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Article in *Africa Education Review* · October 2015

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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH ETHICS: SHOULD ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES BE DEALT WITH ON THEIR OWN MERIT?

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ABSTRACT

A primary principle of ethical codes in research involving people is that of informed consent which ensures participants' right to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. A blanket application of the principle of anonymity to Oral History (OH) research could well be counterproductive to the purported aims of OH research. The research comprised a literature study. Four rationales for doing OH are discussed and positioned within the philosophical framework that informs the purpose of and methodological approach to the research. Examples are extracted to explain where the principle of anonymity could be at variance with the research aims. When OH research sets out to contribute to historical understanding, validate respondents' lives, contribute to democracy and facilitate socio-political transformation, enforcing anonymity has the potential to denigrate the respondent and jeopardize research credibility. Researchers

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

Africa Education Review
Volume 12 | Number 4 | 2015
pp. 552–566

DOI: 10.1080/18146627.2015.1112132
Print ISSN 1814-6627 | Online 1753-5921
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should question whether the unmitigated application of the principle of anonymity restricts them from achieving their mandate of affording respondents' dignity, respect, autonomy and beneficence.

Keywords: oral history, anonymity, autonomy, confidentiality, research ethics

INTRODUCTION

'When we forget the past we lose the anchor that keeps us from drifting; when we forget the sacrifices made for our freedom we start taking that freedom for granted' (Goettsche 2001, 1). Nelson Mandela uttered a similar sentiment during the opening of the President's Budget Debate in 1999. 'Freedom can never be taken for granted. Each generation must safeguard it and extend it' (cited by Dlanga, 2012). Paula Young (2013), a British Columbian historian, when speaking of Canadian aboriginal history emphasizes the importance of knowing the past since it gives meaning to the present – a comment that resonates with Goettsche's observation that the past keeps one anchored. History is thus undisputedly important and in countries with complicated histories, such as South Africa, it is vital to collect and preserve the testimony of 'ordinary people' as a way of adding meaning and giving depth to our understanding of the past as a counterpoint to the 'official' narrative.

Oral history (OH) research is a recognized methodology within inter alia the discipline of social history. Its primary purpose is to collect, record and contextualize specific experiences from an individual's complex life. Its process and application have roots in qualitative research methods and consequently it is conducted in the spirit of critical enquiry and social responsibility with the necessary attention to scientific rigour and the adherence to ethical principles and codes. Ethical challenges in social research arise from concerns about the way the people who are involved in the research will be affected by its processes and the results (Mertens and Ginsberg 2008, 484). Ethical considerations that come to mind in OH enquiry are those that relate to respect for persons, beneficence, privacy, confidentiality and consequently, by association, anonymity, and the negotiation thereof by obtaining informed consent from research participants prior to engaging them in the research. It is generally conceded (Skotnes 1995; Field 1999) that the collection of OH narratives is an attempt to give a voice to the socially marginalized, irrespective of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation or social status. People's OH is a vital contributor to the processes of democratization and social transformation especially in contexts where oppression and subjugation have been commonplace.

In this article I argue that, given the nature and purpose of OH research, and the need to preserve, store and make available information obtained from respondents for future review and further research, the process and outcome of applying the principle of confidentiality and negotiating informed consent could be significantly

different from what is generally applied in qualitative research where interviewing respondents is a key data collection method. It is important to establish what is unique in the research process and how – or if – OH research differs from regular qualitative research, as well as whether it indeed requires that the norms and principles ensuring credible, rigorous and ethical research be applied differently.

To explore this thesis, I intend to discuss the status and purpose of OH research as it applies to OH research in a particular education context where researchers explore the experiences of retired teachers who taught in the apartheid era. I posit that OH research is more than a mere collection of narrations from the past and that the products of OH research should contribute to the body of historical knowledge and understanding of a country's (and an individual's) past. This argument will be based on an examination of the literature that relates to the nature and purpose of OH research and the place of OH in society; a review of the principles of research ethics as they apply to qualitative research; and establishing which of these norms and principles should be applied to OH research in the context of this study, and in what manner.

