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Introduction: Researching 'Down', 'Up', and 'Alongside'

Jacqueline Marx and Gareth J. Treharne

All research is inherently political and reflects differentials in power relationships. What differentiates critical research from other modes of inquiry is that critical social and health researchers commonly foreground a commitment to addressing the inequalities, inequities, and power differentials that impact on personal and social wellbeing. This commitment is demonstrated time and time again in the stories from the field upon which the chapters in this book are based. To focus on ethics in the context of doing critical social and health research also occasions critical reflection on our own conduct and its imbrication in those same relations of power we seek to challenge. The title of this section of the book describes different researcher-researched power hierarchies. In this introduction we outline a debate on the ethics of researching down, up, and alongside and the special contribution of each of the chapters in this section to this debate. The first of these three conceptualisations of research relationships arises from critiques of the disjunctures of power that occur when participants are researched down upon and potentially exploited or harmed. By contrast, researching up is a conceptualisation of power held by individual participants or institutions that hold sway over the research. A steadier balance is sought when researching alongside individuals or

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C. I. Macleod et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethics in Critical Research*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74721-7_21

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institutions as partners, though not without opportunity for exploitation or sway without ongoing labour on the part of the reflexive critical researcher. We conclude our introduction to this section of the book by giving consideration to the enactment and limitations of reflexivity and rigour in navigating complex research relationships and the conduct of ethically responsible research.

Researching Down: The Critical Researcher's Power and Responsibility

Researching 'down' is a term that emerges in debate on the powerful position of researchers relative to those who are researched. It is an issue initially taken up by feminist and anti-racist scholars (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; Kobayashi, 1994; Patai, 1991), but more recently by queer (e.g. Allen, 2010; Schlichter, 2004) and disability scholars (Charlton, 1998; Goodley & Moore, 2000; Stone & Priestley, 1996) who are similarly concerned about misrecognition, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation in research undertaken by 'outsider' (Bridges, 2001, p. 371), 'malestream' (Oakley, 1998, p. 707), 'heterosexist' (Herek, Kimmel, Amaro, & Melton, 1991, p. 1), and 'cisnormative' (Bauer et al., 2009, p. 353) researchers, and the implications of this for the way in which knowledge is mobilised. While these concerns have found their way into relational and situational approaches to research ethics, ethics governance and the bureaucratic assemblages constituted under that mandate are, in the main, geared towards a principalist approach (see Beauchamp & Childress, 1979). Non-maleficence, a principle requiring researchers to minimise the risks of harm or discomfort, is given additional consideration when researching 'down' because of an increased risk for exploitation. In such instances, ethics approval is generally contingent upon researchers having additional safeguards in place. Thus, an interesting aspect of the debate on researching 'down' is that researchers are simultaneously positioned both as a potential threat to participants' best interests and as the people responsible for protecting them.

Emmanuel Mayeza (2018, this section) discusses his experiences of the salience of his gender in deliberations of the ethics of his ethnography of young school children's constructions and experiences of gendered play. Mayeza's story starts with an account of the peer feedback he received early on in the research process, after presenting his research proposal at a faculty meeting. He describes how he experienced feedback that drew unproblematically

on assumptions about childcare being 'women's work' to undermine his suitability for undertaking the research, an issue that was further complicated by inferences regarding the presumed threat that masculinity posed which underpinned concerns regarding children's safety. Mayeza's experience is not unique; others have reported on the suspicion with which male caregiving is viewed (Evans, 2002), particularly when it involves children (Scourfield & Coffey, 2006). Moreover, it has been argued that male researchers are likely to have to negotiate additional safeguarding concerns from gatekeepers of access to participants who are children (Duncan, Drew, Hodgson, & Sawyer, 2009; Horton, 2001). It is also argued that, more important than the gender of the researcher, is an ability to recognise when children are anxious or distressed and to respond appropriately (Connolly, 2008). Interestingly, as Mayeza goes on to explain, it was this concern that was at the forefront of the research ethics committee's consideration of his proposed research.

Rather than focusing on the threat that Mayeza's masculinity presumably would pose, his institutional research ethics committee assumed that he would use his 'powers', as an academic researcher, to protect the children. They also expected that his competency to do this would be demonstrated in the safeguards described in his ethics protocol. Mayeza argues that his peers' feedback left him ill-prepared for the expectations of the research ethics committee. He also argues that the research ethics committee's assumptions about the diminished capacity of children to exercise agency and control over their lives, as evidenced in their assumptions about the children's need for protection, left him equally ill-prepared for the field. There, Mayeza experienced children who wished to take control over decisions regarding the ownership of data such as their drawings and in the management of the individually identifying information of their names on the drawings.

