Research Ethics in Qualitative Research

The question of ethics has been a mainstay of philosophical inquiry for centuries. In research involving human subjects, the phenomenon is much more recent (ROTH, 2004). In the development of ethical principles for research involving human subjects, medical research played a prominent role. For example, the Nuremberg Code (1947) constituted a key milestone. It was formulated in response to the inhuman medical experimentation practices under the Nationalist-Socialist regime in Germany and included principles such as voluntary participation and informed consent. Since then debates and ethics codes have evolved in many fields and disciplines throughout the world. Yet, until the 1960s it was still possible to expose human beings to extreme physical and mental stress—such as testing the chemical agent orange on a Canadian Forces Base or Stanley MILGRAM's experiments where subjects were led to extreme distress when coaxed into punishing others by means of (simulated) electroshocks. Human research ethics boards around the world were created precisely to curtail such exposures.

The question of ethics not also arises in experimental studies, but also in qualitative research. Ethical reflexivity is a core feature of qualitative research practice as ethical questions may arise in every phase of the research process (VON UNGER, 2016; VON UNGER, NARIMANI & M'BAYO, 2014). For example, researchers ask themselves: will this project be worthwhile? Who will benefit from it? What are the potential risks for the participants? What are our roles and responsibilities as researchers? Who are we accountable to and what are we accountable for? Some of these and other questions have already been the focus of studies that appear in the debate on ethics that is an integral feature of *FQS* (http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/browseSearch/identifyTypes/view?identifyType=Debate%3A%20Ethics).

Various conceptualizations of research ethics exist and the topic has been at the center of a heated debate internationally (VON UNGER, DILGER & SCHÖNHUTH, 2016). The controversies mainly revolve around institutionalized review procedures (which give rise to a "procedural ethics") vs. the need to identify and reflect on the day-to-day ethical issues that arise in the doing of research ("ethics in practice") (GUILLEMIN & GILLAM, 2004, pp.263-264). In some national contexts, ethics reviews are obligatory not only for medical research, but also for social science research. A substantial critique has formed pointing to the shortcomings and dangers of these institutionalized ethics reviews and codified ethical standards and principles (ethics codes). Negative implications have been described for scientific quality and academic freedom in general and for qualitative research in particular (e.g., BELL, 2016; VAN DEN HOONARD, 2002, 2011). The institutionalized means for assessing research protocols are based on the medical and experimental sciences; they imply research situations

and processes that may be inappropriate for qualitative research. The regulatory enterprise, some argue, only creates an illusion of ethical practice (CANELLA & LINCOLN, 2007). Instead, ethical conduct should be more aptly conceptualized as an ongoing, critical and dialogical engagement with the moral and political questions of conducting research (CANELLA & LINCOLN, 2011).

A growing body of literature addresses these and other ethical issues relating to specific methods and methodologies (e.g., ethnographic fieldwork, biographical interviews, participatory research, etc.), academic disciplines (e.g., anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.) and fields of study (e.g., social media research, qualitative health research, research with indigenous communities, etc.). However, many social science textbooks cover research ethics in a less than optimal fashion (DIXON & QUIRKE, 2017) and more discussion and analysis are needed concerning the practical experience and relevance of ethical issues in qualitative research contexts. Also, given the noticeable tendency towards increased regulation internationally, there is a need for thorough analysis of negative examples and promising cases.

The special issue is designed to address ethical conduct and reflexivity as genuine issues of qualitative research/ers while scrutinizing and celebrating the diversity of research contexts, research approaches, and possible ethical positions and argumentations. We thus call for papers on questions of research ethics in qualitative research and methodology. The articles may contribute to one of the following areas of the debate:

1. Reflections of ethical issues arising in qualitative research practice, e.g., how do qualitative researchers experience ethical questions and challenges? How do they define and manage their roles and responsibilities? How do they present and justify their research to (potential) participants? How do they do informed consent (e.g., as a dynamic, ongoing dialogical process)? How do they anonymize their data without destroying its hermeneutical value (e.g. SAUNDERS, KITZINGER & KITZINGER, 2015)? However, is anonymization a realistic and appropriate aim at all (e.g. TILLEY & WOODTHORPE, 2011)? Do confidentiality clauses solve some of the problems arising from the threat to the privacy of the participants? Under which circumstances may pseudonymization be insufficient? These examples of "ethics in practice" ideally discuss the questions, problems and solutions in the context of specific research studies.

2. Analysis and discussions of ethics reviews and "ethics regimes" including evaluations of experiences with undergoing ethics review or conducting ethics reviews (as a member of an ethics review board). What is the legal framework and the institutional setup of the respective review procedures? How does the specific context (e.g., region of the world, academic or community setting, field of study, etc.) affect the review process and the principles and standards that are applied? How are the laws and general

guidelines interpreted? What are the implications? And also: how can qualitative research be reviewed and assessed appropriately?

3. Conceptualization of ethical issues and arguments relating to specific methods and methodologies (e.g., (auto-)/ethnographic research, biographical research, participatory research, research with indigenous peoples, etc.) and theoretical discussions of research ethics and ethical conduct in qualitative social science research. For example, how can critical or covert approaches be justified in ethical terms—in specific research situations? What are the ethical strengths and weaknesses of participatory research approaches?

4. How can research ethics and ethical reflexivity be fostered in teaching and methods training in undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate study contexts? What is the approach taken and how did it work out?

Editors of the special issue

Hella von Unger and Wolff-Michael Roth

Submission process

Manuscripts may be submitted in English or German.

Please consult the *FQS* guidelines for authors:
http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/about/submissions#authorGuidelines

The submission process entails two steps:

1. Authors are asked to submit a declaration of interest (i.e., a tentative title and an abstract of approx. 200 words) (to unger@lmu.de and wolffmichael.roth@gmail.com)

2. Selected authors will then be asked to submit a full manuscript.

Deadlines

Declaration of interest:	Oct 31, 2017
Submission of the manuscript:	Feb 15, 2018

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