THE FIELD, PURPOSE AND NATURE OF ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH

Mapping the field of OH research is complex, mainly because this method of research encompasses and draws on so many disciplines, and is influenced by a variety of underpinning philosophies. The primary role of OH research is to gather, analyse, report on and preserve historical information that has been collected in the form of personal narratives and memories about individuals' life experiences. These recollections need to be understood within the cultural and structural settings of the time, and enable researchers to understand how individuals lived through and were affected by social, political and economic events and circumstances that were constituted by prevailing ideologies.

Furthermore, OH research is generally to facilitate historical reconstruction and to supplement existing 'official' historical evidence by providing the perspectives of [usually] nominal individuals on events: perspectives that would otherwise be lost to posterity (Bloor and Wood 2006). More recently, the restorative and legitimizing role of OH research has also been noted (Ross 2003; Skotnes 1995; Wieder 2004) and OH has been described as a means of making sense of and reconciling with the past (Downs 2009, 21). Shopes (n.d., 3) adds that OH research provides valuable sources of new knowledge about the past and that it has significantly enriched the work of social historians by broadening the focus and providing information about everyday life and insights of ordinary people that are not found in conventional sources.

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS RELATING TO ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH

Because OH research entails working with people, a number of legal, moral and ethical obligations and principles apply to the research. Primarily, these principles are aimed at protecting the individuals involved and the products that ensue from the research from abuse and misuse. Legally, researchers need to ensure that research participants are respected, treated with dignity and are not harmed through (during or as a result of) the research. Contentious issues in OH research, such as copyright and ownership of information and its distribution, the right to access information, protection from defamation and the right to privacy, are generally addressed by the legislation of individual countries. OH researchers need to be conversant with these policies and aware of how they influence and apply to their research.

While legal rights are derived from the laws of society, moral rights are grounded in moral reasoning. Apart from having a legal claim to protection from harm, individuals also have recourse to moral rights. The distinction between moral and legal rights is not one that is unambiguous, as philosophers such as J. Bentham (1748–1832), W.N. Hohfeld (1879–1918) and H.L. Hart (1907–1992) have argued (Campbell 2011). In most instances, moral rights have influenced the legal system and have resulted in the passage of related legislation (Trent 2011) such as copyright legislation. According to current usage, the term ‘moral rights’ refers to authors’ and artists’ rights in relation to control over the use of their work and the basic, inalienable rights derived from being human (Trent 2011).

What do legal and moral rights have to do with OH research? The importance of raising the issue of moral and legal rights is that new/original resources are generated by doing OH. The role the researcher plays in the generation of the product is that of directing and determining the process since it is through the questing and guidance of the researcher that the narrator relates and co-constructs the narrative. To be of value to society and to future researchers, these works should be preserved and made available to broader audiences. Both legal and moral rights apply to authored works. Ardito (2002) explains that:

... copyright law protects property rights entitling authors to publish and economically benefit from their published works. Moral rights safeguard personal and reputational rights, which permit authors to defend both the integrity of their works and the use of their names.
(p. 17)

OH researchers as qualitative researchers are obliged to adhere to an ethical code that promotes professional standards in relation to doing OH and the processing and preservation of data. Certainly this is commendable practice which should not be

compromised, but what makes OH research unique is its specific purpose and nature that requires that the conditions under which, and the context within which, the research occurs should be considered when ethics protocols are applied. In instances where researchers' research designs and protocols have to be cleared by institutional research ethics committees who are inclined to apply the general codes of ethics stringently and without necessarily understanding the unique nature of OH research, this could be problematical and give rise to differences of opinion.

Codes of ethics designed for qualitative research are based on ethical codes established for biomedical research (Van den Hoonaard 2003, 142) and have a history dating back to the Nuremberg Code of 1949 (Henderson 2005, 2). Primarily, researchers have to adhere to the 'do no harm' principle; treat research participants with respect and dignity; and obtain informed consent from the participants prior to engaging in the research. Informed consent is the principle that relates to issues of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (Henderson, 2005: 1). Several contemporary researchers (Adams 2008; Henderson 2005; Mertens and Ginsberg 2008; Tilley and Woodthorpe 2011; K'Meyer and Crothers 2007) have cautioned against the blanket application of anonymity in OH research and have argued their point from various angles. What these authors are saying is that the universal endorsement of anonymity may not be consistent with the aims and scope of all OH research and may, indeed, undermine the sense of ownership, autonomy and empowerment that OH purports to facilitate.

