2001).

The research report itself may be designed in such a way as to deflect anyone seeking to identify participants. Thus key information in reports (such as precise geographical locations or detailed descriptions of buildings or people) may be changed to avoid inadvertent identification. While it is a challenge to accuracy, such information might not be vital to the report's conclusions but preserves the privacy of respondents. Similarly the reporting of research information in an aggregate form helps minimise the chances of unwanted identification.

Threats to anonymity

A major problem for ethnography and anthropology is that neither researchers nor their subjects are always in a position to know what the threats to the maintenance of anonymity and confidentiality may be and, therefore, how they could be anticipated. Whatever precautions they take themselves could be circumvented by the actions of determined others.

Thus researchers can only <u>strive</u> to protect their respondent's identity and do their best to hold the information given 'in confidence'. To take another example, if a subject subsequently accidentally or intentionally chooses to reveal their participation in a study there is little the researcher can do about it and so they

cannot be held responsible for such action. If a subject wishes their identity to be disclosed as part of the research report the researcher then has some dilemmas – principally the effect this might have on other subjects of their research (knowing the identity of one participant might help identify others who desire continued anonymity). Some subjects may wish their identities to be disclosed in order to maintain some link to or 'ownership' of the data while gatekeepers to more vulnerable subjects might seek identification to 'charismatise' the data donors (Grinyer 2002). The researcher should resist requests for the identity disclosure of any subject when such disclosure could lead to the failure to preserve the anonymity of other subjects who had requested that their identities not be disclosed. Either way the researcher still has a responsibility to anticipate the potential disadvantages of removing anonymity and may warn the subjects of such pitfalls.

It is interesting that subjects may not be as concerned as researchers have to be about these issues. Recent studies have suggested that most subjects are not fully aware of what they are consenting to when they agree to participate in research (Graham *et al.* 2005). One might argue that often researchers cannot anticipate all the things that could go wrong so they too are not in a position to warn subjects of all the dangers of participation. To help in making their decision to consent we need more insight into what subjects' understanding is of their participation – do they understand what it means to give consent? Do they fully understand what is being promised when confidentiality and/or anonymity is offered?

The Graham *et al.* study demonstrated the centrality of the relationship between 'interviewer' (the field researcher) and 'interviewee' (research subject). This is the key to participants' motivation to comply with researcher requests, to see the project through to completion, and to sustain a commitment to providing accurate responses. These sorts of gatekeeping issues become even more important when dealing with subjects who are assumed to have less 'capacity to consent' such as children. That seems to mean that they might not fully understand what they are consenting to – much as adults don't but perhaps to a different degree. The main tension here is between the rights of children to decide for themselves and the parental right of control. This is usually legally enshrined but UK law for one is not entirely clear in helping resolve this tension for the purposes of research. Of course in ethnographic work with communities those lacking capacity to consent might not be immediately evident to a researcher new to the terrain.

Threats to confidentiality
While confidentiality is also a matter of obeying the law on data protection, the information given by those being researched is, by definition, introduced into a more 'public' domain by virtue of its disclosure to the researcher. The researcher has to try to make clear to the respondent precisely what this sharing of confidences might imply for the respondent. After all these *data* are 'given things' or 'donations' – given to the researcher. In a qualitative research interview the apparent friendship established between interviewer and interviewee might lead to the disclosure of more information than the

interviewee first intended and there may be regret that so much has been disclosed and a need to address the social and emotional consequences of that.

The duty of confidentiality is owed on the basis of a contractual (formal or informal) understanding between researcher and researched. But that duty can be breached by either party to the contract if, say, police authorities request data which is relevant to a case they are investigating or a court issues a *subpoena* which demands the data be disclosed. If criminal activity is disclosed the researcher has to choose between obedience to the law and a breach of any confidentiality and anonymity originally promised. The researcher's moral integrity only remains intact if this is clearly understood by the respondent prior to the commencement of the research. Yet making that clear may have methodological consequences in producing a tendency to minimal disclosure by the respondent as a safety precaution. Once more though, it takes a cautious respondent to always bear in mind the sensitivity of their own information once released into a more public domain.

One device is to randomise the reporting of responses in order to disguise potentially incriminating information. In that way researchers could not subsequently be <u>required</u> to disclose identities.

Public and private space
It should not be assumed necessarily that the assurance and guarantee of anonymity is an ethical prerequisite. Nor should it be assumed that the allocation of pseudonyms offers ethical reassurance to participants. Sometimes participants reject anonymity in order to retain 'ownership of the data' that they have 'donated' to the researcher (Grinyer, 2001, 2002). Grinyer and Thomas (2001) advise collecting sensitive data in a sensitive manner with any information to be imparted by their respondents about their own experiences '…on their own terms and in their own time' (2001: 162). The method they adopted was via narrative correspondence. They made a public appeal through a variety of different media to seek people willing to 'tell their story' – either by writing or tape-recording an account 'of their own' – according to their own dimensions of relevance and not to answer particular questions set by the researcher(s). In fact two thirds of their respondents refused anonymity, however it was decided only to use subjects' Christian names in order to preserve some degree of anonymity – thereby protecting the subjects from unanticipated risks as a consequence of identity disclosure. Evidently how important this is seen to be will vary according to the topic of the research – it might be more problematic for research in emotionally sensitive and personal areas. But the lesson is not to assume the necessity for anonymity, and not to assume that all forms of identity disguise are acceptable and that participants will not change their minds.

As with all other such situations the researcher in the field might find themselves balancing morality with the law in attempting to make the right decisions about disclosures. The prime dilemma is to balance the moral stance of confidentiality, with the legal position, while also judging the 'seriousness' of any reported

offence and balancing that against the potential danger to 'as yet unknown' others who could be harmed by non-reporting.

Researchers' main concern here has to do with what might be considered to constitute 'public space'. Obvious challenges to our understanding of what constitutes 'public space' occur in direct (participant or non-participant) observation studies. Where social and/or individual behaviour is being observed without the subjects' knowledge, researchers must take care not to infringe what may be referred to as the 'private space' of an individual or group. The problem is that this varies between cultures and subcultures. Some societies and sub-cultures establish very clear demarcations between what is considered personal and, therefore, private space, and what is made more generally visible for others. This is something anthropological researchers would have to be very sensitised to.