Brigit Mirfin-Veitch, Jenny Conder, Leigh Hale, Gareth Treharne, and Georgia Richardson (2018, this section) draw on two studies designed to facilitate the active involvement, in research, of people with learning disabilities. The authors argue that adopting the social model of disability, characterised by an inclusive approach to disabilities research, is an appropriate counter to the mainstream medical model of disability which positions people as passive subjects to be tested, observed, and excluded from the production of knowledge about them. They also argue, however, that inclusive research approaches can be potentially problematic. Specifically, radical inclusivity requiring full participation in each stage of the research process, from conceptualisation through to analysis of data and the presentation of findings, can risk excluding people with disabilities who may not want to be involved at all stages of the research process, or whose participation in any or all aspects of

the research requires assistance from third parties. The research outlined in Mirfin-Veitch et al.'s chapter presents two stories which, while intending to be inclusive, also respond to individual needs, preferences, and contexts. Both stories are followed by a discussion of the particular strategies which aim to improve responsiveness, consideration of the ways in which the research could have been more inclusive, and a discussion of the challenges encountered. A particular strength of this chapter is that the authors have drawn on their research experiences to develop a summary of ideas for achieving increasingly responsive research with people with disabilities. These ideas provide guidance on recruitment, informed consent, approaches to interviewing, and communicating research-related tasks.

Researching Alongside: The Critical Researcher as Ethical Research Partner

Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 261) distinguish between procedural ethics—the process of ethics review, which is sometimes also referred to as regulatory ethics—and ‘ethics in practice’, a term they use to refer to ethics in the actual conduct of research. For critical social and health researchers, ethics in practice involves a critical consideration of a range of issues, including the values that researchers bring to the field and the premises upon which they operate. While researchers have historically ‘claimed and maintained considerable power over the research process’, practitioners of participatory action research argue that ‘it is necessary to carry out research “with” people rather than do research “on” them’ (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, p. 51), and this requires ‘that the outside researchers and the local community members (practitioners of their own lives) collaborate on a more equal footing than in the traditional [researcher-researched] relationship’ (Denzin & Giardina, 2010, p. 117).

Jacqueline Lovell and Jacqueline Akhurst (2018, this section) discuss a participatory action research project that evaluates the impact of various initiatives undertaken by *developing partners*, a social enterprise organisation led and run by people with long-term mental health needs. The evaluation team, consisting of members who had both delivered and used the services offered by the organisation, were committed to delivering an evaluation that reflected diverse individual and collective experiences; they realised that doing this necessitated engaging in a fully collaborative evaluative process. Lovell’s and Akhurst’s account of the evaluation process demonstrates some of the challenges

collaborative research occasions, such as the complexities of negotiating, and re-negotiating, those outcomes that are valued and pursued. It also demonstrates the importance of having a methodology that is flexible and responsive to the diverse needs and abilities of the people involved, the implications of which are not always apparent from the start. Lovell and Akhurst discuss creative methodological amendments implemented 'on the run' so that the people involved remained in control of the evaluative process. Their stories demonstrate that, while the goal of participatory action research is to make practical improvements in people's lives, it also needs to shift the balance of power in favour of those who have traditionally been marginalised. Indeed, it is argued that the commitment to democratic engagement in participatory action research is what makes it a political form of inquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Researching Up: Critical Research on the Powerful

Researching 'up' describes researcher-researched relationships in which the researched maintain considerable power. The issue was brought to the fore by Nader (1972) who argued that it is just as important to research the cultures of the powerful as it is those of the powerless. At the time, it had been observed that, although the subcultural lives of 'nuts, sluts, and perverts' had warranted considerable exploration and analysis, researchers had demonstrated little concern over 'the unethical, illegal, and destructive actions of powerful individuals, groups and institutions' (Liazos, 1972, p. 111), an asymmetry suggesting that 'full citizenship and cultural visibility [were] ... inversely related' (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 189). Although there are important reasons to examine how power is exercised, there are significant obstacles to doing this type of research. While some fields are relatively easy to access, it is much more difficult to gain access 'when representatives of prospective research sites see their work as being sensitive and would prefer to avoid outside scrutiny' (Monahan & Fisher, 2015, p. 709). In such instances, researchers are likely to have to negotiate access via institutional gatekeepers, and successfully negotiating gatekeeper permission generally involves entering into a contractual agreement describing the conditions under which access to the field is permitted.

