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Knowing Responsibly: Linking Ethics, Research Practice and Epistemology
(2002) in *Ethics in Qualitative Research* , edited by Melanie Mauthner, Maxine Birch, Julie Jessop, and Tina Miller (eds). London: Sage.

Andrea Doucet and Natasha Mauthner

Introduction

Feminist discussions of ethics have tended to be separated into those that address research practice and those that concern knowledge construction processes as framed in philosophical or epistemological terms. On the one hand, feminist researchers who conduct qualitative research have documented the numerous ethical dilemmas that can arise during data collection and fieldwork, many of which revolve around issues of honesty and lying, power and privilege, and the overall quality of the relationships between researcher and researched (Wolf, 1996; see also Duncombe and Jessop, this volume; Reinharz, 1993; Patai, 1993, Zavella, 1993, Hale, 1991)[1]. Parallel to this body of literature, there has been an enhanced focus by feminist philosophers and theorists on ethical issues surrounding the construction of knowledge (see Alcoff and Potter, 1993; Code, 1987, 1991; Lennon and Whitford, 1994; Antony and Witt, 1993; Duran, 1994; Aldred and Gillies, this volume). These scholars, and many others, draw attention to the "relations between knowledge and power" (Tanesini, 1999:3; Flax, 1992:451) as well as issues of advocacy (Code, 1995), subjectivity and objectivity (Code, 1993; Longino, 1993), and the political and ethical dilemmas involved in reconciling or choosing between relativism and/or realism (Lazreg, 1994; Seller, 1988; Smith, 1999). While methodological and epistemological discussions about ethics have made important contributions to feminist practice, theory and epistemology, our concern here is that they have largely remained separate and parallel discourses (but see Maynard, 1994). This chapter aims to find paths towards greater integration between feminist research that reflects on issues of ethics and methodology *and* feminist scholarship on epistemology and ethics.

We began our work for this chapter by searching for feminist scholars who link ethics, methods, methodologies and epistemologies in explicit terms. We found a noteworthy example in the work of Canadian philosopher Lorraine Code (1984, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995; see also Burt and Code, 1995; Code et *al*., 1983). In connecting concrete discussions of innovative, alternative and experiential participatory research practice (i.e. Burt and Code, 1995) with abstract philosophical discussions about knowing, knowers, and knowledge production (i.e. Code, 1987, 1995), Code's work has centred on, among other things, a consistent concern with "recognizing the ethical dimensions of knowing" (Griffiths and Whitford, 1998:19), as framed in inter-twined methodological and epistemological terms. In her writing and theorising, she constantly interchanges the terms "knowing well", "knowing responsibly" and "epistemic responsibility", thus

[1] More recently, increasing attention has been accorded by feminist researchers to ethical concerns or "worry" that occur in the intersections between "ethics, writing, and qualitative research" (Fine and Wiess, 1996:251; see also DeVault, 1999).

underlining the weight of social and political responsibility attached to those who are involved in "power-based knowledge construction processes" (Code, 1995:14). She argues that the explanatory capacities of theories, and of policies based upon them, "depend upon their having a basis in responsible knowledge of human experience" (1988: 187-88) and that "(k)nowing well, being epistemically responsible has implications for people's individual, social and political lives" (1987:10). For Code, there are ethical issues involved in research *relationships,* as well as in being accountable within the varied sets of relations that comprise any given research project. Following on from Code, our chapter takes up her invitation to consider, in both methodological and epistemological terms, what it means to "know well", to "know responsibly" and to attain a high degree of "epistemic responsibility"[2].

Our chapter develops two arguments that point to concrete ways of conducting ethical research practice, as well as dilemmas that occur while attempting to do so. Our arguments about linking ethics, methods, methodologies and epistemologies focus specifically on data analysis processes because, for qualitative researchers, these are significant sites where everyday accounts are translated or transformed into academic, theoretical and policy-related knowledges. Moreover, data analysis processes constitute sites where methods, methodologies and epistemologies are fully entangled. The arguments developed in this chapter, thus, focus on data analysis processes and they each touch on ethical dilemmas, which revolve around issues of relationships and accountability in varied ways.

Our first argument focuses on research *relationships*. We underline the importance of attempting to maintain 'relationships' with our research respondents/ subjects during data analysis processes, particularly with subjects who may not 'fit' our theoretical, epistemological and political frameworks. While pointing to the importance of attempting to do so in an effort to construct 'responsible' knowledge, we also highlight the tensions that arise through the fact that research involves multiple sets of relationships and commitments to *varied* persons, communities and interests. As pointed out by Code, those who are involved in the processes of knowledge production have an ethical responsibility to those from whom / for whom knowledge is produced as well as to others

