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Autonomy and Compliance: How Qualitative Sociologists Respond to Institutional Ethical Oversight

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Abstract Prevailing sociological understandings of institutional ethical review tend to homogenize faculty responses to them, and are predominantly speculative. In this research, we conduct interviews with sociologists from 21 Ph.D.-granting departments across Canada, finding three predominant "ethics orientations" among them, with associated cognitive maps and strategic actions. In our analyses, we use these orientations to complicate homogeneous appraisals of social researchers' responses to new bureaucratic requirements, enriching our understanding of how such requirements affect the ways sociologists think about their occupation, approach their research, and mentor successive generations. These ethics orientations suggest the field of sociology is comprised of distinct political cohorts with diverging understandings of ethical review, and by extension, power and intellectual work. For some, ethical review signals a more consultative and therefore better approach to knowledge production, while for others it marks the end of an era of unfettered (and superior) intellectual pursuit in sociology.

Keywords Ethical review · Sociology · Qualitative research · Bureaucracy · Strategy

Introduction

The correlation between occupational autonomy and self-reported satisfaction is one of the most significant findings in the sociology of work (Hodson 2004). Academia has long been thought of as an ideal field for those seeking autonomy in their daily work lives, though this freedom has been steadily eroding over time (Krause 1996). Anthropologists explain this erosion as partially resulting from a shift to an "audit culture" in academia, in which intellectual freedom is replaced by neoliberal bureaucratic accountability (Strathern 2000). Social scientists have been attentive to the rise of institutional ethical oversight specifically,

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seeing it as one of the more intrusive and demanding instances of audit culture in the university (Dehli and Taylor 2006). While once scholars studied people guided by disciplinary training, ethical sensibilities, and informal peer and mentor consultation, now they must also submit plans of study to Research Ethics Boards (REBs) or Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) for approval before embarking on their research projects, and are required to seek periodic renewal of approval for the duration of their research.

Scholars call the increasing bureaucratic elaboration of such boards "ethics creep," signalling a steady loss of scholarly discretion (Haggerty 2004). Others use a Foucaultian analysis of governmentality, arguing that institutional ethical oversight involves training academics to be "ethical subjects" engaged in self-monitoring that protects their universities from liability (Dehli 2010). The vast majority of these arguments tend to be theoretical or based on anecdotal evidence. The few empirical approaches to ethical oversight have usually focused on ethics discourse, ethics board decisions, or on observations of ethics board deliberations. Very little empirical research has attempted to understand how academics respond to ethical oversight, despite much speculation on this issue. In particular, two key questions have gone unanswered: In what ways do academics make sense of these new requirements? And, how do they act strategically in response to them?

To answer these questions, we investigate how faculty in one discipline—sociology—make sense of and act in response to the bureaucratization of ethics in the university. Do they embrace new requirements, grudgingly capitulate, or resist? What meanings and strategies attach to each of these options? Interviews with scholars from 21 Ph.D.-granting sociology departments in Canada form the basis of our answers. Our analysis draws on existing analyses of research ethics, as well as work within social movements (Jasper 2006; Matthews 1995) and legal sociology (Ewick and Silbey 1998; Silbey 2003). In particular, we adopt Nancy Matthews' (1995) typology of rape crisis center staff responses to bureaucratic state control as a template for describing three forms of "ethics orientations" prevalent among our participants: active engagement, apparent accommodation, or overt opposition. Expanding on Matthews' typology, our analysis indicates the ways in which each (as opposed to one, or some) of these orientations can be understood as a form of strategic action that sociologists adopt with the intention of maintaining feelings of professional mastery, autonomy, and agency. We find that for the majority of our participants, strategic action involved some form of resistance toward ethical oversight—either through explicit rejection of the legitimacy of ethics policies, or through less explicit forms of "creative compliance." We also find a minority of our participants were able to reconcile their own professional autonomy with compliance, and demonstrate how this reconciliation is tied to certain collectivist understandings of academic work (e.g. Marshall and Rossman 2006) as well as a willingness to accept new responsibilities and skill sets as being constitutive of that work (e.g. completing ethics forms).

Our analysis concludes by suggesting that the ways in which sociologists orient themselves vis-à-vis institutional ethical oversight (as overt opposers, apparent accommodators, or active engagers) depends partially on social structural factors such as gender, age, and institutional membership that determine what sources of power are available to individual academics. Senior men faculty from research-intensive institutions who derive a great deal of power from their personal status recognize bureaucratic interference as a threat to this power and are more likely to overtly oppose ethical oversight. Junior women faculty, on the other hand, seek power through the approval of ethics boards and actively engage with ethical oversight as a way of mining this source of power. In addition to helping us understand the impact that ethical oversight has had on academics, these findings shed light on the more general questions of how individuals, rather than just institutions, absorb

macro-structural changes (Hochschild 2008), and how white collar workers resist regulations that they find problematic either for practical or philosophical reasons. Although scholars have become increasingly attuned to the complexity of resistance in its myriad and subtle forms (Scott 1990), resistance among white collar workers has received scant scholarly attention (Rinehart 2001, p. 87). Our analysis contributes to an understanding of white collar resistance by demonstrating how and when sociologists perceive ethics regulations to be a threat to their autonomy, and how they attempt to resist or domesticate this threat through a variety of strategies.

Methodology

Our study draws on a series of 21 interviews conducted with qualitative sociologists about their views and experiences with institutional ethical oversight. We had three aims in constructing our sample. First, we wanted a broad range of qualitative sociologists in Canada. Second, we wanted participants who had enough experience doing and teaching human-based qualitative methods to offer detailed responses to our questions. Third, we wanted participants who were actively involved in shaping the attitudes of future sociologists (i.e. students) toward research ethics. To achieve all three aims, we set out to sample faculty members with experience teaching graduate-level qualitative methods courses from each of the 22 Ph.D.-granting sociology departments in Canada. When we were unable to sample faculty who taught qualitative courses (some departments do not offer specific qualitative courses), we turned to faculty with experience in supervising qualitative and human-based dissertations. The result was a sample of 21 sociologists[1] that included eleven men and ten women. Three teach in Francophone departments and two were interviewed in French. Canada's top research universities are all represented in the sample (collectively referred to as the Group of Thirteen or G13),[2] as well as eight other universities. Our participants also ranged by career length between those who received their Ph.D.s in the early 1970s to others who received theirs within the last few years. In all, this sample fits our three criteria.

The interviews themselves were conducted in a semi-structured format and each lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Nine of the 21 interviews were conducted in person, the rest by phone. The interviews covered three broad areas: general opinions on research ethics, the participants' experience with ethics in their own research projects, and the participants' experiences with teaching research ethics to their students. In all three of these areas, participants were encouraged to share their opinions and personal stories. They were also encouraged to address both issues of formal ethical oversight such as Research Ethics Boards, as well as their own understanding of what makes research ethical.

