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Feminist Research Ethics, Informed Consent, and Potential Harms

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Abstract: Feminist research is fraught with ethical dilemmas, some of which concern informed consent and the possibility of potential harms to respondents. I review several dilemmas addressed in the literature and how feminist researchers resolved the issues. I also look at the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics and how the concepts of dual relationships and boundaries in social work practice may offer helpful guidelines to feminist researchers.

The conduct of feminist research is a common practice that is fraught with ethical dilemmas. If one takes the tenets of feminist research seriously, one is attempting to meet a very high ethical standard, and these attempts aren't always supported by one's peers or the processes of research. This paper explores a particular area of feminist research that has been discussed in the literature: informed consent. There are many ways to define informed consent, and all researchers have to obtain it, but determining whether or not consent is truly informed can be an ethical gray area. I explore the writings of several feminist scholars who have struggled with this issue in practice, and then discusses some of the ways feminist researchers have chosen to address informed consent. The paper then turns to some potential harms identified by feminist researchers which have resulted from their research, in spite of obtaining informed consent. I argue that feminist researchers could use some guidelines in this area, and that the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics, particularly in relation to boundaries and dual relationships, may provide some assistance in making research decisions which minimize potential harms.

Feminist Research

Feminist social science research methods have been discussed for years, and there is an ongoing question of whether there is such a thing as "feminist methodology." Some argue that methodology is methodology (Chafetz, 2004), or that there isn't a "distinctive feminist method of research" (Harding, 1987, p. 456). Fonow and Cook, on the other hand, believe that there is a feminist methodology, which they state "involves the description, explanation, and justification of techniques used in feminist research and is an abstract classification that refers to a variety of methodological stances, conceptual approaches, and research strategies" (2005, p. 2213).

Harding stated that the distinctive features of the best feminist research weren't going to be found by looking at research methods (1987). Harding's definition of feminist research focuses on three characteristics: women's experience as empirical and theoretical resources; research of problems which concern women and which is therefore done for women; and the placement and recognition of the researcher as a subject who exists in the same moment as the subject matter she is researching (Harding, 1987). Feminist research, in general, has varying definitions. According to Guimaraes (2007), "many propose that—whatever the method employed—what makes research 'feminist' is, in part, an underlying research ethic of

‘integrity’ and ‘responsibility’ in the research process” (p. 149).

Fonow and Cook coedited the anthology, *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* in 1991, in which they attempted to “capture the dilemmas feminists faced at each step of the research process” (2005, p. 2212). Their conception of a feminist methodology offers these guiding principles for researchers: to be reflexively aware of the significance of gender in their work; to help raise consciousness around issues; to challenge the idea that objectivity is obtainable in research; to consider the ethical implication of their research and the recognition of the potential for their respondents to be exploited; and to use their work to advance women’s empowerment (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2213).

DeVault believes feminist researchers “are united through various efforts to include women’s lives and concerns in accounts of society, to minimize the harms of research, and to support changes that will improve women’s status” (1996, p. 29)

These different approaches to feminist research and methods cover most of the main tenets of feminist research. There is clearly a concern for reflexivity and placing the researcher in the same world as those being researched. There is a need for the work being done to be political in some way—to contribute to the transformation of society in a way that is beneficial to oppressed persons. There is a concern that the research be ethical, in that it not cause harm to those being researched, and that it give voice to the voiceless. These are high standards to meet, and yet many researchers use these guidelines in conducting their work.

Feminists conducting social science research have a tendency to choose methods which enable them to answer the questions they pose in a way that is true to their feminist values. Within this feminist approach to research, I look at how the “underlying research ethic” named by Guimaraes (2007) has an impact upon research and how it is addressed by feminist social science researchers in practice. Given the concern for ethical research practice, I review some ethical dilemmas being faced by feminist social science researchers in regard to informed consent. How are they being reflexive about the ethical issues they face, and how they are able to resolve ethical dilemmas in ways that still meet the requirements of feminist research?

Informed Consent

One of the first ethical questions feminist researchers face is that of informed consent. Obtaining meaningful informed consent can become problematic for the research process. One area in which this is prevalent in social science research concerns the study of vulnerable populations, which may include children, young women who are being hospitalized for treatment of some sort, homeless youth, and people who are incarcerated, for example. All of these populations can be of interest to social scientists, and arguments can be made for the importance of research on these populations in terms of contributions to knowledge. Obtaining informed consent in these cases, however, is not a direct process.

