Disciplinary debates and bases of interdisciplinary studies
The place of research ethics in library and information science

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Abstract

There exists a body of literature that addresses ethical issues for knowledge workers and professional librarians. Within these discussions, ethics are concerned with acquisitions, collection management, professional education, and the nature of library stock. Whereas the previous literature has concentrated on professional dilemmas and codes of practice for librarians, this article explores the place of ethics in library and information science (LIS) research rather than in applied or professional settings. As an interdisciplinary field, LIS takes advantage of methodological protocols (e.g., qualitative research techniques) developed in other disciplines. Although LIS has imported from other disciplines, it has not turned its attention to "research ethics" to the extent of the fields it borrows from. Cases and debates from other disciplines raise the visibility of ethics for researchers in LIS. Finally, this article discusses the possibility of an "ethics of interdisciplinarity."
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1. Introduction

Rogers (1994, p. 51) asserted that "ethics has become a hot topic in librarianship," where the "increasing number of publications on the topic" are addressed to librarianship as professional practice. Her research examined the provision of the teaching of ethics in accredited library schools. Other contributions to the literature have concentrated on aspects of ethics such as codes of practice (Adams, 2001; du Toit, 1982; Moorman, 1995; Philip, 2001), the pedagogic potential of ethics (Hannabuss, 1996; Paskoff, 1995; Rogers, 1994), ethical implications of ordinary library practices (Bazirjian, 1990; Bullard, 1987; Bullard et al., 1984), and professional dilemmas i.e., issues for individual librarians and for the

profession as a whole (Atlas, 2001; Moran, 2001). Although these are important issues that deserve attention and revisiting, this article is concerned less with the ethical dimensions of professional practice and more with ethical dimensions of research for library and information science (LIS).

The term *research ethics* includes the following overlapping practices: ensuring individuals' anonymity, maintaining confidentiality, gaining access to settings for research purposes and informed consent, protecting individuals from harm caused by participating in and presenting the research, and examining the relation between the researcher and the researched. A series of cases from psychology and sociology are presented to highlight the nature of research ethics for library and information scientists.

2. Ethics, interdisciplinarity, and the qualitative methodological bases of LIS

Interdisciplinarity reflects the view that certain topics which are studied by several disciplines need to be brought together as a cumulative field, and that these topics require expertise in discrete disciplines (Feltham, 2001, p. 113). In addition, the program of interdisciplinarity is advocated for topics that cannot be studied adequately by the traditional organization of disciplines (Bird, 2001). Interdisciplinarity involves the use of methods and concepts from other fields of endeavor. A proportion of interdisciplinary fields therefore is derived from other fields and disciplines.

For researchers engaged in "qualitative" analysis, several methods are available with which to approach phenomena of study. Whereas the application of methods is appreciably geared toward LIS, the choice of methods available for LIS purposes is broadly based. In consideration of the methods used in LIS as surveyed (Kim, 1996) and synthesized (Powell, 1999), with the exceptions of bibliographic research and bibliometric studies that are developed and refined by LIS, methods are appropriated from other fields. That branch of bibliographic studies or bibliometry known as "citation analysis" is accorded high status as the key "export" of LIS to other fields (Cronin & Pearson, 1990).

A survey of state-of-the-art methods in LIS has shown that there is an increasing diversity of methods being employed in LIS research (Powell, 1999). Among articles in LIS journals, the reliance on methods and theories developed in other disciplines and incorporated into research for LIS purposes is striking. "Research ethics" encompass a family of issues that have commanded the attention of scholars in the human and social sciences.[1]

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[1] Medics face other ethical dilemmas peculiar to medical science — for example, withholding information from particular patient groups (Ryan, de Moore, & Patfield, 1995) and selecting particular patients to benefit from surgical procedures (Kahn, 2001). Medical practitioners may have to rely on the judiciary to adjudicate matters of medical ethics. Matters that have focalized ethical issues include organ transplantation, objections (religious) to blood transfusions essential to sustain life, implanting eggs fertilized by a dead partner's sperm, and voluntary euthanasia or the "right to die." These are "medical" cases, requiring the intervention of the "legal" system, and are subject to ongoing debate. Thus, the arena of medical ethics is, de facto, an interdisciplinary one.