[2] While Code is one of the few feminist philosophers who actively engages with grounded methodological questions at the level of practice, the details of translating "epistemic responsibility" into concrete methodological principles and practices still requires some attention. In her early attempts at this translation between epistemological concerns and methodological guidelines, Code argued cogently for constant links between knowledge and experience while simultaneously recognizing the structural contexts of this experience; she thus argued for "finding appropriate ways of knowing women's experiences and the structures that shape them… and of developing theoretical accounts of knowledge that retain continuity with experiences (1998:187). She also drew on the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and called for a "methodological approach" that entailed "listening responsively.. and responsibly" to "peoples stories (to *women's* stories) as they recount their experiences" (1987:197). More recently Code has gone further in calling for the use of "vigilant methods" (1995:33) including innovative alternative methods such as participatory, activist and experiential research practices (Burt and Code, 1995; see also Birch and Miller, this volume).

who are involved in the production of theory, knowledge and policy. While ethical issues in research are most often, and with justification, centred on the researcher's relationship with and to *research respondents*, we argue that there are other research relationships that should also be attended to in ethical discussions. These 'other', often unmentioned, relationships include the ones we have, or create, with many different communities: our readers; the users of our research; and the varied knowledge communities that influence our work, including 'interpretive' (Fish, 1986), 'epistemological' (Longino, 1985; Nelson 1993) and academic communities. That is, from the beginning of a research project and far after its completion, a researcher and their work exist in many complex sets of relationships (see also Bell and Nutt, this volume). In recognising these multiple contexts which influence our research processes, and within which research endeavours occur, we are inevitably drawing attention to potential conflicts of interests and possible ethical dilemmas. Our chapter is thus informed by a concept of 'ethics' that relates to a wide sense of 'acting responsibly' as researchers who have an obligation and commitment not only to research participants but also to those who read, re-interpret and take seriously the claims that we make.

Our second argument is about ethical issues of *accountability*. Here we suggest that one way of building ethical research relationships with readers, users and varied communities is to be as transparent, as is reasonably possible, about the epistemological, ontological, theoretical, and personal assumptions that inform our research generally, and our analytic and interpretive processes specifically. In this vein, we are employing a wide concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity is often configured as a methodological issue, where it is up to the researcher's discretion to decide how much and what to reveal about themselves. We argue that reflexivity holds together methodology, epistemology and ethics; and we conceptualise reflexivity not only in terms of social location, but also in terms of the personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research (see Mauthner and Doucet, in press). Moreover, in speaking about the ethical significance of reflexivity, we are referring to its relevance to issues of honesty, transparency and overall accountability in research.

Three case studies

In order to illustrate methodological and epistemological ethics in the context of data analysis processes, we draw on three case studies. The second and third are from our own doctoral research projects from which we have written several collaborative and individual pieces on knowledge construction processes with a particular emphasis on data analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, in press; Doucet and Mauthner, 1999; Doucet, 1998; Mauthner et al, 1998). Our studies, while separately conceived and carried out, shared a common focus in that they were both qualitative studies on women and men's parenting and employment lives; Andrea's was a study of heterosexual couples attempting to share housework and child care (Doucet, 2000, 2001) while Natasha's focused on women's experiences of motherhood and postnatal depression (Mauthner, 1999, 2002). Both studies involved multiple interviews, innovative and participatory methods of data collection, and 'the data' were analysed in the context of a research

group while using a particular adaptation of the 'voice centred relational method' of data analysis.

In addition to our own work, we also draw on a case study that occurs in a completely different academic discipline and in another time in history. This is a case study on the work of American geneticist Barbara McClintock (1902-1987) as discussed by Evelyn Fox Keller (1983, 1985). We selected McClintock as an exemplary case of 'knowing well' for two reasons. First, we were initially drawn to her story by an intriguing paradox that remained at the centre of her work and her life. Second, we wanted to broaden out the dominant feminist way of reading this case study by highlighting it as an important example of 'knowing responsibly' and ethical research practice. Although McClintock's subjects of study were plants and not humans, we nevertheless argue that the wider implications of her work have relevance for feminist ethical discussions in both methodological and epistemological terms.

The central paradox that attracted us to the work and life of Barbara McClintock is well described by Keller. McClintock was a scientist who was able "to make contributions to classical genetics and cytology that earned her a level of recognition that few women of her generation could imagine" (Keller, 1983:158). Yet, paradoxically, her life was marked by both "success and marginality" (Keller, 1985:159). Even though she was named a Nobel Laureate, was showered with numerous other awards, and was internationally praised for her research and her landmark discovery of genetic transposition[3], for decades her work remained largely "uncomprehended and almost entirely unintegrated into the growing corpus of biological thought" (Keller, 1985:159). Keller maintains that one key explanation for McClintock's marginality was not that she was a woman but that she was "a philosophical and methodological deviant" (1985:159) because of her philosophical and methodological stance towards her subject matter. "These were my friends", wrote McClintock, "you look at these things, they become part of you. And you forget yourself" (McClintock, cited in Keller, 1985:165). In a world characterized by positivist empiricist models of knowing and knowers as detached, distanced, and objective, McClintock's unconventional view of maize and corn plants as her 'friends' was clearly out of sync with the precepts and approaches of her scientific colleagues.

