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Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Marco Gemignani, Cheri Winton Brodeur and Cheryl Kmiec

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The Technologies of Normalization and Self

Thinking About IRBs and Extrinsic Research Ethics With Foucault

Mirka Koro-Ljungberg

University of Florida

Marco Gemignani

Duquesne University

Cheri Winton Brodeur

Cheryl Kmiec

University of Florida

In this article, the authors discuss the technologies of normalization and self in relation to ethics and the problematization of extrinsic research ethics. They argue that institutional review boards (IRBs) and other similar institutional mechanisms promote extrinsic forms of ethics that are exemplified through institutionalized structures such as (a) the Belmont Report, (b) IRB protocol, (c) informed consent, and (d) localized interpretations of IRB rules and regulations. However, at the same time, institutional normalization enables researchers and participants to construct themselves as ethically responsible participants through resistance and critical reflection. Such "care of the self" and critical awareness of dominant discourses and regimes of power and knowledge are essential to the development and practice of research that is ethical, free, and responsive. Finally, the authors conclude that the discussions about researchers' ethical decision making and freedom of choice need to be separate from discussions related to researchers' compliance, duties, and institutional responsibilities.

Keywords: *normalization; IRB; ethics; Foucault*

The political reductionism in higher education and current educational policies is an indicator for expanding tendencies of normalization and tighter governmental control. At times, the intellectual climate that is created in this way resembles that of totalitarian, oppressive regimes in which diverse or oppositional voices that may go against the interests of the dominant group

are often radically silenced. However, in the contemporary context of scientific production, such oppression is much more clever and persuasive than in totalitarian regimes. In democratic societies, power takes the subtle form of persuasion; it blends together with dominant ideologies and metanarratives to create the feeling that those in power act to achieve the common and superior good.

One aspect of current political reductionism, namely value-free science, has produced professional codes and modes of ethics that serve as moral principles for researchers. "Value-neutral science is accountable to ethical standards through rational procedures controlled by value-neutral academic institutions in the service of an impartial government" (Christians, 2005, p. 146). Institutional review boards (IRBs), or similar institutional structures, have become localized controlling mechanisms and governmental vehicles to overview value-neutral sciences and knowledge produced by government-funded researchers.¹ As a consequence, the federal government and IRBs play a vital role in controlling the types of research considered "fundable," with quantitative research often deemed "preferable" to qualitative research (Lather, 2004). For example, IRBs are authorized to make determinations of the definition and nature of research; the decisions of this sort ultimately influence researchers' possibility of receiving funds for their projects. To make such choices, IRBs embrace specific interpretations of, first, what science is or should be and, second, what ethical codes or behaviors should lead to acceptable scientific practices.

However, for us the question of ethical decision making extends far beyond IRB protocols and institutional supervision. For Scott (1990), a "question of knowing and thinking as well as of choosing and everyday action" (p. 5) defines the realm of ethics. In other words, how individuals choose to conduct themselves is the question of ethics. Socrates, in turn, defines ethics through questioning, critical reflection, and resistance of domestication (Madison, 2005). According to Foucault (1987), ethics can be "understood as the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct" (p. 251) and, through various techniques, into "a moral subject of action" (Smart, 1991, p. 225).

Inspired by Foucault's reflections on the relation among ethics, institutions, and care of the self, the first purpose of this article is to illustrate how researchers are constrained and continuously "produced" through normalization. Established ethical codes and institutional expectations regarding particular moral behavior condition the way in which researchers have come to recognize themselves and relate to each other as certain kinds of subjects inside and outside of science and institutional borders. For example, IRB

approval defines researchers and study participants in their relation to each other, and IRB protocols have been established as necessary, useful, and ethically founded mechanisms to classify, compare, and approve interpersonal data collection and knowledge production.

Second, we argue that at the same time, and to the extent of the possible, researchers should not allow institutional norms or expectations to limit their ethical agency. Rather, researchers should construct themselves as responsible ethical subjects and resist solely extrinsic forms of ethics.

