



# ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN VISUAL RESEARCH METHODS

Edited by  
**Savannah Dodd**



ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

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# ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Series Editor: Dr Ron Iphofen, *FACSS, Independent  
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**ETHICS AND INTEGRITY  
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METHODS**

EDITED BY

**SAVANNAH DODD**  
*Queen's University Belfast, UK*



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## ABOUT THE SERIES EDITOR

**Dr Ron Iphofen**, FAcSS, is Executive Editor of the Emerald book series *Advances in Research Ethics and Integrity* and edited volume 1 in the series, *Finding Common Ground: Consensus in Research Ethics Across the Social Sciences* (2017). He is an Independent Research Consultant, a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences, the Higher Education Academy and the Royal Society of Medicine. Since retiring as Director of Postgraduate Studies in the School of Healthcare Sciences, Bangor University, his major activity has been as an Adviser to the European Commission (EC) and its agencies, the European Research Council and the Research Executive Agency on both the Seventh Framework Programme and Horizon 2020. His consultancy work has covered a range of research agencies (in government and independent) across Europe. He was Vice Chair of the UK Social Research Association (SRA), updated their Ethics Guidelines and now convenes the SRA's Research Ethics Forum. He was Scientific Consultant for the EC RESPECT project – establishing pan-European standards in the social sciences and chaired the Ethics and Societal Impact Advisory Group for another EC-funded European Demonstration Project on mass transit security (SECUR-ED). He has advised the UK Research Integrity Office, the National Disability Authority of the Irish Ministry of Justice, the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, the Scottish Executive, UK Government Social Research, National Centre for Social Research, the Audit Commission, the Food Standards Agency, the Ministry of Justice, the BIG Lottery, a UK Local Authorities' Consortium, Skills Development Scotland and Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR the French Research Funding agency) among many others. Ron was founding Executive Editor of the Emerald gerontology journal *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults*. He published *Ethical Decision Making in Social Research: A Practical Guide* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 and 2011) and coedited with Martin Tolich *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics* (Sage, 2018). He is currently leading a new €2.8M EC-funded project (PRO-RES) that aims at promoting ethics and integrity in all non-medical research (2018–2021).

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Susan M. Brigham** is Professor in the Faculty of Education at Mount Saint Vincent University, Chair of the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender and Social Justice, and President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education. Her research interests include adult education, arts-based research methods, migration, and diversity issues. Her co-edited books include *Adult Education and Learning in Canada* (Thompson, forthcoming 2020); *Building on Critical Traditions: Adult Education and Learning in Canada* (Thompson, 2013), and *Africentricity in Action* (Fernwood, 2012). She is Associate Editor of the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* and the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*. Susan has conducted research and presented her work in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and North America.

**Jennie Carlsten** has published on Irish cinema, documentary, cinematic emotion, and film and history. Her research explores the role of emotion in film viewing, looking at formal strategies and audience response within the context of emotion theories. She is the co-editor of the volume *Film, History and Memory*. Dr Carlsten is a Lecturer in the School of Communication and Media at Ulster University in Northern Ireland. She also works for Film Hub NI, where she is researching the UK's community cinemas.

**Ciara Chambers** is Head of the Department of Film and Screen Media, University College Cork. She is the Author of *Ireland in the Newsreels* (Irish Academic Press, 2012), Co-editor of *Researching Newsreels: Local, National and Transnational Case Studies* (Palgrave, 2018), and Screenwriter and Associate Producer of the six-part television series *Éire na Nuachtscannán* (TG4, 2017). She is a member of the Board of Irish Screen Studies, the Council of the International Association of Media and History, and the Northern Ireland Film Heritage and Archive Working Group. She is Associate Editor of *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* and a member of the editorial teams of *Estudios Irlandeses* and *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*. She has worked on a range of archival projects and digitisation initiatives with the Irish Film Archive, Northern Ireland Screen, Belfast Exposed Photography, UTV, BBC, and the British Universities Film and Video Council (now Learning on Screen).

