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Cultural Complications Translating Principles Into Practice

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Drawing from educational research conducted in Canada and Mexico, university researchers explore how culture complicates both the ethics review process and the translation of ethical research principles into practice. University researchers in Canadian contexts seek approval from university Research Ethics Boards to conduct research, following policies outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. In this article, the authors consider some cross-cultural ethical dilemmas in relation to educational research, which is often qualitative and interpretive in nature and conducted in schooling settings. Drawing from educational research, the authors conduct both in Canada and in an international context an exploration of how culture complicates both the ethics review process and the translation of ethical research principles into practice. As a result of their experiences, the authors focus specifically on issues related to consent, reciprocity, anonymity and confidentiality, and data representation.

Keywords: *university ethics review boards; cultural complications; consent; reciprocity; representation; cross-cultural research; international research*

Individuals connected to Canadian university contexts who want to conduct research with human participants (funded or otherwise) must submit ethics review applications to a Research Ethics Board (REB), a committee of people consisting of faculty, community members, and administrative staff who are guided by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates), implemented in 1998. Three federal granting agencies (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, formerly the Medical Research Council of Canada, the

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council) developed and approved this unified policy applicable to research whether conducted locally, nationally, or internationally. The requirements for adherence to the TCPS are explained in a memorandum of understanding signed by all Canadian universities and the three granting agencies (Canada, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Canadian Institutes of Health, 2002). In the United States, university researchers submit applications to Institutional Review Boards (Anderson, 1996; Sieber, 1992) that serve a role similar to Canadian REBs and many university ethics review boards around the world (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; McNeill, 1993).

In this article, we focus a critical lens on the ethics review process, exploring complications that arise as a result of the interpretation and application of standard policy and procedures across all research contexts. Specifically, we highlight challenges related to culture. Complications arising because of cultural differences are expected and often acknowledged when researchers cross oceans and land to conduct research (Gormley, 2005). However, cultural differences at home, if not blatant or a focus of research, are often left unaddressed. To speak to this silence, in addition to considering international contexts, we take up cultural considerations more broadly and in our article include illustrations that arise when individuals conduct research on home territory, often not recognizing the cultural implications arising from their positioning in relation to the research and the cultural knowledge(s) they carry (or not) into the research context. We illustrate how ethical issues often become visible only as research proceeds and, as a result, cannot be addressed outside the research context and before the research begins.

Although the TCPS has been criticized for the experimental, positivist assumptions embedded in the policy (van den Hoonaard, 2002b), a close read of the actual document shows a certain (although limited) degree of flexibility built into the policy and procedures (e.g., choice in procedures for the use of secondary data). However, even while acknowledging the slight openness reflected in the document, we argue that formal institutional ethics approval based on initial research applications can only play a limited role in ensuring ethical research practices, particularly when methodologies of choice do not fall within traditional positivist research paradigms, as is the case with interpretive, qualitative research. Kellner (2002) suggests that

> when we [social science researchers] consider ethical issues, we are often less than comfortable, for we must grapple with a lack of correspondence

> between codes of ethics and the conduct of ethnographic methods, especially when the codes are interpreted literally and without regard for the range of research circumstances that are not informed by the methods of natural science. (p. 26)

Many researchers regulated by the TCPS argue that applying standard policies and procedures to proposed research, regardless of contexts and methodologies, may in fact create conditions that shape research in ways that contradict the underlying assumptions of the methodologies and work against supporting ethical conduct in situ (Bosk & DeVries, 2004; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, 2004; van den Hoonaard, 2002a).

Our interest in ethics review processes and their influence on research conducted emerges from our experiences (past and more recently) submitting applications to REBs. As a doctoral student, Susan conducted a critical ethnography within a prison school context not prepared for nor realizing, until after the research commenced, the cultural complications of such work. She continues to submit applications to an REB as a faculty member and assists students she supervises to do the same. She has recently completed a 3-year term as a member of an REB.