Educational researchers' moral justifications, then, for investigating and speaking on behalf of others, does not rely on some set of trans-historical identifiers of the human subject (e.g., respect for human rational autonomy) but rather on making sense of concrete circumstance. (McNamee, 2002, p. 5)

As a result, ethical responsibilities cannot be separated from the concrete sociopolitical circumstances, but scholars need to practice a "care of self" that anticipates and emphasizes the researchers' care of others without giving up their own ethical agency, freedom, and contextualized moral decision making. In this sense, the "care for others should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior" (Foucault, 1984/1994a, p. 287). The care of the self represents one's ability to understand, from within a discourse, freedom and ethics by reflecting on processes of problematization, "games of truth," practices of subjectification, and technologies by which a sense of self is created. For Foucault, such critical self reflections are researchers' ethical responsibilities as they allow freedom and a certain degree of liberation. For example, the federal government has created a competitive infrastructure that provides time, resources, and institutional support for researchers. However, only through the critical awareness of institutional normalization can researchers constitute their ethical selves and choose from the ends and purposes that guide their acts and lives in research communities.

The Technologies of Normalization and Technologies of Self

During normalization, a subject becomes an object of control, coercion, examination, judgment, and intervention (Foucault, 1999/2003). Normalization can be characterized as a mode of observation, ordering, intervention, hierarchy, exclusion, and control that simultaneously homogenizes and individualizes

its target populations by taking charge of individual behavior through forms of subtle authority (see also Foucault, 1984, 1988). In addition, normalization is an instrument of power and production as

in a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity. . . . It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (Foucault, 1977/1995, pp. 182-184)

Practices of normalization enable institutional structures, the fields of science, various discourses, and the bodies of government to sustain themselves and maintain independency with the minimum effort from the system itself. In the normalization process, individuals assume roles of pseudo agency that can be occupied only through production and participation in the system.

In the context of research, it can be argued that IRBs serve as a type of “examining apparatus” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 185), and the ritual of IRB protocol is one of the most obvious forms of examination. The hierarchal structure created around IRB protocol, the training that is required, and particular types of knowledge that are produced are ways in which the examining apparatus functions. Furthermore, the examination of protocols is based on mechanisms that link certain types of knowledge to power and hierarchy. Examination and documentation that is produced as a result of examination turns researchers and research projects into cases that are then objectified, categorized, and normalized.

The impact of normalization on individuals is a complex phenomenon. The process of normalization as it relates to the IRB mirrors specific judgments on acceptable standards for scientific frameworks and systems of values and relations of dominant discourses and power–knowledge regimes. It becomes a method of control that combines both hierarchical intervention (e.g., government control of funds) and normative judgment. IRBs follow and at the same time generate specific technologies and discourses of concern.

Lacombe (1996) suggested that power in a Foucauldian sense is “best understood in terms of a ‘mechanism for life’ that includes strategies for self-development that both constrains—through objectifying techniques—and enables—through subjectifying techniques—agency” (p. 334). Furthermore, Lacombe proposed that “power is not only inscribed in practices of normalization, but, most significantly, in practices of liberation” (p. 334; also see Foucault, Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991). From this perspective, the care of self can be viewed as a form of liberation that accompanies normalization.

Sometimes, depending on particular circumstances, the techniques of normalization may presuppose the care of self, or the techniques themselves are the conditions for generating a care of self. Institutional discipline creates various kinds of subjects that utilize their positions of resistance and liberation differently. "Such institutionally imposed discipline is itself continuous with self-discipline, those practices through which people strive to keep themselves within the socially constructed and professionally enforced parameters of normal" (Frank & Jones, 2003, p. 181). This position of individuals' productive resistance also becomes evident in Foucault's (1980) definition of the role of intellectual not so as to ensure that "his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology" but rather to change "the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth" (p. 133).

Furthermore, Foucault unites agency with ethical considerations and responsibilities (e.g., Foucault, 1994b). Care of the self is concerned with one's own actions, but, at the same time, freedom is exercised with the consideration of personal responsibilities in the context of others.

According to Foucault, "care of the self," which brings the constructed or ethical self into being, can be practiced only when there is sufficient liberty. Conversely, freedom is the result of engaging in the practices of "care of the self." (Infinito, 2003, p. 157).

The "care for the self" is not a call for individualism or selfishness. Rather, it implies by itself the care for others and, therefore, "the care of the self is ethical in itself, . . . insofar as the care of the self enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships" (Foucault, 1984/1994a, p. 287). Foucauldian ethics require that individuals are involved in their own construction as subjects otherwise they are harmed and "become slaves of their own desires" (p. 288).

