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FEMINIST RESEARCH ETHICS

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Helen is dying of breast cancer. Facing her own mortality uncertainly, she struggles with how to help her young children through this experience. A few miles away a research ethics board hesitates about approving a study of the relationship between dying parents and young children. Approaching people at their most vulnerable to request consent to study them and their family seems crass at best. How could the risk of intrusion possibly balance any benefit from what might be learned?

Ethics and moral theory are about making judgments, especially judgments informed by some explicit framework. Feminism and the varieties of feminisms themselves constitute such moral and ethical frameworks because they each represent value positions on the experiences and places of women around the world. I agree with the pragmatist feminist Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996) that all feminisms seek to improve the lot of women. Making gender a basic category of analysis, of course, also revalues women in relationship to men and leads to interrogating the categories of sex and gender themselves (Butler, 1990). As Tong (1998)

emphasizes, feminisms vary in how women's revaluation, empowerment, and emancipation ought to be formulated, accomplished, and assessed. Liberal feminists are said to advocate social reform of existing social arrangements, socialist and Marxist feminists advocate restructuring society, and so forth.

In this chapter, I explore the development of feminist research ethics over the past several decades in the context of two influences: the increasing worldwide attention to responsible conduct of research and feminist ethics more generally. Feminist ethics developed in part as an explicit challenge to conventional patterns of Western epistemology and ethics and thus has its roots in two feminist projects. The first is work by psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and philosophers such as Nel Noddings who have formulated an ethic of care believed to better characterize the moral decision making of females than the modernist variety of Western moral theories centered in abstract principles. This project posits differences between how men and women conceptualize and practice ethics and morality. The second feminist project, discussed more fully in other chapters in

Author's Note: I want to acknowledge the assistance of Youngsek Kim in collecting material for this manuscript and the critical questions and generous care provided by Sharlene Hesse-Biber throughout its preparation. The work has benefited enormously from my mentors in philosophy, Victoria M. Davion and Beth F. Preston, who have no responsibility for any of my philosophical errors and misconceptions.

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this handbook and treated only tangentially here, is work by feminist social theorists and philosophers who have contributed to the efforts of poststructuralists, postcolonialists, and postmodernists to challenge the epistemological assumptions of modern scientific practice. Calling into question presuppositions about the nature of human beings, about the efficacy of positivist and postpositivist research models, and about the relationship of knower to known, these feminist thinkers propose alternative ways to define, create, and assess human knowledge.

HOW CAN SHE JUDGE?

With apologies to Lorraine Code (1991) for adapting the title of her cogent consideration of feminist epistemology, I offer here my own position in the array of feminisms and the approach I took in developing a chapter on ethics in feminist research.

Where do I position myself as a feminist? At times I must admit to an eclectic feminism because my positioning has varied by time, place, circumstances, and people. Having grown up in a conventional 1950s, upwardly mobile, European American family, I have lived an adulthood that some of those family members still consider unconventional: 40 years a teacher, 30 years an academic, childless, divorced twice and married thrice. In my role as a social-foundations-of-education scholar, I aspire to be a multicultural and global feminist. In my role as a qualitative research methodologist, this feminism blends with critical and postmodern perspectives and philosophical pragmatism. Educated as a progressive teacher in the 1960s and radicalized by women's liberation in the 1970s, I view change and continuity as the result of the dynamic dialectic among individuals in their ongoing and ever-changing groups, communities, and collectivities.

How does any of this qualify me to comment on feminist research ethics and to make feminist ethical judgments? My preparation as a scholar was in educational research from an anthropological and ethnographic perspective. I have been conducting and teaching qualitative research from a feminist perspective—sometimes explicit and other times tacit—for 30 years. For the past 15 of those 30 years, I have

served on my university's institutional review board, the human subjects research review committee for U.S. universities, the same board that decided to approve the study of dying mothers and their young children. At the start of the new century I won a year's support to study philosophy, working principally with a feminist ethicist and an epistemologist with feminist leanings. Writing this chapter has provided me an opportunity to synthesize several literatures: feminist theory, feminist social research, feminist research methods, qualitative research methods and design at its many intersections with feminism, general research ethics, feminist ethics within the general area of ethics, and moral theory from philosophy. The material that I cite throughout the chapter reflects both general reading in these areas and the results of specific searches on feminist research ethics.

Finally, I offer some comments about what I think I have learned about ethics over the years. First, ethics at best are frameworks that guide decision making. They are not rules, regulations, or laws. Even ethicists who claim absolute values struggle with how those values apply in any given situation. What makes ethical decisions difficult is that several competing "goods" may be at stake or several simultaneous "bads" are to be avoided. I may arrive at an adequate answer, but it is rarely ideal. Second, a review of a research plan for protection of human participants provides only input from other researchers on obvious problematic issues; it does not guarantee that the researcher will have no further ethical challenges. Third, feminist values of whatever kind provide us with ethical frameworks for our decision making, but we must still prioritize those values and decide how they are at play in any given situation.

FEMINISM AND ETHICS

Two scholars, Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, epitomize the challenge of 20th-century feminism to modernism's principle-based models of moral theory. Although many others have contributed to a relationship-based ethics, Gilligan and Noddings are responsible for producing what are now recognized as alternative feminist approaches to the European frameworks organizing ethics around such principles as rights,

duties, virtues, and consequences (Tong, 1993). In this section I describe their orientations as presented in two seminal texts and compare and contrast their ideas to previous moral theory, moral development theory, and some of the philosophical premises underlying these ideas.

