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Integrity in Qualitative Research: Preparing Ourselves, Preparing Our Students

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Students in qualitative research methods courses must learn to manage the challenges to research integrity that exist when humans seek to study the behaviors, thoughts, and emotions of other humans. Yet, preparing students to manage such challenges represents one of the most difficult tasks facing their teachers. In this paper, we aim to provide instructors with an approach for preparing students to deal with such issues; when not handled properly, they can potentially threaten research integrity. The approach is centered upon sharing personal stories drawn from our own research that illustrate such challenges, even when standard procedures for qualitative design and analyses are followed. The stories emphasize the researchers' ability to resolve the problem without harm to project outcomes.

As qualitative researchers, we regularly face the ethical challenge of whether and how to separate our personal biases from the data we collect. Acknowledging that we have biases can be a sometimes frightening and intimidating experience; it causes us to face our own hopes, fears, stereotypes about people, and even about ourselves. Doing so also taps into a core issue for qualitative researchers, that is, whether it is even possible to realistically separate ourselves from that which we study.

While difficult to engage in, we have come to believe that the process of examining our biases brings a depth of insight to our findings that we would not have otherwise accessed. We have learned to value this sometimes thorny process through many years of experience with qualitative research. Our students, however, lack that experience as well as examples of such self-reflection. In this paper we offer an example of this kind of reflexiveness, within the context of constructing integrity in qualitative research, in hopes that future students of qualitative research might benefit.

Setting the Stage: Teaching Qualitative Research from the Beginning

As the semester wears on, we wind our way through the various methodologies well-known to researchers in social sciences everywhere—experiments, surveys, archival research, and so on. By now, the basic tenets of these methodologies are also known to our students, most of whom are upper-division undergraduates or graduate students. We are consequently able to cover the topic in more depth, aiming for an understanding of the nuances and complications of quantitative methods, speaking of measurement theory, various aspects of validity, and probability sampling. This is comfortable language for us, teachers of business and psychology students who, ourselves, were also raised in the world of quantitative design and analyses.

Then, with a deep breath, we plunge ahead into methodological territory less easily digested by students still struggling somewhat with the details of standard quantitative design. We forge into the world of qualitative research, a world little discussed in many business and psychology departments in the United States.

Ironically, despite its minimal attention in some academic departments, qualitative research is becoming an increasingly important tool for industry. For instance, a recent survey of research practitioners indicates that focus groups, as well as surveys, are the most frequently used techniques in consumer research (Achenreiner, 2001), necessitating a need for qualitative data collection and analyses. Further, national polling data suggests that 70% of all money spent to study consumers is used to conduct qualitative research (Luntz, 1994).

Much has been written regarding the instruction of qualitative research (cf., Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Merriam & Associates, 2002). The role of ethics in conducting qualitative research is an essential component of such instruction. In this paper, we aim to provide instructors with an approach for preparing students to deal with some of those ethical concerns. Drawing upon the value of reflection in learning, our approach is centered upon sharing personal stories drawn from our own research that illustrates how the integrity of research can be challenged, even when standard procedures for qualitative design and analyses are followed. These stories also emphasize researchers' ability to resolve the conflict without harm to project outcomes.

Managing the Challenges to Integrity: Teaching by Example

There are many different ways to describe the major ethical considerations associated with conducting qualitative research. Soltis (1989) describes the ethics concerning violating a person's privacy, abridging confidentiality, and causing others harm via the researcher's actions, or even inactions. Punch (1994) suggests that ethical considerations are not so far removed from those found in quantitative research and include issues surrounding informed consent, deception, privacy, harm, confidentiality, trust, and betrayal. Haverkamp (2005) suggests that using a professional codes of ethics, such as the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2002), in combination with examining foundational ethical principles, applying an attitude of care, and maintaining virtue as a researcher offers guidance to managing ethical issues in qualitative research.

