

Chapter 2

The Ethics of Visual Research and Participant Empowerment

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Abstract The ethics of research is integral to all studies involving people and communities. However, studies involving photographs, or other visual representations, present a unique set of ethical considerations. Those considerations present themselves through legal standards, institutional and professional guidelines, as well as personal morals. This chapter explores the different levels of ethical decision-making visual researchers face in designing and implementing photo-elicitation studies, as well as the dissemination of findings. The first portion of the chapter describes the ethical obligations and challenges associated with gaining research approval through institutional ethics committees. The second portion of the chapter addresses the more complicated realm of ethical decision-making that relies on researchers' personal principles aimed at protecting what is in the best interest of participants.

As researchers, we are called upon to grapple with moral and ethical issues of power, right and wrong, and the effects of our inquiry when studying people and communities. The ethical decision processes linked to photography-based work are not markedly different from the decisions linked to text-based data (Rose, 2007). Historically, visual methods resided in the hands of anthropologists who shared a certain training, epistemology and ethical approach to studying groups (Wiles, Prosser, Bagnoli, & Clark, 2008). However, photography and other visually-based research have spread to a variety of disciplines in education and the social sciences that may not provide the same type of ethical training and care-based decision making that should coincide with the collection of visual data (Pink, 2003, 2006). These methods have spread because photography is a powerful tool to explore phenomena of interest and simultaneously empower participants (Bugos, Fitzgerald, True, Adachi-Mejia, & Cannuscio, 2014). But, with that power, come a variety of ethical issues that must be considered and supported throughout one's research journey (Torre & Murphy, 2015).

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There are three general ways to collect visual images for photographic studies: (1) gathering photographs from historical archives or popular media, (2) researcher-generated photographs, and (3) participant-generated (auto-driven) photographs (Prosser & Loxley, 2007). Limited research is related to the ethical issues of historical or popular images, and few researchers report dilemmas or complications with the use of contextualized photographs in studies. The use of pre-existing photographs do activate legal and ethical concerns if they are obtained without proper permission; however, those ethical guidelines are much more transparent and specific than creating photographs in a study (Powers, 1996; Thompson, 2003). For that reason, I focus on researcher and participant-generated photographs that receive the most attention in the ethical arena of photographic research.

Designing and implementing ethical research is the centerpiece of quality research. As a visual researcher, I can attest to the old adage, ‘A picture is worth a thousand words’. But it should come with a footnote—it is worth a thousand words and comes with a myriad of ethical concerns. Hence, visual researchers are charged with emphasizing professional and personal ethics in their studies in order to guard the integrity of visual research (Wiles et al., 2008). I view ethical decision making and consciousness as a three-tiered hierarchy, which involves legal requirements, professional and institutional regulations, and personal ethics (see Fig. 2.1). The legal requirements serve as the base of decision making and require minimal effort in addressing the ethics of one’s study. Any given study might certainly have a legal foundation, but be quite unethical. Therefore, it serves as almost a preemptive step to review the legal mechanics of the study, such as copyright and licensing issues (Rowe, 2011). Next, each field describes their code of ethics through a set of professional guidelines that provide guidance for interactions with society at the micro and macro level. These guidelines often parallel institutional guidelines in the form of ethics committees that serve to review and approve research studies. Finally, each researcher’s personal morals or ethics rest at the top of this model to oversee and reflect on each aspect of the study and its impact on participants or communities.

This chapter is divided into two sections, in order to focus on the middle and top tiers of ethics with photography. The first portion of the chapter describes the ethical considerations and challenges associated with gaining approval through institutional ethics committees to conduct visual research. The second portion of the chapter calls attention to the ethical issues that reside outside of the legal and ethical guidelines of higher education review boards—the unanticipated issues that engage researcher’s personal morals. I begin by describing how institutional ethics committees view the visual work of researchers.

2.1 Ethics Committees and Approval

The use of photography in research continues to grow, but few publications document the ethical and practical challenges of designing, gaining approval, and implementing a photo-based study (Bugos et al., 2014). The lack of sharing of