It is precisely this radical and unconventional way in which McClintock developed and maintained her *research relationships*, albeit with corn plants, that has attracted attention from feminist scholars, both in the realms of epistemology (Bar On, 1993; Longino, 1990; Fox Keller, 1985; Tanesini, 1999; Alcoff and Potter, 1993; Belenky et al., 1986) and methodology (Reinharz, 1992:234). A recurrent feminist reading of the significance of McClintock's work is that she developed "feminist ways of knowing" (Belenky et al,

[3] Put simply, genetic transposition is the view that "genetic elements can move in an apparently co-ordinated way from one chromosomal site to another" (Keller, 1983:199). Keller also writes about the significance of this discovery to McClintock: "For her, the discovery of transposition was above all a key to the complexity of genetic organisation - an indicator of the subtlety with which cytoplasm, membranes and DNA are integrated into a single structure. It is the overall organisation, of orchestration, that enables the organism to meet its needs, whatever they might be, in ways that never cease to surprise us"(Keller, 1983:199).

1986) through developing a close relationship with the plants that she was studying. This intimacy with her research subjects that allowed her to "hear what the material has to say to you" and to develop a profound "feeling for the organism" (Keller, 1983:198) is often used as a metaphor for social scientists conducting responsive interviewing practice (e.g. Gilligan et.al., 1990) and, for feminist philosophers interested in the role of emotions, feeling and connection in knowledge construction (e.g. Griffiths and Whitford, 1988). Returning to the words of McClintock:

> "I start with the seedling and I don't want to leave it, I don't feel I really know the story if I don't watch the plant all the way along. So I know every plant in the field. I know them intimately and I find it a great pleasure to know them" (McClintock cited in Keller, 1983:198).

We suggest that McClintock's story also represents a case study of 'knowing well' and 'responsibly' because it illustrates the ethics of research relationships in two ways. First, McClintock attempted to maintain relationships with subjects that did not 'fit' her theoretical frameworks and analytical concepts. Second, her work demonstrates a wide concept of theoretical, ontological and epistemological reflexivity. We now turn to examine these two issues through McClintock's work as well as through our own research.

Ethics and maintaining relationships with research subjects

McClintock

In her book *Reflections on Gender and Science*, Keller writes on McClintock:

> "Her work on transposition in fact began with the observation of an *aberrant pattern* of pigmentation on a *few kernels of a single corn plant*. And her commitment to the significance of this *singular pattern* sustained her through six years of solitary and arduous investigation - *all aimed at making the difference she saw understandable*" (1985: 163; emphasis added).

Not only did McClintock develop and maintain a close and 'loving' relationship with her research subjects, but she also focussed in on the uniqueness of each research subject, even those subjects whose characteristics fundamentally challenged the theoretical, ontological and epistemological perspectives that she started out with. This is how McClintock describes the process of coming to challenge mainstream explanations:

> "If the material tells you "it may be this', allow that. Don't turn it aside and call it an exception, an aberration, a contaminant.... The important thing is to develop the capacity to see one kernel (of maize) that is different and make that understandable... If something doesn't fit there's a reason, and you find out what it is" (cited in Keller, 1985: 162-3).

McClintock saw, heard and felt something that was not immediately comprehensible, at least within the dominant theoretical, ontological and epistemological frameworks of her field. Yet she maintained a relationship with her research subjects during on-going data analysis. The commitment to maintain, rather than cut off, relationship during this prolonged analysis set her apart from her colleagues working in the same field of research. Speaking again through Keller, McClintock writes:

> "'I feel that much of the work is done because one wants to impose an answer on it... They have the answer ready and they know (what they want) the material to tell them'. Anything else it tells them they don't really recognize as there, or they think it's a mistake and throw it out...". (cited in Keller, 1983: 179).

McClintock's apparent refusal to 'twist her data', particularly the aberrant patterns, to fit more acceptable mainstream scientific explanations constitutes an ethical issue because she faced the dilemma of deciding what to incorporate or reject, what to emphasize, and ultimately what to disclose about her analysis processes. In the end, she risked alienating herself from her scientific community by maintaining a close relationship with the research subjects that were otherwise regarded as scientific 'misfits'. The ethical dilemma illustrated by McClintock's story is that of honouring some relationships and cutting off others and the difficult choices over doing this within, or against, certain 'epistemological communities' (Nelson, 1993; Longino, 1993). That is, will we alienate ourselves from a particular epistemological or scientific community, as McClintock did, if we pursue certain explanations and make particular knowledge claims? And if we know this is possible, what path will we choose and to whose harm? This dilemma is especially profound in cases where established scientific communities, at times with weighty mentors, have the power to censure some stories and promote others (Haraway, 1991:106).