How and why OH research is undertaken and the nature of the discourses that emerge from the research are largely informed by the research paradigms that underpin the research and the researcher's own thinking and philosophy regarding OH (Gluck, Ritchie and Eynon 1999: 2). Selected contemporary paradigms that inform the practice of OH research are thus outlined.

THE PLACE OF ORAL HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: UNDERPINNING PARADIGMS

Research paradigms inform researchers' thinking about knowledge and the nature, purpose and construction of knowledge (Williams 1998). Over the past 50 years, the philosophical paradigms underpinning the theory and practice of OH research can be broadly described as:

- a. a positivist paradigm, in which the 'revival of memory' typical of the post-war collections of oral histories as a source of 'a history of (or for) the people' dominated
- b. a postmodern paradigm since the 1970s, in which conceptualization of memory and cognisance of the subjectivity and plurality of individuals' life and life's experiences.

OH is practised in the latter paradigm is seen as a process to contribute to the democratization of society, as a process constituting transformation or as a means of realizing social advocacy (see Figure 1). In the context of this study which entailed conducting OH interviews with retired teachers who had taught during apartheid – many of whom who had endured or had been subjected to gross discrimination or, alternatively, had been unmindful of the rampant inequality and bias in the provisioning of education – it was necessary to explore the way in which the norms and principles of anonymity and confidentiality could or should be applied, especially in view of how their application would contribute to the process of democratization and the transformation of a divided society. Figure 1 below illustrates a postmodern approach in which OH is seen as a means of realizing social advocacy.

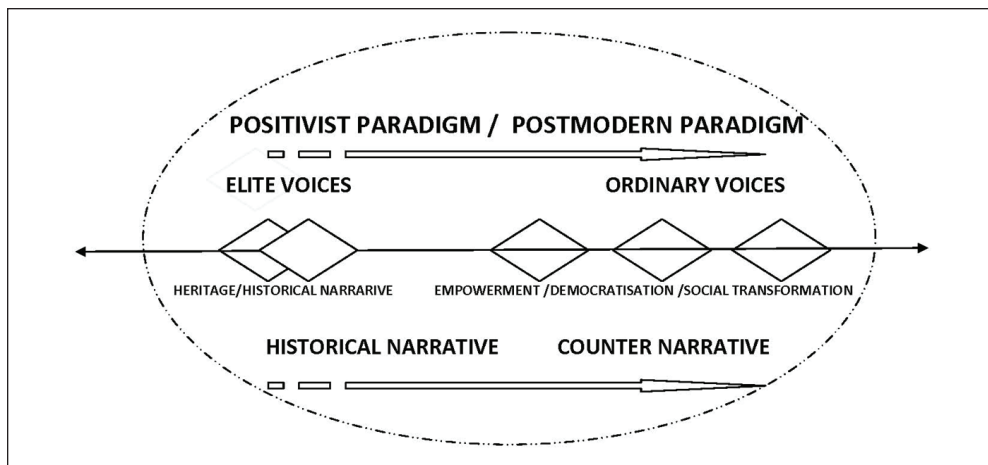


Figure 1: Oral history paradigm and rational continuum

There is no clear chronology for ascendancy to or transition between the paradigms. What emerges is that a particular paradigm is chosen that best fits the research focus or purpose at a particular time and in a particular context. The argument that I advance is that OH research is a unique form of qualitative research given its distinctive nature and purpose. Therefore, we need to consider whether some of the ethical principles that apply to qualitative research in general might not need to be applied differently in the context of OH research. To explain and argue this point, four rationales for doing OH research are outlined briefly.

Rationale 1: the preservation of memory

The modern concept of OH is ascribed to developments that took place in the 1940s and the pioneering work of Allan Neving, an American historian and journalist.