In the absence of any unifying perspective on ethics in qualitative research, we find especially helpful Ely et al.'s (1991) framework of three ethical "foci" in qualitative research. This perspective resonates with our thinking about ethics, likely because the framework offered by the authors is grounded in ethical concerns voiced by students, themselves, who were enrolled in the authors' qualitative research courses. As our aim is to provide a way for students to think about and manage ethics in the practice of qualitative research, Ely et al.'s approach seems especially fitting. Ely et al. suggest that ethical considerations must revolve around the integrity of the study, potential impacts on participants, and the social responsibility inherent to doing qualitative research work.

Though all three of these foci have arisen in our courses, we focus here on the first concern, the integrity of the study, as it is typically the most immediate of ethical concerns among our students. When students are at the beginning stages of developing qualitative research projects, they periodically comment that they simply "don't believe" the conclusions drawn in the background research they uncover. They comment that it doesn't seem realistic or fitting any reality they know. Our interpretation is that, from their point of view, the research lacks what we term "integrity." Such integrity is foundational; without it, research is simply not believed and consequently discarded. Though the other two ethical foci are clearly important, they typically become more relevant to students at the later stages of carrying out their research projects.

Defining integrity. Integrity, as with ethics in general, can take on a number of meanings in qualitative research. In Lincoln and Guba's (1985) influential work they describe the parallel idea of "trustworthiness," in which the researcher must ask how audiences can be persuaded that "the findings of the inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (p. 290). Our jumping off point is not too far removed and is again drawn from Ely et al.'s (1991) experiences with students collecting qualitative data. Ely et al. suggest that integrity refers to researchers' "concerns for the quality, for the value, for the honesty of their work" (p. 219).

When assuring students of the accuracy and/or usefulness of quantitative research, instructors have statistical formulae to rely on and relatively clear rules regarding validity, reliability, and generalizability to follow. These positivist standards seem to convince students that the research in question is "correct" or "real." Convincing students of the parallel idea of integrity in qualitative research is quite a different undertaking. In the absence of such psychometric guidelines and relatively standard rules for qualitative research, we've found it particularly instructive to rely on personal stories from our own forays into qualitative research to illustrate the “how tos” of establishing integrity. Not only do the examples illustrate how integrity can be threatened, or alternately created, but they seem to add to students’ confidence that it is possible to do this type of research even with the lack of hard and fast rules, the lack of pre-existing measures, and other assorted complications. Further, providing the examples and describing the associated process of grappling with ethical considerations seem to help normalize these complicated moments in researchers’ lives.

In the coming pages, we share these examples—our personal stories and experiences struggling with establishing integrity in qualitative research. Using the examples, we illustrate how three challenges to integrity threatened our own work, and how we managed those challenges. Instructors may use these examples directly to bring these challenges to life for students and to explain how researchers come to terms with them, or they may find that they have their own stories to share with students. In either case, we’ve found the process of admitting to developing social scientists that we too face such challenges, sharing our experiences, and depicting how they were addressed is extremely useful to students.

The Context for Our Dilemmas

In this section, we present a brief summary of the research projects from which our reflections are drawn. We refer to two of our own qualitative research projects on women’s work lives. The summary provides some context for the ethical considerations related to establishing integrity described later in the paper; however, more detailed descriptions are available elsewhere (see August & Quintero, 2001; August & Tuten, 2003).

The general aim of one project was to explore the meanings American women ascribe to work and private lives in the later stages of their careers and to detail the meanings they assign to retirement. The aim of the second study was to identify the forces which shaped South Korean women’s career development and to understand their self concepts in reference to work. Both research projects were conducted within the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and involved collecting in-depth interviews that ultimately were woven together into narratives. A major goal of our research projects had been to learn how participants described and made meaning of their lives, in their own words; ultimately, we also aimed to discover how the meanings participants gave to their lives were defined, in part, by cultural background. Those goals were in line with typical uses for narratives, or stories about people and their relationships, which act as a forum in which individuals make meanings of their experiences (Cressy, Harrick, & Fuehrer, 2002).