Considering the extent to which LIS uses exogenous sources (e.g., concepts, methods, and literature from other fields), it is somewhat surprising that LIS researchers have not taken up the issue of "research ethics."[2] Sociology has concentrated on ethical issues in research, to the extent of holding conferences and publishing special journal issues on the matter; however, its focus on research ethics is occasioned, through the publication of new studies that raise such issues. In this respect, research ethics is an ongoing concern, but the visibility of ethics in the profession is episodic. The profile of topics and issues such as research ethics in sociology recedes as other issues command the attention of sociologists (Button, 1991).[3]

Because LIS is a "net importer" of research strategies (i.e., theoretical and methodological approaches), it could be assumed that research ethics would have been adopted, or formed the basis for debate. To continue the analogy with an economy (Cronin & Pearson, 1990),[4] perhaps what is selected for import is that which is perceived to be useful or relevant to LIS, or to a particular study within LIS. The use of approaches perceived to be relevant seems to be obvious enough; what would be the point of using irrelevant material? Yet if this a priori approach were the case, it may suggest that research ethics were not considered relevant to LIS. Why have research ethics not been taken as a topic of serious study? Certain research methods (e.g., survey questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and participant and non-participant observation) necessarily entail engaging people in research procedures. This is a fundamental point that may easily be forgotten and bears reiterating. Conducting, for example, a study of information retrieval using Web-based search tools involves networked computers but also requires people to use these computers. However people are described (Julien, 1999), the involvement of people in research requires considerations of research ethics. This social or human aspect is an ineluctable feature of LIS, which requires the participation of people and information.[5] Where people are engaged—via surveys, interviews, and video presentations—LIS practitioners need to consider the ethical implications of their research.

This is not to say that research ethics have never been referred to in LIS. A highly regarded guide to qualitative research in LIS (Mellon, 1990) has shown, however, that

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[2] Richards suggested that one use of quotation marks is to "imply that the word or words within them are in some way open to question" (Richards, 1942, p. 66). "Research ethics" is enclosed within quotation marks to emphasize the mutable, temporal and contingent nature of "research ethics." To use John R.E. Lee's phrase, "research ethics" are "subjectively problematic."

[3] This is not to say nor suggest that current work in sociology is "less ethical" than a decade or so ago, or that research ethics are less important. Rather, sociology has emerged from internal debate and its professional associations have agreed to (and periodically update) policy guidelines. This is not to say that the matter of research ethics has been settled, however.

[4] These authors seem to have forgotten the analytic status of analogies. What is introduced as an "analogy" in the opening sentence (Cronin & Pearson, 1990, p. 381) is doggedly pursued throughout each paragraph. Their use of analogy is so persistent that in the final sentence (p. 386), it has been transformed into a "model." In so doing, the authors provide a perspicuous example of a "perspective by incongruity" (Burke, 1954), which is rehearsed and elaborated throughout their article.

[5] Issues of privacy, as an intersection between communication technologies and people, are discussed elsewhere (Whitney, 1998).

research ethics are subsumed into discussions of other methodological matters. Furthermore, the notion of ethics is misplaced: "For the ethics of naturalistic inquiry and the credibility of the researcher, it is important that respondents leave the interview situation feeling good about their part in the study" (Mellon, 1990, p. 54). In so doing, "ethics" is transformed into a curious and different order of consideration, namely a "feel-good factor." Research ethics encompass more than the assurance of confidentiality (Mellon, 1990, pp. 50–54).[6] Whereas confidentiality is crucial in research, it requires more than simply telling a respondent that his or her anonymity will be maintained (see Baruch & Cecil, 1979; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). The principle of maintaining confidentiality of research participants, the practice of withholding names by the substitution of pseudonyms, is not "just" an issue of research ethics.[7]

Another issue, related to the sympathies of the researcher (Becker, 1967), is the relation or status position between the researcher and the researched. In discussions of research ethics in ethnography, this is formulated as an issue of "exploitation" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997, pp. 273–275). This aspect is submerged in LIS studies on information and the "working poor" (Chatman, 1987, 1990, 1991). Although the researcher-researched relationship receives extended attention in work by authors Chatman has cited approvingly (e.g., Becker, Gold, and Hughes), she does not attend to this aspect of research herself. In Chatman's (1987, p. 269) study, a respondent clarifies the power relationship between janitorial staff and members of a university, which is personified by the interview between Chatman and the respondent. Chatman's work is not unethical, but the penetration of sociological work in her studies is limited to topical concerns—janitors and low-skilled occupations—rather than the epistemological and methodological issues that these studies entail.