Because our sample represents active qualitative instructors from every Ph.D.-granting department in Canada, we argue that the ethics orientations we present here are reflective of the attitudes of qualitative sociologists in Canada in general. Furthermore, to the extent that trends in ethical oversight in Canada are shared by other countries such as the United States and Australia, we believe these findings are also reflective of the way non-Canadian

[1] We were unable to secure an interview with a member of only one of the 22 Ph.D.-granting sociology departments in Canada.

[2] Membership in the G13 is determined informally by the number of research grants a university receives, as well as the number of Ph.D.s that are awarded (Weingarten 2006). We use the G13 distinction as a rough indicator of whether or not our participants are members of research-intensive departments.

sociologists orient themselves around ethical oversight—although idiosyncrasies within each national context will impact the applicability of our findings. In addition to providing a typology of ethics orientations, we also present observations regarding demographics, including gender, age, and the research-intensity of departments. We are less willing to promote the generalizability of these observations, since we did not sample these variables in a systematic way. Our arguments regarding the relationship between these variables and ethics orientations should not be regarded as established social facts, but as initial hypothesis-generating work concerning how sociologists orient themselves in different ways toward ethical oversight.

Debating ethical oversight: Normative observations and empirical research

As one of our respondents suggested to us, sociologists have been writing about research ethics well before the existence of IRBs and REBs. However, with the rise of institutional ethical oversight in Canada, the US, Australia, and elsewhere, a growing body of literature has been produced debating the feasibility, effectiveness, and consequences of such oversight for human-based research, particularly in its more qualitative and interpretive forms. A significant part of this literature consists of normative and theoretical arguments regarding the applicability of ethical oversight (at least in its current state) to qualitative and ethnographic methods. Those who question applicability often point to a perceived biomedical and/or quantitative bias in ethics requirements (Murphy and Dingwall 2007; Bosk and De Vries 2004; Thorne 1980). It is argued that standard ethical requirements that may fit relatively easily into experimental or quantitative research are far more problematic for qualitative researchers, such as the attempt to provide guaranteed anonymity (Van den Hoonaard 2003) and full informed consent (Murphy and Dingwall 2007; Barrett and Parker 2003; Thorne 1980). Behind these criticisms is the notion that qualitative researchers exercise little control over their research settings relative to experimental and quantitative methods. Bashi (2004) points out that while quantitative researchers seek to control every aspect of the research process, qualitative researchers "actively avoid control" by letting the participants suggest, for instance, who to speak to and what questions to ask (p. 40). The implication of control differences is that within quantitative research, "the researcher generally has a clearly bounded relationship with the research subject. The procedures involved, their risks and benefits, and the alternatives can usually be described in some detail" (Bosk and De Vries 2004, p. 252). The qualitative research process, on the other hand, is less predictable, harder to outline ahead of time, and the projected risks are more hypothetical in nature.

Many of these criticisms of institutional ethical oversight are based on the assumption that ethics policies and guidelines will be applied rigidly with little consideration of the fluid, reflexive nature of qualitative research. However, ethics policies have also been defended as being far more flexible than critics often acknowledge (Stark 2007; Ells and Gutfreund 2006). Ells and Gutfreund (2006) point out a series of "myths" that have developed regarding Canada's national ethics policy, including the notion that anonymity must be guaranteed and that written consent forms are always required or expected to conform to a particular format. Of course, while federal policies may be flexible, local interpretations have the potential to be more rigid. Thus, many of the defenders of ethics policies have advocated local reform rather than total rejection of ethical oversight (Stark 2007; Ells and Gutfreund 2006). As Katz (2006) argues, the issue of applicability is "not an inevitable result of [US] federal law. It has been constructed by interpretations of rules and

elaborations of procedures that depart from regulatory intent" (p. 499). It should also be noted that many of the ambiguities associated with informed consent are not unique to qualitative sociology. Research suggests that similar ambiguities exist in medical practice (Halpern 2004, pp. 840–841).

The normative debate over research ethics is not limited to the issue of applicability. Some scholars have called attention to ethical risks that are specifically tied to qualitative sociology, such as those associated with covert research (Erikson 1995), and the history of class and race biases in the social sciences (Stark 2007, p. 779). On the other side, critics have warned that institutional ethical oversight has the potential to limit the creative process of scientific inquiry and censor academics (Bledsoe et al. 2007; Rambo 2007; Katz 2007). Our aim in presenting these divergent views is not to examine every dimension of the debate, nor to stake a position ourselves, but rather to demonstrate the diversity of ways sociologists understand institutional ethical oversight. Acknowledging this diversity helps us to understand institutional ethical oversight as a sociological issue that requires us to answer a series of questions: where did ethical oversight come from, how does it operate, and what impact does it have on academia? Indeed, a promising trend in the ethics literature has been the attempt to answer these questions by approaching ethical oversight as an empirical research problem, rather than just the subject of normative, theoretical debate.

One of the most common ways in which sociologists have approached ethical oversight empirically has been to examine its historical development. Although no consensus has been reached over why such oversight came into existence, three dominant explanations have emerged. The most frequently cited account argues that ethical oversight emerged through historical contingency and the internal logic of bureaucracy rather than any real need to regulate the social sciences (Schrag 2009; Bledsoe et al. 2007; Haggerty 2004; Fitzgerald 2004). Stark (2007), on the other hand, criticizes this approach as the "victim narrative," because it implies that ethical oversight resulted from some "terrible mistake" (p. 778). She argues instead that ethical oversight was essentially a rational response to real concerns over the ethics of human-based social scientific research (Stark 2007). Finally, some scholars have adopted a Foucaultian-governmentality perspective, arguing that the rise of research ethics reflects a concerted effort to curtail academic freedom and make researchers accountable to the state and to capital (Dehli 2010; Dehli and Taylor 2006; Owram 2004; Halse and Honey 2007a). Important to this third perspective is the transition from guaranteed government funding toward grants that require academics to account for the value of their research to external parties (Owram 2004).

On a micro-social scale there are also studies that seek to show how ethics bureaucracies function, including how ethics boards reach decisions. Stark (2007) observed that committees establish "local precedents," which she describes as "short-hand rules based on previous cases that help board members make decisions that are internally consistent over time" (pp. 781–782). In addition to creating internal consistency, Stark reasons that local precedents also create external variation among different institutions. Fitzgerald's (2004) observational work of ethics boards diverges somewhat from Stark's account. Rather than internal consistency, Fitzgerald observed that ethics boards shift back and forth between intense scrutiny of research proposals and quick reviews. While partially based on the content of the proposals, the shifts between scrutiny and quick reviewing are also driven by unrelated issues such as fatigue or even body language between committee members. Aside from the issue of how ethics boards reach decisions, what is clear is that ethical oversight diversifies the number of institutional players involved in the research process. The implications of this diversification are far from clear in sociology, although some insight is offered from the study of the medical profession. Halpern's (2004) review of this

literature points to a general challenge to the professional authority and autonomy of doctors as ethics policies placed more professionals (bioethics specialists, patient advocates, etc.) into clinical and research work.