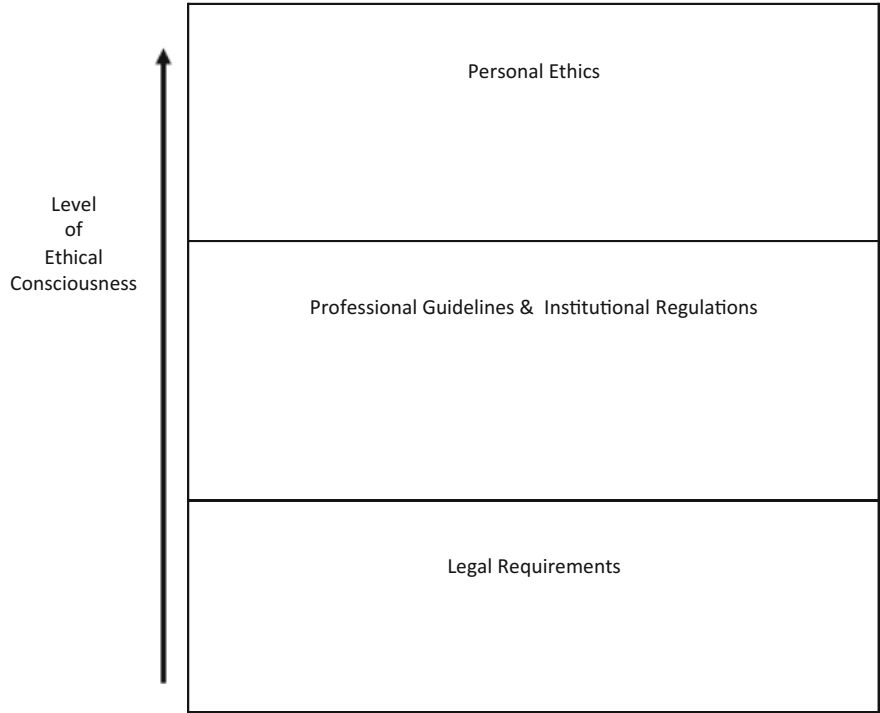


Fig. 2.1 Hierarchy of ethical decision making

experiences has slowed the progress of studies. Instead of learning from others’ ethical obstacles and dilemmas, researchers are forced to endure many of the same trials and errors. Internationally, there is much variability in how researchers gain ethical approval to implement their research protocol with participants (Redshaw, Harris, & Baum, 1996; Wiles, Coffey, Robinson, & Heath, 2012). In fact, in some countries it is even a matter of ‘if’ a formal process exists for committees to review a research protocol. The United States exhibits a more formal and rigid review of studies involving institution based ethics committees (i.e., Institutional Review Boards—IRBs), while other countries defer to each field’s professional guidelines to support ethical practices in research (Wiles et al., 2008). Yet, even within United States, ethical guidelines and review are not implemented uniformly across institutions (Lidz et al., 2012). Sometimes, securing IRB approval results from a matter of ‘luck’ on who reviews the study’s protocol, rather than on an objective and consistent process (Shah, Whittle, Wilfond, Gensler, & Wendler, 2004). What is consistently cited is that the ethical review process can be a lengthy and delicate process for visual researchers (Pitt, 2014; Yates, 2010).

Ethics committees are an important checkpoint in the research process that researchers should keep in mind during the planning stages of studies. There are compelling arguments for their management of studies. The primary argument is that, historically, many researchers have behaved unethically, and committees were necessary to protect the rights and safety of individuals (Wiles, Clark, & Prosser, 2011). These committees serve as a strong force, because they can support or restrict one's research agenda (Edwards, Ashcroft, & Kirchin, 2004). The committees charge is to evaluate each research protocol across seven categories to ensure that researchers are not bringing harm to participants. Those categories are:

1. Risk minimization
2. Risk/benefit comparison
3. Equitable subject selection
4. Informed consent
5. Data monitoring to ensure safety
6. Privacy, protection and confidentiality
7. Protection of vulnerable subjects

The review process evolved from a conservative positivist perspective in the biomedical field, but is applied to all fields and areas of study (Lincoln, 2008; Pitt, 2014). Unfortunately, committees tend to lack understanding of visual ethics, placing these studies at a disadvantage when committees apply these categories during review (Wiles et al., 2011). It becomes the responsibility of the researcher to articulate their case for why photography is essential to their research design and pursuing certain research questions (Wiles et al., 2012). This requires visual researchers to deeply consider the advantages of employing their method, and how the benefits will outweigh the ethical concerns (Pain, 2012).