This article on research ethics uses famous cases within psychology and sociology, among other disciplines, to highlight and address a research issue for LIS. Mackay's (1995) considerations on the ethics of researching and making available video-based materials were made from within the domain of Human-Computer Interaction. A particular point is worth mentioning. Mackay's "what if" scenario—participants on the video recordings, or people who know participants, are present in the conference hall—should be addressed by researchers before taking the platform to present their research. Can *you* take the risk of this happening at your next conference presentation? Although this situation "could never happen to you" (you may not be aware of its occurrence, nor the difficulties it occasions for those involved), it represents only one consideration of the "ethics" of research and the outcomes or products[8] of research.

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[6] Assurances of confidentiality may come under scrutiny if, after the research is completed, different agencies pressure the researcher for sources of information (Bond, 1978).

[7] There are legal and political dimensions, as well as ethical issues, related to the release of names (Geis, 1965). The recent difficulties in some communities with regard to the publication of names of persons convicted of sexual offenses testify to the immediacy of these concerns.

[8] This term refers to published and unpublished papers, books, lectures, and presentations derived from or incorporating elements of the research.

3. Ethics and disciplinary debates

Among the human sciences, various disciplines have encountered the problem of research ethics. Researchers within these disciplines have engaged in internal debate. This section presents cases in psychology that provoked controversy within the discipline. These studies were performed in the 1960s and 1970s. Although these examples may seem, chronologically, historical debates, these cases still have pedagogic value as "extreme case" formulations: they highlight, in a strong way, issues of research ethics and their place in the human sciences. These cases were catalysts for change, and their chronology does not mean that dilemmas of research ethics have been resolved. This section foreshadows how the topic could be an issue for LIS.

3.1. Cases

In a now-infamous series of laboratory experiments, Milgram (1963) studied obedience and responses to authority. The experiment required research subjects to administer what they believed to be electric shocks to "learners" or "victims" in an adjacent room, who were strapped to an electric chair. The research subjects understood the experiment to be about "memory and learning" (Milgram, 1963, p. 372) and administered the shocks when the victim gave an incorrect response to a question. Drawing lots rigged an apparently random selection of roles, so that the subject was always the "teacher." The "victim" was a member of the experiment team. Milgram (1963) was actually studying responses to authority, however, not memory, as the research subjects had been told, where "the primary dependent variable is the maximum shock the [subject] is willing to administer before he refuses to continue further" (p. 371). The following instructions were given before each experiment started:

> The subject is told to administer a shock to the learner each time he gives a wrong response. Moreover — and this is the key command — the subject is instructed to "move one level higher on the shock generator each time the learner flashes a wrong answer." He is also instructed to announce the voltage level before administering a shock. This serves to remind subjects of the increasing intensity of shocks administered to the learner. (Milgram, 1963, pp. 373–374)

Once the experiment began, the subject was in contact with the learner only via questions and the learner's responses, which were illuminated in the subject's room. With some subjects, this process continued until a particular point in the experiment was reached. "When the 300-volt shock is administered, the learner pounds on the wall of the room in which he is bound to the electric chair. The pounding can be heard by the subject. From this point on, the learner's answers no longer appear" (Milgram, 1963, p. 374). On the other hand, the subject may communicate with the experimenter during the experiment; this was usually instigated by hesitancy or reluctance on the subject's part to administer more shocks. A series of standard utterances were used as experiment criteria in assessing obedience, instructing the subject that the experiment had to continue.

Learners (confederates of the experimenter) did not actually receive any shocks. It was the understanding of subjects, however, that the learners did receive shocks.[9] Milgram's interest was less the intensity of shocks administered by subjects than that shocks were administered at all, and the effect of "authority" on subjects in continuing to deliver shocks. Although this form of experiment may seem remote from research conducted in LIS, it highlights issues relevant to researchers. Not only did this study require people to inflict harm on others, it was potentially harmful to participants who realized they were capable of inflicting harm. In addition, subjects were not given the opportunity to make an informed decision whether to participate in the research because they were misled as to the nature of the research.

Zimbardo, Banks, Haney, and Jaffe (1973) conducted a psychological experiment at Stanford, in which they simulated a prison environment. Their research examined the question of why guards and prisoners behave in the ways that they do. Students, who made up the research group, were divided into "prisoners" and "warders," or guards, by drawing lots. Minimal instructions were given to the students about how they were to behave in the role to which they were assigned. The authors abandoned the two-week experiment after just four days, because the students-as-warders gradually became out of control, mistreating the students-as-prisoners. The warders became increasingly aggressive, whereas the prisoners became increasingly submissive.