Louise, a PhD candidate in a comparative international education program, has conducted research in a low socioeconomic region of northern Mexico. Her experience of gaining permission to conduct research in a "foreign" country from an REB situated in a Canadian context posed challenges related to the mismatch between REB requirements and the cultural norms of the community in which she conducted her research. Her experiences illustrate that ethics review guidelines of one country cannot always be easily translated into practice in other national and international research sites.

Our article addresses issues with which we struggled as we faced complications that we had not considered in our qualitative research designs or during the ethics review process.

Ethical Issues and the Practice of Research

In this section, we focus specifically on ethical concerns common to qualitative researchers when conducting research with human participants. These include consent, reciprocity, anonymity and confidentiality, and data representation. Using our past research experiences, we illustrate the cultural complications that emerged as we conducted our research.

Consent and the TCPS

All Canadian universities are guided by the principles and procedures articulated in the TCPS (1998, with 2000, 2002 updates); however, universities individually interpret the policy and create guidelines that researchers must follow to gain approval to conduct research. Although the aim is standard policy and practice, as can be imagined, multiple interpretations across institutions can lead to slight variance in the application of policy and procedures. In the Canadian model, free and informed consent "lies at the heart of ethical research involving human subjects" and has been defined as "a process that begins with the initial contact and carries through to the end of the involvement of research subjects in the project" (TCPS, 1998, Section 2, Article 2.1). The idea is that participants should be provided with adequate information so that they are able to make informed decisions about their initial and continuing participation in the research.

The default expectation is that written consent will be the evidence of choice, indicating individuals are fully informed and voluntarily decided to take part in the research. Consent forms must contain specific information. For example, a statement must be included indicating the participant was invited (and not required) to participate. Specific details of what participation entails must also be listed on the form.

The policy also describes instances where consent procedures do not culminate with a signed form. The TCPS (1998, with 2000, 2002 updates) contains a short discussion of situations when verbal agreement may be preferable to a request for a signature:

> Article 2.1(b) states the preference for written evidence of free and informed consent . . . [and] acknowledges that written consent is not always appropriate. For most people in our society, a signed statement is the normal evidence of consent. However, for some groups or individuals, a verbal agreement, perhaps with a handshake, is evidence of trust, and a request for a signature may imply distrust. Nonetheless, in most cases a written statement of the information conveyed in the consent process, signed or not, should be left with the subject. In some types of research, oral consent may be preferable. In others, written consent is mandatory. Where oral consent is appropriate, the researcher may wish to make a contemporaneous journal entry of the event and circumstances. These and like elements may sometimes need to be refined in concert with the REB, which plays an essential educational and consultative role in the process of seeking free and informed consent. (p. 2.2)

Article 2.1(b) reveals an awareness of how culture might complicate the seeking of free and informed consent. However, this implies only a cursory

consideration of the role of culture in the ethics review process and serves to minimize the multiple ways in which negotiating informed consent can be very differently construed across diverse cultures (Barrett & Parker, 2003; Simonelli & Earle, 2003; Turner, 2003).

The TCPS also includes a specific section discussing research involving aboriginal communities and ways in which to proceed to gain access and consent (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates, pp. 6.1-6.4). Overall, the direction given in regard to ethics and cultural sensitivity(s) is extremely limited, especially considering the fact that national funding bodies (e.g., Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) encourage collaborative research across national and international contexts.

Consent at Home

Susan conducted a critical ethnography in a school housed in a federal/provincial women's prison (Tilley, 1998a). Before being contracted to teach in the prison, she had never been on the "inside." Only after passing through the various locked barriers between the prison entrance and the school housed at the center of the prison did she feel she was on familiar ground. Her teaching context, which later became a research context, was an institution (school) within an institution (prison), and participants were a vulnerable population of incarcerated women.