A Gendered Moral Development

Working with Lawrence Kohlberg and collecting interviews on moral decision making herself, Gilligan (1982) reported consistent empirical patterns of differences between the reasoning of the men she studied and that of the women. She rejected Kohlberg's idea of universally invariant stages of development for a developmental model that accommodates the differing patterns of men and women, pointing out that Kohlberg had selected white, middle-class males for his work.

Kohlberg's Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), in the mid-20th century, following up with Jean Piaget's notions of moral decision making as a developmental process from simpler to more complex, formulated a theory to explain how people reason through their ethical choices (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). He believed that all people mature through six invariant stages of moral decision making as they grow up. The six stages of moral development are interdependent with parallel development of cognitive abilities, and some people never reach the highest stages of functioning. Kohlberg grouped the six stages of moral reasoning in three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. These levels represent a maturation in concern from the self, to the community, and to an abstracted all or universal. According to Kohlberg, only a few people reach the final postconventional stage, the universal ethical principle orientation where individuals make moral decisions on the basis of principles they have adopted for their own, such as the Golden Rule.

Relationship Versus Principle

At both the conventional and postconventional levels, Kohlberg saw people making decisions on the basis of rules, laws, and principles.

Women consistently scored lower on his measures of moral decision making because maintaining and fostering relationships were central to their responses. His premise that the most ethical person acts from universally applicable rights or virtues or obligations is consistent with the modernist assumption that human behavior, including ethical imperatives, is governed by universal laws. However, Gilligan insisted that women's most sophisticated moral decision making was based on the value for relationship, not the value for principle. Contingencies such as gender challenge the possibility of universality in human behavior and thus undermine expectations for certainty and predictability in human activity.

Gilligan explains the differences between how men and women make moral decisions and accounts for overlaps in their maturation by relying on psychodynamic (Chodorow, 1978) and psychodevelopmental theories (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978) of gender. Males and females often have different patterns of early experiences in the family, centering on attachment and separation, and hence may view the world differently. She supplements this framework with a sociohistorical approach in considering how differential experiences and views may have developed in 19th- and 20th-century U.S. society.

Women, according to Gilligan, begin their moral development interviews by asking more questions about the details of a decision, especially probing for the human relationships involved. As they reason through their choices and the justifications for these choices, they focus on relationships among people and not just the rules, norms, or laws that might operate in a given situation. Although aware of fairness as one priority in an ethical dilemma, women more commonly than men privilege the value of caring. They ask, "Does the decision indicate people's caring for one another?" rather than merely "Is the decision fair to everyone?" Among women, relationships are more likely to be conceptualized as connected networks or webs of reciprocities than as rule-governed hierarchies of authority and obedience among separate individuals.

Gilligan formulates women's decision making as maturing through three stages according to how women think through their views of

selfishness and responsibility. An initial focus on the self and on self-interested decisions where the good is what is good for the individual is succeeded by a focus on others and on *selfless* decisions where the good is what is good for the individual's network or web of others. In the third stage, women recognize a responsibility to self as well as others and seek to make decisions where the good is a caring choice for everyone that allows networks of relationships to be maintained. As the individual struggles to balance self with other, the conformity and desire to be "good" of the middle stage develops into a desire for honesty and truth in the third stage. In the third stage, women critically examine their personal needs for care and compassion, assess intentions and consequences independent of how they might be viewed by others, transform their notion of reciprocity into an understanding of interdependence, and come to a sense of responsibility and integrity for their choices. Gilligan concludes that balancing rights and duties is the challenge for all adults, male and female, but that men and women formulate these values and how to prioritize them differently. Individuals learn that the ideals of care and fairness can never be achieved fully for everyone in any particular decision, but that care, responsibility, fairness, and rights all enter the mix when autonomous choices are to be made.

Both Kohlberg and Gilligan show that the competing normative moral theories of rights, duties, consequences, and such come alive in alternatives when people are making real ethical choices. What Gilligan does, however, is challenge some of the philosophical premises underlying Kohlberg's more rigid and narrow view of moral decision making. In her 1982 text, Gilligan argued against privileging the abstract over the concrete, the principle over the relationship, the absolute over the relative, the universal over the particular, the objective over the subjective, and the cognitive over the affective. She discussed real people in their material worlds, making decisions by trying to achieve multiple values and make wise choices for satisfying lives. These decisions undermine such assumed binaries as objective and subjective or even absolute and relative and reveal them more as ideal, if contradictory, states to which we aspire but which we never reach. Such

challenges to philosophical premises embedded in Gilligan's work were approached more directly by Nel Noddings in her 1984 formulation of caring.

An Ethic of Care

Noddings begins by observing that contemporary ethics has been dominated by choices over the right normative principle, whether rights, justice, consequences, or something else, and by a focus on logical reasoning believed to contribute to making decisions based on the right principle. She calls these "the language of the father." She proposes introducing into ethics the "mother's voice." The feminine approach to ethics Noddings endorses is rooted in the relationship of caring and being cared for. In a recent edition of her text (2003), she emphasizes that "relations, not individuals, are ontologically basic" to ethical decisions (p. xiii). When caring must be prescribed as an obligation or duty, then the relation is with social expectations and not the other, not the *thou*, and what Noddings calls natural caring is diverted into something like the virtue principle: People behave in a caring manner because that is the *right* thing to do.