According to The Belmont Report, the main concern of informed consent has to deal with “respect for persons,” which “requires that subjects, to the degree that they are capable, be given the opportunity to choose what shall or shall not happen to them” (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979, Part C, Section 1). All researchers have to obtain informed consent before embarking upon their research, but determining whether or not consent is truly informed can be difficult.

Providing information to respondents about one’s research is a fairly straightforward endeavor, although one still needs to make sure it is provided in terms which the respondent can understand. Comprehension of the research is more problematic. The person may understand what is being put forward to them, but may not understand the implications of granting the request. For example, some may not fully understand how they may be impacted, even if

things are explained to them fairly completely ahead of time. Additionally, the researchers themselves, even though they have spent much time thinking through their research questions and issues, may not have a full understanding of how the research process may impact their respondents. Finally, there is the requirement of voluntariness. This means that the person has volunteered to be part of the project and is not part of the project by coercion. Voluntariness can be complex, such as when respondents are in situations where they are incarcerated or hospitalized, or when doing research with minors. In these cases, is there really voluntariness present? How does a feminist researcher, who is concerned with ethic research that doesn't produce harms, address the issue of voluntariness?

The issue of informed consent must be taken seriously by researchers in order to conduct research with human subjects, and there are many steps in place to make sure that subjects are protected, such as adherence to The Belmont Report and submitting research requests to Human Subjects Institutional Review Boards at universities. In the studies explored here, there were several instances of feminist researchers questioning the validity of the informed consent they had been able to obtain, and those mostly concerned respondents found in vulnerable populations.

Vulnerable Populations

Obtaining parental consent is often seen as the most straightforward way to move forward with research on vulnerable youth populations, but Halse and Honey (2005) warn that "parental consent . . . is not a panacea for the ethical difficulties of consent. The tacit assumption underpinning the idea of parental consent is that parents know what is in the best interests of their daughters and are capable of protecting their interests" (p. 2151). In reference to children who are abused or neglected, that assumption doesn't always hold true, and to take the issue seriously, the researchers have to seriously consider ways in which consent obtained can be deemed meaningful.

Halse & Honey (2005) wanted to research anorexic girls. "Through her constitution as 'other,' the anorexic is positioned as physically and psychologically unable to act in or to protect her own interests, thereby justifying medical and psychological intervention" (p. 2144). By this definition, the respondents may be incapable of providing informed consent. Halse and Honey asked themselves: "To what extent could girls exercise agency given their subordinate position in the world they cohabited with the clinicians [in the facility where the girls were being treated]?" (p. 2149). Parental consent is sometimes considered in such cases, but Halse and Honey found that "parental consent is a double-edged sword, protecting some girls and erasing other girls' potential for agency by increasing the opportunity for parental coercion" (p. 2152). To counteract this ethical dilemma, they decided to use a form of consent proposed by Ramos in 1989, which she called "ongoing consensual decisionmaking." In ongoing consensual decisionmaking, according to Ramos, "emergent difficulties are discussed openly" and "the respondent is *kept* informed as to his vulnerability to potential dangers" and the decisions regarding the research are made as a team (1989, p. 61, italics in original). For Halse and Honey, this meant that consent was obtained "before, during, and after the interviews so that participants had repeated opportunities to withdraw or to qualify consent" (p. 2152). This strategy didn't address all of the issues of informed consent, "but it offered a greater degree of empowerment by providing girls with multiple opportunities to qualify and negotiate their involvement in the research" (Halse & Honey, 2005, p. 2152).

Meade and Slesnick (2002) had a similar dilemma when they wanted to study homeless youth. The Department of Health and Human Services has guidelines regarding when consent has to come from parents and when it can come from the youth themselves, which Meade and Slesnick found "allow the adolescent to consent alone in cases of abuse and neglect" (2002, p. 451). The youth's status as runaways greatly complicates the matter of consent. In their research, Meade and Slesnick found that they had to consider each youth's

competence to truly understand that to which they were consenting. They chose to use a standard proposed by Levine in 1995, who suggested applying “the concept of ‘mature minors’ to adolescents older than age 14 who are able to consent for themselves to ideographic or epidemiological research that poses minimal risk” (Meade & Slesnick, 2002, p. 453). Homeless youth populations, Meade and Slesnick argued, are comparable to youth in situations of abuse or neglect. As such, “the youth should be allowed to consent alone, without parental approval” (2002, p. 460), given the fact that parental involvement could lead to larger problems for the youth.