In recent decades, the regulation of ethical governance and compliance has increased across the globe; most notably in the United States, Australia, and United Kingdom (Boxall & Ralph, 2009). This increase has been met with some resistance and some acceptance (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). Some researchers fear that heightened regulation, coupled with a lack of understanding of the utility of photography, will limit its approved role in research. It may force, and in fact has forced, researchers to compromise the use of photography and dissemination of findings (Miller, 2015; Prosser & Loxley, 2007). Conversely, if ethnographic research is not held to the same standards and process as other methodologies, it may weaken the reputation and perceived legitimacy of the work (Wiles et al., 2011). Some scholars also argue that a higher level of ethical policing is important in this digital era of highly accessible data and dissemination of findings (Boxall & Ralph, 2009). However, for most researchers, ethics committees are merely a reality and can be viewed as an obstacle or an opportunity to reflect on one's research intentions (Wiles et al., 2011). As a researcher using visual methods, researchers must understand the system and guidelines so that they can successfully argue a case to include photography in their research design.

2.1.1 *Informed Consent*

Rose (2007) asserted that there is a general understanding and agreement that covert or deceptive research is unethical in most studies. As the studies in this volume demonstrate, the use of photography to empower participants means that it would be uncharacteristic or illogical to design a study where the researcher is taking photographs covertly. In fact, it would shift the power back to the researcher, instead of sharing power with participants in the study. Therefore, informed consent is a necessary process by which researchers provide participants with appropriate information to allow participants to make an educated decision as to whether they would like to participate in the study (Wiles et al., 2012). It often involves the researcher explaining, verbally or in a written document, the purpose of the study and what participation involves (i.e., contact information, duration of study, voluntary involvement, associated risks/benefits, financial implications, potential use of images). Although it is posed as a way to protect participants who volunteer for a study, some scholars argue it is merely a legal document that safeguards institutions if adverse events occur during the research process (Truman, 2003). However, as presented in the following chapters, many visual researchers place high value on the protection and empowerment of research participants, beyond just protecting their institution or reputation as a researcher.

Depending on the country in which ethical approval is gained, different rules exist for informed consent. While required in North America, there is a move for most countries to require a written consent form to take and use photographs of participants. An example of an approved consent form involving photography can be found in Fig. 2.2. However, even when written consent is part of the protocol, researchers should still explain how the photographs will be used during and after the research study (Wiles et al., 2008). Some scholars have expressed concern that participants were not fully aware of how their photographs would be used as part of the study, even after reviewing and signing the consent form (Shohel & Mahruf, 2012). For example, the growing popularity of online networking sites, such as Academia.edu and Research Gate, propel the sharing and dissemination of articles to a wider audience. This suggests that “informed” consent should not end with a signature, and should be revisited. It also reminds researchers that the notion of “consent” is culturally-situated and may mean different things to different individuals (Simmons & Usher, 2000).

For visual studies, informed consent involves gaining consent to photograph participants or a site, or to use participant-generated photographs in the study. This may involve gaining consent at various layers of a system or across different stakeholders. For example, I have conducted photo-elicitation studies with early childhood centers. This required me to propose and articulate my study to center directors who granted me verbal consent to approach teachers. I then met with teachers to explain the project and attend to their questions and concerns before gaining permission to approach their students’ parents. Finally, I was able to recruit families and gain written consent from parents. Identifying the gatekeepers to

Consent Form

The Camera Project: Sharing Learning Activities with Teachers

Description of the Research:
 We are [researcher names] from [institution/agency], and are conducting a research study to better understand the variety of things parents/guardians do to support children's early learning, and to see if photography can help strengthen the relationship between schools and homes. You are invited to participate in our research study because your child is enrolled in an early childhood center. For this study, you will be taking photographs of your child's activities outside of the school day, and will share your photos with your child's teacher. This research will take place in your home and at your child's early childhood center, or a neutral location of your choice.
 Please note, you have to be 18 or older to participate in this study.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be provided with a digital camera for one week to take pictures of activities you engage in with your child. Once the photographs are developed, you will participate in an audio recorded interview about the photographs with your child's teacher. You can delete any pictures you do not wish to share with the project, and should also consider deleting any photos of anyone who might not want their images shared with the research team as part of the interview. Your photographs will be printed and your interview will be audio recorded.

Your participation will last one week and will include a 30-minute interview with your child's teacher at the end of the project.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

Because we will be providing you with the research information and equipment, there is a risk that other people may find out that you are participating in this study. We are also required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Human Services.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

We do not expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study. However, your participation may help the early childhood teachers to better meet your child's needs.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY PARTICIPATION?

You will receive copies of your photographs for participating in this study. If you decide to withdraw prior to the end of the study, you will still receive copies of any photographs you have taken.

Fig. 2.2 Consent form

communities and respecting the hierarchical system that may be in place is an important piece of conducting ethical research.