Noddings labels her endeavor a "practical ethics" conceptualized from what she believes women commonly do when faced with ethical dilemmas. Although they may consider principles and may reason through decisions, women consider the feelings involved and the relationships among the people in the situation. The caring relationship involves the *one-caring* and the *cared-for* in an interaction to which both contribute, but often asymmetrically. The one-caring, a generic *she* in Noddings's account, acts from the satisfaction of experiencing the feeling of care and from an interest, absorption, or engrossment in the *cared-for*, Noddings's generic *he*. The motive to care comes from previous experiences of being cared for and caring. It is an affective aspiration lodged in relationship rather than a pursuit of some principle, such as fairness or virtue.

Although caring is a feeling accessible to all, judgments based on caring are particular to a given situation and may not be applicable to other situations where the particulars are different. Here, Noddings rejects the binary of

objectivism and relativism by noting how both may operate in any given circumstances. Likewise, she notes that she depends on intuitionism and emotivism as well as rationality to build her case for the ethic of caring—an eclectic mix that refuses only absolutism. Caring, according to Noddings, is a commitment to the development of another.

An ethic of care begins with what Noddings (1984) believes is common to all humans, “a longing for goodness” (p. 27). It relies on the capacity for empathy, a receptiveness to the experience of another that is both affective and cognitive. Like Gilligan, she prefers a psychodynamic explanation for caring, finding its source in the early development of the child in the family, but she precludes neither biological nor social conditions as contributing to it. Men as well as women develop the capacity to care, but Noddings views caring as the predominant response of women to ethical decisions.

She then takes the human commitment to care as a framework for an *ethical ideal* that guides decision making. The ethical ideal is an image people have of themselves as the one-caring, whose priority is to maintain relationship, “guided in what we do by three considerations: how we feel, what the other expects of us, and what the situational relationship requires of us” (p. 46). The ethical ideal is less a virtue than an internalization of people’s selves in their best caring experiences. Conventions and other social norms can be helpful in setting boundaries for care, but moral decision making is guided by caring and by the affective and cognitive requirements for caring. Caring is what Noddings calls a “constrained ideal,” riddled with the guilt aroused from the necessity of selecting among competing priorities and from facing the conflicts inherent to everyday living, but sustained by the joy of positive feelings from and intense engagement with another.

Thus, both Noddings and Gilligan shift the focus of ethics from principles and argumentation to relationships and exploration of particulars. Neither gives up principles and arguments because consideration of both is necessary for deciding what is in the best interest of those in relationship and for weighing the conditions and particulars that contribute to competing priorities. The traditions of principle-based, Western

ethical thought are present in the feminist approach to ethics exemplified by these two scholars, but they are framed differently. These traditions contribute to alternative ways of formulating what is positive in a relationship, rather than as standards to emulate in decision making. Noddings’s philosophical assumptions, similar to the epistemological contributions of such philosophers as Bordo (1987) and Code (1991), are inclusive and multidimensional, resisting such binaries as objective and subjective, absolute and relativistic, for a more faceted consideration of what is at play in the assumptions about how we experience the world and develop knowledge that underlie how we make ethical choices (see the chapters in Part I).

Noddings and Gilligan together offer a feminist ethic based in relationship that challenges the principled ethics of rights, justice, consequences, and such. Interpreted by some as suggesting essentialist assumptions that reduce human behavior to the unchangeable determinism of genetic sex typing (cf. Fuss, 1989, for an antiessentialist argument on the positive contributions of essentialism to feminist thought), both scholars argue that patterns of difference need not mean mutually exclusive thinking and action; both also emphasize the complicated and socially embedded nature of moral decision making (cf., however, Lloyd’s [1996] challenge to the dichotomy underlying the separation of thought from emotion, of reason from intuition, in both conventional ethics and relational ethics). Their formulations of an ethic of care have since been refined and elaborated by others (e.g., Brabeck, 1989).

But how does their thinking contribute to a feminist *research* ethic? To address this question, I first summarize the development of a tradition of ethics for research practice. My focus on the United States is intended as one case among the cases worldwide of concerns for ethical research practice, not as the only way societies and scholars have developed research ethics. I argue later that the principled orientation to research ethics as it has developed in the United States in the past quarter century has been challenged and, in some cases, has been reformulated by feminist ethics—by the concern with relationship, particularity, constraint, and inclusion.

RESEARCH ETHICS IN THE UNITED STATES

Throughout the 20th century, a collection of established status hierarchies were challenged, and in many cases the authority of these structures was overturned. Political colonialism was dismantled; ethnic and racial civil rights movements around the world won civil liberties and political participation for many; various worldwide women's movements challenged and even overturned patriarchal structures. In Western societies, one of the hierarchies so challenged was the subject-researcher relationship. An ethic of authority, where researchers decided what was best for those they studied, has been replaced by a participatory ethic, where researchers' plans are scrutinized by colleagues before being reviewed by potential participants, who are expected to make their own free and informed decisions about consenting to the research.

Consequently most discussions of ethics in social science and professional research focus on who is being studied—the human subjects, participants, or coresearchers. How people are sought, studied, and recompensed for research studies became such a crucial ethical issue in the 20th century that nations such as the United States developed federal guidelines regulating research on human beings. The relationship between the studied and the studier, between the inquirer and those inquired about, is a defining attribute of research in the human, social, and professional sciences, but it has been abstract principle rather than caring that frames most conventional thought about this relationship (e.g., National Research Council, 2003). In this section, I address the ethical problems and controversies that ongoing human relationships pose, but I add to this the ethical implications of formulating research goals and of representing those studied in research reports. Of course goals, relationships, and representations are not mutually exclusive categories of research conduct; they are all interacting facets of the research experience. I separate them for heuristic purposes to ensure that the ethical implications of each are addressed directly.