OH as the preservation of historical memory continues to be undertaken to ensure a legacy of factual information not available elsewhere. This type of OH can be described as a struggle against forgetting. The purpose of such an approach to OH research can be described as the collection of ‘factual data’ where the element of interpretation and explanation is minimal and not the focus of the research. This process is essentially informed by a positivist research paradigm aimed at establishing ‘credible’, ‘verifiable’, ‘factual knowledge’.

In this model, OH data is collected from the elderly members of society and because the researchers retrieving these recollections can only go back one lifetime, the limits move forward in time with each generation (Moyer 1999). In the OH research studies which informed this research, if the documenting of the narratives of close on 60 retired teachers from black communities who taught during apartheid is not seen as a matter of current urgency, the individual experiences and rich recollections will be at risk of becoming lost forever. In addition – and possibly more sadly – will be the fact that the efforts of many individuals who prevailed despite their circumstances will go unacknowledged and unappreciated.

Apart from doing OH research as ‘the preservation of historical memory’, there is another purpose for collecting ‘evidence’ of this nature. Because history can be criticized for embedding the ideas and assumptions of those by whom it was recorded, revisions to this ‘official’ history can be provided by asking individuals to share their personal recollections, perspectives and experiences of historical events. This type of OH research calls into question the often unquestioned ‘truthfulness’ of historical events (Bos 2011). Data collected for this purpose is not confined to the factual, but allows for narrator reflection, explanation and reflection that personalizes the information.

When the legal, moral and ethical principles applicable to OH research are considered, we need to decide which of these principles applies specifically to OH research and how these principles could influence the research. In many cases, the data collected for the purpose of ‘preserving memory’ are archived either as transcriptions, edited narratives or as audio or video recordings. Archivists need to consider how the material will be logged, administered, accessed and protected from misuse, and the purposes for which the archived materials may be used. A primary concern for archived material would be issues of copyright, the ceding and ownership of copyright (Ward 2003).

Codes of ethics invariably mention the principle of beneficence – maximizing the benefits of the research to the participants involved (Henderson 2005): what benefit is it to the individual or the community if the ownership of the product – the outcome of the research – is ceded to a research funding organization, an individual (the researcher) or an academic institution? In proposing that individuals and communities may have a moral claim to the right to information, the question needs to be asked how the moral right (and concomitant duty) to share knowledge with others

should be applied. The right to information is an expression of the moral principle of autonomy that enables individuals to shape their own lives (Britz and Lor 2003, 160). The right of individuals and communities to use and control self-generated information should also be considered. It then becomes pertinent to question whether anonymity is or should be an ethical given? What if the narrator wishes to be named? Does the application of anonymity not undermine the autonomy of the narrator and result in the loss of ownership? Does imposing anonymity not deprive the individual of the opportunity to bequeath a personal legacy? Having one's name attached to a document or product provides a kind of intransience. Is it ethical to deny the narrator this bequest to posterity? It could also be argued that in the quest for evidence-based, 'objective' data, revealing the name of the author would contribute to the credibility and authenticity of the information: the principle of anonymity would thus be at odds with this pursuit (Tilley and Woodthorpe 2011, 19). Perhaps upholding anonymity is unnecessary or even undesirable in such circumstances?

On the other hand, if one were to consider waiving anonymity this matter would have to be circumspectly considered by the researcher who remains the primary advisor in the decision. Is revealing the name of the author desirable? For instance, in the process of negotiating the collection of the narratives of apartheid era teachers' experiences, there were individuals who declined being interviewed since they were apprehensive of the possible consequences – even when assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Clearly, fear for retribution remained a salient concern. Moreover, in all cases the researcher has a primary ethical responsibility to ensure that the research participant is protected from possible harm and should consider and advise the participant whether disclosure of his/her identity would be apposite.

In the following section, three rationales for OH research within the postmodern paradigm are individually examined.

Rationale 2: contextualizing subjective experience

Under the banner of new social theory, since the 1970s many postmodern oral historians have viewed OH research as an empowering process for interviewer and narrator alike (Gluck et al. 1999, 4). The life of the interviewee is validated and the focus is on the individualization and subjectivity of memory. The postmodern orientation acknowledges multiple meanings of culture and experiences. The discourses emerging from such research relate to the construction of memory, to the implications of narrators' various situations in terms of location and context, and an appreciation of the interview as a linguistic event subjected to textual analysis (Gluck et al. 1999, 5; Yon 2003, 412). OH from a postmodern paradigm focuses on the particular, the subjective individual, and the contextualization of knowledge in place and time.