McClintock's story tells of the courage and determination it takes to 'stay with the data'; and the potential cost of remaining faithful to one's data. It can be remarkably difficult to 'listen to the data' amidst political, theoretical, epistemological, ontological or institutional pressures (Mauthner and Doucet, in press). Moreover, the often isolated and invisible nature of the data analysis process compounds the vulnerability of both researcher and research participants. The analysis of data usually takes place 'back in the office', in isolation from our respondents, research users and colleagues. We often find ourselves alone with our data and generally speaking few other people will see this 'raw' data.[4] In the words of Miriam Glucksman, these subdued moments of the research relationship are rife with "ethical considerations" and endowed with issues of "trust":

> "... ethical considerations enter equally, if not more, into the stage of processing the data as into the interview situation. Usually the researcher has sole access to and total control over the tapes or transcripts. No one else oversees which parts she selects as of significance.... Each researcher is left on trust to draw the difficult line between interpreting the data in terms of its relevance to her research

[4] This situation might be different in the case of collaborative research where researchers might analyse their data together.

questions as opposed to twisting it in a way that amounted to a misrepresentation of what was said" (1994:163).

Data analysis is where the power and privilege of the researcher are particularly pronounced and where the ethics of our research practice are particularly acute because of the largely invisible nature of the interpretive process (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Looking back at our research processes, we now realise that it was during our data analysis processes that similar ethical dilemmas surfaced in our work. It was there that we encountered moments of struggling to reconcile dominant political or theoretical conceptions with contrasting accounts and emergent concepts that we were 'hearing' in our data.

Andrea

In Andrea's research, there is evidence of this ethical issue of maintaining research relationships with subjects or respondents who did not fit into her initial theoretical framework. Influenced by many excellent works on gendered divisions of domestic labour that were emerging in Britain in the early 1990's, Andrea began her data analysis work by looking for 'success stories' as represented in the accounts of women who successfully maintained autonomous identities as workers with their parenting practices and identities. As her analysis work progressed, however, she began to 'read' and 'hear' her data in different, at times contradictory, terms. Specifically, her increased reading of literature on the 'ethic of care', combined with the birth and care of her own children, saw her gradually coming to the view that many studies on gender divisions of domestic labour were underpinned by liberal feminist conceptions of autonomous self sufficient and individualistic beings (see Doucet 1995). Subject accounts which did not fit into these liberal feminist theoretical frameworks were those that espoused more connected and relational ways of being and acting; these included accounts that prioritized domestic lives, particularly the care of children, over and above employment identities and practices. Indeed, in other research studies similar accounts as offered by research respondents were sometimes inadvertently treated as being either deficient or as trapped within gendered ideologies (see Doucet, 1995, 1998 for review).

Rather than seeing a 'problem' in and with women's accounts that articulated the value of care giving and the importance of challenging 'male stream' models of full time work, Andrea attempted to hear her respondents accounts from within alternative theoretical frameworks informed by 'the ethic of care' and 'relational' ontologies; these included notions of 'selves in relation' (Ruddick 1989: 211), of 'relational beings' (Jordan 1993: 141), of human relations as 'interdependent rather than independent' (Tronto 1995: 142), and of daily practices as embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations (Gilligan 1982)[5]. That is, in contrast to employing an ontology of self-sufficient human beings which emphasised where women were successful in their attempts to achieve greater autonomy from their children and their household lives, the adoption of a relational ontology enabled Andrea to also hear how women and men defined domestic

[5] In addition, this view can be viewed as akin to sociological accounts that highlight the self in symbolic interactionist terms (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Smith 1999).

work and responsibility in intrinsically relational terms, between persons as well as between social institutions (see Doucet 1998, 2000, 2001).

Yet dilemmas around this issue of maintaining research relationships were also raised. In analysing interview transcripts from 46 individuals and 69 interviews, it became clear early on that relationships could not be maintained with *each and every respondent*. Grouping respondents into heuristic categories where they shared some elements of daily practice or underlying ideological assumptions was a first way of dealing with the complexity of understanding respondents' diverse lives and accounts. Maintaining relationships with certain respondents allowed Andrea to find ways of articulating novel concepts that were not as clearly heard within academic discourses. Nevertheless it is also important to point out that while this can be conceived as ethical practice, in that certain relationships were valued and maintained, others were inevitably cut off and *not* given equal weight. In particular, when women and men espoused views on distinct and irreconcilable gendered differences between women and men, Andrea tended to down play these, as they were slightly outside of the analytical frameworks she was using.

Natasha

A prominent ethical dilemma Natasha faced in her research on motherhood and postnatal depression was how to make sense of women's attitudes towards medical diagnoses, explanations and treatments of their depression. The dilemma arose partly because of differences of opinion among the women, and partly because of conflicts between some of the women's beliefs, Natasha's views, and feminist theories. Taking any kind of position on these issues risked alienating the women and/or feminist research communities.