Multiple cultures were intersecting and influencing the research, all of which were, for the most part, unfamiliar to the researcher. In her ethics application, Susan outlined the bodies from whom she would gain permission. These included various authorities, college officials who hired her to teach in the prison, the federal, provincial, and local officials, including the prison authorities, and the teachers. The women choosing to participate also signed individual consent forms. Numerous consent forms were collected and stored in a locked filing cabinet, fulfilling requirements as outlined in the TCPS. However, as she conducted the research, Susan questioned whether the review process better served and protected the researcher and the university than the participants themselves (Tilley, 1998b).

The research included a vulnerable population where human rights were often confused in the daily workings of the institution. In the prison, authorities and/or prisoners themselves did not always agree on what constituted prisoners' rights. Rights as research participants were even less understood. Collecting signed papers indicating that individuals voluntarily agreed to participate was the easier piece of the consent process. Ensuring that the women understood what they were agreeing to and the possible outcomes was more complicated.

In the initial stages of the research, although familiar with the context as a result of her teaching, Susan was limited in her cultural knowledge related to the larger institutional prison and incarceration, and this affected her decisions as she conducted the research. For example, normally Susan conducted interviews in a visitors' area in the prison, but on occasion, she was directed to conduct the sessions in the "interview" room in the participant's cellblock. Not understanding the implications of this location, she agreed. The designated area was a multipurpose room where lawyers could meet their clients and prison authorities could question the women. Women talking and being recorded were visible, through a glass window, to anyone passing by. Prisoners, and others, could have interpreted the scene in the room in multiple ways, one of the most damaging being that the participant was telling tales and possibly an informer. It was only after a participant described being asked by another prisoner what she was doing during the interview did Susan realize the risk in which she had placed the women, a risk to which the participants had not known they were consenting.

The consent process appears very straightforward on paper and as detailed in the research design. The TCPS describes the consent process as ongoing and the continued responsibility of the researcher. However, nowhere in the policy and procedures description is an emphasis placed on the researchers' responsibility to acknowledge the limitations of their cultural knowledge in relation to the research context and to find ways to address that limitation before and during the conduct of research. Without applying sensitivity to the ways in which research intersects with cultural norms, participants may be placed at risk when research designs and data collection procedures are inappropriate for the specific research context. Decisions that researchers make about consent procedures before contact with research communities and participants are extremely limited in the case of interpretive, ethnographic research designs.

Consent in a "Foreign" Land

When Louise submitted her request for ethics approval from her university's REB, she completed the same application that all researchers complete irrespective of whether the research proposed is cross-cultural or international. An online guide, *Ethics Review at the University of Toronto*, published by the University of Toronto, Office of the Vice-President, Research & Associate Provost (2004), is available to prospective researchers preparing the ethical review protocol, but this guide does not highlight cultural complications possible across international contexts. At a later stage in the

ethics review process, Louise was asked for further clarifications describing how exactly she would obtain consent in a non-Canadian, mostly nonliterate research context. In international research, an even greater possibility exists that researchers (novice and otherwise) may differentially interpret aspects of the research context and participants' needs (informational and personal) and that complications will arise as research proceeds; therefore, special attention rather than a minimal emphasis needs to be placed on the possible ethical issues that may emerge from cultural complications in the field.

University ethics review boards were not in evidence in the Mexican context where Louise conducted her research. When academics in that context, either faculty or student, decide to conduct research, they must first seek approval from the applicable government bodies, such as the state or federal Ministry of Education. If the research is conducted in a school, the school's principal is the ultimate authority and has the right to accept or veto the study. From this particular Mexican perspective, the very act of agreeing to participate in the study is seen as sufficient proof of the participants' consent, and so the academic researcher need not obtain any further evidence of free and informed consent, such as signatures or journal entries of verbal agreement.

By Canadian standards, the Mexican informed consent procedures described above may appear lax. By Mexican standards, the Canadian concept of informed consent is highly legalistic and coldhearted. How does a Canadian researcher doing research in northern Mexico reconcile these two different worlds? In this conundrum, Louise was never able to find an ideological location in which she felt completely comfortable and is still searching for such a place. In actual practice, she followed the Canadian model. Her participants fell into two groups: literate and nonliterate. For literate participants (teachers and principals), she followed the usual procedure of explaining informed consent forms and acquiring signatures. For nonliterate participants (usually parents), she audiotaped her explanation of the study and their verbal agreement. Nonetheless, her methods of obtaining informed consent were far from culturally sensitive.

