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## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

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## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

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### Contents

#### FOREWORD

Dr Janet Lewis AcSS

#### SYMPOSIUM 1: PRINCIPLES

**Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research Discussion - 'Stimulus' Paper**

Dr David Carpenter, University of Portsmouth

**Response (1) to 'Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research'**

Professor Martyn Hammersley AcSS, The Open University

**Summary of Symposium 1**

Dr Nathan Emmerich, Queen's University Belfast

#### SYMPOSIUM 2: VALUES

**Responsible to Whom? Obligations to Participants and Society in Social Science Research - 'Stimulus' Paper**

Dr Matt Sleat, University of Sheffield

**Response (1) to 'Responsible to Whom? Obligations to Participants and Society in Social Science Research'** Professor Rosemary Hunter AcSS, University of Kent and Socio-Legal Studies Association

**Response (2) to 'Responsible to Whom? Obligations to Participants and Society in Social Science Research'**

Professor Kenneth Boyd, University of Edinburgh

**Are We Asked to 'Other' Ourselves? Social Scientists and the Research-ethics Review Process**

Professor Emeritus Will C van den Hoonard, University of New Brunswick

**Summary of Symposium 2**

Dr Nathan Emmerich, Queen's University Belfast

#### SYMPOSIUM 3: STANDARDS

**Developing Standards for Research Practice: Some Issues for Consideration- 'Stimulus' Paper**

James Parry, UK Research Integrity Office

**Response (1) to 'Developing Standards for Research Practice: Some Issues for Consideration'**

Susan V Zimmerman, Executive Director, Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research; (Canadian Institutes of Health Research; Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada)

**Summary of Symposium 3**

Dr Nathan Emmerich, Queen's University Belfast

## INTRODUCTION

Dr Janet Lewis AcSS

The papers presented here are the written output of a series of three symposia held in the spring of 2013 on the topic of *Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research*. The format for each symposium was the same: a main speaker introduced a paper that had been circulated in advance and this was followed by two formal discussants and then participation from the floor. Discussion in groups took place in the afternoon and there was then a brief plenary session. The stimulus paper from each event is reproduced in this publication along with papers from discussants and a summary of each discussion. The proceedings were recorded and the summaries, which have been endorsed by all the participants, were written from these by Nathan Emmerich.

Attendance at the symposia was deliberately restricted to around 40 participants in order to promote good discussion. Over half were representatives of the learned society members of the Academy of Social Sciences. In addition to the speakers, formal discussants and members of the organising committee there were representatives from the Association of Research Ethics Committees (AREC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Health Research Authority (HRA), the Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC), the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and Universities UK (UUK).

The organisers were a working group of four Academicians, Professor Robert Dingwall, Dr Ron Iphofen, Dr Janet Lewis and John Oates, who had a shared interest in seeking to strengthen the ethical practice of social science research. The

aim was to promote the widespread adoption of a common set of ethics principles to augment, rather than replace, existing ethics guidelines and codes of practice.

The idea of developing a social science-wide statement on ethics first arose in February 2009 at a meeting organised by the Academy of Social Sciences and the British Psychological Society to prepare an Academy response to the ESRC consultation on revisions to their Framework for Research Ethics (FRE). This led, through discussions at various conferences, to an exploratory seminar in March 2010, organised by the Academy and AREC, and involving a number of learned societies, on *Ethics principles for social science research*. The idea of exploring a common set of principles covering the conduct of research in the social sciences was endorsed and the Academy was encouraged to pursue it.

The working group was set up in mid-2010 and became involved in preparing a submission to the Rawlins Review of medical research regulation on behalf of the Academy. In early 2011 the group met to discuss how to take forward the principles work but it was not until 2012 that the funding to run the symposia was in place.

The working group and the Academy are extremely grateful to the ESRC, BPS and British Sociological Association (BSA) for their financial support to supplement the Academy's contribution and the Open University and AREC for their moral support and assistance in kind.

## Learned Societies and Organisations Represented at the Symposia

### Learned Societies

Association of Learning Technology (ALT)  
Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA)  
British Academy of Management (BAM)  
British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)  
British Association for International and Comparative Education ((BAICE)  
British Educational Research Association (BERA)  
British Psychological Society (BPS)  
British Sociological Society (BSA)  
British Society of Criminology (BSC)  
British Society of Gerontology (BSG)  
Council for Hospitality Management Education (CHME)  
Joint University Council (JUC)  
Market Research Society (MRS)  
Political Studies Association (PSA)  
Regional Studies Association (RSA)  
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) (RGS)  
Royal Statistical Society (RSS)  
Society of Legal Scholars (SLA)  
Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA)

Society for Studies in Organising Healthcare (SHOC)  
Social Policy Association (SPA)  
Social Research Association (SRA)  
Social Services Research Group (SSRG)  
UK Evaluation Society (UKES)

### Organisations

Academy of Social Sciences  
Association for Practical and Professional Ethics  
Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)  
European Commission, DG Research and Innovation  
Health Research Authority (HRA)  
National Centre for Social Research (Nat Cen)  
Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research (Canada)  
Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC)  
UK Data Archive  
UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)  
UK Universities Ethics Forum  
Universities UK (UUK)

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

### Discussion 'Stimulus' Paper for Symposium I (Principles)

Dr David Carpenter

University Research Ethics Adviser, University of Portsmouth

This paper is intentionally designed to encourage discussion; I hope that I might be forgiven for some departures from normal academic conventions. As this is the first paper in the series I intend to explore some wider issues in the course of responding to the brief, which I take as positing some core generic principles which might be used to inform the ethical conduct of social research. The wider brief assumes that principles and values are distinct but interrelated; I am content to accommodate this assumption but it might be a matter for further debate. I would suggest the following broad areas for wider consideration.

1. Normative ethical theory: Theories of ethics are founded on varying principles, an elucidation of these might help in the identification of potential common, generic principles in social research.
2. Social and political philosophy: It might be useful to consider the importance of contextualisation of research. Social research clearly takes place in social contexts, it might well be that socio-political concepts such as liberty, equality, and justice act as a more effective guide to social research than practical ethics.
3. Scope and application of any putative principles: The construction of a single set of principles aiming to guide the ethical **design**, research ethics **review** and ethical **conduct** of research might be challenging.
4. The focus of ethical review: The current tendency seems to be to focus ethical review on studies rather more than on researchers. Principles which are currently used in ethically reviewing studies are abundant when compared with 'with integrity' which is one of the few explicit expectations of researchers when considering how they should conduct research. Perhaps there might be some value in considering researcher duties in complex social organisations as a source of a set of common generic principles.
5. Cross-disciplinary principles: The background rationale sets the challenge of constructing 'a common set of ethics principles to augment existing guidelines and codes of practice'. There might be scope for considering the possibility of replacing and/or revising existing guidelines; plans to augment them seem rather modest and might be a tactic to duck some of the biggest challenges.

Perhaps the most recent 'theory' to be accepted in general ethics discourse is 'principlism'. It has achieved popularity in professional contexts including research ethics and biomedical ethics. Principlism as a theory and a tool for ethical analysis was developed by Tom Beauchamp and James Childress and used to structure their text *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, now in its sixth edition (2009). Principlism is based on the idea that there are foundational ethical principles which, in themselves, do not stand in need of any further ethical defence

or analysis. Putting matters fairly crudely, they are seen as goods-in-themselves. The principles are broadly used as 'headings' which collectively comprise a framework for ethical analysis. The four principles are Beneficence, Non-maleficence, Respect for Autonomy and Justice (distributive). The use of the four principles is relatively commonplace, particularly in biomedical contexts. Given the statement in the rationale document:

This has left a vacuum for articulated, harmonised and widely supported principles that is at risk of being filled by imposed approaches derived from biomedical research, which are often inappropriate.

I wonder whether a search for principles is wise. Of course, construction of principles and adoption of principlism are distinct but it should be noted that there is a lot of common ground between the principles proposed in March 2010 and those featured in Beauchamp and Childress's list.

Beauchamp and Childress have many critics but the most outspoken is Bernard Gert (1997) and, more recently Stephen Hanson (2009: 77) who highlights the limitations of the principles in a secular, pluralistic society. The main objections are summarised by Gert:

The dominant view in question we have labelled 'principlism.' It is characterized by its citing of four principles which constitute the core of its account of biomedical ethics: beneficence, autonomy, nonmaleficence, and justice. So entrenched is this 'theory,' that clinical moral problems are often grouped (for conferences, papers, and books) according to which principle is deemed most relevant and necessary for solving them. It has become fashionable and customary to cite one or another of these principles as the key for resolving a particular biomedical ethical problem. Throughout much of the biomedical ethical literature, authors seem to believe that they have brought theory to bear on the problem before them insofar as they have mentioned one or more of the principles. Thus, not only do the principles presumably lead to acceptable solutions, but they are also treated by many as the ultimate grounds of appeal.

It would seem self evident that if the continuing aim is to construct principles then there must be a caveat that it would not include any adoption of principlism. I will continue to address the stated aim and use the term 'principles' but it might be worth considering the possibility of moving directly towards a search for common, generic, values.

Less contentious theories include consequentialism and deontology. I don't propose to elucidate the detail of either of these theories; as stated earlier, I propose to identify underlying principles. In the case of the former, morality is measured by the outcomes of actions; contemporary accounts of utilitarianism (a form of consequentialism) posit preference

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

satisfactions (Peter Singer (2011) is probably the best known exponent) as an objective measure of morality. An action (we could substitute 'study') is moral insofar as it brings about the greatest number of preference satisfactions (or the least number of expressions of dissatisfaction) from those affected by it. To grossly over simplify this perspective, it might be seen as a simple matter of social acceptability. An obvious concern is the risk of circularity and contradiction; social research typically focuses on matters such as norms and mores, would the use of 'social acceptability' as a criterion of morality lead quickly to circular, contradictory arguments? It might, but inevitable endeavours to resolve tensions and contradictions could be a pathway to rigorous ethical analysis. I tentatively propose that a simple, but not simplistic, principle that social research ought to be socially acceptable should be considered. The principle would have a further advantage because it invites the question of how it might be measured. Measurement would be readily facilitated by greater involvement of the wider public at all stages of social research. A further principle might be that researchers ought to involve members of the public in the designing, planning, delivery, ongoing monitoring and dissemination of research.

Deontology is frequently contrasted with consequentialism in that it relates the morality of an action to the duties of the moral agent rather than the consequences of the act. Consequentialism is easily criticised on the ground that it could be used to support significant degrees of harm to minorities as long as an action results in the maximisation of benefit for a majority. Deontology is equally criticised on the ground that unwavering adherence to duty could nevertheless lead to significant harm to many as a result; for example it is not difficult to envisage circumstances when a refusal to lie could have devastating consequences. Notwithstanding the differences in the approach that each take, there is no necessary conflict in the outcomes of moral analyses drawing on the respective theories. For example, in most situations telling lies leads to harmful consequences so should be avoided; similarly a duty to not lie generally results in the best consequences. Kantianism in the form of the categorical imperative, is probably the best example of deontology. The categorical imperative demands that we:

act only on that maxim that we can, at the same time, will to be a universal law

In simple terms, it is the golden rule – do as you would be done by. An underlying imperative of universalisability strictly implies that an action is right insofar as the moral agent would be content with others behaving similarly in relevantly similar circumstances. The demands of universalisability and the derived duty to treat people as ends in themselves rather than means to ends, result in a shift from a focus on the moral agent to the social context in which he acts. Kantianism can be extended in recognising that it is the capacity of the rational moral agent to make moral decisions which distinguishes him from other animals and makes him worthy of moral respect.

The Kantian social researcher would be compelled to reflect on the broad issue of social responsibility recognising his duty to meet the demands of the categorical imperative, noting that he or she might, one day, be subject to the principles which guided his or her own research. He or she might equally be subjected to the outcomes of the research in question.

Principles derived from Kantianism might include acting in a socially responsible manner and treating people with respect – as ends in themselves and never means to ends.

The final theoretical perspective I will consider is that of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics focuses on the individual and their duties where those duties are basically a mean position between two vices – the Aristotelian Doctrine of the Mean. Bruce Macfarlane (2009) has developed this perspective into a formalised approach to ethical research. He constructs a framework identifying phases of research enquiry.

## RESEARCH PHASES

Phase	Meaning
Framing	questions, problems, hypotheses, issues, projects, proposals
Negotiating	access, consent, permission, time, support
Generating	data, materials, ideas, inspiration
Creating	results, interpretations, models, concepts, theories, critiques, designs, artefacts
Disseminating	through publication, exhibition, performance
Reflecting	on epistemological and personal learning

He then undertakes an Aristotelian analysis to determine the virtues demanded in each phase.

## THE VIRTUES AND VICES OF RESEARCH

Phase	Vice (deficit)	Virtue	Vice (excess)
Framing	Cowardice	<i>Courage</i>	Recklessness
Negotiating	Manipulativeness	<i>Respectfulness</i>	Partiality
Generating	Laziness	<i>Resoluteness</i>	Inflexibility
Creating	Concealment	<i>Sincerity</i>	Exaggeration
Disseminating	Boastfulness	<i>Humility</i>	Timidity
Reflecting	Dogmatism	<i>Reflexivity</i>	Indecisiveness

Tables from Macfarlane (2009)

Macfarlane then goes on to elaborate the virtues thereby providing clear descriptions of required conduct.



### Living out research virtues

#### Courage

- seeking to challenge one's own presuppositions or conventional wisdom
- developing a project that might not necessarily attract funding or represent a 'fashionable' topic
- pursuing a line of research without undue regard to career and other financial imperatives
- freely admitting when research does not go to plan or when you feel your previous research was factually or conceptually mistaken

#### Respectfulness

- being respectful to others including vulnerable individuals and communities
- being aware of the temptation to take advantage of organisational, social or intellectual power over others
- taking care not to cede too much power to others who may wish to distort the research process for their own ends

#### Resoluteness

- being transparent about circumstances when the extent of data collection or creative endeavour has been compromised from original intentions
- being aware of the temptation to start analysing data or other results before a representative sample or case study has been completed

#### Sincerity

- ensuring that the results of research are based on an accurate representation of all the relevant information collected
- resisting overt or covert pressure from a powerful sponsor or stakeholder to skew results to meet their needs or expectations
- being aware of the temptation to conceal or exaggerate results in order to gain some advantage, either materially and/or to reputation

#### Humility

- fully acknowledging one's intellectual debt to others
- ensuring all research partners are fairly represented in being accorded publication credit corresponding with their relative contribution
- inviting others to challenge your own thinking and/or results

#### Reflexivity

- being self-critical about one's own research findings or personal performance as a researcher

*would also mean selflessly) in recognising their social responsibilities and contribution to the common good by undertaking scientifically worthwhile and valuable research* would appear to be worthy of further consideration.

Putting the common good at the heart of social research raises further interesting ideas with regard to the analysis of the socio-political context in which research takes place. It might be argued that a major shortcoming of biomedical research is its underlying assumption that the overriding guiding principle for all research must be respect for individual liberty. The assumption is reflected in pre-occupations with individual consent, concern for the privacy of individual data and little consideration of the wider interests of society. Perhaps controversially it might be argued that this is a reflection of the consumerist culture fostered by the political New Right under Mrs Thatcher's leadership. In claiming that there is no such thing as society Mrs Thatcher promoted the interests of the individual (and, to be fair, families) above other wider social concerns. Perhaps it is not surprising that the principle of respect for autonomy gained strength in biomedical and research ethics discourse at the time. Few philosophers have had the courage to turn Mrs Thatcher's dictum on its head – 'there is no such thing as an individual, just communities and societies'; to do so would invite accusations of promoting totalitarianism. Communitarian critiques of individual liberalism do make a compelling case for seeing justice as nothing more than some sort of remedial virtue whilst promoting virtues such as love and solidarity which are to be found within communities rather than to be imposed upon them. Although somewhat nebulous, it might be argued that David Cameron's interest in 'Big Society' is a step away from the more selfish aspects of individualism though the cynically disposed might see it more as an attack on state collectivism.

Tensions between prioritisation of individual liberty and the pursuit of the common good might serve to identify further ethical principles. A totalitarian state showing little consideration for individuals would not be acceptable; so why should a libertarian state, preoccupied with individual autonomy, as evidenced in the proliferation of individual rights claims, be any more acceptable. It would seem obvious that there should be a **principle requiring a balance between respecting the needs of individuals and pursuing the overall common good**. Onora O'Neil (2011) has provided a persuasive argument for shifting public health research away from concerns of individual liberty towards a common good:

Work that takes public and global health seriously needs to be anchored in political philosophy, to look beyond informed consent and individual choice, and to ask which interventions are permissible without the consent of those whom they may affect, and which are not. Public health encompasses more than health 'promotion' and 'nudges' – and these too require justification – and even clinical interventions that are directed to individuals presuppose standards, technologies, and structures that cannot be a matter of choice.

It might be argued that O'Neil's analysis provides the ground

Highlighting **researcher virtues as a source of principles** has the effect of shifting the focus from studies to researchers; this has the advantage of prompting an analysis of researcher intentions. It might be reasoned that the virtuous researcher, 'living out' the virtues identified above, would be more inclined toward social responsibility, and social justice; taking social responsibility seriously would require the researcher to ensure that their research was both socially and scientifically valuable.

**A principle requiring researchers to act virtuously (which**

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

for distancing, but not divorcing, social research ethics from contemporary biomedical (research) ethics; her approach to public health research has much in common with the ambitions of social researchers. O'Neil's analysis is derived from sound theory including Rawlsian notions of social justice, (developed from Kantian moral philosophy) and communitarian eschewal of universalism. Further elucidation of these theoretical perspectives is beyond the scope of this paper but might well be useful as the overall project progresses.

A further socio-political issue is evidenced by political shifts as a reaction to Mrs Thatcher's libertarian perspective. 'New Labour' sought to distance itself from both individual liberalism and state collectivism in adopting Giddens's 'Third Way' (1998). Amongst the key elements of the third way is a call to balance rights with responsibilities; its philosophy requires citizens to consider their duties and contributions to the society of which they are part as well as the rights that it might afford them. Individual liberty and privacy should be balanced with a duty to contribute to learning resulting from social research. **A principle of duty might be argued as establishing a default position<sup>1</sup> requiring citizens to contribute to the learning from which they and others might benefit.** In this situation the prevailing idea that citizens should somehow be 'protected' from research becomes much less compelling.

In the introduction to this paper I identified what might be seen as a challenge posed by the aim of constructing a single set of principles guiding the ethical **design**, research ethics **review** and ethical **conduct** of research. I would propose that the principles I have outlined<sup>2</sup> could be used in the ethical analysis of the design and conduct of social research. Principles which might be deployed in undertaking ethical review of research might be derived from those I have identified but there is also a compelling argument that they should either be distinct or supplementary. I am sure that I am not alone in observing that members of research ethics committees often lose sight of ethical issues and become preoccupied with procedural bureaucracy and conformity to imposed standards reflected in various templates such as information sheets and consent forms. Whilst there are numerous codes, declarations and policies directed at ethical

design and conduct of research I am not aware of any that focus specific attention on the ethics of reviewing research as opposed to the review of research for ethical considerations and issues. What virtues should reviewers 'live out'? What principles should reviewers adopt? Would it be possible to develop a foundational, common, generic reviewing tool? I would suggest that addressing these questions might bring the various academic and / or professional disciplines together in the pursuit of a shared objective.

### Notes

- 1 This would obviously be rebuttable.
- 2 I am not claiming principles I have identified to be either necessary or sufficient – this is a matter for discussion in the symposium.

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## Response 1 to 'Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research'

Professor Martyn Hammersley

Education and Social Research, The Open University

David's paper usefully maps out some of the topics, but for me there are a series of prior issues that need to be addressed and that shape my reaction to his argument and to the project behind this symposium.

- a) The first issue concerns the context and function of the task of producing generic principles. David starts from what he takes as his brief, namely the need to posit 'some core generic principles which might be used to inform the ethical conduct of social research' (p 1). I want to know why there is a need for these principles. *What's wrong with the principles we have, and what role are principles being expected to serve?*

Part of the background here, necessarily, are the various regimes of ethical regulation that now operate in the social sciences. My view is that any form of ethical regulation *in this context* is itself unethical, because it damages the quality of research and infringes the legitimate autonomy of researchers, without there being any counterbalancing need for it (the situation is different in some areas of medicine). I won't argue the case for this position here, I've done it elsewhere (Hammersley 2006, 2009; Hammersley and Traianou 2011), but for me it is an important part of the picture.)<sup>1</sup>

- b) A second point concerns what the term 'principle' means. It seems to me that the phrase 'generic principle' involves redundancy. It is in the nature of principles that they are generic, or abstract: it is this which forms the contrast with specific value judgements about particular actions, situations, and people. The Belmont Commission (1979) was very influential in developing an approach to research ethics based on principles. They identified three (or perhaps four): respect for autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence, and justice. I notice that the proposal on which this symposium is based also identifies four principles, though a slightly different selection.

David distinguishes between 'principle' and 'value', though I'm not sure on what grounds. More significant, I think, is that we have a continuum here. Thus, another relevant term, this time identifying a mid-point along the continuum between principles and specific judgements or imperative instructions, is 'policy'. We might think of some professional codes as specifying policies, in some sense.

David distances himself from principlism, though it is not entirely clear how or why. This term has been used in different ways, but it seems to me that the basic idea, in words taken from the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2010: 7), is that 'ethical research conduct is, in essence, the application of informed moral reasoning, founded on a set of moral principles'. Here principles are treated as the foundation from which particular ethical judgements are to be derived, presumably drawing on situational information to indicate their relevance and specific implications. This is, more or less, the process that Beauchamp (2003) refers to as 'specification': 'spelling out where, when, why, how, by what means, to whom, or by whom the action is to be done or avoided' (Richardson 1990: 289). Thus, Beauchamp distinguishes between principles, 'frameworks of particular moralities', which he sees as interpretations of basic principles, and particular moral judgements.

Beauchamp suggests that specification parallels 'the associated method of reflective equilibrium', but there is a significant conflict between Rawls' notion of reflective equilibrium and principlism. Rawls (1993: 8) writes that 'one feature of reflective equilibrium is that it includes our considered convictions at all levels of generality; no one level, say that of abstract principle or that of particular judgements in particular cases, is viewed as foundational'.<sup>2</sup> While, in considering particular issues, Beauchamp comes close to a reflective equilibrium approach, the very label 'principlism' suggests that principles have priority.

We can think of a 'principle' as a statement to the effect that some particular consideration should or must be taken into account. Even in a mild (i.e. non-imperative) form, there are those who reject the very notion of principle, on the grounds that all we can have are situational judgements, perhaps even based on sensibility, that are intrinsically incapable of being captured in general statements or even in formal judgements (MacIntyre 1971: ch 12; Dancy 2004; Cray

2007). Some versions of virtue ethics also come close to this position.

Interestingly, one of the members of the Belmont Commission (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), Albert Jonsen, went on to write a book with Stephen Toulmin which advocated a very different approach from principlism, drawing on the ancient tradition of casuistry (Jonsen and Toulmin 1988). Beauchamp argues that this is not a rival to principlism because all analogical reasoning relies upon assumed norms of relevant similarity. However, in part what we have here is a contrast in view about the nature of moral reasoning, and the character of what is taken as fixed. Most casuists would argue that what should be taken as given in any particular case will often be a matter of judgement rather than of explicit principle, and that there are many more such considerations than four.

My own view is that while ethics must be primarily concerned with situational judgements, principles are useful as a way of summarising and reminding us of the considerations that we need to take into account. However, this function becomes problematic when we are no longer talking about an individual formulating principles to guide her or his behaviour but of some association or community not simply stating its commitments but laying down *regulatory* principles. Here we have to ask: who is setting principles on behalf of whom, with what authority, and with what potential effects?

An issue of some significance here is whether principles are conceived as matters of rational discovery of fundamental truths, as matters to be decided by negotiation among those with different commitments, or as a matter of convention or 'positive law', invented by some association or community, and imposed by a sovereign, individual or collective.

- c) Another important issue concerns whether what is produced is a *system* of principles, such that when the principles are interpreted in particular cases they generate a single, coherent judgement. Or, instead, do we have a plurality of principles that generate conflicting interpretations?

David has drawn attention to the different meta-ethical theories that underpin the sets of ethical principles we find in professional codes: such as deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics.<sup>3</sup> He suggests that 'there is no necessary conflict in the outcomes of moral analyses drawing on the respective theories' (p 3). Yet these approaches are fundamentally at odds as regards the principles on which they rely, and the methods of moral reasoning that they recommend. As a result, they necessarily generate conflicts, which is not to say that their implications are *always* in conflict.<sup>4</sup>

I suggest that no *system* of principles is possible, so that we must find ways of resolving conflicts. In fact, there are conflicts built into single principles: for instance, in



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

respecting one person's autonomy we may be infringing someone else's.

All this counts against any simple appeal to 'the common good', a phrase that David employs later on in his paper (p 6). Any conclusion about what is in the common good will almost certainly involve trading off some people's interests against those of others, both at particular points in time and over time. And an issue that arises here is: who has the authority to do this, in a manner that does not infringe the autonomy of individuals, or of particular communities or organisations?

- d) A final issue I will mention concerns whether any set of principles can capture *all* the various considerations that might be ethically relevant in particular situations. We might call this the question of exhaustiveness. I suggest that no set of principles can be exhaustive: it is not possible entirely to anticipate what could be relevant considerations in particular situations. This is not an argument against formulating principles, but it is an argument against principlism, and ethical regulation based on principles. Incidentally, this relates to another fundamental issue, which concerns the definition of 'ethics' and 'ethical' and its boundaries with, say, 'politics' and 'political' (see Hammersley and Traianou 2012a: ch 1).

### Conclusion

The implications of my points here are to suggest that principles cannot provide the strong guidance role that the background proposal requires them to play. They are no more than, and should be no more than, reminders of matters that we ought to take into account.

Furthermore, in practice, in the context of ethical regulation, they will almost always be turned into prescriptions. If one looks at ESRC or BPS codes, despite the insistence that what is being provided is principled guidance, we frequently find prescriptions. For example in the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics respect for autonomy is specified via the following set of imperatives: 'psychologists have a responsibility to develop and follow procedures for valid consent, confidentiality, anonymity, fair treatment and due process' (p 8).