Studies, such as these by Milgram (1963) and Zimbardo et al. (1973), are useful in uncovering the existence of "research ethics," and in clarifying ethical positions within professions.[10] In discussing his experiment, Milgram acknowledged that there was a "fine line" in regards to the responsibilities of the experimenter: "There is, at best, ambiguity with regard to the prerogatives of a psychologist and the corresponding rights of his subject. There is a vagueness of expectation concerning what a psychologist may require of his subject, and when he is overstepping acceptable limits" (Milgram, 1963, p. 377).

Another psychologist, the eminent Sir Cyril Burt, was posthumously accused of inventing data in his studies of intelligence in monozygotic twins reared separately. There was a vagueness surrounding the circumstances of data collection (e.g., collected when and by whom) and a *Sunday Times* correspondent raised questions about the "missing ladies:"

> [His] allegations [against Burt] rested largely on the claim that he had been unable to locate in person or to find any trace of two women — Margaret Howard and J. Conway — who were credited with assisting Burt in his research on twins. Howard was a co-author of one of Burt's most important articles on twins and Conway was named as the sole author of an article that was actually written by Burt himself, according to his secretary. (Jensen, 1995, p. 5)

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[9] This study in psychology may be reconceptualized via sociology (e.g., the "definition of the situation") as it illustrates the famous sociological dictum "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572).

[10] "Clarifying" is an adequate rubric for these discussions of ethics. Psychologists were fully aware of the place of ethics in their discipline before these experimental studies of obedience (Ellis, 1932).

That an article is found to be written by somebody other than the credited author has obvious implications for bibliographic inquiries. Furthermore, work contained in an article that is known to have been fraudulent has the following implications: (1) focusing attention on the specifics of the work and engaging others in considering its merits and demerits[11] and (2) subsequent use by others unaware of the problematic status of the work (e.g., basing arguments on fraudulent material; Mascie-Taylor, 1995, p. 71).

Did Rosenhan (1973) overstep an "acceptable limit" (Milgram, 1963) by asking "pseudopatients" to present mental illness–type symptoms to have themselves admitted to psychiatric hospitals? His pseudopatients managed to have themselves admitted on the basis of simulated symptoms, but following admission, they "ceased simulating *any* symptoms of abnormality" (Rosenhan, 1973, p. 251; emphasis supplied). Indeed, "the pseudopatient behaved on the ward as he 'normally' behaved" (p. 252). Rosenhan was curious about the ability of the psychiatric profession to detect "sanity," in the admissions procedure and on the ward itself. "Despite their public 'show' of sanity, the pseudopatients were never detected" (Rosenhan, 1973, p. 252). Following the study, did Rosenhan overstep another acceptable limit by informing a psychiatric establishment that a number of pseudopatients would present themselves for admission? Of 193 persons presenting themselves for admission to the hospital, 41 were suspected of being sane. Subsequent to the study, however, Rosenhan (1973, p. 252) had not sent any pseudo-patients for admission.

3.2. Cases and debates

Baumrind (1964) criticized Milgram's (1963) study, and the exchange (Milgram, 1964) generated more heat than light. Although Savin (1973a) criticized Zimbardo et al.'s original study, Zimbardo's (1973) reply displayed an awareness of issues that his critics did not anticipate. Savin's (1973b) brief, dismissive response to this reply did not engage with the issues that Zimbardo had raised, but the opprobrium within the discipline of psychology illuminated an issue for psychologists. The profession was subject to regulation. Regulations are not universally welcomed (Adair, Dushenko, & Lindsay, 1985) and are subject to change (British Psychological Society Standing Committee, 1990).

Various disciplines and professional associations[12] have developed their own sets of regulations regarding social research (Dean, 1996, p. 2), which are to be taken under advisement whichever field is being practiced (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, pp. 29–30). Whereas guidelines are designed for research in particular disciplines, there are resemblances or common features between them regarding contact with people for research purposes. It is important to recognize the discipline-specific nature of regulations and

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[11] See, for example, further contributions to the debates on Burt's work (Mackintosh, 1995) and references contained within them.