The most notorious transgressors of such rules are the paparazzi who follow the rich and famous hoping to catch evidence of some private indiscretion which they decide should be made available for public consumption. The only check on their behaviour is litigation. Researchers cannot afford such contamination of their field so, where it is practicable, they should attempt to obtain consent after the event. At the very least they could interpret behaviour patterns that appear deliberately to make observation difficult as a tacit refusal of permission to be observed. (Those very actions might themselves be of social scientific interest, but there would have to be very good justification for disobeying the tacit refusal of consent in order, for example, to better understand how people manage their public/private space and so enable the continuing development of even more ethical observational research.)

The social scientist as an intuitively interested observer of human social interaction observes some noteworthy pattern of behaviour and writes about it. It is perhaps only different in depth of analysis and theoretical background to the kind of human interest writing that columnists for newspapers and magazines publish. It would not be expected that retrospective consent for such commentary should (or even could) be sought. Other examples are vox pops or vignettes – overhearing a comment by a passer-by and using it, or finding oneself engaged in really insightful discussion that highlights a particular phenomenon of interest. To neglect to report it might mean the loss of a valuable insight into the human condition from which we all might learn. But it must be employed with care and sensitivity to the individual's awareness that their accounts and behaviour might be 'collectable' and reportable in a research study. Once again what lies behind all these reflections are ideas for accomplishing the best way of respecting the rights of others – even in unconsented observational studies.

A major threat to confidentiality and anonymity lies in data retained after the completion of a project and/or preserved in a data archive for some future analytical purpose (secondary research). In the UK there is a legal obligation implicit in case law which prohibits researchers from passing on information to a third party without the explicit consent of the research subject – and only the research subject can decide which of their data can be considered confidential.

The general principle is that consent should be sought for all uses of data for secondary purposes – thus if data has even only the potential to be passed on or made available for further analysis this should be clarified to respondents. It again illustrates the importance of a clear consenting process and the provision of adequate information. If the data are required to be retained and archived for subsequent study, the subject's permission must be gained in advance (Backhouse 2002). There are added data protection problems associated with the secondary analysis of qualitative data collected for some other purpose. It is essential that the archiving principles adopted are declared and understood by both participants and researchers.

To illustrate, the policies for qualitative research in the UK can be found at the major archive sites:
http://www.qualidata.essex.ac.uk
http://www.dipex.org.uk

Information about the UK Data Archive licence with depositors, plus a download option for the form can be found at:
http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/depositingData/LicenceAgreement.asp

In general, good practice suggests that research should be conducted in accordance with the principles of the applicable country-specific national data protection legislation. But care should be taken not to confuse the 'protection' of the data with privacy/confidentiality. Protected data may still be made publicly available – its protection may relate to its integrity (i.e. its link to context and to subject).

Accountability
In business, management and public policy research it is quite common to reveal the identity of organisations involved in research and to identify individual key informants – at least those assumed to be less vulnerable at the more elite hierarchical levels. That would best be accomplished as part of a preliminary agreement ideally with the problem being addressed in open discussion with research subjects with the aim of obtaining some degree of informed consent to a potential disclosure. In cases where disclosure of the identity of a subject (whether an individual or an organisation) is central and relevant to the research neither confidentiality nor anonymity can be guaranteed. Indeed the disclosure of unanticipated but serious public accountability issues is ethically justified. There is more of an expectation that not preserving anonymity is both methodologically essential and in the public interest – enhancing the presumed public benefits to research. The full value of such research may depend upon researchers' skills in report-writing and the medium chosen for dissemination and the quality of its content. Seeking a deliberately salacious outlet may boost a researcher's notoriety and their short-term public visibility but it might not help in securing further commissioned projects for management or public organisations.

It has to be acknowledged that some risk of unintended disclosure is always present in any project. Researchers should be able to demonstrate that, where

agreed, they have taken all reasonable steps to prevent the disclosure of identities and, where not agreed, they have very good reasons for allowing the disclosure.

i   Dealing with Vulnerability

The perception of subjects as vulnerable is likely to be influenced by diverse cultural preconceptions and so regulated differently by localised legislation. It is likely to be one of the areas where researchers need extra vigilance to ensure compliance with local laws and customs. Some vulnerabilities may not even be obvious until research is actually being conducted. There may be a popular consensus that some members of a society are visibly (or understood to be) more vulnerable than others.

Clearly that is a social judgement and we may be in danger of patronising some individuals or sectors of society who wish to be seen as 'strong enough' to make their own decisions about their presumed vulnerability. Evident/visible physical disability leads to presumed vulnerability, but to be 'precious' about the disabled may lead to their social exclusion and the lack of adequate representation of their views and experiences in research studies. Even this should not be simply assumed – children can be very wise, mentally disabled people astute on some specific matters and the physically disabled extremely wary of repetitive research engagements. Between cultures and societies views of vulnerability can differ markedly. Researchers cannot predict everyone's vulnerability, nor can they cater for it comprehensively – but researchers can attempt to minimise the more obvious vulnerabilities by careful phrasing of questions and considering what to do if there is an evident emotional response.

So the key question for ethical review is: 'Are these subjects made any more vulnerable than they might ordinarily be in their daily lives as a result of their participation in this research?'

Protection from harm

Researchers have a duty to attempt to protect all participants in a study from any harmful consequences that may arise out of their participation. This is even more the case when those groups or individuals are less able to protect themselves. Children are seen as particularly vulnerable, while older people may be both vulnerable and marginalized. Children may lack the sophistication to perceive when a study is not in their interests or when disclosure is damaging to them (Alderson 1995). Older people may be excluded from most studies due to their lessened economic and political importance in their society. The ethical researcher has to guard against all these 'disprivileging' possibilities. Feminist research in particular has highlighted and made public the traditionally private worlds of females, families and households (Cotterill 1992). That, in itself, is not without ethical concern – how those worlds are made public and the consequences for the people in the study may then lie outside of their control.

More recently researchers have become concerned about the potential for harm to groups or individuals who may be typically 'excluded' from studies as a consequence of their socio-cultural location. Such exclusion might mean that

their interests are inadequately represented in a study and the researcher's (necessarily) limited perspective on the world cannot guarantee the inclusion of all groups. While 'who' to include is primarily a methodological problem, ethical concerns arise when routine exclusion perpetuates or exacerbates an individual's or a group's lowered status in society.