The care of self that Foucault refers to is not the humanistic, romantic, or self-focused search for introspection, insight, enlightenment, revelation, or individuation but an act of resistance that comes from the awareness of the disciplinary roles of knowledge and power. It must be taken into account that the "Who am I?" question entails the relationship of power and knowledge to the self (Deleuze, 1986/1988). The subject responds to normative disciplines, discourses, and regimes of power and knowledge, but it is not reducible to them. Power always leaves open possibilities to resist. Nonetheless, such resistance can occur as care of the self only by reflectively thinking on the origin of problematizations and prescriptions. "Thinking is carried out in a space between seeing and speaking" (Deleuze, 1986/1988, p. 116), in a dynamic place of difference, change, metamorphosis.

Thinking With Foucault About Extrinsic Research Ethics

In 1974, the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research was established. The commission was charged to identify the basic ethical principles that should underlie the conduct of biomedical and behavioral research involving human participants and to develop guidelines that should be followed to ensure that such research is conducted in accordance with three principles: (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). These basic principles were to guarantee ethically appropriate research acts, and commitment to them would produce ethically responsible investigators. Through IRBs and other federal regulations of research, the government attempts to create the analytical link among personal ethical decision making, ethical guidelines (e.g., what is the respect of persons, beneficence, or justice), and public and university governance mechanisms. However, it can be argued that the created university governance and protocol structure, including the IRB protocols, work against the very idea that researchers and research participants are supposed to constitute themselves as “moral subjects of their own actions” (Foucault, 1984, p. 352).

When IRBs situate themselves above the experiential, terrestrial, everyday, lay conditions and contexts of the research, they ask researchers for a practice of obedience and confession. A parallel with Christianity may fit well here: A fundamental discourse in the sacrament of confession is characterized by *exomologesis*, or “recognition of facts.” The disclosure of one’s own sins to God or to others structures a particular care of the self as a way to efface sin and seek remission. According to Foucault, the most important model used to explain *exomologesis* is that of death, torture, or martyrdom, in which people prefer to die rather than give up their faith. Based on the model of Christian monastic life, the sinner achieved redemption through a form of absolute obedience and contemplation that was “more concerned with thought than with action” (Foucault, 1982/1994d, p. 247). In this Christian hermeneutics, the object is not the past actions of the day but the present thoughts. Monks must therefore constantly scrutinize their thoughts to allow the discrimination between those that lead toward God and those which do not. Monks’ obedience is a practice of “sacrifice of the self, of the subject’s own will” (Foucault, 1982/1994d, p. 246).

Similarly, it could be contended that IRBs situate themselves as guardians of both proper research procedures and the protection of research participants.

Almost absolute obedience is expected by IRBs, and many qualitative researchers are constantly scrutinizing whether they are following the protocol or not. Although apparently positive and caring, such “holy spirit” (the Christian figure of a divine person who looks after every single individual) is often accompanied by the loss of researchers’ experience of agency and freedom. Next, we will discuss more in detail current governmental and institutional structures that shape researchers’ freedom and researchers’ ethical decision making.

Belmont Report

The Belmont report was created to serve as an analytical framework to guide ethical problems involving human participants. In addition, the Belmont report provides the link between personal ethics and university governance mechanisms from which university governance and protocol (i.e., rules and regulations) have been developed. The report is divided into three basic principles: the boundaries between practice and research (regarding the process), basic ethical principles (regarding the researcher), and applications (regarding the participants). Techniques within these three principles both normalize and enable the construction of subject (researcher and participant).

The ambiguity of the language leading to “a blurring” between what constitutes research and practice both constrains and enables researchers in forms of exclusion and available interpretations. For example, terminology such as *research*, *hypothesis*, and *generalizable* limits the concepts of “scientific” research and thus redirects (especially qualitative) researchers’ ethical decision making. At the same time, the “blurriness” of terminology invites various interpretations of research practice and calls for different variants of scientific research process. However, it is interesting that although ambiguity exists between research and everyday action or common practice, the decision as to whether a specific project constitutes research or practice is so blurry that the final decision is not determined by the researchers but by the review board.

Basic ethical principles of the Belmont report are connected to the fundamental philosophy of ethical judgments and the evaluation of human actions. The principle labeled as “respect for persons” focuses on autonomy for individual participants and on the increased protection of the persons with decreased levels of autonomy. Beneficence guarantees that people are treated in an ethical manner by respecting decisions they make, protecting them from harm, and ensuring their well-being. Beneficence is defined as researchers’ obligation to the participant not to harm and to maximize the

benefits while minimizing harm. Last, the report addresses justice by asking, "Who ought to receive the benefits of research and bear its burdens? And how can researchers provide equal benefit for all?"