Ethics of Research Purpose

What is the value of conducting research with human beings? Why should we do this at

all? What is right and wrong about studying people? What is intrinsically moral and ethical about inquiry into human endeavors, and how do we make that decision? Why should feminists distract themselves from more important tasks to conduct research? My argument is that, although different feminists may find different values in their research purposes, all feminists understand that research itself is value laden rather than value neutral and hence are attempting to realize some value through their research.

Some have addressed the question of research value by claiming that knowledge is superior to ignorance—that understanding by itself has intrinsic value. The normative codes adopted by such professional research organizations in the United States as the American Anthropological Association (1998), the American Educational Research Association (2000), the American Psychological Association (2002),¹ and the American Sociological Association (1997) prescribe knowledge generation as good.²

Many feminists likewise value knowledge over ignorance. Much of the initial feminist research in the 1970s, for example, focused on differential patterns of experience and behavior among men and women (e.g., Goetz, 1978; Goetz & Grant, 1988) to demonstrate that scholarship on men could not be assumed to represent knowledge about women. Gilligan's (1982) work in women's moral development exemplifies this pattern.

Another justification for research appeals to nature. Our animal physiology and development revolves around sensing the environment, storing and using the information acquired, and learning from this process. We could argue that, as particular kinds of beings, we are predisposed genetically to seek information, to know, to understand. Although this natural law justification frames much of 19th-century feminist demand for equality of treatment (Traina, 1999), most feminist thought is ambivalent about appeals to biology. This may be changing with such feminist challenges to conventional evolutionary theory as that of Gowaty (1997) and Waage and Gowaty (1997), whose genetic research disputes sexist assumptions about biology in the notion of biology as destiny (cf. Haraway, 1989; Harding, 1998).

Most cultures around the world incorporate in their ideology, their belief systems, some

presumption of an intrinsic value of knowledge—knowledge is good. Here it is a virtue, and that becomes its justification. Or because knowledge is taken as inherently good, we can understand it as a duty to pursue. The Western scientific movement (Harmon, 1996) arising during the European Enlightenment was based on the idea that knowledge is freeing—that it provides an alternative to superstition, to religious orthodoxy, and to feudal authority. This assumption of the intrinsic value of knowledge is deeply embedded in feminist thought. Around the world, women's access to knowledge and to education provides the means to improving their lives (Bloom, 1998; Martin, 1985; Sexton, 1976). DeVault (1999), in her survey of feminism and social research, stresses the value of revealing hitherto invisible knowledge. Throughout her text, she emphasizes not only neglected experiences but also corrective research—studies that provide views of women's experiences that are alternatives to gender-insensitive portrayals.

Nevertheless, cultures often offer the antithesis of knowledge being good as a second attribute. Knowledge can be bad—it can be painful, disillusioning, frightening, and destructive. Fonow and Cook (1991) briefly acknowledge how the intimate and personal nature of what many participants reveal in feminist research may generate knowledge that they and other women might prefer to avoid. This suggests that the intrinsic nature of knowledge may be neither good nor bad—but good or bad according to its content and the purposes to which it is put, in context and in relation to the knower and the known. Knowledge per se then becomes integral to other values, and knowledge as inherently political is a fundamental claim of 20th-century Western feminisms (e.g., Harding, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993).

The idea of an intrinsic value of knowledge is related to the view of knowing and the search for truth as constituting a form of worship. In revealing the mystery of life and of others, the knower is affirming a value beyond self—god, nature, community, or cosmos. However, the value is conceptualized; the search is a way of respecting and honoring god, nature, community, cosmos, or other value beyond self. Among feminists, Mary Daly's (1978) mystical formulation of an essential, natural female beingness

provides such an ethical purpose for the inquirer. Daly's work, generally grouped with radical feminism, embraces gender separatism as best promoting the interests of women, a position some other feminists find objectionable. Such profound disagreements prompt the question of what values are served by the quest for knowledge.

During the Enlightenment, the religious premise—service to god—became a service to the human community, and the idea was transformed into the consequentialist philosophy of right action being what benefits the community. Here, what made knowing and inquiry good were more or less direct consequences—study is good because it promotes more effective behavior or better solutions to human problems (Reason, 1996). Seeking knowledge that fosters social change and the transformation of societies into better places for women to live, where they may “liberate themselves from oppression” (Tong, 1998, p. 280), is arguably one of the common threads among many feminisms. In her characterization of feminist research, Reinharz (1992, p. 240) likewise includes “creation of social change” as one of 10 common themes. However, the question of who benefits from research requires that we also ask who may be harmed by the inquiry and the knowledge produced, and what benefits are privileged at the cost of alternative goods. Feminist researchers vary in how they conceptualize harms and benefits and thus how they frame their studies (see Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, for commonalities among the diversity of feminist social research).

Addressing the cost-benefit issue requires consideration of relationships of power. How power and the distribution of resources are considered among feminists varies, of course. Among Marxist, socialist, and postmodern feminists concern for power differentials is commonly integrated into research goals (Naples, 2003), often with the intention of disturbing or dismantling conventional arrangements of power, as Fine (1992) has attempted in a number of her research endeavors and as many standpoint theorists advocate (e.g., Harding, 2004).

