

# Working Paper

Institute of Criminology  
University of Cambridge

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**From Paper Ethics to Real World Research:  
Supervising Ethical Reflexivity when taking Risks in Research with the 'Risky'\***

Dr. Ruth Armstrong  
Institute of Criminology  
University of Cambridge  
Email: [ra299@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ra299@cam.ac.uk)

Prof. Loraine Gelsthorpe  
Institute of Criminology  
University of Cambridge  
Email: [lrg10@cam.ac.uk](mailto:lrg10@cam.ac.uk)

Dr. Ben Crewe  
Institute of Criminology  
University of Cambridge  
Email: [bc247@cam.ac.uk](mailto:bc247@cam.ac.uk)

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## **Abstract**

This paper candidly describes the ethical compromises of a UK post-graduate conducting ethnographic work with prisoners and ex-prisoners in the USA. It questions whether being ethical is synonymous with following ethical protocols to the letter, or whether taking risks might respect the values that underpin ethical regulations more than trying to rule out these risks entirely. It reflects on the discomfort of undertaking and supervising these risks, and describes the importance of trust, honesty and 'ethical sensibility' in the process of field work and research reporting. It outlines how the academic supervision process can facilitate reflexivity and make a safe space for the ethical manoeuvrings of a novice researcher discovering the realities of criminological ethnographic fieldwork.

I'm truly sorry man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
And justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes thee startle  
At me, thy poor, earth born companion  
And fellow mortal! ...  
But little Mouse, you are not alone,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes of mice and men  
Go often awry,  
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,  
For promised joy!  
(Robert Burns, To a Mouse on Turning Up in Her Nest with the Plough, 1785)

In real-world research, ethics are not fixed. Ethnographic researchers require flexibility to negotiate the ambiguities of ethical compromise and honour ethical values. Indeed, in what has been termed a 'reflexive turn' (Brewer, 2000), it is now more common than previously for researchers to engage reflexively with the fieldwork process, acknowledging knowledge production as both situated and partial (Lumsden, 2012) and emotional (Jewkes, 2011, Israel and Hay, 2006, Ruby, 1980). Less common is expressed reflexivity regarding the ethics of particular studies, acknowledging how the implementation of ethical safeguards is also situated, partial, and sometimes compromised in the field (but see Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, and McGraw, Zvonkovic, and Walker, 2000). This is especially taboo because of the heightened ethical concerns of work with 'vulnerable populations' in the field of criminology. This chapter considers how powerful institutions can utilise ethical procedures designed to both define and protect 'the vulnerable' to inhibit research that aims to encounter these individuals within the risky realities of their lives. We deliberate on what Israel and Hay (2006) outline as the two difficulties facing social scientists: i) the need to engage in ethical conduct while ii) also ensuring regulatory compliance. We argue that researchers seeking to conform to ethical review procedures can design methodological safeguards that, in practice, may numb their ethical sensibilities, and discourage honest engagement in and reflexive deliberation of 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

This chapter is the product of the shared reflections of its three authors. Ruth Armstrong (RA) writes from her perspective about the ethical dilemmas of both access and encounter in her ethnographic work with male convicts<sup>1</sup>, both in prison and during the first year post-release. Loraine Gelsthorpe (LG) and Ben Crewe (BC) write from their perspectives as RA's academic supervisors. Our collective aim is to take the reader 'back stage' (Tunnell, 1998), to show the underside of the research process (Gelsthorpe, 2007), to expose ethical vulnerabilities and thereby permit accurate reflection of the ethical rigour of the research described here. In candidly describing the ethical compromises of a UK post-graduate conducting ethnographic work with prisoners and ex-prisoners in the USA, we question whether being ethical is synonymous with following ethical protocols to the letter, and ask whether taking risks might respect the values that underpin ethical regulations more than trying to

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<sup>1</sup> This term was preferred by participants, as it distinguishes them from others on the basis of their conviction, rather than offending behaviour.

rule out these risks entirely. We reflect on the discomfort of both undertaking and supervising these risks, and describe the importance of trust, honesty and 'ethical sensibility' in the process of field work and research reporting. Finally, we outline how, in this case, the academic supervision process both facilitated reflexivity and made a safe space for the ethical manoeuvrings of a novice researcher discovering the realities of ethnographic fieldwork.