Some threats to vulnerability are so subtle that they may be hard to recognise. Researchers are ever more accustomed to being cautious about communication across cultures and to avoiding gendered or racist language. But some of the ways in which offence can be caused are so deeply embedded in our language use they may not be easily recognised (Karpf 2006: Ch 12). If it is the case that men and women have fundamentally different linguistic schemata that reflect different dimensions of relevance and cognitive structures then the choice of question phrasing is anything but methodologically and ethically trivial (Tannen 1994, 1995). This is not just a question of gender differentiation in language, there are subtle meta-communicative 'frames' that hide implicit assumptions about relationships and similarly tacit mechanisms for checking and asserting hierarchical relationships that can seriously impair the validity and reliability of research interactions – quite apart from the unintended 'offence' they might cause. Sometimes these may be no more than the inappropriate employment of terms of endearment – such as, in the UK, calling someone 'dear' or 'love' (see Tannen 1992: Chs 5, 6). All we can do is seek to improve our knowledge about how such mechanisms operate and to gain skills in the more sensitive employment of language. The added problem for the anthropologist entails working in a second language or a regional dialect within their second language when subtle messages about vulnerability and dependence are not fully acquired and/or understood. Even anthropologists studying sub-cultures within their own society can miss subtle forms of idiom and jargon. Such a researcher of communicative forms within the European Commission would have to be well versed in acronyms to understand fully the social interaction involved.

Research with children
Children are frequently assumed to be one of the most vulnerable groups in most societies so extra care has to be taken when they are the subjects of a research project or if they are otherwise involved in a larger study of a community. The seeking of both the child's and parental consent and the screening of interviewees is often advised. But the extent to which this has to be accomplished appears dependent upon the age of the child, the location of questioning/interviewing, the presence of a parent or guardian as chaperone and the length of time spent with an interviewer. All of these factors have to be balanced against methodological accuracy and the guaranteeing of confidentiality and/or anonymity, if requested, for the child's response (Alderson & Morrow 2004).

The problem with research with children has increasingly become one of protecting their rights, ensuring their participation is free and informed and that the protections guaranteed by the law are routinely observed. But how does one protect the rights of a child to choose freely to participate in a research activity while still observing the parents' rights to decide, on their child's behalf, whether

or not it is in their interests to participate? Researchers have to balance the maintenance of confidentiality with care for the rights of the child.

While a great deal of energy has been expended on the ethics of research with children, very little has been done to find out children's own perspectives on ethical issues associated with their participation in research. Using fairly innovative, 'user-friendly' techniques for accessing children's views a NatCen team in the UK found that the interviewer has such a key role to play in ensuring that children understand their participation rights in research that it is vital they are well-trained, and that they are accorded some flexibility – using their own judgement – in both information-giving and in the consenting process. What counted as 'sensitive' or personal topics varied considerably between the children interviewed – making it difficult to predict which areas of discussion required more careful approaches. But ultimately they were unable to conclusively answer a key question: just how much do children comprehend what is being asked of them and what research may be for? Hence it remains difficult to assess just what 'capacity' for consent children do actually possess (Reeves *et al.* 2007). Nonetheless the UK National Children's Bureau has been very keen to avoid patronising children and advocating ways in which they can actively participate in research – contributing to and critiquing research in which they are the 'subjects' (see for example, Shaw, Brady and Davey 2011).

Research with people with disabilities

Research can contribute toward the achievement of human rights and social justice for people with disabilities; but, equally, if not conducted properly it can obstruct those very aspirations (United Nations 1993). Guidance on the ethics of research with people with disabilities has been offered by the National Disability Authority (Ireland) (NDA 2004). They outline a set of overarching 'core values' such as respect for the human rights, dignity, equality and diversity of all involved in research. They promote social justice, well-being and the avoidance of harm, together with facilitating participation so that no groups – the disabled in particular – are systematically excluded from research for reasons of ignorance or avoidance. They advocate the maintenance of high professional research standards and the fulfilment of legal responsibilities.

Guidelines for 'good practice' for anthropological research with any group or community include the following:
- *Plan for inclusion*: ensure the representation of all groups in the community. Different forms of participation at different stages of the research process may have to be considered, as well as the implications of the appropriateness of different research methodologies to people with different abilities. In anthropological work this can, of course, lead to challenges to existing power structures.
- *Anticipate diversity*: do not assume necessary homogeneity within any group. Cultural heterogeneity might be discovered and explored. Varied appropriate methods of communication, access and participation will be required to cater for diversity in sexual orientation, ethnicity and other social situational factors.

- *Minimise harm*: ensure the research will not damage the established rights or limit the legitimate entitlements of all people in the group. It may be necessary to consider ways in which people can be empowered to participate in research, and the ways in which they can become disempowered both by the research or during the research.
- *Avoid 'over-researching'*: some groups and some individuals are researched more frequently on the grounds of their ability to articulate their situation or they might be more politically active and so make themselves more accessible than others. To over-research is both methodologically unsound as a 'sampling' strategy and may be harmful in terms of making excessive demands on the time and physical energy of the disabled group/person.
- *Collaborate with those being studied*: include participants in research planning and design, as active participants/researchers themselves and/or as members of advisory groups.
- *Make use of 'consultants'*: consider ways in which the expertise of those who have previous knowledge of the study group can be used in an advisory capacity before and during research projects. Recognise the value of accumulated knowledge and experience. Researchers who have worked previously with a particular ethnic group or in a specific community can help guard against major errors of engagement.
- *Facilitate research accessibility*: by using accessible and appropriate language and being sensitive to the use of language. This not only means employing the standard 'intelligent layperson' forms of language in interviews, questionnaires, proposals and reports, it also means avoiding insensitive uses of terminology. Research findings could be available to and 'readable' by members of the population – in particular when such research has direct implications for their lives. If the participants lack literacy skills then information could be provided using pictures.
- *Exercise caution with the use of gatekeepers and proxies*: Gatekeepers control access to research subjects while proxies are presumed to speak on their behalf. In all cases this must be treated as 'indirect' evidence and it might be hard to avoid. For example in some communities older people, or people with disability may be unable to speak for themselves and may need the services of an advocate and/or interpreter. But the researcher must be aware that this necessarily changes the dynamic of the relationship between researcher and researched. In some cases the person with disability may be unable to prevent the intervention of a gatekeeper since they may be dependent upon them for their care. Use of proxies, gatekeepers and so on certainly has implications for the status of the evidence produced by such means. Particular care over the consenting process is required when any form of proxy is involved.
- *Consider budgetary implications and project timeframes*: specialist research materials, translation facilities, production of additional reports and discussion papers all have cost implications for research budgets.