The primary purpose of postmodern research is to benefit – through empowerment – those who participate in it. The benefit is derived from the transformational potential of critique directed not only at social structures, but also the social relationships. Despite the good intentions of the research to emancipate and empower individuals, researchers are cautioned to ensure that these ideals do not become oppressive in themselves (Rafael 1997: 35). This caution applies right from the planning phase, since the underlying assumptions have direct implications for the purpose of the study; the review of the literature; the participant-researcher relationship; method of enquiry; ethical principles applied (respecting that a multiplicity of realities can be constructed); and the presentation of the findings (noting that knowledge is contextual) (Rafael 1997, 36–39).

Van Manen (2003, 253) cites philosopher Charles Young's critique on postmodernism, that the postmodern individual and researcher 'is less and less inclined to recognize sources of meaning, criteria of truth and standards of value that lie outside the realm of the self and personal identity'. Certainly this caution raises issues that relate to the ethics of how the OH study is planned, conducted, analysed and reported on if the researcher is committed to producing scientifically rigorous and ethical research.

Rationale 3: contributing to democratization

Many researchers focus on working with marginalized groups who represent the voiceless ordinary person whose contributions to the writing of the history of the people have been omitted – most often due to political hegemony. The contributions they make by sharing how they experienced hardship or conflict during their life are seen to constitute a process that contributes to the democratization of society. As such, OH gives a voice to the voiceless, with the underlying assumption that there is a link between 'voice' and 'dignity' (Ross 2003, 327). In the process of gathering the data, a complex and nuanced popular historical memory is created, which has the potential to provide ordinary people with public legitimacy (Skotnes 1995, 63–66; Wieder 2004, 23). A record is made of how ordinary people experienced and were affected by historical events.

The value of OH in the South African context, a particular example being the collection of narratives relating to the gross violations of human rights heard before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission shortly after the political changeover, was seen as being an opportunity to promote reconciliation, and democratization and to bring about socio-political transformation (Field 1999: 2–3). Reconciliatory discussions were also held in the aftermath of the Zimbabwean liberation war and state-orchestrated responses to the unrest in Matabeleland after independence in 1980 (Werbner 1998).

Clearly when the purpose of OH research is to promote the democratization of society, potential challenges and risks are present. All OH research has at least two contributory authors: the interviewer and the narrator. The interviewer's role is to initiate the interview; define the purpose; and guide the process with questions and comments, all of which ultimately determine the outcome. The respondent's narrative is often edited – for purposes of public presentation – or potentially reconfigured during the analysis stage. The effect of the researcher on the construction of the narrative cannot be underestimated and poses the danger of distorting and manipulating the meaning of life history narrative provided by those who were previously marginalized – in effect, subjecting them to a second bout of marginalization (Skotnes 1991, 67).

Rationale 4: supporting transformation

When approaching OH research from a transformative paradigm, the central question is how the research can contribute to the enhancement of human rights and social justice. The consequence of this approach is that the nature of reality is viewed differently from when it is considered from a traditional postmodern perspective. Postmodernists would argue that there is no objective reality. The transformative paradigm rejects cultural relativism and embraces the critical examination of versions of perceived reality in terms of the cultural and societal parameters that have traditionally permitted those in positions of formal power to define reality for those who do not share this privileged position (Mertens and Ginsberg 2008, 486). The design decisions of OH research within a transformative paradigm would question the choice of topic, the selection of the respondent, the framing of the research question, the process of data collection and analysis strategies, and the presentation of the findings. The relationship between the researcher and the members of society being interviewed needs to be examined, as well as the extent to which the researcher understands and responds to the cultural complexity of the community. Essentially, the researcher is expected to raise questions about power and privilege and acknowledge the validity of interviewees' perceptions of reality (Mertens and Ginsberg 2008: 486–487).