**Savannah Dodd** is an Anthropologist and a Documentary Photographer based in Belfast. Savannah integrated her knowledge of anthropology with her passion for photography in 2017 when she founded the Photography Ethics Centre with the aim of raising awareness about ethics and increasing ethical literacy across the photography industry. Her work with the Centre involves developing online

training courses, designing and facilitating workshops, authoring articles for online and print publications, and lecturing at universities on the topic of photography ethics. She has organised events on photography ethics at institutions like the Royal Photographic Society and PhotoIreland's Museum of Contemporary Photography. Alongside her work with the Centre, she is pursuing her PhD in Anthropology looking at the ethics and politics of archiving photographs in Northern Ireland.

**Cigdem Esin** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychosocial Studies at the University of East London and a Co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research. Her research focusses on narrative methodologies, multimodal and visual narratives, and research ethics.

**Robert Godden** is a Human Rights Campaign and Communication Consultant specialising in the use of visual media for positive social change. From 2000 to 2014 he worked in the Asia-Pacific Programme at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International, based in London (2000–2008), Kathmandu (2009–2011), and Hong Kong (2011–2014). Between 2004 and 2014, he was the organisation's Asia-Pacific Campaign Coordinator. In 2014, he co-founded Rights Exposure, a consultancy providing support to non-profits, including research, project management, training, and audio-visual production. In 2018, he collaborated with the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (University of Hong Kong) and the Explore Program (World Press Photo Foundation) to organise the conference, 'The Ethical Image: Challenges in Visualising a Changing World'. The conference covered a wide range of issues, including informed consent and the ethical representation of vulnerable populations. He has a Master's degree in South Asia Area Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

**Crispin Hughes** is a Photographer who focusses on documenting social issues in the UK and internationally. He has worked in participatory photography with a wide range of communities, including school children in the UK and communities living with HIV in South Africa.

**Mohamed Kharbach** is a doctoral candidate at Mount Saint Vincent University. His doctoral research centres on the analysis of the discourse of radicalised groups. His research interests include: critical discourse analysis, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, visual research methodologies, and emerging literacies. He is an Associate Copyeditor in the *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*.

**Aura Lounasmaa** is a Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of East London (UEL). She worked as part of the award-winning team from UEL in the Calais Jungle to teach a university course in the camp in 2015–2016. She currently directs the Erasmus+ funded pre-sessional university course Open Learning Initiative for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

**Angela Stephanie Mazzetti** is a Senior Lecturer at Newcastle University Business School. Angela's research focusses on the ways in which stress appraisal and coping behaviours are influenced by cultural norms. Angela has published a number of papers on the ethical and practical challenges of engaging in sensitive qualitative research. Papers related to the use of drawings in sensitive research include Mazzetti and Blenkinsopp (2012) and Mazzetti (2014).

**Cahal McLaughlin** is Professor of Film Studies at Queen's University Belfast and Director of the Prisons Memory Archive ([www.prisonmemoryarchive.com](http://www.prisonmemoryarchive.com)) and coinvestigator on the AHRC funded project Community Experience of Conflict in Haiti: Assessing the Emotional Legacy of Civilian Deaths as a result of Intense Use of Force by UN Peacekeepers. He has worked on films in South Africa and Ireland, exploring the legacy of state violence. His films include *Armagh Stories: Voices from the Gaol* (2015) and his publications include *Recording memories from political conflict: A filmmaker's journey* (Intellect, 2010). McLaughlin and Wills are Co-producers and Co-directors of the film *It Stays With You: Use of Force by UN Peacekeepers in Haiti*.

**Alice Neeson** is a Research Fellow at the International Communities Organisation. She is particularly interested in community-based action research, social impact, and participatory and creative methodologies. She has a PhD in Social Anthropology, for which her research focussed on the role of storytelling in processes of conflict transformation.