For all these reasons, in my view the project of specifying a system of generic ethical principles is of doubtful viability, and under conditions of ethical regulation is very likely to be undesirable.

### Notes

- 1 For useful extended discussions of the operation of ethical regulation, see van den Hoonaard 2011 and Stark 2012.
- 2 For an interesting elaboration of this notion of reflective equilibrium, see Elgin 1997.
- 3 There are, of course, more than these three, see Hammersley and Traianou 2012a and b.
- 4 Incidentally, I think David misquotes Kant to the effect that we should treat people '*as ends in themselves and never as means to ends*' in a way that results in an even sharper conflict between deontology and consequentialism than

there actually is. Kant's statement is, I believe, 'never *solely* as means to ends'.

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## A Summary of Symposium I: Principles

### 5th March 2013, British Psychological Society, London

Organising Committee: Robert Dingwall, Ron Iphofen, Janet Lewis and John Oates

Summary by Dr Nathan Emmerich, Queen's University, Belfast

#### Introduction

The first in a series of three Academy of Social Science symposia was convened on 5th March 2013 at the British Psychological Society's offices in London and chaired by Birgit Whitman of Bristol University. This first symposium debated a proposal for generic ethics principles in social science research and practice. The subsequent two symposia would focus on Values and Standards. The day was organised around a discussion paper written by David Carpenter (University Research Ethics Adviser, University of Portsmouth). Professor Martyn Hammersley (Open University) and Professor Sharon MacDonald (University of York) were invited to respond to this paper. The presentations of these three speakers occupied much of the morning session. The afternoon session saw the attendees breaking into three working groups to conduct more focused discussions, summaries of which were then fed back to the whole group for plenary debate.

#### Stimulus paper: David Carpenter

**David Carpenter's** presentation opened with a critical discussion of 'principlism' (predominantly based on the Beauchamp and Childress four principles model), perhaps the most common approach to research ethics. The Beauchamp and Childress model has become the dominant *biomedical* model of research ethics. Despite attempts to move away from this model in social science research ethics, it is still very much in evidence in, for example, the ESRC's REF/FRE.<sup>1</sup> As the focus in social sciences is broader than the (biological) individual, Carpenter suggested that its ethics should be similarly recalibrated to focus on groups, collectives and communities and the social identities of individual research participants. Carpenter also discussed broader moral theory as well as social/political philosophy, commending the virtue-based approach of Macfarlane (2009, 2010). He also drew a distinction between the ethics work involved in different stages of a research project - these being design, review and conduct – and asked whether different principles or imperatives were more or less relevant in each case. Indeed Carpenter questioned the extent to which a search for principles was itself wise. Whilst he appeared to answer in the affirmative, his reservations about 'principlism' remained. Reflecting on utilitarian moral theory, Carpenter suggested that researchers might adopt the principles that: social research ought to be socially acceptable; and researchers ought to involve members of the public in all stages of a research project. Reflecting on Kantian deontology he concluded that it would support the principle of: acting in a socially responsible manner and treating people with respect – as ends in themselves and never as means to ends.

Carpenter then turned to MacFarlane's use of virtue theory to articulate some principles that can guide the ethical conduct of research and which are rooted in the 'virtuous researcher'. However whilst arguing that the principle of virtuous conduct must precede any more detailed research ethics that are rooted in virtue theory, Carpenter also sought to connect this

perspective with the wider aims of the social sciences in their broader socio-political contexts. He sought to recognise that researchers have social responsibilities and that scientifically worthwhile and valuable research contributes to the common good. Furthermore we might consider the need to find a balance between respecting the needs of individuals and pursuing the overall common good to be a principle of social science research ethics. Here Carpenter drew our attention to the work of Onora O'Neill (2011) on the ethics of public health research, epidemiology being an example of the meeting point between biomedical and social science research. In addition Carpenter suggested that a principle of duty might suggest citizens should, through participating in research, contribute to the common good produced by the social sciences.

In the conclusion to his talk, Carpenter returned to his suggestion, taken up in later discussions, that the ethical design, review and conduct of research might each be governed by different principles. He noted that, when reviewing the ethics of research proposals, it is easy for committees to become preoccupied with the bureaucratic process, something confirmed by research on such committees (e.g. Stark 2011). In conclusion, Carpenter posed the questions of the ethics of ethics review, of what would make a good or virtuous reviewer of research ethics, whether any principles of ethics review could be discerned and whether it might be possible to develop a generic reviewing tool for use in the social sciences and, perhaps, beyond. Responses by discussants

**Professor Martyn Hammersley** followed David Carpenter and agreed that having principles that informed the ethics of social science research was wise but what was of vital importance was the context of their application and use. He argued that the discussion and use of principles in the context of regulation was deeply problematic. Hammersley also raised the question of what was and was not a 'principle' and, by extension a 'value.' It is unclear whether principles are discovered, negotiated or decided and, similarly, whether they are matters of fundamental truth or of social convention. In his view there is a continuum between values, principles and actions or instructions. Into this continuum we might insert some ethical policies and professional codes. Hammersley suggested that we ought to examine carefully our attitudes to principles in the light of the situational features of ethical judgements. He briefly discussed the work of Jonsen and Toulmin<sup>2</sup> (one of the Commissioners of the Belmont Report, alongside Beauchamp and Childress) and their argument that we should revive the casuistic tradition. This tradition refuses to allow principles to become overly abstracted from particular cases and particular instances of their use.

Hammersley argued that principles are useful when individuals seek to formulate guidance for their future behaviour (as when planning research) or when an association or

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

community states its commitments. However he saw them as deeply problematic when this becomes a matter of laying down regulatory principles, suggesting we must consider: 'who is setting principles on behalf of whom, with what authority, and with what potential effects?' Are sets of ethical principles an abstract systematisation of research ethics that produces single, coherent judgements across a set of cases or are they plural, overlapping and competing concepts that will, potentially, produce multiple interpretations of a conflicting nature? Hammersley considers the latter to be more likely the case, rendering the idea of the (or a) common good deeply problematic. Finally, Hammersley questioned whether any set of principles could be exhaustive, arguing that there will always be unanticipated cases that will require us to go beyond any previously considered 'principle.' Thus, whilst he is in favour of principles, Hammersley is against principlism, something that any approach to ethical regulation that is founded on principles will be hard pressed to avoid. Here principles – ethical guides – are easily turned into prescriptions – ethical solutions. This conclusion draws our attention to the border between, on the one hand, 'ethics' and 'the ethical' and 'politics' and 'the political', on the other.

**Professor Sharon Macdonald** began her talk (*unfortunately her paper has been unavailable for publication here*) by pointing out that social scientists were often engaged in the ethical project of trying to understand the perspectives and values of others and that such others may be less powerful than ourselves and have little voice in society. Less often did they engage in the study of those more powerful than themselves with a strong voice in society. Nevertheless in both cases anthropologists were engaged in 'studying-up'. Anthropology is not a top-down process that imposes a (theoretical) perspective but an inductive discipline with a bottom-up approach. This is what the discipline has to offer, something that might well be very useful to the development of a social science research ethics which was trying to counter the 'top-down' approach that results not only from principlism but from importing a specific kind of principlism from biomedical research governance. She confessed to being frustrated by some of her experiences with ethics review and concerned that, for some researchers, review was becoming a predominantly procedural or tick-box exercise due to the way it was conducted. She felt greater transparency of ethics review and the creation of ethical governance was essential.

Macdonald suggested that we might usefully consider the different commitments that research might make in trying to find methods and approaches that will facilitate the development of a social science understanding of the perspectives, concerns and values of those whom researchers are studying and thereby working with or within. While it is important for social science to have and articulate its own ethics norms it is also important that social scientists understand and respect the moral norms relevant to the cultural locations and individuals they study. She asked us to consider the difference between an 'upfront ethics' (procedural, soliciting signed informed consent forms prior to research taking place) and an 'embedded ethics,' (something implied by working with cultural groups with the aim being to develop an understanding over time) and which of these was more appropriate to the kind of work social scientists and, in particular, ethnographers do. Macdonald suggests that a top-down procedural ethics could be seen as ethnocentric. She then reflected on the virtues, and

vices, of principles and considered if we should be searching for them. She questioned the extent to which they might be underpinned by the values and virtues of social science research and researchers. Thus it might be important to understand the nature of the virtuous social science researcher, something that might vary across disciplines, prior to articulating any ethics principles or specifying any further detail about their relevance or use within specific contexts of research.

She felt that distinguishing between treating people as means and as ends was useful but countered that it was unavoidable that social science research 'objectified' its subjects and therefore could not avoid treating research participants as means to the ends of the researcher and their research project. Nevertheless, we could still respect our participants as ends in themselves and, indeed, much social science research aimed to learn from research participants and communities. Social scientists often seek to articulate the voice and perspective of their research participants and to effect positive change on their behalf or in accordance with their interests. Of course not all social science research has the collective interest of its subjects at its heart. Nevertheless, we might say that social science research does, for the most part, aim at the common good, even if that is a fundamentally contested notion. In the contemporary context of the 'impact agenda' Macdonald counselled us to be wary of the notion of the common good becoming politicised, or being led by the contemporary attitudes of politicians towards academic research. This would lead to research becoming 'results led' implying that such research would become aimed at producing known or predetermined outcomes for the purposes of creating impact.

Macdonald appreciated the idea of the virtuous researcher and linked it to the ongoing engagement in a self-reflexive form of research. She wondered how we could build such reflexivity into the culture of research and researchers themselves. Macdonald also felt that the scientific value of truth and, more recently, integrity could be placed under threat by the impact agenda that created imperatives for researchers that may not be consistent with the ends and goods of the social sciences. Macdonald seemed to suggest that one way in which we could encourage a reflexive culture in social science research, and counter the politicisation (or political direction) of the social sciences, would be to embrace a culture of pluralism and to do so transparently. She concluded with the question of whether pluralism and transparency could be considered principles of ethical social science.

### Morning Discussion

Following the presentations of the stimulus paper and the responses by discussants there was a session for comments from those in attendance. Some of the discussion centred around a defence of a principle-based research ethics. Mark Sheehan (Ethox, Oxford and advisor to the Health Research Authority) noted that Beauchamp and Childress's four principles were intended to capture the range of ethics issues that arise in medical practice and research. However they are not supposed to be free of conflict; in any given context one principle can often be understood to be in conflict with another. The point is to examine the principles in relationship to the case at hand and, in doing so, give greater specification to both. As such, principles should not be understood as prescriptive but as functioning to outline the range of

considerations that should be taken into account. In each case the range should be considered. We should, therefore, aim to articulate the range of ethical considerations that determine whether or not research is ethical without saying in advance the ways in which they come into play in any particular case. Michael Dunn (Ethox, Oxford, Social Care REC) further suggested that having an overly rigid conception of the relationship between principles and judgements was problematic but this need not be the case. We can work to improve the quality of ethical deliberation and that this can include returning to first principles. He also suggested that focusing on the social responsibilities of the social science profession(s) would be a fruitful line of enquiry. David Carpenter suggested that principles might not be anything more than reminders of areas of ethical concern. However, Robert Dingwall (Academy of Social Sciences) expressed concern about the context in which principles are used and the way in which the theoretical intent or ideal becomes bureaucratised. Research ethics have migrated from a professional discourse into a regulatory domain where it can all too easily become a tick-box process. Where we all agree is that the ethics of research should be constituted dialogically and centred on an inclusive and deliberative process that allows any ethical principles used the flexibility to inform, rather than determine, discussion. This was echoed by a delegate who noted that there might be some second-order (or meta-ethics) principles which underlie the use of first order ethics principles, these being: plurality of interpretation and open approach to discussion and debate. Subsequently Robert Dingwall raised the question of what kind of professionals we want researchers (academic and non-academic) and social scientists to be and whether we should focus on what their moral qualities (properties, or virtues) might be. These questions stand apart from any specific regulatory concerns. Hammersley proposed that a prerequisite for finding 'common ethics ground' amongst the learned societies of the Academy of Social Sciences (as proposed by the symposia series) was to map the existing diversity.<sup>3</sup> Hammersley furthered that such principles - that respect, or provide for, diversity among the social sciences - may be at risk of being so broadly drawn as to be vacuous. What we are attempting to do may risk not being viable.

Kirstein Rummery (University of Stirling and Social Policy Association) discussed her experience in drawing up the SPA's ethics guidelines noting that they deliberately rejected the idea of a framework of overarching principles. The SPA thought that a set of overarching ethical principles was beyond the scope of any statement on research ethics offered by a Learned Society or Societies as these more properly belonged to society as a whole. She suggested that 'the social' and role of the social scientist should be the foundation and centre of any social science research ethics. If we are to build an ethics consensus we must focus on the context(s) in which we, as social scientists, operate. Matei Candea (Association of Social Anthropologists) made a related point by suggesting that when addressing concerns for ethics regulation (both in the sense of bureaucratic oversight and in the sense of regularising ethics practices) it was important to recognise that what was required, such as requesting participants to sign informed consent forms, can alter what subsequently occurs and, therefore, what we subsequently study. Ethics regulation and regularisation can have distinct methodological implications.

Representing the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Gemma Moss (Institute of Education) suggested that her association's code was constructed around the principle of 'do no harm.' This was particularly important when conducting research with those less powerful than ourselves. She further suggested that ethics should be seen to be about acknowledging and dealing with conflicts across the design, conduct, review and use of research. This latter point was also made by Stina Lyon (LBSU, BSA) who pointed out that researchers are responsible to the public and that there was a particular issue with the way research was sometimes discussed outside the university and used by partisan social actors. She highlighted the fact that the dissemination and use of research was further stage of research, beyond design, review and conduct, which had an ethics dimension. Nic Groombridge (British Society of Criminology) pointed out that the statement on ethics issued by the BSC addressed much more than 'research ethics', something we might adopt when focusing on how research participants are treated by the researcher and the research protocol. The BSC code of ethics also discussed researchers' responsibilities regarding the use and dissemination of their research in the media. Debrah Harding (Chief Operating Officer of the Market Research Society) questioned the extent to which researchers could control the discussion and uses to which their research was put. If data are misrepresented researchers can try to correct misleading pictures but the media may not wish to listen.

Annabelle Mark (Society for Studies in Organising Healthcare, SHOC) commented that these ethical waters were muddled by the fact that research often has multiple funders. Sally Hardy (Regional Studies Association) commented that the RSA had considered adopting a code of research ethics but had decided against it because researchers were governed by their HEI. However, the Society was reconsidering its position because it is now funding some research. There were further concerns about funders and the associated pressure to have 'impact' and whether this created a structural imperative to 'talk-up' one's own research without being open about the broader perspective of the field. One example of this is the current focus on phonics in children's literacy education. It was felt that this approach was over-promoted and, rather than dichotomising pedagogic approaches, as has occurred in public, political and policy discourses, researchers should be open about the diversity of perspectives in any one field and to promote views other than their own when appropriate. The fact that ethics guidance often omitted any talk of the media's use of research and the researcher's responsibilities regarding dissemination of their own work and the work, or knowledge-base, of their field more broadly was also made. Phil Sooben (ESRC) questioned whether funders and the impact agenda were necessarily threats to ethical research and proposed that they should not always be consistently positioned as dangers or sources of conflict. As with moves towards open access research there is something fundamentally ethical about aiming for research, both generally and in the social sciences, to have an impact, which is to say, to do good in the world. In response one of the participants gave an example of some research findings which had been used by the government in such a way that the researchers in these fields were encouraged to focus on the government's approach by the imperative to have an impact. This was at the cost of disseminating and communicating the broader picture.



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

Stina Lyon suggested that if we are to have precepts, principles and values then there must be some way of addressing any breaches. She thought there should be structures to handle complaints and whistleblowing and noted that the BSA occasionally receives complaints. These are then discussed and, if necessary, addressed. BSA members can be dismissed from the society for ethics breaches. She also noted that there were organisational differences between learned societies and universities. The former are evolving organisations, changing and developing with, and at the behest of, their members, whilst universities can be characterised as more hierarchical and centralised. In the context of a changing ethics context it is the learned societies that are in a position to respond with greater rapidity. Peter Lugosi (Oxford Brookes, Council for Hospitality Management Education) observed that the University of Otago had developed a 'pluralistic' or 'open' approach to research ethics that seeks to be sensitive to cultural nuances both within and beyond the academy. He thought it might offer some useful insights for this series of seminars and the project as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

This issue of the burdens of ethical regulation was raised at various points in the day. Sharon Macdonald raised the issue of whether we should oppose regulation or the over-extension of regulations articulated by other bodies. One participant questioned if this project could, itself, add to the burdens facing researchers. There was general agreement that ethics review should be proportionate and facilitate rather than obstruct research. Madeleine Hatfield (Officer for the Royal Geographical Society [with IBG]) suggested that the RGS-IBG saw itself as a body that sought to facilitate the research and ends of its members. If the learned societies have a role in articulating principles or any other ethics aspects of research or professional practice they should continue to adopt a facilitative approach. Furthermore it may be that research ethics committees should be understood similarly i.e. as facilitating research and encouraging researchers to reflect on the ethics of their research. Libby Bishop (researcher liaison with the UK Data Archive) pointed out that her organisation was centrally concerned with the reuse of data and facilitating researchers' access to the data.

Kirstein Rummery commented that our unifying factor was that we were all social scientists interested in creating the best possible conditions for ethical social science research to take place. Annabelle Mark flagged up the role of the researcher themselves, a point that was echoed by others in suggesting we consider the role of researcher professionalism and integrity. This was a theme that recurred throughout the day's discussion and it became apparent that a research ethics focused on the participants of research was only one aspect of the professional ethics of researchers. As Carpenter's stimulus paper made clear, ethics review was one aspect of ethics in the conduct of a specific research project. Similarly research projects are only one aspect of the occupation 'researcher.' Social scientists also engage in other tasks including teaching, administration, and the (peer or ethics) review of other researchers' proposals. If, in the interests of ethical research, we are to address the idea of a virtuous researcher then we should fully grasp the role of the researcher in its entirety and not simply focus on particular projects or proposals.

### Afternoon Discussion

The afternoon session was organised around three group discussions which then reported back to the whole

symposium. Each of the groups was asked to consider the principles that governed, first, the ethical practice and, second, the review of social science research ethics. In regard to ethical practice the groups were steered to consider: respect for the autonomy and dignity of individuals; scientific value; social responsibility; and to maximise benefit and minimise harm. In regard to ethics review the groups were steered to consider: independence; competence; facilitation and transparency and accountability. The groups were, of course, free to consider other principles or factors in the ethical practice and review of social science research.

The feedback from group one was that after spending some time 'coming to terms with terms' they discussed social science research ethics as an 'occupational ethics' and distinguished between retrospective and prospective ethics. They considered the need for a statement of what it is we do, as members of various social science disciplines. They also considered the relevance of such disciplinary (and professional) identities for the professional and research ethics of social scientists. They suggested that the basis of research ethics was being critically reflective on what it is we do as researchers and that in the context of accountability we must be reflexive. This can be taken to mean that the critically reflective researcher must maintain a positive relationship to the ways in which they are ethically accountable whilst recognising that their ethical responsibilities as researchers are not abrogated by the accountability created by being reviewed by an ethics committee. The researcher must continue to exercise critical reflection on ethics while conducting research. They commented that knowledge was an (ethical) good in itself but that it should not be sought at any price. They questioned whether ethics committees that review social science research were always ethical in their treatment of researchers and considered who was represented on such committees and why. They noted that researchers should be able to expect members of ethics committees to exercise critical (self) reflection on their own activities. They concluded that whilst they made little headway in agreeing any principles – there was always a counter example – there were commonalities in the principles articulated by the various codes of ethics currently published by the Learned Society members of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Group two connected the ethical practice of social research with the social responsibilities of researchers. They also suggested that, in social science research, the autonomy of individuals should be coupled with those of (their) social groups. They highlighted the need for informed consent to be an on-going social process and the interconnection between social science researchers' responsibilities to individual and communities and the potential harms to both. Group two questioned the notion of 'scientific value' (as an ethics principle of social science practice). It was suggested that this was becoming confused with the social value of research. It was felt that integrity was a preferable term in that it drew on a broader range of principles including honesty, reflexivity and transparency. In regard to ethics review group two felt it was important to talk of the duties of reviewers and committee members. They also questioned from what should ethical review (and reviewers) be independent? It seems clear ethics review cannot be conducted independently from disciplinary knowledge and, therefore, disciplinary colleagues. However they did feel it could, and should, be independent of practical concerns about insurance, university reputation and 'risk'.

They questioned whether it was better to think in terms of accountability (and interdependence) rather than independence.

Group two suggested that ethics review should be about facilitation and that it should be aimed at helping the researcher to reflect on ethical issues raised by their research. The suggested reviewers may (or may not) have virtues and that they should respect the diversity and multiplicity of intellectual and disciplinary traditions and of researchers and research participants. Committees should foster an environment for deliberation, should be 'consultative', and engage in on-going conversations with researchers. The group wondered if researchers should first present their research proposal and its ethics dimensions to a committee and only subsequently submit a formal 'application' that took into account the discussion they had with the committee following their presentation. Review should be decentralised and discipline specific. Therefore it should occur at the level of the department whilst faculty or university level oversight should pertain to the committee's activities rather than the researchers.

Group three expressed clear agreement on the need for a strong collective and public voice on ethics in social science research. They questioned whether we could construct a framework or a set of principles for guidance as, whilst it was clear what the function might be, it was unclear who it was for and if they were representative. However, since the Academy of Social Sciences project is not aimed at replacing other codes, particular those of the Learned Societies, this need not be too problematic. They thought that ethics review ought to be redesigned into a deliberative process and that social responsibility and political awareness are important facets of a deliberative research ethics. They wondered what distinctive contribution the social sciences made and so what might be distinctive about its ethics. They felt that respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons as individuals and members of communities (carriers of social identities) was vital and that it should be a central consideration of research ethics at all stages of research (design, conduct, review, funding and use). They also felt that researchers ought to be accorded the same autonomy and dignity as research participants, i.e. as individuals and as members of discipline communities. Group three considered whether a framework could be constructed around ethical questions and issues that are hard to reconcile and represent difficult to resolve conflicts. They suggested that research ethics and governance should be considered as distinct and independent from each other. They noted the limits of the biomedical model and the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the researched.<sup>5</sup> They noted that the relationship between the researcher and the organisation (ethics committee, HEI) affects the outcome and that ethics review should be seen as a participatory deliberative process (and practice) involving a dialogue and negotiation between researchers and organisations.

Following the presentation of the individual groups' discussions there was a short time for questions, comments and further discussion. It was noted that there was a potential trade-off between risks and originality of a research proposal. It was suggested that research should be 'good enough' and meet minimal (or median) ethical standards rather than being ethically perfect. There was a suggestion that the primary

concern of an ethics committee should be whether they had adequately equipped the research proposal and researcher with the tools to complete the research ethically. In closing one member re-iterated their approval of the virtue-based approach used by McFarlane and drawn on by Carpenter in his opening presentation and stimulus paper.

### Conclusion

The following bullet points were felt to be the primary messages of the day's presentations and discussions:

- A virtue based approach holds promise for articulating an account of the professional social scientist.
- This should be further explored as a potential ground for any principles of research ethics in the social sciences.
- Any principles of research ethics should be connected to the wider professional ethics and values of social science and its sub-fields (disciplines).
- Ethics principles should not be deterministic or be allowed to become deterministic in practice.
- There may be a set of values or meta-principles (meta-ethics) that guide the application and use of the first order ethics principles of social science research. Such values would include a commitment to dialogue, open structure of ethics and ethical review, and on-going ethics engagement.
- A distinction should be made between the ethics principles relevant to different stages of research.
- The Academy of Social Sciences project should not seek to take over the role of the Learned Societies (or their codes) in guiding the ethics of research.
- A summary of existing codes should be drawn up.
- The autonomy of individuals should be understood in its broader social and cultural context. Individuals should be understood as social actors whose actions reflect and impact upon their communities.
- Ethics review should be conducted ethically. Review (ethics and peer) of research is a core aspect of the social sciences and, therefore, a role of the social scientist. It should be conducted virtuously and in such a manner that reviewers/committees are accountable to researchers, disciplines and social science communities as well as universities, research participants and the public.
- Ethics review in the social sciences should be designed so as to facilitate a more discursive encounter between researcher and reviewer/committee. Review should, at least in the first instance, occur at the departmental/school level. Its connection to the governance of research in the wider sense should be reflected upon critically.

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

In the light of the papers, responses, discussions and comments summarised above, the project team concluded that there appeared to be a broad consensus for taking forward the following principles:

- The practice of research should demonstrate:
  - ◆ respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons as individuals and members of communities
  - ◆ integrity
  - ◆ social responsibility
  - ◆ maximise benefit and minimise harm.
- The review of research protocols should demonstrate:
  - ◆ independence
  - ◆ competence
  - ◆ facilitation
  - ◆ transparency and accountability.

### Notes

1. <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/research-ethics.aspx>
2. He is referring to their 'Abuse of Casuistry.' Both Jonsen and Toulmin being, alongside Beauchamp, members of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research which produced the Belmont Report.
3. Note: the project team is summarising the existing codes of research ethics published by the LS members of the Academy of Social Sciences.
4. The University of Otago has recently started The

Ethics Application Repository (TEAR: <http://tear.otago.ac.nz/>) that archives IRB/ REC application forms and consent statements in the interests of developing a more comprehensive approach to research ethics in Otago, New Zealand and across the world. Submission from all scholars are welcome.

5. A similar commitment is often said to guide the ethics of medical practice, however this is the relationship between a patient and their doctor, distinct from that which may (or may not) exist between a biomedical research and a research subject.

