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Knowing Responsibly: Ethics, Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies

Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner¹

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 (Hale, 1991; Patai, 1991; Reinhartz, 1992; Wolf, 1996; Zavella, 1993; see also Duncombe and Jessop, [Chapter 7](#), this volume). 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; Antony and Witt, 1993; Code, 1987, 1991; Duran, 1994; Lennon and Whitford, 1994; Gillies and Alldred, [Chapter 3](#), this volume).

The scholars cited above, 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).² In connecting concrete discussions of innovative, alternative and experiential participatory research practice (for example, Burt and Code, 1995) with abstract philosophical discussions about knowing, knowers and knowledge production (for example, 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, 1988: 19), as framed in intertwined methodological and epistemological terms. In her writing and theorizing, she constantly interchanges the terms 'knowing well', 'knowing responsibly' and 'epistemic responsibility', thus 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: 187–8) and that '(k)nowing well, being epistemically responsible has implications for people's individual, social and political lives' (1987: 10). For Code, thus, 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'.

Our chapter develops two arguments that point to concrete ways of conducting ethical research practice, as well as to 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 ethical dilemmas, which revolve around issues of relationships and accountability in data analysis processes.

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 this, we also highlight inherent tensions. In recognizing a responsibility to *research respondents*, we also know that there are other research relationships that incorporate issues of 'responsibility'. That is, processes of 'knowing well' and 'responsibly' are wrought with tension and complexity because research involves multiple sets of relationships and commitments to varied persons, communities and interests (see also Bell and Nutt, [Chapter 5](#), this volume; Seale, 1999). 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 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 in this chapter that in addition to this important focus, there are other research relationships that should be attended to in ethical discussions. These 'other', often unseen, 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, 1980), 'epistemological' (Longino, 1990; Nelson 1993) and academic communities (Haraway, 1991). 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, [Chapter 5](#), this volume). In recognizing 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, reinterpret and take seriously the claims that we make.

Our second argument is about ethical issues of *accountability*. Here we highlight that one way of building a relationship with our other sets of research relationships – those of reader, users and varied knowledge 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 very wide concept of reflexivity. We conceptualize reflexivity not only in terms of social location, but in terms of the personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research (see Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). 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. In speaking about the ethical significance of reflexivity, we are referring to its broader relevance to issues of honesty, transparency and overall accountability in research.

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 include brief illustrations from our own doctoral research projects, about which we have written several collaborative and individual pieces on knowledge construction processes with a particular emphasis on data analysis (Doucet, 1998; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003; 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 largely 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 are interested in broadening out the dominant feminist way of reading this case study and to suggest that she is an interesting and important case study of 'knowing responsibly' and thus of ethical research practice. Although McClintock's subjects of study were plant subjects and not human subjects, we nevertheless argue that the wider implications of her work have relevance for feminist ethical discussions in both methodological and epistemological terms.³

The central paradox that attracted us to the work and life of Barbara McClintock is well described by Keller who writes about her as 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, 1985: 158) and yet, paradoxically, McClintock's life was marked by both 'success and marginality' (Keller, 1985: 159). That is, even though McClintock was named a Nobel Laureate and was showered with numerous other awards and international praise for her research and her landmark discovery of genetic transposition,⁴ her work

remained for decades 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 because she is a woman but because she is a *philosophical and methodological deviant*' (1985: 159; emphasis added). That is, part of the reason for her persistent location on the periphery of mainstream science, both philosophically and methodologically, is found in the often cited description that McClintock gives of her scientific matter under study: '... these were my friends ... 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.