The American sample contained 21 women, all of whom were nurses, public school teachers, or private practice therapists. They ranged in age from 49 to 72 with a median age of 60, and the sample varied widely in ethnicity and marital histories. The South Korean sample was composed of 23 bilingual South Korean women ranging in age from 23 to 64 with a median age of 32. They held a variety of jobs in professional, service, and clerical capacities and also varied in marital histories.

For the American study, all women participated in a series of three in-depth, semistructured interviews, each of which lasted approximately one hour, while South Korean participants each engaged in one hour-long, in-depth, semistructured interview. In each case, with the consent of participants, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for later coding. All participants were asked to pick their own pseudonyms, which are used in this paper.

The approach to the initial stages of data processing followed Taylor and Bogdan’s (1984) suggestion of using a combination of grounded theory and analytic induction with the overall aim of developing “an in-depth understanding of the ... people under study” (p. 129). In terms of specific techniques, the transcripts were examined for themes. Segments of the transcripts were then marked for later scrutiny. Coding schemes, grounded in the data, were developed for both the American and South Korean samples that delineated categories for each theme and the details of that theme. These coding schemes were used to organize and process all of the transcripts. Ultimately, we also reconstructed the interviews and the themes that emerged into written narratives of some of the women’s lives. In the following pages, excerpts from those narratives serve as a touchstone for discussing the issue of integrity. We draw from multiple women's stories; interactions with some women became the basis for reflecting upon certain aspects of integrity, while interactions with other women were formative in considering other aspects of integrity.

Throughout the process of collecting, summarizing, and interpreting the data, we kept reflective journals and detailed analytic memos. Reflexive journal writing is a technique often recommended in qualitative research (cf., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It involves keeping a personal research diary for recording information about both oneself and the research method. We found that by writing about ourselves, we obtained often cited benefits of the reflexive journal—both catharsis regarding difficult research moments and the opportunity to reflect upon the emergent information with regard to our own interests and/or values. We also used the reflexive journal for the secondary reason of recording various methodological decisions made while we were in the field and rationales for those decisions. In addition, we also wrote analytic memos often recommended by qualitative researchers (cf., Glaser, 1978). Doing so involves writing thorough explanations of the meanings of coded categories developed during data analysis; sometimes, too, the memos contain explanation for patterns developing between categories. We used memoing for both of those reasons.

Both analytic memos and reflective journals are written primarily for oneself and are recommended by qualitative researchers as a "self-check" for ensuring integrity. The researcher typically writes analytic memos on a systematic, formal basis, as a way to track changes in analyses; journals are often written with a more casual tone, as would be expected in a diary. Both the journal entries and analytic memos served as a basis for our reflections upon the dilemmas revolving around integrity that we experienced. Using this material, we were able to reconstruct personal stories detailing what and how we felt, as well as how the dilemmas were ultimately resolved.

Researchers' and Participants' Interdependence and Consequent Challenges to Integrity

Students in qualitative research methods courses must learn to situate themselves within the context of their inquiry. Indeed, this topic is ubiquitous in the literature (cf., Wolcott, 1992). Doing so makes clear how our own belief systems and subsequent reality constructions become layered over the lives we attempt to depict. We are not detached researchers, but rather have our "favored positions" (Calas & Smircich, 1996, p. 219) in the realm of theory. For instance, as feminist researchers, we tend toward interpretations of women's lives in which outcomes are partly the consequence of systemic privileges offered by various institutions in our society. Sometimes, those privileges are invisible to the casual observer. For that reason, we see particular value in listening to women's voices as they describe their experiences and staying attuned to their representations of reality, which sometimes veer from mainstream constructions.

Students of qualitative research must recognize that participants and researchers are interdependent and that the people we study cannot readily, or realistically, be decontextualized from their surroundings. Ironically, it is this very interdependence that becomes the basis for potential issues of research integrity. In the stories we share, the challenges to integrity grew from several of our "human," rather than "trained researchers," tendencies. Specifically, we found ourselves battling with perceiving findings in the data which supported what we wished to find, perceiving findings drawn primarily from our existing knowledge framework, and coping with what we felt for participants given the emotional attachments that become normal when working with other humans.