All of the women she interviewed expressed relief at having their experiences labelled and diagnosed 'postnatal depression'. They actively used this term to describe their feelings and were strong advocates of the label. This position conflicted with dominant feminist accounts which viewed postnatal depression as a medical construct not a medical condition. Most feminists criticized the label for medicalizing and pathologizing women's distress, and for reifying postnatal depression. They suggested replacing it with other, less-'loaded' terms such as 'unhappiness after childbirth.' Natasha was in agreement that the label 'postnatal depression' was a historically and culturally specific construct, and that its use implied the existence of biological abnormalities within individual women. However, she also believed it was important to recognize, understand, and reflect women's use of the label. She resisted the feminist view that in using such medical terms women were simply being *passively* regulated by and subjected to medical discourses of postnatal depression. Instead, she argued that women *actively* draw on the culturally dominant medical discourse to make sense of their experiences partly because there are few alternative ways for women to interpret their feelings; partly because a medical explanation absolves women from feelings of guilt, blame, and responsibility. By locating their problems within their body--typically, hormonal changes--and therefore beyond their control, a medical diagnosis validates women's experiences of motherhood despite the fact that, in their eyes, they have fallen short of cultural ideals of motherhood

(Mauthner, 2002). In staying with the women's accounts and using the term 'postnatal depression', however, she risked alienating, and indeed has alienated, some of the feminist researchers reading her work.

However, Natasha has also risked alienating at least some of the women she interviewed by questioning hormonal explanations and medical treatments of postnatal depression. Although, as noted above, Natasha puts forward an explanation of why many women embrace a medical diagnosis, explanation and treatment of their depression, she also argues that the hormonal basis of postnatal depression is, as yet, unproven; even if there is a hormonal basis, women's stories implicate a host of psychological, interpersonal, social, and cultural processes in their depression that cannot be ignored; and while antidepressants may help some women overcome depression, women are also calling out for other forms of treatment (namely, talking treatments) (Mauthner, 2002). While this position is in accordance with some of the women's views, others may feel it undermines their strong beliefs in, and advocacy of, a medical approach to their depression. In this instance, the ethical problem of how to retain relationships with each and every one of her respondents remains unresolved as some relationships are inevitably 'sacrificed' in favour of others.

While pointing to the importance of maintaining relationships with subject or respondents who do not initially fit ours, or our academic discipline's, dominant theoretical frameworks, it is also important to reiterate that we are not maintaining a thoroughly ethical position with *all* research subjects. Indeed it could be argued that in hearing some perspectives, we are cutting off others and thus perhaps acting unethically with some respondents. What we are highlighting here is the importance of recognizing that being uniformly ethical, in the sense of maintaining a close and connected relationship, is not possible with all respondents. This is partly because respondents are not a homogenous group, and partly due to the fact that in taking theoretical positions in our research, some accounts are heard with greater commitment and connection than others. The complexity of our multiple research relationships and commitments in research confounds our desire, however well intentioned we may be, to remain in relationship with *all* research respondents. This issue will become even more complicated in the next section.

Ethics, reflexivity and accountability in methodology and epistemology

McClintock

In her analysis of McClintock's life and work, Keller asks an intriguing question: "What enabled McClintock to see further and deeper into the mysteries of genetics than her colleagues"? (1983:197). Keller argues that McClintock's insights grew, not only out of the close relationships she maintained with her research subjects, but also from her realization and admission that the theoretical, ontological and epistemological dimensions of her work had radically altered as a result of her research. Keller points to a dialectical process between methodology and epistemology/ontology/theory whereby McClintock's observations shifted her 'gestalt', which in turn modified how and what she observed. As an example, Keller refers to how McClintock gives an "account of a breakthrough... in

analysis" pointing to how the geneticist "describes the state of mind accompanying the shift in orientation that enabled her to identify chromosomes she had earlier not been able to distinguish" (1985:165). In the process of utilizing innovative methods that allowed a certain 'listening' and 'responding' to the data, McClintock came to take on a changed conception of 'nature' and a different epistemological understanding of "what counts as knowledge" (Keller, 1985:166). These different epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions led, in turn, to radically different analytical questions to be asked of her subjects, and consequently to distinct readings of data, changed findings, and a thoroughly altered story.

Keller's interpretation of McClintock's knowledge construction processes is an excellent case in point of the wide and strong reflexivity we are calling for. In reflecting on how it was that McClintock came to the claims and discoveries that she did, Keller reasons that it is not the fact that she was a white middle class female scientist working within a world of men. Nor was it only her relational and connected way of doing research - her 'feeling for the organism' - that mattered to her work. Rather, it was the ontological, theoretical and epistemological assumptions that informed her work, her realization that they changed part way through her research, and her ability to make these transparent. Keller writes:

> I am claiming that the difference between McClintock's conception of nature and that prevailing in the community around her is *an essential key* to our understanding of her life and work. (1985:167; emphasis added).