In some studies, researchers are requesting consent to both create and to use the images for dissemination purposes (Pink, 2006; Wiles et al., 2008). Some researchers approach the informed consent as one packaged deal that covers the creation of images and their dissemination. More frequently, ethics committees require that consent for both pieces remain separate. For example, if a researcher is requesting written consent from participants, one signature would be required for general consent to participate in the study, and produce or help to produce

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name or your child's name and photographic images will not be used in any publications.

The transcript of your interview will be assigned a number in place of your name. Your number and identifying information will be kept in separate locations. Transcripts will be used for research purposes only. They will be heard and viewed by researchers working on this project. We will keep the recordings for 10 years.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research, you should contact the Principal Investigators. [Names and contact information]

If you are not satisfied with the response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the [institution's name and contact information].

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study, it will have no effect on any services or treatment you are currently receiving. Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

_____	_____
Signature	Date

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

Fig. 2.2 (continued)

photographic images. A second signature would then be required, often within the same document, for their permission to use the photographs for educational purposes. Some scholars believe consent should extended beyond requesting permission to use the photographs, and should ask participants to agree to certain formats (i.e., reports, publications, presentations, exhibition) (Smyth, 2004). This allows individuals to participate in the study without the obligation of being seen in the final product.

There is no consensus as to whether consent should be negotiated separately or together (Pink, 2006). The researcher must determine what is the most appropriate within the context of the study; with the understanding that their decision may be trumped by the views of an ethics committee. For example, Shaw et al. (2013) studied Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States and waited until after participants shared the photographs and participated in the photo-elicitation interview to request consent to use the photographs in publications. Most of the participants gave permission to use the photographs, but for those who did not give permission, she honored their request by destroying their photographs. She made

this ethical decision for her participants. Because students may not have anticipated the images they would contribute to the study at its inception, this design allowed the students to make an informed choice at a later point in the study.

There are situations where gaining written consent would be an inappropriate feature of a protocol and put participants at increased risk (Coomber, 2002; Miller & Bell, 2002). For example, if a project involved immigrant populations, including undocumented immigrants, asking individuals to sign a form could elicit fear or uncertainty with participants. It could even jeopardize their current circumstances and, therefore, should be waived. In these situations, verbal consent should replace written consent. The most appropriate format should be determined within the context of the study and then negotiated with one's ethics committee.

Informed consent emerged as part of the ethical review process in the biomedical field (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). Given the unique characteristics of photography, the traditional use of consent forms may be somewhat incongruent with nontraditional process of visual research (Boxall & Ralph, 2009). Cox et al. (2014) advocate that we re-imagine the consent process for photographic research. It may be more ethical to think of consent as a working document or fluid commitment that is continuously revisited and renegotiated. Allowing an openness to the consent process may be practical up to the point of publication. Once photographs enter into a public space, they are difficult to remove or manipulate (Brady & Brown, 2013). However, until then, it should become an ethical standard to continue to ask permission from participants along the research journey.

2.1.2 Informed Consent and Children

Inviting children to participate in a photography-based research creates a noteworthy dynamic in a study. Children are not legally allowed to consent on their own and require developmentally appropriate explanations that differ from an adult population. Children are often studied through the perspective of adults through direct observation, parental reports and standardized testing (Alderson, 2000). They are consistently *voiced over* by adults, rather than provided with opportunities to share their authentic perspectives and realities (Luttrell, 2010b). It is rare to see children as the primary managers of their data, which creates an ethical consideration in itself. Researchers who include children in their studies, or have attempted to include them, know that it is rare to gain approval because institutional regulations make it more difficult to study children than adults. This is highly defensible because society must protect the rights of children as minors, but researchers must also create opportunities for children to speak their minds. Puzzlingly, nothing alarms an ethics committee more than suggesting that a researcher will give a child full control over a camera to document their own lives.

Ethics committees take special precautions when research involves children, especially when it involves children and visual images (Wiles et al., 2008). Although I study children's early learning experiences, and children serve as the

focal points for photographs, parents are ultimately in charge of the cameras. This releases concerns about involving minors but it also can disempower children, in that, again, an adult is making decisions about what data are collected about their lives. Therefore, I greatly respect the efforts of researchers who focus on the perspectives of children, because of the wider range of ethical issues to address before, during, and after the study (Barker & Weller, 2003).

As described earlier in this section, informed consent is necessary when engaging in ethical research. This becomes somewhat more complicated when desired participants are not of legal age to consent to the study. Therefore, a parent or guardian must sign the formal consent form, while a secondary assent form can be used with the minor (Alderson, 2004). Depending on the age, children may or may not be able to read and comprehend an assent form. The assent form should be written for the literacy level of the child. Researchers should carefully select language that is familiar to the children.