[12] Under the aegis of the European Council of Information Associations, associations of information professionals in the European Union agreed on ethical principles, outlined in *Managing Information* (volume 8, issue 8, p. 44). This code does not cover research for academic purposes, however.

guidelines, however, particularly in interdisciplinary research. Cassell (1978) argued that ethical guidelines applied to research strategies that fall outside the purview of the guidelines (e.g., assessing the ethicality of ethnographic approaches using the rubric of quantitative or psychologistic guidelines) distort the assessment. It is not that ethnographers should be exempt from the commitment to avoid causing harm to participants in ethnographic research but that discipline-specific requirements are not designed to cover the contingencies of ethnography. Cassell is not suggesting that ethnographic research does not require ethical regulation but that "inappropriate regulation may do more harm than good" (p. 141).

In sociology, some isolated studies have served as landmark cases or defining moments in the "natural history" of ethics in social research. Humphreys (1970) anticipated protests at the methods he used to study the social organization of fleeting sexual encounters. Accordingly, he provided a considered account of the ethics of covert fieldwork, without which, he argued, he would have been unable to observe the subject of his study.

Earlier, a community study known as the "Springdale" case (Vidich & Bensman, 1958) sparked a fierce debate about the rights and responsibilities of social researchers, which Lee (1953) had previously outlined. The case centered on the attribution of views to individuals, exacerbated by the recognizability of individuals within the community from the published research and further compounded by the identifiability of the community itself. Issues of recognizability were associated with description and selection of pseudonyms that failed to disguise identities. Positions within the debate are documented in the journal *Human Organization* (1958–1959). The debate was opened by an editorial (Whyte, 1958), a response by Vidich and Bensman (1958–1959), followed by comments by other researchers; the case and debate led to further considerations of community studies and publication of ethnographic research (Becker, 1964).

Another intradisciplinary debate, appearing in a special issue of *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (1992), scrutinized Whyte's (1955) study of street corner boys in an Italian American neighborhood. Whyte knew that participants in his study, the street corner boys, would read his book (p. 342). He gave copies of his book to key participants in his ethnography, and their feedback is evident in his "methodological appendix" (pp. 279–358). Whyte had been concerned about the effect his work would have on the boys, and protected them from any unnecessary embarrassment by omitting discussion of sexual activities and attitudes toward women. Although some people may not want their potentially criminal activities to be exposed in print, these activities were not a source of shame within the culture of the street corner boys. He excluded potentially embarrassing research findings and published them elsewhere, in a journal that the boys were unlikely to access (Whyte, 1943).

Whyte originally published his research in 1949; the criticisms, over half a century later, demonstrated certain inconsistencies with the ethical positions they purported to espouse. Boelen (1992) sought to discredit Whyte; however, a reply to her paper by one of the original street corner boys (Orlandella, 1992) showed that she employed the same surreptitious, covert investigative techniques that she bemoaned in Whyte's research.

The methods used by Boelen in her dismissal of *Street Corner Society* (Whyte, 1955) raises the question "Whom should social inquirers trust?" A responsibility or obligation of a researcher is to his or her colleagues (Corden, 1996; Lee, 1953), yet some have sought to investigate the background of participants in colleagues' studies. Boelen entered the homes of participants in Whyte's ethnography with ulterior motives, as Orlandella discovered. How can members of the academic community trust that other researchers will not attempt similar "detective work," to cast aspersions on the circumstances of data collection? To clarify the authorship of *The Professional Thief* (Sutherland, 1937), and establish the social status of the man who informed the study, Snodgrass (1973) traced Chic Conwell's personal documents and birth certificate. Sometimes, perhaps, it is not the ethics nor motives of the original researcher that should be scrutinized.

There is a "natural history" to ethics in the human sciences. Questions of ethics, "current trends," and emphases are not static.[13] Indeed, Richardson's (1992) critique of Whyte commits the fallacy of historical epoch by judging the ethical position of *Street Corner Society* in terms of the ethical standards of 1992. This point is made in a defense of the sociologist Émile Durkheim from 20th century criticism: "It would be a mistake to evaluate the argument on the basis of a completeness that it was incapable of achieving given the limitations of research methods at the time" (Rawls, 1996, p. 478). Ethics and notions of sensitivity of research are often retrospective. In this sense, ethics are unanticipated consequences of the study, which are not subject to the a priori considerations of ethics committees. For example, a "political" dimension may begin to impact on or affect the research during the course of study (Rainwater & Pittman, 1967). Or, as in researching local political parties (Anderson & Lee, 1979) and in the Springdale case (Vidich & Bensman, 1958), ethical shock waves reverberate after the research has been concluded. Lee experienced difficulties with his final research; access to his Ph.D. dissertation was restricted, and he was unable to publish it.