Ironically, it is precisely this appreciation of the radical and unconventional way in which McClintock developed and maintained her *research relationships*, albeit with corn plants, that has attracted the most attention from feminist scholars, both in the realms of epistemology (Alcoff and Potter, 1993; Bar On, 1993; Belenky et al., 1986; Fox Keller, 1985; Longino, 1990; Tanesini, 1999) 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., 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 (for example, Gilligan et al., 1990) and, for feminist philosophers interested in the role of emotions, feeling and connection in knowledge construction (for example, 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 want to propose a different reading of the significance of this case study of McClintock from ones most often proffered from feminist scholars. That is, we examine this as a case study of 'knowing well' and 'responsibly' in that her story illustrates the ethics of research relationships in two ways. First, she attempted to maintain relationships with subject that did not 'fit' her theoretical frameworks and analytical concepts. Second, her work demonstrates a wide concept of reflexivity, which incorporates theoretical, ontological and epistemological reflexivity. Each of these points will be examined, first through McClintock's work and then with brief reference to how these issues have played out in our own research.

Ethics and Maintaining Relationships with Research Subjects

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 focused 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 ongoing 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 took the risk of alienating herself from her scientific community, and chose instead to maintain a close relationship with the perspective being offered by the research subjects who were largely 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' (Longino, 1993; Nelson, 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).

From McClintock we learn about the courage and determination it takes to 'stay with the data'; and the price she paid ultimately for remaining faithful to her data. The dilemmas qualitative researchers face in analysing their data are not dissimilar. It can be remarkably difficult to 'listen to the data' amidst the political, theoretical,

epistemological, ontological and institutional pressures that can bear down on us at this stage of research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). 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. In the words of Miriam Glucksmann, 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 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 realize 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. We will illustrate this dilemma by drawing on an example from Andrea's work.

In Andrea's research, there was evidence of this ethical issue of maintaining 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 1990s, 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 offered by research respondents were sometimes inadvertently treated as being either deficient or as trapped within gendered ideologies (see Doucet, 1995, 1998).

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, 1995: 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 that emphasized 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 work and responsibility in intrinsically relational terms, between persons as well as between social institutions (see Doucet, 1998, 2000, 2001).

In analysing interview transcripts from 46 individuals and 69 interviews, it quickly 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.

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 and Reflexivity in Methodology and Epistemology

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' (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 analysing data (Doucet, 1998; Mauthner et al., 1998). This strong reflexivity also means being cognisant and open about the epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions that 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 (for example, 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 are now cognizant of 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 by drawing on an example from Natasha's work, 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 also Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

It is with the benefit of hindsight that Natasha became aware of the multiple influences – personal, institutional, theoretical and epistemological – that shaped her research and affected her knowing processes about women's experiences of postnatal depression. 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 doctorate. Despite the physical move, she still felt intellectually caught between two paradigms. While 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 prioritize 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 marginalized 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 romanticize women's 'voices' and 'subjectivities'.

As Natasha's research progressed, she also incorporated relational theory into her doctoral theoretical framework and into her 'hearing' aid through which she listened to the women's accounts. 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 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', prioritizing her analysis on relational issues in women's accounts, and constructing a relational interpretation

of postnatal depression. This shift in ontological, theoretical approaches meant that her understandings of postnatal depression altered radically and she began to posit alternate understandings to those that were dominant in academic and public discourses.

In speaking about these processes together, and in looking back on our knowing processes, we 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, lives 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. In being reflexive about these processes with our readers, we want to argue that this increases ethical research practice in that it allows for greater accountability on the part of the researcher while simultaneously instilling trust in the reader who 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 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' (1995: 13). 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, 2003). 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 (see also Siltanen et al., 2008).

There is also a further dilemma pointed to here in the processes of being reflexive and being accountable in our research. Given that, as argued above, a wide and robust conception of reflexivity may only become meaningful and enacted during our data analysis processes, and indeed after the completion of the projects,

it may not always be possible to be completely honest and transparent with our *research respondents* about the wide array of assumptions influencing our research. As mentioned above, 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 that 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; Denzin, 1998; Edwards, 1993; Ribbens, 1994). 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 are arguing that, as this is only one of many relationships that occurs in research, we must also be careful to recognize that we also have commitments to our other sets of research relationships, including with those persons and communities who will read, use and build on our knowledge. What we are pointing to here is that the stronger weight of being transparent and accountable in our reflexivity can sometimes be found in the relationship between researcher and reader and user of the research. The larger implication here is that rather than frame ethical issues exclusively or mainly in terms of our relationships with respondents, other important research relationships also require recognition and attention.