In Louise's research context, the perceived integrity of the researcher's character held far more weight with a potential participant than did formal methods of seeking evidence of free and informed consent, including ethics approval from an institutional research review board. Thus, Louise's acquiring signatures and audiorecording verbal assent was sometimes seen as a superfluous step that emphasized distrust between participant and researcher. After all, if the researcher was truly a "good and honest person,"

then surely such paperwork and audiotaping would not be necessary. If Louise's intentions as a researcher were noble, then there should be no participant/researcher misunderstandings and no need to provide written documents to the participants or to acquire evidence of free and informed consent through signatures and audiotape recordings.

Louise's experiences demonstrate that the concept of informed consent articulated through the TCPS, when transplanted to other international contexts, may in application even further complicate the ethical issues of cross-cultural research.

Reciprocity: Giving Back

Reciprocity occurs when the researcher gives back to participants and/or to their communities. The TCPS explores some issues related to reciprocity in Section 6B "Research Involving Aboriginal People – Good Practices." These good practices promote the active involvement of the aboriginal community in the research endeavor, with one of the aims being to provide reciprocity. Some suggestions are for researchers:

- To conceptualize and conduct research with aboriginal groups as a partnership
- To consult members of the group who have relevant expertise
- To involve the group in the design of the project
- To examine how the research may be shaped to address the needs and concerns of the group. (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates, p. 6.3)

Both Section 6B and Section H Article 1.14 (which will be discussed below) consider aspects of reciprocity in cross-cultural and/or international research.

Reciprocity on Foreign Soil

In Article 1.14 in Section 1H "Review of Research in Other Jurisdictions or Countries," the TCPS reminds researchers of their duty to ensure that the benefits of their research are accessible to the host country. At the same time, researchers are not expected to take on unreasonable expectations of aid responsibilities:

> Furthermore, researchers should ensure that the benefits of their research are available in the host country. Benefits may, for example, take the form of information-sharing, training for local personnel both in the host country and in Canada, or health care or similar services. However, since researchers are

> not aid agencies, REBs should not try to force them to undertake aid work. (TCPS, 1998, with 2000, 2002 updates, p. 1.12)

Researchers conducting international studies are sometimes criticized for acting as "saviours on white horses" who go into foreign contexts and from their positions of privilege prescribe ill-fitting solutions to populations culturally different from their own, often causing risk to the groups studied (G. Dei, personal communication, July 19, 2003; Gormley, 2005; Smith, 1999). A growing body of literature seeks to shed light on the hidden racism inherent in many cross-cultural research methodologies (Dei, 1999; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Stanfield, 1993, 1994; Smith, 1999). Some authors question if ethical research is even possible when privileged academics conduct their research in poor communities, especially if they overstep their boundaries and attempt to offer answers to developing countries' social problems (Patai, 1992; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Thorny ethical issues surrounding reciprocity arise when international researchers believe their research brings benefits to the host country but host nationals do not perceive so-called benefits in a positive light.

On the other hand, limitations also exist when a Canadian academic conducting research in a foreign context decides to keep silent out of fear of imposing dominant thinking on the community being researched. For example, although it was understood that Louise's research was mainly an exploration of issues of educational success among various stakeholders, the Mexican Ministry of Education gave her permission to conduct her project only if she agreed, after completion of the research, to submit to them a copy of her recommendations. Reciprocity in the form of recommendations was of prime importance to the Mexican Ministry of Education. It is interesting that when she submitted her research ethics application to her university REB, she was only required to consider two questions that were related, in a circuitous way, to reciprocity: "What do you hope to accomplish with this research?" and "What are the implications/applications of the research?" Even her university REB's directives on risks and benefits were a superficial, at best, consideration of the possible benefits to a community under study (University of Toronto, Office of the Vice-President, Research & Associate Provost, 2004). Prospective researchers are asked, among other things, whether participants have been informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time, that they will not be judged nor evaluated, that they may be given the opportunity to review transcripts, and that they may be provided with a summary of the study results (University of Toronto, Office of the Vice-President, Research & Associate Provost,

2004). Thus, "benefits" were addressed with minimal discussion in ethics review guidelines; however, reciprocity in the form of recommendations was of prime importance to the Mexican Ministry of Education.

