

Insider Research Ethics

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Understanding Insider Research

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- Also known as *practitioner research*, and relates to wider discussions around *positionality*.
 - Arises when a person has a dual-role e.g. both practitioner and researcher.
 - Framed as an ‘insider’ due to their attachment to, or involvement with, the site of inquiry as a member of that organization or community (Sikes and Potts, 2008).

Challenges for the Insider Researcher

- Challenges and dilemmas emerge due to pre-existing and ongoing professional relationships with and role obligations towards colleagues/participants, whilst also coming to terms with newfound role and conduct as researcher (Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Greene, 2014).
- Insider researchers are more likely to face unexpected or ongoing ethical dilemmas long after the research finishes (Floyd and Arthur, 2012).

Challenges for the Insider Researcher

- Challenges arise predominately around:
 - Power and coercion (Bloomfield & Harreveld, 202)
 - Participants' internal and external confidentiality (Tolich, 2004; Toy-Cronin, 2019)
 - Data distortion resulting from undocumented and deep historical knowledge of participants and context (Taylor, 2011)

Ensuring 'Ethical' Insider Research?

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- Criticisms exist surrounding the efficacy of procedural ethics approaches, such as university ethics review committees (Head 2020)
 - most ethical issues cannot be easily predicted and 'managed out' prior to a study commencing (Traianou 2019).
 - The ethical dilemmas can be unexpected and ongoing (Head 2020).
 - Insider researchers need to be ethically sensitive, ethically aware, and ethically reflective (Macfarlane 2010).

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- Insider researchers require an understanding of what to do as researchers who act with integrity (Macfarlane, 2009; 2010):

“integration of a person’s true self and linking their values and identity as a person with their research practice”

(Macfarlane, 2009: 45)

- This means acting reasonably when faced with challenging circumstances and maintaining a vigilant attitude towards their character and subsequent actions (Macfarlane 2010).

Whistleblowing & Poor Research Practice

- Tuskegee Truth Teller, Peter Buxtun
- An autopsy-orientated study, started 1932
- 40 years later, US Public Health Service had deceived and exploited hundreds of black men with syphilis near Tuskegee, Alabama using free meals and burial insurance to incentivise participation in research, received no treatment for potentially deadly disease, never told of infectious disease, nor offered any treatment
- Nobody will listen / retribution
- *Your role as a researcher?*
Employee? Citizen?



Case Study

Following a national anti bullying campaign, a Professor of Psychology wishes to study bullying in the Physics department of their institution. The research will involve online questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The Professor plans to publish the results in a Psychology international peer-reviewed journal.

What concerns could an ethics committee have about this proposed research?

Insider Research & Role Blurring

- **Influencing design, recruitment, collection, analysis, & dissemination**
 - Being recognised as a researcher
 - Building boundaries before, during and after research
 - Prepare participants as you shift into and out of role as a researcher
 - Power dynamics
 - Superiors, peers, and juniors
 - Coercion and consent: perception of a legitimate free choice
 - Questions asked...or *not* asked / people included or not included

Insider Research & Role Blurring

- **Influencing design, recruitment, collection, analysis, & dissemination**
 - Maintaining confidentiality
 - Storage of data
 - Maintaining anonymity
 - Location of data collection
 - Drawing on knowledge/experience/insights as an employee and as a researcher
 - To promote participation
 - To build rapport during data collection
 - Academic freedom
 - Consequences...for organisation, your colleagues, yourself