Honesty: Balancing What We Wished to Find With What We Did Find

The effort to represent data in an honest, accurate fashion is a challenge to qualitative researchers, given most qualitative researchers' recognition that they cannot be readily dissociated from that which they observe. We, too, found this tangle between ourselves and that which we observed to be a challenge in accurate data depiction. Specifically, toward the beginning of our research projects, we both found ourselves searching for personal heroines in our participants. This was by no means an academic endeavor, but an implicit personal wish that such people existed. As we studied the career lives of our female participants, we imagined such heroines would have all the answers to some of our most pressing personal questions, including how to effectively balance personal and professional lives, how to make work meaningful, how to stay true to one's personal and professional goals, and how to fulfill dreams, all the while earning the respect of others in their lives. We thought these imagined heroines could be role models for us. We, who are in the early stages of our careers, would be able to profit from the wisdom of women who had found a way to be happy with themselves, their lives, and their careers, in some cases for many, many years.

Despite our initial efforts to keep our wishes separate from the data, both of us ultimately chose one woman as a representative case from which to develop propositions and theory and write our first set of narratives; these women, we later realized, were our imagined heroines. Rachel chose Elizabeth as a case study, as a way to demonstrate how differing career opportunities are presented to people, depending upon the social world in which each of us lives. Tracy chose Yustina to illustrate how people experience opposing forces from various sources in their efforts to develop careers. In Yustina's case, her mother and society at large sought to limit her career opportunities, while her father and others helped expand her opportunities.

During the analyses and writing process for those narratives, our analytic memos and journal reflections began to demonstrate our concern about how accurately we had depicted those women. Further, in one case, a helpful friend offered similar feedback when hearing one of us speak about the woman chosen as a representative case. It appeared that our personal search had accidentally impacted the representative cases we chose and, further, informed how we described those women in the products of our data analyses.

Our initial drafts of the narratives demonstrate that we depict each woman as appearing to "have it all," as was essentially our wish for a heroine. However, after countless hours spent reading their transcripts over and over, we recognized that they, too, did not have all of the answers. Subsequently, as we tell our students, we reformulated our narratives several times to better reflect who these women actually were, rather than who we wished for. Elizabeth, for instance, tended to gloss over personal and professional crises or put them in an optimistic light. However, she, too, faced difficult questions concerning her professional status and balancing her spouse's needs with her own and continues to do so in her now semi-retired position. Yustina, an excited, optimistic woman, also felt quietly constrained by her fears regarding her professional development. She had wanted to pursue graduate education for more than 10 years but had not due to her husband's concerns. He regularly questioned her goals and her ability to obtain a job following additional education, suggesting she is "too old" to find one. This seems to have undermined Yustina's confidence and created some self-doubt, although she rarely talked about those fears. Nevertheless, she is not always as brave as she seems at first glance.

Our reflections about and revisions to the narratives helped us understand that all women, "heroines" included, struggle to find balance in their lives and combat social systems that can make carving out a career difficult. It is likely that no one lives a struggle-free life, achieving their goals and dreams with simple ease and grace; this was something we needed to recognize in our own participants in order to honestly represent the data at hand. We describe this personal story to our students as a way of sharing how the honest depiction of people's lives in qualitative research can be compromised by the researcher's own needs and desires. The story becomes a tool to demonstrate how to manage that challenge. Specifically, we emphasize to students the need for regular reflection upon their own role as a nondispassionate observer during data analyses and how that may influence accuracy. Further, we remind students of the need to actively seek information in their dataset to ensure integrity. Specifically, they can use techniques such as negative case analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—the examination and revision of ideas as they are formulated, given the data at hand—to help maintain honest representations.