By the time her study is completed, Louise's efforts to provide reciprocity will include a written document submitted to the Mexican Ministry of Education detailing ideas for improvement that were mostly gathered from participants, as well as a significant amount of time dedicated to volunteer teaching while she was in the field. But will her efforts at reciprocity be enough? By what criteria can research be deemed to have provided sufficient reciprocity?

Louise did not consult her Mexican research community prior to designing the study as is recommended in Section 6B "Good Practices" of the TCPS (1998, with 2000, 2002 updates). Ideally, prior to conceptualizing her study, she should have consulted with members of this particular Mexican community "to examine how the research may be shaped to address the needs and concerns of the group" (TCPS, 1998, p. 6.3). However, this was logistically impossible, so Louise designed her research while she was in Canada and then flew to Mexico to conduct the study. Thus, her research was inherently less likely to provide reciprocity than if interested Mexican parties or her participant group had been involved in, or informing aspects of, the original project design. Nonetheless, through her future submission of recommendations (mostly originating from participants) to the Mexican Ministry of Education, possibilities still exist for Louise's study to be a catalyst for at least a few changes beneficial to the community researched.

Reciprocity in a "Total" Institution

Susan in her ethics application addressed benefits, as many researchers do, with very general statements. She suggested the possibility that the research would be useful to high school teachers and prison educators at some nebulous time in the future. Her work would contribute to a body of growing literature. Susan's limited awareness of the institutional and prisoner cultures embedded in her research site made it difficult for her to know in advance what possibilities existed in regard to reciprocity. As always in ethnographic work, relationships are fluid, and methods applied contextually as the research proceeds (Adler & Adler, 2002). The TCPS does not take this into account with its demands for researchers to tell all in their ethics review applications. O'Neill (2002) writes, "This requirement that the project be fully known in advance is troublesome in qualitative research, where the notion of discovery during inquiry is usually considered a strength—not a weakness—of the approach" (p. 18).

How can researchers give back to participants captive in a prison institution? For many conducting research in a prison, a typical form of reciprocity is payment of a small sum of money to the participants. Many prisoners have little access to money, so agreeing to be research participants opens up an avenue to finances not otherwise available. The participant becomes indebted to the researcher and works for her money. Obvious problems exist with enlisting people for research purposes by agreeing to pay them when they have little or no access to money. Would individuals not so desperate for funds agree to partake in the same research projects? In most cases, we suggest they would not.

Once familiar with the daily procedures and cultural norms of a total institution such as a prison, researchers can find other ways to provide some benefits for those who have given to their research. Oftentimes, these concrete benefits provide material relief for participants. For example, it is not surprising that women's rights are not always respected in ways they would be outside the institution. In regard to medical treatment, it was common practice for women to be made to wait extensive time periods to be seen by medical staff. Prisoners whom Susan came to know in her role as teacher and through the research, when sick, would still come to the school and ask Susan to call the clinic on their behalf. Although the process raised the ire of the guards and medical staff, it was unlikely that they would ignore the teacher's request when liability might become a future issue. Women found relief more quickly as a result of Susan's (and other teachers') interventions.

Reciprocity, similar to other aspects of interpretive, ethnographic work, cannot always be planned before knowledge is accumulated about research contexts and participants. Women in prison are a captive audience and are often asked to participate in research, not always agreeing as voluntarily as it may appear. Research suggests that women are, for the most part, treated as children in prison contexts, making none of the everyday decisions they have made for most of their lives. Carlen (1983) states that

> women . . . whose [lives have] been steeped in the ethos of maternal responsibility, experience a very specific and painful loss of status when they themselves are treated as the children of a paternalistic regime which denies them adulthood. (p. 113)

The possibility of any woman's decision being voluntary is influenced by her prison experiences. Women incarcerated are acculturated into a context where it is safer to say yes and keep silent rather than ask questions or voice dissent.