### **Negotiating Access to the Powerless through the Powerful**

The research described in this chapter was conducted in the USA with participants selected from a pre-release prison programme. In total, 51 prisoners fell within the pre-defined release period and were eligible to participate. Permission to carry out the research was sought and granted by the Director of the voluntary sector agency responsible for programming in the pre-release prison, who also arranged initial access to the prison. Eligible prisoners were approached and 48 agreed to participate. However, on the second visit to the prison, the Director highlighted access problems. He could not authorise the use of recording equipment in the prison, and could only arrange for limited access to prisoners. The obvious route to gain broader access was to get authorisation for the research from the state Department of Corrections (DoC). However, academics in the USA warned that this would be a lengthy process, likely to derail a Ph.D, which is meant to be completed within a three-year period within the UK, and unlikely to be authorised due to a perceived reluctance to permit independent external research and the difficulty of getting ethnographic research with 'vulnerable populations' past the requisite Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). As leading USA criminologist Professor Mark Hamm has noted: 'In America it is harder for a criminologist to get into prison than it is for a convict to break out of one'<sup>2</sup>.

The ethical dilemma faced in this instance was that the study already had ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of a leading UK University, and the participants had already agreed to take part. Would subjecting the study to further review by an IRB and by the administrators of the participants' captivity help to protect participants' autonomy – one of the foundational principles of ethical review processes in the USA? Would 'respect for persons' – a second core principle - be better safeguarded by avoiding further access scrutiny? Might not restrictions on prisoners' and ex-prisoners' freedom to choose to communicate their experiences violate the third principle – that of beneficence?

The 1991 Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, known as the 'Common Rule', sets out the special conditions for research on 'vulnerable populations' defined as 'persons who are relatively or absolutely incapable of protecting their own interests'. They include children, foetuses and pregnant women, the terminally ill, students and employees, comatose patients and prisoners. As a vulnerable group of humans, research involving prisoners is therefore subject to 'special regulations ... that *restrict* the involvement of prisoners in research'<sup>3</sup> The Common Rule defines prisoners as 'any individuals involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution'. This does not include persons on probation or parole. The state DoC in this study defines research projects requiring their authorisation as 'any external empirical analysis of the practices and proceedings of

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>3</sup> See the US Department of Health and Human Services, Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams, Nov 2002:p.22.

the department involving offenders under supervision in the criminal justice system'. It applies to all people supervised by the DoC before, during and after incarceration. Part of the DoC external research approval process is IRB approval.<sup>4</sup> The role of IRBs as ethical review boards in the USA grew from recognition of the need to protect human subjects from potentially risky medical and behavioural research. However, IRBs have been criticised for 'mission creep' (Gunsalus et al., 2006, Whitney et al., 2008) on the basis that rather than protecting human participants from biomedical and behavioural research *experiments*, they have come to regulate human *interactions* (Gunsalus, 2004:369 emphasis ours). Gunsalus argues this situation, has "undermined respect for important ethical oversight" (p381) because ethical review has come to be understood as "pro forma compliance as opposed to review of fundamental ethical issues" (p373).

At worst, the 'protections' offered to prisoners as 'vulnerable populations' can provide a legalistic mechanism to censor external research, ironically denying vulnerable persons the autonomy to participate in research concerning their conditions of captivity. Other ethnographers have argued that, in reality, official 'protection of human subjects' paperwork does little to safeguard the dignity and interests of socially vulnerable research subjects, and is more often used to safeguard institutions from lawsuits (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009). In this project, care had been taken to ensure participants' informed consent. The obligatory forms had been ethically reviewed, the research had been clearly explained, as had the freedom to refuse to participate (chosen by three potential participants), to withdraw at any point (later chosen by one participant), to moderate participation as desired, and the independence of the research from the criminal justice system and its internal processes. In this light, it felt uncomfortable to request further DoC authorisation to engage in a conversation with an ex-prisoner about their experiences post-release, or that IRBs should have authority to regulate 'two people talking situations' (Gunsalus, 2004). Experienced US academics advised that the best way to 'officially' navigate this situation was to present the research as an 'evaluation' of the third sector programme which did not 'empirically analyse the practices and proceedings of the department' in order to safeguard against criticism for choosing to circumvent the DoC authorisations. But these informal understandings about how to frame research in order to avoid bureaucratic hurdles so as to access 'vulnerable' populations inhibit academics from writing in an honest way about what they have actually done, and why.

