CHAPTER 8

Ethics

> A moral law, like a law in physics, is not something to swear by and stick to at all hazards; it is a formula of the way to respond when specified conditions present themselves. Its soundness and pertinence are tested by what happens when it is acted upon.
>
> Dewey (1929, p. 222)

Ethical concerns permeate a pragmatist approach to methodology. We have already discussed ethical issues in Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9. This is because, as Dewey's quote suggests, pragmatism is focused on action in and on the social world (Kilpinen, 2009). Whether we are planning a holiday or conducting research, human action is embedded in a field of norms, values, and standards. In so far as human action is consequential for other people, it is also moral. Thus, in so far as human action contributes, even in a small way, to the future of human relations, it requires responsibility.

Social science research has become increasingly aware of ethical issues since the mid-twentieth century. There are increasing guidelines covering an increasingly broad range of research contexts. This includes, for instance, the ethical standards set up by the American Psychological Association as well as international standards set up, for example, by the Declaration of Helsinki. The general principles of the former are (1) beneficence and nonmaleficence; (2) fidelity and responsibility; (3) integrity; (4) justice; and (5) respect for people's rights and dignity (American Psychological Association, 2023). The Declaration of Helsinki focuses more broadly on medical research involving human subjects. It starts from the premise that the health and well-being of participants are of paramount importance and, as such, that research should be guided by safeguarding the participant's interests (World Medical Association, 2022). These interests are served by following established research practices, including informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Consent forms typically

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list these rights and ask participants to acknowledge that they have been informed about the study and agree to participate.

The challenge, however, is how to move beyond ethics as "box ticking," a bureaucratic exercise that asks researchers to comply with formal requirements without necessarily engaging them in moral inquiry and deliberation. While the standards listed earlier are useful and morally sound (who would disagree with the idea of prioritizing a participant's health and sense of well-being?), they are rarely foregrounded for researchers or participants unless the investigation deals with a controversial topic or vulnerable populations. These guidelines preexist the encounter between researcher and participants and, beyond signing the consent form at the outset, rarely appear again in the research process. Pragmatism, with its emphasis on consequences, reflexivity, and sensemaking, insists that ethics is not a separate moment in research but an integral part of it (Baker & Schaltegger, 2015; Simpson & den Hond, 2022). Ethical deliberation should permeate the entire research process, from setting the aims to the consequences of the findings.

As such, pragmatism invites researchers to go beyond thinking of ethics only (or mainly) in terms of data collection and storage (through informed consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw, deleting data after the study, etc.). While these standards are important, the rituals associated with satisfying them (and, by extension, satisfying ethics review boards often faced with difficult tasks) risk becoming empty of meaning, in the worst case, or, at the very least, make researchers miss valuable opportunities for deeper forms of questioning (Schrag, 2011). For example, what do the participants, in contrast to the ethics committee, think about the research? Who is the knowledge created for? What does the knowledge "do"? What kinds of interests does it serve? Does the investigation promote prediction and control, or does it also empower its participants? Might there be unintended consequences of the research?

These questions should be central to any research project, from its conception and execution to its dissemination and impact. Unfortunately, it is much more likely for engaged ethical reflections to be part of doctoral dissertations (especially in the qualitative research tradition) than to appear in articles reporting empirical studies. The latter typically only briefly mention International Review Board approvals or the national or international guidelines followed, with little reflection on how ethics shaped the aims and approach of the research. The roots of this problem run deep. They concern a specific view of the relationship between science and ethics that pragmatist thinkers and researchers are eager to challenge.

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In essence, a false opposition has been constructed between scientific discovery and the need to protect human subjects, a dichotomy that often places researchers in the uncomfortable position of negotiating what they see as competing pulls (Brendel & Miller, 2008). This view stems from the implicit assumption, in positivism, that scientific work should be "objective" and detached from "biased" human interests and concerns (see Chapters 2, 3, and 9). On the contrary, ethics foregrounds the individuals involved and rejects "an amoral position where 'facts' become separated from 'values', and are reduced to data, to variables whose numerical values are more important than their practical meanings" (Simpson & den Hond, 2022, p. 139). And yet, research participants have rarely been included in discussions about ethics (e.g., providing feedback on the ethical aspects of the study they participated in). In contrast, from a pragmatist standpoint, participants are on the front line of research ethics because they have the clearest view of the ethical implications of the research on those who participate in it. The point is that ethical concerns are too often reduced to a narrow version of "protecting human subjects" or the well-known "duty of care," which can be perceived as constraining by researchers, even leading them to abandon potentially impactful research. "Doing" science and being ethical risk being perceived as conflicting constraints rather than integrated practices and concerns.

Pragmatists are keen on dismantling this false opposition and bringing together science and ethics as part of a unitary process of inquiry, discovery, and moral deliberation. To achieve this, however, we need to consider research ethics as more than a series of guidelines and obligations. In the pragmatist tradition, ethics is conceived

> as a spirit of open inquiry and practically focused reasoning about ethical dilemmas. It can be described as a 'bottom up' approach to ethics in which moral and philosophical thinking is generated in response to (and is intended to resolve) day-to-day dilemmas. … Pragmatic research ethics strives to carefully identify and analyze competing values in practical contexts of … research, recognizing that moral trade-offs, pitting scientific validity and subject protection, are inevitable. (Brendel & Miller, 2008, p. 25)

In this chapter, we develop the pragmatist proposition that *social research creates both power and responsibility* – that ethics is an integral part of any research process, beginning to end, and that a pragmatist stance widens the role of ethics and shifts the focus from ethical boards and researchers to board, researchers, participants, and other stakeholders. We will also argue that moral inquiry is enhanced when using multi-resolution research

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given that it presents us with unique opportunities in both research and ethical terms.