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## Responsible to Whom? Obligations to Participants and Society in Social Science Research

### Discussion 'Stimulus' Paper for Symposium 2: (Values)

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The social sciences play a crucial role in helping us understand our social world and critically and normatively reflect upon it. One might say that social scientists have a responsibility to engage in such activities in order to nurture an informed public which will then be better placed to make more informed decisions on matters of public concern, and offer innovations in our thinking about the social world that can help society better respond to changes and crises. In light of this responsibility, how should we conceptualise the nature of the relationship between the social science researcher, the research he undertakes, and the society which he hopes to both speak about and speak to? What are the obligations owed between the researcher, the individual participants in the research, and society at large? And, crucially for our purposes here, what do these tell us about the normative principles that should underpin a form of ethical regulation suited to the particularities of the social sciences? I want to explore these questions here through the issue of whose interests and rights should take priority when thinking about the appropriate ethical constraints for social science research, contrasting this with the normative assumptions that underpin the ethical regulation in the biomedical sciences. A crucial lesson of this discussion will be that it is at best inappropriate to import and impose regulation from the biomedical sciences into the realm of the social sciences, and at worst actually hinders our ability to successfully execute the responsibilities of the social scientist noted above.

#### The participant protection model (PPM)

I want to start by setting out a model of thinking about the duties and obligations of the researcher that underpin the ethical regulation of the social sciences in those countries where it is further entrenched and developed than it is in the UK, such as Australia and the US; though I should say that I also think that the same normative and ethical commitments of this model are present in the ESRC's current Research Ethical Framework (REF) documents. This model, which I call the participant protection model (PPM), is at the heart of the ethical regulation of the biomedical sciences and, for reasons that are well-known but I cannot go explore here, has often either influenced or been directly imported as the model for thinking about similar regulation of the social sciences. The PPM prioritises the risks that any research study poses to those individuals who participate in it, seeking to protect the rights of the participants over and above the rights and interests of other individuals including the researcher and society more generally. The researcher has a moral duty not to harm those who participate in his research, an obligation which 'trumps' any other possible concerns. So it is strictly prohibited to undertake research on a participant that is likely to result in significant harm to the participant *even if* doing so is likely to lead to advances that might have substantial widespread benefits to many other individuals or society more broadly. This sort of consequentialist calculation (the harm caused to one outweighed by the benefits to many more) is rightly seen as morally inappropriate, violating as it does the

respect due to that participant as an end in himself rather than a mere means to the realisation of the ends of others. While the primary aim of the research might be the increase of knowledge and scientific or social advancement, the rights of the participants not to be harmed cannot be violated in this pursuit.

This ultimate concern for avoiding harming research participants and prioritising their rights over all other considerations clearly reflects a post-World War Two moral consensus on the primacy and the non-violability of individuals' human rights. But it also reflects a concern about the structure of research projects themselves, and in particular the fact that participants of biomedical research often sit in a deeply unequal relationship of power to the researcher such that the latter's possession of greater knowledge and the former's often vulnerable status (as less knowledgeable, as sick or dependent upon the researcher for medical care, etc.) creates a context in which abuses could easily occur. One of the central normative objectives of ethical regulation in the biomedical sciences has therefore been to equalise this imbalanced or asymmetrical relationship of power by protecting the rights of the participants and severely constraining the legitimate actions of the researcher. Correcting, as far as is possible, this asymmetry of power is a key way in which the participant is respected as a moral agent and the possibility of harm further minimised.

In developing ethical frameworks for the social sciences, the temptation has always been to more or less import the PPM models employed in the biomedical sciences. There might be very good reason for this. These frameworks have often been in place for several decades and have the benefit of having evolved through testing and experience in practice. And that they have been largely successful means that they are taken to be 'models of good practice' from which there are no good *prima facie* reasons (from the perspective of the regulators that is) to deviate from. Why reinvent the regulatory wheel? Hence the PPM frameworks have been generalised and universalised to apply to all research conducted 'with or about people'. I now want to suggest that this is a mistake because the PPM contains often implicit principles or ethical commitments that are inappropriate to research undertaken in the social sciences and may hamper the ability for the social sciences to successfully execute its normative and critical social responsibilities. Once this is properly understood then *where it is the case* that the public responsibilities of the social sciences are being served, the particularities of social science research justify (contra the PPM) a presumption in favour of prioritising the public or social interest over the individual rights of participants.

#### Conceptualising harm

At the heart of the PPM is an ethical concern about avoiding harming participants that is clearly informed by the abuses that litter the history of biomedical research and intended as a



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

way of preventing instances of such scandals occurring again in the future. The first thing to say is that the social sciences differ from biomedical research insofar as the latter often involve trials and studies that may cause physical pain or even death (e.g. from the use of novel drugs or experimental surgical techniques). While it is true to say that some social science research has the possibility to cause physical harm, in the vast majority of studies the potential for causing physical harm to the participants is clearly lower than in the biomedical sciences. Where social science research does have the potential to cause harm this is more likely to be of a psychological kind (e.g. stress, offence or upset) or harm to the participant's interests (e.g. reputation, finance, career, etc.). We should not denigrate such forms of harm as irrelevant ethical considerations, but there clearly is a sense in which the human stakes of social science research are more often than not lower than that of biomedical sciences.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the aim of social science research is to explore (and often oppose) social and economic injustices, such as abuses of power, mistreatment, exploitation, malpractices, and so on, which is likely to have detrimental effects on the interests and reputation of specific individuals, groups, or corporate bodies like companies or institutions that benefit from them. In such cases it is very likely that 'social' forms of harm will be unavoidable and predictable. How do we justify this harm? One obvious route is to appeal to the objectives of the research itself, which in such cases is often to prevent or alleviate future harm by examining ways in which institutions and practices can better track the interests of those subject to them. Crucially, this is not the same as saying that causing harm is the direct intention of the research (as has been suggested elsewhere)<sup>2</sup>, but it does mean that causing harm might be an inevitable and inescapable dimension of much social science research. Furthermore, such utilitarian calculations of trading-off rights seem more appropriate when the level of potential harm that could be caused to the participant is not so grave as to include physical or serious psychological pain.<sup>3</sup> But according to the ESRC's Framework for Research Ethics (FRE), and this is indicative of injunctions included in regulatory frameworks for the social sciences elsewhere, 'Harm to research participants and researchers must be avoided in all instances' (2012 – emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> It is therefore wrong to interview employers whose discriminatory or unjust practices the researcher was hoping to expose and thereby end, or to seek information on the relationship between politicians and particular groups or individuals that might be resulting in prejudicial policy decisions. Giving priority to the rights of the participants and employing an expansive account of harm in the manner of the PPM therefore sits in some considerable tension with the social sciences' moral responsibility to (amongst other things) explore prejudicial practices, uncover injustices and scrutinise prevailing power relationships.

It is also important to remember that the knowledge or understanding that we as social scientists seek to ascertain through our research is not knowledge about a private individual but knowledge that is of or about the *public* social or political body. Though this knowledge might be revealed as part of our interactions with individuals, we interact with them in their role as occupants of public office (e.g. elected representative, judge, a Vice Chancellor, an economic advisor to a Prime Minister) or as someone who operates in a social context beyond their private individual selves (e.g. terrorist,

public broadcaster or a private broadcaster with political influence, a CEO of a company that employs significant proportion of a population, an enemy combatant). Importantly, we do not engage with them as private individuals. Likewise the knowledge that we ascertain is not private knowledge about a private individual, which an ethical framework puts very strict conditions on using or releasing, but knowledge that is public in the sense of being about the common. While the harm social science research might do can clearly affect the individual and many of their private interests, it is their public role that is of interest to us (though admittedly these are not easily separable). The point is that social science research only harms the private interests of individuals indirectly, as an often inescapable ramification of pursuing their public responsibility to study and analyse public matters. A different set of ethical considerations thus come into play and the prioritisation of individual rights and the avoidance of harm seems inappropriate.

### Conceptualising the researcher/participant relationship

As we have seen, a key assumption underlying the PPM is a conceptualising of the relationship between the researcher and the participant in which the inequality of power between the two creates an ethical justification for protecting the latter from potential harm from the former. The researcher is a potential threat to the participant of his research. This concern generates a series of intuitively desirable regulations such as participants must freely consent to be involved in the research (what the 1948 Nuremberg Code formally established as the first and 'essential' principle of research ethics) and there must be full disclosure of the purpose to which the research will be put, the nature of the information sought from the participant, and the motivations of the researcher in seeking this particular information.

This asymmetrical power relationship is often neither as stark in the social sciences as it is in biomedical research nor in many instances actually completely the reverse of what the PPM assumes. There clearly are some fields of social science research in which the relationship remains balanced in favour of the researcher. Research undertaken with children or other potentially vulnerable individuals such as the elderly, immigrants, the mentally ill very often – though not always, it is important to add – place the researcher in a position of greater power with the ability and potential to cause some considerable harm. And where this is the case then it is clear that the presumption should be in favour of protecting the participants' rights as in the PPM.

But very much social science either has a negligible asymmetry of power and knowledge or reverses the positions such that it is the researcher who is often in the weaker position and the participant in a position to potentially harm. There are several aspects of this that we need to appreciate. The first is that much social science research addresses aspects of the social world in which significant power relations are in play, and, as such, it is often the case that the individuals who will be of interest to social scientists will be those in a position of power and influence by virtue of the fact that they are decision-makers or holders of public office, or indeed by being in possession of relatively greater knowledge. They are the subject of our interest *because of* their relatively more powerful/knowledgeable position, unlike in the biomedical sciences where it is often a subject's

vulnerability or weakness that makes them a suitable or interesting participant, and it is not possible to artificially equalise this relationship. And this asymmetry might also make the participant the most likely to have the authority, prestige and capacity to harm the researcher, either physically (as in the case of some more hazardous fieldwork projects) or through harming their interests (e.g. reputational, financial, cutting off future funding or access), rather than the other way around (Langlois 2011).

It should also be remembered that when the aim of research is to criticise the status quo or to suggest better alternatives, such participants in the research are themselves interested stake-holders who may well not support the aims of the research or the purposes to which it is put (and may act in ways to protect those interests). Our research participants are often neither the disinterested objects of the natural sciences or the vulnerable individuals seeking our help. Neither therefore, in light of its social responsibilities, can the social sciences always engage in research through the gathering of information willingly or freely offered through consent.<sup>5</sup> At least some research might require recourse to legal and hence coercive means to acquire information, such as the use of the Freedom of Information Act. Likewise the fact that the social sciences often come up against vested interests and takes place in conditions of power asymmetry balanced more strongly against the researcher raises the question as to whether deception or duplicity is justified in the pursuit of information relevant to the public issue being investigated.<sup>6</sup> Is it necessarily unethical to lie about one's religion in order to gain access to a self-professed anti-Semite? To pretend to be sympathetic to a particular form of political extremism in order to interview members of a certain party or group? And so on. Such cases clearly involve duplicity in which the participant is not in full possession of all the relevant information and hence being used as a means to acquiring more information rather than an end in him or herself. When information is obtained through coercion or deceit, it is hard to think of it as being voluntarily offered, and hence in keeping with the first principle of the Nuremberg Code or the fourth key principle of the ESRC's Framework for Research Ethics which states that 'Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion' (ESRC 2012)<sup>7</sup>. Yet clearly fully informing the participants of the research can often radically alter the results we get, or prevent us from getting any at all. And simply asking for information that is likely to implicate particular individuals or institutions is not always likely to prove successful. Hence there is again a case for claiming that the ethical assumptions underpinning the PPM are not always appropriate for the social sciences, and may indeed hinder its ability to carry out its social responsibilities.

## Conclusion

The social sciences are alive with healthy debates surrounding the ethics and politics of research. Indeed, and here I speak only for my own discipline (though see Dyer and Demmeritt 2009 for a similar account of debates in human geography), one of the main debates of the past decade or so in political science/theory has been the extent to which it has become increasingly abstract and disconnected from the real-world of politics as it has reflected more and more on the epistemological, ontological, metaphysical, and ideological nature of its basic assumptions and presuppositions. Far from not thinking enough about the ethical implications of our

research, many have claimed that such concerns have dominated our discipline at the expense of research about politics itself (and in doing so failed to properly engage with politics as its responsibilities demand). Admittedly this sort of ethical soul searching and the sort of self-regulation that it engenders has not been communicated well beyond academia, and hence what are important ethical debates about the principles which should guide our research have been interpreted as navel-gazing and slides into ivory tower irrelevance. They thus have not provided the sort of reassurance to others (society at large, funding councils, governmental institutions, etc.) that there are ethical principles which regulate our research, that these are principles which are under constant review, and that they are upheld. It may be that at least in part the imposition of a framework derived from the medical sciences reflects the fact that the social sciences have failed to properly communicate the relevance and import of these internal activities.

What I have suggested here is that the prioritising of participants' rights, avoidance of harm and assumptions regarding the dominant position of power that the researcher stands in relation to the participant, assumptions that are at the heart of the PPM, are ethical commitments that do not map on to the realities of much social science research and are incongruous with it fulfilling its normative and critical social responsibilities. Does this mean, for example, that we should *always* prioritise the interests that would be served by exposing certain practices that might harm the reputation and career of research participants rather than their individual rights? Or that we must *always* be more concerned about reducing the potential harm caused to the more vulnerable researcher over and above any harm that might be caused to the relatively more powerful participant? Part of the difficulty with thinking about ethical regulation of the social sciences is that the complexities, contingencies and vagaries of our social world rarely makes it possible to determine hard and fast rules as to which should take priority. These are judgement calls and, being such, it is rarely possible to say anything beyond abstract generalities, and even those might not apply in particular concrete circumstances. And much of what I have suggested here requires us to make further judgement calls about what counts as 'public' in the first place, as a 'public role' that legitimates a private person becoming a subject of our interest, and as an issue that is truly a matter of 'public concern' or 'public interest' that justifies the use of particular methods that would otherwise be unethical. As social scientists, and in the face of creeping regulation, we must press for *our* freedom to be able to make these judgement calls, for it is more often than not the researcher him or herself who is best-placed to make them (and to take responsibility for when the wrong decision is made). All I want to have raised in this brief paper is the thought that the ethical considerations that pertain to the social sciences are *not* *always* the same as those which rightly underpin the biomedical sciences, and that however our discipline is regulated, be it through the inculcation of professional values or more formal regulative frameworks, it must be through a framework that understands and enables rather than misconstrues and hinders good social science research.

## Notes

1. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has recently recommended that any research that imposes no more than minimal risk of harm in its

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

subjects should be exempt from requiring approval by an Institution Review Board (IRB). It is clear from their discussion about which methodologies are minimal risk, such as interview and surveys, that an implication of their recommendations is to exempt much social science research from the requirements of IRB approval.

2. Here I disagree with Langlois who argues that the causing of harm 'may be the whole point of the exercise' of social science research (Langlois 2011: 150). There is a question here, of course, as to whether what I am calling 'social harm', e.g. damage to reputation, career, employment, financial interests etc, should count as a harm. Here I am assuming that it does insofar as it is a form of damage to the interests of the participants. This also seems to be the position of the ESRC when they define risk to include that to a subject's 'personal social standing, privacy, personal values and beliefs, their links to family and the wider community, and their position within occupational settings, as well as the adverse effects of revealing information that relates to illegal, sexual or deviant behaviour'.
3. Another way this might be justified is as a form of 'double effect', the doctrine in just war theory that harm is permissible to non-combatants in war if and only if causing that harm was the *unintentional* outcome of the pursuit of a noble or worthy outcome, even if that harm was foreseeable or inevitable. This is a controversial and complicated doctrine, but not one without its merits in a world where there is often a sizeable gap between the intentions of an action and its actual consequences.
4. This key principle seems to sit in some considerable tension with a claim made later in the ESRC'S FRE document that 'Not all risks can, or in some cases, should be avoided' and that, in cases such as this where research seeks to question and explore social, cultural or economic processes and in doing so negatively impact upon particular institutions or their agents, 'Principles of justice should, however, mean that researchers would seek to minimise [not eliminate] any

personal harm to individual people'. As someone who works in normative political theory, I can confidently say that there is a huge amount of disagreement as to what principles of justice might demand of researchers. It is also unclear what is meant here by 'personal' harm.

5. For an excellent discussion of the problems of consent in social science research, and in particular the standard method of declaring consent via signed forms, see van den Hoonard 2008, pp 29–32.
6. Interestingly the AAUP report recommends that the use of duplicity and deceit not be sufficient to mark a project as needing IRB approval (AAUP 2013: 11).
7. In some cases it may violate the FRE's sixth key principle also: 'The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit'.

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## Response 1 to 'Responsible to Whom? Obligations to Participants and Society in Social Science Research'

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### Introduction

In the spirit of reflexivity – which appears to be one of the shared values which emerged from the discussion at the previous symposium – I will begin by reflecting on the various perspectives I bring to bear on the question of generic ethics principles in social science research and the values that might inform them. These perspectives are, in no particular order, those of:

- a (socio-) legal scholar
- a researcher trained in the United States and Australia
- a teacher of research ethics to undergraduate and postgraduate students

- a feminist
- the Chair of a Learned Society which has its own Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice.

How these perspectives have informed my thinking will no doubt become evident in what follows, and no doubt provide sources of disagreement.

One of the key insights that social scientists can contribute to debates about research ethics is that research is a social activity, which brings the researcher into relationships with a range of others. Thus, the biomedical model or PPM (as Matt Sleat refers to it in his stimulus paper) captures only a small

part of the picture. In addition to research participants, the researcher is brought into a relationship with:

- her institution, including its ethical review mechanisms
- her research team
- her broader disciplinary and research communities
- her research funder/s and/or sponsors
- potential non-academic ‘users’ or ‘beneficiaries’ of or stakeholders in her research.

Each of these relationships can give rise to ethical duties and the need for ethical judgements. One of the things I particularly value about the SLSA’s Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice<sup>1</sup> is that it does acknowledge and address this range of relationships, including, for example, the need to maintain the integrity of the discipline as a whole by reporting findings accurately and truthfully (2.1.1); to appropriately acknowledge and give weight to other people’s research (2.2.2, 4.3); to publish and disseminate the results of research to reach the range of appropriate audiences (2.1.2); to appropriately credit all contributions to research collaboration (4); to provide research staff with reasonable working conditions and not subject them to unreasonable expectations (5); to ensure that funded research and consultancy retains intellectual and ethical integrity (10); and to behave with probity when bidding for contracts (10.1.1). It also encourages members in their capacity as consultants to funders or sponsors to advise their clients to adopt transparent and inclusive bidding processes (10.3.2).

An important point made in previous discussions is that relationships do not operate only in one direction, and that while the researcher may owe duties to a variety of others, they may also owe duties to her, particularly in the case of institutions and ethical review bodies, but certainly also in the case of peer reviewers of grant applications, funders and sponsors, and perhaps also stakeholder groups and research participants themselves. The next section of the paper focuses on the ethical duties of the researcher, but in the third section I will return to this point about the responsibilities of other actors in the system.

### **Ethical decision making, ethical review and the PPM**

In making ethical judgements, it seems to me that a researcher can usefully be guided by both ethical ‘principles’ and ‘values’. I do not intend to engage here with the debate about the respective meanings of and the distinction between ‘principles’ and ‘values’. My working definition is that ‘principles’ are general statements designed to guide behaviour and decision making, while ‘values’ are fundamental normative commitments which may underpin ‘principles’. In particular, ‘principles’ are not rules or prescriptions, although I accept the argument that this is another distinction which can be difficult to maintain in a regulatory context. Nevertheless, we should be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath-water. Ideally, principles draw attention to things that ought to be taken into account, and provide parameters for, without determining, specific judgement

In my experience, the requirement to submit research proposals for ethical review provides a very useful discipline in drawing attention to things that ought to be taken into account when designing and conducting research. In the managerial university we spend an increasing amount of time

filling out forms for risk assessment and audit purposes which get in the way more and more of actually doing our teaching and research. Ethical review forms are one of the few such processes that I actually find helpful, that provoke me and my students to be better researchers rather than actively obstructing us from doing research – although I acknowledge that the ethical review process may actively obstruct some kinds of research, and will return to this point later. For now, taking the process as one which requires us to take a series of issues into account (and leaving aside the kind of judgements made by ethics committees), the fact that the PPM only draws attention to some of the things that ought to be taken into account (i.e. focusing only on the researcher–research subject relationship) suggests that it should be built upon rather than jettisoned altogether.

In relation to the PPM itself, I have to say that I have been shocked by the apparent ignorance of ethical considerations concerning research participants evident in some of the funding applications I have reviewed, so I don’t think we should be complacent about leaving it to the good judgement of individual researchers to safeguard their subjects adequately. I would also take issue with Matt’s argument about the nature of the relationship between researchers and respondents in positions of power and authority. Having done my fair share of research with ‘elite’ respondents, including senior lawyers, judges and civil servants, Matt’s picture is not one that I recognise. To be sure, such subjects stand in a position of power in relation to the researcher in that they can decide whether to provide or withhold information. Their lack of cooperation could torpedo the project. But at the same time, of course, they exist in a network of relations extending well beyond the researcher, in which they are also likely to have something to lose by being open and honest in giving her their views. Hence they are highly concerned about confidentiality, anonymity and the form and venue in which results will be published. Indeed, I was recently refused an interview with a senior judge whom I have known for years (and hence who I expected would trust me) on the basis that she had been ‘burnt’ by another researcher who wrote up her results in a way that, while maintaining strict anonymity, was completely identifying. No thanks to that researcher for neglecting not only her ethical responsibility to the research subject, but also her relationship with the wider disciplinary and research community. My point, however, is that a Foucauldian conception of power is perhaps more apposite in this context. The fact that someone is in a position of authority does not simply reverse the power relationship between researcher and subject. Rather, power circulates through and around the two parties in several directions. Both have access to certain power resources, and both have the capacity to harm the other. Ethical judgements need to be made within this context.

### **Values**

Turning then to the specific subject of this Symposium – values – we might consider three questions. First, should values have any place in a statement of generic ethics principles in social science research? I have already suggested that both values and principles are useful touchstones in the design and conduct of research. The critique of principlism might suggest that values rather than principles should be the main focus of any statement emerging from this project. However, I would suggest that values (at least on my working definition) are too general to stand alone, and need to be elaborated in the



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

research ethics context by means of principles. The values and principles do, of course, need to be related.

Secondly, is it possible to agree on a set of values for our purposes? For someone more at home in the world of value conflicts than value consensus this is a challenge. It may be that the number of values we can agree on is quite small, although whether it is worth producing only a lowest common denominator statement is questionable.

Thirdly, if we can agree on some common values, what are they? Reading back through the account of the discussion at the last Symposium, a number of candidates present themselves:

- Social acceptability (David Carpenter: 'social research ought to be socially acceptable'). I would not want to include this in any list of values for social science research, precisely because of the lack of consensus about social acceptability. What is considered socially acceptable or unacceptable varies substantially by social location. So the question would devolve to one of who decides. If it was the researcher, the result could simply be self-serving. If it was the ethics committee, the result is likely to be conservative, and possibly even more restrictive than what happens already.
- Democratic participation (David Carpenter: 'researchers ought to involve members of the public in all stages of a research project'). This seems more like an aspiration than a value, and one that would be quite difficult to achieve in practice, and again could stymie some kinds of research.
- Individual autonomy and dignity (treating people with respect, as ends in themselves rather than means to ends). This is the classic value underpinning the PPM. I would contend that it ought to be retained but extended to apply not only to how researchers treat research subjects, but how institutions and ethical review bodies treat researchers, and how members of research teams treat each other.
- Respect for cultural difference/pluralism (Sharon Macdonald: 'it is important that social scientists understand and respect the moral norms relevant to the cultural locations and individuals they study'). I would certainly include this on my list of values, although with the caveat that while it is important to respect cultural difference, it is also important to avoid cultural essentialism, and to recognise that cultures are dynamic, internally differentiated, and often contested.
- Reflexivity. As noted at the beginning of this paper, this seems to be a universally acknowledged good for researchers and, one might add, for ethics committees and research funders.
- Integrity. Another universally acknowledged good which again might apply not only to researchers but to other actors in the system, including peer reviewers and funders and commissioners of research.
- Transparency, social responsibility, independence, competence, accountability. These are all values that both appear to command wide agreement in relation to researchers, and that should apply to ethical review processes as well.

Several further values may not have been raised previously, but are worth consideration:

- Collegiality. Collegiality within the disciplinary community is noted as a value in the preamble to the SLSA Statement, although it could clearly also extend to collegiality with the wider research community, and collegiality within institutions (including in the relations between ethics committees and researchers).
- Trust. Should this be a desirable characteristic of all relationships within the research system? Should there be reciprocal duties to engender and extend trust?
- Inclusiveness. The SLSA Statement says:  
  
6.7 When designing research, including identifying research participants, and disseminating research findings socio-legal researchers should give due consideration to principles of diversity and inclusivity. These principles may include consideration of the ethical implications of excluding participants from research on the basis of their class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, physical ability, race or religious belief.

The value of inclusiveness could also be invoked to encourage ethics committees to take a more facilitative approach where researchers propose to include participants who would be excluded by the standard requirement to sign a consent form.

- Empathy. I find this is one of the greatest problems I have with my students, and hence one of the values I have to try hardest to inculcate. Undergraduate students in particular seem to find it very difficult to put themselves in the shoes of their intended subjects and to imagine the impact of their research on those subjects. It seems to me that empathy is an essential companion to individual autonomy/dignity and pluralism, without which these values cannot be fully operationalised. Ethics review bodies might also usefully embrace the value of empathy with the researchers they regulate.
- Open-mindedness. This is the other problem area I experience with students, and with some colleagues as well. The importance of asking questions to which the answer is genuinely open; of gathering, interpreting and analysing research data in a spirit of open inquiry rather than seeking to confirm a pre-conceived view – these are points on which I find myself hammering away repeatedly. It may seem too obvious, but to me, open-mindedness is a key value underpinning the conduct of any social research, and is worth spelling out for that reason.

### Conclusion

In summary while the PPM may not be a good fit for social science research – or for any conception of research as a social practice – it is not wholly without value for social science researchers, and can be improved upon. Thinking carefully about the range of relationships involved in social science research and the nature of those relationships can help us to consider what ethical judgements need to be made and by whom, as well as what values and principles might appropriately inform those judgements.