The call for research to serve women's interests has come from many feminist scholars, and justifications for feminist research are as diverse

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as feminism itself, or feminisms themselves. Eichler (1988) proposes nonsexist inquiry, including women's perspectives to achieve a more representative knowledge of humanity, a goal reflecting issues of fairness or justice. However, Du Bois (1983) has sought research that would "address women's lives and experience *in their own terms*, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women" (p. 108), moving the emphasis from creating balance to valuing research on women for its own sake. Here, a concern for justice or fairness, in Eichler's rationale, becomes care for or interest in the particular. In Smith's (1987) formulation, women's positions, experiences, and views of the world are standpoints that lack cultural representation:

The issue is more than bias. It is more than simply an omission of certain kinds of topics. It involves taking up the standpoint of women as an experience of being, of society, of social and personal process that must be given form and expression in the culture, whether as knowledge, as art, or as literature or political action. (p. 36)

Smith and other standpoint theorists (e.g., Harding, 2004) insist that research is always carried out by someone in a particular position and that understanding the purpose of a study requires understanding the position of the researcher.

Like Du Bois and Smith, Lather (1991) denies neutrality in research. She calls for "research as praxis," or research to serve the purposes of social justice, for a feminist research to put gender at the center of inquiry. The intent is both to make the gendered facet of human identity clear in any study of humans and to redress implicit and explicit gender inequities. Lather proposes that, to assure awareness of choice in the values directing any study, feminist researchers must consider and reconsider their own purposes and approaches in self-reflexive critique (cf. Doucet & Mauthner, 2002). Collins (1990) elaborates the feminist agenda by cautioning that studying gender without concern for race and class merely privileges some experiences of marginality without addressing the complexities of human oppression. Longino (1994) likewise

compares racial and gender biases in her discussion of how researchers' assumptions, questions, procedures, and conceptualization of data reflect social values that prejudice the knowledge generated. Roman and Apple (1990) offer a set of questions for feminist researchers to consider in assessing how well their endeavors serve the integrity and purposes of their participants (cf. Grossman et al., 1997; Massat & Lundy, 1997). Finally, Allen and Baber (1992) summarize the limitations of goals, such as those voiced by feminists, that seek to transform the lives of others—risks of homogenizing diversity among women, of co-opting or subverting others' visions of themselves and goals for themselves, of losing public relevance in overemphasizing the personal, of trading the universal for the particular. Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1991), for example, in their study of women's entry and reentry into the labor force, found that women participants do not always share researchers' desires for their emancipation.

Feminist researchers from a variety of disciplines have tried to assure that their studies serve women's purposes by including participants in the formulation, planning, conduct, and analysis of the work. Some scholars may formulate this as a kind of feminist participatory action research (PAR), but others consider it integral to the feminism they practice (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Fine (1992), for example, builds a strong case that conventional and interpretive research, however much influenced by feminist perspectives, cannot relieve women's oppression as effectively as does activist participatory feminist research.

Participatory feminist research has had mixed success, depending on research participants' interest in and commitment to the endeavor. As might be expected, this varies greatly. For example, Seibold's (2000) study of the experience of menopause of single midlife women was assured some value for women because she herself had experienced menopause as a single middle-aged woman and because participant concerns guided her selection, collection, and analysis of information. Paradis (2000), on the other hand, had not experienced the homelessness she wanted to study in an urban setting, and she details the variety of issues that feminist professionals face when trying to

plan a study both *on* and *for* homeless women. McGraw, Zvonkovic, and Walker (2000) increased interest in their study of work and family life among Northwest fishing families by adding to their objectives a goal specified by their female participants that could be construed as antifeminist by some. However, both this study and another by Skelton (2001) of female youth in Wales indicate how researchers must prioritize even feminist goals. Both studies show researchers focusing on how women want to view goals they themselves formulate, regardless of how well these goals fit a particular feminist agenda.

Ironically, feminist principles or policies may or may not foster feminist care. Patai (1991) believes that the undeniable and inevitable inequities between researchers and those they study make unavoidable a certain level of exploitation in research. She counsels humility in our claims to benefit others and courage to continue research that is ethical enough without being ethically perfect (cf. Gillies & Alldred, 2002).

In this section, I have explored what I have called the ethics of research purpose. Feminist scholars from the spectrum of feminisms have formulated their research purposes for the values they seek to realize, and these are ethical choices. The ethics of principle, especially social justice, and the ethics of care have been the predominant rationales used by feminist researchers to justify their endeavors. Feminist research in the 1970s and 1980s, with its focus on sex differences, was more explicitly concerned with equity *per se*. We sought to expose inequalities in resources and power and to discredit claims that women were somehow lesser men. More recent feminist research, informed by Gilligan, Noddings, and others, has been more preoccupied with a responsive research that attends to the goals of participants.

However, the goals and objectives of research are only one facet of the ethical issues in research. Feminists and other emancipatory theorists share additional concerns. What interests are served and what are ignored or imperiled in a particular study? Who will have access to the knowledge produced, who decides this, and how is it decided? Who gets to be the inquirer and who is the inquired about? What

balances of resources and decision making do these roles represent? These questions are addressed in part by consideration of the researchers' roles and interactions with those researched. Feminists have been at the forefront of challenging conventional researcher roles and interactions with those researched, just as they have been at the forefront of challenging the neutrality of research purpose.