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 also incorporates interpersonal and institutional contexts of research, all of which can have a profound effect on our research (see Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). 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 that 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, 2003).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we attempted to follow Lorraine Code's initiative to reflect on 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 the life and story of American geneticist Barbara McClintock as an illustrative case study, 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 emphasized 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 rife with ethical issues because it exposes power and privilege in relationships, decision making around maintaining or curbing relationships with research subjects, and the potential for profound and varied relational violations. In arguing that data analysis processes are ethically infused, we also suggest that data analysis methods are not neutral techniques that are solely methodological. In this vein, we challenge the distinction which was drawn by Sandra Harding between methods, methodologies and epistemologies⁶ and which has been utilized, in turn, by several feminist researchers (for example, Collins, 1991/2000; DeVault, 1996). Contrary to this view, we argue data analysis processes are key sites for drawing together ethics, methodology and epistemology and thus are key sites 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 Grosz, 1995; Mauthner et al., 1998), 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.

A third implication of what we are arguing is that, as argued in the Introduction to this edition, research may be best served by 'situational' or contextualized ethics. That is, each research project will have to decide on a number of ethical issues: how to enact a process of including the perspectives of research subjects who would seem to challenge our initial theoretical frameworks; which relationships to emphasize 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. Furthermore, these processes can be greatly assisted through the creation of supportive 'knowing' communities that can aid us in our attempts to maintain our varied research relationships as well as to be accountable within these relationships.

Finally, 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 that 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*. 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 context of discovery and the context 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 actualize 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'.

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Notes

1 Like many of the other chapters in this volume, our contribution was written 10 years ago when we were still in the early stages of our thinking on reflexivity and responsible knowing. We have since widened and deepened our approach to these matters in at least three ways. First, we have continued to reflect together on intertwined issues of subjectivity, relationality, reflexivity, and narrative in our research practice (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006, 2008; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, forthcoming) as well as what it means to enact 'responsible knowing' in the context of team-based or collaborative research (Mauthner and Doucet, 2008). Second, Andrea has expanded her attention to the epistemological significance of relationality between researchers, readers and epistemological communities (Doucet 2008). Finally, Natasha has explored how the

entanglement of ontology, epistemology and ethics highlights the ethical and moral responsibility we have for the knowledge we produce, for the realities we bring into being, and for the methods we use in doing so (see Mauthner's [Chapter 10](#), this volume).

2 While we maintain the shape of this chapter as it was etched a decade ago, our future attention to this topic will incorporate some of Lorraine Code's recent thinking on her concepts of 'knowing responsibly' and 'epistemic responsibility', both of which are central to this chapter. We note, for example, that she has further developed her epistemological approach within a framework that she terms 'ecological thinking' (Code, 2006, 2008); this approach 'is not simply thinking *about* ecology or *about* 'the environment' but rather a 'revised mode of engagement with knowledge, subjectivity, politics, ethics, science, citizenship, and agency that pervades and reconfigures theory and practice' (Code, 2006: 5).

3 If we return to these issues in the future, we will seek to interweave this chapter's central case study of Keller's compelling narrative of Barbara McClintock with Code's equally compelling narrative of marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson. There are intriguing overlaps in how these two feminist philosophers, Keller and Code, draw on the radical thinking of two female scientists to demonstrate the interconnections between relationality, epistemology and ethical research practice. Parallel to Keller's story of McClintock, which we address briefly below, Code refers to how Carson practiced 'ecological thinking' and 'responsible knowing' through the 'explanatory power of an attentive concentration on local particulars (and specificities)' (Code, 2006: 50), a 'careful understanding to and about the precise circumstances of a particular species, community group, or society' and 'the power and value of the small' (Code, 2008: 199).

4 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).

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

6 In *Feminism and Methodology*, Harding distinguishes between a method as 'a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence' and a methodology 'as theory and analysis of how research should proceed' (1987: 2–3). She also states that epistemological questions should not be confused with issues of method or methodology.

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