Susan's most telling experience related to reciprocity was connected to the new knowledge the women gained about their rights as research participants as a result of their involvement in her study (for a more comprehensive discussion, see Tilley, 1998b). Jane, one of the participants in Susan's study, had also agreed to participate in another research project being conducted in the prison. Jane explained to Susan that when she agreed to participate in the other study, she had not realized that the researcher planned to use a video camera. The consent form had said taped, not videotaped. Jane described telling the researcher that she was uncomfortable being videotaped. The researcher responded to her concerns by turning off the camera and taking a break, only to continue videotaping after a short lapse of time. Jane explained to Susan that she felt she could not refuse to continue with the interview because she had been paid $10.00, which she had spent and could not return.

After a discussion about participant rights in research with Susan and with the students in the prison class, Jane made the decision to refuse to take part in the second, already agreed-on, interview. After that incident, Jane and other women started to ask questions and make demands of researchers who invited them to participate in their studies. One woman informed a researcher that the consent form she provided only indicated that the interviews would be taped, not videotaped. She explained she would not participate if video cameras were used. The researcher decided to audiotape the interviews to meet the demands of the potential participants. For Susan, the women's developing confidence and critique of researcher practices and the knowledge they gained related to the rights of research participants was a form of reciprocity she had not accounted for in her original ethics application.

Reciprocity needs to be given serious consideration in relation to all research. Researchers acknowledging complications specific to different research contexts and participants may enhance possibilities of addressing reciprocity in culturally sensitive ways. However, it is unlikely that the possibilities for reciprocity and for that matter harm can be decided once and for all before research proceeds.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Multiple Readings

Positivist assumptions inform the requirements for confidentiality and anonymity in the TCPS. Although anonymity may be possible in experimental, quantitative research designs, it is extremely difficult (and some would argue a questionable goal) to promise in interpretive, qualitative research (Walford, 2005; Wax, 1980). Rather than require a distanced objectivity on

the part of the researcher and inflexible controls and measures in data collection, interpretive methodologies often expect a familiarity and assume that relationships between researchers and participants are fluid and develop in the field with time (Patai, 1992; Stack, 1996). Thick description is at the heart of ethnographic research but complicates the possibilities of ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. As well, participants themselves may not want to remain anonymous or have their words tagged with pseudonyms. In the report, *Giving Voice to the Spectrum*, the following statement was made relating to the issue of voice and Canadian researchers' concerns for respectful practices in regard to anonymity:

> Considerations of "voice" are crucial within several methodological traditions, and many researchers noted that attention to "respect for the dignity of persons" should normally recognize participants' right to ask to be identified and to have their views correctly attributed to them. (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, 2004, p. 30)

Louise found that the direction of the TCPS in relation to anonymity was an uneasy fit in her international context. While collecting data, she discovered that the vast majority of her participants had a highly negative interpretation of anonymity. Out of 41 participants (consisting of teachers and parents) who could have chosen to remain anonymous in her dissertation, only one teacher-participant selected that option. All other teacher-participants preferred their real names be used in her dissertation as well as in any future related papers. Some of the participants went to great lengths to ensure their full names had been spelt correctly. A few even offered their photographs for inclusion in any publications. Perhaps a few participants may have wanted a little recognition (maybe even a little fame?) for their contributions to the community and to the study. One of Louise's participants, the popular teacher Luis Adán Pulido Correa (personal communication, May 14, 2003), explained, with a fun-loving smile and only partially joking,

> I like the idea that up in Canada, some people are going to read about me and that my name will be in a book. I think it's great that somebody who lives as far away as Canada is going to know that in the little town of Garcia, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, there is this Grade 6 teacher by the name of Maestro Luis Pulido who tries his hardest to teach his students and who plans science experiments for them to do.