The chapter is structured as follows: First, we frame the larger debate concerning universalism versus contextualism in ethics, largely mirroring the one between positivism and relativism in science. We propose that pragmatism transcends this dichotomy as well by considering the role of general (and particular) ethical norms and values in context. Then, we outline briefly what the pragmatist approach to ethics is founded on before discussing the ways in which ethical concerns and forms of reasoning accompany every phase of a research project. The practice of deception, widespread and controversial in social and psychological research, provides a case study. Finally, we end with considerations regarding mixed methods and multi-resolution research and their ethical commitments before offering some concluding thoughts.

8.1 Framing the Debate

The assumed opposition between science and ethics persists because of an oversharp distinction between objective "facts" versus human "values." The history of ethics is marked by numerous attempts to establish universal normative principles rather than operate with context-based moral judgments. From Plato to Kant, the main task has been to rationally derive moral guidelines that, once properly justified, could be applied across all contexts and situations. The alternative was considered to be irrational and dangerous: the fragmentation of ethics into a myriad of personal beliefs and self-serving conceptions. The normative approach inspired, among others, the creation of general ethical guidelines for researchers and their promotion by national and international bodies. According to Altman (1983, pp. 227–228), some key assumptions behind universalist ethics include the following:

1. There is some unique set of principles that specifies ethical conduct for any individual in any historical period.
2. There is some unique set of principles that specifies for all historical periods the ethical social order.
3. The task of fully justifying a set of ethical principles must proceed from an ethically neutral starting point.

The normative approach embraces universalism and rejects relativism in ethics (see also Chapters 2 and 3). Universalists judge the morality of other people's actions from an outside position by referring to transcendent

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ethical principles. The reason is that the origin of moral beliefs, be it God or Reason, is immovable and all-encompassing. Relativists, in contrast, "claim that because individuals are socially constructed, the types of people produced in these different cultures differ so widely as to render such judgment impossible" (Butt, 2000, p. 86); they see moral values as essentially constructed. As such, ethical principles – and especially dealing with ethical dilemmas – require interpretation and a great deal of local knowledge. One should not try to judge others "from the outside," without trying to understand their position and worldview from the inside. The risk with this position, as Butt also notes, is that what is moral or immoral becomes a question of societal practices. This can become problematic, for example, when dealing with something like universal human rights. Should they be pursued with no consideration for historical differences and local knowledge? Relativists would not necessarily argue against extending human rights, and certainly neither would pragmatists (Hoover, 2016), but their approach would be guided by doubt and questioning rather than an unexamined reliance on norms.

Pragmatists are promoters of moral deliberation and, as such, might seem to be on the side of relativism rather than universalism in ethics. Yet it would be wrong to assume this. In fact, the uniqueness of the pragmatist standpoint is that it tries to integrate normative-universalist and contextual-relativist positions. Pragmatism tries to move the debate beyond these oppositions by proposing moral pluralism (Graham et al., 2013). In contrast to both universalists and relativists, pragmatists privilege the voice of the participants in the research (and, more broadly, those who will be on the receiving end of the knowledge produced). When giving these stakeholders a voice in research ethics, it is expected that their ethical judgments will be shaped by their culture and norms (i.e., aspects of relativism), but there will also be absolute constraints that researchers cannot ignore (i.e., aspects of universalism).

One of the main problems with universalism is that once a commitment is made to general principles, then anything that opposes or questions those principles considered "right" risks being deemed unfounded or even unethical; otherwise, the principles themselves must be revised. One of the main problems with relativism is overlooking how important the notion of universal values is for local discussions of ethics. In practice, universal and contextual arguments are brought to bear on any ethical deliberation, and precisely the interplay and articulation of these positions lead to nuanced, ethical, and workable conclusions. This pragmatist position is useful for Institutional Review Board discussions of specific research

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proposals (Brenneis, 2005). These boards are necessarily guided by some general ethical principles, reminiscent of universalism, while their reason for existing is an understanding that each research project has some unique elements and, as such, needs to be considered in its own right. It is precisely this openness to debate and discussion that is at the heart of pragmatist ethics. This enables ethics to adapt and respond not only to changing practices of research but also to changing cultural norms. However, in addition to this, pragmatists also emphasize that these debates should not be isolated to ethics boards or researchers but should also involve research participants and other stakeholders.

Johansen and Frederiksen (2021) refer to a pragmatic-dualist approach to research ethics. Similarly, Morgan (2014b, p. 142), aiming to reach a synthesis leading to "ethical solidarity," writes about pragmatic humanism as an approach concerned

> with cultivating a sensitized mindset (in those who are willing to listen) to a deeper consideration of the sameness that can be found even within our differences, and in particular, of the sameness that exists in our shared capacity to suffer, to cause suffering, and also to relieve suffering.