Quality: Balancing Expectations from Literature with Reality of Participants

Another challenge we contended with while conducting this research was striking a balance between seeing participants from their points of view and seeing them from our own of viewpoints, which were derived in part from our training in the field of psychology and management. Ineffectively managing this challenge can threaten integrity. Quite often, assuring "quality" in data and the resulting findings means describing it in a way that makes clear the rigor of the analyses and the conceptual soundness of ideas. In quantitative research, those ideas are almost always drawn from prior research. In grounded theory work, however—the type of qualitative research we undertook—the ideas can be drawn from prior research, but only if they are fitting to the data at hand. In other words, existing literature does not always completely reflect human realities, and researchers often need to come up with new categories and concepts to describe what they see. Nevertheless, prior research informs our very human tendencies to see what the literature suggests we should see, regardless of our training in quantitative or qualitative research. More specifically, people—including all researchers—are subject to selective perceptions.

As an illustration of this tension between understanding participants based on expectations we had developed from prior research and aiming to truly understand participants from their own perspectives, we share the following personal stories. In our research, we saw many instances in both the American and South Korean women's lives which seemed to represent feminist issues, such as the consequences of overt racism and sexism and social systems which foster as well as impede women's development. Yet, participants did not respond to these issues in the same way we, as researchers, did.

Specifically, Rachel met many interviewees whom she might have called "feminists" because of their struggles with, and sometimes triumphs over, those challenges. Audrey, a nurse's aide, was one of those women. She chose to go on welfare and, ultimately, make a better life for herself rather than continue to be oppressed by an economy that lacked opportunities for African-American women with few marketable skills and no transportation. However, she specifically stated that she does not identify with feminism:

> I don't believe in being a feminist. I don't believe that I have the strength to do what a man can do, and a lot of times I have to troubleshoot this [hospital] equipment also ... it's a lot of heavy equipment that has to be pushed around, and it's all day … I don't like it, and I don't want to be classified with the men. I don't have that strength ... I hate the whole idea of being a feminist. I believe in equal rights. The feminist part, I don't believe in it. I believe women should … do the same amount if I want to get paid. I believe I should do that, do exactly what they're doing. But I would never vote to do anything like that. You know, like you see women out in construction ... not here, but like in Pennsylvania, women in coal mines, I just don't believe women have a right there because their body can't take what a man's body can take.

Audrey seemed to equate feminism with being expected to do things she believes are beyond her physical capability, like moving equipment which is too heavy or working in coal mines. She was not alone in this sentiment; another nurse also felt the same way. Both were women of color—one African American, the other Mexican American. Though many women of color, as well as academicians, prefer the term "womanist" to feminist (Gilkes, 1990) as a more inclusive term that recognizes oppression based on race, class, sexuality, and gender, neither of these women suggested that term as an alternative. A dilemma arose as to how to represent such participants; it was not clear whether these women were feminists, womanists, or something else entirely.

Tracy faced a related dilemma. In encountering the oppression of South Korean women, she came to realize that even in her own feminist struggles as an academician she had never come close to experiencing the barriers South Korean women face when attempting to carve out a career and maintain a family. The obstacles they face are enormous, ranging from limited to nonexistent work place protections regarding sexual harassment, equal pay, and gender discrimination to widespread cultural beliefs about the subordinate role women play in society and the expectation that they will obey the wishes of male family members.

Bernadette voiced these obstacles: "In Korean society, women are always considered inferior to men. I think men and women are all at the same level. And it is so in this office. But outside, they still consider women inferior to men. I don't like that—the Korean way of treating women." Kimmie also notes the presumption of male dominance: "My husband, he is a very responsible husband, very responsible. He wants to be first in charge of our house. So he always wants me to obey him."

Tracy's initial reaction was a wish to encourage the interviewees to fight as "feminists" might, to demand the jobs and respect they deserved. However, she recognized that her way of framing those participants' situations was reflective of her world, in which women have made significant (though not complete) inroads establishing workplace protections, positions of relatively high status both at work and in the larger social sphere, and greater equality in marriage and family systems. The fight women in America have waged on those fronts over the past several decades has been rewarded, at least to some extent. In South Korea, that fight has just begun. The costs to women are potentially great—ranging from risking disapproval of extended family to being shunned by nonsupportive husbands to being ostracized by neighbors and friends—and the outcomes are much less clear.