Dealing with prejudice
Anthropologists have to be particularly sensitive to sources of vulnerability in different societies and the variations can be immense. Sexism and ageism offer

the most common examples of institutionalized vulnerability. In many societies women may be considered particularly vulnerable as subordinate members of the community. The main problem with older people as vulnerable subjects is their assumed physical and mental deterioration. Such assumptions lead to stereotypical attitudes toward them and expectations about them. It might be advisable with older people and other distinct population categories that researchers add some extra ethical principles that take account of systematic variations in treatment of those sectors of the population while allowing that they should be accorded at least the same 'research rights' as all members of the population. Such guiding principles have been suggested by Tom Kitwood under the umbrella notion of 'personhood' (Kitwood 1997). They include recognition, respect and trust. More recently the guiding principle of 'dignity' has also been proposed in a major EU study (Tad 2005). If all subjects were accorded consideration under these principles, then no special positive discriminatory action need be taken for older people *per se*.

In practical terms then, to maintain the dignity and personhood of research subjects one would have to anticipate the potential limitations to their participation in research and adjust methodologies accordingly. So, perhaps paradoxically, given the condemnation of covert research in some circles, it could be argued that observation could be the least intrusive way of researching aspects of the lives of vulnerable people since it is less likely to challenge them emotionally and physically. A range of naturalistic observation methods could be employed for which in some cases they need not be made aware and, in others, might be positively enjoyed (Clark 2007).

Establishing trust

Being there, being interested, listening and hearing remains a *sine qua non* of qualitative research. Research subjects often have a way of knowing – as we all do as ordinary human beings – if this is being accomplished authentically. More than that there is an inherently long-term expectation of involvement between researcher and researched that is implied in any relationship of trust (Duncombe and Jessop 2002). Honest and immediate responses to potential breaches of trust have to be made. This can be as apparently trivial as requiring more time and energy investment of the participant than was originally implied. And this can happen in qualitative research when repeat visits are deemed necessary to enhance validity or as a check on the reliability of data gathered. The ongoing development of the research relationship provides insight into potential for increasing a participant's vulnerability.

By consenting to participation the respondent has already to some degree allowed the researcher into their life. The degree to which that involvement is to be continued or deepened has to be continuously negotiated. The precise nature of the mutual expectations of researcher and researched will have to be continuously clarified for methodological as well as for ethical reasons. It is vital that, given their presumed vulnerable status at the outset of the research, the process and outcomes of the project does nothing to exacerbate that vulnerability.

There may be a limit to the degree to which participants can remain truly involved which depends upon the conceptual level or the detailed technical language adopted within research reports. The researcher comes from a professional and disciplinary tradition which the participants may not share. To ensure participants' continued understanding of how their contribution extends theoretical knowledge it might be necessary to 'translate' the research products for their benefit. There is clearly a danger of either demeaning the participants or of limiting the nature of their contribution by the inaccessibility of the terminology.

Here, again, the potential for conflict between researcher and professional (carer, civil servant, welfare officer etc.) roles can emerge. 'Being listened to' is something many clients often plead for. Ironically, more time may be spent with and listening to a 'patient as a subject' within the context of a research project than in routine therapeutic engagements; or in interviews with a young offender than they might spend in their encounters with the police. While the researcher who is also, say, a health professional may cope with that personally, a problem of appropriate disengagement from a research relationship which has therapeutic implications can arise. Preparations for that disengagement could be made both with researched clients and health or social service colleagues.

j   Involving Subjects in Research

In recent years there has been a considerable move in SSH research towards incorporating research subjects as more active 'participants'. In some research traditions they can become full collaborators or co-researchers, while in anthropology their status has varied throughout the history of the development of the discipline.

This topic illustrates a tension between methodology and ethics that runs throughout SSH. Do we need passive, compliant subjects who merely accept the things we do *to* them or say *about* them? Or should we only do research *with* them and show that we prefer knowledgeable participants who can be constructively and actively involved – but who may at times be recalcitrant and hold very strong views of their own about how the research should proceed?

It is not always possible or methodologically desirable to allow subjects too active a research role and should by no means be seen as ethically 'compulsory'. The wisdom of participant involvement very much depends upon the substance of the research, its aims, the proposed design, the methods to be employed and the anticipated consequences for the participants of too active an involvement. However participant involvement can offer insights to problems and anticipate harms that external researchers might not have thought of.

Communities can vary in their capacity to make judgments about the benefits of research to themselves and/or to their society at large. People in more 'advanced' societies may understand the importance of and value scientific knowledge and sustain this interest in popular news media. Less advanced groups might not value research in the same way and might not have access to

popular news media. In either case, by participating in research individuals gain knowledge and experience that they might otherwise have missed or information and insights that could enhance their life style and opportunities. Or they may gain personally and more directly from having opportunity to air their concerns or even the potential catharsis that comes from sharing problems with independent observers. But that is no guarantee that active participation in research design and/or data gathering and analysis is to their benefit – nor is it necessarily to the benefit of the researcher.

More actively-oriented research participants might value the opportunity that research affords for improving any services delivered by their larger society. If a research study enhances the provision of services to the community then study participants may gain both directly and indirectly. Research which reflects the needs and perspectives of service users may even be more likely to produce successful policy and practice recommendations. It remains vital, on ethical grounds, that those being studied should be able to freely decide for themselves, with advocacy support if needed, if they wish to be involved more actively than merely being the 'objects' of study.

Participatory research
A key question is how to ensure the most effective contribution to research from participants. They cannot be assumed to be passive and/or acquiescent, nor that they may not be knowledgeable about how they wish to participate in the research. Groups may possess acute political awareness, may be articulate and forceful in their own interests and researchers need to be prepared for such empowerment. Once the decision is taken to involve subjects then it also has to be decided within which of the stages in the research cycle they can be best employed. They can be involved in selecting and prioritising the topics to be studied, in helping to design and manage the research, as active researchers themselves (in data collection and analysis), and finally in the writing of reports and the dissemination and evaluation of the research. Probably the most subject-inclusive research method is participant action research (PAR) which suggests a variety of strategies for incorporating subjects effectively. (See, for example, Whyte 1991, Reason 1994.) But the 'objectivity' of some research designs would be seriously compromised by excessive contribution from the subject population.