What matters most are not universal principles or local values but sensitivity to human interests and giving stakeholders voice within discussions of ethics. A focus on our shared humanity can be such a starting point, one which places differences against a background of commonalities. Bringing research stakeholders into the discussions about ethics may reveal that there is less opposition between science and ethics than has hitherto been assumed.

8.2 Pragmatism and Ethics

One of the aims of pragmatism is to transcend unhelpful dichotomies. We carry this aim forward by seeking to transcend the structured–unstructured data dichotomy (Chapter 5) and the qualitative–quantitative methods dichotomy (Chapters 6 and 7). The divides between science and ethics and, within ethics, between normative-universal and contextual-relativist standpoints are other dichotomies that we want to challenge. Instead of reinforcing the old terms of these debates, a pragmatist approach shifts the focus from ethical principles to the processes through which they emerge, clash, and transform – from universal laws to how power and responsibility manifest in research practice. Such critical reflection is possible only when people are presented with moral dilemmas whereby two or more courses

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of action are imagined as possible. Thus, at the heart of this enacted ethics is the experience of doubt.

"Wherever there is doubt," Simpson and den Hond (2022, p. 140) note, "there will also be a moral choice to be made; the resultant action is deemed moral if the situation is transformed and growth results." In other words, the ultimate criterion for assessing what is "good" and "bad" considers the entire situation, the actors and actions involved, and their short-term and long-term consequences. Morality does not reside in prejudgment but precisely in the acts of choosing, deliberating, and doubting (Senghor & Racine, 2022). In a broader sense, such actions are based on expectation and, thus, by definition, on uncertainty. Ethics does not deal in certainties because it considers the future of human action and its fundamentally uncertain consequences (see Chapter 9). The morality of any act (just like the truth value of knowledge) is in the future: what it does, who is impacted by it, and what future it contributes to. This makes the work of Institutional Review Boards and ethics committees even more challenging. They are tasked with prejudging something that has not occurred, and while there are actions whose consequences are almost certainly negative, many occupy a much greyer area when it comes to anticipated futures. This raises the prospect of evaluating ethics not only before a research project is conducted but also at the end of it, when the actual consequences on participants can be assessed (later in this chapter, we will discuss using postassessments for research that entails deception).

Assessing the risks associated with research activities is an essential part of the process. Normative universalism tries to eliminate risk by resting on immovable laws; relativism avoids it by refraining from reaching a final ethical conclusion. Pragmatism, in contrast, engages the risk head-on: It brings participants and stakeholders who experience the practical consequences of the research into the discussion to make an informed, but necessarily uncertain, assessment of the ethical implications of the research. It embraces the fact that "moral trade-offs between competing values may entail nuanced and fallible judgments" (Brendel & Miller, 2008, p. 25). Also, just like actions are shaped by failures and obstacles, ethical reasoning needs to be flexible enough to shift direction and learn from the ever-present possibility of getting things wrong. The fallibility of ethical judgments is not a sign of weakness or an indication that they should be abandoned; on the contrary, it reflects the condition of human action as always anticipating and constructing a future that should never be taken for granted.

This open-endedness makes it difficult to construct a unitary or singular pragmatist ethical theory. In fact, given that the pragmatist does not

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follow antecedent principles and rejects the logic of foundationalism – rather building the foundations in the actual interaction, in the practical consequences of what is being done as well as by following closely human action in its diversity – the lack of consensus is not surprising. In the words of Serra (2010, p. 7), "instead of proposing a specific theory, pragmatism describes itself as a method for understanding better – or reconstructing – already existing theories, and more generally, as a method that enables greater awareness of our actual moral life." Pragmatist ethics offers a way of dealing with ethical questions, not necessarily answering these questions.

It is perhaps more appropriate, then, to discuss the ethical theory of specific authors. To take a concrete example, John Dewey's work inspired numerous (neopragmatist) elaborations. For instance, Fesmire (2003, p. 4) emphasized Dewey's interest in the moral imagination and his thesis that "moral character, belief, and reasoning are inherently social, embodied, and historically situated" and that "moral deliberation is fundamentally imaginative and takes the form of a dramatic rehearsal." Since the impact of action is, at least in part, in the future, we need the help of imagination in order to build anticipations of what is to come (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2018). We can also imaginatively rehearse actions and their consequences, something that should not be the solipsistic activity of isolated researchers but a topic of discussion and collective deliberation. Serra (2010) points out that, for Dewey, ethical reflection starts whenever the person encounters morally problematic situations, those that have incompatible ends and, thus, require reflexivity and choice. "Moral experience is bound to not knowing what to do among several demands" (Serra, 2010, p. 4). Importantly, these acts of deliberation are not intrapersonal as much as they are interpersonal, communicative, and socially engaged. "In deliberating, we not only imagine and reflect on the consequences for ourselves but also try to figure out the responses of others" (Serra, 2010, p. 5). This is where imagination and perspective-taking become important for ethical conduct by facilitating the "playing out" of impulses, courses of action, and potential outcomes. Deliberation is dramatic and active; it is not a cold mathematical calculation; it is personal, embodied, and empathetic. Ethics is lived through rather than detached from everyday living and its myriad of experiences, including the experience of research.