The effect of ethics committees is arguable. Gregg and Jones (1990) advocated the separation of department and institution ethics committees, and suggested procedures for their operation. McLean (1995) discussed the function of ethics committees and suggested guiding principles for them, to clarify the role of such committees to both researchers and committees. Rose (1977) provided a graphic indictment of an ethics committee in confusion over its role: the logic, if not the intention, of the committee's position was to preclude all research involving people ("human subjects") altogether.[14]

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[13] For a discussion of historical events and ethical principles that have worked to shape the development of theorizing in sociology, see Sjoberg and Vaughan (1971).

[14] Although it is available from written accounts of studies that researchers do not necessarily consider research to be "unethical" because of the constituencies to which "research subjects" used in particular studies belong (Milgram, 1963, p. 372), some constituencies (e.g., beggars) require "special pleading" for use as research subjects (Dean, 1999). For purposes of approaching ethics committees, political and social welfare applications of studying beggars are prioritized over any potentially analytic insights. Rose (1977) showed that the interdisciplinary constitution of ethics committees as bureaucratic bodies limits the participation of people, regardless of their social status or prevailing attitudes toward particular groups of people.

3.3. Research strategies and research ethics

The American sociologist George Lundberg was concerned with the status of sociology as a science and the need to adopt an approach to sociological topics based on the physical sciences. Lundberg's (1968) mandate was afforded through a positivist approach toward social phenomena. He argued that the development of a social science, in the character of the physical sciences, is not defeasible by the (moral) objections leveled against it. There may be some benefit, however, in considering his contention that the dichotomy between the antonyms "ethical" and "unethical" is inappropriate: there is a relativizing cast to this dualism, and it may be useful to eschew the morally laden notion of "unethical" in favor of "nonethical." Invoking the "canon of ethics," Lundberg produced findings of a different level than through scientific techniques (p. 54). He argued that a "source of error is the tendency of scientists, and especially of social scientists, to permit the current code of morals of the community or their own personal notions of ethics to influence them in their collection and manipulation of data. The findings of science are per se non-ethical" (p. 53).

Although Lundberg wrote from a particular set of commitments, his comments challenge researchers to think about ethics in a critical manner. What does it mean to talk about "research ethics"? Are researchers "justifying" or "defending" (Austin, 1970) research, for example? What is the status of criticism leveled at a study vis-à-vis research ethics? Do criticisms in terms of research ethics invalidate the study as a whole? Considering the status of criticism, whether material is made redundant in light of ethical principles if ethics are given priority in the decision to use material (Atlas, 2001), raises further questions. What are the principles or criteria for judging research to be ethical or unethical? From where do these principles originate? Who defines work to be ethical or unethical? Following Bittner's (1965) considerations, who has the accepted credentials or "bona fides" to determine the ethical status of a piece of research or a project proposal? Who has the right to make such determinations, and how do they use that right? Who conducts research is yet another matter. For example, is it unethical to examine, in detail, the communication difficulties experienced by people with muscular dystrophy? If so, is it acceptable if this examination is *produced by* a person with muscular dystrophy (Robillard, 1996), or wheelchair use by a wheelchair user (Wong, 1997)?

Accepting ethical principles (e.g., that no harm is caused to a participant in research) should not prevent researchers from considering questions of research ethics as topics of study in their own right. The *gestalt* switch between topic and resource (Zimmerman & Pollner, 1971) that is taken by ethnomethodologists does not regard ethical guidelines as prescriptive. Whereas research ethics are important considerations for the protection of participants, ethnomethodology also regards "research ethics" as a topic for study per se. Accordingly, "no special interest is paid to them aside from an interest in their varieties as organizationally situated methods of practical reasoning" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. viii). Indeed, researchers are encouraged

> to refuse serious consideration to the prevailing proposal that efficiency, efficacy,
> effectiveness, intelligibility, consistency, planfulness, typicality, uniformity, reproducibility
> of activities — i.e., that rational properties of practical actions — be assessed, recognized,

categorized, described by using a rule or standard obtained outside actual settings within which such properties are recognized, used, produced, and talked about by settings' members. (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 33)