Louise's parent-participants were even more adamant in their insistence that their real names be used when quoting them. As Doctor Camilo Manilla

(personal communication, March 18, 2003), the President of the Francisco Beltran Otero Primary School Parents Association, said fervently, "If I were to use a pseudonym, it would be like denying the paternity of my own child." Most mothers, including Señora Graciela Martinez, Señora Martha Morales, and Doña Monica Cecilia Reyes Ramirez, found the entire concept of anonymity and confidentiality to be rather odd and foreign. One father, Señor Tomás Martínez, ridiculed the option of his words remaining confidential in the thesis, saying that only a coward would choose to hide his identity.

Although an educational researcher must obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct a study, Louise's experience was that the Mexican academic research paradigm generally does not take into consideration such North American concerns as participants' rights to privacy, confidentiality, and manner of data representation. Although ethics in a broader sense is widely studied and analyzed (J. G. Garza Treviño, personal communication, August 21, 2004), the narrower theme of "ethical issues in university research involving human subjects" is not prominent at the universities in the northern region of Mexico where Louise conducted her research, much less in a poor community where such ideas are particularly alien.

Except for some elite private foreign schools, the schools (both public and private) in Louise's Mexican research community rarely required as many parental permission forms as our Canadian school system does. Canadian educational institutions at all levels adhere to a far more legalistic and paper-filled view of the world. Therefore, many of the ethics guidelines that have become standard procedure in the North American model of academic research involving human subjects (for example, offering participants the option of confidentiality) can be viewed as rather strange behavior on the part of the researcher in this particular Mexican context.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Women Incarcerated

Anonymity and confidentiality take on special meaning in a prison context. Issues of protection are complex. Anonymity is difficult to promise in any research but particularly for interpretive, ethnographic work that focuses on creating "thick description" to meet criteria for credibility and uses interviews as means of collecting data. Conducting interviews in the prison itself compromised any possibility of anonymity, so the greater concern was for confidentiality—that participants' names not be connected to any specific data. A number of women participated in the research because they had lots to say about their experiences in public schools and they saw the research as

a means to have their words recorded. When asked about using pseudonyms, participants spoke of not caring if their real names were used. Susan encouraged them to create pseudonyms (or permit her to) because of her concern that something seemingly insignificant recorded may be used against participants at a later date. Also, including the names of participants who requested their names be used might, in certain circumstances, make the identification of those not wanting to be recognized possible.

Agreeing with Carlen's (1983) analysis of the process of infantilization of women in prison, Susan tried to be respectful of the participants' choices of what was okay or not to reveal. However, she was not confident that her own assessment or the women's was informed enough to foresee future dangers. Although erring on the side of caution may have been the appropriate decision in the moment, Susan believes her actions might also be perceived of as patronizing participants and reinforcing the notion that the women were not able to decide for themselves what was in their best interests.

Writing Up/Down Our Data

> It is the ethnographer who lays her fingers on the keyboard to play the final note in the chorus of voices. (Stack, 1996, p. 106)

We both experienced difficulties making choices about what to include in our final research documents, recognizing what we produced would consist of truths that were "inherently partial-committed and incomplete" (Clifford, 1986, p. 7) and not a replication of an objective reality. Our difficulties lay in our desire to respectfully re/present participants who kindly participated in our research. Issues of re/presentation in relation to interpretive research are taken up in multiple ways in the research literature (Borland, 1992; Clifford, 1986; Fine & Weis, 1996; Patai, 1991; Van Maanen, 1988). We provide a limited discussion related to specific decisions we made that influenced our manufacturing of text.