Several options for ethical access were considered, including only contacting the participants once released. However, because DoC research authorisation is required to speak to people who are in the community but still subject to parole supervision, this strategy did not erase the ethical dilemmas. Instead, access was facilitated through volunteering for the pre-release programme within the prison. This approach enabled researcher presence in the prison, but prohibited recording equipment other than a field note book and printed questionnaires. This contact pre-release proved very important to establishing relationships of trust between the researcher and the participants which translated into a very low attrition rate.<sup>5</sup> Voluntary status overcame a bureaucratic hurdle and got researcher access through the gate, but within the prison it was known that the researcher's role

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<sup>4</sup> While the study had approval from the Ethical Review Committee of a leading UK University, USA academics thought this was unlikely to satisfy the requirement for IRB approval because the UK University's Ethical Review Committee did not include either an ex-prisoner or prisoners' representative on the panel, a requirement for an IRB deciding the ethicality of research involving prisoners.

<sup>5</sup> RA lost contact with just six participants during the course of the study.

both altruistic and academic. The Director of the pre-release programme was keen to discuss the research with officials, and the researcher talked about her work with the DoC audit team, the Executive Director of the DoC and the Director of Parole. A special trip was made to DoC headquarters to discuss the research with the DoC Head of Volunteer Services. What the project lacked in formal compliance it gained through relational legitimacy. Despite this, what the warden of the prison knew, or thought, or preferred not to know, was never made explicit. However, it was not necessary to be dishonest in order to be discreet. If deciding not to seek official authorisation was engaging in a form of deception, then it was a deception that Tunnell suggests is “central to the sociology of crime ... deceiving those whose positions of official power ... allow them to adversely affect participants, researchers, and researchers’ work” (Tunnell, 1998:212). This research did not engage in ‘conflict methodology’ (Tunnell, 1998); the epistemology was person-centred, not anti-institutional. In order to learn from ‘fellow mortals’ one must approach them as such.

### **Taking risks in person centred ‘edgework’ with ‘the risky’**

Lyng (1998:221) argues that “[m]any important empirical and theoretical problems taken up in the social sciences can be thoroughly and honestly studied only by placing oneself in situations that may compromise safety and security in a normative or corporeal sense”. Ex-prisoner re-entry studied ‘from below’ is one such problem (Wacquant, 2010). The document drafted to secure ethical approval for this study included strategies to safeguard against imagined risks to both participants and researcher and stated its overriding consideration as safeguarding participant wellbeing. One way to safeguard participant well-being as the overriding consideration was through authentic encounter in supportive and validating social interactions, but facilitating this meant minimising the power differentials between researcher and participant through coming alongside participants in the risky realities of their lives.

In line with the proposed methods drafted pre-fieldwork and approved by the Ethics Committee, interactions with released prisoners began through pre-arranged meetings with participants in public places, and in locations selected by the researcher. The methods proposed involved safeguards such as not travelling with participants alone, and not letting participants know the home address of the researcher. However, it became evident very quickly that sticking to some of these ‘safeguards’ would result in a failed fieldwork project. Tunnell (1998) suggests that in order to experience ‘backstage behaviours’ researchers must take a ‘backstage approach’. His argument is practical rather than ethical, and is persuasive. However, in this re-entry study, engagement in ‘experiential anarchism’ through ‘edgework’ (Lyng, 1998, 1990) was not merely for practical reasons, but was grounded in ethical concerns. These field notes capture the dilemma:

The individuals I want to meet with are not used to moving around the city and are not particularly motivated to spend their newly found free time with me [RA]. As such, in order to engage my participants I need to make it as easy as possible for them to meet with me, that is, I need to do it on their terms where possible.

However, this approach to fieldwork is not merely a pragmatic decision in order to ensure a good follow up rate. In no small way it comes from the theoretical underpinnings of the study developing through my time with the men. It feels

incongruous to nod and smile and encourage these men to tell me everything about their lives, to hear how individuals who believed in their goodness helped to enable that goodness, but to insist we meet in a public place of my choosing, unspoken, yet understood, to ensure my security.