A more radical stance on this is provided by Emmanuel Levinas, who, although not a pragmatist, did privilege the face-to-face moment of interaction. Levinas (1991) argued that ethics begins by being confronted with the actual face of the other, making it lived and personal rather than detached and abstract. While other philosophers put Truth first, Levinas put ethics first. He argued that our responsibility for one another comes

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before questions of ultimate truth. We are, he argued, created through social interaction, and as such, there is nothing before encountering the other. These relations to each other, he argued, are the basis of ourselves, and without these ethical interdependencies, and taking responsibility for these interdependencies, truth has no value for humans. One key insight that Levinas provides is that the Other always exceeds Self. The Other has a perspective that can never be fully understood by Self (see the idea of surplus of the Other in Gillespie, 2003). This means that devolving ethics entirely to an ethics committee, which is not impacted by either the research process or outcome, could give false security. The ethics committee cannot fully know the participants in the research or the people impacted by the knowledge. In short, Levinas' ideas prompt us toward engaging more actively with our participants and end-users of knowledge or stakeholders in a research project – to give them voice in assessing the ethicality of the research.

While there might not be any definitive pragmatist theory of ethics, there is enough "family resemblance" between the thinking of pragmatists and neopragmatists to allow the abstraction of some general features of the overall approach. For example, LaFollette (1997) identified four key characteristics of pragmatist ethics: (1) It employs criteria without being criteriological; it refers to moral principles but foregrounds deliberation; (2) it is objective without being absolute; it tries to separate what is ethically good and bad but admits fallibility in the process; (3) it recognizes that ethical judgments are relative without being relativist, because ethical judgments need to engage lived contexts but also compare across contexts; and (4) it is pluralist without being indecisive; pragmatism recognizes moral differences but also tries to decide about them based on open dialogue (see also Serra, 2010). These four characteristics overlap with what Arras (2001) described as "freestanding pragmatism" in ethics. This entails (1) contextualism, namely, reasoning about ethical dilemmas in context; (2) instrumentalism, namely, focusing on practical outcomes; (3) eclecticism, namely, using multiple theoretical approaches in ethical decision-making; (4) theory independence, or the avoidance of "top-down" deliberation; (5) reflective equilibrium, or the continuous reexamination of one's own assumptions; and (6) searching for consensus through inclusive deliberation. For both LaFollette and Arras, ethics is neither an individual nor an institutional practice. Ethical judgments occur in a space created by human actions and interactions involving various actors, interests, experiences, and expectations. This plurality invites a reflective stance on the morality of specific research activities and what is understood by ethics in each given context.

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What are the strengths and weaknesses of this broad pragmatist stance? Because pragmatism has its roots in an empirical and experimental approach to knowledge construction while, at the same time, acknowledging the relation of knowledge with human interests and concerns, it is well placed to navigate the ethics of research. The activity of Institutional Review Boards could undoubtedly be enriched by taking a pragmatist stance. One of the main challenges comes from fully grasping the context around moral deliberation: Who is part of this context? Whose interests are being represented (or made invisible)? Why are participants and other stakeholders so rarely involved in discussions about ethics? How can we ultimately decide where to draw the line in our ethical analysis, and when to end our ethical deliberation? (See also Altman, 1983.) For instance, Mead (1934, p. 387) wrote that "when we reach the question of what is right … the only test … is whether we have taken into account every interest involved." The interests involved depend upon the consequences, and the consequences are in the future and inherently uncertain (although we can have more or less confidence), and as such, it is impossible to fully take account of all the interests involved before the consequences are realized (see also Chapter 9). Saying that the outcomes of this process vary, pragmatically, context to context, might not suffice. At the same time, we should avoid developing a fatalistic or agnostic outlook on ethical decision-making. There will always be unanticipated consequences (Merton, 1936), and the risk of "getting things wrong" (as with any human activity) is ever-present. The quality of an ethics preprocess depends on whether the relevant stakeholders have been taken into account – which is most easily achieved with genuine stakeholder participation.

8.3 A Pragmatist New Look at Research Ethics

How do these different pragmatist ethics (in plural) apply to research? How can we translate an open system into a list of guidelines, even if advisory rather than mandatory? Brendel and Miller (2008) offered a useful proposal in this regard, namely, a set of guidelines for a pragmatist approach to ethics in research. Their context is clinical research, but their guidelines are broadly applicable:

1. The importance of focusing on case-by-case moral problem solving to balance the drive toward scientific discovery with the need to protect human subjects in clinical research.
2. A conceptualization of ethical principles in clinical research as a set of working hypotheses – rather than pre-determined, fixed moral

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rules – about how to promote research while protecting human subjects in concrete situations.

3. The need for open-minded engagement of ethical inquiry with the specific contextual details of proposed research projects.
4. Acknowledgment of the fallibility of principled judgments about clinical research and of the appropriateness of revising basic assumptions, decisions, and policies based on new information and analysis, including experimental evaluation.
5. The importance of open-minded debate and deliberation, as well as respect for minority viewpoints, amongst a diversity of individuals reviewing clinical research proposals. (Brendel & Miller, 2008, pp. 25–26)

We uphold all these general guidelines and consider them essential for research with human participants in any field; what could be added to them is an "ethics from the inside" approach in which the perspective and interests of those involved or impacted by the research come to the fore. Taken together, these principles show that ethical concerns are not reserved for specific "moments" within the research process like data collection and data reporting. There is much more to ethical engagement than considering what kind of information participants are given, what debriefing is set in place, or how confidentiality is safeguarded, as important as these concerns are. Within pragmatism, ethics permeates the whole process of research, from why the topic is chosen out of the infinity of possible topics to the guiding questions and interests to how the findings are built upon theoretically and practically.