It could be argued that justice changes as the cultural norms are adjusted over time and space. As a result, the purpose of the Belmont report illustrates one primary function of modern society: the need to reform what society deems as being inappropriate or deviant behavior. The report ensures societal standards of research through normalization rather than promoting researchers' freedom and agency. Although the normalization process is more pronounced, the identification and statement of rules and regulations in the Belmont report does enable the researcher to more clearly and quickly understand the issues and authority set forth in this document. The guidelines presented in this documents and the federal statutes enable the researcher to obtain process information and to visualize and extract information necessary to apply for and receive funding for research. In addition, the understanding of IRB guidelines enables the researcher to know more in detail what it is he or she is possibly resisting and working against.

IRB Protocol

Nelson (2004) argued that IRBs operate without

their own system of checks and balances, often without secure mechanisms of appeal, [and they] are equally subject to individual and group self-deception, even more so now that they are moving to review social sciences and humanities research more widely than ever before. (p. 209)

At the same time, IRBs have become a virtual police force that promotes the values of liberal humanism and respect for persons while enabling researchers and investigators to transfer their liability and ethical responsibilities to IRBs.

Ethical approval in the form of approved IRB protocol shapes the existence and acceptance of research and, therefore, of the researcher. In this sense, IRBs are institutional attempts to translate into action (by means of restriction and permission) norms of minimum ethical standards and practices of disciplinary control that are generic, universal, and ahistorical. During the past years, through the process of judging which research protocols may receive approval, IRBs' position has moved from protecting participants to protecting the universities they represent, often favoring quantitative over qualitative projects (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004). IRBs themselves, structured

after the biomedical model, are set up to favor quantitative clinical and biomedical research over qualitative research. Researchers are “persuaded” to adhere to strict regulations and preplanned procedures, with the result of creating inflexible research processes, that is, the opposite of what most qualitative frameworks necessitate (Nelson, 2004). For example, IRBs expect qualitative researchers to conduct their work adopting the language of positivist scientific methodologies and using expressions such as *study subject*, *informed consent*, *authorization for collection*, and *objectivity*. Another example of the mismatch between IRB and qualitative social science research is how the use of interview guides limits and restricts the interaction between researcher and participant. “In tightly framing the contexts, in prioritizing the questions and areas of research, researchers can silence or marginalize the very concerns and cares that those, whom they claim to speak on behalf of, wish to express most forcefully” (McNamee, 2002, p. 6). In addition, by mandating the use of predetermined interview guides to direct researcher–participant interaction, IRBs are assuming that everything significant to research occurs during the collection phase. This is certainly not an approach qualitative researchers believe to be relevant (Nelson, 2004).

From the vocabulary that researchers are mandated to use to the rigid structures they are forced to follow, IRBs regulate research projects by forcing all researchers to adhere to a medical model of science that is not universally accepted in the social sciences. Lincoln and Tierney (2004) stated, “Indeed, among the AAUP (2001) committee’s conclusions was that some IRBs ‘too often mistakenly apply standards of clinical and biomedical research to social science research, to the detriment of the latter’” (p. 223). Ultimately, the result is a powerful IRB that gives researchers little to no autonomy and control over their own research (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004; Nelson, 2004). An example of such lack of researcher’s autonomy is the practice by IRB officers to advise the researcher to follow exemplary protocols word-for-word to guarantee expedited and unproblematic approval of research protocol. Recently, when one of the authors of this article became a new member in a research institution, he or she was advised by tenured faculty members to meet and greet the “gatekeeper” at the local IRB office. During this visit, an IRB officer showed him or her the university’s preferred protocol with preexisting sentences, gave him or her a copy, and advised the researcher to follow it word-for-word—simply “plug in” the words describing him or her current study. In this way, the officer explained, researchers can guarantee positive and expedited review.

Because of the IRBs' preplanned procedures, researchers are often placed in a position that is grounded in a rigid, authoritative research protocol, which has little room for reciprocity, participant voice, or participant negotiation. Researchers submit the protocols, correspond with IRB officials, and are called for full board meetings. Very infrequently, IRBs will hear research participants and their opinions regarding ethical decisions made about them. These clearly predetermined roles privilege researchers as primary source of knowledge, creating an ultimate power differentiation between researchers and study participants. This procedure becomes problematic for many qualitative researchers, who believe that knowledge is negotiated during interviews with the participants and that the preplanned and preapproved IRB interview guide often makes negotiations impossible. As Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) explained, the strict confines of the interview protocol create pressure and unethical situations when there is a need to address or act on unexpected talk. As a result, qualitative researchers might place more emphasis on their own purposes, views, goals, and desirable messages, limiting the analysis of participants' differing agendas. In addition, rigid IRB research process does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the participants' viewpoints, further limiting not only researchers' but also participants' power and freedom (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).