What is striking about McClintock's experience and account is her honest rendering of these reflexive processes. As qualitative researchers confronted with differing ways of interpreting a story, it is not just staying close to the research participants or subjects that merits recognition as an ethical issue, but the naming of the assumptions that lead us to read and tell the stories that we do (Doucet, 1998; Mauthner et. al, 1998). These are not just methodological and epistemological issues, but also ethical issues in that they involve being as honest, transparent and accountable as possible with our varied audiences about the role our informing assumptions play in interpreting individual stories. This "strong" and "robust" reflexivity (Harding, 1992, 1998) within our research practice goes beyond situating ourselves in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and geographical location. Indeed, as Daphne Patai points out, these locations, and their automatically associated power differentials, are often "deployed as badges"; they are meant to represent "one's respect to 'difference' but do not affect any aspect of the research or the interpretive text'" (Patai, 1991:149). A robust conception of reflexivity means giving greater attention to the interplay between our multiple social locations and how these intersect with the particularities of our personal biographies *at the time* of analyzing data (Doucet, 1998; Mauthner et al., 1998). This strong reflexivity also means being cognisant and open about the epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions which inform our work, and particularly as they shape our data analysis processes. Just as ethical reflections in fieldwork concentrate on issues of honesty/lying, power and relationships (i.e. Wolf, 1996), these ethical issues of transparency and

honesty in naming the influences on our knowing processes are also fundamental in providing responsible accounts of "coming to know people" (Code, 1988).

In our own work, we have both become aware of how our theoretical and personal biographies affected our knowledge construction processes as well as the knowledges that we produced about women and men's lives. We would argue that a wide and robust concept of reflexivity should include reflecting on, and being accountable about, personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research, and specifically about our data analysis processes. We want to concentrate here on outlining how our respective backgrounds – personal, theoretical, ontological and epistemological - came to play a role in the analysis of our data and the findings we drew and made from our data. Moreover, as we highlight in the following section, it is with hindsight, as well as time and distance from our doctoral projects, that we have both been able to understand and articulate how our research was the product of these multiple influences (see Mauthner and Doucet, in press).

Andrea

It is with the benefit of hindsight that Andrea has become aware of the multiple influences – personal, institutional, theoretical, and epistemological - that shaped her research. Theoretically, her research was driven by multiple theoretical influences that emerged from her varied academic studies in political science, sociology and international development studies, as well as from her four years as a participatory research trainer in South America. With a background in Marxism, socialist feminism and later influences from interpretivist qualitative traditions, symbolic interactionism, feminist standpoint theory, and critical theory, Andrea began her doctoral research with methods that attempted to encourage people's 'voices' and to situate those voices within theoretical accounts that would, she hoped, contribute to progressive social change around gendered home and employment lives. Andrea's theoretical approach began to widen and change due to combined institutional and theoretical influences. In particular, the arrival of a well-known feminist academic led her to incorporate relational theory as a complement to the theoretical approaches she was already using. The inclusion of relational theory and ontology enabled Andrea to 'hear' her respondents' accounts in more relational, rather than individualistic terms and this provided the basis for innovative thinking around domestic and community lives and processes (Doucet 2000, 2001).

In terms of personal influences, it is also with retrospection that Andrea has become acutely aware of how her own biography affected her choice of academic texts that guided her research, and how this combination of personal life and academic texts led her to particular ways of 'seeing' and 'hearing' respondents' accounts during her data analysis processes (Doucet 1998). Recognizing the liberal feminist conception of autonomous self- sufficient individuals that underlined much of the literature on gender divisions of domestic labour, Andrea aimed to balance out this perspective through the inclusion of a relational ontology as informed by feminist work on 'care' and the 'ethic of

care' (Gilligan 1982; Graham 1983; Ruddick 1989; Jordan 1993; Tronto 1993). Moving towards this inclusion was, however, very much affected by her own parenting practices and ontological connection with care and these processes, in turn, had a profound effect on her knowledge construction processes. In specific terms, research respondents who challenged mainstream and 'male stream' models of parenting and work were, in retrospect, accorded particular weight during data analysis processes, partly because they provided a balance to the well established liberal and liberal feminist inspired stories on women and parenting that dominated the literature on gender and domestic labour and also because their challenges resonated with Andrea's experiences and the theoretical literature she was exploring (see Doucet 1998, 2000, 2001).

Natasha

For Natasha, personal, theoretical, ontological and epistemological influences also came to affect her knowing processes. While she initially approached her doctoral research from a positivistic background in experimental psychology, her disenchantment with the discipline and its positivist paradigm led her to move to a social and political sciences department in the first year of her PhD. Despite the physical move, she still felt intellectually caught between two paradigms. Whilst her explicit theoretical and methodological position was one in which she rejected notions of the detached, neutral, 'objective' researcher, she nevertheless felt a positivist pressure to render herself, her voice, and her influence invisible in her research. This was compounded by the fact that, having not experienced motherhood herself, she viewed the women she was interviewing as 'experts' about motherhood and postnatal depression. Her tendency to prioritise the women's accounts also resulted from her desire to react against the dominant research traditions and theories in her field, in which mothers' views are devalued and disregarded (Mauthner 1998, 2002). And here, she was influenced by feminist standpoint epistemology and the notion of 'giving voice' to marginalised groups such as women and particularly women with mental health problems. Her approach also reflected the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning the methodological and theoretical tradition she was using in analysing her data in which there is a tendency to romanticise women's 'voices' and 'subjectivities'.