**Jacqueline Shaw** is a Research Fellow in the Participation, Inclusion and Social Change at the Institute for Development Studies, with expertise using visual methods for participatory action research and community-led change. She started using video for social purposes in 1984, and has since then collaborated with marginalised communities on participatory projects in diverse community, development, and health contexts. She co-authored Participatory Video (Shaw & Robertson, 1997) a definitive methods guidebook, and, as convenor of the *Participate* visual methods programme, worked with partners in India, the Palestinian West Bank, Kenya, and Indonesia to bring the reality of poverty to UN decision makers. Her recent research used participatory visual methods in five countries to explore how to build inclusive and accountable relationships within and across communities, and between marginalised groups' and influential duty bearers. Currently, she is using participatory video to explore resource politics in Kenya for seeing *Conflict at the Margins* (<https://seeingconflict.org/about>), and contributing to disability inclusion research in seven countries.

**Siobhan Warrington** is a researcher, writer, and facilitator who works with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community organisations, universities, and artists. She has an interest in participatory research, representation, and the value of lived experience. She has conducted two multi-country research projects that explore the process of film and photography, and visual representation from the perspective of those featured in NGO communications. She has been

commissioned by several international NGOs to produce guidelines and training materials on ethical approaches to image gathering and has produced a set of ethical guidelines for the UK NGO sector. Her article with Dr E. Ademolu titled, *Who Gets to Talk about NGO Images of Global Poverty* was published in *Photography and Culture* journal Volume 12 (2019).

**Siobhán Wills** is Professor of Law at the Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University and primary investigator on the AHRC funded project *Community Experience of Conflict in Haiti: Assessing the Emotional Legacy of Civilian Deaths as a result of Intense Use of Force by UN Peacekeepers*. McLaughlin and Wills are Co-producers and Co-directors of the film *It Stays With You: Use of Force by UN Peacekeepers in Haiti*.

# SERIES PREFACE

Ron Iphofen (Series Editor)

This book series, *Advances in Research Ethics and Integrity*, grew out of foundational work with a group of Fellows of the UK Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) who were all concerned to ensure that lessons learned from previous work were built upon and improved in the interests of the production of robust research practices of high quality. Duplication or unnecessary repetitions of earlier research and ignorance of existing work were seen as hindrances to research progress. Individual researchers, research professions and society all suffer in having to pay the costs in time, energy and money of delayed progress and superfluous repetitions. There is little excuse for failure to build on existing knowledge and practice given modern search technologies unless selfish ‘domain protectionism’ leads researchers to ignore existing work and seek credit for innovations already accomplished. Our concern was to aid well-motivated researchers to quickly discover existing progress made in ethical research in terms of topic, method and/or discipline and to move on with their own work more productively and to discover the best, most effective means to disseminate their own findings so that other researchers could, in turn, contribute to research progress.

It is true that there is a plethora of ethics codes and guidelines with researchers left to themselves to judge those more appropriate to their proposed activity. The same questions are repeatedly asked on discussion forums about how to proceed when similar longstanding problems in the field are being confronted afresh by novice researchers. Researchers and members of ethics review boards alike are faced with selecting the most appropriate codes or guidelines for their current purpose, eliding differences and similarities in a labyrinth of uncertainty. It is no wonder that novice researchers can despair in their search for guidance and experienced researchers may be tempted by the ‘checklist mentality’ that appears to characterise a meeting of formalised ethics requirements and permit their conscience-free pursuit of a cherished programme of research.

If risks of harm to the public and to researchers are to be kept to a minimum and if professional standards in the conduct of scientific research are to be maintained, the more that fundamental understandings of ethical behaviour in research are shared the better. If progress is made in one sphere everyone gains from it being generally acknowledged and understood. If foundational work is conducted everyone gains from being able to build on and develop further that work.

Nor can it be assumed that formal ethics review committees are able to resolve the dilemmas or meet the challenges involved. Enough has been written about

such review bodies to make their limitations clear. Crucially, they cannot follow researchers into the field to monitor their every action; they cannot anticipate all of the emergent ethical dilemmas nor, even, follow through to the publication of findings. There is no adequate penalty for neglect through incompetence, nor worse, for conscious omissions of evidence. We have to rely upon the virtues of the individual researcher alongside the skills of journal reviewers and funding agency evaluators. We need constantly to monitor scientific integrity at the corporate and at the individual level. These are issues of quality as well as morality.