Our challenge in this instance was determining what would count as a "quality" product in research. Should we connect these women's views with those we knew of in feminist literature and politics? Or was it necessary to find entirely other ways to make sense of the data? Other social scientists, too, have faced this dilemma. Reinharz (1994) suggests that "feminist biographers, just as other biographers, cannot give subjects sole responsibility for defining their lives" (p. 73). She believes researchers are responsible for helping define women's problems and may choose to do so in feminist terms. As we tell our students, perhaps this means that Audrey could be called a feminist, at least in the context of research. And further, perhaps this means that Bernadette and Kimmie could have been alerted to the ways women's lives can be changed while continuing to support their choices. Alternatively, Riger (1992) describes instances in which feminist researchers engage in a "dialogic process" (p. 737) with participants in an effort to merge contrasting interpretations. Perhaps there was a common ground we could have found with participants through such an iterative process.

However, ultimately we managed this problem of assuring quality in a different way. We use this personal story as an illustration that it is almost impossible for researchers to understand a participant solely from his or her own point of view. We share our belief with students that our frame of reference is bound by many factors, including personal viewpoints, viewpoints drawn from prior research, the fact that we have learned to think, write, and speak in a particular language we call "academics," and the possibility that participants are unlikely to voice everything that is relevant to the topic of discussion. Researchers are several frames removed from the point of view of any given participant and can achieve, at best, what we think of as "bounded knowledge."

Given this belief, we suggest to students that the task of qualitative researchers is to highlight rather than reinterpret or rectify these differing views; they are illustrations of how diverse women's opinions can be and further exemplify how women's (and men's) views are at least partially contingent on the context in which those views have been developed. We thus aim to represent the multiple truths frequently uncovered in qualitative inquiry, with the belief that these multiple truths are an indicator of the quality, and consequent integrity, of the research. We hope that we contribute to knowledge and theory-building by purposefully describing the range of experiences women have and the degree to which our interpretations fit participants' own interpretations.

Creating Value: Empathy and Acknowledgement as an End Rather Than a Means

The final issue of integrity we deal with is in reference to what has been termed "emotional data" (St. Pierre, 2002, p. 405), or the emotional responses qualitative researchers sometimes have when encountering participants' suffering, loss, pain, and similar experiences. The consequent experience for researchers, as St. Pierre notes, is that one can hardly "textualize, code, categorize, and analyze" (p. 405) the data, in light of its emotionality. We, too, have had many similar experiences. Our method of choice requires us to develop a level of empathy with participants, both to aid in building rapport and as a natural consequence of spending hours with our participants listening to their stories. As women, we also felt particular kinship with the participants in the studies described here; we had faced many similar questions and life circumstances.

We describe such personal stories to our students to illustrate how the empathy that is typically a goal in qualitative research can also challenge integrity. Specifically, recognizing how we, the researchers, were like the "others" in our research made it difficult to code some of the transcripts and potentially could have compromised the accuracy of the analyses. Consequently, in an effort to maintain accuracy, we had to develop techniques to manage our emotional responses to the data while coding it.

We describe to our students how listening to participants' stories, both as told to us and again later as we processed them, often had the effect of making us feel as though we were reliving participants' experiences with them. In Rachel's case, for instance, some of the stories were very stirring and tragic. Participants described tales of horrendous physical and/or emotional abuse, botched abortions, multiple miscarriages, and the deaths of loved ones. We present an excerpt from one such transcript below. Here, Elena, a nurse, talks about an abusive ex-husband. As this excerpt is taken out of context, it may impact the reader differently than the researcher. However, Elena's pain seems obvious.

> My ex-husband he was a foreman in the field, also, [like my father]. He was also an alcoholic ... and he was an abuser, too. I was beaten quite a few times ... We'd been separated for about two, three years, and I didn't have the money to get a divorce ... One time I went to this dance and he saw me there. And he beat me. He beat me so bad that it took me a whole month for my face ... for the swelling of my face to come down. Someone said I looked like a flat tire because it was like a flat face ... I think it would have been worse, but there was this kind man that took him off of me—three times. He would walk away a little bit and my husband would come back and drop me to the floor. And I could see that he could put one foot here and one foot here *(points to each shoulder)*, and he would get me ... because he said what he wanted to do is that he wanted to ruin my face so that no other man would ever look at me ... I think his aim was, he was going to do me in that day.