### Note

- 1 Available at <http://www.slsa.ac.uk/ethics-statement>

## Response 2 to ‘Responsible to Whom? Obligations to Participants and Society in Social Science Research’

Professor Kenneth Boyd  
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Thank you for inviting me to comment on Matt Sleat’s paper. I was particularly interested in what he said about justifying deception in social science research. I shall come back to that at the end, but first let me say something more about the biomedical research ethics model and why it is inappropriate for the social sciences.

The oldest rule in medical ethics is *primum non nocere*, ‘above all do no harm’. Doctors can do more serious harm to more people than can members of most other professions – except perhaps the oldest, or of course the military. But these are not professions to whose skill and judgement vulnerable people often need to entrust their health or life itself. The Hippocratic Oath seems to have been designed, among other things, to assure prospective patients that those who swore it were trustworthy – unlike shady practitioners who performed abortions, poisonings or surgery. Symbols of trustworthiness provided to assure and attract patients were in evidence again in more recent centuries, in the creation of medical guilds and colleges from which perceived quacks and charlatans were excluded, and later in official recognition and regulation of the profession through a variety of national and international councils and codes. And where medicine had boldly gone, other occupations aspiring to professional status followed, creating their own councils and codes and seeking official recognition.

Until the mid-20th century, the ethics of medical practice, let alone the ethics of medical research, was discussed if at all only among doctors in private. The osmosis theory of medical education assumed, in the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath, that ethics was absorbed from the medical ethos, commonly from father to son; and formal teaching was often limited to the ‘rule of As’: prohibition of abortion, addiction, adultery, advertising, and association with unqualified practitioners. The unspoken ethics of medical research seems still to have rested on an implied contract from the early days of charity hospitals, where patients, mostly from the poorer classes, provided the human material for research, in return for better medical care and treatment than they, unlike the wealthy, could afford at home.

That implied contract, of course, was shattered in the mid-20th century by what became publicly known about seriously harmful medical research, conducted without patient consent, notably in Nazi Germany, but to some extent also in the UK and America. The professional reaction to this once again involved the creation of ethical codes, including the to-be-repeatedly-revised Declaration of Helsinki, and also the gradual development of research ethics committees, increasingly with lay involvement and under official regulation, eventually at national level. At the heart of all this effort was a determination that never again should patients be subjected to potentially harmful biomedical research without their informed consent. Like all ethical reactions, however, the danger of overreaction was waiting in the wings, and so it has proved.

It is now beginning to be accepted that insistence on fully informed consent from everyone who might possibly be harmed in any way by their involvement as subjects of any kind of medical research is an impossible ideal and contrary to the public interest in improving its health and healthcare. There are areas of public health research for example where it is impossible to gain individual consent to data from the past, and others where the future use of data and human tissue cannot be predicted. Informed consent to research, or for that matter treatment, involving physically or psychologically invasive procedures on people with capacity clearly must remain mandatory, in order to ensure, as Onora O’Neill has put it, that people are ‘neither coerced nor deceived’ into research or treatment. But patient involvement (through questionnaires or review of anonymised health data) in non-invasive clinical audit, service evaluation and public health surveillance, for example, no longer require to be subjected to research ethics committee scrutiny.

Such developments imply a dual recognition: the history of medicine’s unique capacity to harm as well as heal clearly requires continued regulatory oversight of medical research; but people also need trustworthy doctors, and trustworthiness is not encouraged if no room is left for virtue ethics and the motivated conscience, individual and collegial, of medical researchers. But these aspects of research do seem unique to medicine and perhaps in a lesser degree to some other ‘caring professions’. It is difficult to see how they are appropriate to non-clinical social science research, in which the risk of direct harm to participants normally is small, and where the researcher is not normally someone to whom vulnerable people turn for trustworthy care and treatment. The suspicion must be that scientific and social scientific associations, and also academic institutions, have borrowed the medical model of ethical codes and ethics committees, because these associations and institutions have been swept along in the wake first of medicine’s successful 19th-century professionalisation, and then of its 20th-century overreaction to its own sins – an overreaction now, ironically, being moderated in medicine itself.

There may however also be another reason; and while the desire for a principle-based ethics for the social sciences may be yet another carry-over from medicine, it may also be more morally defensible. Principle-based medical ethics arose in the last quarter of the twentieth century to meet, among other challenges, the need to communicate effectively and acceptably, on the increasingly complicated choices of modern medicine, with colleagues, patients, and a wider public, many of whose views were more democratic and more morally pluralistic than those of previous generations. The well-known four principles of bioethics accordingly included listening to patients and trying to be fair to everyone as well as the more traditional medico-moral aim trying to do more good than harm. Many doctors find these principles, and the frequent tensions between them, helpful to bear in mind when, individually or collegially, they are coming to a judgement on a

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

difficult ethical issue they have to deal with, or explaining the reasons for that judgement to others, or indeed in reflecting on how they are shaping their own character or the ethos of their team. These particular aids to reflection, of course, are tailored to medical practice: but they are rooted in the more generally applicable ethical principles of trying to do more good than harm in our lives, of trying to respect other individuals, and of trying to be fair to everyone, including ourselves. Respecting these general ethical principles and the tensions between them – in professional or academic work, in relations with colleagues or students, in personal, social and civic life – is surely an appropriate moral aim for professionals. Spelling them out in any greater detail as a principled-based ethics for the social sciences or indeed for any one social science however, is much more difficult and may not be desirable.

Some reasons for this are suggested by the philosopher Simone Weil in *The Need for Roots*, written in 1942 as a report to the Free French on the post-war regeneration of their country. Discussing what she calls 'the needs of the soul', or what individuals need to be fully human, she identifies freedom of thought as an essential need. She then argues that to protect this freedom, associations concerned with their members' interests (trades unions for example) should be allowed to promote those interests but not to express collective opinions on wider matters. 'For', she writes:

when a group starts having opinions, it inevitably tends to impose them on its members. Sooner or later these individuals find themselves debarred ... from expressing opinions opposed to those of the group, unless they care to leave it.

People on the other hand should of course be able freely to associate with others in order to discuss ideas, but in 'fluid social mediums' where the arguments for and against ideas of all kinds can be canvassed and tested: 'set out in their full force, all the arguments in favour of bad causes' could even be published, with the proviso only this 'did not pledge their authors in any way and contained no advice for readers'.

What this publication sounds like of course is the kind of journal in which ideas are fiercely contested and tested to destruction by otherwise mild-mannered academics. Her distinction between associations concerned with interests and associations concerned with ideas might be seen as that between for example, trades unions and learned societies, or more generally still between politics and science, a distinction she also characterises as between a field that 'forms part of action' and a field that is 'outside action'. Considered as an ideal type, science, including social science, is 'outside action' in that it allows freedom of thought and enquiry to disciplined intelligence – provided only that that intelligence does not intrude on the field that 'forms part of action', namely politics, again considered as an ideal type. A different metaphor for this might be that science is like the assessor sitting by the judge who provides all the information required before the judge can come to a judgement.

In practice, of course, these ideal types and fact–value distinctions are much more blurred, not least nowadays by how research is funded and by the involvement of scientists at certain levels of policymaking. The ultimate reason for both

the funding and the involvement however nevertheless does seem to be that scientific research is valued because it is considered to be in some fundamental sense 'outside action'. If therefore a scientific association 'starts having opinions' by giving more or less weight to one or other ethical principle in the constellation all of which deserve to be kept in mind, and even more by spelling out the implications of this for its members, it might well be moving into the political field that 'forms part of action', and thereby possibly diminishing its authority and usefulness. This is not to say that there no political issues on which scientific associations should have opinions – doctors and torture is one example and climate change may be another. But the influence of such opinions in the political field is probably in proportion to their rarity; and without such specific stimuli, 'having opinions' seems a high-risk area for scientific and social scientific associations.

Turning finally to the specific issue of deception raised in Matt Sleat's paper: I mentioned Onora O'Neill's remark that the basic reason for informed consent in medical ethics is that people should be 'neither coerced nor deceived' into treatment or research. But this, as I have suggested, reflects the particular importance of both harm and trust in medicine, which is very much less in social scientific research. In that context, Sleat's paper, I think, makes a good case for deception in at least some circumstances, including those when the research participants (whom the ESRC says 'must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion') are being investigated not as individuals but because of their possibly powerful role as public office holders or again as parties interested in the research not being conducted.

An interesting question here however, concerns the researcher's own 'possibly public role' as an impartial and unbiased scientist. If the role of the duplicitous researcher is 'to criticise the status quo or to suggest better alternatives', it might be argued that it has passed into the field that 'forms part of action' and has therefore largely forfeited the protection afforded by science to freedom of thought and enquiry. The duplicitous researcher's role here seems analogous to that of the investigative journalist or undercover policeman, the ethics of whose activities are widely contested and not afforded privileged protection from political judgements. This is probably a question which associations concerned with the interests of their members would be wise not to foreclose, but to leave matters to the 'fluid social medium' of general ethical discussion and debate in, for example, learned societies and universities, but also in the conversations of society – in the hope, ultimately, that the ethical assessor may be able to supply the political judge with appropriate material for a mature judgement on the subject.

## Discussion Paper: Are we Asked to ‘Other’ Ourselves? Social Scientists and the Research-ethics Review Process

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This paper underscores the manifold ways that the formal research-ethics codes perpetuate an imbalance. The most obvious imbalance relates to the imposition of a biomedical model of ethics review on the social sciences which numerous scholars have already commented on. I argue that while this imbalance constitutes a sufficient reason for social scientists to jettison the current review system as a whole, there are also other imbalances that make the ethics regime wobble. I refer to the uneven demands placed on researchers and incumbents of ethics committees. Taking the Canadian ethics code regime, TCPS 2 (CIHR, 2010) as an example, we see that researchers must specifically uphold at least 23 virtues (ethical obligations), in contrast to incumbents of ethics committees who can go about their business ‘virtue free.’ Despite this powerful discrepancy of virtues, ethics regimes continue to insist that social researchers refine their ethics in research based on an extraneous model of research. In effect, ethics regimes are asking us to ‘other’ ourselves, and to define the ethics of our research through the lens of biomedical paradigms. If this alone were enough to sunder the whole system of ethics review, we as social scientists are also finding ourselves in a crisis of mission with the rise of many alternatives in methods and purpose. This paper, I hope, shows that the current research-ethics review system lacks a moral or ethical basis.

This paper starts with describing the current crisis of sociology, spells out the inherent contradictions of ethics research-ethics review system, and then delves into the double-standard of the research-ethics review process; no ethical standard is demanded of incumbents of ethics committees, in contrast to the social researchers who must follow a bevy of ethical standards. The paper concludes with a number of approaches to solve these dilemmas.

### I Situating contemporary social research

The unstable feature of research-ethics review impinging on the social sciences is partly on account of the social sciences’ own loss of identity and mission. The current state of the social sciences, and especially sociology is similar to the crisis that visited anthropology 35 years ago. At the apogee of that crisis, Anna Grimshaw and Ken Hart (1994: 227–8) raised doubts about the prospects of anthropology:

... since the wave of independence movements [anthropology was] shattered [in] its empirical base and posed serious intellectual and political challenges to many of its fundamental assumptions. Anthropologists themselves have made many attempts to address this crisis and to find new practices suitable to a changed world order. But the problem of whether anthropology can survive as a discipline in the twenty-first century stubbornly remains as pressing as ever. Some professionals feel that millenarian predictions of the end of anthropology are tired and repetitive; others deny that there is any crisis at all, except an uncontrolled outbreak of navel-gazing; a number look for new areas to colonize (documentary film,

literature, tourism); while others seek a solution to the politics of anthropology through the invention of new writing strategies.

These observations, I believe, bear an uncanny resemblance to the current state of sociology, with one exception. While anthropology was then seen as a coloniser, sociology today has become the object of being colonised and it is the ethics-review system that is effectuating this colonisation by the biomedical paradigm.

The after-effects, within sociology, include a search for our soul and identity as sociologists. Sociologists are increasingly adopting the biomedical language (e.g. ‘protocol’, ‘investigator’) and contorting themselves and their research to suit the colonising paradigm. As has been universally noted, at the rate of 10 publications a year since 2000, the biomedical paradigm is vastly different than the sociological one.<sup>1</sup> So much so, that the application of the biomedical paradigm offers nothing that might be even remotely helpful to sociologists in their search for ethics in research. Besides, sociologists already have a treasure trove of insights about ethics in research, as expressed through manifold ethics guidelines in their own professional and academic societies.

Here are some important differences between sociology and biomedical research frameworks (see Table 1 below):

**Table 1: Comparative differences between social & biomedical research**

Social research	Biomedical research
1 stresses interdependence	highlights autonomy of res. part.
2 affirms aggregate, collective, patterns	speaks mainly about the individual
3 critiques of status quo	does not critique of status quo
4 sees worth of research in numerous ways	values worth of research in terms of social good
5 admits to interpretations and multiple perspectives	celebrates one perspective
6 has developed keen sense of ethics on the ground	takes its cue from template
7 acknowledges hierarchy of credibility	‘what’s this?’
8 continues ethical reflections through to publication	is less prone to wrestle about ethics in publications



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

I realise that this table offers a Promethean fit of each paradigm; it is highly generalised but it illustrates some of their principal difference as a basis for a rudimentary comparison.

These formal opposites lead us to think that we need to reconceptualise the schema of research-ethics review for social researchers. Annette Hemmings (2006: 12) speaks about 'seemingly intractable divides between notions of good, ethical ethnography and qualitative research and the ethical frameworks ... endorsed by ... IRBs' (2006: 12). But, what values will guide us if the biomedically based ethics-review system is not suitable for social research? As sociologists, we intend to portray society in the hopes of exposing inequality, injustice, and the routines of the everyday life of individuals and institutions. How do we become better analytical mirrors of society? How do we become authentic mirrors of society (Kleinecht, 2007: 229)? Who tilts this mirror these days? Research ethics committees and ethics policies. The quest to understand society has become more and more remote ... and more difficult given these obstacles.

### 2 Inherent contradictions about current research-ethics review regimes

There are conceptual contradictions in the way ethics policies articulate ethical stances. They fail to realise that every principle of ethics involves relationships and interdependence. For example, ethics codes call for 'trust' or 'trustworthiness' (CIHR, 2010: 44, 56, 59, 91, 105, 110, 118, 140) but also engage in the clarion call of 'trust-but-verify'. The same contradictory stance should apply to their deliberations about 'ethics applications'. These deliberations express cynicism; they speak of a deep distrust for researchers. Applications are researcher-evacuated, and the ethics-review process exemplifies control and bureaucratic gerrymandering. The process falls entirely short of the vital principle of ethics as something that pertains to human relationships (in this case, the relationship between ethics committees and researchers). The treatment by ethics committees of researchers' applications cannot be divorced from ethics which must give due regard to human relations. Unless ethics committees connect the 'treatment' of ethics applications from researchers as a *de facto* ethical relationship with researchers, the research-ethics review is a doomed moral or ethical enterprise.

As presently constituted, the research-ethics review process cannot be an ethical, or even a moral project. The research-ethics review process now boils down to an administrative process. Ethics is always about human relationships because how can virtues (e.g. trust, charity, generosity, respect, etc.) manifest themselves except through relations? As mentioned above, in their consideration of research applications for their ethical viability, ethics committees see that process as primarily a bureaucratic exercise involving control and the like, usually disconnected to the relations that must connect the committee to the researcher. We learn that Kant, in his concept of ethical conduct, advocated the idea that we should never treat something as merely an end in itself. In that light, I disagree with Howe and Moses (1999: 23) who believe that ethics committees employ '*de facto* Kantian' principles. The guardians of the ethics regime consider the application as a test of ethics, rather than their relationship to researchers. In such a consequentialist approach, the ends justify the means. More is vested in vetting applications than in cultivating relations with the researcher. As Annette Hemmings averred,

members of a social community have moral obligations flow from each other; when ethics committees do not see themselves as part of a social community (but as independent guardians), the notion of 'ethics' is absent from their deliberations, decisions, and outcomes. The terror or fear that committees strike in the hearts of students expresses, paradoxically, this lack of ethics. It is not virtuous to 'terrorise' students (van den Scott, 2013). As Hemmings points out (2006: 14), 'the life of students is made miserable'.

Second, although relations between researchers and individual research participants are acknowledged as part of the research, they do not, however, constitute the whole research. Sociologists value the search for interactional, collective, and institutional patterns. As Sleat (2013: 4) has stated,

It is also important to remember that the knowledge or understanding that we as social scientists seek to ascertain through our research is not knowledge about a private individual but knowledge that is of or about the **public** social or political body. Though this knowledge might be revealed as part of our interactions with individuals, we interact with them in their role as occupants of public office (e.g. elected representative, judge, a Vice Chancellor, an economic advisor to a Prime Minister) or as someone who operates in a social context beyond their private individual selves (e.g. terrorist, public broadcaster or a private broadcaster with political influence, a CEO of a company that employs significant proportion of a population, an enemy combatant). Importantly, we do not engage with them as private individuals. Likewise the knowledge that we ascertain is not private knowledge about a private individual, which an ethical framework puts very strict conditions on using or releasing, but knowledge that is public in the sense of being about the common.

Our 'representation' of research participants would be a failure if we, as sociologists, do not abstract the larger patterns that tend to culture and social structure. Moreover, much of the thrust of ethics codes is to equalise the power imbalance between researcher and research participant (Sleat 2013: 2), but the social sciences have tended to recognise such potential imbalances anyway. In many social-research settings, it is the research participant who generally has more power. I am relying on Martin Sleat's stimulus paper (2013: 4) that expresses a different notion of harm as articulated in biomedical models of research:

While the harm social science research might do can clearly affect the individual and many of their private interests, it is their public role that is of interest to us (though admittedly these are not easily separable). The point is that social science research only harms the private interests of individuals indirectly, as an often inescapable ramification of pursuing their public responsibility to study and analyse public matters.

Third, we aim to change the status quo, or at least not follow the 'party line' in our attempts to discover these patterns. 'Ethnographers were taught to be adventurous, generate knowledge of wide relevance', says Annette Hemmings (2006: 12). The critical stance is

important, especially in this era of oversight and upside-down democracy. 'Inverted totalitarianism' is a term coined by political philosopher Sheldon Wolin to describe what he believes to be the emerging form of government (especially in the United States; in the UK, Thatcherism expresses that form). Wolin believes that the United States is increasingly turning into an illiberal democracy, and he uses the term 'inverted totalitarianism' to illustrate the similarities and differences between the United States governmental system and totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union (Wikipedia). Today, challenging the status quo is perhaps the single most important task facing social scientists. As Matt Sleat (2013) at our Symposium has already stated, the social sciences 'play a crucial role in helping us understand our social world and critically and normatively reflect upon it'.

Fourth, following the idea that the 'sociological stance may be experienced as betrayal or rejection by participants who expect researchers to affirm or endorse their version' (Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 342), sociologists are not naive about the import of their research. To some extent, sociologists carry a heightened sense of the moral peril in which they find themselves. We find an applicably good statement in Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 342) about sociologists wanting to assert multiple perspectives, but cannot say as much to research participants. The opacity of sociological and anthropological research raises concerns when dealing with research participants. For example, Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 342–3) raise the issue of a study on parents with disabled children. Parents thought the study was about to see whether they were 'good' parents.

Fifth, social scientists struggle with the authorial voice in their writings. Do their perspectives, interpretations, and understandings override those of the research participants? Do social scientists have a right to privilege their own voice? To fight the authorial voice in our culture, is the only legitimate role for researchers to reproduce the research participants' perspective? As Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 345) point out, do we have the right 'to go beyond this [to usurp] the right of people to define their own reality'? If sociologists swallow what research participants say and do, do we claim that those genuine expressions mirror a false consciousness? Ethics codes are supremely silent on this basic, elementary issue in ethics for social researchers. There is no guidance forthcoming from the ethics regime.

There is a way out despite the silence. I have derived most of the remaining points from the work by Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 345–6). They propose that (1) authors have to become visible in the texts; (2) we need to present evidence upon which our interpretations are based; (3) we should acknowledge that for some it is not about the validity of the interpretations, 'but the question of control over the interpretative process'; (4) we need to acknowledge our interests and the extent to which they differ from the research participants; (5) we need 'to alert participants to the ways in which we will re-frame their versions of their experiences'; (6) reflecting on conflicts of interpretation is also needed; and, finally (7) in the face of 'solipsism and radical relativism', the

researcher should resort to consequentialist ethics and show the power of research to 'produce valued social outcomes' (Fine, in Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 346).

Sixth, still following Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 343) if we judge research by its effects, we can become apprised of the hopeful fact that research 'often do not lead to exploitation'. Still, we find highway signs that potentially warn us of the dangers that we could exploit the community we are studying. We are 'disingenuous' (Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 344) in our 'attempts to downplay inequalities and develop reciprocal relationships'. With financial benefits to researcher, are we not exploiting research participants? How do we go about returning benefits to research participants (Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 344)? Can we conclude with the thought that although biomedical research has colonised social research (via ethics committees), social researchers exercise a 'new form of colonisation' (Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 345) by interpreting the experiences of others? In other words, are we 'usurping' the rights of others to define themselves?

Finally, if research leads to self-awareness among research participants, it may also 'lead to trouble' (Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 340). We need to agree with Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 341) that 'ethnographic publications can hurt'. 'Does the researcher,' say Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 344), 'actively support' groups (e.g. KKK) or undermine them? Even by publishing about them? Research ethics codes are silent on the specifics of these dilemmas. That silence is deafening. And, yet, in all other matters, social researchers must carry the burden of having been colonised by a biomedical paradigm that gives no insight into these vexing problems.

The mission of the social sciences is disappearing. As I mentioned elsewhere (van den Hoonaard 2011), ethics committees have homogenised and pauperised social research, and social scientists and we are complicit.

### 3 Situating ethics codes

This section of the paper even troubles me. My investigation is still ongoing, but my premise is that ethics codes do not speak about virtues which members of ethics committees must demonstrate,<sup>2</sup> but the ethics codes have spelled out plenty of them for researchers to acquire. This problem goes to the nub of our dilemma. The guardians of ethics committees (for whom virtues are not significantly spelled out) are insisting that we, the social researchers, take an uncompromising look at the ethics of our own research. We are to produce ethical perspectives even though most of social research has had them without the benefit of ethics committees. In other words, we have been asked to 'other' ourselves, to 'explain' and 'elaborate' our research lives in terms of what the biomedical model of the ethics framework is driving us to do. As Martyn Hammersley in response to David Carpenter (2013) asks, 'What's wrong with the principles we have ...?'

This colonising mind-set offers no warrants (unlike open courts) and secrecy is touted as the norm. In addition to the diversity of opinion among ethics committees, researchers have a difficult time sorting through the demands and wishes of these committees. Research proposals are sometimes so contorted and changed by ethics committees that one has the feel that we are doing 'research by committee'. We find an abundance of values in ethics codes, but a shortness of virtues (except those demanded of researchers). The widely held

belief by the guardians that research-ethics review can be standardised is irritating, to say the least.

Reading the (Canadian) TCPS 2 as a guide of virtues for both researchers and incumbents of ethics committees, one is struck that researchers are ideally required to have 23 virtues (see Appendices A and B) but no list of virtues has been set aside for members of ethics committees.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, researchers are in much greater need of them! However, there is a list of institutional virtues attached to ethics committees which do not translate into virtues of individuals.

As a research note, I systematically read the TCPS 2 and traced the listed virtues. Using [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_virtues](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_virtues), which has a list of 114 virtues, I tried to match the nature of the virtues in the TCPS 2 with those listed in the relevant website. It was possible to make a straightforward match in some cases; in other cases, it was not that easy and I had to infer what virtue a particular phraseology would refer to. No doubt, the 'virtues list' is not complete and probably reflects a Western bias. For example, some virtues are missing from the list, such as Respect for elders (which is critical when doing research in Aboriginal communities).

The most ardently sought-after virtues that Canadian ethics policies wish researchers to follow include Respect, Openness, Truthfulness/Honesty, and Sensitivity (see Appendix A). The next set includes Trust(worthiness), Responsibility, Justice, Co-operativeness, Balance, and Compassion (e.g. concern for welfare). At the next level, the TCPS 2 promotes these virtues: Understanding, Flexibility, Fairness, Impartiality (separate roles), Benevolence (that research is of benefit to res. part.), Cautiousness, Integrity, Thoughtfulness, and Vigilance (protect participants). The final set of virtues includes Courage (adopt critical perspective) (challenge mainstream thought), Fair-mindedness, Freedom (freedom from coercion), Commitment, Loyalty, and Independence.

Institutionally speaking, the 'top' virtues that TCPS 2 welcomes the most in terms of dealing with research participants are Openness, Truthfulness/Honesty (reveal Conflict of Interest, Transparency), and Sensitivity. The virtues less emphasised in TCPS 2 include Respect, Justice, Responsibility, Cooperativeness, Fairness, Impartiality, Integrity, and Fair-mindedness. The least emphasised one involve Trust (worthiness), Balance, Understanding, Flexibility, Thoughtfulness, Courage, Attention, Loyalty, and Independence. Appendix C 2 provides a schematic overview of virtues according to the different levels of relative importance:

### Is there a Way Out?

It seems clear that the current research-ethics regime is not in a position to guide social researchers. The most urgent and satisfying approach, in the words of Martin Sleat (2013: 6), for social scientists ('in the face of creeping regulation') is to:

press for **our** freedom to be able to make these judgement calls, for it is more often than not the

researcher him or herself who is best-placed to make them (and to take responsibility for when the wrong decision is made)

The ethics codes of academic and professional societies, developed over many years through the experience of their respective memberships, are very adequate in guiding researchers through periods of ethics on the ground.

Despite our fervent and provocative pleas we might still see the endurance of the kinds of ethics codes that cannot sustain the sort of ethics that make sense in social research. Failing to dispense with those biomedically based codes, we should make the case for developing a parallel system of ethics policies. This can take several forms. We should either consign individual ethical obligations (virtues) to incumbents of ethics committees, much like ethics codes today spell out individual ethical obligations of researchers.

Failing to elicit attempts by policymakers to assign personal obligations for incumbents of ethics committees, we might argue that ethics codes drop the personal obligations of researchers and, instead, specify only the ethical obligations of disciplines in general (and not of researchers). This parallel arrangement speaks to a more balanced approach. The professional and/or academic societies can then spell out the obligations of individual researchers (which they now do anyway).