Article 2.1 of the section titled "Free and Informed Consent" of the TCPS acknowledges the difficulties that language barriers present; however, it does so only with respect to free and informed consent and not with respect to the re/presentation of participants' lives and perspectives. When conducting her research in a "foreign" country, Louise did not need an interpreter. She learned to speak and understand Spanish from her Mexican mother. Having lived in northern Mexico for several years in her childhood and young adult life, Louise embarked on her research with cultural knowledge of the research site. In spite of her Spanish-language fluency and her

familiarity with the northern Mexican culture, she nevertheless still experienced difficulties making decisions related to data re/presentation.

What is "factual" and necessary to write from the researcher's perspective may serve to further stereotype already marginalized people. The poverty that Louise's Mexican research community experienced had a dramatic negative effect on children's right to medical attention and to basic good health. When Louise describes the impoverished living conditions of her Mexican participants, she must think deeply about the language she chooses to create a respectful re/presentation of what it means to live in dire poverty. She must do so without resorting to hyperbole and sensationalism that may in fact embarrass her participants.

When Louise applied to her university's REB, she was unaware that decisions related to how to re/present her participants in a way that maintained their human dignity and yet revealed their lack of material wealth would emerge as an ethical issue. Nor was she asked to consider the possibility of such challenges.

When researchers travel abroad without being able to speak/research in the language(s) of the host country, they often conduct interviews through interpreters, individuals who may consciously/unconsciously influence data through their interpretive acts. Researchers (whether conducting research abroad or at home) distanced from raw data, through the bodies of interpreters or others (e.g., transcribers) are often re/presenting data with which they have limited familiarity, making respectful re/presentation more difficult as well as possibly bringing credibility of findings into question (Tilley & Powick, 2002).

As Susan began to write up her data, questions of re/presentation also emerged. With her developing understandings of incarceration and prison culture, she was more knowledgeable about the media discourse's misrepresentation of women in prison and wanted to ensure her final document did not contribute to the stereotypical representations frequently broadcast across newspapers and televisions. She made "thought full" choices of what to write and leave unsaid. In particular, word choice took on a seriousness that she had not envisioned at the beginning of her research. For example, Susan purposefully refused to use the watered-down, softened language that has developed over time in the discourse related to the criminalization and incarceration of women (as well as men), in which, for example, *inmates* is the term used instead of *prisoners*, *correctional center* in place of *prison*, *living unity* instead of *cell*. Her growing knowledge of the institutional culture and the lives of women in prison encouraged her to make

public, through her documentation and writing, the contradiction inherent in the belief that rehabilitation is the goal of total institutions and to emphasize the debilitating effects of criminalizing and incarcerating women who pose no danger to society (Faith, 1993).

Conclusion

We are not arguing against ethics review of research involving human participants within university contexts. Past history suggests some form of ethics review is necessary (McNeill, 1993). However, institutional ethics review is limited in its ability to ensure that respectful, ethical research actually takes place. Completing an ethics review process and successfully gaining approval from an REB does not necessarily translate into ethical practice as research proceeds, and some would argue may in fact inhibit possibilities for ethical issues to be appropriately addressed, especially in the case of interpretive, ethnographic research. A degree of flexibility, although limited, related to cultural implications is built into the TCPS policy; however, to argue for alternative procedures in ethics applications, researchers must be thoroughly versed in the policy documents, which is often not the case. In cross-cultural and international research, even when a study has received REB approval, the real risk exists that the application of Canadian TCPS notions of free and informed consent, reciprocity, and confidentiality and anonymity will be applied in a manner that turns out to be neither culturally sensitive nor respectful.

The TCPS provides guidelines that are often incompatible with interpretive qualitative research (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Special Working Committee, 2004; van den Hoonaard, 2002b) and as such increase the difficulty to be ethical in situ. We are suggesting that issues related to culture (broadly construed) need to be recognized, acknowledged, and addressed in flexible ways. With the growing push from national funding bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Council to conduct international research, more attention (including the researchers') needs to be focused on the cross-cultural complexities of translating ethical principles, in particular those ostensibly espoused by the TCPS, into practice. This article, we hope, will serve as a springboard for further collaborative dialogue about the ethics review process in relation to international and domestic research contexts where culture complicates the pursuit of respectful research.

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