Additionally, the researcher should verbally explain the project and allow children to ask questions. The written and verbal explanation should meet the child at his or her cognitive level. In a study about children's grief, children were provided an assent form with the instructions that they would 'take pictures of anything that reminded them of their loved one who died' or that would help the researcher understand 'how things have been for them since they died' (Stutey, Helm, LoSasso, & Kreider, 2016). In Luttrell's (2010b) study about fifth graders' lives, she instructed participants to 'imagine you have a cousin who is moving to town and coming to your school. Take pictures of the school, your family and community that will help him/her know what to expect' (p. 227). Alderson (2004) used leaflets with pictures to explain the projects to child participants, which may be a more developmentally appropriate approach depending on the child population of the study.

Even when power is shifted into the hands of a child, researchers must still acknowledge that an adult-child power differential will always exist. Although a child can withdraw from a study at any point, they may not feel as though they are actually able to make that decision without consequences or disappointing a parent or researcher (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Formally, individuals are asked to consent at the beginning of the study. However, children might forget what they consented to or might not have fully understood the project. Therefore, it is recommended that children are continuously asked before each activity or interaction whether they would like to participate or what images they would like to contribute to the project and discuss (Alderson, 2000; Flewitt, 2005; Connors & Stalker, 2007).

2.1.3 Privacy and Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an issue for almost any study involving human subjects. Researchers should never assume that the assignment of a pseudonym will mask the identity of a person or place (Mannay, 2016). For example, Vidich and Bensman's

(1958) study of a small-town community led to a great deal of resentment by community members who were able to identify themselves within a published book based on participant descriptions. Assuring confidentiality can be difficult in text-based studies, which means photography adds an additional layer of responsibility and conscientiousness when protecting identities of participants since photography yields visually identifiable participants (Wiles et al., 2011; Rose, 2007; Papademas, 2009; Wiles et al., 2008). Unlike purely text-based studies, images cannot be masked or de-identified in the same manner. Therefore, anonymity of a location or person cannot be guaranteed and should never be promised (Sweetman, 2009). Assigning a pseudonym to each participant and using caution with identifiable descriptions does not conceal participants' visual representation in a photograph.

Regardless of whether photographs are researcher or participant-generated, researchers must decide how the visual images will accompany the analysis and dissemination phases of the study. Researchers must communicate to participants how the photographs will be used and who will have contact with the images before beginning the study (Mannay, 2016). Bugos et al. (2014) further endorsed, "Until the moment of publication, the participant should be given permission to ask that their images not be used, shared, or distributed. If participants request it, photographs should be destroyed, deleted or returned to participants" (p. 15). Researchers are often unaware of the data that may emerge from the study, much like the participants who may not have anticipated the types of activities that would be captured on camera and their feelings connected to sharing those moments with a research team or wider audience. This may create ongoing tension of what to reveal and what to conceal in photographs, as well as who should be involved in those decisions (Cox et al., 2014; Lomax, 2011). With the use of digital equipment, those decisions are easily resolved, as participants can simply delete photographs they do not wish to share with the research project (Miller, 2015). However, if researchers print the images for the participants to view, it requires more agency on the part of the participant to request their removal from the project. In some cases, it may lead to embarrassment for the participant or awkwardness in the participant-researcher relationship (Rose, 2007).

Ethics committees view photography as a threat to participant confidentiality, and will often request modifications to the protocol or restrictions placed on how and if photographs can be used for dissemination purposes. In many cases photography may only be approved if the images do not include people. For example, one study that used photographs to investigate the barriers and supports to healthy living were restricted from including people in the photographs (Bugos et al., 2014). Based on ethical concerns for the vulnerable population they were recruiting, the review board believed the topic was too sensitive to include identifiable individuals in the data. Similarly, in Dai O'Brien's study of the deaf community highlighted in Chap. 3 of this volume, participants were instructed to avoid photographing any individual who had not signed an informed consent form as part of the study (O'Brien, 2013). Instead, they were asked to take a picture of an object or place that represented that person or idea.

In other cases, researchers are required to pixelate or cover faces before including images in presentations or publications (Sweetman, 2009; Macintosh, 2006). This may be a realistic compromise with the ethics committee if capturing individuals on camera is essential to exploring the research questions. However, there has been significant objection to these compromises. Some researchers argue that these steps will render the data meaningless or distort its central message (Prosser & Loxley, 2007). Part of the frustration stems from speculation that the management of these images is rooted in fear of litigation rather than in protecting the rights of participants (Gunsalus et al., 2007).