Bottoms' (2007:83) calls for a dialogical relationship between theory and empirical observations as researchers navigate the 'rough waters' of data collection. Liebling (2001) also argues that attention to synthesis is required in empirical research. Reconciling the dialogue between desistance theory, data and ethical methods required a methodological re-orientation towards the participants and towards interaction. Methodologically prioritising the personhood of participants involved both embracing risk and trusting instincts. Sticking to methods designed to avoid risk entirely would have limited opportunities to encounter the realities of ex-prisoners lives, whereas prioritising personhood permitted close-range encounters with the realities of re-entry: visiting where participants lived, meeting their families and friends, feeling the public stigma and constraints of electronic monitoring, racing back from excursions to comply with curfews, sensing participants' frustrations when we 'arrived' at their chosen venue to find that their old haunts had long since disappeared. One participant proudly acted as chauffeur to show off his newly purchased vehicle, but was then frustrated and embarrassed, heavy in the atmospheric stigma of the label 'murderer', when he took a wrong turn and found he was headed towards a dead end on a country lane at midnight in an area he claimed he 'used to know like the back of [his] hand'. These experiences, and others, provided knowledge of the re-entering prisoners' mortification in the mundane - the sense of dislocation in finding they no longer belonged in the place they thought they were from.

Approaching participants on the basis of their present personhood rather than their past convictions permitted trust to grow and authenticity to flourish. This involved frequenting forgotten neighbourhoods, carefully following instructions of the route out and warnings not to stop; picking a way through a ransacked house, not yet cleared up following a revenge burglary; celebrating homecomings with home-made food and extended family; and watching prostitutes walk the street while rocking on the porch holding the hand of a mother sobbing for her drug addicted son. This non-judgmental approach meant that participants felt able to share struggles as well as success. When Morris<sup>6</sup> moved out of a halfway house at 3pm, with only an hour to get across town to a homeless shelter before intake closed at 4pm, he called for a lift. He would never have made it on public transport and of course had no money for a cab. Arriving with moments to spare, he submissively and successfully negotiated his bed in the hostel. When Elijah was released from the city jail at 4am, due to 'round-the-clock' release policies to deal with overcrowding,<sup>7</sup> he called to ask for a lift home, providing insight into jail release procedures that see hundreds of men released in the dead of every night onto the empty streets, little money and no way to get home. Compliance with risk protocols now embedded in ethics guidelines would not have permitted appreciation of such predicaments, nor provided the opportunity to speak to participants in such moments, such as asking Elijah about his few days back inside and what might come next in his life. This involvement helped with the development of appropriate questions for subsequent meetings, and provided the platform of trust from which they could be asked. The solidary nature of the ethnographic approach

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<sup>6</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

<sup>7</sup> A recent bill to mandate release from jails only during daylight hours did not pass through the legislature.

created a safe environment in which difficult realities were shared and discussed and discrepancies between explanations and experiences could be challenged. In other words, taking risks provided a vista to the realities of participants' lives and provided a receptive forum in which they could both speak and be heard.

Being person-centred and taking risks does not eschew the need for imposing safeguards when it seems prudent. When David requested a 5am pick up to take him to a rehab centre, it seemed sensible to arrange for another ex-prisoner who knew him, but was not a participant in the research, to chaperone the dawn foray. David was living on the streets. He was thin and dirty, addicted to crack cocaine. Picking him up alone at 5am with few people around involved risks both for the researcher's safety, and for the participant, by providing an easy target for a robbery that could supply the proceeds for a quick drug fix. However, requesting a chaperone also involved ethical compromise in terms of participant confidentiality. Ravaged by drugs, sleeping rough, not having eaten for three days and without transport to get from rehab to parole to change his address and back again before intake closed, David would not have got into rehab without the help of a belligerent foreign white woman with a penchant for persistence. This experience brought home how with all the will in the world, bureaucratic structures can block avenues of assistance for those seeking a way out. One situation also made it questionable whether withholding the home address was an ethical way to proceed. Casey had secured himself a job working away, and, proud of his achievement, he wanted to send a postcard, responding to the many he had received from England during his participation in the research. Perceiving the need to justify such revelations to an imaginary ethical police, RA's field notes recall:

I didn't want to say no to him. I felt like saying no would detract from his humanity. I am not concerned about what he will do with it, but rather, how I can account for giving it to him if I should be 'discovered'.