Researchers who focus on social justice and finding remedies for inequity face unique ethical challenges. Primarily, the potential participants in this research are likely to be vulnerable. Although the participants and researcher might not differ in respect of age, gender, race, ethnicity or language, the power differential will undoubtedly be skewed in favour of the researcher. It is here that unique ethical conundrums arise. Mertens and Ginsberg (2008, 491) warn that power differentials surface in many guises and in all stages of the research enterprise. Foremost among these power differentials are the selection of the representatives from the community being researched. The reality is that it is not necessarily the most vulnerable members

of the communities who will be interviewed, but perhaps the most vocal or articulate. These individuals might not necessarily speak on behalf of the communities they represent, but rather for themselves. The complexity of the power dynamic between the interviewer and the narrator also has implications for the analysis of OH narratives. The ethical rigour of the research is determined by the researcher's awareness of these issues and the way in which they are addressed.

OH research within a postmodern paradigm, under which the above-mentioned three rationales for OH fall, principally aims to benefit, empower and emancipate the socially marginalized. It is assumed that there is a relationship between providing individuals with a voice and affording them dignity and respect (Ross 2003, 327). This type of OH also aims to validate the experiences of the ordinary person (Mertens and Ginsberg 2008); to help individuals make sense of the past and bring some measure of reconciliation (Down 2009); and to promote democratization and socio-political transformation and justice (Field 1999, 2–3). Among the core ethical principles of OH practice are empowerment, respect, dignity and social justice. Perhaps it is these principles that apply in particular to the above-mentioned rationales for doing OH.

Owing to time or funding constraints, researchers are often pressured to undertake and complete their research in record time. A postmodern perspective of OH aims to emancipate and empower; to give a voice to the voiceless; to afford the most vulnerable respect and dignity – but in reality, researchers are drawn to approaching the most willing, the most vocal or the most articulate in order to facilitate the task. Ironically, as a result the voiceless remain voiceless; marginalised; ignored. Researchers clearly need to question and reflect on the issues of power and privilege, and to seek ways in which their research could contribute to validating the voices of social peripherals (Mertens and Ginsberg 2008, 486).

As a transformative, empowering and democratizing process, the issues of social justice and beneficence should be foremost on the researcher's agenda (Adams 2008). The credibility and validity of research within this context depend to a large extent on the researcher's ability to relate to the context in which the research is undertaken, to constantly enquire into the 'integral human interplay of rational and emotional relationships' (Adams 2008, 178–181) and to be aware of prejudice and the potential ethical violence that could be directed to the respondent. In such research, the individual triumphs of the interviewees need to be celebrated and the tragedies conceded – in a way that contributes to the well-being of the individual (Adams 2008, 178, 181, 186). Again, the question could be asked whether empowerment, validation and beneficence can really be achieved when anonymity is upheld? The vast majority of retired teachers who participated in the study described previously were amenable to their names being mentioned in the transcripts and the narrative reports: they were proud of their achievements, and appreciative that they had been approached to be interviewed. Many mentioned that the interview was – in some way – a validation of their achievements.

As OH research is often sensitive in that disclosure of identity could render the individual vulnerable to ridicule, victimization or further exploitation, it could be argued that the choice to waive confidentiality should reside with the narrator. In instances where the narrator has triumphed under difficult circumstances and takes pride in his/her achievements, the issue of relinquishing confidentiality should be provided as an option. Excluding the narrator from such a pivotal decision could render him/her voiceless a second time. However, it could be that institutional ethics protocol requirements – when applied stringently – discourage or constrain researchers from considering the waiving of confidentiality as an option.