The question of whether or not institutional ethical oversight challenges the professional authority or autonomy of academics points to the fact that most of the empirical approaches to research ethics have focused primarily on the ethics bureaucracies themselves, rather than researchers and their work. We know an increasing amount about how ethics bureaucracies developed and how they function, but not much about how they impact the academic researcher. Some exceptions do exist. Grayson and Myles (2004), for instance, have demonstrated that the way an ethics board edits consent forms can have significant effects on response rates in survey research—effects which they found to correlate with major demographic factors such as gender and country of origin. This suggests that ethics review has the potential to impact actual research findings. However, much of the speculation that exists in the normative debate over ethics concerns a more fundamental impact that ethical oversight has on the researchers themselves, including their professional consciousness (i.e. the way they understand themselves as academics, the purpose and potential of their work, their relationship to their participants, etc.) and the strategies they adopt to meet their professional goals.

In terms of consciousness, Dehli and Taylor (2006) speculate that ethical oversight has the potential to turn academics into "ethical subjects" whose professional identity is more closely attached to filling out forms and seeking external approval than has traditionally been the case in academia. Anecdotal accounts have also been presented to suggest that undergoing ethics review makes academics more internally conflicted about their research, particularly for those researchers whose own ethical views diverge from those of their ethics boards (Halse and Honey 2005; Baez 2002; Thorne 1980; Rambo 2007), or when research experiences do not conform to assumptions implicit in ethical guidelines (Barrett and Parker 2003).[3] As for strategy, we draw on insights provided by one of the few empirical studies that focuses specifically on researchers (Bledsoe et al. 2007). Through a series of interviews, Bledsoe et al. studied academics within their own institution who engaged in "consensual censorship" with their ethics boards. That is, these academics left the formal ethics regulations unchallenged, while getting around them through informal "collusion" with regulators. The work of Bledsoe et al. represents an important step in bringing empirical evidence to bear on this issue, but it is still limited by its focus on one institution and one type of behavior or strategy.

In contrast to this existing literature, we have adopted a broad empirical approach aimed at identifying the diversity of ways in which qualitative sociologists understand institutional ethical oversight, and how they adopt strategies in reaction to it. We argue that the ways in which academics understand and act toward ethical oversight is far more complex and variable than is represented in the current literature. The normative literature suggests that sociologists take a wide range of positions on the issue of ethics, and often these positions are quite resistant rather than complacent. We conducted interviews in search of this

[3] Barrett and Parker (2003) convincingly demonstrate that the act of seeking consent is highly dependent on the group being studied, and signing written consent forms may not always mean that the participants have actually provided their consent. Recounting ethnographic experiences, the authors argue that they had to get to know their participants (i.e. begin their research) before they were able to attempt to gain consent in a culturally sensitive manner, and recognize when consent had been granted. Their paper illustrates the negotiating and problem-solving that researchers must go through when their field work does not conform to default assumptions about the research process—in this case the assumption that a signed contract represents consent.

complexity and variation, found it, and make sense of it here. Our interview data enables us to map the "ethics orientations" of sociologists, explaining this variation in their understandings of—and actions toward—institutional ethical oversight.

Ethics orientations

Based on a precedent set by much of the literature (Bledsoe et al. 2007; Katz 2006; Halpern 2004), and on our own data analysis, we feel it is fair to conceptualize institutional ethical oversight as producing a "strategic dilemma" for academics (Jasper 2006). That is, academics have multiple avenues available to them in the way they *orient* their actions toward institutional ethical oversight. We have adopted the terms autonomy and compliance in our title to emphasize this dilemma. Rather than the "ethical subject" suggested by Dehli (2010), we see the academic as a relatively autonomous agent capable of establishing professional goals that may or may not line up with the requirements of ethics policies—and then acting strategically in order to realize these goals. Do academics see a conflict between professional autonomy and ethical review? Do they work to reconcile autonomy and compliance or explicitly resist review? These questions are at the center of this dilemma.

The dilemma of autonomy and compliance presents itself to the academic throughout the research process. From the very beginning social researchers must choose whether or not to wait for ethics approval to begin their investigations or to start immediately. The dilemma is made even more acute by the "emergent nature" of qualitative research (Katz 2006). Qualitative research involves responding in real time to developments that are occurring in the field, and researchers may, and often do, confront situations in which the application of ethics policies is ambiguous (Thorne 1980; Barrett and Parker 2003; Haggerty 2004, pp. 404–405). In the face of this ambiguity, we argue that ethics requirements confront academics as an additional consideration during the research process. It is the individual academic who, in the end, must decide whether these requirements are ignored, grudgingly accepted, or embraced and reconciled with the other goals of the research project—be they scientific, political, or other.

While we use the term "autonomy," we do not wish to present academics as self-interested, instrumental actors a la rational choice theory. We acknowledge that actors' ability to establish goals and self-interest is actually *enabled* through shared social structures, discourses, institutional resources, etc. (Giddens 1984). As Jasper (2006) argues, actors may choose their strategies, but their choices reflect a complex mix of personality, biography, emotions, organizational culture, experience and resources, among others. Therefore, we argue that the ways in which academics act strategically toward the requirements of ethics policies are tied to forms of consciousness—that is, the ways in which academics understand themselves, their work, and their relationship to research participants. Forms of consciousness, in turn, are tied to shared cultural schema and social structures (Ewick and Silbey 1998; Sewell 1992; Silbey and Ewick 2003). In our conclusion we tie ethics orientations specifically to power differences in gender, age, and institution.

In linking consciousness and strategic action to institutional rules and regulations, we are following work done within the area of legal consciousness. Ewick and Silbey (1998) in particular have demonstrated significant variation in the way people understand laws and the legal system. These different understandings, or forms of consciousness, are inextricably tied to how people form goals and act within the legal system. In a study

more closely related to the issue of research ethics, Silbey (2003) documents that when university lab scientists perceived new safety regulations as a threat, they adopted various forms of strategic resistance including discounting the regulators' understanding of science, amplifying indigenous safety protocols, opposing the production of standardized compliance forms or graduate student training sessions, or vocalizing opposition to regulation in the course of daily work in the labs. Silbey finds variation in resistance based on the particular cultures of different sciences (for example, biology versus chemistry).

Our own data suggests there is significant variation *within* fields and disciplines as well. Using sociology as a case, we make sense of this variation using a typology of "ethics orientations." "Ethics orientations" refers to the ways that academics orient themselves—in consciousness and actions—in response to the desire for autonomy and requirements of compliance. For some of our participants, autonomy and compliance were reconcilable. However, the majority of the sociologists we interviewed (16 of 21) demonstrated resistance to complying with ethical oversight. For the purposes of this paper, we understand resistance to be any attempt by an academic to limit the influence of ethical oversight in their professional work. The specifics of how this resistance occurs in both the consciousness and behavior of our participants will be demonstrated as our analysis progresses.

Our typology of ethics orientations extends from the work of Nancy Matthews (1995), who provides a model of responses to institutional regulation that our data corroborates. Matthews studied independent rape crisis centers responses to government regulation. While compliance with regulation brought funding, it also translated into a loss of autonomy. Matthews found that the rape crisis centers reacted to state oversight in three ways: overt opposition, apparent accommodation, and active engagement. Underlying Matthews' typology is a set of analytically useful connections between consciousness and strategic action that develop when social actors are forced to negotiate between bureaucratic regulation and their own professional autonomy and goals. We adopt and extend Matthews' typology to make sense of the existing ethics orientations among qualitative sociologists.