In their work with adolescent substance abusers, Brody and Waldron (2000) confronted some similar issues in terms of informed consent. They came up with a method for addressing the concerns around the issue in the context of their research:

We recommend that researchers have adolescents read a portion of the consent form aloud and discuss the contents. Investigators may also want to ask potential clients to take a Breathalyzer test prior to agreeing to research participation, or reschedule appointments if the adolescent exhibits signs of recent substance use, in order to ensure that intoxicating effects of substances are not impacting the adolescent’s capacity to consent. (p. 220)

Brody and Waldron’s approach, making the respondents discuss the contents of the consent form leads to a greater sense that the consent given is meaningful, in that the respondent is showing understanding of that for which he or she is volunteering.

Other Aspects of Informed Consent

In an example of a slightly different vulnerable population, Logan, Walker, Shannon, and Cole (2008), did research on women who had been victims of partner violence and found that in general, the participants didn’t understand research, how it differed from social service programs, or what kind of participation was involved. This creates issues for informed consent.

Merely reading the forms was insufficient; explanation and examples needed to be offered to make sure participants understood exactly what they were agreeing to in order not to experience undue risk or become disillusioned with the study and hence discontinue participation. (p. 1236)

Had the authors not done such extensive preliminary work before conducting their actual research, they would not have known to what extent they needed to explain the process to the respondents. Having found what they did and then used the explanations and examples means that the informed consent they gained was more meaningful than it would have been otherwise.

Lal’s 1999 research in Dehli, India, brought up another aspect of obtaining informed consent, given that her participants may have felt their jobs were at stake if they did not comply with her requests for interviews. Lal was interested in power differentials and class inequalities that occurred in the context of observation. She was given permission to conduct her research and gained access to factories through factory management. She described the situation in which she was able to conduct her research:

Gaining access to firms with the consent of managers and owners often meant that women were called to a room that was assigned to me for interviewing, without knowing why they had been called upon. This situation was understandably seen as threatening by some of the women, who sometimes assumed that I was a sankari (government) employee and hence someone to be wary of. This was especially true for those women who were not in stable jobs. After I explained the research project and the nature of

the interview to each prospective interviewee, with one exception, not a single woman who was approached refused participation in the study. (Lal, 1999, p. 109)

Lal was quick to point out that she didn't take this as actual informed consent, since the way the situation was presented to the women didn't suggest that they had a choice in terms of being interviewed by her. The fact that the women's supervisors had ordered them to speak to Lal meant that many of the women didn't think they could choose to say no. In a situation in which one isn't sure if one's job or livelihood depends upon agreement, there is no way to have meaningful consent, although Lal's example shows how something as seemingly simple as a method of access to respondents can lead to its own issues with informed consent.

O'Connell Davidson (2008) pushed the discussion of informed consent a little further with her feminist colleagues after she engaged in an ethnographic study. She posed the following question to feminist social science researchers:

If researchers are working in a context that requires them to secure the consent of research participants, then they are expected to understand that 'No' definitely means 'No' if they meet with refusal. But if someone does give informed consent to a lengthy period of participation in research that closely interrogates and then publicly dissects the intimate details of her life, experience and emotions, should we accept that 'Yes' means 'Yes'?

In discussing her work with her research subject, she shared that she "never regarded Desiree's consent to the research as a once-and-for-all prior event, but rather viewed it as a process. It was something that was discussed and renegotiated over time" (O'Connell Davidson, 2008, p. 55). This is similar to the approach used by Halse and Honey (2005), in which they had an ongoing process of discussion of the research process with their respondents in order to allow them chances to withdraw their consent at any time. This example, however, points to some of the limitations of informed consent, especially in long-term research projects through which researchers develop relationships with their respondents.

Informed consent, then, is one major aspect of doing feminist research, and researchers need to consider such things as the ability of their respondents to give consent, the level of understanding the respondents have regarding that to which they are consenting, and the often overlooked potential for harms which comes with longer-term research projects. Taking the matter of informed consent seriously can have consequences on the research at hand. It can take more time, more effort, and more resources from the researchers. On the other hand, to be considered feminist in its approach, research is expected to meet these types of ethical guidelines and to guard against harms to the respondents involved, which is one of the reasons for obtaining informed consent. However, obtaining informed consent, many researchers have found, doesn't always guarantee that they have been able to prevent harms to their research subjects, or to themselves.