Jason Bantjes and Leslie Swartz (2018, this section) tell the stories of two critical organisational ethnographies. In the first story, Bantjes, while working as a school counsellor, witnesses an incident at the school where he works. Believing that the incident raises interesting questions, not just about the behaviour of the group of boys involved, but about the institutional culture of

the school, he endeavours to obtain permission to research the incident and the context in which it arose. Bantjes and Swartz describe how, by agreeing on 'safeguards' to protect the school, which included making the school principal the final authority on decisions regarding the publication of the research findings, Bantjes was successfully able to negotiate the requirement for institutional permission. Upon reflection, however, Bantjes realises that although he initially did not foresee significant ethical issues associated with doing the research, neither he nor any other of the stakeholders (the school principal, teachers, scholars, parents, school board) could anticipate the full extent of what might have emerged in the actual conduct of the research. Consequently, in agreeing to the safeguards, he had inadvertently handed over power to censor information that might have been in the public interest, or in the best interests of some of the stakeholders, though critical of others. The story is interesting because insider practitioner research in educational settings is extremely common, but relatively little has been said about the impact of institutional hierarchies and the conflicts of interest such hierarchies occasion on the ethical conduct of research.

In the second story, Bantjes and Swartz discuss critical ethnographic research with in-patient hospital care for people who had attempted suicide. Unlike the school ethnography in which Bantjes negotiated multiple roles (employee, colleague, school counsellor, researcher), the 'outside' researcher role in the hospital ethnography was much more clearly bounded. However, as ethnographic research involves spending significant periods of time in the field, it inevitably results in increasing familiarity and the erosion of an outsider identity; as Bantjes's and Swartz's story illustrates, familiarity makes relationships more complex and introduces a range of competing ethical imperatives. On the one hand, there was the imperative to promote the interests of the public who are affected, positively and negatively, by varying standards of care. On the other hand were the rights of the hospital staff inserted into, and reproducing, institutionalised practices which promote, but at times also undermine, those same standards of care. In both stories, Bantjes and Swartz draw on insights derived from situational and relational approaches to ethics in order to think through competing ethical imperatives.

Marco Marzano (2018, this section) provides a frank and provocative discussion of the ethics pros and cons of covert ethnographic research. This discussion is based on his experience of ethnographic research in hospital wards and charismatic groups linked to the Catholic Church. In each of these settings, Marzano discusses how he began by openly negotiating access to research sites with the official institutional and organisation gatekeepers, just as researchers are required to do. In each instance, however, Marzano encoun-

tered gatekeepers who granted access on the condition that he mask his researcher identity which is quite the opposite of common notions of seeking informed consent from participants. On the hospital wards he was to be a medical intern and at the church meetings a new or prospective convert. These roles involved minimal deception in that they were only intended to provide a convenient and plausible cover for his being there (which was essential for him to make the necessary observations), and was not a disguise for tricking people into confiding in him. Nevertheless, it did mean that some of the people who he would be observing would not know the true purpose of his being there. Although Marzano was uncomfortable with the gatekeepers' terms, he acquiesced in order to be able to proceed with research that he believed was in the public interest. This scenario creates an interesting point of distinction from the common assumption that ethnography is covert at the wish of the researcher rather than that of the gatekeeper.

In the history of the development of research ethics, there are numerous accounts of research involving deception and resulting in significant harm to participants (Arras, 2008; Baumrind, 1964; Brandt, 1978; Orne & Holland, 1968). Consequently, as Marzano points out, it is very difficult in the current regulatory environment to obtain ethics clearance to conduct research involving deception. While scandals about deception in harmful research continue to emerge (e.g. Smith, 2011), there are growing calls for a more nuanced debate that distinguishes between different types of harm and the role of power in mitigating both risk and consequence. In the context of research that is located in state institutions, corporations, and other large organisations, and particularly when the focus of the inquiry is on the practices of the organisation rather than on the individual lives of clients or patients, the traditional conceptualisation of research participants as private individuals is potentially problematic. In particular, because it obscures those contexts in which participants act 'as agents which are corporate, collective, social, public or in some other form engaged beyond' who they are in their private lives (Langlois, 2011, p. 148). In such circumstances, agents are afforded greater 'authority, power, prestige, influence, [and] stature' (Langlois, 2011, p. 148). In these instances, Langlois (2011) does not believe that the usual protections afforded to private research participants can, or should, apply. It is argued that institutions, corporations, organisations, and the officials who represent them should not be seen as analogous to private individuals, and that we 'should not assimilate them to the same ethical paradigm used to discuss responsibilities towards [private] people' (Aldred, 2008, p. 12). Otherwise, researchers who discover business, institutional, or organisational practices that put people in harm's way will have to give equal con-

sideration to the likely reputational, financial, and legal harm that would be the consequence of making such information public.