Overt opposition: Sociology in peril

Matthews uses the term "overt opposition" to describe rape crisis centers that refuse regulations tied to government funding, perceiving irreconcilable differences between feminist objectives and state interests. Like these centers, overtly oppositional sociologists express deep opposition to institutional ethical oversight and reject influence of IRBs/ REBs on their own research and on the discipline more generally. Overt opposition tends to be exhibited mostly by senior men in the discipline who began teaching in the 1970s or 1980s, although some senior women are also opposers. Overt opposers also tend to hold appointments at the most research-intensive and elite institutions. Of our 21 participants, we identified six with this orientation.

Overt opposers distinguish and dichotomize bureaucratic ethics and sociological ethics, asserting sociologists' authority to define and enact ethical research without administrative oversight. For this group, thoughtful discussion about power in the field has been increasingly eclipsed by IRB/ REB approval letters and signed consent forms. Overt opposers do not believe IRB/ REBs make research more ethical, nor do they feel that these regulations are intended to accomplish this goal. Members of this group build their opposition around a separation between "real" ethical issues such as the protection of participants or amelioration of social problems, and the role of the Board in regulating and controlling research. The purpose of IRB/ REBs, overt opposers stress, is better understood

by looking at the political interests of the university, rather than at ethical ideals. For example:

> **Respondent 14**: I think that the [ethics] process is really bureaucratic and it feels like the purpose of it is to cover the university's ass rather than to really ensure that research subjects are treated ethically. I think the ethical questions would be better dealt with outside of this process.

> **Respondent 11**: If there were any truth in advertising, the university ethics review committee would be called the "how not to get the university sued committee."

In recognizing political interest as the underlying purpose of ethical oversight, opposers frame it as an instrument of powerful elites—university administrators worried about institutional liability, or local business interests trying to keep nosy researchers at bay (**Respondent 15**, see below). According to this view, ethical oversight has less to do with protecting research participants from exploitative sociologists, and more to do with protecting elites from critical scholars aligned with subordinate groups. Thus, overt opposers see themselves at the bottom of a power struggle, resisting, rather than propagating, harm and exploitation.

Because they question the legitimacy of ethical oversight in general, overt opposers' engagements with IRB/ REBs are markedly resistant. They interpret critiques of their own research proposals as violations of academic freedom, impeding their intellectual work and sociological critique. Some overt opposers try to identify and resist the influence of elite political interests on their own research. The following quote from a sociologist, describing his application for approval to interview local workers, exemplifies the suspicion ethics review inspires in overt opposers:

> **Respondent 15**: [The REB] wanted management approval because they would feel more comfortable with such approval. In this case the company involved is local and I think there was some fear that the company would complain to the university about interviewing workers at the company.

> **Interviewer**: Did you have to change the research at all?

> **Respondent 15**: No! Absolutely not! We will not change research. I think *that's* an ethical issue, the right to do research you need to do.

This respondent's opposition to his REB is not based on practical or logistic issues, such as concerns about response rates or access. Instead, he perceives a larger struggle that involves protecting his research from market forces (i.e. the managers of the local company). He overtly opposes the REB, and by extension local business interests, by refusing to make changes to his plan of research. Resisting the REB is something in which he takes pride, but his anger also reflects his frustration with both the intrusion of local business interests into the research process, and the REB's challenge to his rights and responsibilities as a tenured scholar.

Overt opposers commonly expressed anger and frustration when they discussed how institutional ethical oversight threatens their autonomy and the practice of intellectual work. For example:

> **Respondent 9**: Basically what [ethics review] does, it's one of the things that is taking away the autonomy of the researcher! It makes people into little apparatchiks, who basically have to follow all these guidelines. And it endangers academic freedom, quite frankly!

This respondent, like most opposers, distinguishes between the intellectual, autonomous scholar, on one hand, and the subordinate "apparatchik" or non-intellectual technocrat who perfects procedures on the other. Overt opposers see themselves as standing at the edge of this divide, struggling to maintain their autonomy in the face of an overly restrictive and encroaching administrative culture. They understand ethical oversight to be one dimension of a general "corporatization" of academia, wherein scholars become absorbed into the larger university organization, losing the ability to produce creative, critical work.

Tied to the loss of autonomy, overt opposers worry about the disappearance of many important forms of sociological research that are deemed either too risky by REBs or too much of a hassle by researchers. Among these forms of research are exploratory studies that do not follow a pre-established format. For example:

> **Respondent 2**: I can imagine what it would be like trying to get approval if you said this is genuinely exploratory! My suspicion is that they would be very unlikely to approve it.

Others spoke in defense of covert research and worried that this too was a dying form of sociological research:

> **Respondent 14**: In the past, sociologists would sometimes do covert research. I think that kind of research is virtually never being done anymore. And I think that's too bad, because I think there's some covert research that can be perfectly ethical, but that gets at some things that you can't get at with overt research.

Still others point to the impact ethics review may have on subversive, social justice oriented research:

> **Respondent 15**: I'm concerned that the enforcement of certain policies may create a chilling effect on what might be considered controversial or risk-taking research, including research that aims to gather data from the less-powerful about their relationships to those who have power.

Overt opposition, therefore, seems to be linked strongly with a sense that the discipline of sociology is undergoing a fundamental change for the worse. Overt opposers look fondly back at the Chicago School, for example, as the ideal sociology: scholars should leave the ivory tower, go out into the "real world" and talk to people, and in so doing, adopt whatever methods they deem useful and ethical. They worry that as the research process becomes more regulated, human-based research itself will markedly decline as a sociological practice.

> **Respondent 9**: The classical job of qualitative sociology—the Chicago School approach—is getting very difficult and a lot of people say I don't need to go through this hassle!

> **Respondent 15**: The bigger problem is that academics are more inclined to sit in their offices and gather data online then to go out and meet people and talk to them in any great depth.

Given the threats to sociology that overt opposers associate with institutional ethical oversight, it is understandable that they adopt strategic actions aimed at minimizing and even undermining its authority and influence. In discussing how they conduct their own research, supervise students' work, and teach, overt opposers describe the various ways

they subjugate influence of formal ethics policies and bodies to their own judgements. For overt opposers, the independent, critical-minded scholar is the real ethics authority, while IRB/ REBs and formal guidelines superficially protect the researched.

The strategies of overt opposers are particularly relevant with respect to their supervisory work with graduate students. For these sociologists, issues of ethics are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. They believe only those immediately involved in the research are qualified to determine what is ethical. Some of our respondents stressed the importance of learning the personalities and capabilities of individual students before deciding what constitutes ethical research for them. One sociologist evaluates her students "according to my ethical standards" rather than deferring to institutional reviewers. For example, she trusts her Aboriginal students to conduct research in their own communities without going through a "vulnerable population" review process. Other respondents reported similar approaches with students who study vulnerable populations of which they are a part, such as prisoners and high school students. By asserting the importance of knowing their students, opposers reclaim authority and influence from an undifferentiating and distant Board that cannot grasp student researchers' personal experiences or capabilities.

