



Research Ethics in the Real World: Euro-Western and Indigenous Perspectives

Helen Kara

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Review by Amanda Haste. First published online 4 March 2019.

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Helen Kara has been an independent researcher since 1999 and focuses on research methods and ethics. Her initial aims in writing *Research Ethics in the Real World* were to “raise awareness of the need for good ethical research practice at all stages of the research process,” and to show that research ethics should not exist in isolation, but rather be connected to “individual, social, institutional, professional and political ethics” (1). However, just as she was preparing to start writing, a seminar on post-colonial and Indigenous research methods led her to “rethink the entire book” (2) and ultimately to present the issues of ethical research from these two very different perspectives.

Although researchers are generally “working to make the world a better place” (9), for researchers in the Euro-Western tradition “‘truth’ is something that can be empirically verified”¹ while for researchers in Indigenous societies “‘truth’ may exist in stories, experience and relationships with ancestors”² (9). Kara argues that, rather than assert that Euro-Western culture’s notion of ‘truth’ is “the right way” – effectively “another way to colonise the world”³ – we should “respectfully engage with each other’s knowledges” between – and within – societies “as a basis for mutual learning” (9).

¹ Alldred, P. and Gillies, V. (2012) “Eliciting research accounts: re/producing modern subjects?” In Miller, T., Birch, M., Mauthner, M. and Jessop, J. (eds) *Ethics in Qualitative Research* (2nd edn). pp140-56. London: Sage. p142.

² Chilisa, B. (2012) *Indigenous Research Methodologies* Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage, p116 ; Blackfoot Gallery Committee, The (2013) *The Story of the Blackfoot People : Niitsitapiisinni*. Richmond Hill, Ontario : Firefly Books, p18.

³ Castleden, H., Sylvestre, P., Martin, D. and McNally, M. (2015)

“I don’t think that any peer review committee ... would ever ‘get’ what I currently do’: How institutional metrics for success and merit risk perpetuating the (re)production of colonial relationships in community-based participatory research involving Indigenous people in Canada.” *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 6(4), p12-13.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol6/iss4/2/>

The book is in two parts: Part I, Research Ethics in Context begins with a detailed introduction covering issues such as ethics methods, ethics interactions, and reflexivity, and explaining the overall structure of the book. This is followed by four chapters exploring Indigenous research and ethics, which precede the discussion of Euro-Western research and ethics, a placement this reviewer found particularly telling, and enriching because the Euro-Western researcher is then confronted with the 'other' cultural norm effectively as the starting point, with the Euro-Western tradition as the comparison.

Part II, Doing Research Ethically, contains nine further chapters covering ethical considerations in planning, context setting and literature review, data gathering and analysis, presentation and dissemination of findings and ends with substantial and useful chapters on ethical aftercare and researcher well-being.

Case studies throughout the book clearly and deftly illustrate the "real world" ethical problems that can arise even with the best-prepared fieldwork, whether through loss of key participants, issues of consent from a research community, changes in political circumstances, war and civil conflicts. Each chapter is also a stand-alone entity which ends in a conclusion and "reflective questions," these latter providing a very useful teaching resource for courses in ethics in research methods as well as for individual reflection.

This reviewer particularly appreciated the wealth of detail in the case studies and direct quotes from participants and researchers which bring the ethical issues to life, rather than leaving them as a dry checklist to be ticked off when accomplished. For instance, on gatekeepers, Kara points out that in Indigenous research, consent may need to be agreed collectively rather than by an individual. Also, in some Indigenous societies "it is inappropriate to refuse a direct request for help," meaning that friends or relatives of Indigenous researchers may need to be used as intermediaries (105).

Kara also provides useful examples of ethical considerations that are fluid and ongoing, even after the data collection has been completed:

"Different ethical difficulties arise with using visual methods in the Indigenous paradigm. For example, some Indigenous peoples, such as those in parts of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, can be very distressed by the publication of photographs of people who have died. It is essential to be aware of this if you use photographs from these communities, as you would need to be prepared to amend or remove these images from your research outputs following the death of any participant: perhaps for a period of mourning, or for good, as specified by the community".⁴ (143)

This excellent book goes far beyond the basic tenet of "do no harm," and its comprehensive and holistic approach to the very real ethical issues confronting scholars, especially those in qualitative research, provides a wonderful resource. The balanced referencing of both Euro-Western and Indigenous paradigms considerably enriches the discussion, taking the Euro-Western researcher outside their (narrow?) comfort zone and forcing them to see again with new eyes the cultural bases for the ethical decisions to be made at every stage of the research process and beyond...and to question them. Not only that, but the book is beautifully written and, despite the author's clam that there are "not many laughs" to be found (x) this reviewer has found herself repeatedly diving into her review copy just for the pleasure of it.

Amanda Haste is a British musicologist and academic translator who teaches as adjunct faculty at Aix-Marseille University, France. Her own largely ethnographic research focuses mainly on identity construction through music and language and has been published in journals and in books by major editors such as Palgrave MacMillan, Taylor & Francis, and Routledge. She co-authored (with Prof. James Block, DePaul University) *Constructing Identity in an Age of Globalization (Paris: Ex Modio, 2015)* and is currently doing preparatory research for a monograph on the British Colony in nineteenth-century Marseille.

⁴ Bostock, L. (1997) *The Greater Perspective: Protocol and Guidelines for the Production of Film and Television on*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. Australia: Special Broadcasting Service, p38.