Whether we disband the research-ethics regime or reconfigure it with or without personal ethical obligations (for committee incumbents and researchers), it remains all too clear that ethics always involves human relations. If the basis of judgements by ethics committee about applications from researchers does not acknowledge that central fact (as is currently the case), ethics is an empty page.

Rediscovering the sociological imagination represents another way out. Caught in the maelstrom of being colonised by the biomedical paradigm, social scientists, and sociologists in particular, must find a new way of asserting the foundation of their discipline, taking a critical and/or analytical stance in research. Murphy and Dingwall has set a course, namely to combine 'a commitment to social constructionism with the pursuit of truth as a regulative ideal'. They also claim that '[s]ubtle realists accept the idea that there might be multiple, non-contradictory versions of reality which, although different from one another, may nevertheless all be true', a perspective also voiced by Murphy and Dingwall (2002: 346). The latter two offered this vision, namely that such an approach 'opens up the possibility that participants' versions of events may be 'reality tested' through empirical work. The researcher is not obliged to treat any particular version as authoritative simply because it is offered by a participant'. The ethical imperative is about **fair dealing** (Murphy and Dingwall 2002: 346).

In the meanwhile, one can also suggest that 'Slow Scholarship' is something that all researchers might consider to find their way out of this maelstrom (see, e.g. Hertz et al 2013; and a FB page <http://www.facebook.com/groups/188202231458/>).

### Notes

1. Martin Sleat, in a paper prepared for our Symposium

has articulated the clear difference between bio-medical conceptions of harm and those in the social sciences, relating such profound differences to the varying natures of their research. I highly recommend his insights.

2. When under 'FAQ' on US Human Research Protections, I searched the term 'virtue', the reply was as follows: **Q:** 'How do the regulations define "prisoner"? **A:** The regulations define "prisoner" as follows: "Prisoner" means any individual involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution ...'.
3. In some cases, it is relatively easy to infer what virtues TCPS 2 refers to because the terms are equivalent to those found on the virtues website (e.g. integrity). In other cases, one might want to assume that 'being transparent' (p 92) is the same as 'being open'. There are also descriptions in TCPS 2 that one would need to translate more vigorously, such as when it asks researchers to be considerate of the nature of the research when it 'invades sensitive interests' (p 141). Are we to assume that the virtue of Sensitivity is to be applied here?

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## APPENDIX A

### PROVISIONAL LIST OF VIRTUES AS EXEMPLIFIED IN CANADA'S TCPS 2 (2010): THE INITIAL SCAN OF THE TEXT

Instances of pages in TCPS 2 where I have inferred a virtue, directly or indirectly

Instances of pp virtues appearing on pp in TCPS 2	Researchers & Res. Participants	REB & Res. participants
Respect	8, 28, 52, 58, 89, 103, 105, 106, 107, 109, 114, 117, 119, 123, 126, 143	8, 67, 89
Openness, Truthfulness/Honesty (reveal Col) (transparency)	7, 32, 58, 89, 91, 94, 95, 96, 150, 152, 157, 158, 161, 164, 183, 186	90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 152, 157
Sensitivity	8, 55, 88, 107, 120, 130, 141, 169, 174	55, 88, 100, 144, 169
Trust(worthiness)	44, 56, 59, 91, 105, 110, 118, 140	90
Responsibility	27, 42, 56, 80, 103, 153, 154, 160	80, 153
Justice	10, 41, 47, 48, 109, 116	47, 67, 88
Cooperativeness	108, 110, 115, 123, 124, 128	86, 99
Balance	41, 106, 107, 111, 166	41
Compassion (e.g. concern for welfare)	10, 40, 109, 162, 173	10, 67
Understanding	24, 138, 140	24
Flexibility	81, 138	85
Fairness	10, 110	90, 160
Impartiality (separate roles)	32, 95	21, 79
Benevolence (that research is of benefit to res. part.)	41, 124	
Cautiousness	138, 182	
Integrity	58, 163	68, 93
Thoughtfulness	7, 177	177
Vigilance (protect participants)	57, 155	
Courage (adopt critical perspective) (challenge mainstream thought)	35	21
Fair-mindedness	47	47, 79
Freedom (freedom from coercion)	29	
Attention?	28	28
Commitment	7	
Loyalty		90
Independence		93
Total virtues	23	20



**APPENDIX B**  
**PROVISIONAL LIST OF VIRTUES AS EXEMPLIFIED**  
**IN CANADA'S TCPS 2 (2010):**  
**THE INITIAL SCAN OF THE TEXT**

Number of pages that has at least one reference to the indicated virtue

Instances of virtues appearing on pp in TCPS 2	Researchers Res. participants	Ethics Committees
Respect	16	3
Openness, Truthfulness/Honesty (transparency) (acknowl. with Col)	16	8
Sensitivity	9	5
Trust(worthiness)	8	1
Responsibility	8	2
Justice	6	3
Cooperativeness	6	2
Balance	5	1
Compassion (e.g. concern for welfare)	5	2
Understanding	3	1
Flexibility	2	1
Fairness	2	2
Impartiality (separate roles)	2	2
Benevolence (that research is of benefit to res. part.)	2	0
Cautiousness	2	0
Integrity	2	2
Thoughtfulness	2	1
Vigilance (protect participants)	2	0
Courage (adopt critical perspective) challenge mainstream thought	1	1
Fair-mindedness	1	2
Freedom (freedom from coercion)	1	0
Attention?	1	1
Commitment	1	0
Loyalty	0	1
Independence	0	1
Total virtues	23	20

**APPENDIX C**  
**LEVELS AND KINDS OF VIRTUES MANDATED IN**  
**TCPS 2**

Different levels of virtues as expressed in TCPS 2

Level 1 expresses the most-mentioned virtue; Level 4, the least.

	Researchers are mandated to have	Ethics committees should have
<b>Level 1</b>	Openness	Openness
	Truthfulness/Honesty	Truthfulness/Honesty
	Sensitivity	
<b>Level 2</b>	Trust(worthiness)	Respect
	Responsibility	Justice
	Justice	
	Cooperativeness	
	Balance	
	Compassion	
<b>Level 3</b>	Understanding	Responsibility
	Flexibility	Cooperativeness
	Fairness	Fairness
	Impartiality	Impartiality
	Benevolence	
	Cautiousness	
	Integrity	
	Thoughtfulness	
	Vigilance	
<b>Level 4</b>	Courage	Trust(worthiness)
	Fair-mindedness	Balance
	Freedom	Understanding
	Attention	Flexibility
	Commitment	Thoughtfulness
	Loyalty	Courage
	Independence	Attention
		Loyalty
		Independence

**Note**

When a virtue appeared at least once on a page, I scored it one time. So the levels of the virtues are based on the number of pages in which a particular virtue has appeared.

## A Summary of Symposium 2: Values

15th April 2013, British Psychological Society, London

Organising Committee: Robert Dingwall, Ron Iphofen, Janet Lewis and John Oates

Summary by Dr Nathan Emmerich, Queen's University Belfast

### Introduction

The second in a series of three Academy of Social Sciences symposia was convened on 15th April 2013 at the British Psychological Society's offices in London. The day, chaired by Paul Atkinson (Cardiff University), was concerned with Values and followed the first symposium (5/3/13) where the discussion focused on Principles. The final symposium will focus on Standards.

There was an initial discussion of the previous symposium, the written summary and the direction the project was moving. The morning was focused on the discussion paper written by Matthew Sleat (Department of Politics, University of Sheffield) and responses by Rosemary Hunter (University of Kent and the current chair of the Socio-Legal Studies Association) and Kenneth Boyd (University of Edinburgh). This was followed by a wide-ranging discussion.

The afternoon session recommenced with a paper by Will van den Hoonaard (University of New Brunswick) and, following a brief discussion, the attendees were divided into working groups to conduct more focused discussions, summaries of which were then fed back to the whole group for plenary debate.

### Initial discussion

The first order of business was to discuss whether the Chatham House Rule could be abandoned for the purposes of summarising the discussion. Whilst there was general agreement about the need to include names and affiliations of contributors, some members felt they needed to have an opportunity to ensure comments about their Societies were correct. Robert Dingwall concluded that, prior to being made public, summaries would be circulated to participants on a confidential basis for comment and minor amendment. The summary still reflects what was said and is, therefore, an abridged version of a social exchange; nothing reported in these documents can be taken as authoritative. When seeking advice individuals should always refer to the current guidance published by their Learned Society and are encouraged to contact them if further clarity is required.

The second order of business was a brief consideration of the direction which the Symposia Series and the 'Generic Principles' project was taking. Following the confidential distribution of the summary of the previous Symposium there was some concern that the working party was seeking a predetermined conclusion or that if a set of generic ethical principles was adopted by the Academy of Social Sciences it would become a condition of membership on the Learned Societies. Robert Dingwall assured the audience that this was not the case. Whilst it was important to distinguish between the different disciplines of the social sciences other people, including the general public, might have a more singular picture of the social sciences and social scientists. John Oates noted that part of the purpose of the Academy of Social Sciences

adopting a set of generic principles would be to inform the various publics (funders, sponsors, the public at large, including participants and communities being researched, ethical regulators and those involved in research governance) about the ethical nature of social science research.

Dingwall also noted that any generic principles would remain open to local interpretation and application. He also suggested that those involved with the symposia series saw it as a 'bottom-up' process and that we were seeking to form a *useful* consensus but remained open to the possibility that there would not be one. Ron Iphofen echoed these comments. Matei Candea (ASA) expressed concern about how much the eight principles had been modified from the previous symposia and raised the question of whether principles, rather than values or virtues, was the best way to do ethics in the social sciences. John Oates noted the eight principles had been modified, and that in retrospect their inclusion in the summary was unfortunate as they were not a conclusion of Symposium One and could have been distributed in a separate document.

### Stimulus paper: Matthew Sleat

Commencing the morning schedule Sleat offered a brief summary of the views he set out in his discussion paper. It was, Sleat said, the first time he had considered research ethics and governance in any detail and he was immediately struck by the way in which it was easy for social science research ethics to follow the tracks previously laid out by biomedical research ethics and the shape of regulation in the US, Canada, and Australia.

Whilst recognising difference, Sleat suggested that one thing these models had in common was that they centred on what he called the Participant Protection Model (PPM) of research ethics. Reflecting the post-World War Two consensus this model accords precedence to the rights of the participants. However, Sleat wanted to question whether the responsibilities of social scientist were the same as those of biomedical researchers, and who should be given ethical priority in social scientific research.

Sleat suggested that the PPM is an inappropriate model for governing the ethical aspect of social scientific research. He argued that the social sciences have a critical and normative function within any given society. This means that the social sciences have a different ethical structure to biomedical research and therefore different sets of responsibilities pertain to biomedical and social scientific researchers. Furthermore Sleat suggested that, whilst there was an asymmetry of power between biomedical researchers and participants who are often ill, this was not always the case in the social sciences. Furthermore the potential for harm was, generally speaking, far less in the social sciences than in biomedical research.

Sleat also argued that because social scientists researched 'the social' the focus was often on the public roles and actions of

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

research participants not on their biology. Thus we might think there is a different dynamic to the principle of autonomy in each case. Furthermore if we considered the concept of 'vulnerability' we might think that, whilst the participant in biomedical research was always more vulnerable, in the social sciences the researcher might be the more vulnerable party. For example, in his own discipline of political science, researchers often sought to study politicians and other individuals who occupy positions of power far greater than academic researchers.

### Responses by discussants

**Professor Rosemary Hunter** began her talk in the spirit of reflexivity – a value that emerged from the previous symposium – by noting several of her social locations relevant to the discussion. These included: being a socio-legal scholar; a researcher trained in the US and Australia; a teacher of research ethics to postgraduate and undergraduate students; a feminist; and a chair of a Learned Society with its own code of ethics. In the light of Sleat's discussion about the normative and critical function of the social sciences it is interesting to highlight Hunter's commitment to feminism and, presumably, feminist research in the social sciences. Hunter also highlighted the relationships researchers have to their: institution (including its ethical governance procedures); research team; disciplinary colleagues and community; participants; funders; and other stakeholders including users of research. She felt that Sleat's focus on the PPM captured only one aspect of the ethics of social scientific research and felt that highlighting these other relationships indicated that 'ethics' involved reciprocal relationships and parties had duties to each other.

Hunter felt that the process of ethics review and the requirement to fulfill some bureaucratic requirements was a good opportunity to reflect on the design and conduct of research. That the PPM captured some of the ethics issues in conducting research indicated that it ought to be built upon rather than jettisoned. Furthermore, Hunter felt it was important to retain the PPM as, in her experience, some researchers and students did not pay sufficient attention to the potential impact of research on participants. She felt there could be a lack of empathy with or for participants on the part of researchers. She also disagreed with Sleat's characterisation of relationship between researchers who sought to research those in positions of power. She felt that we should reject the idea that someone was or was not more powerful than someone else and adopt a conception of power as circulating through social networks and relationships. Thus in some social scientific research there ought to be a stronger sense of the mutual relationship between researcher and researched and their duties to each other.

Hunter then turned to the question of values in social scientific research. She suggested that values are too general to stand alone and that they needed to be seen as informing principles. She also questioned whether 'lowest-common-denominator' values that achieved wide consensus at the cost of being informative would be all that helpful. She considered and rejected a number of candidate values from the previous symposium. Those she assessed in a positive light and others she suggested were:

- Autonomy and dignity, for both research participants and as an aspect of the other relationships, such as

those that researchers have to institutions, funders, colleagues, and communities.

- Respect for cultural difference/pluralism. With the caveat that we avoid cultural essentialism.
- Reflexivity.
- Integrity.
- Transparency, social responsibility, independence, competence, accountability.
- Collegiality.
- Trust.
- Inclusiveness. A value that may encourage ethics committees to take a more facilitative approach.
- Empathy.
- Open-mindedness, particularly in regard to the conclusions of a research project.

Hunter concluded that, while the PPM may not be a good fit for social scientific research, it is not wholly without value. The PPM should be situated within a consideration of the range of relationships engendered by the social practice of social scientific research.

**Professor Kenneth Boyd's** talk was informed by his experience of teaching professional and research ethics to biomedical researchers and medical professionals. He highlighted the historical and contemporary commitment of medicine to 'doing no harm' and the way the Hippocratic Oath was designed to engender trust. These commitments served to guide the medical profession until the seeds of professionalisation were sown in the late 17th century, culminating in the establishment of the General Medical Council in the 19th century. Nevertheless medical ethics continued to be absorbed via socialisation into the ethos of medicine, perhaps with some discussion of the 'Rule of A's' until the mid-20th century. Furthermore the ethics of research rested on an implied contract, predicated on 19th-century charity hospitals, where patients provided the human material for research in return for medical attention. This contract was shattered by various revelations of abuse in the 20th century resulting in responses such as the Declaration of Helsinki.

Boyd suggested that whilst such documents, and biomedical research ethics more generally, have focused on the importance of fully informed consent there is now a general consensus that it is an impossible ideal. Public health research is one such area where it can be impossible to obtain individual level consent. As with public health research the risks to participants in the social sciences are of a different order to those posed by biomedicine.

There is a degree of irony in the application of the biomedical model of research ethics to the social sciences as, via an increasing recognition of the need for the kind of trust that is engendered by the virtuous physician, medicine is now moderating its procedural approach to research ethics. Boyd suggests that like other institutions debates about social scientific research ethics and its governance are being swept along by the social momentum of professionalisation in medicine and healthcare more generally. Furthermore a principle-based ethics is more easily defended in public fora and medical professionals have found them, and the tensions between them, useful in practice.

However Boyd argued that spelling out a principle-based ethics for the social sciences might be more difficult. He thought this might be because of a blurring in the distinction between science and politics that is unavoidable in the social sciences. Nevertheless he maintained that ideally that, like all science, social scientific research should be conducted 'outside action' or independently from 'politics' and the kinds of actions it undertakes. In the age of impact and engagement the appropriate maintenance and transgression of this boundary is itself an ethical challenge.

### Morning discussion

Following the talk by Matthew Sleat and the responses by Hunter and Boyd the floor was opened for comment, questions and discussions. Woody Caan (RSS) raised the issue of the benefit research participants, particularly young people, derived from being involved in research. Boyd expressed concern that exercises in protecting the 'at risk' could quickly become a bureaucratic exercise whilst Hunter wished to resist labeling groups as 'vulnerable' and therefore treated in a particular way. Caan redirected by suggesting he was particularly interested in whether young people should derive some direct benefit from their participation in research. David Carpenter (Research Ethics Advisor, University of Portsmouth) later suggested it was not problematic for research with young people to benefit them as a group rather than as individuals.

Tim Bond (BACP) suggested that research can give voice to individuals and members of particular groups and therefore contribute to broader social discourses that might otherwise be closed to their perspectives. Annabelle Mark (SHOC) recalled her experience with the National Institute for Health Research where patient representatives were involved in decision-making and the award of grants. She found the direct inclusion of patients to be very useful and felt that academic interpretations rooted in research was not a replacement for this. Stina Lyon (BSA) felt that it was too easy to consider people as beneficiaries on ideological grounds and that if research was to be beneficial then it must be conducted with (scientific) integrity. Boyd followed this up with the question of how integrity could be obtained and maintained. He felt that the best way to maintain an ethical culture was through continually addressing ethical conflicts and not producing finalised statements, positions or 'solutions.' Agreeing with this view Lyon concluded it was the responsibility of researchers and research communities to maintain this discourse.

Matei Candea (ASA) gave his support to the way Hunter had suggested we added values, such as mindedness, and felt that it echoed the discussion of the previous symposium on the meta-value of disciplinary pluralism in the social sciences. He also reflected on what might happen when organisations spell out their values. He felt we should be clear about to whom this spelling out of values or ethics is addressed and that the language we use, or what needs to be said, might be different if we were addressing the public or other scholars and learned societies. In the light of a commitment to (the value of) disciplinary pluralism Candea was concerned that speaking with a single voice would involve the somewhat paradoxical stance of needing to present the plurality of views that stand behind this 'single voice.'

Dingwall again reiterated the view of the organising

committee that this project was not about talking down to learned societies but in bringing the societies into dialogue with each other. He noted that there was a good deal of variation in the amount of attention paid to research ethics across the learned societies. The aim was to feed back the discussions to the learned societies and that this would include areas of dissent, dispute and conflict as well as commonalities. Boyd agreed that a positive outcome or aim of this project could be an on-going conversation amongst the learned societies.

Sheila Peace (BSG) noted that her society involved researchers from a range of disciplines including social and biological sciences. Furthermore gerontologists work with vulnerable people some of whom have, and some of whom lack, capacity. Because BSG members have their own disciplinary codes of ethics to draw on, the BSG itself does not offer a code but a set of best-practice guidelines.

David Hunter (Editor of Research Ethics) suggested the apparent problems with the ESRC's FRE and other such codes were only apparent as, if they were properly understood, the perspective they offered was open to a greater degree of interpretation than commonly thought (and sometimes assumed by more detailed guidance based on the documents). He also thought it was more productive to focus on the required standards rather than the ideal, as the latter may not always be achievable.

James Parry (UKRIO) felt that starting a conversation would be invaluable in engaging with the problem of a tick-box culture. He also felt the potential audience might be the universities themselves. Having previously surveyed the ethics statements of UK universities he clearly perceived the influence of work in biomedical research ethics. Things had developed since then but he felt the current discussion could further the redevelopment of frameworks and bureaucratic procedures such that they were more appropriate to the social sciences. Helen Simons (UK Evaluation Society) suggested that when the UKES produced its ethics guidelines they drew on existing codes from within and without the social science. Nevertheless they sought to provide instruction and information for researchers and those who reviewed research.

Mary Brydon Miller (UC, currently a Fulbright Fellow at Keele) offered a warning from her experience in America where IRBs seemed to be a pre-emptive form of liability defence or mitigation on the part of the university. It was not so about improving the ethical dimension of research or addressing the moral questions raised by research. Thus we must bear in mind the different interests in institutionalising ethics review. She wondered how we institutionalise inclusive ethics reflection that includes the views of others who are not normally represented, such as laypersons and those who are, or who 'represent,' subjects or communities being research.

Aware of the problems of ethics review in America, Ron Lphofen (Organising Committee and SRA) nevertheless acknowledged that universities needed to institutionalise ethics review as a form of research governance but that it should be separated from questions of liability. He was also concerned to ensure that there was always room for broader ethics conversations to continue. He also raised the question of whether ethics could be fully distinct from politics,



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

particularly in the case of emerging technologies such as nanotechnology and surveillance. Ron also encouraged people to suggest possible outcomes from the series of symposia. In response Matei Candea (ASA) thought that online resources and collections of case studies would be useful. James Parry (UKRIO) said his office was keen to develop such resources and provide a 'point of collation' where researchers could find links to existing codes produced by learned societies.

There was some discussion of what a principle was and a suggestion that they were norms and therefore what might be usually desirable, not absolute rules. Thus one should have to argue the case for transgressing a principle or norm and bodies charged with regulating research ethics must make room for this. Michelle Dodson (ESRC) offered her support for the project and this interpretation of principles. She felt the ESRC adopted an approach that saw the ethics of research as a developing area needing on-going attention and that forums such as this were one way of doing that. She felt collecting 'difficult' case studies that presented not only solutions but gave some idea of how people worked through the problems would be valuable. She suggested the ESRC was open to expanding, (re)creating or supporting a web-portal for research ethics in the social sciences.

Stina Lyon mentioned the RESPECT code of conduct for socio-economic research in Europe and that it might be usefully drawn upon in developing research ethics for UK social science.<sup>2</sup> Van Den Hoonaard suggested the UKRIO might also collect articles by researchers critiquing the system or offer alternative perspectives, justifications and empirical evidence. Ann Buchanan said that her priority in working on research ethics and regulation was to ensure there were no unnecessary barriers to research. Her group also collected 'protocols' or standardised ethical approaches to particular forms of research. A number of other delegates thought that collecting examples, cases and approaches as guides to others would be very useful. In making this point, calling for actual grounded and real cases, Libby Bishop (UK Data Archive) identified a possible theme of the discussion. This was a commitment to an alternative to the single event tick-box model of ethics review. The UK Data Archive are trying to collect examples of how data can be made available for reuse in an ethical manner.

Nathan Emmerich commented on Matt Sleat's suggestion that social scientists were interested in 'social roles' rather than (biological) individuals, as was the case with biomedical research. The ethical relationship between biomedical researchers meant that researchers and researched could focus on 'the biological body' as an objectified site of research. In contrast the interests of social scientific researchers were such that the focus had to be on the social lives of individuals, something inseparable from their personal and public identity and conception of self. Paul Atkinson (Cardiff and Symposia Chair) suggested that this view could be reflexively applied to biomedical research and be used to suggest that research ethics had an under-socialised view of the individual flatly contradicted by, for example, genetic and genomic research. Boyd also supported this view arguing that the atomistic individual was a legal fiction that should not be allowed to overly dominate ethical debate.

James Parry (UKRIO) suggested that the government did not show any signs of bringing forward legislation on this issue but

felt that we should bear in mind quasi-regulatory structures and the publish or perish culture. Dingwall commented that the absence of regulation did not mean that other normative structures would not occupy the same space. He felt that universities, and therefore researchers, over-complied with insurance requirements, and demands made by these private companies were treated and understood differently to those imposed by public bodies.

Matthew Sleat closed the discussion by reminding the symposium that the ethics of research has been an ongoing part of the social sciences throughout its lifetime and wondered if we should be bolder in asserting this fact and in taking ownership of the ethics of research and its governance. Kenneth Boyd noted that the concern for ethics in the social sciences mirrored interest in such issues elsewhere in society both in biomedical research but also beyond. Universities, for example, increasingly have ethics committees that are concerned with the actions and investments of the institution.

### Discussion paper by Professor Will C van den Hoonaard

Following lunch Professor van den Hoonaard (University of New Brunswick) gave a talk on his perspective on social scientific research ethics and the difficulties generated by a bureaucratic form based on that used to govern biomedical research.<sup>3</sup> The basic concern addressed by van den Hoonaard might be described as whether ethics review of social scientific research is conducted ethically. He suggested that the social sciences are being asked to 'other itself' by framing the ethics of research through a foreign lens. He considers sociology, anthropology and the social sciences more generally to have been colonised by biomedical research ethics with the result that research has become more conservative. One example of this is the increasing use of the interview as a research method, to the detriment of all others, particularly ethnography or participant observation. He also noted the degree to which words such as protocol (something he felt was an account of research which was supposed to eliminate interpretation), best practice (which appears to suggest one 'best' way of doing things), investigator, and informed consent have been imported into social scientific discourse.

Van den Hoonaard felt that the current system of ethics review mirrored the approach taken to reviewing grant applications. This, he suggested, was not a basis for doing ethics. In the first instance this approach would encourage decision-making to be made in the absence of researchers, as not doing so did not strike him as a good, or ethical way to do ethics. Furthermore ethics committees operated according to a 'trust but verify' approach that seemed to him to be a paradoxical basis for a relationship. Finally he noted that there seemed to be an on-going search for ethics horror stories that, in the social sciences, are notable by their absence. This search for horror stories speaks volumes about the relationship between 'research ethics' and 'social scientists.' The problematic relationship between researchers and research ethics committees can also be perceived in the attitudes of PhD students who are often intimidated by ethics committees, something that can also continue after approval when the research does not go exactly to plan. Van den Hoonaard considered the ethical legitimacy of such a system to be deeply questionable. There is a deep irony in a system of research ethics that requires social scientific researchers to follow 23 virtues whilst making no ethical commitments

regarding its own activities. Van den Hoonaard argued that we should articulate the virtues and values that guide ethics review.

Furthermore van den Hoonaard called for a revitalisation of the social sciences which asserts their own ethical and moral culture. He pointed towards examples of researchers that had refused the imposition of anonymity on research participants that did not wish to be anonymised. Finally he suggested academics should stand up to research ethics committees on behalf of themselves, their students and their discipline.