Similarly, current IRB protocol makes it difficult to create more participatory forms of research or designs that are built to change according to situational, cultural, and individual circumstances. Nevertheless, current protocol forms make participatory-oriented researchers consider alternative ways to include participants in the IRB process and research design, for example, by including participants as coinvestigators in the projects.

Informed Consent

The composition of IRB protocol and informed consent can be one of the most helpful tasks researchers do at the beginning of their research projects. The standardized fields of the form, such as the purpose of study, recruitment of participants, methods, and procedures, can assist researchers in their designs by focusing on the essential elements of the study plan and research process. Furthermore, the informed consent form requires researchers to consider the research process from the participants' perspective. For example, decisions regarding the time spent for the project and who will have access to participants' data are important considerations that will influence participants and their willingness to participate in the research process.

At the same time, informed consent forms reduce complex research designs into formal, minimized, and standardized formats. For example, the informal and participatory approaches to research that are desired by many qualitative researchers are difficult to get approved because of constraints on the standardized form. The expected stability of the research process and predetermination of design does not allow enough flexibility for researchers to adjust their designs according to the participants' needs, researchers' changing subjectivities, or the sociocultural context. Moreover, the text in the informed consent permanently labels the research project and all of its components, with implications for researchers' and participants' expectations, roles, and responsibilities.

Information presented in the informed consent also determines and identifies specific roles and identities of researchers and participants. By doing this, it is assumed that the participants and researchers have essential selves because the informed-consent process requires that individuals take on the identity of either "the researcher" or "the study participant," which are two positions that entail specific assumptions and role expectations. For example, researchers ask questions or carry forward instruments, and participants respond and participate in predetermined research tasks. Similarly, informed consent protects participants' vulnerability but does not address the harm possible caused by the participants. Last, consent concludes with an ultimate note of authority—if problems arise or participants have any questions or concerns, they can contact the local IRB office. This note of authority clearly indicates the institutional authority associated with the consent process.

Furthermore, researchers are required to list risks and benefits in general terms, as if risks and benefits would be the same for all participants. In the current informed consent form, it is impossible to list diversified and situational risks for each participant or participant group. The lack of space for diversification of risks in the form can be interpreted as discouragement for researchers who might want to consider risks and benefits at a deeper culturally situated level. In this way, informed consent superficially protects participants and answers to the bureaucratic needs of the university and government rather than encouraging deeper ethical considerations by the researchers.

Similar observation related to the bureaucracy and institutional paper trail can be made regarding the details of study participation. The informed consent form does not consider that the participants' needs and requirements to participate in the study are likely to vary according to their life circumstances. For example, for a 1-hour interview, participants may need babysitting

arrangements, solutions to transportation needs, and possible time off from work, which could all be considered as requirements for participation.

Finally, informed consent presumes a particular knowledge base for the participants: All of them are expected to understand the meaning of various research terms, such as voluntary participation, withdrawal, and confidentiality. The problem with unfamiliar terminology becomes even more apparent with informed consent including Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act regulations and health information releases.

Localized Interpretations of Rules and Regulations

One large problem with operational rules of IRBs is the localized interpretations of rules and regulations. It is frequently unclear which protocols are considered to be at a higher-than-minimal risk and thus end up being discussed and evaluated in full board meetings and which proposals are exempt. In this regard, Christians (2005) discussed how the expedited review depends on an “enlightened IRB chair and organizational flexibility” (p. 147). To provide an example from our research community, when two researchers submitted almost identical qualitative research protocols including interviews and observations at the school settings, one protocol was considered as exempted and the other one was not.

The composition of review boards and the inadequate representation of different disciplines further normalize IRB reviews. The construction of review panels and experts who evaluate submitted proposals reflects institutions’ current perceptions of important areas and values of research. To an extent, this is inevitable, but the issue is that influences of power and ideology are ignored and “a means-ends system operates in fundamentally its own terms” (Christians, 2005, p. 148). IRBs recruit reviewers who can completely and adequately assess research activities commonly conducted at their institution. However, the lack of knowledge about qualitative research or about other less common research approaches frequently creates concerns and uncertainty about the proposed methods, their effectiveness, and ethical appropriateness among many reviewers.