Some ethical committees are even more conservative in approving the use of photographs in any type of dissemination or viewing beyond researchers listed on the research protocol. This was my experience with a review board that deemed the photographing of young children too risky. In fact, I was advised to remove photography from my study and explore my questions through interviews and observations. After several months of negotiations with the ethics committee, I was allowed to include photographs as long as they only served as prompts in interviews and were not actual pieces of data that would be analyzed or disseminated. I was not able to share the visual images beyond the research team, which limited their contributions to the study. Since the photographs captured contextual components of preparing children for school, the photographs contain important information that may not have been identified by participants or the research team. These types of institutional roadblocks may prohibit the full use of photographic material. I attempted to argue that the photo elicitation process would benefit from pairing images with the text to provide the audience with a complete panorama of the data and allow the audience to further question and interrogate my findings, which is important in any study.

As many visual researchers advocate for the inclusion of photographs in dissemination efforts, others caution the production and dissemination of digital images. Boxall and Ralph (2009) wrote:

In contrast to the huge numbers of images placed on websites by journalists and the general public in recent years, researchers usually take a much more cautious approach to Internet publication...Care needs to be taken to ensure there are no signs in pictures or present on websites which will deny individuals' anonymity and inadvertently allow others to locate them in the community. (p. 49)

They reference their work that focuses on individuals with disabilities, and further interrogate the issue of whether participants fully understand the ramifications of publishing in a web-based product. They conclude that many populations may not be equipped to make that type of consent. I extend this concern by suggesting that with the fast-paced advances in technology and dissemination efforts, even researchers may not entirely comprehend the implications of their actions.

On the other side, is it ethical to deny a participant's desire to be seen? This is a question that many visual researchers face when images are not part of the dissemination plan (either by choice or ethics committee request). In many projects, participants want to be recognized or visible in their work, but may be denied that

opportunity (Heath & Cleaver, 2004; Miller, 2015). When the project desires to empower participants, this stifles that drive. In some cases it draws upon the notion of time immemorial, where time reaches beyond one's memory. Participants may move on and forget about their involvement in the study, but the data still exists. Researchers must openly discuss the long-term consequences of being seen or socially labeled in a study (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). The products from the study will last forever, while their disposition towards a certain identity or label may alter at a later point in life. For example, involvement in projects related to sexuality, health/disease, or political positions may lead to regret in adulthood. Allowing a participant to be "seen" should always be weighed against long-term consequences (Brady & Brown, 2013).

Finally, there is the issue of protecting the privacy of other individuals who may appear in photographs. This may result from the social nature of many projects that ask participants to photograph their daily lives. Individuals they interact with on a regular basis are likely to appear in the images. This is often the case with studies that take place in educational settings, such as schools or after school programs. For example, as Boucher explained in Chap. 10 of this volume, the ethics committee was concerned with the protection of student privacy within the school building (Boucher, 2016). This required the researcher to gain administrative assurance that students had previously signed a school-based release form that photographs could be used for educational purposes. As the photos taken in the classroom were not shown to anyone other than the teacher and the researcher, the photographs could be legally used in the study, and met the committee's criteria for ethical compliance.

Taking pictures in public spaces will likely result in capturing the images of individuals who are not part of the study. To protect the privacy of others, some researchers may require a signed release form from any identifiable individual who is photographed (Bugos et al., 2014). Depending on the specifics of the study, that may not be a practical approach to protecting privacy of individuals, so researchers may encourage participants to avoid photographing people or delete these images from the data set (Miller, 2015). Other studies have required participants to gain verbal consent from individuals to be photographed; however, some remain uncomfortable with the ethics of asking participants to ethically manage that task (Wiles et al., 2011). Moreover, it may not be possible to approach strangers in public places to gain consent (Harper, 2002).

2.1.4 Safe Spaces

An important obligation to participants is that the researcher is not putting those participants at risk while taking photographs of her or his life. For example, in a photo-elicitation study of students attending a liberal arts college, students were asked to take photographs of objects on campus that they believed represented a liberal arts education (Schimek, 2016). The first rule for participants was to remain physically safe while taking pictures. The ethics committee wanted the researcher to

stress that their safety was paramount. Climbing walls or maneuvering in unsafe spaces to capture a certain angle or image was unnecessary. Likewise, in studies that are situated in high-crime areas, participants should always prioritize their personal safety (Bugos et al., 2014). This may require participants to discuss certain spaces or objects in the interview, rather than enter a space to photograph it. Participants need to know from the outset that their personal safety should never be jeopardized to participate in the study.

