

This is the second videocast on research ethics. The first was on ethical theories, the third will be on ethical research practice and in this videocast I'm going to look at ethical principles starting with the Euro-Western paradigm principles which are around the regulation of research ethics.

Research ethics is regulated through a system of ethical governance which is set up by universities, health authorities, some government research departments, and it's about setting and maintaining high standards in the profession of research. There are differing views on what this system is actually for. Ostensibly it's for safeguarding the welfare of research participants, primarily at any rate. But another way of looking at this is that it's for safeguarding the welfare of the institutions that set up the systems of ethical governance. These systems of ethical governance are implemented through systems of ethical review and this is carried out by groups of people – committees – called in the UK research ethics committees, or in the US institutional review boards, and they receive applications for ethical approval from individual researchers and from teams of researchers. Again ostensibly they're primarily interested in the welfare of participants and their well-being, and making sure that that is cared for, and of course that is very important and should be a very important ethical consideration for all researchers at all times.

It can also be argued that systems of ethical review, these committees, these groups of so-called experts, are really interested in protecting the institutions that commission and carry out the research from any risk, and particularly from risk of being sued by participants who may not be happy with how they've been treated during the research process or may not be in agreement with the findings of research. So there are disagreements about what ethical governance and what ethical review are for. There's a very interesting book called 'Behind Closed Doors' by a woman called Laura Stark who carried out an ethnographic study of three institutional review boards in the United States and found that they work a lot on the basis of precedent. So if they've approved a similar study they're more likely to approve another study in that style. They also work a lot on who they know: they trust people more if they know them better.

There are other aspects to this ethnography too and I would encourage you to look it up and read it if you're interested in this topic because it's very well written it's very fascinating. Another resource that might be useful is an online database called TREAD, which stands for The Research Ethics Applications Database, which is hosted at Oxford University and it's a database of research ethics applications that have been successful from around the world. It's interesting to look at those, and looking through all of the ethics applications on the database, which I did a year or two ago, reveals that most ethics committees are indeed interested primarily in

participant well-being and data storage. Of course research ethics committees are not all the same and some are becoming now much more genuinely interested in helping researchers to act ethically at all stages of the research process, or at least at more stages than simply when they're collecting data. But even the mechanisms of doing this, filling in a form for a decision to be made behind closed doors, some ethics committees will welcome researchers to the meeting to discuss their project but they very rarely will take the decision in the presence of that researcher. So there is a question that is raised by some researchers and by some ethicists about how ethical really is the system of ethical review? How ethical are the ethics committees?

There has been some progress on this in recent years so for example there was a conference called the ethics rupture summit held at Fredericton University in Canada and that resulted in the New Brunswick Declaration. It was by invitation only this conference, 30 or 35 ethics researchers there. I wasn't part of that group as I wasn't so involved myself at the time but it's interesting to me to read the New Brunswick Declaration, it's only a page long and it speaks of some of the principles that we saw in the last videocast and more from the Indigenous research paradigm than the Euro-Western paradigm, so it incorporates principles such as respect and the importance of research benefiting participants not just researchers. And there were people there representing countries where there is a strong tradition of Indigenous research such as New Zealand and Canada other such countries. I don't know whether Indigenous researchers themselves were present but certainly some of those principles made their way in, whether or not the people who do that kind of research were there in person. Then the Academy of Social Sciences worked hard over several years to create some core principles for research that people could use to base ethical guidelines, ethical codes, on or just to help them think through how they would act ethically. I was involved with this process and there were several symposia with researchers from different disciplines talking about what was important to them and discussing what needed to go into the core principles. And while these principles are perhaps more firmly located in the Euro-Western paradigm – they explicitly privileged democracy for example – they also do look at issues of relationship and reciprocity and respect, so this is widening out the whole system of Euro-Western ethics or certainly trying to.