When trust is built between overtly opposed supervisors and their students, the supervisors typically take little interest in whether or not their students adhere to formal ethical guidelines.

> **Respondent 9**: I don't want to speak for my Ph.D. students, but I am quite convinced that they don't push this [consent] form under people's noses.

Similarly, overt opposers adopt strategies of deception rather than reconciliation when they or their students break ethical guidelines. One sociologist explained how she reacted to a student who began conducting research without ethics approval:

> **Respondent 14**: I realized that she'd collected all this data and she hadn't done [an ethics review]. And I said, "Don't tell them! Just put in the form." And they didn't raise any questions. I mean, she can use that data. How are they going to know? And it's not like she did anything unethical.

Over opposers are being pragmatic when they allow their students this flexibility. But in so doing, they train students to seek approval from their mentors rather than anonymous institutional reviewers, privileging this relationship and asserting mentors' authority. Over the course of time, subverting IRB/REBs becomes a point of solidarity between faculty and student.

Minimizing and critiquing the influence of institutional ethics also takes place within the classroom. Just as they are required to undergo ethics review in their research, faculty are also encouraged to teach their students institutional ethics policies. For the overtly opposed, however, such lessons focus on training students to resist administrative control. Overt opposers try to avoid teaching their students about formal policies and procedures. Instead they explore the political and philosophical nature of ethical oversight. Overt opposition in the classroom is exemplified by the following scholar's approach to teaching:

> **Respondent 11**: I teach this stuff because it's the rules, but I also try to teach them that there's politics around this stuff. And the people pretend there isn't politics.

This respondent uses ethics protocols to challenge and subvert what he understands to be their politically suspect origins and applications. Overt opposers teach students that ethics requires deliberation among researchers rather than formulas. Terms like privacy and

confidentiality are mined in their classrooms with the intention of complicating their meanings and applicability across research settings.

Opposers passionately defend unencumbered intellectual pursuit, sociological traditions of inquiry, experiments and innovations in inquiry, the primacy of sociological understandings of ethics, faculty discretion, and critical or autonomous sociology. Such scholars see institutional ethical review as putting intellectually-credible human-based sociology and academic freedom in peril, threatening the nature and legacy of the discipline of sociology and the job of sociologists. They are nostalgic for the era of classical sociology when research was not subject to institutional review, and tend to use theories such as "the iron law of oligarchy" to understand the incursion of ethical review on their academic lives. Overt opposers challenge ethical review by noncompliance—not submitting protocols, submitting protocols that critique ethics boards' touted best practices, refusing to comply with ethics board directives, distinguishing between sociological ethics and bureaucratic ethics, and teaching students to evade or critically engage institutional review. For the most part, this cohort of scholars has practiced sociology without ethical oversight for the bulk of their careers. For them, ethics review is not a fundamental part of social science, but reflects the hegemony of corporate control and corporate culture, government surveillance, technocracy, and anti-intellectualism.

Apparent accommodation: Ethics review as a necessary evil

While most of our participants voiced dissatisfaction with institutional ethical oversight, only a minority demonstrated overt opposition to it. Ten of 21 respondents, who tend to be mid-career sociologists in mid- to high-level research-intensive institutions, adopt an orientation of "apparent accommodation." Matthews employs this term to describe those rape crisis centers that accept state funding—and the regulations that come with it—while still maintaining their own political ideals. Running a center according to anti-bureaucratic ideals while adhering to state regulations creates internal conflicts that must be managed. In our study, apparent accommodators accept the necessity of ethics regulation, but fret over the practical implications of these regulations for their research and teaching. Like the rape crisis centers, these scholars adopt practices aimed at resolving the conflicts that arise for them when they attempt to both comply with institutional regulations and get work done as sociologists.

Apparent accommodation is not a passionate but a pragmatic position. Scholars in this category are mostly annoyed (their word) —rather than enthused or enraged, by ethical review, likening reviewers to pests who appear unable to balance their interests with others. For example,

> **Respondent 4**: I use the analogy of a referee in sports and rule books; the Tri-Council policies being the rule book, and the local REB being the referees. At times the referee calls too many penalties which prevent the play from occurring and ruin the game.

> **Respondent 5**: You know, my wife and I joke that for a dental hygienist, dental floss is the most important thing in life.

Apparent accommodators' analogies indicate they experience formal ethics adherence as a hassle—a referee who deserves to be heckled from the bleachers, a clucking hygienist whose advice must be tolerated but not necessarily heeded. They believe games need referees, and teeth need cleaning, but that people in such jobs can also become fanatics if

unchecked. Apparent accommodators aim for balance. They agree social researchers have the propensity to be unethical, but they also see institutional review as threatening academics' reasonable pursuit of research. Apparent accommodators' are of two minds about ethical review, and can appear to be speaking opposing positions in the same breath, as the following exchanges suggest:

> **Interviewer**: So, to what extent do you find these policies helpful?
>
> **Respondent 5**: It's not the slightest bit helpful. I'm not saying we shouldn't have them. I do acknowledge there probably is a need to have some ethical committee. Certainly on the qualitative end, if you go back to the '50s and '60s, some weird and wonderful things happened that probably shouldn't [have happened].
>
> **Interviewer**: To what extent do you find these policies useful?
>
> **Respondent 12**: No, I think they are. I think that they're useful. I think that…you know, we have enough examples of badly done, intrusive, inappropriate research to say that we…obviously regulation isn't a terrible thing. I guess my other side of that though is…again there…it seems…it's the overwhelmingness of it.

Apparent accommodators believe some sociologists have conducted unethical research. They feel therefore, they must support institutional ethical review even if they believe it will not prevent future violations, or is unhelpful in their own research endeavors and bureaucratically crippling. They believe past transgressions necessitate current regulation, and that it is unfortunate but legitimate that they must now pay for the sins of researchers past. It is not surprising then, that apparent accommodators experience ethical review as punitive, a process that posits them guilty by extension of their predecessors' exploitation of the researched, and guilty until they receive institutional approval on their proposed projects. For example,

> **Respondent 1**: I have to spend so much time and energy trying to justify [my research] and it's always a little adversarial. It's always like as though I'm trying to do something wrong, or maybe that I'm *trying* to abuse those people….

Despite such feelings, apparent accommodators usually try in earnest to comply with Ethics Review protocol in their respective universities. However, over time, several factors accrue that diminish their intentions. The experience of stigma and the stress of presumptive guilt suggested above are two of several feelings or observations that produce skepticism about ethical review. For some, the idea that sociologists are hurting people by studying them stands at odds with their understandings of sociology as a discipline dedicated to ameliorating inequality and injustice rather than exploiting the vulnerable. They ally with the researched, as the following quotes reflect:

> **Respondent 8**: The thing about ethnographic research is that, you know, it's inherently ethical because it is based in a profound respect and an interest in people, their lives, their experience, their subjectivity, the way they understand things. You know, we don't even call people research subjects.