### Discussion following van den Hoonaard's presentation

Professor Caan strongly supported van den Hoonaard's call to challenge the over-use of anonymity where it is neither (ethically) warranted nor desired by research participants. Van den Hoonaard wondered why we lacked the courage to reject unnecessary demands for anonymisation whilst Professor Mary Brydon Miller followed up by suggesting that we had a tendency to over-respond to ethics review according to our internalised expectation. She suggested IRBs were sometimes open to different approaches if they were justified. Van den Hoonaard noted this internalisation was, as per his argument, a classic response to colonisation. Atkinson noted that it was important not to over-respond to (or even further) this colonisation by needlessly producing extended forms of self-regulation. Helen Simons (UK Evaluation Society) reminded the symposium that anonymisation was the correct norm for most research conducted by social scientists and van Den Hoonaard followed up with the idea that people did not necessarily have to be anonymous or not anonymous. He referenced the idea of 'broken identities', which is where a single research participant might be given a number of pseudonymous identities in published research. This is usually used as an aide to anonymisation but could be used in conjunction with non-anonymous reporting of a research participant's views or actions.

There was a feeling that there was a particular problem in regard to anonymisation in research with elites. On the one hand it can be particularly difficult to ensure anonymity whilst on the other it can be particularly important to attribute views to individuals in positions of power and to hold them to account. Van Den Hoonaard used this comment as an opportunity to note that the motive of the researcher and the research was central to its ethical conduct and the standards that it should conform. There was a feeling that that the researchers ethics responsibilities did not end if a research participant waived their right to anonymity and Nathan Emmerich later echoed this view. Professor Boyd felt that this debate was illustrative of the problems of taking over the ethics formed within a different paradigm of research. Anonymisation of health data means, simply, the removal of names. In social science research this becomes a more complicated operation. He also felt that it was easier to identify vices rather than virtues, things we should not do rather than things we must do. He recommended that we might concern ourselves with the identification of the vices of social scientific research.

Professor Caan suggested many PhD students were now supervised by inexperienced researchers whereas it used to be the case only experienced researchers had the privilege of doing so. This increased the risk of unethical behavior and research. Van den Hoonaard followed up by noting that ethics

committees increasingly offered methodological 'advice' to research students or stipulated methodological requirements; they engage in supervision by committee. The idea that only 'good' research is ethical maps onto the increasing use of interviews discussed by van den Hoonaard.

### Group discussions

Following van den Hoonaard's talk and the discussion, the symposium split into groups to discuss the worksheets containing the updated principles for review and research.

#### Group One

This group began with the suggestion that naming the vices or social scientific research might be productive. They considered: misconduct; incompetence; abuse of individuals or communities; irresponsibility; and injustice. However their view was that it was better to be aspirational and consider positive virtues than negative vices. They also considered what are ethics and how they can be dynamic systems. They considered how ethics review created a focus on a point in time and negatively impacted on considering research throughout the process of research. They discussed the idea of engaging communities in research by using a structured ethics reflection process, usually associated with action research. The aim was to inform the practice of researchers and to negotiate a set of guiding questions that the research addressed.

They then discussed the development of large data sets as a resource for social scientific research. Focusing on education, where student's assessment data is accumulated into a large data set, they considered what informed consent might mean in the case of longitudinal research. They also reflected on cultural and cross-cultural ethics as well as the language of ethics. They questioned whether the term 'generic' in the title of this symposia series was a fruitful term as it was synonymous with 'standard issue.' This was something they felt clearly not appropriate when the aim was to engender more ethics engagement across the disciplines. They felt there might be some basic ethical foundations around which all the social science could unite however these would be 'operationalised' and further articulated in particular disciplines and research projects.

Returning to the aspirational challenge they set for themselves at the beginning of their discussion they felt the following were fruitful terms: good conduct; competence; respect for individuals and communities; responsibility; and justice. Finally they made a plea for whatever emerges to be consistent with the ongoing exercise of ethics reflexivity on the part of researchers, disciplines and the social sciences as a whole.

#### Group Two

Group Two set out to consider the principles listed on the worksheets provided, to reflect in the morning's discussion on the hegemony of the biomedical model, and to think about the way to move forward at the end of the symposium series. They noted that the principles listed on the ethics review worksheet and the ethical practice worksheet touched on quite different things. Their discussion wasn't centered on the content of the principles themselves but on the processes of review. Their main concern was on how to balance the competing interests in an ethics review process. In particular there were the competing interests between the independence of review, on the one hand, and the need for

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

deliberation, reflection and engagement on the right kind of ethical principles, on the other. They felt that constructing a process that adequately mediated between and facilitated these imperatives was a difficult challenge. They felt that the symposium series could aim to offer some guidance on this matter and this might be more valuable than specifying generic principles.

Thinking about the principles on the ethics review worksheet they considered adding 'proportionality' (and expedited review for minimally risky research). They also felt that the review process itself should encourage ethical engagement and dialogue between 'stakeholders.' They felt this would be different in different disciplines and across institutions, particularly with regard to the availability of resources.

They felt that the tension in the biomedical model was in whether it was appropriate to social science research or whether it needed to be more adequately interpreted and nuanced in this new context. They felt the latter was the right perspective. This led them back to previous discussion of proportionality and to the question of the ethics, and ethics principles, that should guide ethics review.

### Group Three

This group considered the difference between values and principles. They suggested that in order to get beyond the biomedical model of research ethics we must engage with those we research and include those communities. This may be a challenge to the norm of anonymity. Furthermore they also felt that inclusivity could conflict with the value of objectivity in the social sciences as certain questions might be vetoed by research participants. However they also felt reflexivity was promoted by such inclusion.

Group Three felt we were in a situation where regulation was a shock. This has arisen because we do ethical research and the issues raised are not so problematic as they are in the biomedical sciences. They felt 'regulation was the new aristocracy' and they wondered how we go beyond this to speak to our society. They felt ethics review gives 'certificates of comfort' which can prevent ethical thinking. They felt that guidance for researchers was important but that it should also be provided to research participants (including information on what social science is as well as ethics standards) and, more importantly, to institutions and reviewers. They felt that it was important that ethics review avoided becoming 'protectionism' i.e. being about reputation management. Ethics should be about how we treat people and that this required on-going dialogue and discussion with research participants.

Group Three highlighted the fact that the 'situation does not stand still.' The moral landscape continues to change and develop both within and without the social sciences. They felt that the utility of this group might be in educating those outside the social sciences, including those in positions of power over social science research, about social science as a whole. However we must reflect on how this can be done with humility and integrity. This also applies to the dissemination of particular research findings, but the group felt there was a point at which dissemination ceased and 'diffusion' began.

### Group Four

Group Four took each of the worksheets and the listed

principles in turn. They considered the ways in which ethics review could be independent, these being independence from: a discipline; from the funders; the researcher; independent from the research project or proposal; from the institution within which the research takes place; from the research participants. Whilst review could (and should) be independent from funders, institutions (at least in the juridical sense) and the research project it cannot be (fully) independent from the researcher (who first considers the ethics of a project when forming its initial design); the discipline(s) of the research (which gives some indication of the relevant ethics norms and is a matter of competence in the review process); or from representatives of the research participants (via, for example a lay person on the review committee or through some sense of empathy on the part of reviewers and researchers). They felt that independence was a way to manage potential conflict of interests and that collaborative working could complicate matters in this sphere.

This group distinguished between independence, transparency and accountability. Inclusion of lay-persons could contribute to all of these and help fulfil our social responsibilities. However, increasing transparency and making researchers mutually accountable could help to avoid the bureaucratisation of review and a tick-box approach. This was also the locus where proportionality of review could be addressed. The dialogue between researchers and reviewers could be promoted by these virtues. They felt that committees needed to be collectively responsible and act as a committee rather than as a number of individual members. Nevertheless this group discussed the idea of 'face-work'<sup>4</sup> where the meaning of a committee's judgment could be personally communicated to researchers and the meaning(s) of official written feedback decoded. Again this would encourage collaboration in developing the ethics of a research proposal rather than the opposition currently experienced by many.

The group then turned to consider the principles that guide the conduct and practice of social science research. The first of these was 'respect for autonomy and dignity of persons as individuals and members of communities' (this being the updated version of respect for autonomy). They discussed relational autonomy and the idea of people as socially embedded beings. This idea was reflexively turned onto researchers which suggests the ability of researchers to conduct research is a function of the fact they are members of communities (of practice) and of social institutions such as universities and disciplines. Furthermore these social locations could not result in research without being further related to research participants as socially located individuals and members of groups that are of interest to the social scientist. This was felt to support the need for disciplinary, methodological and ethical pluralism.

This also highlighted the virtue of empathy as researchers must be able to empathise and comprehend the viewpoint(s) of those they seek to engage in research in order to both design research and to design ethical research. Group Four felt that the principle of integrity included being open-minded, particularly in relation to: potential research findings; the need to remain ethically aware; the consequences of research and the ways in which it might be followed up by other researchers, including researchers with differing points of views. They felt that scientific integrity required researchers to be socially inclusive and to seek ways to represent the

potential diversity, and diversity of views, that exist within the communities they were involved in researching. This group thought it was important to be aware of the impact of research findings but that there was a distinction between disseminating research and the point at which this stopped and it becomes diffusion. They also considered the responsibilities of the researcher to aim towards the social good but that this was a rather imprecise concept.

### Conclusion:

The following bullet points were felt to be the primary messages of the day's presentations and discussions:

- The internal and public discussion of ethics should remain an ongoing aspect of the social sciences.
- The PPM needs to be situated within the moral landscape of social scientific research with a greater degree of nuance and reflexively connected to wider ethical concerns in such research.
- This ethical reflexivity should also challenge the 'legal fiction' of the autonomous individual present in (biomedical uses of) the PPM.
- There was support for identifying the range of values that support social scientific research and for considering some more relevant to different stages of research.
- The symposium series might seek to produce documents that represent social science research and its ethical commitments to the public, to funders and institutions in such a way as to make commonalities clear but whilst also clearly demonstrating the pluralities at play.

- This should include information on the history of ethics reflection in social science research.
- There was support for collecting codes, cases, guides, approaches and perspectives, including published critical perspectives, in one place as a resource for researchers and stakeholders.

### Notes

1. The rule of A's (Abortion, Addiction, Adultery, Advertising and Association with unqualified practitioners) is a set of prohibitions for medical doctors said to be common to the UK prior to the advent of modern medical ethics. See Boyd *et al* (1997).
2. See: <http://www.respectproject.org/code/>
3. Amongst other work on the ethics of social sciences Will van den Hoonaard is the author of *The Seduction of Ethics: Transforming the Social Sciences*. University of Toronto Press, 2011.
4. Hedgecoe (2012, online first).

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## Developing Standards for Research Practice: Some Issues for Consideration Discussion ‘Stimulus’ Paper for Symposium 3: (Standards)

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### Introduction

In recent years, there has been increased discussion and scrutiny of issues such as ‘research integrity’, ‘scientific integrity’, ‘research practice’, ‘good research conduct’ and ‘research misconduct’. While the terminology used, and indeed the meaning of that terminology, have often varied, these discussions have generally focused on what standards – both voluntary and mandatory – there are for the conduct of research and whether these standards are being met.

A wide range of organisations have explored whether researchers are obeying the norms of their profession and if their research is honest and reliable. Issues of research integrity have been examined by Government (Council for Science and Technology 2006), Parliament (House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee 2011), research funders (UK Research Integrity Futures Working Group 2010), learned societies (Academy of Medical Sciences 2011) and other bodies (British Medical Journal and Committee on Publication Ethics 2012), and a variety of international organisations (2nd World Conference on Research Integrity 2010; ALLEA and European Science Foundation 2011). In some cases, this has led to new guidance for the conduct of research (Universities UK *et al* 2012), while in others it has led to changes in structures for research governance (GOV.UK 2011). It should be noted that the Government has declined calls to legislate on these issues, such as setting up oversight or investigatory bodies empowered by statute (UK Government 2012).

There has also been increased interest in research integrity in the media, both mainstream (Jha 2011) and academic (Jump 2012; Cressey 2013). While there has been a great deal of thoughtful discussion of research integrity, often the focus of media interest has been on so-called ‘scandals’, whether the term might be applicable (General Medical Council 2010) or not (Russell 2010). At the same time, there has been increased interest from the public, perhaps driven by and/or driving the media interest. Universities and journals have seen the rise of a particular type of anonymous complainant: a pseudonymous person or group that scrutinises large numbers of academic papers online for evidence of fabrication, plagiarism or other fraud (Marcus and Oransky 2011). Blogs that discuss questionable and unacceptable practices in research can attract a large readership (Goldacre 2013; Marcus and Oransky 2013).

Major initiatives on research integrity have often been carried out by employer groups and funding bodies (UK Research Integrity Futures Working Group 2010; Universities UK *et al* 2012; Higher Education Funding Council for England 2013; Research Councils UK 2013). Theirs is a valuable perspective but it is not the only one. All involved in research – including the public – have an important contribution to make in support of research integrity. In particular, it is essential that learned societies and professional bodies play a role in the ongoing discussions. The 2012 *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (Universities UK *et al* 2012) recognised the importance of learned societies and professional bodies, as

well as the duty of employers and others to support researchers in reporting concerns to professional bodies. UKRIO lobbied for, and welcomed, these elements of the Concordat and we hope that learned societies and professional bodies will be listened to when they speak out.

### The role of the UK Research Integrity Office and the purpose of this paper

The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) was set up to support good practice in academic, scientific and medical research and to assist with the prevention and investigation of questionable practices and misconduct. Since 2006, it has provided independent and expert support across all disciplines. UKRIO is the only body in this country that offers dedicated support to the public and the research community on issues of research integrity. We have amassed a great deal of practical experience on these issues.

UKRIO is an advisory body, not a regulator. Our advice and guidance are not mandatory; instead, they reflect and reinforce existing good practice. We have no interest in micro-managing researchers or telling them what they ‘must’ do. Our intent is to provide practical and proportionate advice, which the public and the research community may find useful.

In that spirit, this paper sets out some issues for consideration when discussing and agreeing the conclusions and outputs of these symposia. UKRIO has helped a wide variety of research organisations, learned societies, research funders and other bodies to develop standards for research conducted under their auspices. While the appeals for our help and our response must remain confidential, we share the issues and solutions identified in our advisory work through our other activities. Accordingly, this paper will explore some ‘lessons learnt’ from UKRIO’s involvement in the creation or revision of standards for research practice, both our own and those of other organisations, as well as ‘lessons learnt’ the hard way by researchers and organisations – from when things have gone right and from when they have not.

Isn’t some of this stuff obvious? In short, yes. Some of these questions asked and issues explored below may well appear to be obvious. Ensuring high standards in the conduct of research is often thought to be straightforward. At their most fundamental level, standards for research practice do not ask a great deal: researchers must not lie when reporting data or results; they must not steal the work of others nor spend research funds on purposes for which they were not granted; and, most importantly, they must protect the safety, dignity and well-being of research participants. Organisations also have responsibilities: they must support their staff, students or members in meeting the necessary requirements and not hinder them from doing so.

As the standards are so self-evident, so the thinking goes, it must be straightforward for organisations to articulate these standards to researchers, for those researchers to understand and adhere to them, and for the author organisations to

support them in doing so. The experiences of UKRIO suggest otherwise and any guidance for researchers must overcome this challenge.

### What are the aims?

What do the Academy of Social Sciences and other bodies involved hope to accomplish by developing generic ethics principles in social science research? Such principles would be useful in themselves, by adding to the discussion and development of research ethics in the social sciences, but presumably the participants have additional aims in mind. These might include:

- To help social scientists continue to conduct research that advances knowledge, is high quality and of a high ethical standard. This (obvious) aim suggests that the principles would be used in a variety of ways, for example: standards that could be referred to when planning and conducting research, and also when a researcher reflects on their completed work; a teaching/training aid; a reference tool for research institutions to use when developing their own guidance for social science research; guidance to inform research participants and other interested parties of the ethical principles which would guide a research project; a reference tool for social sciences research ethics committees; an information note for researchers from other disciplines who plan to collaborate with social scientists, to inform them of the ethical norms of the discipline; and/or a set of mandatory standards for professional/membership organisations for social science researchers.
- To protect the safety, well-being, dignity and rights of research participants, other persons (including researchers themselves) and communities involved in research. A caveat would be that this would not include a duty to protect the reputation of research participants etc. at all costs, thus giving researchers freedom to criticise when this would be warranted and demonstrated by research data and findings.
- To help retain public trust in social science research. Research has become fundamentally important to society. The knowledge generated through research is used for making decisions that are crucial for economic development and the general welfare of individuals and society. Significant public funds support research and researchers. Public trust in research – and in researchers – is based on the ‘professional promise’ that research will be honest, objective, accurate, legal, safe, ethical and efficient. To be worthy of the public’s trust, research needs to fulfil that promise.
- To help reduce the incidence of poor practice, questionable behaviours and misconduct in the social sciences. A sense of perspective is important: UK research, including that in the social sciences, is not rife with fraud. Nonetheless, there is a growing body of evidence which suggests research misconduct is not as rare as many would like to think (Fanelli 2009, 2010; Fang *et al* 2012). Pressures, whether internal or external, can drive researchers to cut corners or worse. There is no doubt that more systematic and long-term examination of the frequency and nature of misconduct in UK research is needed. In the meantime, while UK researchers might be more competent, careful, honest and immune from temptation than the

average person, professional responsibility includes taking steps to minimise predictable harm. This aim suggests that whatever output is generated by these symposia should be relevant to three types of situation: the most common, where researchers conduct research that meets relevant standards and support on sustaining and improving those standards would be welcomed; cases of (major) research fraud; and the so-called ‘questionable research practices’, lesser but still unacceptable behaviours sometimes described as ‘deliberately sloppy science’. The output of the symposia should also include guidance for researchers and others who wish to raise concerns about problems or alleged fraud.

- To suggest a way of moving towards clarity across the profession on what is ‘good’ social sciences research. Or is this something that the profession wishes to avoid, for fear of seeming to micro-manage researchers or place barriers in the way of innovative or cross-disciplinary research? A reasonable approach may be to suggest some possible areas of common agreement and, where there is difference, to explain why.
- To ensure that the social sciences profession has a broadly unified voice in determining standards for the research that it carries out, rather than leaving this by default to other actors, such as Government, research funders and employers. The profession already has standards in place in the form of those set out by various professional and other bodies in the social sciences, hence the use of the term ‘broadly unified’; however, there may be professional and political rationales for seeking common public standards. There may also be a practical benefit, and this will be discussed later.

The above aims are not intended to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive. They are articulated because each will require different approaches in terms of actions taken following the conclusion of these symposia. For example, a set of principles aimed at sustaining and improving the conduct of social sciences research could be seen as primarily ‘inward facing’ – by the social sciences profession, for the social sciences profession. If such principles were also designed to retain public trust in social sciences research, then they would need to be disseminated to a much wider audience and perhaps in a different format than guidance aimed solely at researchers. Principles which attempted to tie together existing guidance from professional and other bodies to ‘give a voice’ to the profession as a whole would need to be designed with an action plan in mind, one to advance the professional and political rationales behind their creation.

### How should the generic ethics principles be articulated?

The two previous symposia and their associated papers have discussed in detail the roles of ethics, values and principles in social sciences research and the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches. I will not repeat those discussions here but focus instead on ways the principles or other outputs agreed following the symposia might be articulated. By way of background, UKRIO would agree with speakers at the previous symposia that principles: can elaborate values; can be used to instruct the complexities of research; and are ‘things to keep in mind’ rather than a set of rigid instructions. These views on principles underpin the discussions below.

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

### A single output or an ongoing process?

The agreed principles might be articulated in a code of practice or other form of written guidance. Alternatively, such a publication could be the first step in a more lengthy process, a continuing dialogue between the stakeholders of these symposia and the social sciences research community, including participant and lay groups. There would be ongoing outputs from this process in a variety of forms.

The second option would be more challenging to devise, launch and sustain than simply publishing a code or reference tool. However, it would enable the issues to be examined in more depth, allow for greater involvement from the social sciences research community and other groups (including lay/participant involvement), and ensure that new developments in research policy or practice could be incorporated into the ever-developing generic ethics principles. It would also help guard against the adoption of a 'job done' attitude regarding issues of research ethics and integrity.

### Basic standards or something more aspirational?

Should the principles describe the minimum acceptable behaviour for social sciences research – so-called 'good practice' – or something more aspirational – so-called 'best practice'? Or would a combination of the two be the most suitable approach?

A document which sets out the basic norms for social sciences research practice would presumably summarise, in an accessible format, existing guidance/requirements from relevant bodies in the social sciences. It would highlight areas of commonality across the social sciences professions and explain where differences arose, perhaps providing discipline-specific guidance in such cases.

Describing 'best practice' would be a more challenging exercise. In UKRIO's experience, there is little consensus on the meaning of the term. It can sometimes be used by organisations to describe standards which go slightly further than the bare minimum required – in effect, anything more than merely 'ticking the boxes.' I assume that such an approach would not be welcomed. A conclusion of these symposia could be to go beyond such a definition and agree to identify principles, standards and/or practices in social science research which reliably lead to better outcomes than other methods.

This could be a considerable piece of work and it may well prove difficult, if not impossible, to agree so-called 'best practice' principles, standards or practices which were applicable to most, let alone all, of the social sciences. If this approach were adopted, it would be sensible to describe the existing basic standards (as these can be regulatory or contractual requirements) as well as how they might be built on and exceeded. It would also be sensible to describe the benefits of going beyond the minimum standards. UKRIO has often found that individuals and institutions can consider issues such as research ethics and research integrity as a matter of regulatory or contractual compliance, rather than as an inherent part of professional conduct.

A hybrid approach might include basic standards for social sciences research underpinned by more aspirational principles. This might be the most appropriate way forward, marrying the values/principles generated by these symposia with a synthesis

of existing guidance/requirements from relevant bodies in the social sciences. As before, any areas of differences between the various professions should be highlighted, to avoid the assumption of commonality in such cases, and relevant guidance from the various disciplines signposted. For the reasons given above, it would be sensible to explore why researchers should aim to do more than just meet basic requirements.

### What type of content?

Existing guidance on the conduct of research varies in terms of content and length/detail. Some different approaches are outlined below. Please note the sample documents, in particular the one from UKRIO, are included for illustration only and not to indicate a preferred approach.

1. **Short principles only.** This has the advantage of setting out the information in a short and accessible format, hopefully increasing the chance of it being read and acted on. Disadvantages are the lack of detail and lack of examples of how the principles translate into standards for research practice and/or can be put into practice.  
Sample document: Council for Science and Technology, 2006. *Rigour, respect and responsibility – a universal ethical code for scientists*. Available from: [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/bispartners/goscience/docs/u/universal-ethical-code-scientists.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/bispartners/goscience/docs/u/universal-ethical-code-scientists.pdf)
2. **Broader principles, with some defined standards based on them.** The principles are either longer than in the previous approach or, while brief, are expanded on through supplementary text. The sample document for this approach follows the latter model, containing short principles ('commitments') which are then described in more depth. While the principles provide more information than in the previous example, care must be taken to ensure that the principles are not so broad as to be essentially meaningless. This can be mitigated by the defined standards, which illustrate how the principles can be put into practice, though it is helpful if the standards themselves are not too broad.  
Sample document: Universities UK et al, 2012. *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity*. Available from: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/POLICYANDRESEARCH/POLICYAREAS/RESEARCH/Pages/Researchintegrity.aspx>
3. **Short principles plus standards.** A declaration of interests is in order at this point, as this was the chosen approach for UKRIO's *Code of Practice for Research* (reference below). The format allows the articulation of standards for research practice underpinned by aspirational principles. An advantage compared to example 2, above, is that the greater number of standards provides greater illustration of how the principles might be put into practice. As the bulk of the document focuses on standards rather than on the principles, care must be taken to ensure that the former do not overshadow the latter.  
Sample document: UK Research Integrity Office, 2009. *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct*. Available from: [www.ukrio.org/publications/](http://www.ukrio.org/publications/)

4. **A handbook describing what can be involved in doing research that is high quality and of a high ethical standard.** It would describe principles, regulatory and other mandatory requirements, voluntary standards/guidance and common practices, covering the research process from conception to publication and archiving. It would also include topics for discussion, questions for the consideration of the reader, useful resources and sources of help.

This type of document provides in-depth instruction on the norms and complexities of research and is therefore incredibly useful. Their detailed and wide-ranging nature also provides a welcome alternative to the often much shorter and more prescriptive guidance from employers and funding bodies. Creating such a document is clearly a large piece of work. Their length and level of detail can count against them, as longer guidance documents can tend to go unread.

Sample documents: Steneck, N., 2007. *Office of Research Integrity Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research Revised Edition*. Available from: [www.ori.hhs.gov/documents/rcrintro.pdf](http://www.ori.hhs.gov/documents/rcrintro.pdf)  
Social Research Association, 2003. *Ethical Guidelines*. Available from: <http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ethics03.pdf>

5. **Guidance for organisations as well as for individual researchers.** The proposed generic ethics principles would be useful in themselves to research organisations. For example, they could use them as a reference tool to use when developing their institutional guidance for social science research, as noted above. The focus of the principles could be broadened, to describe how research organisations can better support research and researchers in the social sciences.

This would be an additional element incorporated into one of the four approaches described above, rather than a separate approach in its own right. In addition to setting out principles and standards for researchers, the document would also discuss how organisations could support researchers in meeting those standards. It would also note those responsibilities which fall to organisations alone.

Sample documents: UK Research Integrity Office, 2009. *Code of Practice for Research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct*. Available from: [www.ukrio.org/publications/](http://www.ukrio.org/publications/)  
Universities UK et al., 2012. *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity*. Available from: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/POLICYANDRESEARCH/POLICYAREAS/RESEARCH/Pages/Researchintegrity.aspx>

### Prescriptive or non-restrictive principles and standards?

Should the outcome of these symposia attempt to describe 'the right way' to conduct social sciences research, 'the right ways' to conduct such research or 'some of the right ways'? In other words, would the preferred outcome be:

1. a defined set of principles and standards which set out

how to conduct high quality and ethical social sciences research?