Rachel found herself procrastinating before coding Elena's transcripts, feeling that she would not be able to hear Elena's voice again and read her words without serious emotional turmoil. In terms of specific techniques we suggest to our students, we describe how Rachel ultimately resolved this problem by coding such transcripts a few pages at a time, taking frequent breaks, and stopping altogether when necessary. Though efficiency was compromised, this strategy seemed less likely to negatively impact the accuracy of the analysis.

In an effort to further elaborate the ethical challenges inherent to handling such emotional data, we also discuss with our students the notion of "ethically important moments" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262). Such moments are the difficult, subtle, unpredictable situations that arise in the course of research in which researchers must make choices about their human obligations to respond in a compassionate, nonexploitative way, as well as the need to remain attuned to their role as a researcher. For instance, the moment described with Elena clearly calls for some acknowledgment of her pain by the researcher and that the interview should not just continue as though nothing has happened. While this choice could interfere with the integrity of the data by, for instance, altering the researcher-participant relationship to resemble "friends," it seems to be the more humane choice. Many additional choices could be made, such as whether to turn off the recording device, whether to continue with the interview following the disclosure, and so on.

Given that a primary rule of ethics in research with human participants is to not cause participants undue harm (American Psychological Association, 2002), reviewers for university Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) sometimes suggest that the potential for harm during interviews is too great when people are asked to describe personal histories that may involve potentially distressing topics. IRBs may indicate that the risks to long-term mental health are too great because, in describing painful memories, participants may to some extent re-experience them; this could result in depression, anxiety, or other mental health problems. IRBs seem to recognize that the potential for "ethically important moments" is quite high in qualitative research.

We aim to teach our students that, though these instances happen, they are not necessarily negative for the researcher or participant. In fact, we suggest to students that, when handled appropriately, these instances add to the integrity of the work, specifically in terms of what Ely et al. (1991) have called the "value" of the research. In our experiences, participants benefited from discussing their pains as well as joys in the presence of someone who acknowledged and respected those feelings. Rosenblatt (1995), too, has suggested that qualitative research offers such advantages. In Rachel's case, it was common for the participants to express gratitude that someone was willing to listen to them as they tried to make sense of work and family lives that spanned 30 or more years. In Tracy's case, participants expressed feelings of being validated and remarked that no one had ever really asked in detail about their lives, their worries, and their challenges. They felt that simply being asked made their lives feel much more worthwhile. Further, they felt that participating in such research was an opportunity to help other women understand the challenges they had faced and to learn from their experiences.

In struggling with these ethical considerations, we came to believe that conducting such interviews results in a personal value to participants. We emphasize this desirable consequence of qualitative research to our students. Further, there can be a broader social value in qualitative research. As Reinharz (1992) has indicated, feminist researchers can ultimately make efforts to help interviewees, whether by becoming their advocates in a public setting or uncovering systemic biases in organizations. Perhaps our real ethical obligation, rather than ensuring that participants do not revisit potentially painful topics, is that of actually making attempts to create personal and social value out of the lived experiences of our participants.

Concluding Remarks

All qualitative researchers face challenges to integrity like those we've described here. Seldom are we truly prepared to manage those challenges until we acknowledge their prevalence in our research experiences and consider the various ways to respond to them. By sharing our stories, we prepare students for the process of recognizing such challenges and resolving them by responding appropriately, both as human beings and as qualitative researchers. The resolutions mentioned here—finding ways to honestly depict participants' lives given our own wishes, focusing on the quality of interpretation as a way to bridge the discrepancy between theory and reality, and recognizing the value inherent to qualitative research even in light of its potential emotionality—have been useful as we seek to prepare our students to manage their own work. We hope that other instructors will find this approach useful as they prepare students to anticipate and manage their own stories in qualitative research.

Endnote

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