Power and Reflexivity: On the Righteous Simulation of Ethics

It is argued that '[w]ithout rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility' (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 14). Thus, comparable with rigorous adherence to methodological rules for ensuring validity and reliability in quantitative research, qualitative researchers have been concerned with devising evaluative criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Riggs & Treharne, 2015). Trustworthiness, it is argued, is 'a matter of persuasion' (Sandelowski, 1993, p. 2) requiring the researcher to provide a decision trail so that readers can verify the soundness of the research process and the legitimacy of the researcher's claims (Sandelowski, 1986). Criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are said to be achieved by employing member checks, memo writing, bracketing, peer review, and triangulation. One implication of the development of these methods for establishing trustworthiness is the suggestion that 'it is method and method alone that "produces" findings' (Schwandt, 1996, p. 60). The privileging of methodological concerns, sometimes termed 'method-fetishism' (Koch, 1981, p. 260) or 'methodolatry' (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 285), can suggest that processes of knowledge production do not require 'moral and political speculation' (Schwandt, 1996, p. 61). Unsurprisingly, critical researchers have found this assumption untenable. For Lather (1993, p. 675), validity in qualitative research 'is not a matter of looking harder and more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing' and doing this requires 'reflexive exploration of our own practices of representation' (Woolgar, 1988, p. 98, cited in Lather, 1993).

In the last chapter in this section of the book, Eric Stewart (2018) engages in a meditation on the difficulties and contradictions involved in representing the other in research, especially when we try to transcend dominant representational practices. In doing so, Stewart also interrogates implicit assumptions about the researcher and, drawing on psychoanalytic notions, explicates how this constitutes an ethical tension. Arguing that it is insufficient to ground notions of ethics in rationality or simplistic humanism, Stewart suggests that we should consider the inescapable complexity, and dangers, at hand in any act of representation. The chapter provides a fitting conclusion to this section

of the book because reflexivity is an issue that emerges in debate about our relationships in the field.

To be reflexive is to concede 'that all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production, including the complex power relations between researchers and research participants' (Bondi, 2009, p. 328). By engaging in reflexive practice, critical researchers 'have sought to respond to power inequalities that cannot necessarily be overcome, undone or even predicted, but which can be thought about and acted upon' (Bondi, 2009, p. 328). In holding out the promise of ameliorating at least some of the negative impacts of power differentials on processes of knowledge production, reflexivity has become 'a defining feature' of critical social and health research (Finlay, 2003, p. 5). The increasing prominence of reflexivity is not without criticism however. In the context of our relationships in the field, whilst reflexivity provides a means to examine uneven power relations, it does not necessarily interrupt those relations of power and, as Stewart (2018, this section) argues, can even perpetuate them by reifying the notion of a 'truly conscious' researcher honouring moral and ethical obligations in the conduct of rigorous research.

In writing about their experiences of researching up, down, and alongside, the authors of the chapters making up this section of the book have put into practice what Richardson (1993, p. 516) calls 'writing from our selves'. It is a strategy that is employed to mark one's own voice among other voices and to acknowledge that what is presented as knowledge is constructed from particular authorial positions. We do this to dispel the idea that we are speaking as 'transparently knowable agent[s]' (Rose, 1997, p. 309). But we would also do well to remember that there are limits to reflexive insight. On this issue, Pillow (2003, pp. 188, 192) argues that we should let go of our 'comfortable' uses of reflexivity and should experiment instead with 'uncomfortable' reflexive practices that lay bare the messiness of research that unsettles or disrupts the processes of knowledge production and legitimation. This is what Stewart attempts in the final chapter when, in a deconstructive move, he foregrounds his authorial voice in order to challenge its power to interpret peoples' lives and to critically examine the aetiology of his own psychic investments.

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