Ethics of Research Roles and Conduct

In the past 30 years ethical codes provided by the U.S. government and various U.S. professional groups have regulated the participation of people in research studies. Such codes have set parameters for the conduct of research that constrain all scholars, and the codes themselves may be challenged by emerging feminist practices. The current professional standards of research conduct toward study participants have been influenced by 20th-century transgressions of human rights, neglect of respect for others, and violations of conventional standards of decency in the United States and elsewhere (Jones, 1981; War Crimes Tribunal, 1947; World Medical Association, 1975). The Kantian ethical imperative (Tong, 1993) that people be treated as ends, rather than as means, was ignored in the name of research time and again over the course of the 20th century.

The National Research Act, a U.S. law passed in 1974, resulted in the development of a set of principles, summarized in the Belmont Report, governing human participation in research studies: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Medical and Behavioral Research, 1979). These principles frame a code of conduct requiring informed consent of those studied, assessment of the balance of risk to benefit in any research, and fairness in selection of human participants. This is the guide used around the United States by the institutional review boards (IRBs) charged with the protection of human subjects of research by reviewing and approving research proposals. Its focus is on what happens during the period when data are collected. Although beneficence requires researchers to consider the morality of the research itself—Will the presumed benefits

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outweigh any harm to participants?—the emphasis is on the people directly involved. Likewise, the justice principle is often interpreted to mean justice for those involved, rather than justice more broadly; this may be changing as concerns have increased about funding for offshore research in circumstances less regulated than in the United States.

Much of the initial feminist commentary on research relationships occurred within the same time frame—the 1980s and into the early 1990s—that IRBs were being set up around the United States. I believe that feminist researchers were responding, in part, to the same climate of criticism of conventional research practice and policy (Barnbaum & Byron, 2001) that prompted governmental intervention: concern over a proliferation of research studies that manipulated and endangered people.

The feminist response to protection based on principle is a challenge to the assumed division between who is the researcher and the knower and who is the researched or the known. The principles themselves may be inoffensive, even desirable, given our history of research abuses, but they assume a relationship and an ethics governing relationship that many feminist scholars have found problematic (e.g., Edwards & Mauthner, 2002; England, 1994; Robertson, 2000). An initial challenge to the researcher as detached, protective expert is Oakley's (1981) classic comment on interviewing. In a study of expectant mothers, Oakley found herself restricted by expectations of distance and detachment from her participants and especially hampered by the asymmetry of the interviewer as the questioner and the respondent as the answerer. She found these expectations contradictory to her commitment to caring about the women as individuals, to establishing authentic relationships with them, and to offering whatever she knew that might improve their lives (cf., however, Oakley's [2000] reconsideration of the deeper gender assumptions underlying such dichotomies as qualitative and quantitative research). Stacey (1991) took this argument further, finding that fieldwork requires researchers to misrepresent themselves and to manipulate participants. Her second issue with a feminist ethnography is that the product, the ethnography, is a representation of participants and their

lives that is ultimately controlled by the researcher. I elaborate on the latter concern in the next section.

In 1981, Oakley found the conventional research *relationship* unfeminist, but a decade later, Stacey questioned whether conventional research itself might be unfeminist (however, cf. Kirsch, 1999, pp. 42–43, for how the vagaries of ordinary relationships are inevitable in research relationships too, and Wolf, 1996, for how research conventions may be used to further feminist efforts in fieldwork). Between these positions are efforts of many feminist researchers to reform the exploitative hierarchy of the researcher and the researched, and these efforts have affected a generation of feminist practice (Romy, 1996). Fisher (2000), for example, endorses a process that brings research participants into the moral decision making such that the ethics of any study may be considered not only by researchers and peer review boards, but also by those to be studied.

What happens when feminist researchers strive to put these policies of reciprocity into practice? As might be expected, this varies. Gatenby and Humphries (2000), in their PAR with Maori participants in higher education, report a level of success that may have been fostered by a study of women educating themselves in ways they themselves selected. Knight (2000) similarly engaged members of an education community to improve and to document their work with diverse communities and thus drew on participants' own aspirations in framing her research. On the other hand, Morris-Roberts (2001) was challenged to maintain equity in her relationships with the teenage girls she was studying when she began to observe some of them bullying others and felt impelled to intervene. In another study of young women, Morris, Woodward, and Peters (1998) also report being challenged for their affiliation among the participants in the study. These studies suggest that reducing the ethical tensions of unequal status may only open the way to the ethical dilemmas of living among peers. Choices in affiliation are complicated further when the researcher is operating across levels of institutional status, as Weinberg (2002) reports in a study of a facility for single mothers in Ontario. She was pressed to balance her allegiance between the female

clients and the female staff. How ethical decisions may vary according to the differing interests of diverse research participants and the variety of contexts researchers may encounter is illustrated well by Vivat's (2002) ethnographic study of a hospice in Scotland; Vivat uses the notion of "situated ethics" as a contrast with a principle-based "detached ethics."

Robertson's (2000) study of bulimia among adult women indicates other issues when studying individuals from an assumed position of equity. First, as a recovered bulimic, she notes the researcher's care of self as part of a responsibility to protect everyone in a research endeavor, echoing both Gilligan's and Noddings's emphasis on self-care as an indication of maturity. Second, she found that sharing data and results with some participants put them at risk of psychological distress that contributing information had not. Third, a request from a participant to interview the researcher about her own experience with bulimia permitted Robertson a view of her ethical practice she had not previously had. Finally, like Patai (1991), Robertson emphasizes the ethical considerations in ending the research relationship. This is yet another power difference between researchers and their participants.