A major concern is the selection of the primary goals of the research. Any research which establishes alliances with participants may find that the research goals may have to compete with the action-oriented aims of the subjects. Researchers will carry theoretical as well as potentially ideological assumptions into the field. Thus methodological and policy/practice ideologies may lie in tension with each other, with the danger that one set of concerns dominates the other (Ruano 1991). The participant's commitment may be more to social reform than to methodological purity – in which case the researcher's pursuit of objectivity is tainted (Ruano 1991: 216). So while '...this means that the researcher must be willing to relinquish the unilateral control that the professional researcher has traditionally maintained over the research process. This does not mean that the professional researcher must accept every idea put

forward by key practitioner collaborators' (Whyte 1991: 241). But Whyte does go on to suggest that researchers have to use '…rational discourse and powers of persuasion in planning and implementing PAR'. In which case I wonder what that suggests about the true balance of power in the relationship.

In some cases the need to access participants, the nature of the topic under study and the chosen methodology can 'impel' researchers toward a participatory approach. The personal concerns of the participants can compromise the professional concerns of the researcher – to say nothing of the danger that the nature of such personal relationships could directly affect the personal concerns of the researcher. Compromises with funding and commissioning agencies can impede the full pursuit of participants' interests and concerns. And, ethically, perhaps it could be argued that should be the case since they are paying!

Balancing 'stakeholder' interests
Moreover the initiating methodology and design might have elements of the professional researcher's vested interests, while the data to be collected might have been directed by the commissioner's information needs and not those of the co-researchers. (This being a particular concern if, say, the research is being funded by state intelligence agencies as discussed earlier.) Budgets for participatory research can be difficult to estimate given the variable time that may need to be spent on addressing group dynamics, interpersonal relationships and any specific research skills training that participants might need. Roles have to be established and the balance between 'leadership' and 'facilitation' remains uneasy in participatory research. Collaboration, co-operation and partnership each imply different models of group research engagement, and different implications for the balance of power between co-researchers. Given all of these complex and variable influences Peter Reason suggests that there is no one method of collaborative inquiry and that '…those who want to use collaborative methods…should study what others have done, explore the range of methods that is available, and then invent their own form which is suitable for the project they wish to undertake' (Reason 1994: 201).

The effectiveness of subject participation in research can be enhanced if the experience of interest groups operating in this field is drawn upon. On the other hand interest groups will have vested interests that may distort the research. So the balance of power between researcher and researched requires attention since specific interest or pressure groups will have accumulated a range of political skills and persuasive powers from their lobbying activities to such an extent that the researcher may find themselves, and the methodology, dominated by participants with 'too much' experience.

Some of the above concerns can be met if research participants are selected from groups likely to be among the beneficiaries of subsequent applications of the research. For some commentators on participation the starting point is the principle that ethical research is research that is of benefit to those being studied. Care must still be taken to ensure participants are not systematically selected from groups for reasons not directly related to the research focus of study such as the fact that they may be easily available and so accessible, or that

they have little choice but to participate, or might be considered relatively easy to manipulate. Correspondingly participants must not be systematically excluded for reasons of inconvenience that are not related to the research focus of study.

There may be an assumption that including subjects as participants extends the duration of the study – however, it may equally be the case that subjects are better able to move quickly to answer the research questions as a consequence of their contacts and insights. On the other hand since the 'subject as researcher' adopts multiple roles – researcher, practitioner, subject and principal disseminator – there is a great deal of tension in which of the roles take primacy at any one time. Investigating a 'problem' in one's community does not necessarily lead to its solution. By problematising a situation the researcher may undermine their own ability to continue behaving 'normally' in their community. Research into one's own life and behaviour can lead to serious ethical conflict which might be difficult to resolve – examples include: a police officer researching into policing organizations, prison officers investigating the prisoner's experiences, teachers exploring the educational system, health professionals conducting research on their own patients (see Sapsford 1999: 41, Iphofen 2005).

Given that ethical decision making is a particularly dynamic process for ethnographic approaches, it is even more so when subjects are extensively and intensively involved – hence it will be more demanding of consideration on the part of researchers and subjects alike. While some ethical consequences can be anticipated, not all can and the subjects become even more implicated in those decisions than if the study was being conducted *on* and not *with* them: it will be even more necessary '…to negotiate in practice the ethics discussed in principle when the group was forming' (Treleaven 1994: 158).

The implicit assumption that subject involvement is of benefit to the participant and empowering should be guarded against. Any researcher's desire to incorporate their subjects into their cherished project might not be matched by any sensed need in the members of the community they seek to include. Subjects do not have a 'right' to be included so the view that they ought to be granted such a right is a political act that endows participation with a form of democratic 'value'. To feel obliged or persuaded to participate is coercive and so cannot be regarded as necessarily empowering or emancipatory. To put such pressure on potentially vulnerable community members may even exacerbate their vulnerability – and they might not be the best judge of that happening. Even by allowing the subjects a 'taste' of empowerment while collaborating on a project could prove frustrating when they find themselves back in their own culture – their sensed relative deprivation could even be exacerbated by the experience. On the other hand a 'right' to be not unreasonably excluded might justifiably be accorded to subjects – a complementary example is offered in the suggestion that 'representatives' of women and minorities (of age and ethnicity) should be included in all relevant clinical trials – otherwise the results cannot be assumed to be applicable to such populations.

In the research setting – whether that be in the most well-intentioned action research or merely collaborative – since it is a research project the balance of power (in skills, knowledge, experience and resources) still lies with the researcher. There are many devices for attempting to even out this power differential but it is difficult to demonstrate clearly that a redistribution of power has been accomplished, that the participant had freely chosen to join the project and that no additional distress or harm was suffered. There may indeed be a subtle tyranny to participatory research in which people feel 'obliged' to be involved (see for example Cooke and Kothari 2001). The ethical challenges of community-based participatory research were considered by a Community Research Team in Durham University and reported in 2012. A set of principles and illustrative case studies offer examples of good practice. (See Durham Community Research Team 2012)

k   Disseminating Findings

There is a surprising range of ethical issues associated with the dissemination and reporting of project findings. The series of questions that need to be addressed about publication include those contained in the classic mass communication formula: what is communicated, to whom, how, when and why?