Last, the localized mechanisms to address protocol violations are usually not articulated in a clear manner. For example, in most research institutions, failure to maintain proper records or to obtain authorized informed consent results in corrective action. Not only is there ambiguity in how IRBs define the terms *bad* and *research*, but their policies and procedures rarely indicate what kind of corrective actions will take place at the research institution.

In the case of Wright (2004), the researcher did not obtain informed consent for his personal essay from his participant. Wright was required to contact the journal and have his essay removed from publication, even though he believed that he did not conduct “research” at all.

Problematizing “Games of Truth” and Extrinsic Research Ethics: Moving Toward Complex Understandings of Ethical Decision Making

The concept of problematization refers to the conditions under which something becomes worthy of the subject’s reflection and, by doing so, constitutes that something (e.g., the ethical research and researcher) as an object of thought. By defining “the conditions in which human beings ‘problematize’ what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live” (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 10), problematizations become inseparable from the specific conceptualization of the subject’s nature, agency, freedom, and, therefore, ethics. We argue for problematizations that go beyond simple care for the research participants toward an increased critical assessment of the acceptability of external, institutional, and universal research ethics that create, endorse, and pretend specific “games of truth.” As *games of truth* imply specific versions of truth and falsehood, they represent external ethical standards of freedom that determine what a subject can say or do. They are technologies of knowledge creation, and, by covering such role, they establish external obligations of truth (e.g., “discovering the truth, being enlightened by truth, telling the truth”—Foucault, 1994b, p. 178). Thus, games of truth define “the conditions of possibility of ‘true’ discourse, thereby taking up the function previously given to epistemes” (Han, 1998/2002, p. 170). When “truth” (e.g., about ethical practices) is hegemonically imposed on the researcher or on the participant, he or she has no other choice than to conform to the regime.

Besides imposing specific demands on acceptable research ethics, external institutional structures (e.g., IRBs) exercise power in ways that target the creation of subjectivities, that is, the subject’s processes of self-reflection (a critical aspect of the care of the self) and recognition. As a result, subjects, including researchers and research participants, constitute themselves into certain games of truth (Foucault, 1984/1994a) that through externalization and comparison shape individuals from inside out (see Han, 1998/2002). According to Foucault subjectivity becomes “the way in which the subject forms the experience of himself in a game of truth which he relates to himself”

(as cited in Han, 1998/2002, p. 633). In other words, the subject constitutes itself as a part of a discourse that is both active and passive, based on “the morality of behaviors” and prescriptive “moral codes” that are externally imposed on the subject and to which he or she did not contribute in creating (Foucault, 1984/1990). As we previously mentioned, Foucault is not simply talking about the conditions that shape or control the subject’s development and freedom but also, and more subtly, the reflective understanding that the subject itself has of its own nature, possibilities, and moral behaviors. In these ways, “the games of truth no longer involve a coercive practice, but a practice of self-formation of the subject” (Foucault, 1984/1994a, p. 282). In addition, “Games of truth involve . . . a practice of self-formation of the subject” (Foucault, 1984/1994a, p. 282), in which “people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations” (Foucault, 1994c, p. 264). Ethics, morality, and games of truth are therefore intertwined practices that deeply influence researchers’ and participants’ understandings and experiences of freedom. Furthermore, it can be argued that “only through moral autonomy can a professional be a member of an ethical community and take ethical action as a member of the community” (Dougherty & Atkinson, 2006, p. 295).

Because of the lack of various degrees of researchers and participants’ autonomy, it is important to problematize the assumed connection between controllable IRB processes (e.g., the aspects of legal protection of research participants and institutional documentation) and ethical research practices. Currently, even though IRBs put forward institutional duty and enforce researchers’ responsibilities through guidelines, protocols, and board meetings, it is impossible for IRBs to control the actual research process and empirical data collection or analysis phases. Thus, researchers and study participants may or may not precisely follow their protocols because of personal or empirical reasons. In addition, researchers’ and study participants’ ethical codes can be shaped by various simultaneous professional ethics (e.g., the ethical codes of counselor, medical provider, and teacher) that complicate ethical decision making and universal rules of ethical conduct.