Within the research ethics field new problems, issues and concerns and new ways of collecting data continue to emerge regularly. This should not be surprising as social, economic and technological change necessitate constant re-evaluation of research conduct. Standard approaches to research ethics such as valid informed consent, inclusion/exclusion criteria, vulnerable subjects and covert studies need to be reconsidered as developing social contexts and methodological innovation, interdisciplinary research and economic pressures pose new challenges to convention. Innovations in technology and method challenge our understanding of 'the public' and 'the private'. Researchers need to think even more clearly about the balance of harm and benefit to their subjects, to themselves and to society. This series proposes to address such new and continuing challenges for both funders, research managers, research ethics committees and researchers in the field as they emerge. The concerns and interests are global and well recognised by researchers and commissioners alike around the world but with varying commitments at both the procedural and the practical levels. This series is designed to suggest realistic solutions to these challenges – this practical angle is the *unique selling proposition* (USP) for the series. Each volume will raise and address the key issues in the debates, but also strive to suggest ways forward that maintain the key ethical concerns of respect for human rights and dignity, while sustaining pragmatic guidance for future research developments. A series such as this aims to offer practical help and guidance in actual research engagements as well as meeting the often varied and challenging demands of research ethics review. The approach will not be one of abstract moral philosophy; instead it will seek to help researchers think through the potential harms and benefits of their work in the proposal stage and assist their reflection of the big ethical moments that they face in the field often when there may be no one to advise them in terms of their societal impact and acceptance.

While the research community can be highly imaginative both in the fields of study and methodological innovation, the structures of management and funding, and the pressure to publish to fulfil league table quotas can pressure researchers into errors of judgment that have personal and professional consequences. The series aims to adopt an approach that promotes good practice and sets principles, values and standards that serve as models to aid successful research outcomes. There is clear international appeal as commissioners and researchers alike share a vested interest in the global promotion of professional virtues that lead to the public acceptability of good research. In an increasingly global world in research terms, there is little point in applying too localised a morality, nor one that implies a solely Western hegemony of values. If standards 'matter', it seems evident that they should 'matter' to and for all. Only then can the growth

of interdisciplinary and multi-national projects be accomplished effectively and with a shared concern for potential harms and benefits. While a diversity of experience and local interests is acknowledged, there are existing, proven models of good practice which can help research practitioners in emergent nations build their policies and processes to suit their own circumstances. We need to see that consensus positions effectively guide the work of scientists across the globe and secure minimal participant harm and maximum societal benefit – and, additionally, that instances of fraudulence, corruption and dishonesty in science decrease as a consequence.

Perhaps some forms of truly independent formal ethics scrutiny can help maintain the integrity of research professions in an era of enhanced concerns over data security, privacy and human rights legislation. But it is essential to guard against rigid conformity to what can become administrative procedures. The consistency we seek to assist researchers in understanding what constitutes ‘proper behaviour’ does not imply uniformity. Having principles does not lead inexorably to an adherence to principlism. Indeed, sincerely held principles can be in conflict in differing contexts. No one practice is necessarily the best approach in all circumstances. But if researchers are aware of the range of possible ways in which their work can be accomplished ethically and with integrity, they can be free to apply the approach that works or is necessary in their setting. Guides to ‘good’ ways of doing things should not be taken as the ‘only’ way of proceeding. A rigidity in outlook does no favours to methodological innovation, nor to the research subjects or participants that they are supposed to protect. If there were to be any principles that should be rigidly adhered to they should include flexibility, open-mindedness, the recognition of the range of challenging situations to be met in the field – principles that in essence amount to a sense of proportionality. And these principles should apply equally to researchers and ethics reviewers alike. To accomplish that requires ethics reviewers to think afresh about each new research proposal, to detach from pre-formed opinions and prejudices, while still learning from and applying the lessons of the past. Principles such as these must also apply to funding and commissioning agencies, to research institutions and to professional associations and their learned societies. Our integrity as researchers demands that we recognise that the rights of our funders and research participants and/or subjects are to be valued alongside our cherished research goals and seek to embody such principles in the research process from the outset. This series will strive to seek just how that might be accomplished in the best interests of all.



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