This is the third in the series of research ethics videocasts. The first was on ethical theories, the second on ethical principles, and in this one we're going to look at research ethics in practice.

Research ethics is the responsibility of all of us, all researchers and at all stages of the research process. From the very moment you first come up with a research question, right through until the very end of the project, and even after that in some cases. It's not only the responsibility of researchers, it's also important that other people who have big stakes in research – like research funders, research commissioners, research ethics committees, institutional review boards and so on – have a real sense of the importance of research ethics in every research project. Doing research ethics properly takes a lot of time. It's not just about filling in a form and getting ethical approval and then ticking the box that says I've done ethics now I can do the research. You need to be able to spend time thinking through ethical dilemmas that you can foresee, and those that come up that you haven't been able to foresee, and figuring out ways to address those ethical dilemmas.

There's also a need for awareness that ethics is not a universal practice, that the practice of research ethics may vary between different cultures, between different nations, particularly if you're doing cross-cultural research or research with different communities in a single country, you may need to be aware of the differences in ethical practice between different people. It's also not just a qualitative problem. Quantitative researchers sometimes take the view that all they have to do is get the ethical approval and then do their research.

Quantitative researchers are becoming more aware that there are more dimensions to research ethics than we used to think. So for example quantitative researchers some years ago would think that secondary data really had no ethical implications, it was just there, you could take it and use it as you wished. Whereas now research ethics committees are more interested in uses of secondary as well as primary data, want to know particularly of course if there's any impact on participants and whether consent was given that covered all of the uses that the data might now be put to, and so on and so forth. And ethical practice applies at all stages of the research process. It's not just about data gathering whatever some research ethics committees might think and whatever their priorities might be.

There are ethical implications at the context-setting stage, the planning stage, your literature review, your research design, and at data analysis,

when you're writing research and when you're presenting findings and disseminating the findings of your research too. We're going to look at those stages in a bit more detail now. So when you come up with a research question, this is where the ethical work starts. Is it a good question to ask? Is it just going to benefit your career, or is it actually going to make potentially a positive difference in the world? Could the results be misused by someone who has a different agenda from your own? These are the kind of things that you need to be thinking about when you come up with a research question that you think might merit further investigation.

Also at this very initial stage you need to think from the research questions through the methodology that you might apply and the methods that you might use. If you're doing ethical research you will think carefully about methods at this stage, not just take a knee-jerk approach to using the methods that have worked for you before or the methods that you feel most comfortable using.

And of course when you're planning research you need to think through what the possible ethical implications of your work might be at every subsequent stage as far as you can. Of course you can't think of everything and there may well be – there are almost certainly going to be – unforeseen ethical dilemmas that occur and that you have to deal with on the hoof as it were.

So when you move from the planning stage to the context-setting stage, which in academic research is usually a literature review, in other forms of research may take different forms such as looking at documentary evidence or statistical evidence and so on. Whatever form of context-setting you're using, it's important to look widely and look at other people's findings that may contradict the findings you might be looking at e.g. the premises that differ from the premises that you are taking, work from different standpoints, different stances, different viewpoints, work that you know you disagree with and work you don't know yet whether you agree with or not. And if you're reading ethically you take the time, you don't just skimread the introduction and the conclusion then try and figure out the rest without really reading properly.

Ethical reading makes taking the time to understand what you're reading, what the arguments are presented, where that is located in the wider academic conversation. That also means that you can cite ethically, that you can acknowledge people's work accurately and appropriately, and that you can also understand where your work fits within the wider dialogues and discussions that are going on in the area that you're investigating.

Then when we move on to data gathering, this is probably the best rehearsed. There's the most literature about this, it's what the ethics committees are most concerned with. So you'll probably already be aware of the importance of informed consent and confidentiality and anonymity of participants and respondents, although sometimes participants may want to be named, they may have reasons of their own I've heard – I've not been involved with but I've heard – of research that was done with terminally ill children, and they asked to be named in the research because they wanted to leave something of themselves behind in the world which is very understandable, and there are many other reasons why at times respondents may want to be named. In the Indigenous research paradigm it's regarded as ethical to name respondents.

So it's not always the case that confidentiality and anonymity must be preserved but in the Euro-Western paradigm that's mostly seen as the most ethical way to act. The key is to know your participants even before you start, to have some idea about who they will be, what their priorities are, what's important to them. And as well as participants' safety and well-being you need to think about researcher safety too, because when you're gathering data it can be a difficult time, there can be hazards, maybe you're going into people's homes to ask them for information, maybe you're going to other settings where there may be hazards, maybe you're researching something quite dangerous, perhaps you're wanting to do research in a conflict zone. And even in non-conflictual research settings, research can be quite stressful, quite demanding, and you need to think about your own well-being at all stages of the process, not just when you're gathering data.