The typical image of the "trade-off" between science and ethics is replaced here by a unifying goal of producing knowledge that works for the humanity and dignity of those involved and, thus, that improves the human condition. For pragmatism, there is no trade-off because truth and values are assessed in the same way, namely, in terms of consequences. The trade-off, if we are to speak of one, is not between science and ethics. The only trade-off is between the interests of self and others (i.e., when the interests of different groups are in conflict or the consequences of the research for self and others are markedly different). This is why pragmatist researchers reflect on much more than what kind of methodological devices are reliable, valid, or trustworthy. They start by considering what the study and its conceptual framing "do" in relation to how we consider human beings. Are participants depicted as agentic or nonagentic, creative or uncreative, active or passive? Are the findings going to be used to empower or control others? Does the study add or take away from the

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complexity of human existence? Will the research produce knowledge that empowers people? Or that makes them predictable and controllable – limiting some people's degrees of freedom while increasing the action capacity of others (e.g., companies, groups in power)?

Research ethics often focuses on the duties and responsibilities of the researcher (i.e., how, for example, duty of care is framed). Pragmatism shares this concern for consequences (i.e., mental, physical, and well-being impacts of the research on participants), but it also encourages us to respect the human dignity and agency of research participants, topics that are not always at the forefront of how we design and conduct research. The broader implication is that humans are intrinsically creative and reflective, and as such, it is ethically questionable to treat them as mere data points without any concern for the motivation and context of their participation in research. This goes well beyond informed consent and points to a more profound notion of accountability in research (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). It also connects to empowerment and the need for researchers to reflect more deeply on what kind of human interests are advanced or hindered by their studies (see Chapter 9).

The pragmatist proposition guiding our conceptualization of research ethics is that all social research entails both power and responsibility. The power of the researcher comes from their role in designing the research situation and inviting participants to comply with his or her instructions. It also derives from the knowledge being produced; useful knowledge holds power as it creates change. Whether this change is positive or not raises the second issue, that of responsibility. Responsibility is associated with the consequences of the study, for researchers and participants, consequences that follow from how the study is designed and carried out. Researchers must make many ethical decisions along the way, with imperfect information and uncertain outcomes, but decisions that can nonetheless be informed by using stakeholders to stimulate self-reflection. In the end, whoever is impacted by the knowledge produced within the study has a stake in the process. Pragmatism invites us to consider this aspect as an ethical dilemma in and of itself and, as with any dilemma, to use it as an opportunity for rethinking our assumptions and questioning our commitments. In the words of Johansen and Frederiksen (2021, p. 280):

> Dilemmas regarding research ethics cannot be contained in a sentence or two in the introduction or conclusion of a research paper stating that proper research ethics have been observed. Research ethics are not some appendage that can be identified, prepared and implemented once and for all. On the contrary, they are an epistemological condition embedded in the whole

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research project – from introductory considerations about theme and issue to the concluding thoughts about facilitation and dissemination. They must be considered and reconsidered, negotiated and re-negotiated, throughout the entire research process.

These dilemmas are not always the most obvious. For example, a salient dilemma might be whether subjecting research participants to moderate stress is compensated by the usefulness of the knowledge obtained. However, sometimes the unproblematized aspects of research might carry significant ethical implications. For example, the way a research question is set carries specific assumptions, some of which concern research participants (e.g., their abilities, knowledge, interest, and level of agency). The way participants are approached and incentivized to participate in the research project betrays assumptions about what might motivate them and how these motivations can be used to persuade them to take part in the study. The coding frames employed by researchers capture their expectations about the data and about what is important to them, which is rarely the same as what is important to their participants. Even the analysis performed involves choices such as emphasizing unity or variability, highlighting positive or negative aspects, and displaying trust in the participants' accounts or suspicion. Last but not least, writing up a piece of research involves choices, especially about what is to be included and to be left out of the account, including which participant perspectives are "important" or "valuable" and need to be foregrounded as part of the findings. Writing up the research also brings into focus the potential uses and abuses of the research findings and entails choices about how to frame these. Other dilemmas, like the use of deception, present researchers with both explicit and implicit moral dilemmas and, as such, present an interesting case study to demonstrate the utility of a pragmatist approach.

8.4 The Case of Deception

Deception has posed a long-standing dilemma for research, especially in social psychology. Many of the classic experiments on obedience (Milgram, 1969), conformity (Asch, 1955), bystander effects (Darley & Latané, 1968), and the power of the situation (Haney et al., 1973) used deception, and it is difficult to imagine how these studies could have been conducted without deception. These studies produced much concern at the time (Baumrind, 1964), and subsequently, deception in experiments was curtailed (American Psychological Association, 2010; British Psychological Society, 2010).

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The debate about using deception in research continues today (Baumrind, 2013; Just, 2019; Weiss, 2001). The core problem with deception is that it violates the foundational idea of informed consent: How can participants consent to be deceived? If they are told about the research, then they will not be deceived. But if they are not told about the deception, then they cannot give consent. Accordingly, one might assume that research using deception is at an impasse.