It need not be seen as ethically inevitable to publish. All, a part or nothing of the findings (i.e. embargoing them) could be published, largely depending on judgements about the harm and benefits that might accrue from this 'knowledge transfer'. Once an appropriate audience for the work has been decided upon, next the form in which the information might best be released for maximum benefit can be chosen. Potential harms arising out of dissemination must be anticipated, and intellectual property rights assigned where they are due, with all recognisable sources of information acknowledged and referenced. In fact it might not be a bad idea to consider dissemination issues at the start of research, even though these might change during the life of the project.

Audiences for the report

Audiences for anthropological findings are wide-ranging and also include those who may be considered to be 'users' of the research. It could include: the general public, the research participants who donated their time, insights and information, the academic/professional audience of other researchers in similar and/or related fields, the government and policy makers at all levels, those who might be affected by policy changes consequent on the research, interest groups, journalists and others involved in mass media who rely upon research for interesting/challenging news stories and so on.

The first ethical concern to these constituencies is to judge whether or not the information released will benefit them or contains the potential for harm. The greatest loss of disseminatory control is to journalists who pick up research outputs and 'interpret' them according to their news values – seeking conflict and controversy since that makes for more saleable newspapers. Learning to prepare press releases and to be interviewed for radio and television is one of the vital skills of all SSH researchers. They have to become quite skilled in resisting a news reporter's 'drive' towards the opposing view. This becomes

especially difficult if the interpretation of findings is complex and subtle – especially so if there is no 'opposing view', since they may feel the need to create one!

On the other hand researchers' major complaint is when their findings are not so broadly disseminated and their publications infrequently cited. The greatest dissatisfaction is with reports that merely 'sit on a shelf' or articles in journals read by only a few people and do nothing to justify the researchers', participants' and/or funders' efforts. Hence articles in more 'intellectually-oriented' but more broadly read periodicals are often sought to explain the findings more fully and, hopefully, help to ensure that key policy recommendations are not merely ignored. For anthropological research outlets such as *National Geographic* command popular interest about other cultures, other periodicals and more general newspapers will be keen for more 'sensational' reports and may tend to select such elements from a fuller press release about the research. So anthropologists may have to exercise a little more care in press releases so as not to distort impressions of the culture or group they have been studying.

Without publishing findings the charge could be made that all stakeholders' time had been wasted – that is clearly an ethical concern. To produce 'results' and then keep them to oneself might seem a scholarly indulgence or may even be further grounds arousing suspicions about funders' motives. But few researchers have easy access to popular commercial outlets and fewer still will find they can control how their work is treated in such media.

However it is also the case that researchers should not assume the general public to lack the ability to read and discern with some degree of technical sophistication a fuller account of the work done. Given the more easy availability of the internet and cheap costs of publishing information on the World Wide Web, there is really little excuse for researchers not offering a more careful, detailed account in such a form. They may have to encounter dialogue with an informed and intelligent public – but that is something that increasingly researchers should consider as part of the justification for continued public support of their work. It could be assumed that researchers will have much more control over their formal reports to funders and commissioners and in their outlets in scholarly journals. Even here the process of peer review may 'force' alterations in reported findings in order to secure publication. Peer review is a highly flawed procedure which is heavily reliant upon trust and so raises many ethical concerns. It is a '...subjective and therefore inconsistent process' (Smith 2006: 179). There are plenty of examples of fraud and misconduct in peer review with plagiarism occurring in some cases and rejection due to prejudice against particular authors' work and/or their favoured methodologies.

The central problem is focussed on who can be legitimately counted as an authoritative yet independent peer. Such an individual would need at least equivalent, if not more, knowledge of the field and background in profession, discipline and methodology than the author. It is hard to come to an objective judgement that peer review is effective in actually accomplishing what it claims to do – filter the dissemination of knowledge and information so that only the

best gets through and the 'truth' emerges. Systematic review of the process suggests that there is only a belief that this is the case – no good evidence – and that peer review is no better at detecting fraud and error than could be achieved by chance (Jefferson *et al.* 2002). The best that researchers can do is to hold the peer review process itself under review, participate in it (be willing to review others' work) and when it is being applied to one's own work ensure that the system operating within the chosen journal outlet is as fair and transparent as possible.

Ownership of the findings

Even at the dissemination stage questions remain relating to who owns this information. When researchers collect data it is assumed that they have been 'given' to them and so can be treated as a gift. It might not mean that they fully 'own' it since the data donor might claim rights to it in retrospect. Once analysed however the data become 'findings' and if the research subject had no part to play in the analysis it is hard to see how they can claim ownership of the knowledge thereby produced. The study of poverty and inequality in different societies offers some interesting challenges to the problem of data ownership and its use. For example it has been charged that researchers could be regarded as 'stealing' from the poor by holding on to data about poverty captured from many data sources over a series of years: in so doing they slow the understanding of poverty and hamper poverty-reduction efforts. Leading analysts in research institutes in Europe and the US hold the monopoly over some quantitative datasets for extended periods, making them available to policy makers in advanced countries while limiting access to poverty researchers in developing nations. In some South Asian countries official statistical agencies refuse to place officially collected data in the public domain until they have secured enough income from private companies willing to pay for access to it. Even qualitative researchers hold on to vital life history and experiential accounts in order to enhance their own career prospects by publishing first and delay archiving or making the accounts publicly available for analysis. Good practice would require datasets to be made more publicly available on research organisations' websites once they had been 'cleaned' for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality (Hulme 2003a, 2003b).

When research participants are involved in the dissemination of research findings their criteria of relevance may differ from those of the researcher. In such cases researchers have to guard against influences of that kind compromising their impartiality otherwise the primary claim to be acting in society's interests would be jeopardised. This does not mean that researchers cannot 'take sides' – but that if they do they should make this clear and they should clarify the grounds on which they believe it reasonable to do so. The same rationale should apply to policy makers, government departments and/or professionals who may be concerned that they might be expected to become committed to implementing the 'best options' emerging from the project.

Howard Becker's overview of this problem some years ago offers a useful set of grounds for judging how researchers should assess the consequences of reporting their work: '…it is that one should refrain from publishing items of fact or conclusions that are not necessary to one's argument or that would cause suffering out of proportion to the scientific gain of making them public. …Even though the statement as it stands cannot determine a clear line of action for any given situation …it suggests …that the scientist must be able to give himself good reasons for including potentially harmful material …(and)…it guards him against either an overly formal or an overly sentimental view of the harm those he studies may suffer…(and)…it insists that he know enough about the situation he has studied to know whether the suffering will in any sense be proportional to gains science may expect from publication of his findings' (Becker 1964).