The account is thus: that in order to describe re-entry one must understand it, that "depth of understanding" is "related to the degree of co-presence" between researchers and participants (Lyng, 1998:225), that to get this understanding requires the "honesty and openness" of participants, and facilitating this "cannot be a one way process ... to ask for these things generates obligations" (Liebling, 2011:520). On this occasion, withholding the address would have involved complicity in a pejorative power differential. These examples of interactions with David and Casey show how the imposition of safeguards is not always antithetical to expressing trust and facilitating authenticity, whereas pre-ordained risk management strategies can over-regulate the research process, curtail spontaneity (through encouraging researchers to avoid situations involving ethical compromise) and consequently numb researchers' ethical sensibilities. Taming the research process through legalistic adherence to ethical protocols could have damaging consequences for both ethical practice and research outcomes: it could result in researcher withdrawal from difficult and hidden areas of social life, or encourage dishonesty about the realities of this work. In research with 'the risky', taking some risks may be part of a researcher's ethical obligations.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) outline the value of reflexivity in providing both a 'language' and an 'approach' that can assist researchers in dealing with the 'ethically important moments' that arise in research. They distinguish between 'procedural ethics', drafted for ethical review boards pre-



research, and 'ethics in practice' which are negotiated in situations that are 'difficult, often subtle, and usually unpredictable' (p262). A researcher's 'ethical competence', they argue, is only tested in practice through showing a willingness to recognise and acknowledge ethical dimensions in the 'micro-ethical' dimension of their work and to think through ethical issues and respond appropriately. While they therefore suggest that "procedural ethics cannot in itself provide all that is needed for dealing with ethically important moments in qualitative research" (p262), and that "arguably, procedural ethics has little or no impact on the actual ethical conduct of research" (p269), they posit a continuity between procedural ethics and ethics in practice. As the examples in this chapter show, however, there is a danger that the perceived need to adhere to pre-determined 'paper ethics' can undermine the fundamental principles on which ethical review is based, through suppressing researchers' willingness to engage in – and then honestly recount – the messy ethical dilemmas of ethnography. In the following section, we reflect on the role of open, honest and high-trust supervision in nurturing 'ethical sensibility'. We discuss how such an approach could be utilised by ethical review boards to facilitate reflexivity in 'ethics in practice' and help safeguard the ethical values that good researchers aim to uphold.

### **Supervising risk in research with the 'risky'**

As Guillemin and Gillam write, it is important to have or be able to develop 'a means of addressing and responding to ethical concerns if and when they arise in the research (which might well include a way or pre-empting potential ethical problems before they take hold)' (2004:276). As supervisors, we are duty bound to ensure that research students are aware of ethical guidelines for the discipline (in this case Criminology) and indeed, for the University, to conduct a 'risk audit' for anyone planning to undertake fieldwork. One of us (LG) has chaired a professional ethics committee for many years as well as undertaking fieldwork in a variety of criminal justice contexts, and teaches 'ethics' as part of a social science methods programme - all the while promoting the exercise of 'ethical muscles' and reflexivity, whilst the other (BC) has extensive experience of conducting prison-based research with all the complexities and concomitant concerns regarding access that that involves. In our dealings with senior gatekeepers, there has always been an understanding – sometimes explicit – that some creative (but careful) interpretation of formal research guidelines may be a pre-requisite for meaningful research. Senior practitioners have expressed faith in our ability to make decisions in the field that are sensible and defensible, with defensibility defined in relation to the spirit more than the letter of ethical frameworks. In other words, we are trusted to know what the rules are and how to use them. In supervising students, we try to generate the same relationship, and the same understanding of what it means to undertake ethical research. This requires an ethical sensibility that is broader in scope, and deeper in spirit, than can be assured through simple compliance with ethical protocols. Part of our preparation work with students is to point out the limitations of codes of ethics. We also seek to reproduce the relationship of mutual trust that we ourselves have experienced as researchers, despite the insecurities that result from it, because it is only under conditions of trust that truly helpful discussions can take place about the context-specific ethical dilemmas that they confront.

We had all along anticipated on-going contact with Ruth during the fieldwork, well aware that ethical issues might arise in the process. Certainly, there was no belief that codes of ethics hold all the answers, or that Ethics Committees know what the realities of fieldwork might be like.