When sociologists in this group sense that those reviewing their ethics protocols do not share this understanding of sociology, they lose faith in the ethics review process. Put another way, perceived respect for disciplinary significance and autonomy are key to ethics compliance. Infringements, of which there are several, constitute what we call "decisive trespass" which leads them to disinvest in ethical review. Another example of decisive

trespass is institutional micromanagement of graduate student protocols. Supervising faculty are named in graduate student ethics submissions, and are notified of review results. Faculty often interpret their students' failed protocols as negative evaluations of their mentoring. When such perception of critique occurs, faculty members in this group are compelled to recuperate authority by critiquing their institutional review boards and training their students how to evade them the next time. Some surmise when these critiques occur that non-sociologists who do not understand sociological methods conducted the review. They also conclude reviewers are intent on finding ethical transgressions to justify the time they spend reviewing protocols. If reviewers believe they have prevented unethical research, the argument goes, they feel efficacious.

Apparent accommodators also experience diminishing respect for review boards when they observe inconsistent logics mobilized across different application reviews within the same and across different universities. When colleagues share their ethics reviews with one another and note different responses to similar or identical protocols, they conclude the review process is random and that ethical review is inherently subjective. However, faculty also lose respect for ethical review if the directives they receive appear too "boiler plate," asking for identical-looking consent forms, exact wording of privacy assurances, or precise data storage mechanisms. When faculty across different universities submit identical protocols and receive diverging responses, they develop institutional analyses about their own and others' boards as respectful of faculty autonomy or controlling, methodical or haphazard. Moreover, they link these assessments to their analyses of the larger administrative culture of different universities. In this way, questions of ethics take a back seat to analyses of organizational behavior, leading to cynicism about the overall utility of ethical review.

Despite the fact that many apparent accommodators discuss their disappointment in the review boards with their students and colleagues, they do not initiate collective efforts to resist or change them. Rather, their resistance occurs on an individual basis. They quietly evade obstacles that threaten their work rather than publicly oppose the constraints. They maintain a distinction between principles and practice, expressing the idea that while ethical review guidelines may be generally applied with positive results, their research projects in particular have outstanding features that render the guidelines either inapplicable or harmful. Apparent accommodators believe that the focus, location, or methods they use in their research make standard review inapplicable to their projects. For example,

> **Respondent 1**: I find that their work [ethical review boards] is essential, it's very important, but sometimes it's a little bit like they're on this mission to impose universal principles and they don't have much intercultural sensitivity about certain issues. So I have to spend a lot of time explaining why I cannot request written consent in a Communist country where people would be so skeptical.

> **Respondent 16**: I'll tell you about one group that I've been researching for like a hundred years and I'll try to show you why the consent form really turns out to be a little impractical. These are [population]. Many of them don't speak English, and I might be in a position to say "look, I teach at a university and there are these ethical issues—here are these concerns and it's spelled out in this document; why don't you sign it?" Many of the people would not care to sign it. They're kind of suspicious of these forms. A lot of the people [also] can't read them.

Apparent accommodators focus on the exceptional aspects of their research that make their own compliance with board dictates more challenging than it is for their peers doing more

conventional work. Yet when they discuss strategies for dealing with their challenges, members of this group surmise that many peers are likely engaging in similar forms of "creative compliance." Rather than organize to change ethics guidelines, apparent accommodators convey they do not strictly adhere to their own research protocols after they secure approval.

> **Respondent 16**: I'm speculating here, but why the hell not? I think that there's probably a disconnect between the arrangement that you make with the ethics board and what actually happens in the field.

> **Respondent 10**: Other times I did not fight it, I just did not follow the procedures exactly. I just decided on my own, according to my own judgment, that it was fine to have [my data] on my computer at home instead of having it only at work and not telling the [board] that this is what's happening…unfortunately.

Because apparent accommodators subscribe to the basic principles of ethical review but do not wish to comply with them themselves, they develop individual strategic actions that help them conform or appear to conform while preserving their autonomy. One of the most basic strategies they use is to be as vague as possible about their research in ethics protocols, providing only the most basic information required. Scholars anticipate which aspects of their research might produce red flags for reviewers and modify them, including description of research population, interview questions, locations for the practice of participant observation, places data will be accessed and stored, amount of money, services, or items given in exchange for participation in research, or informal social interactions with research participants. If reviewers flag a problem in a protocol, apparent accommodators make sure to closet that aspect of their research rather than change it in future submissions. For example,

> **Respondent 5**: I've learned to give the very minimum detail.

> **Interviewer**: Do you have any examples of how you learned these strategies?

> **Respondent 5**: Well, just from doing studies and getting these queries coming through. I've learned by trial and error. For methodological research, the less information you can give them, the better.

In addition to providing minimal detail, apparent accommodators come up with other plans of action to evade their boards. If they perceive their boards to be particularly interventionist and are doing collaborative research with a colleague at another university with a board that is conciliatory, they run the grant through that institution. Similarly, scholars with large grants who experience their boards as intrusive sometimes choose to contract the research out to survey data firms that use tactics considered unethical by most boards to achieve higher response rates. While scholars who engage in this practice feel guilty about depriving their universities and graduate students of research funds, they consider this outcome preferable. One respondent believes that had he kept a study in the university, "…that would have been a disaster, and I could have ended up with an unpublishable study." Even scholars who believe ethical review is a good thing will not comply with board directives if they believe doing so will impede their research.

Another strategy apparent accommodators use to facilitate easy passage through the ethics bureaucracy is to use "ethics-speak" throughout their ethics protocols (Halse and Honey 2007). One accommodator includes "countermeasures" in her application, or explanations of how she and her graduate students thoughtfully anticipated risks and what

they would do should those risks arise. Others advise students to read institutional ethical guidelines for phrases or sections they might apply in their applications. The following quote explains a common rationale used to support this practice:

> **Respondent 8**: You see, people who are reviewing these often don't know much about real ethnographic research, right? So that it's all frightening to them. It's not controlled and all that. All the students out there are endangering the public. And so the things that people get most concerned about are naturalistic observation. So, quoting what the Tri-Council says about that, that if you're not manipulating or staging events, it's considered minimal risk, right? So I'll often quote that little passage to signal to people that this should be considered minimal risk.

For others, such a strategy is too cynical, and they simply discourage graduate students from pursuing qualitative projects prior to the dissertation. For example,

> **Respondent 4**: I had an MA student held up for a number of months because the [reviewers] were commenting on his data's ability to conduct factor analysis, when this was not part of his project. He merely wanted to do a tabular and graphical analysis of his survey results. The delay ultimately forced him to miss his window to sample and he ended up with such a low response rate he had to abandon that part of the project and move to using existing secondary data. For this reason, I encourage my MA students to avoid doing primary research unless they can afford an extra year to conduct it.