2. principles and standards that support a variety of approaches to high quality and ethical social sciences research?
3. principles and standards that aim to get researchers thinking about how they might do high quality and ethical social sciences research but which do not set out any particular approaches?

I assume that the preferred option would not be a set of prescriptive principles and standards (option 1) but have included it for the sake of completeness. This option runs the risk of suggesting, either tacitly or overtly, that there is a single 'right way' to conduct social sciences research, 'straitjacketing' the conduct of researchers who follow such guidance and limiting innovative research questions and methodologies. It would also be challenging to devise a set of prescriptive principles and standards which were sufficiently flexible to accommodate existing research practices within the social sciences.

I believe that an approach that was more inclusive/open would be preferable (options 2 or 3). It would hopefully avoid micro-managing research while encouraging the consideration of what is involved in research that is of a high ethical standard. Option 2 would be most suited to a guidance document of some sort containing principles and standards (examples 1–3 in the sample content types described above), while option 3 would suit the 'handbook' approach (example 4). Any of the above three options could also include guidance for organisations as well as researchers (example 5).

It should be noted, however, that *any* guidance for researchers runs the risk of becoming prescriptive. Principles for research practice are commonly designed not as rigid guidance for researchers but as a starting point for reflection on the practical and ethical challenges involved in research. In our experience and that of others, such principles can come to be perceived very differently – for example, when the stature of stakeholder organisations means that their guidance is seen by researchers and/or employers as something which *must* be followed, rather than as an aid to reflection and improvement.

### Mandatory or voluntary principles and standards?

At the second symposia, the organisers made clear that there are no plans to make the generic ethics principles (and any associated standards) mandatory. However, I feel it is worth discussing some implications of taking either a voluntary or mandatory route.

**Voluntary guidance** is more likely to avoid the pitfall of consideration of ethical issues in research being reduced to a matter of regulatory or contractual compliance. A caveat: we have found that researchers and organisations alike can adopt the so-called 'tick box' approach even with non-mandatory guidance. In some cases, as noted above, this has apparently – and inadvertently – been caused by the stature of the organisation(s) which produced the guidance. Other factors which have been cited include: a lack of time to consider ethical and associated issues in any depth; lack of leadership on these issues from senior researchers; and attitudes towards research ethics/integrity which can be paraphrased as 'this is something other researchers have to worry about but not me' or 'this is something to get out of the way so we can get on



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

with the actual work’.

We have observed through our advisory work that a number of factors are essential to help ensure the uptake of guidance produced by research organisations and other bodies. This is discussed later (‘How useful are standards for research’) but for now I will note two factors that seem particularly relevant for voluntary guidance. In our experience, researchers and their employers naturally pay attention to the requirements of regulatory and funding bodies. Voluntary guidance can be somewhat left by the wayside in comparison. If voluntary guidance is to succeed (i.e. be read and acted on when there is no obligation to do so), then it needs to be of practical value and in an accessible format. This cannot be emphasised enough.

‘Practical value’ does not necessarily only mean principles and standards which can be easily translated into practice; it could equally mean guidance which encourages researchers to reflect on their professional conduct and research, and on how they might meet and exceed standards for research conduct. In terms of format, quasi-legal phrases and pages of dry text tend to be ignored, whether in hard copy or online.

**Mandatory guidance:** if any organisations did decide that the generic ethics principles generated by these symposia must be adhered to by their members (or equivalent), there would be a number of implications:

- How to make their members aware of the principles/standards that they must adhere to.
- How to make sure that their members are meeting the required principles/standards! Simply creating mandatory standards and making people aware of them would not be enough.
- How concerns about members falling short of the required principles/standards could be raised with the relevant organisation, both by other members and those from outside.
- How those concerns would be investigated by the relevant organisation and a conclusion reached on the allegation(s).
- What action would be taken against members by an organisation which had found its required principles/standards for social sciences research had been breached.
- Most importantly, would the introduction of mandatory standards and a mechanism for sanctioning those who had breached them change the nature of an organisation, or at least how it was perceived by its members? For example, a professional or learned body might have criteria for membership but no mechanism for sanctioning or disciplining its members. It then brings in required standards for research practice which its members must meet, and a process for investigating members and possibly sanctioning them if they fail to meet the standards. Members are now subject to a regime, even if only a light-touch regime, of standards, monitoring and, potentially, sanctions. They are, in effect, chartered or licensed in terms of research conduct. This could have wide-ranging effects on the ethos and purposes of an organisation, as well as changing how it is viewed by members and outsiders. The introduction of a regime of standards, monitoring and sanctioning would also require additional

resources, the creation of relevant processes and access to sufficient expertise when investigating alleged breaches.

**Adoption by research organisations: a middle ground between voluntary and mandatory standards.** The stakeholder organisations should consider the implications of research organisations adopting the principles generated by these symposia and publicly stating that they have done so. For example, a university might consider the principles to be of such quality that it will require its researchers to adhere to them. Many implications of this would be positive. Organisations which adopted the principles would presumably use their resources to embed them in social science research conducted under its auspices. However, there are some implications to consider.

Would the stakeholders allow any organisation to adopt the principles if it wished to do so? Or would there be some sort of ‘licensing’ process, by which the stakeholders’ permission had to be sought, and possibly certain criteria met by the research organisation, before adoption was allowed? What if a research organisation asked the stakeholders to review and/or endorse its systems for ethical review of social sciences research? Both the licensing and review/endorsement approaches have implications for: the relationship between the stakeholders and the research organisations; the activities and aims of the stakeholders; how the guidance is perceived by other bodies now it had become something that was ‘licensed/endorsed’; and the resources which the stakeholders would need to undertake the licensing and review/endorsement activities. The stakeholders would also need to consider the implications of a ‘licensed/endorsed’ research organisation failing to adhere to the standards or being perceived as failing to adhere to them.

Even if the stakeholders decided not to proceed down a licensing/review/endorsement route, adoption of the principles by research organisations might cause some misconceptions. For example, a university might adopt the principles and make a public statement as follows:

‘Social sciences research conducted by this organisation adheres to the standards generated by the 2013 Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research symposia convened by the Academy of Social Sciences, the British Psychological Society, the Association of Research Ethics Committees, the Economic and Social Research Council, The Open University and the British Sociological Association.’

In such circumstances, it might be assumed that the stakeholders have taken on a degree of responsibility for that university’s social science research, in particular that they have:

- endorsed in some way the social sciences research conducted by that institution
- reviewed and approved the institution’s ethical review processes for social science research or even for all research
- an oversight role in relation to the university’s ethical review processes
- the power to hear and judge appeals against the decisions of research ethics committees
- the ability to investigate any concerns about the

university's social sciences research.

The above scenarios might seem far-fetched; however, such misconceptions have arisen concerning UKRIO following the adoption of our (voluntary) guidance by some research organisations and I am aware of other cases as well. The stakeholders might wish to consider how they would address such misconceptions if they arose.

### **How useful are standards for research?**

Principles and standards for research practice are a tool. Like any tool, these guidance documents ('guidance' is used here to cover both voluntary and mandatory principles and standards) are good at some things, reasonable at others, and inappropriate or useless in certain circumstances.

Guidance documents are essential, however, in that they set out the basic values, principles and standards for research practice. Perhaps more importantly, they also define the particular ethos and requirements of individual organisations concerning research. In UKRIO's experience, it should not be assumed that staff, students or members will automatically know and understand an institution's ethos or standards, even those who are established researchers.

Despite being essential, guidance documents can only ever form part of activities or initiatives to sustain and enhance standards for research ethics and integrity. If merely published and left unsupported, guidance on research practice tends to be either ignored or interpreted in a 'tick box' manner. I leave it up to the reader to decide which of these outcomes is worse.

Social scientists and others have examined factors which incentivise or permit acceptable professional behaviours and those that incentivise or permit behaviours that deviate from professional norms. As someone from outside the discipline, I will not embarrass myself by seeking to report or build on that research to those who are much more familiar with it; instead, I will continue to share some key lessons learnt by UKRIO from its involvement in the creation or revision of standards for research practice, in particular those of other organisations.

As noted, standards for research cannot stand on their own. They are part of an ongoing process – ideally a long-term dialogue with those who are supposed to adhere to the standards. Guidance for researchers, whether employees, students, members of a professional body or learned society, or others, must be supported following their publication by sufficient resources: personnel, time, facilities, funding, training and, in particular, sources of help. They must be strongly disseminated and promoted by the stakeholder organisation (s). Their uptake and use must be monitored and comments on the content and utility of the guidance invited from researchers, participants, organisations and other involved persons, bodies or communities. Monitoring and gathering of feedback must take place whether the guidance is voluntary, mandatory or licensed in some way.

Above all, guidance for research practice should be a 'living document', revised periodically in response to feedback, monitoring and developments in research practice, ethics, policy and legislation. The support that is provided to researchers to help them adhere to the guidance and other

## **Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research**

mechanisms to promote its uptake and use should also be revised periodically.

Earlier in this paper I asked what the stakeholder organisations hope to accomplish by developing generic ethics principles in social science research, in addition to the basic aim of adding to the discussion and development of research ethics in the social sciences. Each selected aim will require its own programme of dissemination, awareness raising, support, gathering of feedback, monitoring and periodic revision. Many elements of these action plans would be common to many, if not all, of the desired aims but some would require bespoke measures.

Standards for research are not a cure-all (and I recognise there is debate over whether there is a problem with research in social science that needs to be 'cured'; similar debate is taking place in other disciplines) but they have the potential to support and, hopefully, enhance the conduct of research that is honest, accurate, safe, legal and of a high ethical standard. However, the publication of such standards is merely a step in this process of support and enhancement, and not the end. When properly supported, standards for research practice can encourage researchers to:

- engage critically with the practical, ethical and intellectual challenges of conducting high quality research
- consider the wider implications of their work
- perhaps most importantly, consider issues and problems in advance and how they might be resolved.

There are a variety of implications for organisations which publish standards for research practice, some of which have been discussed already (for example, under 'mandatory or voluntary principles and standards', above). It is vital that learned societies and professional bodies have a voice in the development of such standards but they must also consider the practical and practice consequences when they devise, promote and protect them. They must be aware of the tendency of researchers and organisations to treat guidance for research practice as a matter of regulatory or contractual compliance, rather than as an inherent part of professional conduct. They must also be aware that they might have to adopt certain 'protectionist' devices, such as the 'licensing' issues discussed earlier (Iphofen 2013). They could also have such 'protectionist' devices bestowed upon them if you will, through serious misconceptions about the stakeholders' relationship with the standards.

### **Relevancy of standards for research: a personal view**

There are many codes of practice and other guidance for research. Their scope, the type of their content, the nature of their authors, and whether the principles and standards they contain are voluntary or mandatory, all vary. The sheer number of codes can cause confusion when organisations wish to represent externally their own work on research ethics, practice or integrity, and runs the risk of hindering rather than helping novice researchers who need practical help in thinking through their own approaches (Iphofen 2013).

In UKRIO's experience, researchers, understandably, tend to pay attention to research standards from their employers and from funders: standards that are a condition of their employment and standards that are both a condition of their

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

research funding and a gateway to further funding. This does have some benefits: when researchers and commissioners of research follow the same guidance, it should enhance relationships and understandings between the two (Iphofen 2013). When they do not, we have observed that problems can easily arise. In addition to employer- and funder-generated standards, we have seen that researchers also pay attention to standards backed by statute, for obvious reasons.

Organisations which are not employers, funding agencies or regulators face a significant challenge when devising and promoting new guidance for research. They are not only, in effect, launching a new product in an already crowded marketplace. They also run the risk of their 'product' being seen, wrongly in my view, as 'second tier', somehow less relevant than the three types of standards mentioned earlier.

What then is the role of research standards from learned societies, professional bodies and similar organisations? My personal view is that it could be to go beyond 'research standards as contractual or regulatory requirement'. The value of guidance without a contractual or regulatory 'kick' behind it is that it can go into more depth than guidance from mandatory sources. Guidance from sources which *must* be followed runs the risk of micro-managing or otherwise limiting research if it is too detailed. This can come about inadvertently, perhaps as a result of poor content or the intent of the stakeholders being misconstrued (see earlier) or as part of a poorly applied regulatory, or quasi-regulatory, approach.

That is not to say that learned societies and professional bodies should not articulate the ethos and norms for their fields of research or professions. This is an important aim, especially as failing to achieve this may allow other actors to set out standards which might, inadvertently and tacitly, be seen as the norms for the profession instead. However, I feel that learned societies and professional bodies can go beyond this. They, more than employers, funders or regulators, are well placed to get researchers thinking about research – its wider implications, and how to engage critically with the practical, ethical and intellectual challenges of conducting high quality research. This would hopefully not only benefit research and researchers but also the other individuals and communities involved in social science research.

To achieve this, guidance from learned societies and professional bodies must be: informative; accessible; promote debate and reflection; and, above all, be useful. The authors must recognise that they are writing for those who have, for whatever reason, potentially little or no knowledge of these issues. They are also writing for those who have knowledge and wish to know more. Perhaps most importantly, they are writing for the future, hopefully identifying emerging developments in social sciences research and challenges to conducting research of a high ethical standard.

Generated by learned societies and professional bodies in the social sciences, the proposed generic ethics principles could benefit both the profession as a whole and the general public, beyond the potential benefits (and potential detriments) for individual researchers. A straightforward benefit for the public would be if the principles and associated standards could help ensure the safety, wellbeing, dignity and rights of individuals and communities involved in social sciences research.

Both the public and the social sciences professions would also benefit if the principles, through their use/adoption and dissemination, could help retain the public's trust in social science research. This would tie in with the mission and ethos of the stakeholder organisations – for example, the Academy of Social Sciences' mission is to promote social sciences in the United Kingdom for the public benefit. This approach would involve the political, reputational and representational value of principles and standards for research. It is part of how one 'sells' a particular approach to the 'outside' world and has effects for status, reputation and 'economic value' (Iphofen 2013).

As noted earlier, public trust in research is based on a 'professional promise' to the public and to other researchers that research will meet certain standards. The generic ethic principles might help social sciences research to fulfil that promise. They might also help explain the ethos and norms of the profession to the public. The latter could be achieved if agreement on generic ethics principles across the social sciences provided a degree of clarity on what is 'good' social sciences research, which could then be communicated both within and beyond the discipline.

While care would need to be taken to avoid micro-managing or limiting researchers – or glossing over differences between the social sciences professions where they exist – this clarity could be useful. As well as helping to inform the public, it would help explain professional norms to researchers new to the social sciences, whether those at the beginning of their careers or researchers from other disciplines who plan to collaborate with social scientists. It would also be a valuable resource for commercial organisations and independent researchers involved in social sciences research. It has been noted that, 'to a large extent [such organisations and individuals] rely on the relevant professional and discipline-based bodies to monitor current practice and enforce high standards' (Academy of Social Sciences 2012).

There would also be a further professional, even political, rationale for seeking clarity on what is 'good' social sciences research. It could provide a broadly unified baseline for determining standards for the profession, rather than leaving this – by default or by design – as a job for others to step in and take on. There might be value in professional bodies, learned societies, researchers and universities coming together to develop mutually acceptable and deliverable solutions, as a means of circumventing top-down pressures, whether intentional or not, for new regulatory or quasi-regulatory processes. It would also ensure that the voices of learned societies and professional bodies were at the heart of initiatives to support and enhance research ethics and research integrity in the social sciences, as they should be. 'Learned societies and professional bodies are well capable of taking the lead in setting standards applicable to research in new and emerging fields and any challenges posed by interdisciplinary research' (Academy of Social Sciences 2012).

### Scope and terminology: research ethics or research integrity?

Is the goal of the symposia to generate generic principles for the social sciences on research ethics or research integrity? Definitions of 'research integrity' vary and there is no consensus on the meaning of the term. Some view it as sitting alongside research ethics, covering issues of the



professionalism of researchers – in effect, are they meeting the norms/standards of science? – and the reliability of research (Jacob 2013). Others view it as having a wider focus than research ethics, including research ethics and all aspects of, and issues relating to, the design, conduct, dissemination, governance and management of research. The stakeholders of *The Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (Universities UK et al 2012) would appear to view ‘research ethics’ as a sub-set of ‘research integrity’, with the document addressing ethical issues in research in one of its five commitments on research integrity.

Having said that, some organisations do use ‘research ethics’ as a catch-all to describe research conduct/integrity, particularly ‘good’ research conduct. In practice, one institution might have a ‘code of practice for research integrity’ to which all of its researchers must adhere, while another might have a ‘code of practice for research ethics’ that fulfilled the same purpose. Despite the different terms used in their titles, both documents would cover pretty much the same issues.

I mention this not to argue over semantics but to note that there is no standard terminology in use to define clearly the scope of guidance on research practice. The various terms can have different meanings to different people and organisations. This should be kept in mind when devising guidance for researchers, to ensure clarity.

It should also be considered whether the aim of these symposia is to create standards/principles for research ethics only or if the output(s) of the symposia should have a wider focus. If nothing else, it might be sensible to acknowledge if and/or when the generic ethics principles stray into aspects of research practice outside of research ethics and note sources of guidance and assistance available on issues of research integrity.

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## Response I to ‘Developing Standards for Research Practice: Some Issues for Consideration’

Susan V Zimmerman

Executive Director, Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research

(Canadian Institutes of Health Research; Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada)

The challenge of the session on Standards was, in my view, to determine the response to three questions:

1. what is the desired goal of the exercise?
2. who has primary responsibility for achieving and maintaining that goal?
3. what is the preferred mechanism for achieving that goal?

The first is a question of substance; the second, of governance; and the third, of process. The Canadian experience since 1998 and particularly since 2010 offers a concrete example of developing common guidance on principles of research ethics, implementing those principles and ensuring their evolution.

First, the question of substance. It is important to clarify the aim of the exercise, as there is much confusion with respect to the use of terminology. Is the goal to establish guiding principles for the ethics of research, in particular research involving humans? If so, the focus is on the relationship between the researcher and the participant (or subject). Is it to establish principles of research integrity, usually understood as professional relations among researchers, and their interaction with the research community (i.e. their peers)? Or is it to establish overarching principles governing both of these topics and, more generally, good research practice, sometimes referred to as responsible conduct of research?

The Canadian research agencies<sup>1</sup> have opted for a unified approach to policies and procedures in each of these three areas. The guiding principles for the ethics of human research are contained in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (known as TCPS 2). Originally developed in 1998 and substantially revised and expanded in 2010, this policy statement aims to provide general ethics guidance for research involving humans, whether it is conducted in the social sciences, health sciences, natural sciences or engineering. The decision to establish a unified policy was based on the belief that there are certain fundamental ethical principles that apply across disciplines, and that it strengthens these principles to have them presented as applying to all researchers who do research involving human participants.

TCPS 2 reflects an evolution from earlier guidelines and codes established separately by the medical and the social sciences agencies. It is based on respect for human dignity, as expressed through three core principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. How these principles apply to different types of research will depend on the methodologies, approaches and customs of specific disciplines or multi-disciplinary collaborations. The policy therefore allows for a diversity of research approaches when assessing the ethics of a proposed study. In particular, the second edition of the TCPS has taken great care to incorporate changes based on critiques from the social science research community. As a result, TCPS 2 is seen as better reflecting the reality of social science research, and providing more relevant and useful guidance as a result.

Next, the question of governance. In Canada, the responsibility for establishing and maintaining ethics principles for human research as well as policies on research integrity and responsible conduct of research has been shouldered by the research agencies. While individual institutions and organizations representing distinct disciplines craft their own policies in these areas, the research agencies see their responsibility, as guardians of public funds, to set the standards of accountability for the use of those funds. They have evolved, over the last 15 years or so, to viewing this responsibility as one that is better carried out in a unified manner, rather than continuing to have each Agency develop and implement separate policies. This choice recognizes and reflects the significant commonality of ethics and integrity principles across disciplines, and the need for common guidance with respect to responsible conduct of research. The agencies also wished to ensure harmonization in their interpretation and enforcement of these policies, so as to provide clearer, more reliable guidance to the research community, which is increasingly multi-disciplinary.

Finally, the question of process. The Canadian research agencies, having no regulatory authority, have chosen to use a policy statement to achieve their aim of establishing standards – both for human research ethics, through TCPS 2, and for the overall goal of responsible conduct of research, through the *Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research*. These policies have force because the Agencies require compliance with them as a condition of eligibility for research

funding. This applies to individual researchers as well as to institutions (universities, colleges, hospitals). Given the importance of eligibility to both researchers and institutions, this has proven to be a very effective mechanism for implementing these policies across the country. With Agency support for education and training through a centralized tri-Agency Secretariat, these policies have become a vehicle for enhancing understanding and implementation of the important principles they embody.

There was no consensus at the symposium in May on the questions outlined above, although the discussion offered many perspectives on potential directions to pursue. In assessing the options available, it is worth considering the Canadian model. After more than a decade of experience and evolution and despite some significant initial resistance, in particular from social scientists, the adoption of common guidance for human research ethics has proven to be a resilient and effective approach, underscoring the importance of core principles while equally reflecting the importance of

respect for the diversity of disciplinary practices.

### Notes

1. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada ("the research agencies").
2. Available at <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>
3. Available at <http://www.rcr.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/framework-cadre/>
4. The Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, together with two advisory Panels, is responsible for overseeing the implementation and evolution of both TCPS 2 and the Framework on Responsible Conduct of Research (for information on the Secretariat and Panels, see <http://www.rcr.ethics.gc.ca/default.aspx> ).

## A Summary of Symposium 3: Standards 23rd May 2013, British Psychological Society, London

Organising Committee: Robert Dingwall, Ron Iphofen, Janet Lewis and John Oates

Summary by Dr Nathan Emmerich, Queen's University Belfast

### Introduction:

The third and final symposium of the series was focused on standards. The aim was to consider potential standards suitable for the governance of social science research ethics, how these might link to the principles and values discussed in the previous symposia and what actions might be taken forward. The role of integrity in the contemporary landscape of the social sciences, research ethics and governance was also discussed.

Professor Paul Wiles, formerly the Government's Chief Social Scientist and Chief Scientific Adviser to the Home Office, chaired the day's discussions.

### Stimulus Paper: James Parry, Chief Executive, UKRIO.

After acknowledging that he is not a social scientist (his discipline being archaeology) James Parry offered some considerations on the process and purpose of developing standards for research practice. These were informed by his work in the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO).<sup>1</sup> Parry felt that it was worth explicitly stating what might be considered self-evident or obvious. His paper aimed to consider:

- What do we want to achieve by generating and articulating these ethics principles?
- What methods might be used to achieve those aims?
- What challenges do we face in putting these objectives into practice?
- How does this work fit into the wider, diverse and increasingly crowded landscape of research ethics?

At the present time there is a lot of guidance and scrutiny of research, however the UK government does not seem inclined

to go down a wholly regulatory route and the UKRIO has no interest in acquiring such powers. The existing key actors (researchers, employers, funders, publishers and the learned societies and professional bodies) are those who have responsibilities in this area. In the UK employers and funders have thus far taken the lead in articulating guidance and governance; the recent Concordat on Research Integrity being one example of this. There is no overall statutory regulation of research in the UK. Parry felt existing key actors need to develop a stronger voice in this area and the outcomes of this symposia series could make an important contribution.

Parry felt that what we might seek to achieve in this area is to help researchers to conduct good social science research; to help to sustain and support good practice; to help to protect research participants and others involved in research, including researchers; and to assist in the maintenance of public trust in social science research. Social science research needs to be accurate, honest, safe, ethical and legal – Parry thought that the principles could facilitate these ends. He felt that unethical and bad practices were not more widespread in UK social science than in any other discipline but that there were three categories the symposia outputs needed to be able to handle:

1. The majority of researchers that do good work.
2. Cases of outright fraud.
3. Questionable research practices.

These different categories required any standards to be flexible. Parry wondered if the Academy could offer a definition of what constitutes good social science and if not, whether this meant definitions offered by other bodies would become the de facto standard which informed the public

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

understanding of social science research.

Parry noted that the previous symposia had suggested the output from the series should not be a single statement but an ongoing process of dissemination, engagement, reflection and revision with the rights, wrongs and goods of social science research. He felt this would be really valuable and support the development of the social sciences in the long term and enable researchers to engage with the challenges presented by future advances in research and changes in wider society. He raised the issue of whether the Academy should set out basic standards or aim at something more aspirational, including setting out basic norms, considering when researchers should go beyond these norms, and what 'best practice(s)' in the ethical conduct and dissemination of research might be.

Parry then considered how these outputs should be presented and to whom they were aimed. It could be that the outputs were just aimed at researchers and learned societies. However it could be that outputs were also aimed at funders, employers (universities) and other organizations. The interests of these bodies, including those that have supported the symposia, are among the 'communities of interest' that a broader view of research integrity and ethics should seek to encompass.

The ESRC considered its REF/ FRE to be a starting point and whilst this was not always the way in which it is taken, this ought to be the way this group understood it and other documents which structure the landscape of social science research ethics. How, then, should the symposia outputs be presented? There seemed little will for them to be mandatory but, nevertheless, a lack of formal mandate would not prevent their adoption and so it was important to engage with the communities of interest in order to prevent the guidance becoming another document responded to in a 'tick-box' manner or, worse, ignored.

Parry thought that research ethics standards are useful as they can set out the basic norms of an institution or a funding body and can usefully characterize the ethos of a profession or learned society. In this latter case they can also encourage researchers in their thinking about how to do good research, what criteria define good research, what implications, issues and pitfalls might result from conducting research and how these might be engaged with. Learned societies play an important role because they are not offering mandated standards but standards with which researchers can engage. Parry suggested that what the Academy might offer could be likened to a teaching aid, which researchers could use dynamically, rather than as formal rules, to which researchers often respond in a static manner.

Parry closed with some comments on what he perceived to be a wider issue for anyone engaged in articulating research standards. Standards exist in a social context and compete for researchers' attention. The other demands and pressures on researchers include: publishing, publishing in better places, attracting funding etc. As with any other social field, the way in which it is structured has consequences for the practices that take place within it. For the case in hand this means the way(s) in which the social organization of academic institutions impacts on the academic research that is carried out. The methodological and ethical standards of a discipline are such social structures. Furthermore they can be clearly positioned

as such and used to engage with the positive and negative aspects of other institutional and institutionalized pressures. Explicit standards for research practice must be sensitive to context and designed in recognition of the other positive and negative institutional pressures on practice.