Intimate, equitable relationships pose ethical dilemmas that distant, hierarchical relationships may avoid (see Avis, 2002). Birch and Miller (2002) and Duncombe and Jessop (2002) report experiences with attempting to put their feminist principles into practice that indicate the pitfalls and hazards of all human relationships. Bingley (2002) suggests incorporating approaches from psychotherapy into research practice so as to better address these pitfalls and hazards. De Laine (2000) provides extensive examples of the assault on a researcher's psyche such difficulties create. Wolf (1996) discusses the disadvantages that fieldworkers who are members of a field community encounter because of the conflicts between their insider role and their researcher role and stresses what she considers as power differentials between researchers and participants that complicate friendships in the field. What all these examples suggest is that moving from a codified and principle-based set of ethical standards to an ethic of care does not resolve ethical dilemmas.

The principle-based ethics of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice helps researchers

to consider those they are studying as fellow human beings with their own goals, priorities, and agendas. They aid feminist researchers, for example, in balancing feminist agendas with those claimed by the women we may be studying. What principle-based ethics do not do is address the situation-specific quality of human relationships and interactions. The ethic of care provides a systematic model for an engaged and reciprocal relationship with research participants. It gives us a set of priorities for decision making that takes into account the specifics of who we are while we study ourselves and our similar-to-different others (Gluck & Patai, 1991a). Nevertheless, feminist ethnographer Bell (1993), who summarizes her development over a period of years from a "naïve feminist empiricist stance" to an appreciation of how the politics of feminism and power differentials operate in field situations, cautions that "feminist ethnography opens a discursive space for the 'subjects' of the ethnography and as such is simultaneously empowering and destabilizing" (p. 31).

Although the ethic of care permits us to judge the quality of our researcher roles and human interactions in a research study, it does not eliminate our ethical dilemmas. The challenges of research remain, the asymmetries created by the different interests of researchers, participants, and even researcher-participants are inevitable, and unanticipated issues may plague researchers who have added new sets of expectations to their notions of ideal research practice. The principle of respect for persons that I discussed previously as guiding U.S. informed consent may be a less demanding ethical precept for research conduct than is the ethic of care, which demands that we acknowledge a relationship of whatever kind we seek. To the extent that an ethic of care becomes the major influence on our research conduct, our responsibilities are much greater (Gluck & Patai, 1991b). Publishing and otherwise presenting or disseminating the research adds to the levels of complexity in ethical decision making. I turn to this next.

Ethics of Representation

The ethics of representation is the good or ill that results from how participants are

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represented in publications, presentations, and other reports of research. Feminists have a particular stake in the ethics of representation because of what many of us believe to have been misrepresentations of women and our experiences. The androcentric scholarship that feminist thinkers such as Code (1991, 1995) find so objectionable both ignores and distorts women's lives and views (cf. Richardson, 1997). Feminists have led the way in challenging how people are represented in the human and professional sciences. Will research participants be distressed when they learn how they are described, characterized, and interpreted? Will they agree with how they are represented? Will individuals be placed at risk from others in their situation or from the general public by how they are presented? Will other people—other teenagers, others suffering from bulimia, other single mothers, for example—face difficulties in their lives because of how those who share their attributes are represented?

The feminist ethic of care provides moral justification for the concern expressed by scholars such as Hopkins (1993) for relationships with research participants and for the desire to support their pride and avoid embarrassing them. Another ethical challenge to feminist representations is the assumption of homogeneity among women whose points of view and experiences vary considerably by race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation, and their ability-disability conditions. Having objected to being portrayed as no different than men in social science research, white women scholars have been challenged by scholars of color, by queer theorists, and by others with divergent points of view to honor, respect, and celebrate the diversity of women's experiences and views of the world (e.g., hooks, 1984; Lewin, 1995).

In a now-classic formulation about representing others in what we write and present about them, Fine (1994) struggles with the conventions, positioning, and hierarchies that produce a mostly offstage author writing a tidy image of players. The writing itself, who writes whom, creates imbalances in power and an inevitable "othering" of participants. Fine advocates addressing this issue by "working the hyphens." She does this by presenting material that defies stereotypes and conventional images of people,

material that critiques those who create these conventional images, and material that calls for direct action to rectify inequities. She struggles to address our multiple, interacting identities as women, individuals whose abilities, ethnic and racial backgrounds, religious affiliations, and sexual orientations vary. She advocates studying the powerful as well as the powerless.

Fine stresses that although our identities are fluid and changeable, they nevertheless associate us more with some in our communities than with others. These groups and affiliations can be caricatured and stereotyped in ways that hamper and hurt both individuals and communities. Even more important is positioning of self and other at what Fine calls "the hyphen." This metaphor invites the reader to reflect on the self as other and the other as self. How might I write differently about my experiences with my research participants if I write about "we" or if I write about an "I and thou" relationship? The ethics of relationships provide models of connections with those we study. These sources and the other strategies Fine suggests permit us to work the hyphen, to problematize rather than to assume the relationships between researcher and researched (cf. Alldred & Gillies, 2002). Thus, Robertson (2000) is working the hyphen when she agrees to be interviewed by a research participant about her own struggle with bulimia. Stacey (1991) works the hyphen by insisting that feminist ethnographers take responsibility for an ethically imperfect research practice.