Then analysis too has its ethical dimensions. This is different. Gathering data is often fun. If it's qualitative you're talking to people, if its quantitative you're up for searching for the data that you want. When it comes to analysis you're sitting with your data trying to make sense out of it. You need to prepare the data for analysis sometimes, to code it; that can be very laborious and it's really important to do that very thoroughly and very carefully. You may be entering data if you haven't been able to collect it using technology, again a very laborious task but must be done very carefully otherwise your analysis may be flawed. There's great pressure to publish in academia and there's great pressure to publish interesting findings, novel findings, original findings. Researchers doing analysis on their own may be tempted to just massage their results a little to get a more interesting finding. That's really not ethical. If you look at Retraction Watch on the internet, and see the number of papers that are now being retracted

from journals because data has been falsified in the analytic process, or manipulated incorrectly, the results of that are quite shocking. It's really important to act ethically during analysis and to interpret your findings carefully, to do justice to your participants, and to make sure that what you're finding is rooted firmly in your data and not invention or imagination or wishful career advancement.

Then, leading on from that, when you're writing up again you're interpreting further, and this applies just as much as always to quantitative as well as qualitative researchers, you can't just present numbers, you have to make a story around them in words. Similarly with visual images, any form of data, you have to choose your words carefully, you have to choose the structure of your written output. And it's very important to represent your participants fairly, to give their voice space if you can do so, if you're using human participants, and if you're using statistical data again to make sure that you're giving an accurate representation of what that data really says. If you want to use direct quotes from participants you need to be very careful if you've gathered data using social media, because a direct quote entered into a search engine can lead you straight back to that tweet or that blog and compromise the anonymity of your participants. If you conducted interviews or focus groups then it's okay probably to use direct quotes as long as you've got consent for that, of course you need – if you're working within the Euro-Western paradigm – you probably need to remove all identifying details to maintain your anonymity and confidentiality of your participants.

If you've got direct quotes from people in a different language from the language you're using to write up the research, then you should put those quotes in both languages, both in the original language and translated so that readers who speak the original language can assess your translation and can read the quote in the original. And when you're writing, again this is another stage in the interpretive process, interpretation is at the core of our work as researchers whether qualitative or quantitative or mixed method and it's important to give a fair and accurate representation of your research findings.

And the ethical work doesn't finish there. When you're presenting research it's important to engage your audience. I sometimes say it's not ethical to bore people which is a rather controversial statement, it upsets some of my colleagues, but I think it's important for us as presenters to have presentation skills and to try to make it engaging. Using more than one method is helpful such as for example here you can see me, you can see

my slides, you've got two things to look at, research evidence shows that will make it more likely that you will retain what I'm telling you. And again giving as fair a representation as you can. This can feel very difficult at the presentation stage, you may have done years of data collection and analysis, you may have written papers and books or a thesis maybe and now you've got 20 minutes to represent the whole thing. It's very difficult to distil it, so it's a real art, but it is important to make it as fair as you can, and If it's still relevant give your participants a voice.

If you're presenting ethically you will present to your participants as well as to other audiences and/or disseminate your research. You can't always present directly to participants but if you can't it's worth looking for a way of disseminating your findings to them such as the people who researched homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent, they weren't able to make a presentation to their participants but they created a graphic novel and took it round the streets and gave it to rough sleepers to pass on to their peers.

And as far as possible disseminate widely. Just putting something on the internet with a URL isn't really disseminating, you also need to push it out through social media, maybe put the URL in your email sign-off for a while, all sorts of ways you can do this. And think about people who don't have internet access, there is still rather a lot of them both in the UK and around the world. And where possible have an interchange when you're disseminating and presenting, don't just present and go, or send stuff out, try and get a response – get some feedback – because that may inform your future work, and it also enables participants to feel more involved and more valued in the research you've done.

 When you finish the research there may still be ethical dilemmas. There may be reactions from participants to work that you've published that may be positive or not. Participants may need some form of aftercare, they may find that something online that they consented, to five years down the line then no longer happy about it being there, that would be something you would need to consider and try to respond to ethically.

You also may need aftercare. Research may have profound effects on you and those effects may continue for quite some time, maybe years, maybe even decades after a research process. These after-effects may be negative if you've done some very stressful research or they may be positive if you get lots of positive acclaim for your work. If you get opportunities to build on your research it's a good idea to take them if you

can, it helps to make the work more worthwhile, and it's also important to celebrate that you've done a big and an important piece of work.