As a result, we argue that a stable ethical order at the institutional level removes autonomy and decreases individual responsibilities of the researchers and participants regarding themselves and others. To minimize this effect, researchers should raise the problem of ethics and IRB and the problem of generalizable conceptualizations of ethics in the form of “nonacceptance of what is happening,” which would illustrate an ethical attitude (Foucault, 1984, p. 377). Moreover, it can be argued that (qualitative) researchers’ ethical codes should not be external or universally determined. “Ethics is by its nature bound up with individual decision, so cannot be legislated” (Small,

2002, p. 92). The answers to the questions “What do I know? What can I do? Who am I?” change and depend on existing games of truth. However, because it is unlikely that the IRB as a regulatory system for ethical surveillance and governmental oversight will ever be completely dissolved, future discourses need to address the limitations of dominant discourses and the types of regimes of power and knowledge that are fundamental to the development and ethical research practices guided by current IRB regulations. In addition, it is important to provide counterdiscourses that describe ethical research practices that operate differently when compared to dominant practices.

Foucauldian “care of self” exemplifies one form of ethical counterdiscourse when it implies that researchers operate as reflective subjects that are derived from existing ethical discourses but do not fully depend on them. Researchers must care for others “without giving up the freedom to act as individuals” (Infinito, 2003, p. 162). Infinito (2003) continued by stating that “according to Foucault, constantly exercising one’s existence prevents others from controlling our subjectivity” (p. 164). In other words, both Infinito and Foucault call for active resistance and continuous construction of ethical self. The concept of care of the self encourages and calls for technologies, techniques, self-knowledge, and self-improvement. Instead of leaving construction of ethical selves of the researchers to IRBs or to institutional responsibility, each researcher has to practice his or her own “care of the self” ethics as freedom that enables productive autonomy and self-constructions in the social context. The researchers’ reflections on their practices of relating to others, care of self, and subjectification add to their freedom as persons and build possibilities for self positions while simultaneously affecting their ethical practices (also see Infinito, 2003). Ethical researchers are “dedicated to the formation of the self as a site of experimentation and exploration” (Infinito, 2003, p. 167) in the presence of others.

Foucault’s conceptualization of ethics shares similar orientation on both self and the other with feminist communitarianism, which integrates the subject’s autonomy with sociocultural and communal well-being (e.g., Christians, 2005; Denzin, 1997, 2003). However, in feminist communitarian ethics, the ultimate aim is communal transformation that is guided by intrinsic morality, whereas for Foucault the techniques of normalization and the moral systems of norms play a significant role in the ethical and moral agency of individuals. In regards to communitarian ethics, we agree with Denzin (2003), who proposed that the rights to control and own one’s culturally determined ethical practices belong to cultural groups, such as indigenous people themselves. However, if the institutional structures such

as IRBs and their regulations cannot be discarded, the question becomes how to modify the existing structures to integrate culturally specific ownership of ethical codes with institutionally established duties and responsibilities of the researcher. Institutional structures, recommendations, guidelines, protocols, and practices also need to accommodate diverse, intrinsic, and sociocultural ethical codes and practices by utilizing localized knowledges and expertise. It is essential to facilitate a dialogue across differences by learning from first-person accounts, alternative perspectives, goals, values, and expectations related to ethical decision making. Even though such dialogues might currently occur among the members of university IRBs, they are rarely democratic, in the sense of being open to the communication and collaboration of every perspective and member. For a democratic system to work, the most powerful parties need to acknowledge their power and take responsibility for the richness and wisdom that comes from promoting dialogue and participation among different groups and factions. In addition, members of a democratic system need to avoid the use of totalitarian tools (like threats, veto, neglect of alternative views, etc.) to keep the status quo. In this sense, it would be essential for IRBs to actively seek ways to increase their internal diversity of political, philosophical, and cultural positions. In addition, IRB directors and administrators should avoid creating the internal oligarchies, that is, the concentration of too much power or political influence in the hands of a few. Only if a diversity of perspectives is openly acknowledged and respectfully considered will the modalities by which the researcher's subject and care of the self are created be highlighted and, at the same time, codes, actions, and decisions appear to everyone as prescriptive, although necessary and socially constructed, elements of ethical behavior.

In addition, counterdiscourses to the ethical hegemony and governmentally guided ethical decision making need to promote complex understandings of ethical research practices and decision making by working against discriminatory models of research ethics that introduce "as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences" (Foucault, 1977/1995, pp. 182-184). Furthermore, it is vital to facilitate and encourage thinking between and beyond existing power structures and to create the space between seeing (problematization) and speaking (reflecting and communication on the concern). Such a space is both a place of interstice and disjunction (Deleuze, 1986/1988). By problematizing individual actions and engaging in critical reflection, researchers grow as ethical beings and learn within and from the historical and discursive context that influences the constellation of ethical research practice.