The strategies employed by apparent accommodators are of the "Scotch tape" kind—short-term fixes for what they perceive to be a serious and growing fissure between their professional interests and opportunities. They tinker with applications, change or omit sections of their review protocols to appease committees, experience guilt, pride, or resignation based on the way their protocols diverge from their actual research practices, or attempt to wholly circumvent their university's boards by outsourcing research or reviews. In addition, while they train students to navigate boards, they also discourage them altogether from engaging in research that may get tied up in the board review process. Past experiences and choices may lead apparent accommodators to feel cynical and overwhelmed. Members of this group acknowledge a history of ethical violation, and believe this history prevents them from more outwardly opposing their boards. They describe a gradual accretion of discomfort with ethics review procedures over time, leading them to increasingly share some of the analyses and observations of their more oppositional colleagues.

Active engagement: Building a culture of ethics

Those faculty most accepting of institutional ethical oversight who see the least conflict between the interests of researchers and the interests of ethics boards demonstrate an orientation of *active engagement*. In Matthews' (1995) study, activists who demonstrated active engagement adopted the discourses and practices of state bureaucracy as they worked to create a climate that minimized tension between the interests of the rape crisis centers and the interests of the state. Active engagers believe regulators and practitioners can collectively manage conflicts by working together as virtual peers within the same committees and institutional settings. In the context of research ethics, several of our participants demonstrate a similar approach to reconciling their research and teaching work with the process of attaining ethical clearance and adhering to guidelines. What

distinguishes active engagers in particular is how they see themselves and the members of the ethics boards as part of the same community of scholars. They invite the influence of institutional ethics on their research and teaching activities. Respondents in this study who exemplify this orientation, of which we encountered five, tend to be younger, untenured women faculty with less than a decade of teaching experience, holding positions at less research-intensive universities.

Active engagers understand the relationship between the researcher and the review board in a way that sharply contrasts with overt opposers. Instead of a menacing iron cage that restricts the creative potential of the autonomous academic, active engagers see research ethics boards as forming—in principle, at least—a type of Habermasian public sphere. According to this orientation, boards are comprised not of alien authorities, but by a group of peers who share the same goal of fostering ethical research among all scholars and who reach decisions through rational-critical deliberation. Active engagers trust their boards. As one expressed, "I feel confident that I could go to the REB with any research that's reasonable or respectful of people's rights and they would be fine with it" (**Respondent 13**). Active engagement is characterized by this trust and sense of togetherness as a discipline or larger scholarly community, and is exemplified by the use of the term "we" in discussions of ethical issues. For example:

> **Respondent 13**: We're critical of people who have done "helicopter-type"-research where they drop into a community and collect data and then don't give anything back to that community.

> **Respondent 18**: We would like to build a culture of ethics that infuses all research undertakings.

By using the term "we" in discussion of research ethics, active engagers convey that they see institutional ethical review as a project—or culture—that they participate in, rather than something imposed on them from above.

As participants in a culture of ethics, active engagers envision far less conflict between researchers and ethics boards. The engagers among our respondents emphasize that going through ethical review is not a bureaucratic exercise necessary to obtain permission to do research. Rather, it is an opportunity to be actively involved in formulating and meeting ethics obligations throughout the research process.

> **Respondent 18**: The [board] is not a gatekeeper, and it's not a set of hurdles. But actually, when you think about the research, we're talking about relationships and obligations. Those ethical obligations have to be embedded in that whole process of research.

> **Respondent 7**: What I say to my students is that the question of research ethics has to be with you at every step of the process. You have to be thinking about ethics in terms of the research question, how you're going to involve people in your study, how you're going to report your findings to them. And that's the practice that I have encouraged in students, to put ethics everywhere.

As these quotes reflect, active engagers emphasize personal responsibility. They understand themselves to be working in partnership with their ethics boards and place importance—even pride—in ensuring that their research follows through on the promises they make.

Like all faculty, active engagers acknowledge the bureaucratic aspect of ethical review. However, while faculty with other ethics orientations consider the added labor associated

with filling out forms to be a bureaucratic intrusion, engagers demonstrate far more tolerance. Active engagers understand filling out forms and going through review to be part of the job of an academic and value the practical skills they develop in getting through quickly and with little conflict, as reflected by the following:

> **Interview**: Can you describe your overall experience in dealing with your own REB?
>
> **Respondent 6**: It's been fairly smooth. I've been very good at filling out forms.
>
> **Respondent 13**: Nobody likes filling out forms or anything like that, but that seems to be academic life. I don't think it's confined to ethics.

Absent from these responses is the sense that ethical review represents a bureaucratic intrusion into "real sociology." While overt opposers express nostalgia for a pre-ethics sociology, active engagers see going through the review and filling out forms as integral to what it means to be a sociologist. This contrast may be explained by demographics. Overt opposers and active engagers developed their self-understandings as sociologists in different eras. For the younger engagers, ethics review has always been a part of their training and intellectual pursuits.

While active engagers think of researchers and ethics boards as part of the same community of scholars, they tend to place more professional distance between themselves and their research participants. This relationship was often framed as a dominant-subordinate power dynamic in which researchers are in a position to potentially exploit or harm their participants.

> **Respondent 7**: Sometimes people think that if you are just asking questions, you know, how complicated is that, right? But, sometimes you can ask people questions that are deeply troubling to them, and you may not anticipate how troubling those highly personal questions can be. They may touch on questions of, you know, risk to those individuals, which they may not anticipate.

Because of the dangers they associate with social research, active engagers see mediating the relationship between researchers and participants to be the responsibility of the entire discipline, rather than just the individuals involved. This is particularly important, one sociologist stressed, for the vulnerable communities researchers consistently approach. While individual researchers come and go, institutional review boards act as a permanent advocate for studied communities. Expanding on this point, the respondent said that ethical oversight was centrally about

> ...being as ethical as you can, so you set the ground work to do [research] across generations. So even if you are done with a site and you're moving on, others might want to study it someday. So it's like the environment, except that it's not like you want to leave no footprints. You want to leave very clear and very good footprints. (**Respondent 18**)

In other words, building a culture of ethics is something sociologists must do collectively, and institutional ethical oversight provides a means for this collective action.

Employing this consciousness, active engagers adopt strategic actions aimed at creating a culture of ethics. They act in ways that invite the influence of formal ethical guidelines and boards into their research and teaching, distinguishing them from both overt opposers and apparent accommodators. Respondents who best exemplify active engagement convey that they value the insights of institutional guidelines and boards. One researcher, for instance, praised her board for suggesting a "graduated consent form" that she finds helpful

for her research (Respondent 13). Rather than find institutional guidelines intrusive, active engagers sometimes find them too vague and seek more detail. For example,

> **Respondent 10**: We had to do some research, because I don't think the Tri-Council policy addresses [Internet research] very well. I remember we had to do quite a bit of research to find ethical guidelines, because there was nothing about it.

The effort to elaborate ethical guidelines and critique their brevity characterizes active engagement. In contrast to faculty who resist or avoid the influence of ethics bodies or formal guidelines, active engagers see these as valuable resources for conducting research and cross reference them.