Like Andrea, Natasha was also inspired to incorporate relational theory into her doctoral theoretical framework. This was partly facilitated through her discontent with existing theoretical explanations and partly through institutional influences in that she began to work with a visiting feminist academic who introduced relational theory and associated methodological approaches to her and her University department. Increasingly, she began to listen to the women's stories of depression and mothering through a 'relational' filter – listening for a relational 'self', prioritising her analysis on relational issues in women's accounts, and constructing a relational interpretation of postnatal depression. This shift in ontological and theoretical approaches meant that her understandings of postnatal depression altered radically and she began to posit alternate understandings to those that were dominant and publicly powerful.

In speaking about these processes together, and in looking back on our knowing processes, we (Andrea and Natasha) are now aware of the multiple influences that came to matter greatly in our work. Moreover, as in the McClintock case study, our theoretical and ontological concepts changed over the duration of our projects' evolution, partly due to personal and institutional influences in our research, and these changes profoundly affected the knowledges that we each produced. These changes were not fully known to us while we were in the thick of data analysis, and while under institutional pressure to complete our projects. It was only much later that the breadth and width of our reflexive processes was revealed to us. In this sense, we would argue that the theoretical and epistemological life of a project, and the knowledges it creates, live on long after the project work has been formally completed. When we speak about accountability in research, it is perhaps best configured in this very long term way as a process through which researchers engage in a conversation with those who read, re-read, critique and utilize their work and also in relation to one's evolving thinking about theoretical, methodological, and epistemological issues. We argue that being reflexive with our readers in an ongoing and evolving way increases ethical research practice. It builds a closer relationship between the researcher and their readers, allows for greater accountability on the part of the researcher, and instils trust in the reader in that they know something about how knowledge was constructed.

One dilemma that is raised here is that since some of these critical assumptions affecting our knowledge production may not be readily available or known to us at the time of conducting our research, it may be that reflexivity and accountability are ultimately limited. That is, in spite of our attempts to be highly reflexive, we concur with Grosz (1995: 13) who maintains that "the author's intentions, emotions, psyche, and interiority are not only inaccessible to readers, they are likely to be inaccessible to the author herself". We have argued elsewhere that it may be more useful to think in terms of 'degrees of reflexivity', with some influences being easier to identify and articulate at the time of our work while others may take time, distance and detachment from the research (Mauthner and Doucet, in press). In a similar way, it may be that there are '*degrees of ethical accountability*' in that it may be that we can be as open and transparent as is reasonably possible at each stage of our knowing processes but that it may take time and engagement with varied academic communities – interpretive or epistemological - before we can actually clearly articulate the multiple influences on our research. One way of increasing the likelihood of this strong reflexivity and thus enhancing our ethical research practice along the lines of being accountable is to create dedicated times, spaces, and contexts within which to be reflexive. In our own case, a research group set up around data analysis assisted us in beginning to think critically about the assumptions informing our work and thus in acquiring some degree of reflexivity in our research.

A further dilemma arises through the fact that research respondents are not a homogenous group and saying too much about what influences our research at any given moment may hinder our projects' attempts at data collection. That is, in cases where we have differing world views and political assumptions than those held by some of our research respondents, we may risk their inclusion if we speak too much about the research's informing assumptions. Of course we can and should let research respondents know some

of the assumptions which inform our work. Indeed many researchers have experimented with varied ways of involving their participants throughout the project's stages, especially during data analysis and writing up (Borland, 1991; Ribbens, 1994; Edwards, 1993; Denzin, 1998). While this is laudable, we would also maintain that with large samples of diverse research respondents, this is not always possible and the ethics of doing this very much depend on the project's overall purposes and focus. Moreover, we suggest that relationships with respondents cannot necessarily take precedence over other relationships and commitments, including with those persons and communities who will read, use and build on our knowledge. Ethical issues, we argue, need to be framed and considered in terms of these wider relationships that go beyond those we nurture and maintain with respondents.

In this section, we have pointed to a complex and wide conception of reflexivity as being an ethical issue that relates to being as transparent as possible about theoretical, ontological and epistemological conceptions, while also recognizing that this wide conception of reflexivity incorporates interpersonal and institutional contexts of research, as well as ontological and epistemological assumptions, and epistemological conceptions of subjects and subjectivities all of which can have a profound effect on our research (see Mauthner and Doucet, in press). We have also drawn attention to what we now regard as the limited extent of our reflexive processes at the time of our research. We point out how, with the benefit of hindsight, we have reached a greater understanding of the range of influences which shaped our research. We also want to suggest that the particular conceptions employed by researchers are less important than the *epistemological accountability* involved in making these conceptions as transparent as possible for the many communities who have a relationship to, and interest in, our work. (Mauthner and Doucet, in press).