An essential part of promoting the intrinsic forms of ethics and decision making is activism and civic education by professional organizations. According to Foucault (1977/1995), disciplinary power “is exercised through its invisibility” (p. 187). Through public education and increasing awareness among multiple sectors, the cloak of invisibility can be removed from the IRB process. To do so, researchers ought to join organizations such as the International Association of Qualitative Inquiry or special interest groups in the American Educational Research Association that could systematically monitor for opportunities to influence and change the IRB process and federal regulations. For example, the last time the IRB was open for suggestions to changes to the Belmont report was in 2005, and federal statutes are also reviewed on a regular basis. Members of the committee could work toward training representative to influence the federal IRB panel into “reversing the political axis of individualization” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 192).

In addition, the development of political strength at the organizational level could provide a method of making international recommendations that could bring about such changes as rewording terminology and definitions in the Belmont report, in the federal guidelines, and in any new guidelines established around the world. Along with the revisions and expansion of basic terms, such as *research* and *scientific*, various approaches to research need to be accommodated in the IRB process. A part of this dialogue could occur through conversation partnerships between IRBs and researchers, between IRBs and organizations, and between IRBs and research participants. Such conversations could lead to local IRBs making more informed decisions related to the needs of research participants and researchers while still protecting rights of all individuals. One example is the way in which the boards could accommodate clinical partnership agreements and colearning agreements between researchers and study participants. In addition, IRBs should explore the tensions, complexities, and contradictions related to university-wide and research collaboration because all groups and collaborative units “tend to privilege order over disorder or unitary development rather than multiple developmental processes” (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005, p. 24).

Finally, we should specify that our purpose for this article was to reflect on the potential risks and limitations associated with “principle-led moral decision-making” (McNamee, 2002, p. 7), with a practice of domination and externalization that may come from the power given to IRBs or similar institutional structures. Instead of defining ethical practice as the ability to act in a given situation according to particular ethical guidelines, to fit to and follow prescribed and extrinsic general rules that cannot make justice

of the variety of local research contexts, ethical research comes from acts of reflection, understandings of how ethical principles are applied in particular circumstances, from mastery of one's moral and ethical self, and from resistance to dominant discourses through informed ethical decision making. While struggling with wording, protocols, and assumed or imposed research roles, qualitative researchers have the chance to constitute themselves through resistance, to reflexively analyze their own practices of subjectification, and to truly consider what kind of moral and ethical research they desire to conduct and how they can be critical of normalization by differently constructing themselves and their roles. Researchers could construct themselves as apprentices of ethics and morality who continuously pay attention to ethical decision making and to the methodology of ethics (see Small, 2002). In other words, the potential oppression implicit in normalization practices can promote learning, resistance, and deeper care of self among qualitative researchers, with results of creating an even more constructive critical awareness of metanarratives, dominant discourses, and power-knowledge regimes. During such resistance, researchers are able to gain more complex understandings of the rules and dynamics that lead to the creation of ethical and moral subjects. As a result, the researchers' ethical decision making and freedom of choice cannot be direct results of researchers' compliance, duties, and institutional responsibilities that are externally imposed.

Note

1. IRBs were designated to review research involving human participants under Federal Wide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services and to safeguard the rights and welfare of human respondents participating in biomedical and behavioral research. IRBs have been established in accordance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 56; University of Florida, Health Science Center, 2005).

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Mirka Koro-Ljungberg is an associate professor specializing in qualitative research methodology at the University of Florida. She received her doctorate from the University of Helsinki, Finland. Prior joining to the faculty at the University of Florida, she spent 3 years as a visiting scholar at the University of Georgia. Her research interests focus on the conceptual and theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry and on the implementation of qualitative methods in various empirical settings. Her recent publications have appeared in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, and *Qualitative Research*, among other journals.

Marco Gemignani is an assistant professor in the Psychology Department at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He graduated in counseling psychology from the University of Florida with a dissertation on narratives of identity, home, and agency among refugees from Kosovo. He embraces Foucauldian, social constructionist, and critical approaches to research and psychotherapy. His main fields of interest are cultural studies, migration, and diversity in counseling and education.

Cheri Winton Brodeur is a doctoral student and a coordinator of the Program Development and Evaluation Center in the College of Agriculture at the University of Florida. Her research interests are in organizational restructuring in complex organizations, focusing on conceptual and theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry around the function of teams and team problem solving.

Cheryl Kmiec is a curriculum and instruction doctoral student at the University of Florida. Her areas of specialization include the middle grades, the transition from middle school to high school, social studies education, and preservice teacher preparation.