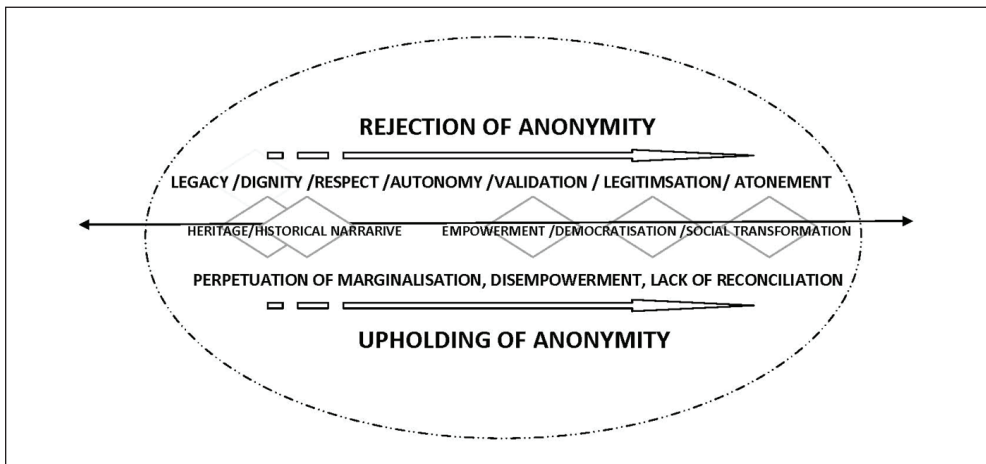


Figure 2: Ethical issues in respect of anonymity and the research rationale

Adams (2008, 185) suggests that the ‘silencing demand’ of imposed anonymity may jeopardize the interviewee’s desire to narrate. People are not mined for data; they need to be acknowledged, valued, respected and their voices legitimized – issues that are all part of the democratizing process (186). The credibility of the narrative could be said to depend on the narrator’s reputation – a case of ‘what is said by whom’. Often an individual is approached to participate in a study based on his/her knowledge or role. To ensure the value of the narrative, might it not be expedient to consider waiving confidentiality with the consent of the respondent? Since the purpose of OH research is to contribute to historical understanding, knowing who the narrator is – his/her position and role in the event – could contribute towards validating the narrative (Ritchie 2000).

Boschma et al. (2003, 131) suggest considering the possibility of a ‘two-step’ approach to establish informed consent. The first step is to assure the respondent that confidentiality and anonymity will be upheld, but the second ‘step’ affords the respondent the opportunity to waive confidentiality, subsequent to the actual

interview, transcription and member-checking process. At this stage the narrator will be in a better position to decide whether he/she should choose to forgo anonymity and privacy. Several OH researchers (Adams 2008; Boschma et al. 2003; Downs 2009; Mannay 2011; Smith 2010; Swauger 2011; Wood 2006) have been asked by interviewees during the research process whether their names can or will be attached to the research. In the contexts described, the researchers have indicated interviewees' willingness, and perhaps even enthusiasm, to be named. These questions reflect aspects that contemporary researchers are already being required to deliberate.

CONCLUSION

OH research as a form of qualitative research was at one stage regarded as a research 'orphan': it was accused of being superficial and lacking in credibility, and the data was criticized for being biased and unreliable. What followed was a quest for legitimacy. Today there can be little doubt that OH research has validated itself. One of the reasons for this legitimization is that OH researchers subscribe to particular codes of ethics that apply specifically to doing OH research. These guidelines propose ways of ensuring that the interviewing process is conducted in a professional, respectful and non-threatening manner, and that history is not misused or misrepresented.

In an academic context, we have seen OH bringing focus to people's lives, contributing to transformation and democratization, and helping others better understand contexts and issues that they themselves have not experienced and might perhaps not even know about. People's stories need to be heard. While some choose to remain anonymous, others prefer to have their stories linked to their names as a way of saying 'I was there: celebrate my accomplishments with me', or, 'understand my suffering'.

In this article I attempted to outline some of the rationales for doing OH research. I positioned each rationale within its dominant theoretical paradigm to clarify the nature of, purpose in and approach towards doing OH. I argued that the codes of ethics guiding OH research could be viewed as constrictive and unresponsive to its unique research requirements and aims. In certain instances, the blanket application of aspects of the ethics code – in particular, the principle of anonymity – could be counterproductive to the envisaged aims of doing the research in the first place. There is credence in the notion that the application of ethical principles in qualitative research goes beyond fixed institutional guidelines (Swauger 2011, 498). Indeed, perhaps this is the issue that research ethics committees – who are not necessarily familiar with the nature and context of OH research – need to become better acquainted and place them in a position to make informed decisions.

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