Wolf's (1992) representation of a young mother's unconventional behavior in a village in Taiwan through three different genres—field notes, a conventional ethnographic report, and a short story—was intended to illustrate many of the complications of the ethics of representation. She discusses the "double responsibility" of "feminists doing research on women," responsible both to their women participants and to the broader world of women whose lives we hope to improve. She cautions that power is not merely held by researchers over participants but by participants who make their own decisions about what to share with, withhold from, or distort for investigators. Having shown the multiple and competing views of one woman's interactions with her neighbors, Wolf nevertheless worries about the academic consequences to feminist

scholars of being forthright about acknowledging the power that participants may exert.

Some feminist researchers attempt to address the ethics of representation by limiting their studies to collaborative research or PAR or to such personal endeavors as autoethnography (Ellis, 2004) and experimental ethnography (Visweswaran, 1994). Others ask research participants to “vet” or otherwise edit or approve data and even interpretations that involve them. Disputed material may be omitted or disagreements about material may be included in reports. Reports and presentations may be composed so as to include multiple voices and commentators—researcher, researched, and other stakeholders (Blakeslee, Cole, & Conefrey, 1996). Researchers Kirsch (1999) and Mortensen and Kirsch (1996) examine the multiple ways researchers have struggled with the moral and ethical issues of representation and conclude that every alternative has its strengths and limitations.

In a study of women activists on both sides of the abortion debate, Ginsburg (1993) considers the issue of representation as broader than the particular individuals directly involved in her study; she uses the notion of polyphony, developed by the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, to generate a multifaceted and heterogeneous presentation of her research. Zeni, Prophete, Cason, and Phillips (2001) similarly apply Collins’s (1990) analysis of African American feminists to represent multiple perspectives held by individuals in diverse communities. In contrast, Mills (2002) finds the authentic representation of even a single individual to pose a challenge to the skills and knowledge of researchers—how to move from autobiography to biography in a way faithful and respectful of the subject. Jacobs (2004) recounts a different issue in representation in her study of the experiences of females during the Holocaust where the death of those she studies does not relieve her sense of ethical obligation to them. The tension expressed by all these researchers is underscored by their relationships to those they study. In representing their participants, they are also representing themselves and facets of themselves that they share with the participants. Similarity and difference merge, and the ethics of research become the ethics of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

What I have tried to do in this chapter, first, is show the connections and disconnections between the Western approach to ethics developed in academic philosophy, especially as it applies to women, and the challenge to that ethics posed in the 20th century by feminist ethicists. Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings challenged the privileging of principle-based decision making, and they reconceptualized moral theory to include the ethics of relation. Second, I have linked this to general research ethics as applied by many social scientists and to ethical practices developed among researchers using an explicitly feminist approach. Although many feminist researchers continue to be guided by such ethical principles as justice, most have integrated an ethic of care and relationship into their conduct of research. In this chapter, I have examined how these two frameworks play out in how we feminists formulate our research purposes, how we work with others in the research, and how we represent those we study in our research reports.

However, feminist ethics do not resolve moral dilemmas in research. Women studying women, about women or with women, for the purpose of relieving women’s oppression and reconfiguring androcentric knowledge into a more inclusive understanding of “*huwomany*,” complicates the research process. This is the pattern attested to by many of the feminist researchers I have cited here. Feminist ethics likely generate as many issues as they may help either avoid or address. This is particularly evident in trading a detached, distant, and hierarchical stance for an intimate, close, and equitable position. Distance and intimacy create their own problems.

Even within sets of coherent guidelines lie troubling tensions. The feminist project is deeply grounded in the principle of justice. Women’s rights have traditionally been justified by the values of equity and equality. The ethic of care and relationship does not preclude consideration of principle but may provide a parallel formulation of human rights and responsibilities to one another. Nevertheless, philosophers such as Jean Grimshaw (1991) caution feminists about the implications of claiming an ethics that may place women back into a gendered ghetto.

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Similarly the conventional binaries of universal and particular, relativism and absolutism, objectivism and subjectivism, realism and idealism—like that of man and woman—may no longer adequately represent conceptual positions that admit subjectivity to objective study or locate categories of particulars as universals. Feminist ethicists (e.g., Held, 1987) and feminist epistemologists (e.g., Moody-Adams, 1997) are rejecting the view of ethical frameworks as either inevitably universal, absolute, objective, and real or alternatively particular, relative, subjective, and ideal. The ethics of relationship that Gilligan and Noddings have pioneered are grounded in the subjective, the particular, and the relative, but neither scholar denies the relevance of a universal principle like justice.

Likewise the formal and static roles once assumed in research designs have given way to circumstances where the researcher may research herself, where she may be researching others while others research her, or where research itself becomes part and parcel of everyday public and private life—no longer limited to the purview of an expert with esoteric training unavailable to ordinary people (see Benhabib, 1992). However, even with such an expansion and democratization of inquiry, ethical dilemmas and issues will still arise. Balancing the interests of individuals and communities is an ongoing human enterprise. Ameliorating old oppressions and preventing new forms of exploitation is a global endeavor. Satisfying what can be competing needs for knowledge of and action for the oppressed and exploited in situations where people disagree among themselves about what is happening to them makes ethical choices complex. Attending to both secular and sacred human interests when people dispute which of these should prevail is an ongoing challenge. What the ethics of relationship have added to the ethics of principle is a complementary framework that permits a different layer of consideration in these thorny difficulties.

NOTES

1. The American Psychological Association has also published an anthology on feminist ethics in psychology (Brabeck, 2000).

2. Noticeably missing from this list is the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA). NWSA does have an ethics policy (see www.nwsa.org/govern/policy.php#ethics, retrieved December 14, 2005), but it focuses on relationships among members and says nothing directly about research ethics.

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