It is also important to locate a safe space to interact with participants. Since photographs are often accompanied with an interview, identifying a private location to share and reflect on the photographs is an important decision. If the study includes students, it may require finding a private classroom or conducting the interview after hours so that participants do not feel uncomfortable or exposed (Bugos et al., 2014). Safety, privacy and convenience should help focus the researcher's options. For example, in a study on South African adolescents who were orphaned from AIDS, interviews took place in the AIDS awareness center, in a private room, where privacy could be assured for participants (Tshweneagae & Mokomane, 2013). In my experience, allowing participants to choose the location they feel most comfortable (e.g., home, library, community center) has been the easiest process.

In sum, the code of ethics that exist within institutions and professional communities aim to protect the safety and well-being of participants. Wiles et al. (2008) summarize the central ethical issues of visual research:

- (1) Researchers should strive to protect the rights, privacy, dignity and well-being of those that they study;
- (2) Research should be based on voluntary informed consent;
- (3) Personal information should be treated confidentially and participants anonymised unless they choose to be identified;
- (4) Research participants should be informed of the extent to which anonymity and confidentiality can be assured in publication and dissemination and of the potential re-use of data (p. 8).

These ethical areas help to protect participants and the integrity of photographic research studies. It is the ethical gateway at the onset of a project, but should not be the endpoint of ethical considerations and decision-making. Instead, each researcher's personal ethics should oversee the full project from beginning to end.

2.2 Beyond the Ethics Committee—Personal Ethics

Gaining approval through an ethics committee requires researchers to justify that the potential benefits of the study outweigh the risks for participation in the study. The process of rationalizing that one's work will lead to minimal consequences for participants is not the highest level of ethical decision making and care of participants (Wiles et al., 2008). While it will grant permission to conduct the research, it

is restrictive in its view of the ethical responsibilities you have in working with individuals. If visual researchers believe their ethical responsibilities have ended once they have met the requirements of professional guidelines and institutional requirements, they are missing the most important piece of supporting ethical practice—personal ethics (Simmons & Usher, 2000). Moral crevices exist even within the most well-established ethical policies, which then requires researchers to make ethical judgments and decisions that will impact participants in the study (Luttrell, 2010a).

For individuals who engage with sensitive topics and employ photography as a research tool, it is recommended to take additional and ongoing steps to ensure that care, compassion, and beneficence guide your work with participants. Personal ethics is the humanistic and relationship-based side of leading a research project. This requires researchers to place participant interests and needs before their own through the principle of beneficence (Rose, 2007; Pink, 2006; Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). It requires ongoing reflection, critical conversations with peers and open dialogues with the research community.

Many issues related to the use of photography can be anticipated before beginning the project, while others may surprise researchers along the journey. In those cases, researchers can engage in critical conversations with peers to best navigate the situation or draw upon literature in the field to determine next steps (Wiles et al., 2008). Still, advice and recommendations must still be filtered through the researcher's personal beliefs as well as the ethical standards of their field. Ethical dilemmas may overlap with issues presented in other studies; however, they are always unique to the specific project and principles and codes may not always be the definitive moral compass for what is in the best interest of the participants or community of study. Each ethical dilemma must be addressed within the context of the site or relationships.

2.2.1 Exposing Realities

Photography is a useful tool by which individuals can empower themselves. Nonetheless, engaging with creative representations of their lives, can lead participants to emotional places that may alter their comfort level with the study (Mannay, 2016). Participants are often asked to slow down their lives when they enter into a visual study. They may be asked to look at physical images or representations of life they may not have recognized or acknowledged prior to the study (Gurevitch, 1998). Researchers must be sensitive to the types of emotions that may emerge during this process, and adjust their questioning or interactions accordingly. In all qualitative studies, there is a general concern for the unintended consequences of participation. Research is an undeniably an intervention in itself, and being part of a research study will leave an impact. With photography, participants are often guided to think more deeply on a topic and analyze their lives and/or context (Pain, 2012). As a researcher, I always strive for beneficence and my desire to leave a

positive impact on participants. However, beneficence cannot be a promise or a guarantee depending on the topic, facilitation of the process, and findings (Zartler & Richter, 2014).