Conclusions

In this chapter, we attempted to follow Lorraine Code's initiative to reflect on the intertwined ethical, methodological and epistemological processes and to consider what it means to "know well", to "know responsibly" and to attain a high degree of "epistemic responsibility". Using as illustrative case studies the life and story of American geneticist Barbara McClintock as well as our own research studies, this chapter argued for the inseparability of ethics, research practice and the construction of knowledge. First, we argued that attempting to build 'responsible knowledge' involves maintaining relationships, or staying in relation, with research subjects, particularly those who may not fit our theoretical, epistemological and ontological models. We emphasised particularly the importance of these continuing relationships during data analysis processes. Second, we argued for a 'robust' concept of reflexivity that goes beyond the usual calls for researcher location. This is a reflexivity that includes reflecting on social as well as political and institutional locations but also involves transparency and accountability about the theoretical, epistemological, and ontological assumptions that inform and influence our knowledge construction.

Several implications emerge from the arguments made in our chapter. The first is that data analysis is an ethical issue because it exposes power and privilege in relationships, decision-making around maintaining or curbing relationships with research subjects, and the potential for profound relational violations. In arguing that data analysis processes are ethically infused, we also suggest that data analysis methods are not neutral techniques. Rather, they are methods that embrace both methodological and epistemological assumptions. In this vein, we challenge the distinction Sandra Harding (1987) draws between methods, methodology and epistemology. We argue that data analysis methods *are* epistemological and ontological issues because they carry epistemological and ontological assumptions with them, although these may alter in our own utilisation of these methods. In arguing for the inseparability of ethics, epistemology and methodology, data analysis processes are key sites for noting the deeply knotted quality of these strands of responsible knowledge construction.

The second key implication arising from this chapter is that reflexivity, as an integral part of knowing processes, is also an intensely ethical issue. While feminist researchers often draw attention to the importance of reflexivity as an ethical aspect of our commitment to the women from whose experiences we construct knowledges, we also have an 'epistemic responsibility' to the women (and men) who read our work and indeed to any person who takes our knowledge claims seriously. While we cannot always know or name the multiple of influences on our research at the time of conducting it (see Mauthner et al., 1998; Grosz, 1995), we can be as reflexive as possible in the very wide sense that we have outlined in this chapter. In recognizing that knowledge construction requires a range of commitments and relationships to large groups of knowers, both participants and readers alike, we then recognize the critical importance and ethical weight that 'robust' reflexivity plays in our knowing processes. "(I)f we are to ensure that we know responsibly and well" (Code, 1995:43), greater sustained attention must be accorded to the ethical aspects of our data analysis procedures and to putting in place strong enactments of reflexivity throughout our knowing processes.

Third, the arguments we are positing in this chapter lead to a wide concept of ethical practice, one that focuses on relationships and accountability and recognizes the importance of attending to these issues throughout and beyond the research process. Just as the methodological literature, including feminist contributions to methodological debates, has concentrated overwhelmingly on data collection processes (see Mauthner and Doucet, 1998), it may also be the case that ethical discussions in methodology have concentrated heavily on research relationships with respondents during data collection. This partly mirrors the separate discourses on feminist ethics in methodology and feminist ethics in epistemology. It also mirrors a continuing division in research which feminist empiricists have, to their credit, astutely tried to draw together: the "context of discovery" and "the context of justification" (See Longino, 1990, 1993). That is, while feminists have ably described the influences on data collection processes at the 'discovery' phase of the research, little attention has been accorded to the context of *justification*. That is, much greater attention should be given to the epistemological questions of justifying and validating one's knowledge claims and of building and maintaining relationships with the readers and users of our research, as well as the

academic, interpretive and epistemological communities within which this research is conceived, carried out and reviewed. Our view is that ethical research practice must attend to the close connection between both the contexts of discovery and the contexts of justification by attending to the continuous, fluid and complex relationships that constitute qualitative research projects throughout the varied contexts and processes of knowledge construction. In order to actualise ethical research practice, there needs to be a wider understanding of the multiple commitments that research entails and the long-term quality of 'knowing well' and 'knowing responsibly.

A final implication of what we are arguing is that, as argued in the Introduction to this collection (See Mauthner et al., this volume), research may be best served by 'situational' or contextualised ethics. That is, each research project will have to decide how to enact a process of attempting to include the perspectives of research subjects who would seem to challenge our initial theoretical frameworks, which relationships to emphasise and which relationships to play down, how much and how far to be accountable and to whom. Being ethical in research practice may involve *varied degrees* of ethical responsibility and accountability. These processes can be greatly assisted through the creation of supportive 'knowing' communities that can aid us in our attempts to achieve what Code has referred to as "responsible knowledge of human experience" and "exemplary kinds of knowing" (Code, 1993:39).

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the mothers and fathers who agreed to take part in our respective research studies. We are grateful to Melanie Mauthner, Maxine Birch, Julie Jessop and Tina Miller for their critical commentary on this chapter as well as to the members of the Women's Workshop on Qualitative/ Household Research. We also thank Carol Gilligan, Martin Richards and Robert Blackburn for the support, encouragement and insights they continue to give us in our work. Financial support for our research was provided by the Medical Research Council of the United Kingdom, and the Commonwealth Association and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, respectively.

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