Moreover, we have become increasingly conscious of the fact that institutional ethics committees sometimes confuse safety, security, and ethical practice and have criticised increased regulatory controls over research under the guise of 'ethics' in our teaching (Israel and Hay, 2006). But there is a difference between questioning the meaning of 'ethical practice' in the classroom, and addressing it in practice. Thus engagement in Ruth's ethical dilemmas renewed concern to think about the values which underpin research and how new regimes of regulatory ethical control can limit rather than facilitate 'value-led' research. Doing qualitative research is by nature a reflective and recursive process of course (Ely et al, 1991: 179) but somehow direct engagement with Ruth's dilemmas brought it all closer to home and we needed to be reflexive in relation to the ethics of her research.

As we see it, the process of reflexivity is an attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it. For us, being reflexive in doing research is part of being honest and ethically mature in research practice, and we would certainly endorse any steps which require researchers to 'stop being "shamans" of objectivity' (Ruby, 1980: 154).

One of the immediate reactions when learning of the complexities of Ruth's research – both in terms of her access, and her on-going practices – was to think defensively: how could she ensure safety, and how could we ensure her safety - at great distance? Would the research be compromised? Would our institution's reputation be compromised if anything were to go wrong? Thus classroom debates became a pressing reality. We either had to trust the person we knew, and who was close to the ground, or compromise her research ourselves, by insisting upon formal rather than substantive compliance with official practices and procedures. We were thus prompted to think about the differences between 'procedural ethics' and 'ethics in practice' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Our faith in Ruth's judgment and maturity, and our recognition that she was street-smart, was crucial here. It made it easier to leave decisions in her hands, even though this meant living with a degree of nervousness about the potential for things to go wrong. (The fact that both the country and criminal justice system in which she was working were relatively unknown to us, and were far away, perhaps made it easier to live with our nerves). With other students we have supervised, we would have been considerably more reluctant to give such latitude. Indeed, we might well have drawn upon official guidelines to dissuade a student from making such decisions or, even, to pull the plug on some aspects of the study. In this respect, formal protocols were potentially a shield behind which we could all withdraw. In this case, it made more sense to offer ourselves as sounding boards for Ruth in precisely those moments when she found herself in situations which could not possibly be covered by formal research guidelines, when her insecurities were likely to be their greatest. Ruth's constant candour about the edgework in which she was engaging was an edgy experience for us, as supervisors. But we came to recognise more forcefully than hitherto that it was more valuable for her to expose (us to) the messy negotiations and risky practices inherent in her research than for her to avoid them, deal with them alone, or tidy them away in the writing up of her research. Had she done any of these, not only would her research have suffered, but so too would her development as an ethically sensitive researcher.

## Conclusions

This chapter has argued that reflexivity is an important mechanism through which ethical rigour can be maximised. It builds on the previous work on reflexivity and ethics to suggest that legalistic adherence to existing forms of ethical safeguards might not always protect the values we hope they will. We have argued that ethical supervision, in the form of capacity for honest discussion of ethical compromises in an atmosphere of trust contemporaneous with field work, could help to promote such reflexivity. Israel and Hay (2006) argue the researcher's job is to ensure both ethical conduct, and ethical compliance. Reflexivity in this project has forced us to question whether this is always possible. The concern is that, all too often, human research participants might be under-protected or disempowered as academics engage in broad and bland research proposals, solid enough to survive the ethical review process, but elastic enough to permit pragmatic research. These concerns are heightened in criminological research where powerful state institutions can evade an independent academic gaze behind paternalistic determinations and oversight of how to protect 'vulnerable' people from 'risky' interactions.

Dequirez and Hersant (2013) describe the 'virtues of improvisation' in ethnography: it gives researchers the freedom to adapt and to be inventive which is beneficial for both knowledge production and for analytical frameworks. In this paper we have argued such flexibility might also lead to more ethical research, and develop more ethically sensitive researchers who report the realities of their labours candidly. Essentially, the research has to be ethically 'good-enough' (Winnicott, 1973). Within policing, Bowling (2009) argues 'good-enough' means being clear about fundamental values, and transparent about the means and the ends. The same holds true for research. This experience of trying to do a 'good-enough' ethnography (Scheper-Hughes, 1989) suggests to us that it might be possible for ethical regulatory bodies to oversee ethnographic research in politically sensitive areas in a way that permits transparency about ethical improvisations while upholding ethical values. This would involve movement towards a more social scientific standard of rigour where research is not judged by the absence of ethical ambiguities, but by evidence of ethical sensibilities through practices that return us to the heart of the matter - respect for autonomy, beneficence and justice.

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