The pragmatist response to this impasse focuses on the participants who have gone through the research and thus experienced its consequences. Instead of getting consent before the deception, the idea is to obtain consent after the deception. Crucially, this entails giving participants the power to halt the research if they believe it to be unethical. In this sense, each participant endorses the next participant to go through the research. From a pragmatist standpoint, these participants are particularly well placed to assess the ethics of the research because they have experienced the research. Moreover, giving participants the power to halt the research genuinely empowers them, such that they are more likely to be treated with respect in the research and fully debriefed.

One example of this pragmatist approach to the ethics of deception is research on cyranoids, namely, people who speak words given to them by a hidden other in real time (Gillespie & Corti, 2016). In the classic variant of this research, run by Milgram (1992), participants were asked to interview a boy aged eleven. Unbeknownst to the participants, there was a university professor (Milgram) who heard their questions and told the answers to the boy via a concealed wireless transmission to the boy's ear. The boy was trained to repeat the words heard fluidly, even when he did not understand the content of the words. How would the interviewers assess the depth and breadth of the boy's conversational skills? Milgram found that the physical appearance of the boy (age eleven) was more powerful in determining attributions than the content of what the boy said (the words of a professor).

In replications and extensions of this cyranoid research (Corti, 2015; Corti & Gillespie, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), the ethical problem of deception was addressed by giving each participant in the research the right to halt the research. After participants were debriefed, they were asked if they would object to someone else like themselves taking part in the study and being deceived, just like they had been deceived. The participants' responses were revealing: They acknowledged that they had sometimes felt awkward during the experiment, but they also appreciated the importance of understanding how appearance shapes our judgments. In the end, no

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participant halted the research. Moreover, some participants thanked the researchers, saying that they had learned about their own biases (Corti, 2015).

This approach to ethics is pragmatist because any research, no matter how carefully it has been mapped out ethically, can have unintended consequences (Merton, 1936). Just like there can be no guarantee in advance that our theories or knowledge will work (see Chapter 3; Peirce, 1955), equally, there can be no guarantee in advance of research that the consequences will be ethical for all participants. Accordingly, just like pragmatism puts the truth in the future, it equally puts the ethicality of research in the future. This, of course, is not to say that there should not be prior ethical scrutiny – there should. Ethics committees utilize prior experience to make informed expectations about how the research will be received and the potential consequences it might have. Rather, it is to say that the "final" arbiter of whether the research is ethical is in the actual consequences – not the expected ones.

This pragmatist approach to the ethics of using deception in research (which could, of course, be extended to all research) illustrates a key pragmatist move: to champion the people directly impacted by the research. By giving these participants the power to halt the research, one is empowering participants. When participants are thus empowered, the debrief and the explanation of the motivation and rationale for the research cease to be a formality; they become an earnest, even existential, activity. In line with Levinas' (1991) ethics, this locates ethics in the point of contact between the researcher and the participants. It builds on broader ethical and safety thinking because it allows each research participant to "stop the line" (Bell & Martinez, 2019). Thus, it keeps the research, throughout the data collection process, on alert for deviations from the expected impact on participants; it remains open to the possibility of surprise and disruption.

8.5 Ethics in Mixed Methods Research

Mixed methods research entails mixing various ethical commitments. Each method, and especially its application, presents the researcher with specific opportunities and challenges in the moral domain. Besides general guidelines formalized by national and international bodies, different methods bring their own ethical requirements. For example, experiments are grounded in control and standardization, and as such, they call for a deeper reflection on what kind of impact the control exercised by the experimenter might have over the participants. Beyond highly visible and

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ethically questionable studies like Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (Perlstadt, 2018), we need to acknowledge the power of experimental authority in every single study of this kind and how it impacts participants. Interviews, in contrast, are more accommodating of participants' interests because they have less standardization and more openness to participants' own views. And yet, even in interviews, there is a power dynamic and a struggle for meaning and recognition (Tanggaard, 2007). In observational studies, there is much variability in how researcher and participant interact, depending on whether the observation is overt or covert, participatory or not. Specific ethical issues in observational methods relate to the trust built between the observer and the observed and avoiding the numerous ways in which this trust can be broken. Last but not least, doing research with online data raises its own series of ethical dilemmas, key among them being the difficulty (sometimes impossibility) of gaining informed consent (Eynon et al., 2008). Naturally occurring data can be public, but this does not automatically mean it is ethical to use these data for research.

Mixed methods research often combines one or more of the aforementioned methods and others (see Chapter 6) and thus brings together different ethical concerns. Mixed method studies are acknowledged for increasing the complexity of ethical decision-making while, at the same time, offering a wider range of flexible tools for tackling ethical dilemmas in multifaceted real-world contexts (Preissle et al., 2015). In recent years, there has been growing interest in how mixed methods researchers discuss their ethical decisions and the distinctive reflexivity that mixed methods research might foster. A systematic review of these issues by Cain and colleagues (2019) found, disappointingly, that researchers do not tend to discuss ethics topics at length within mixed methods research. When they do, discussions of ethics fall under four main categories: (1) ethics as defined by an Institutional Review Board; (2) data quality as a measure of ethics; (3) ethics as defined by theory; and (4) social justice-minded ethics. The first two can be considered surface considerations given that they transfer ethical responsibility onto others, in the form of either institutions or data themselves. The last two, however, point to the role of theory and social impact, the latter resembling pragmatist criteria. The authors called for more transparency in reporting on ethics and more reflexivity in moral decision-making, linking these with the credibility and legitimation of the research itself.