Implications of Informed Consent and Potential Harms

Harms to respondents, as stated earlier, are a major concern of feminist social science researchers. DeVault (1996) claimed that "feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process" (p. 33), and noted that feminist researchers have sought to limit negative consequences to participation in research, in part by "leveling hierarchies of power and control in research relations" (p. 33). Ironically, Kirsch (2005) pointed out that the attempts to level power relations and be more open with research participants "may have inadvertently reintroduced some of the ethical dilemmas feminist researchers had hoped to eliminate: participants' sense of disappointment, alienation, and potential exploitation" (p. 2163).

Indeed, Stacey (1988) discussed the danger of ethnographic research, in which she found herself “wondering whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation” (p. 22), because, she found, “the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater is the danger” (p. 24).

Relationships and Boundaries

Stacey’s concerns are confirmed by ethnographic researchers who discuss the issues they faced with boundaries with respondents when they engaged in research (Huisman, 2008; O’Connell Davidson, 2008; Pini, 2004). Huisman shared some of her ethical concerns in an article tellingly named “Does This Mean You’re not Going to Visit Anymore?”

Despite my efforts to avoid exploitation, betrayal, and abandonment in my work, I encountered several ethical challenges. Although I took steps to mitigate the challenges and dilemmas I faced, in the end I was left feeling as though I had let some of the participants down. Thus, more than 4 years after I completed this research, the ethical challenges I faced remain largely unresolved. (p. 379)

Kirsch (2005), similarly, warned researchers that there are ethical risks to forming rapport with research subjects, which is often a pivotal quality to obtaining research evidence.

Researchers who strive for the benefits of close, interactive relations with participants must accept the concomitant risks. These risks include the potential for relationships to end abruptly and for participants to feel that they have been misunderstood or betrayed, especially in moments when participants’ and researchers’ priorities diverge, as many times they will. (Kirsch, 2005, p. 2163)

O’Connell Davidson (2008) discussed an ethnographic project she undertook in which she became very close to her main research subject. O’Connell Davidson (2008) freely discussed the way in which she and her respondent became “part of each other’s friendship circles, and our lives came to overlap in the way that lends itself to the easy flow of conversation, gossip and long-running esoteric jokes that create a strong sense of intimacy between two people” (pp. 53-54). Their relationship even included Christmas and birthday celebrations between the women and their families. O’Connell Davidson further cautions that as researchers, “we should recognize that we have asked them [respondents] to consent to an extremely intimate relationship within which they are to be used as objects” (p. 65). O’Connell Davidson continues to question the consent given by her respondent, in that the respondents in ethnographic research “consent to a relationship that is inevitably time-limited and that ultimately leads to their own objectification” (p. 61).

The issue of relationships between researchers and their respondents are clearly complex and difficult to navigate, leading Cotterill (1992) to advocate for more sharing of process for feminist researchers, since “how they engage in interviews with other women and the personal relations which develop are also part of ‘putting the subjective in the knowledge’ and have implications for feminist research” (p. 593). One such implication, beyond that of disgruntled and exploited respondents, is the unanticipated consequence of harm to researchers themselves.

Harms to Researchers

Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham (2008) studied researchers using feminist research methods and found some unexpected harms—harms to the researchers themselves. They

find “the paradigm of feminist research methods has come to influence the conduct of qualitative research, carrying with it a potentially high cost for the health and well-being of researchers” (p. 920). The ongoing nature of research was one area in which they found significant concern from feminist researchers.

Leaving the field was regarded as problematic and sometimes heart-wrenching. The nature of the activity that the women who talked about these issues had been engaged in was a ‘real’ one in which real emotion and feeling had been invested into ‘real’ relationships. Women found that ‘switching these off’ was not a straightforward matter and identified complications arising from enduring research relationships. (p. 927)

Kirsch (2005) is very concerned with how feminists do their research and the impact of relationships with research subjects, and she advocates setting clear boundaries.