Becker's conclusions were drawn after an overview of studies that chose to report socially damaging information about a community whose members could be fairly easily identified, a decision to report confidential information about an interest group whose members were deemed 'unlikely to read' the outlet in which the information about them was reported and studies of proscribed organisations who, as a consequence of their activities, had placed themselves so far beyond the moral community that any research reporting their 'secret' activities could be deemed legitimate (Becker 1964).

The 'gift' of data

The source material for qualitative research is unlikely to be anonymous data. It is more usually a person's account, story, imagery, considered responses and, in that sense at least, is primarily owned by them and given by them. Since data are literally 'given things', the subjects' agreement to participation in research entails 'gifting' their experiences to the researcher as data. It is likely in the first instance to be their 're-presentation' of a personal experience and has, therefore, a precious, human quality. If a respondent talks about their experience of an illness or disease, or their domestic arrangements, for example, they will be disclosing intimacies – something that reveals a quality associated with the nature of their existence as a human social being and members of a specific community. Indeed all data generated from human responses is, in essence, 'gifted' even if it is nothing more than a superficial counting procedure or behavioural actions.

Then, as a necessary part of the research process, the researcher manipulates this data in some way by coding, classifying, re-interpreting it and, ultimately, by disseminating it in a form accessible to interested others. The researcher's ethical responsibility is then associated with how that shared gift is cared for (whether or not the data continue to be treated as 'precious' as they are analysed, transformed and reproduced as new knowledge) and how the person who shared the data is cared for as a consequence of that data being delivered – albeit in a different form – to a larger audience.

Part of the problem here is that an essential element of the researcher's task is inevitably to select from those data enough of them to permit the description, understanding, explanation and so on that are part of the purposes of the

research – the production of this 'new' knowledge. Conventionally this is known as 'data reduction' and is inevitable since the full richness of the person's unique and individual original experience can never be captured. Nor can it be fully reproduced. One of the researcher's tasks is to help convey that experience authentically and in a way that might be useful for purposes of explanation, policy-making or practice. So there is always something of the researcher themselves that must be included in the re-presentation since they were party to the mediated reproduction of the experience. Thus the anthropological researcher has to maintain a reflexive position, gauge how much of what emerges is dependent on or independent of them and consistently hold themselves accountable for the knowledge produced (Holland 1999).

Acknowledging all sources and careful and comprehensive referencing is essential to giving credit where it is due. It is a first principle in establishing rights to intellectual property. But the current pressure to publish and to claim the ownership of knowledge can lead to dishonourable behaviour and, even, to scientific fraud. The temptations to cheat are many and varied, and more effort must be put in to understanding the causes and consequences of scientific fraud. In the complex interrelationship between ethical review, publication and intellectual property, even governmental research councils have been found to 'misbehave' as the following example illustrates: A student who had participated in a field trial on a small municipality's drinking water found his name appearing on two academic journal articles of which he had no knowledge. Both papers neglected to report any negative results from the trials which in fact had been terminated prematurely when residents complained of laundry being bleached, the water smelling of chlorine and small pets dying during the trials. The Canadian Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) had sponsored the trial which was part-funded by the company that had patented the alternative water-purifying technique being tested. The student was threatened with an action for defamation when he complained to the journal editors (one of which later retracted the article), but the NSERC failed to respond to the accusation that it had failed to maintain research standards (Fine 2006). Since commissioning/funding councils are equally capable of engaging in unethical behaviour it is even more vital that both individual researchers, with the support of their professional associations, disclose actions of this nature and work together to maintain and espouse professional standards that can help expose and remove corrupt research practices.

l   Implications of internet and e-research for ethnography and anthropology

Changes in communications technology offer considerable opportunities for innovative methodological approaches for professional ethnographers and anthropologists. But this technology has also permitted a tremendous growth in 'amateur ethnographers'. Ordinary members of the online and 'digitally-armed' public are key gatherers of new data using developed communications technologies. The potential for digital video ethnography has expanded rapidly with the cheap availability of highly portable audiovisual recording devices with large memory capacity. There are even iphone apps for recording observations.

Ordinary personal phones can record enormous amounts of data and transfer and disseminate them instantly and broadly.

Social media networking
With the new social media (Facebook, Linkedin, Twitter etc.) come new forms of social contact and new forms of community, some say even new forms of identity for people as well as for groups and organisations. YouTube, for example, offers entirely new possibilities for participant observation. People are linked in ways never seen before and, given previous developments, future ways of linking and interacting are difficult to anticipate. Identity can be 'managed' in new ways and communities formed on a range of disparate and even unrelated values and practices. Barry Wellman (2004) calls this 'networked individualism' – moving from communities based on place to communities based on persons. Early mass communication developments such as radio and television challenged traditional forms of community based on locality and were, in many respects, disconnecting; new forms of media are re-connecting. Both the form of the community and the way individuals relate to it pose real challenges to the key ethical research principles of consenting, voluntary participation, and vulnerability.

With this interconnectivity understanding of public and private space has become more complicated. Participant observation studies of online communities are easy to conduct and 'consenting' may be easily sidestepped by the assumption of the availability of 'subjects' (respondents, participants and non-professional 'co-researchers') in the public domain. Pressures to produce research less expensively may lead to unwarranted assumptions about the populations such online communities can be considered representative of. To illustrate, one online market research company (Everydaylives) points to having access to "55,000 people in 30 markets" willing to video their own and/or their friends' lifestyles. (For example they may be asked to film their fridge and talk about it; show examples of their worst possible day or their indulgences; or film their mealtime routines.) These video ethnographies are treated as cross-national panel studies in ways that raise many methodological questions quite apart from the ethical issues of consent, privacy, confidentiality and so on.

Different examples show the many ways research activity may be conducted with varying degrees of openness. Patricia Lange's YouTube channel "AnthroVlog" (http://anthrovlog.wordpress.com) has a clear research purpose – the study of people via their video-logs (vlogs). Mike Wesch offers an educational course and engages his novice students in digital ethnography (http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg/). And while 'authenticity' has always been a problem for ethnography and anthropology, the potential for 'faking' is heightened via new media. (A notorious example was the "lonely girl 15" vlog that turned out to be entirely scripted as a 'developmental narrative' by three experienced scriptwriters and 'acted' by a young woman.) From a SSH perspective populations and samples have to be seen as self-selecting, data (videos, audio and text) are generated, filtered, organised and distributed by 'users' who vary greatly in technical capacity and accessibility. But there is no doubt these are 'communities' and social researchers have to exercise ethical caution in engaging with them. These are not 'amoral' communities, yet one has

to be attuned to how 'morality' can be applied in new communities. For example, when almost 250,000 Germans requested that Google blur pictures of their homes on their Street View service, home-owners in Essen who opted out of service were victimised by anti-privacy vandals, having their homes pelted with eggs and had 'Google's cool' notices pinned to their doors.