Worryingly, studies have found that many mixed methods investigators do not consider their ethics training useful for planning, conducting, and reporting their research (Stadnick et al., 2021). These findings raise the

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important issue of how to prepare mixed methods researchers to recognize, seize, and address ethical dilemmas. In the absence of such training, researchers might not notice when such dilemmas present themselves and misguidedly see themselves as better at managing them than they are. A more substantial ethics education for mixed methods researchers should include five issues.

First: *one should know one's epistemological position and the epistemological underpinning of using different methods in specific ways*. Epistemology is deeply intertwined with ethics (see also Chapters 1 and 2), given the fact that it organizes our worldview and addresses key questions, such as what counts as valid, reliable knowledge. Pragmatism connects its theory of truth and its ethics by pointing to the consequences of our actions. In contrast, epistemologies like positivism contribute to the perceived separation between science and ethics, discussed at the outset of the current chapter.

Second: *one should consider the ethical implications of theories and conceptual frameworks*. Mixing methods often, but not always, leads to mixing theories as well. Given that, as we argued in Chapter 3, theories are similar to maps or models, this means that researchers either work with a more complex and detailed guide or are confused by what different maps are telling them about the data and their interpretation. In pragmatism, theories are not abstract constructions but tools that help researchers discover, select, and act in relation to the phenomena they are interested in, and therefore, ethical questions follow logically. For instance, theories assist researchers in making specific analytical choices: When does the phenomenon of interest start or end? What counts as data and what is irrelevant information? What records should be kept and transformed for analysis and what can be disregarded? Which participants should be included and excluded in the research? These questions involve ethical reasoning because they relate to participants' participation, representation, and visibility.

Third: *one should reflect on the ethical dimension of research questions*, especially when these questions are very different from each other within the same mixed methods study. In Chapter 4 we proposed a typology of questions that differentiated between and within qualitative and quantitative approaches to the data. This typology showed that there is more to scientific research than induction and deduction because it emphasized the role of abduction and the creativity involved in coming up with new questions. These questions need to be considered in terms of soundness, feasibility but also impact, and ethics.

Fourth: *moving from raw to various forms of transformed data, and back again, poses its own ethical dilemma*. This is because, as shown in Chapter 4,

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structuring data involves simplifying, summarizing, or categorizing existing data. Particularly when working with data that reflect human perspectives or experiences, structuring should be guided by ethical concerns as to how these perspectives and experiences are represented and what might be lost when focusing on data at only one stage in their transformation process. Conducting research with big qualitative data presents us with its own challenges, described in more detail toward the end of Chapter 4.

Finally: *mixing methods can lead to synergistic effects also in the area of ethics*. It does not suffice to avoid complexity by following, separately, the ethical guidelines for each method; the combination might have unexpected consequences and help researchers implement traditional ethics advice in a new key. For example, experimentalists can gain a new understanding of trust by conducting interviews or can appreciate the role of consent differently when combining their study with online or internet research. Of course, there can be a tension and even conflict between the moral demands of different methods. But these are opportunities to become reflective and creative in dealing with moral dilemmas.

8.6 Ethics in Multi-resolution Research

Multiple resolution research presents us with an interesting case for ethics because the ethical demands placed on researchers are different in quantitative and qualitative studies. In quantitative research, the need for control and even deception comes to the fore (see the earlier discussion of ethics; Weiss, 2001), while in qualitative research, ethics often focuses on how participants are portrayed and how much room there is for their "voice" (Ashby, 2011). Pushed to the limit, some recommend that studies use no deception or as little as possible (Just, 2019) and are very critical of findings from prior research that do not meet contemporary ethical standards (Baumrind, 2013). For qualitative studies, a radical proposal is to give participants the power to veto either part of the data or the interpretation derived from the data they provided (see the discussion of participant validation in Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). At the very least, participants should be asked whether the perspectives they offered were understood correctly or whether the researcher misunderstood their views. On a practical level, this means creating channels of communication between researcher and participants that allow participants to be part of the research process after data collection has been completed. Such longer-term relations between researcher and participants contribute to building trust (Christopher et al., 2008) and ensuring that the research and its outcomes do not have

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a detrimental impact on participants, and maybe even have a positive impact.

As shown throughout this book, in multi-resolution research we need to balance multiple constraints; in particular, multi-resolution research is doubly constrained by the demands placed on it by both quantitative and qualitative research. In being so, it needs to find new and innovative ways for solving some traditional tensions between these two types of research. Take, for instance, the issue of surprise. The quality of qualitative studies is judged, at least in part, by whether the analysis managed to add to or trouble the initial assumptions of the researchers (something Gaskell and Bauer, 2000, refer to as "local surprise"). In contrast, quantitative research is pushed toward adopting practices like preregistration, that is, specifying and submitting one's research plan and expected findings to a registrar (Nosek et al., 2019). This is useful for clearly separating hypothesis-generating (exploratory) from hypothesis-testing (confirmatory) research and reducing uncertainty and surprise in the latter (which is the bulk of studies conducted within an experimental paradigm). Pragmatically, multi-resolution research requires navigating this tension and being able to foresee – and perhaps preregister – certain aspects of the study while making sure that the generative dynamics coming out of zooming in and out of the same corpus of data, and the "surprises" associated with it, are not stifled by open science practices (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2018). Fundamentally, multi-resolution research remains an exploratory type of design and any kind of confirmatory or hypotheses-testing practices are limited in scope and value.