### **Response 1: Susan Zimmerman (Executive Director, Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research, Government of Canada):**

Susan Zimmerman began her response by positioning the Canadian context half-way between that of the USA and the UK. She felt that the US approach was very regulatory and bureaucratic. In contrast the UK felt more free-flowing where people had a diversity of independent and nuanced opinions with 'regulation' and bureaucracy being conducted in a less formal manner. She felt that Canada also aimed to regulate with a light touch and this was in part accomplished through the office she represented. The Secretariat is involved in research ethics and the responsible conduct of research, which includes research integrity. It was created and is supported by the three main Canadian research agencies, and so it covers research in the health sciences, natural sciences and engineering as well as the social sciences and humanities. Nevertheless it has no formal regulatory powers, relying on eligibility for funding as the basis for requiring compliance with ethics standards. She was in broad agreement with Parry's stimulus paper and so proposed to take the audience through the way in which research governance has been developed in Canada as she felt it was something of a living lab for the ideas contained in his paper.

Zimmerman felt it was important to be clear about terms such as ethics, integrity and the responsible conduct of research but did not want to argue for particular definitions in her presentation. Nevertheless, having clear definitions, is, she felt, important for articulating what it was that we wanted to do, how we wanted to do it, and how we could make sure it was done correctly. Clear terminological definitions would help in the articulation of such aims. She also felt that addressing procedural and substantive aims separately was important and that this meant distinguishing between who should be engaged in a process that aimed to achieve the adopted ends, and who had responsibility for conducting that process.

Zimmerman then compared the recently revised Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) to the RESPECT code that had been previously brought to the attention of delegates.<sup>2</sup> The TCPS2 is much bigger than the first version (which is more like the length of the RESPECT code). However she felt that the revision provided better guidance and was more widely used. She felt that the entire document could be summarised by the underlying value of 'Respect for Human Dignity' and the three core principles: Respect for Persons; Concern for Welfare; and Justice. The TCPS2 is structured by 13 chapters, with the first seven applying to research in general. The later chapters address ethical issues specific to particular types of research such as, for example, qualitative research and research involving (Canadian) Aboriginal peoples (to a large extent also applicable to any marginalised or culturally specific community). In the process of drawing up the document she often found that issues which initially seemed to be unique to, say, qualitative research, were found, upon further reflection, to be more generally applicable and so were incorporated into the earlier chapters. Each of

the chapters has a series of 'articles' followed by a discussion section about their application.

The theoretical and practical aim of the document is to facilitate the movement from the general to the particular. Thus Canadian research ethics boards must contain members who are expert in the disciplinary methodologies under review, as well as members generally knowledgeable about ethics. This provides for a link between the general principles and the standard practices and accepted norms of particular disciplines. The document itself does not prescribe what a good anthropologist, sociologist, biomedical researcher or whatever will do and whilst the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics offers a consultation service, it is up to researchers and disciplines to articulate their own norms within the TCSP2 framework. When it is felt to be useful, the Panel publishes the advice it provides and has built up a repository of these interpretations for consultation on its website. Zimmerman felt this represented the on-going process of articulating ethics and other standards in and for research. This was embedded in the basic activities of her office that continued to engage in educational activities including discussions about the document with researchers. She noted that whilst the TCPS1 remained unchanged for 10 years, her office and the Panel had already produced some revisions and further guidance related to TCPS2. Zimmerman felt this indicated that the aim of producing a 'living document' was being met.

Zimmerman then offered brief definitions of her terms and the way they are used in Canada. Research ethics is the ethics of the interaction between researchers and research participants. Research integrity is about the interaction between researchers, their colleagues and the scientific community. The responsible conduct of research is a broader umbrella term and encompasses all aspects of research including research ethics, research integrity and the interaction with the public, other stakeholders and funders.

The Canadian research agencies have also produced a joint policy framework with respect to responsible conduct of research, also administered by Zimmerman's office. The approach adopted by the Agencies is, at least initially, to focus on compliance with Agency policies, including TCPS2, rather than on misconduct. Repeated non-compliance (whether intentional or not) may indicate misconduct and institutions, as well as the Agencies, may respond with more serious sanctions. However a key role of Zimmerman's office was engagement and education – something that was made a lot easier because of the funders' support for her office and for TCPS2. Zimmerman closed by suggesting that the key to articulating good guidance is education and activities that support the document and engage with wider research communities. She again reiterated the question of who has responsibility for the tasks, as opposed to who should be engaged in the tasks themselves.

### Response 2: Isidoros Karatzas (Head of Ethics Sector, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission):

Note: The original paper has not been available for this publication and so is not included elsewhere.

Isidoros Karatzas began by noting a few things that had occurred to him whilst reading the stimulus paper. First, he was reminded of the case of Diederik Stapel,<sup>3</sup> who has become the poster-boy for research misconduct. He felt the case

illustrated the fact that codes of practice and guidance cannot, by themselves, be sufficient to guarantee the integrity of research. Karatzas felt that the students who had reported Stapel's misconduct should be awarded their PhD's and asked to teach others about ethical issues in research integrity. Second, he wondered if self-regulation in science and banking (or the press) had anything in common? He noted that there are a great many ethics codes, guidance and other documents available across Europe and their number is increasing. Many of them evinced a commitment to more education in research ethics and integrity. Karatzas felt that it is about time we stopped talking about such education and actually started delivering it, possibly by making research ethics a mandatory part of a higher education. He noted that in medicine 'ethics' was increasingly externalised, with responsibility being outsourced to committees. He did not want the social sciences to adopt this way of doing things.

That said, Karatzas felt that the social sciences needed their own 'Helsinki Code.' Such codes have major international recognition and backing; they are popular, useful and effective. Furthermore, these codes have the power to garner political support. Karatzas felt the social sciences would greatly benefit from developing a unified voice in public and, especially, in political fora. Natural scientists often disagree behind closed doors, he said, however when they talk to funders they will usually need to present a unified opinion. Social scientists need to develop a collective voice for use in public and political spheres.

Karatzas again reiterated that the problem that needed to be addressed is not bad people doing bad things but good people doing bad things. Codes could not fully solve this problem, as it is impossible to fully police all research. He felt that we needed to address the deeper pressures on researchers, pressures that sometimes lead to sloppy research and the cutting of corners. Some of these pressures are the imperative to research and to publish but also the administration of research. He felt that we needed a governance system that had integrity and that space within the field(s) of research was opening up to this possibility. Ethics review and research misconduct have been treated separately but these are becoming merged. Karatzas felt that distinctions between mandatory and voluntary approaches to research governance, ethics and misconduct are becoming blurred and that many apparently voluntary codes were, in practice, mandatory.

Karatzas felt that codes often fail to pay attention to the needs of particular research subjects, such as children. He felt that, following the Arab Spring, 'warzones' are another issue as many researchers had wanted to conduct research in response to these protests and subsequent political changes. He was particularly concerned that only minimal attention is paid to what might happen to research participants following the completion of the research. On that point he drew to a close.

### Morning Discussion:

Tim Bond (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) wondered what the panel thought of the relationship between the social sciences and the law, and if we should engage with the law as morality and ethics. In response James Parry thought there were many scholars in law and socio-legal studies who thought similarly and it was certainly a view worth pursuing. Birgit Whitman (University of Bristol) raised



## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

the question of what possibilities we open up when we think about ethics differently. She wondered what a social science research ethics that was not constrained by the biomedical model might look like. James Parry (UKRIO) thought that these issues highlighted why it was important that the profession have a voice in the development of regulation and research governance. He felt that the biomedical model is not being pushed on the social sciences by medics, who also struggle with their system. The approach to governance and ethics in biomedical research has been developed over time and often in a responsive mode. A recent review of medical research governance advocated the streamlining and harmonisation of medical regulation.<sup>4</sup> Current regulatory approaches focus on minimising risk (particularly for participants) and promoting good professional practice. This needs to be the heart of research regulation but that, were the social sciences to speak with a single voice, it was possible they could effect alterations to the review of social science research.

Stina Lyon (British Sociological Association) enquired as to the funding of the UKRIO and this led to a discussion of the way such bodies were funded beyond the UK. The UKRIO was initially set up as a pilot project with by a broad range of stakeholders, including the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, the UK Departments of Health, the Research Councils, the Royal Society and research charities. The current position is that UK HEIs choose to subscribe to UKRIO which, as a charity, aims to assist all those involved in research on request. Paul Wiles suggested that the government did not offer direct funding as it would not be appropriate for the government to be directly involved in the ethics of (social) science research. Zimmerman (Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research) said that her organization was funded by the three (major) funding agencies of Canada and that it had responsibility for research integrity and ethics. Wiles suggested this was the equivalent of UKRIO being an office of UKRC. Robert Dingwall (Academy of Social Sciences) highlighted that the UKRIO focus was on the integrity of research and not ethics, which was still a concern of RCUK. He felt that some of the discussion over the three seminars raised the question of whether it was sensible to treat these things separately.

Mary Brydon-Miller (Cincinnati/ currently a Fulbright Scholar at Keele) raised the point of education – for students and research on the ethics of research – and contrasted it with the problem of the structural arrangements of institutions. She read the following quote: “We need to put more emphasis on trying to arrange social institutions so that human beings are not placed in situations in which they will act badly.”<sup>5</sup> Brydon-Miller thought that institutional arrangements are such that they could encourage unethical behavior. She felt we ought to emphasize our own ability to examine these structural arrangements and to comment on institutional reform. Karatzas agreed, suggesting we should rethink the way academic careers are built, and wondered why institutions do not give credit to researchers for serving on ethics committees. He felt we must change the ‘end product’ if we are to change how we get there.

James Fairhead (Association of Social Anthropologists) commented on the summary of ethical codes and the variation and diversity found within.<sup>6</sup> He felt that the distinction between a code and a guidance document was

whether or not the publishing association felt able, at least in theory, to ‘enforce’ them. He felt that the existing guidelines and codes demonstrated that the Learned Societies had developed their own approaches and this meant that whatever this project produced could, at most, be a guideline document. He felt the RESPECT document was an exemplar of what was possible at a ‘supra-discipline’ level.<sup>7</sup>

Gemma Moss (BERA) raised some concerns about the set up of the discussion and the way in which the day’s speakers spoke from their positions as regulators. However, those being regulated, the (present and not-present) audiences were individual researchers who face a diverse set of ethical challenges. She felt it was a mistake to roll-up ‘ethics’ with ‘misconduct’ and ‘quality.’ The former concerned the issues faced by individual researchers whereas the latter was a concern for regulators. She felt that the summary of codes of ethics mistakenly differentiated between research and professional ethics and that the effect was to bracket-off a range of ethical concerns for researchers. In particular it bracketed-off concerns about funders and institutions, as well as the position of researchers in relation to funders and institutions, in favor of focusing on the narrower concern of the treatment of research participants. She felt this division and its influence had misled the discussion.

Ron Iphofen (Academy of Social Sciences) reiterated his view that this symposia series was trying to assist researchers in addressing the issue of ethics in research and that there was no sense in which it had been organized to come to a specific conclusion or to instantiate a particular approach. He said that the panel for this symposia on standards had been invited due to the insights they offered into the governance of research and the institutionalization of research ethics. He felt the TCPS2 was an excellent document that respected the diversity of research, researchers and researched.

Stina Lyon (BSA) had a broad comment on a statement in James Parry’s (UKRIO) paper. She cited a couple of lines that expressed the idea that “the public trust in research was based on a professional promise that research would be honest, objective, accurate, legal, safe, ethical and efficient. To be worthy of the public’s trust, research needs to fulfill that promise.”<sup>8</sup> She felt this reflected the standard mission statements issued by a variety of public and semi-public bodies at the present time and towards which the public was skeptical. The public did not trust them as they were ‘cover-ups’ rather than a transparent description of what actually goes on. She felt it was a mistake to go down this ‘mission statement’ route and that we should pursue a policy of transparency. This meant explaining to politicians and the public about the risks and the need to occasionally break commonly assumed ethical norms (as in the case of covert research). Lyon then reflected on the public’s attitude to ‘mystery shoppers.’ She suggested that the public are happy for mystery shoppers to be used in almost any setting (supermarkets, care-homes), excluding private homes. She said the public feels an increasing desire for and right to information. This runs counter to the idea that we have to educate the public about ethics, as this is a public that has access to the internet and all the information it could provide. She felt that we needed to understand the skepticism of the public towards institutional guarantees of knowledge. Her view is that transparency is the key to overcoming this scepticism and this is an area in which the

Academy could make a contribution. She closed by mentioning a excellent UN report on good research practice in development studies as it emphasizes the participation of those being studied.<sup>9</sup>

David Hunter (Editor of *Research Ethics*) raised the issue of the importance of maintaining the particularity of disciplinary approaches to research ethics. However he felt that the underlying principles remain the same even if their particular operationalization or application in different disciplines are quite varied.

Sheila Peace (British Society of Gerontology) discussed the multidisciplinary nature of her Learned Society and how this influenced the fact that they offered generic ethical guidelines rather than an ethics code. She is conscious of issues to do with the professional conduct of research, which may include whistleblowing. However she felt that the 'supra-disciplinary' guidance offered by the BSG focuses on issues of research ethics, rather than issues of professional ethics, because of the multidisciplinary constitution of its membership.

Robert Dingwall (Academy of Social Sciences) fondly recalled watching a scene in the second *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie where the pirates debated the nature of the 'pirate code' and whether it was a code or merely a set of guidelines. He drew our attention to a point that Will Van Den Hoonaard made at the second symposia concerning the ethics of the research ethics process. Dingwall questioned the fairness with which institutions treated their researchers and students. He commented that we know quite a lot about the conditions that lead researchers to engage in bad behaviors, citing research from the 1960s and 1970s into misconduct in biomedical research.<sup>10</sup> He felt that the idea of institutional structures leading to malpractice is not news, but that we have failed to learn the lessons of such ideas. He also commented on the ethics of mystery shopping, noting that in pharmaceutical practice research this was a common method.<sup>11</sup> He wondered why we bother to regulate participant observation in the age of Google-glass and head cams?<sup>12</sup> Nobody feels the need to create elaborate structures of regulation around these phenomena. Dingwall wondered if we were chasing shadows and what led us to pursue these special professional claims?

Annabelle Mark (Society for Studies in Organizing Healthcare) commented that the next-generation is increasingly struggling with the rule-based organizations (HEI's and funders) through whom they have to negotiate their futures. She felt that we have to help early career researchers to understand how to produce good social science in spite of, rather than because of, those rule based organizations. She felt that the constraints placed on researchers will increase and that the Academy has a role in pushing back the institutionalization of overly prescriptive rules in the interests of research and researchers.

Janet Lewis (Academy of Social Sciences) picked up on these points and wondered how Zimmerman's office set about supporting researchers, particularly early-career researchers and students, in a 'rule-based' culture that was not particularly supportive. She felt that research ethics review focused on the research design phase and neglected wider ethics aspects.

James Fairhead (Association of Social Anthropologists) wished to comment on the relationship between academic ethics and ethics outside of academia. He had three points. The first was

to question whether ethical principles are really the same across the social sciences. He felt that we are not as similar as we are being led to believe. He cited a recent apology made by UK economists to the Queen for the financial collapse and suggested that economics could be just as dangerous as medicine. However it was dangerous in a different way and through a different form of ethics encounter with its population. It is not just about the relationship between the researcher and the research participant. Second, he suggested that universities have taken a great deal of responsibility for research governance. HEI's in the UK all have structures, guidelines and educational programs and they are informed by disciplinary standards. However, much social science research takes place outside of universities and such research is not subject to the same restrictions. He wondered to what extent this process could be about research conducted by businesses. He wondered where that left the relationship between researchers in different settings, and universities and businesses more generally.

Tim Bond (BACP) felt that we should also be aware of the media's role in contemporary society and their capacity to investigate and make things transparent. He felt it would be problematic if formal guidance prevented academic research into certain topics, which was then only commented upon by the media.

Sue Williams of the Social Services Research Group (SSRG) explained that the members of her learned Society, who come from a variety of backgrounds, wanted to ensure that social care research was seen as different to medical research and that the 'medical model' of scientific research, i.e. assumptions made by reviewers based on norms concerning research designs and methods commonly used in clinical research, was not imposed on social care research by the Research Governance Framework.<sup>13</sup> SSRG sat on the DH advisory group for Research Governance in Social Care, and were instrumental in developing the Implementation Plan for Social Care<sup>14</sup> which recognised a) that there are important differences in the health and social care contexts in respect of the kinds of research undertaken, b) Local authorities with Social Services Responsibilities have a key role in governance. SSRG members took part in commissioning training for local authority staff, based on an evaluation of training needs and in partnership with the DH, academics and the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADASS), SSRG members, contributed to, and published, the Research Governance Framework Resource Pack for Social Care (version 1 and 2).<sup>15</sup>

SSRG were members of the Advisory Group that set up the Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC)<sup>16</sup> and a member contributed to the Roadmap for Social Care researchers<sup>17</sup> which, inter alia, states that no research should be ethically reviewed more than once. Sue Williams noted that the SCREC was only really relevant to a small proportion of research (i.e. mainly grant funded, DH funded or high risk research). Following the Mental Capacity Act (2005) implementation the Governance Arrangements for Research Ethics Committees (GAfREC)<sup>18</sup> was harmonised across health and social care.

In response to the comments, Zimmerman pointed out that the TCPS2 was not a regulatory document and that her office had no regulatory power. That said, it is the case that government funding does make compliance with TCPS2 a

## Generic Ethics Principles in Social Science Research

precondition. Nevertheless the process of (re)developing the document was one in which the concerns of social scientists were taken into account. There was an independent advisory panel that had a strong input into the document and it was intended to be a document that reflected what researchers do and the concerns they have in doing their work. This included being cognizant of 'critical enquiry.' She felt it is a mistake to see any one discipline as having its own very specific concerns and, therefore, ethical autonomy. In no small degree this was because much research is multi- and inter- disciplinary and therefore requires a commonality of approach. She felt that the Canadian system facilitated a marrying-up of the specific and the general, and that it allowed for clarity.

Karatzas commented that it was easy to repeat the mantra that lessons should be learnt from what had gone before. He was unaware of anyone who wished to prevent good research from taking place. He felt that social scientists become risk averse when they engage in reviewing the ethics of research because they hate to see anything bad happening to participants.

Paul Wiles closed the session by suggesting that contemporary social science is a much more complicated endeavor than when he started out in his career. He questioned what the role of a body like the Academy is or could be in this area. He felt that the morning's discussion had been very interesting and useful. However it had focused on what we as researchers think about it. He wondered to what extent researchers want to maintain their autonomy over this process. The discussion had also focused on the need for ethics guidelines to make sure that things don't go wrong. In addition he thought that there was a need to support research because it does good.

### Afternoon Session

The programme for the afternoon involved the delegates being randomly assigned to three different groups and asked to discuss the possible outcomes of this series. They were provided with a worksheet to guide discussion and it included the following headings, some of which were related to the stimulus paper by James Parry: 'Purposes' of this Exercise; Target audience(s); Desired Outcomes (rest of workshop); Options (1. Precisely defining how to conduct high quality social science research, 2. Supporting a variety of approaches to high quality social sciences research, 3. To be 'aspired' to without precise specification); and Outcomes (what activities should the working group now pursue). Following the group discussion the symposium reconvened and the groups fed back the main points of their discussions. These were as follows:

#### Group 1

There was a recognition that the social sciences need to find some common ground across the disciplines. They agreed that ethical reasoning was an important factor for enhancing the practice(s) of social science research and that procedures needed to be rooted in values and a nuanced respect for the dignity of research participants. They felt that the Academy could provide a framework of reference that outlined standards, ethical values and processes. This group also felt that there was a need to address the issue of internet mediated research. They agreed that ethics should be centrally embedded in the practice of research, particularly in training, and with the aim of ensuring a culture of ethics in the social sciences.

#### Group 2

The recommendations from Group two were for three different documents and one event. They felt there was scope for a web-based document that highlighted the distinctive contribution of social science research and then focused on shared dilemmas. These could be things like working with children, working in dangerous places, and conducting research on the internet. Principles and virtues would be embedded in the answers. These documents could have a wiki structure and be designed with researchers in mind. It could provide a teaching and learning resource.

Their second document was to focus on how to handle the ethics of review boards. It would contain examples on how to run such boards, educating ethics review boards, and separating out functions such as ethical review and research governance. Their third document proposal was to showcase excellence in social science research, showing how difficult issues were resolved, and resolved differently by different disciplines. It would link back to the codes of the Learned Societies.

They thought there would be some mileage in having a virtue ethics day. And there also felt it was important to involve students and those working beyond HEI's.

#### Group 3

Group three talked about virtues but also rhetoric in the Aristotelian sense. They felt that the Academy could provide a public face for the social sciences and communicate more directly to the public about what social science is and what the ethical commitments of social science research meant. They also felt that it could provide an important online resource, particularly for novice or early-career researchers. They felt that when putting forward a 'common face' the Academy should also present social science research in its diversity and respect the differences of the Learned Societies. They discussed the tension between articulating principles whilst not getting into a formal governance or regulatory role. They discussed the role of the Academy in public policy-making and connecting social science and social science researchers with the political process. They felt the Academy could provide a web-portal that connected social science with its public(s) and communicated the idea(l) of the common characteristics of the virtuous researcher and ethical research. It could discuss commonly encountered dilemmas or difficulties and the way(s) in which they could be resolved or engaged. They wondered if such a portal should try to use more inclusive language that encompassed the range of practices that constituted social science research (such as evaluation, assessments, audits etc.). This group felt that the next task was to think explicitly about what a common statement might look like.

Following the Group presentations there was a brief discussion about how an ethical culture of research could be built and how this must involve all those engaged in the process of research (funders, administrators, university managers) and not just the researcher and the researched.

#### Closing Remarks by Janet Lewis:

As this was the final symposium in the series Janet Lewis offered some closing remarks on behalf of the working group. She gave a brief account of the working group's activities since 2009. At the beginning of 2011 they began planning this symposia series and support was gained from the Open

University, the BPS, the BSA and the ESRC. She was very pleased with how the events had gone and believed that her views were borne out by the fact that more people had attended the third event than the first.

The symposia series had opened out into a fuller discussion than had been initially anticipated. This included reflexivity, virtue ethics, the ethics and practice of ethics review and the Participant Protection Model, and was not just restricted to the relationship between the researcher and the researched. There had been an underlying theme about the role of the Learned Societies and the Academy in guiding the ethics of research. There had been debate about the value of collecting together all the codes of ethics and guidance offered by the Learned Societies.

Lewis felt that the day's discussion had added a lot more and had raised issues not discussed in the previous symposia. She felt that more thought was needed about how the debates from all three events fitted together and what the next steps might be. In the longer term there was potential to find some shared principles or approaches. For her the document summarizing the codes of ethics demonstrated that the commonalities between the learned societies were more significant than any differences. Nevertheless there remained an issue about the difference between research ethics and professional ethics and the diversity of the latter.

Lewis felt that the huge regulatory framework facing new researchers was counter productive and that while ethics review caught occasional significant lapses in judgment it was nevertheless the case that what was really significant went on elsewhere. She felt that an advisory, rather than a review, body would be more useful and that the New Brunswick Declaration was at one with her thinking on this issue.<sup>19</sup>

In closing Lewis remarked that this was the end of the beginning, rather than a final end. There are two events in the planning stages and the working group will rethink these events in the light of the points, issues and debates that had been raised and explored in the symposia series. She also felt that there is a need to identify the additional aims and objectives that had emerged and to consider how others might be included in the process of moving forward.

### Notes

1. <http://www.ukrio.org/>
2. TCPS2 and the RESPECT code can be found at: <http://www.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/> and <http://www.respectproject.org/main/ethics.php>
3. Karatzas made reference to this NY times interview: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/magazine/diederik-stapels-audacious-academic-fraud.html> but also see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diederik\\_Stapel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diederik_Stapel)
4. James Parry is referring to the Rawlins Review: <http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk/p47prid88.html>
5. I am not sure of the book Brydon-Miller was reading but the quote appears to be from Gilbert Harman's "Skepticism About Character Traits." *The Journal of Ethics*. 2009;13(2-3): 235-242. Also found in his Unpublished Manuscript: "My Virtue Situation." (2005) <http://www.princeton.edu/~harman/Papers/Situ.pdf>
6. This summary is also available on our website: <http://www.acss.org.uk/Ethics/>

[AcademyGenericEthicsProject2013home.htm](http://www.academyethicsproject.org/2013/home.htm)

7. See: <http://www.respectproject.org/code/>
8. See the seminar 3 stimulus paper by James Parry (UKRIO) available in this document.
9. UN Human Development Report: Human Rights and Human Development. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000. See also: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2000/>
10. Barber, Bernard. *Research on Human Subjects: Problems of Social Control in Medical Experimentation*. Transaction Publishers, 1979 [1973].
11. Dingwall, R., P. Watson, and A. Aldridge. Covert Research: Poor Ethics and Bad Science. *Pharmaceutical Journal*. (1992) 250:182-183
12. Or helmet video cameras: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/bike-blog/2012/mar/20/best-bike-helmet-cameras> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2013/apr/28/cyclist-regrets-posting-video-road-rage-attack>
13. [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_4109577.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4109577.pdf)
14. <http://www.screc.org.uk/background.asp>
15. <http://www.researchregister.org.uk/files/RGFGuidancepack2010.pdf>
16. <http://www.screc.org.uk/>
17. <http://www.screc.org.uk/files/routemap.pdf>
18. See: <http://www.nres.nhs.uk/nres-publications/news/governance-arrangements-for-research-ethics-committees/>
19. [http://the-sra.org.uk/sra\\_resources/research-ethics/the-new-brunswick-declaration/](http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/research-ethics/the-new-brunswick-declaration/)



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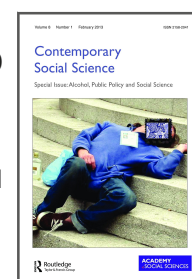
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