More recently in New Zealand at least one research committee, research ethics committee, has made its work accessible to community-based researchers, so it's not only researchers working for or working within institutions like universities who can go to research ethics committees for guidance on how ethical their research might be. And overall this kind of

move is moving away from the principle of regulation and moving towards the principle of ethical education for researchers, for all of us, because nobody has got all the answers. The greatest research ethics expert in the world doesn't have all the answers to all the ethical dilemmas that everyone may encounter. And another form of this progress is moving away from the old biomedical principle of do no harm, which is really a very low baseline now for research ethics, and moving towards promoting social justice alongside research and through research and for research to be done in the interest of social justice. So Euro-Western principles are about regulations, and also about progress in terms of that regulation. It's not static, we're moving towards something more even more ethical than our existing ethical systems.

Indigenous ethical principles are different in some ways and interesting and not universal. Talking about Indigenous ethical principles, like talking about Euro-Western ethical principles, makes it seem as though they are universal, and they're not; in practice there are variations. But there are some common features. So for example Wilson and Wilson put forward these four principles that they regarded as pretty much core to Indigenous research ethics. One is that knowledge belongs to everyone. They don't use experts in the way the Euro-Western paradigm does. In Euro-Western research, and in Euro-Western society more widely, we will assign expertise to a particular person. Someone may be an expert on glaciation, someone else may be an expert on nutrition, but in the Indigenous paradigm knowledge is regarded as belonging to everyone. Everyone is their own form of expert and it's about bringing all those individual knowledges together that creates an ethical way of knowing.

Then relationship which is key, as we saw in the last videocast, key to Indigenous research ethics. Every relationship should be mutually accountable and that's another key principle of Indigenous research ethics. And then reciprocity, every relationship should be reciprocal as well, and that's relationships between people, relationships between people and communities, relationships between people and organisations, and so on and so forth. And also that there should be a holistic approach that knowing isn't purely cerebral, it's also emotional, it's also spiritual, that knowledge may be held by ancestors who may not now be living, that knowledge may be held by the land, and knowledge can be gained by being in relation with ancestors, with the land, for example, and with other aspects of being and aspects of experience.

There's a nice quote here from Bagele Chilisa, a professor in Botswana which kind of sums up most things about Indigenous research ethics. I'm just going to read it to you in case you can't see it on the screen. She says

a post-colonial Indigenous ethical theory recognizes power sharing within diversity as an integral part of fairness and social justice and as a means to challenge power structures in order to transform lives. So there are many elements within that quote: it's about power sharing, it's about a balance of power not inequalities of power. And it's about power sharing within diversity, so however different people may be within that group or within that community, they all have a right to share power and that this is integral to social justice. It's not only that though, it's not only fair and just, it's also a way of challenging imbalances of power and ultimately it's about making a positive change to people's lives. That's what research ethics is for; that's what it's about. And Bagele Chilisa in her book on Indigenous research methods, which is a very interesting book and well worth reading, she came up with the four R's in terms of Indigenous ethical principles which are really quite similar to the principles set out by Wilson and Wilson's but not exactly the same. So again we have a clear similarity in the first one, in that relationships are important and everyone's accountable for those relationships, particularly in research, of course, the researcher.

And then the second one, in research researchers need to listen carefully, listen deeply, really pay attention, really listen, not just collect data that becomes an artefact for them to use but to listen fully not only in terms of paying attention intellectually and cognitively but paying attention emotionally and making sure that there's space for other knowledge systems than their own and for other voices than their own ones in that research whether it be qualitative quantitative or mixed method. Then again we have reciprocity but Chilisa goes a little further than Wilson and Wilson here. She recognizes research as appropriation, this is where you're collecting data and taking it away, you're appropriating data and appropriating knowledge, and it is important to remember I think that research has been a tool of oppression and subjugation by colonial peoples of colonized peoples and this is perhaps a legacy of that. But again here we see the need for research to benefit participants and benefit communities, not only benefiting researchers. And then Chilisa acknowledges the regulation principle which is where we started in the Euro-Western paradigm, but she is arguing there is scope within Indigenous ethical principles for regulatory protocols which will explicitly give ownership of research to colonized and marginalized people and ownership of the knowledge produced by research. And this is enshrined now in research ethics protocols in countries such as Australia and New Zealand and Canada where there are big Indigenous populations conducting Indigenous research.