I propose that feminist scholars may want to consider carefully which roles they wish to play (and which to avoid) by delineating clear boundaries between researchers and participants so that *neither party* unwittingly compromises expectations of friendship, confidentiality, and trust. (p. 2166, italics added)

Kirsch encourages researchers to remind participants regularly of the distinction between their relationships as researcher/participant versus that of friend/friend and of the fact that what they share will make it into published research. She also advises consideration of Paul V. Anderson’s notion of “confirming consent,” wherein “when participants find themselves in particularly vulnerable positions . . . they ought to be given the opportunity to renegotiate consent after the fieldwork is completed” (Kirsch, 2005, p. 2168). This type of consent is reminiscent of Ramos’ ongoing consensual decisionmaking, and it acknowledges the vulnerability of the participants. Giving such reminders to respondents is also a good reminder for the researcher, and may be another way to avoid potential harms to researchers themselves.

Huisman’s research (2008) shows that the potential for harm in the research relationship isn’t limited to respondents.

When Mirsada looked me in the eyes and asked if I was going to visit her anymore, I feared that what I was doing ran counter to my commitment to feminist ideals of equality, reciprocity, and improving the lives of women. (2008, p. 388)

I felt overwhelmed by the emotional dimension of this work and felt as though my struggles were falling on deaf ears when I tried to talk about it with my professors. I longed for connection around these issues, but for the most part, I struggled alone. (2008, p. 389)

Her research experience has impacted her subsequent work, in that she undertook her next research project with a team, so that the relationship stresses wouldn’t burden her so deeply upon ending the research. Her example shows, however, how much support of colleagues and some clear guidelines would have aided her in this process.

Social Work Ethics as Helpful Guidelines

After reviewing all of these articles on feminist research dilemmas around informed consent and potential harms, it appears that feminist researchers seek to obtain some clarity about their roles in research and how to best manage issues around boundaries with respondents in order to reduce potential harms. Social work, which is related to sociology, already addresses issues of informed consent and boundaries in relation to working with clients, which

may be comparable in some ways to researchers' ethical responsibilities to respondents. In The NASW Code of Ethics, both informed consent and dual relationships are addressed in terms of social workers' ethical responsibilities to their clients. Informed consent in the NASW Code of Ethics is similar to that already used by feminist researchers, and emphasizes the use of "clear and understandable language" "risks related to the services" and clients' "right to refuse or withdraw consent" (NASW Code of Ethics, 1.03 Conflict of Interest, a).

The area of greater value to feminist researchers, however, concerns the concept of dual relationships. The NASW Code of Ethics defines dual relationships as relationships in which social workers have more than one relationship to a client, such as seeing someone in a therapeutic situation, but also being involved with them at an outside social setting, such as a church, in which the relationship is very different. This could be comparable to the duality experienced by feminist researchers when performing ethnographic research, in which they are both researchers and humans who develop relationships with respondents. The Code of Ethics (2008) states that:

Social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should take steps to protect clients and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. (NASW Code of Ethics, 1.06 Conflict of Interest, c).

Although these guidelines are rather vague, there is other research available which addresses the topic more extensively. Dewane (2010) offers several questions for consideration when dual relationships are possible, and recommends discussing these with a trusted colleague:

- (1) How will this secondary relationship change the power differential or take advantage of a power differential in the therapeutic relationship?
- (2) How long will this relationship last? Is it a one-time occurrence or expected to last indefinitely?
- (3) How will ending one relationship affect the other relationship?
- (4) How much will objectivity be impaired?
- (5) What is the risk of exploitation? (p. 18).

These questions would give feminist researchers some questions for consideration and guidelines for entry into relationship with respondents, so that they have more protection, both for the respondents with whom they are working and for themselves.

Reamer identifies five areas in which boundary transgressions in social work relationships become problematic, and these can also be seen as potential dangers in the researcher/respondent relationship. These areas are: intimate relationships; pursuit of personal benefit; emotional and dependency needs; altruistic gestures; and responses to unanticipated circumstances (2003, p. 124). The danger of intimacies has already been addressed by feminist researchers, and the personal benefit is inherent in the research enterprise, wherein the researcher will benefit from the relationship by definition. Emotional and dependency needs may also arise, as seen in the relationships between O'Connell-Davidson and Desiree, and Huisman and Mirsada. There are often altruistic gestures between researchers and respondents which may require some consideration of implications, and unanticipated circumstances are also a common feature of ethnographic field research, and may require an immediate response from the researcher. As such, there are many potential dangers in the researcher/respondent relationship which need to be considered in order to conduct ethical research.