Active engagers also aim to train their students into the culture of managerial ethics. In the classroom and during thesis supervision, they think of the policies and procedures of institutional ethical oversight as an essential part of methodological training. Active engagers carefully guide their students through the ethics review process to ensure they understand what needs to be reported. For example, one scholar reviews each of her students' ethics applications and suggests improvements for making the applications "more concrete."

> **Interviewer**: So, do you find that when students get very prepared before going through the ethics process, they generally get through?

> **Respondent 6**: Well, they do if they're my students. There's nothing worse than having some kind of pickup later. When we talk about the research ethics process, I tell them what the process is, that there's a committee….I show them the website, and tell them to come to me with any questions and we go from there.

By making her students knowledgeable about policies and reviewing their applications before submission, she ensures her students' investment in and respect for the review process, while reducing the critiques they may encounter. Since an unsuccessful protocol often produces cynicism, the students avoid this road. This strategy contrasts with that of apparent accommodators, who might encourage their students to withhold information in order to get a conflict-free review, and overt opposers who would take little interest in students' reviews at all.

Resolving the tensions that sociologists experience when adhering to ethical obligations and engaging in the spontaneous, unsystematic process of qualitative research is an important part of active engagement. Some active engagers resolve these tensions by serving on ethics boards themselves. Matthews (1995) argues that the tactics associated with active engagement are more available to activists as they become legitimate participants in governance bodies. These tactics include "entering political dialogue through lobbying and committee work" (p. 303). Indeed, within our own study, the faculty who serve on ethics boards also demonstrate strategies of active engagement. One sociologist spoke of his attempts to make Canadian research and granting bodies more aware of qualitative methodology.

> **Respondent 18**: What we're trying to do at the national level, we're trying to educate [the Tri-Council] and move beyond—you know, not all kinds of qualitative researchers have the same ethical issues. You have to be able to have a wider focus in terms of the dialogue you want to have—in terms of making this ethical review work, and that's always a work in progress.

The desire to "make this ethical review work" is much like the desire conveyed earlier to build a culture of ethics. Both comments reveal how active engagers see themselves as vital participants in—not passive recipients of—the project of research ethics.

For active engagers, ethics review is central to active engagers' understanding of what it means to be a sociologist. They suggest institutional ethical oversight can positively impact both research practice and knowledge production, enabling consultation in the otherwise isolating world of social research. By continually interacting with their ethical review boards, discussing ethics issues with their students, and serving on ethics boards as reviewers, active engagers see themselves as building consensus around and collective commitment to ethical research in the social sciences. This group does not prize autonomy, nor do its members believe researchers left to their own devices can or should be trusted by potential research participants. The classics that inspire nostalgia among overt opposers make engagers shudder. This cohort sees sociologists as Goliath, not David. Thus, they are interested in building and participating in a culture of ethics and the bureaucratic practices this culture necessitates.

Agency, diversity, and ethics orientations

The analysis we present corroborates several observations and arguments made in the existing literature on ethics. However, we broaden and extend these observations by demonstrating the variety of ways that scholars understand and act strategically toward institutional ethical oversight. The majority of the sociologists we interviewed identified moments at which complying with ethical oversight infringed on their professional autonomy, leading them to adopt resistant strategic actions. For most, these infringements were practical in nature— "decisive trespasses" into professional work by a bureaucracy founded on good intensions. The response of these scholars was an equally practical strategy of "creative compliance"—getting around ethics requirements without explicitly challenging those requirements. Through this observation, we corroborate the findings of Bledsoe et al. (2007). For others, however, the infringements of ethical oversight are seen as presenting more than just a practical problem and threaten academic freedom itself. Our research also finds that not all sociologists see a contradiction between their own professional autonomy and compliance with ethics policies. In some ways this observation ties to Dehli and Taylor's (2006) "ethical subject" thesis. Active engagers saw filling out forms and seeking permission as part of—rather than detracting from—their intellectual work. However, we have shown that compliance is far more active that is perhaps suggested by the concept of an "ethical subject." Compliance is tied to a certain understanding of social research as a collective activity, and ethical oversight is recognized as a formal institutional expression of that collectivity.

To summarize, overt opposers see institutional ethics review as a jail cell that has slowly been built around them, leading them to feel righteously indignant. Apparent accommodators view it as a parking ticket, only partially deserved, inspiring exasperation and fatigue. Active engagers view it as a jigsaw puzzle, to be collectively assembled, inspiring feelings of mastery and accomplishment. These groups and their attendant metaphors and emotions reflect distinct cohorts within sociology that are clustered institutionally, demographically, and ideologically along a continuum. Opposers tend to see ethics in terms of power struggles, and are senior men at the most elite institutions. They predict authentic sociology will likely retire when they do. The bulk of sociologists are apparent accommodators—they tend to be mid-career scholars at research-intensive institutions who share their oppositional colleagues' analyses while also internalizing blame for the transgressions of their predecessors. For them, ethical review is a necessary evil, which requires a Goffmanesque approach. They suggest sociologists must perform ethical compliance on stage, but once out of costume they need not keep up the song and dance. They justify this perspective by empirically observing and collecting stories of the

ineffectiveness of ethical review as it has been applied in their own and their colleagues' work lives. Active engagers tend to be young women employed in less research-intensive institutions. They neither romanticize the sociology of their predecessors, nor believe sociology's purpose is to advance a critical perspective. They see sociologists as more likely to exploit than liberate vulnerable populations. They comply with and believe in accountability structures, and act as good citizens, serving on institutional review boards and writing their universities' ethics policies and training modules.

The cultural schemas and strategies each of these groups mobilize reflect their relative social locations and their respective efforts to maintain or achieve status and power. Senior men do not seek administrative approval, nor are they enlivened by it. For them, institutional and disciplinary power does not reside in their ethics boards. They posit themselves as victims of bureaucratic control. Junior women, in contrast, are the least powerful among tenure track professors, and often have distinctly different understandings of how to achieve power organizationally. To them, power appears invested in their ethics boards, and they align themselves with this source of power through the process of ethics board consultation and approval. The autonomy prized by senior men is not similarly coveted by junior women, who have less experience of autonomy and do not see how it benefits them. Social psychological research on self-esteem indicates young (white and Asian) women are highly invested in others' needs and opinions, which may explain why this group sees ethical review as a source rather than diminution of power (Rosenfield 2008). Not surprisingly then, they strategically use cooperation to achieve power and legitimacy. Notably, they see themselves not as victims of institutional control, but as privileged academics from whom vulnerable populations deserve protection. These polarities indicate the significance of social location in producing ethics orientations. Such orientations are generational, institutional and gendered and each corresponds to a different set of labor-intensive strategies. Those who embrace institutional control of research work in concert with one another to facilitate this trend. Conversely, the majority who tolerate and the minority who passionately oppose such institutional control could join forces to resist it, but appear to lack the collectivist impulse necessary to do so. As the generation of opposers retires and engagers increase in prevalence and power, the range of available orientations and methodological approaches may markedly narrow, with possible effects on the production of sociological knowledge.

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