Conducting visual research with children offers enormous potential to demystify the lives of a group that is almost exclusively described and viewed through the eyes of adults. As discussed earlier, gaining approval from the ethics committee is a challenge, but more importantly is the application of one's personal ethics to these projects. Children may lack a full awareness of the information they are divulging in photographic images. In fact, it may result in revealing aspects of their lives they do not want to display or that may lead to negative consequences (Zartler & Richter, 2014). Once the project is in motion, it becomes a balancing act to provide an uncensored space for participants who are often silenced or misrepresented in research, while at the same time protecting those participants, especially children, from foreseeable and unforeseeable consequences (Kallio, 2008; Thompson, 2008).

2.2.2 Beneficence and Ethics

If you begin a study, it is your ethical responsibility to complete the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Participants invest valuable time and reveal personal aspects of their lives to explore a research phenomenon. Therefore, you owe it to the participants to fully analyze data with integrity and disseminate findings to key stakeholders. This holds true even when data collection uncovers unflattering or negative realities of a group or community. It raises the issue of beneficence and non-maleficence, the inclination to help and not harm participants (Mauthner et al., 2002). Some researchers may feel in order to “do no harm” to their participants they should abandon the project. However, it may just require reframing the study or capitalizing on a few non-malevolent aspects of the study.

For example, I conducted a study with families and teachers at early childhood centers that aimed to strengthen positive relationships between parents and teachers. Families took photographs of their home-based learning practices and then shared them with teachers who were trained in facilitating the photo-elicitation interview exchange. It became clear at an early stage of the project that the photographic sharing was reinforcing previously established assumptions about families and deficit thinking, rather than help teachers recognize the variable ways in which families support early learning. Instead of abandoning the project, the other researchers and I shifted the analysis to analyze power dynamics between parents and families for publication purposes at the higher education level. Additionally, we analyzed photographs and transcripts to identify family strengths and practices that were then shared with each center. It was not the original intent, but I believe the reaction to the emerging data allowed for the preservation of some participant empowerment.

Some researchers choose to make their aim of beneficence clear to participants at the beginning of the study. This may be an important step in alleviating concerns

with vulnerable populations who may face greater risks in exposing aspects of their lives. In the South African study on children who were orphaned from AIDS, the researchers asked adolescents to take photographs of their lives that helped them cope with loss and brought their life meaning (Tshweneagae & Mokomane, 2013). This investigation focused on the assets and positive aspects of participants' lives; however, there is always some uncertainty as to the types of images and emotions a study might expose. It could put the adolescents in a sensitive position, as well as the AIDS Awareness Center, where the research was conducted. Therefore, the researchers addressed this during the recruitment and consent process:

The research participants were made aware that the study results would be disseminated in a research report...However, it was made clear that the report would not expose the strengths or weaknesses of the research sites where the study was conducted or result in negative consequences for the people involved (p. 91).

Making such a statement holds the researchers accountable and brings this awareness to the forefront of the study and their relationship with participants. Of course, this can always become rhetoric embedded in a consent form or obligatory discussion with participants. It becomes beneficence when researchers continuously assess how participants experience the process of taking photographs and reflecting on them, as well as how the findings are framed in a report.

Even if permission is in place to publish photographs, researchers should always reflect on this choice. Stutey et al. (2016) wrote about their ethical decision to only publish interview data as a limitation to their study.

Given the age of our participants [six to nine], we felt it was not in their best interest to include images in this manuscript; however, we were aware that this might have sacrificed some of the depth in representing the data. While we felt strongly that this was an ethical decision, future researchers may find other ways to balance protecting participant confidentiality and allowing for a more vivid way of representing the data (p. 10).

Similarly, in Chap. 10, Boucher discussed his choice to only publish text-based explanations of researcher generated photographs, and not include the interviews' corresponding images. These examples show the ethical complexities of determining 'if' or 'which' photographs should enter publication. The choice should always return to what is in the best interest of the participants.

2.3 Conclusion

Ethical issues are tied to every method available to researchers (Mannay, 2016), and ethical practice should serve as the foundation to all ethnographic work (Wiles et al., 2011). However, the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of research are inherently tied to the researcher's research community, discipline of study, individual experiences, and research tools (Gregory, 2003). The lack of ethical agreement surrounding the utilization and dissemination of photography in research has slowed the widespread use of this method (Banks, 2001; Pitt, 2014). Photography presents a unique set of

ethical circumstances that require reflection and care in order to responsibly empower participants and communities. Ethics committees serve to protect participants by minimizing anticipated risk in the study. However, research is unpredictable, and researchers must remain reflexive in their relationships with participants and photographic data. Photography is not the guaranteed solution for redistributing power to research participants or empowering marginalized populations (Zartler & Richter, 2014). Rather, it is the careful and conscientious application of this method that places ethical practice at the center of a research study.

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