Doubly constrained ethics refers to balancing different and sometimes conflicting ethical demands that arise out of analyzing data both quantitatively and qualitatively. These demands include, among others, a concern for issues of voice and representation (a marker of quantitative studies) alongside standardization and making meaningful analytical cuts (a marker of quantitative research). Some of these constraints apply at different moments of the research cycle; for instance, widening participation is important during data collection, while analytical frames are devised before or during data analysis. Other times, some of these demands might seem incompatible. For example, the requirement of allowing the voice of the participants to be heard – the basis of calls for "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) – could conflict with the need for bold analytical distinctions or quantification. We could move even further in this regard and, following a pragmatist stance, we could imagine giving participants a veto on how they are portrayed in research. Multi-resolution research considers these

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trade-offs pragmatically and asks for the researcher to constantly engage in reflective deliberation as to the costs and benefits of each methodological decision taken. Fortunately, because of the recursive and multiscalar nature of multi-resolution research, what appear as trade-offs when one has to choose between either a qualitative or quantitative approach turn into an exercise of establishing priorities for a given segment of the study (with the possibility of reversing these priorities in another). Pragmatically, we should develop and use theory without foundational assumptions, and therefore, we should be able to use different, even incompatible, theoretical and ethical frames within the same research project to genuinely expand the range of ethical insights we use for one and the same study.

The presence of constant deliberation in multi-resolution research offers researchers the opportunity to think about ethical issues in deeper and more comprehensive ways. In doing so, they will necessarily have to consider the interests being served by the production of knowledge and raise the important questions of "who is the study for" and "what does the study do." Does the study impoverish or enrich our view of people as engaged, agentic, and reflective? Thus, the implications of multi-resolution research go beyond the validity, reliability, or surprise embedded in one's findings and address, at a broader level, what kind of image of fellow human beings, human interactions, and human society we are advancing through our studies, theories, and methodological innovations. One could criticize research for oversimplifying humans, for denying the richness of human experience and diversity, for "mechanizing" humans, and prioritizing control over agency. Such impoverishing models of human beings do not do justice to them, suppress all sorts of diversity, and feed forward into building impoverishing and even oppressive institutions, which, in turn, shape the kind of people we become. In contrast, research that empowers both researcher and participants is based on a commitment to difference, agency, and fairness. Pragmatism fosters research that does not merely describe social life but is reflective about being an intervention in social life. Such research begins by recognizing that all social research implies both power and responsibility.

8.7 Conclusion

Pragmatist approaches to research ethics aim to transcend unhelpful dichotomies by focusing on the development of research that serves human purposes (Wicks & Freeman, 1998). By considering the interests at stake and the action-based nature of scientific inquiry, pragmatists

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envision research as an inherently ethical activity (Simpson & den Hond, 2022). At the same time, the emphasis is placed on moral deliberation and decision-making rather than an appeal to fixed and absolute moral laws that should govern human behavior, including in research. Pragmatism focuses on who is impacted by the research, the stakeholders, and it gives them an important role in assessing the ethicality of research.

Currently, the ethicality of research tends to be assessed by researchers and ethics committees (which may have lay membership but rarely any actual research participants). By involving research participants and other stakeholders in deliberating the ethical dilemmas posed by research, we can distribute agency within the entire research system. Social research entails both power and responsibility, but these should not be concentrated at one point in the system. By giving voice to participants, we would be empowering not only them but also researchers themselves. What might seem like a reduction of researcher agency is actually an opportunity for authentic forms of dialogue and moral deliberation. Researchers would be the first to benefit from such engagement, given the fact that ethical dilemmas are, as discussed earlier, both social and contextual. They would develop a deeper and richer understanding of the research situation and, with it, a more diverse set of perspectives from which to conduct research that is ethically anchored in substantial issues. In this way, research, including its ethical dimensions, is not conducted by the researcher *on* but *with* human participants. Bringing research participants into the decision-making will help researchers create knowledge that is useful beyond academia.

The metaphor of building knowledge without foundations (introduced in Chapter 2) is applicable to research ethics. Like a ship that is patched at sea, our ethical guidelines are keeping us afloat, and should not be abandoned, but they also need patching as we encounter new contexts and challenges. As Serra (2010, p. 11) writes: "[T]he task of a pragmatist ethics … is not to provide final solutions, but rather to indicate that it is only via the testing and communication of experiences that the superiority of one moral idea over another can be demonstrated." This is not a relativistic stance; it is a progressivist stance. Although our ethical considerations will never be perfect, they can always be better. Research ethics is always uncertain – until after the research is completed. The final arbiter, or truth, of ethicality lies with the participants (who are heterogeneous, culturally embedded, and changing). A pragmatist approach to ethics brings together researchers, participants, and all people impacted by the knowledge, by focusing on the consequences of the research (for participants, stakeholders, the researchers, and society). This approach fosters

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hope, "an optimism about the possibilities for the future and a disposition to experimenting with alternative ways of living that hold some promise to better realize human aspirations" (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p. 130). Thus, for pragmatism there is no opposition between truth and ethics: Both are evaluated by the same criteria, namely, whether they create a better world, enrich humanity, and expand possibility.

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