Reamer (2003) identifies ways in which social workers, or feminist researchers in this case, may work to avoid such problematic situations. He suggests six elements of a risk

management protocol:

- 1) Be alert to potential or actual conflicts of interest.
- 2) Inform clients and colleagues about potential or actual conflicts of interest; explore reasonable remedies.
- 3) Consult colleagues and supervisors, and relevant professional literature, regulations, policies, and ethical standards to identify pertinent boundary issues and constructive options.
- 4) Design a plan of action that addresses the boundary issues and protects the parties involved to the greatest extent possible.
- 5) Document all discussions, consultation, supervision, and other steps taken to address the boundary issues.
- 6) Develop a strategy to monitor implementation of action plan. (p. 130)

Even though professional social workers, sociologists, and researchers receive training and are taught to consider potential harms, situations in the field can challenge the limits of training. Having a system in place to help guide ethical decision making is important, as is being able to discuss these issues with colleagues. Feminist researchers open discussions about ethical issues and try to forge a way forward in which these dilemmas are acknowledged and discussed. Halse and Honey (2005) argued that:

It is necessary to make the ethics of research transparent in order to identify the moral crevices of ethics policy and practice and to develop new and better ways of doing feminist research and being ethical feminist researchers. (p. 2142)

In that vein, Huisman (2008) spoke of her own struggles with research ethics in the field. “I will continue to grapple with and reflect on the ethical dimensions of research and hope others will do the same by keeping the dialogue going” (p. 394), and Watts (2006) acknowledged that “researcher integrity is complex and dynamic; it functions along a continuum of practical constraint that involves mutuality, negotiation and re-negotiation of boundaries with participants” (p. 385). Through these brief excerpts, it appears that informed consent and research ethics are indeed complex issues; feminist researchers benefit from the support of colleagues and could use some guidelines in order to navigate these issues in a way that is ethically grounded.

Gatenby and Humphries (2000) noted that research is a balancing act between “being supportive of a woman in the project and maintaining our own spaces” and they noted the advantage of having two researchers involved, as it “provides a safety net, so that we each step in where the other cannot” (p. 96). By sharing their dilemmas and the ways in which they negotiate them, feminist researchers are trying to support one another in the ethically murky field of doing feminist research. It is a difficult endeavor to attempt to meet the ethical standards of both feminist research and personal ethics in terms of relationships with respondents. It is necessary for feminist researchers to have some sort of safety net, however they are able to construct it, so that they can continue their work and not be traumatized by the decisions they have made in the field in the pursuit of knowledge. Kirsch (2005) reminded researchers to:

Develop realistic expectations about our interactions with participants, recognizing that they are shaped, like all human interactions, by dynamics of power, gender, generation, education, race, class, and many other factors that can contribute to feelings of misunderstanding, disappointment, and broken trust. . . .
Be as respectful, supportive, and empathetic as possible—to be as friendly as possible—as we forge ahead in relationships with those whose generosity

toward us enables the advancement of knowledge in our various fields of feminist inquiry. (p. 2170).

By approaching feminist research in a manner in which ethical dilemmas are discussed openly, and in which support and consultation with colleagues is a given, feminist researchers may decrease the inadvertent harms that come with social research. If they are able to add to this process an ethical framework to help them make decisions in the field, they will be able to feel better about their research and about their roles in the research they conduct, which will then allow them to continue to contribute important knowledge to the field.

Conclusion

Feminist research holds many ethical challenges in terms of doing research and also holds researchers to very high expectations. One of the biggest ethical challenges faced by researchers concerns obtaining informed consent, which can be a very complex thing in itself, and which requires much forethought to handle effectively. Another significant ethical challenge concerns potential harms to respondents, which feminist researchers seek to avoid. However, the opportunities for potential harms are prevalent, and they aren't always discussed among researchers or in the literature. In this paper, I aimed to illuminate some of the ethical dilemmas experienced in the field by feminist researchers and to offer some additional considerations that may aid feminist researchers in navigating relationships with respondents. By borrowing from the NASW Code of Ethics and other social work literature, feminist researchers can develop guidelines and questions for themselves and their colleagues as a way to help avoid potential harms in relationships with respondents.

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