In a period of austerity it is important to resist the temptation of online panels offering cheap, quick, but possibly unreliable findings. There will be pressure from commissioners to use Internet surveys since they can rapidly access target groups and re-contacting is cheap and easy via e-mail. The major problem is that panels necessarily have to be 'opt-in'. More importantly little is known about the structure and demographics of the online community and how it compares to the 'offline' community. The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) reported in 2010 on nonprobability online panels suggesting they cannot estimate accurately estimate population characteristics. (http://www.aapor.org/Home.htm)

Such work is not necessarily methodologically or ethically unsound – but its implications are certainly not yet fully understood. Charles Ess's (2002) work raises some core ethical principles that remain applicable despite rapid technological and social developments across the Internet and the Web.

5   Conclusion

Much of this discussion is predicated on an assumption of values that are fairly commonly held internationally. One of the central tenets of ethical scrutiny at European Commission level is that there is a certain degree of 'universality' to principles of research ethics. Not to accept such principles is rather like suggesting that certain standards in human rights only apply to certain geographical regions. It is up to countries (and the EC) that have established and monitored systems intended to protect people being researched to advance those standards globally. Research fields cannot only be contaminated locally in an increasingly global world. How willing would we be to learn from research conducted in what we would regard as an unethical manner on human subjects in one of these developing countries? Could our beneficence, our knowledge-gain, be regarded as properly generated in this way – in fact, might we not have grounds for epistemological doubts for knowledge gained from a range of improper practices? Thus anthropologists who conduct their research in a range of different countries and cultures, while upholding these values are, at the same, time promoting them globally.

As multi-site, interdisciplinary and cross-national studies grow due to larger corporate commissioning – European Commission research funding being a case in point – the issues of ethical review become even more complex. Knowledge transfer requires partnership arrangements that may lead to aspects of joint research programmes being beyond the control of any single partner. There can be no easy guarantee that standards and values are necessarily shared across institutions. (In the UK the Association for University Research and Industry Links (AURIL) has, for example, recently seen the need to establish its own ethics code to cover collaborative knowledge exchange.)

The balance between the right to privacy and the public interest is challenged daily with the power of modern communications technology – the surprisingly easy access to and disclosure of 'secret' government documents and diplomatic cables via Wikileaks, and the hacking into personal communications between climate scientists offer illustrative examples. As a consequence some commentators have suggested that social research is less 'privileged' even than investigative journalism when it comes to sacrificing some core ethical principles – such as confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent – when democratic values and the public interest are at stake.

Of course this all depends upon who is conducting the research, why they are conducting it and who 'benefits' from findings. 'Context' is always vital for ethical judgment – different rationales for reward incentives may be proffered from the different social research sectors – private, academic and/or government-sponsored. Intent also remains a fundamental criterion. Journalists need to 'sell' a story and the more contentious and conflict-ridden, the better. If researchers act in that way their integrity comes into question and their field of study permanently contaminated. Ultimately the judgment call in such situations comes down to one's estimate of the potential damage to the 'public interest', balanced against the potential damage to 'private' individuals and the research professions. And it is impossible to regulate that balance in general terms – it very much depends upon the specific case. So it remains vital for SSH researchers to continue to think things through and come to their own, often personal but well-informed, conclusions when confronted by the challenge of ethics.

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Glossary of Terms

Analytic induction: an ongoing process of systematically searching for evidence that challenges (falsifies) the emerging explanation – a way of 'testing' that the theory being developed does indeed offer a valid explanation of the behavior observed.

Anonymity: not disclosing the identity of research subjects.

Confidentiality: not showing data from a research project in a form which will allow the subject to be identified.

Consent: when a subject gives the researchers permission to study them.

Contamination of the field: actions by a researcher that alters the behaviour of those being studied and/or upsets them making them reluctant to help researchers in the future.

Debriefing: offering the opportunity to discuss the research after completion for the purpose of advice, counseling or even complaint.

Deduction (deductive method): procedures which use a set of logical rules to infer from some basic assumptions that certain conclusions will follow. This usually requires starting from a theory which gives rise to specific hypotheses which then must be tested by observation to check if the theory is correct.

Ethical review: the formal review of a research proposal in terms of the balance of harms and benefits that could be anticipated as consequences of the research.

Ethnography: the study of groups of people and their social interactions with a focus on the meanings lying behind those interactions. It uses a wide range of data collection methods – including observation, depth interviewing and documentary analysis.

Gatekeeper: someone who controls access to research subjects.

Holism: the assumption that individual actions can only be understood in terms of the total social context in which they occur.

Induction: a process of explanation which starts from specific observations, proceeds to generalizations about what those observations might mean and then to the building of a more comprehensive theory about behaviour.

Naturalism: studying people in their normal or natural setting without undue interference by the researcher.

Participant observation: a researcher joins a group in order to study them

more closely – observing, asking questions and making notes.

Proxy: someone who acts on behalf of or 'represents' a research subject.

Purposive sampling: selecting a sample of subjects from the population with a specific focus of interest – such all figure of 'authority', or all mothers and so on.

Reflexivity: continuous monitoring by the researcher of their own actions and thoughts and how these might influence their findings.

Retrospective consent: seeking permission from a research subject after the study has been conducted.

Sampling: taking a small selection from a larger group in order to draw inferences about that larger group.

Snowball sampling: selecting participants on the recommendations of a previous research subject. As a snowball gathers more snow when rolling down a hill – so extra subjects are 'collected' and added to the sample.

Theoretical sampling: is a flexible form of sampling that is conducted as the research progresses – cases being selected in order to test out categories and build a theory that explains what is going on. It stops when no new categories emerge.

Triangulation: the use of a range of different methods to offer different angles on the same problem.

Verstehen: explanation by 'understanding' people's meanings – the attempt to 'interpret' the motives and intentions behind subjects' behaviour in social settings.

Vulnerability: a source of weakness in a research subject that can increase the risk of them coming to harm.