Setting itself apart from dichotomies such as scientific/nonscientific, quantitative/qualitative, and objective/subjective (Sharrock & Watson, 1988), ethnomethodology is not restricted to ideological tensions such as value-neutrality, partisanship, or the responsibility for being partisan (Becker, 1967) (an issue that is itself suffused with moral judgments). The methodological guidelines of "ethnomethodological indifference" (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970, p. 345) debars practitioners of ethnomethodology from imposing extra-analytic or extraneous formulations of natural language practices (e.g., misdescribing the social world via theorizing, ideology, and research ethics). As members of the self-same culture that is investigated in their studies, researchers engage in natural-language practices in the same way as nonacademic persons. Approved ethics procedures, such as informing participants of the nature of the research, drafting consent forms, asking for potential participants' informed consent, disguising identifying details, and assigning pseudonyms to participants, are conducted in ordinary or natural language. Thus, research ethics are standards of research practice constituted through natural-language practices.

The use of conceptual and epistemological frameworks unsuited to the description of interactional settings is proscribed by ethnomethodology, and the methodologically non-ironic description of interactional phenomena is facilitated by ethnomethodological indifference. Ethnomethodological indifference, as a methodological policy, is outlined in the following terms:

Ethnomethodological studies of formal structures are directed to the study of [natural language] phenomena, seeking to describe members' accounts of formal structures wherever and by whomever they are done, while abstaining from all judgments of their adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practicality, success, or consequentiality. (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970, p. 345)

Ethnomethodology does not accept the terms and dualisms that derive from foundational matters in sociology (Button, 1991). Ethical and moral guidelines constitute such ex situ rules or standards and therefore are introducing a source of "methodological irony." Ethical and moral guidelines change. As means of evaluating the state of research, then, research ethics are inconsistent measuring devices. This does not mean that ethnomethodology is unethical, nor that ethnomethodologists are exempt from adhering to ethical principles. Like all researchers where the study involves the participation of people, ethnomethodologists use ethical guidelines devised by institutions or professional associations to which they are affiliated. From their concern with naturally occurring interaction, however, ethnomethodologists attempt to apply ethical guidelines in a context-sensitive rather than prescriptive manner. For ethnomethodology, ethics are local, in situ matters that are embedded within the research project, not applied from outside.

Although there are pitfalls with analyzing ethics, it may be argued that "with snags, as with nettles, the thing to do is to grasp them – and to climb over them" (Austin, 1970, p. 183).

The study of ethics is a preferred option to the blind acceptance of particular research ethics. The benefits of topicalizing research ethics outweigh the pitfalls: only through the knowledge of what researchers are "doing" when referring to research ethics, can ethics become a truly useful part of research itself.

3.4. The ethics of interdisciplinarity

With particular reference to LIS, a further question raises the matter of an ethics of interdisciplinary work. The program of interdisciplinarity entails the use of research strategies (e.g., concepts, theories, and methods) that fall "inside" the boundaries of a particular specialty. The research strategy (or aspects thereof) is appropriated for the study of the topic of interest. Issues involved with this approach, however, relate to the "logical grammar" of research strategies as discipline-specific concepts as follows:

- Decontextualization: removing the research strategy (this includes concepts and theories) from the context of its occurrence.
- Suitability: the use of the research strategy within or beyond its applicability; the importation of a concept without consideration of its theoretical underpinnings.
- Transformation: the changes necessarily effected in the process of applying a research strategy to a specific topic or case.
- Traducement: the defeasance of the internal logic of the research strategy. As its theoretical underpinnings are excised, diminished or *ersatz* versions of the research strategy are presented.
- Dissemination: the enlargement of the category errors produced by recycling inferior and logically incoherent versions of the research strategy that is being claimed to be used.

In nascent interdisciplinary fields there are additional responsibilities toward colleagues and future scholars. These responsibilities are not limited to the provenance of "findings" but a commitment to the adequate description of prior research: ensuring that research does not misrepresent analytic positions.[15] This is the accountability (or lack thereof) regarding the presentation of research strategies. There are two issues here. First is the use of primary and secondary sources (Hopkins, 1990). Second is the claim to use primary sources rather than secondary sources, as documented in footnotes and bibliographies. The unwarranted claiming of use of primary sources leads to the creation of "category mistakes" (Ryle, 1966) by combining logically incompatible concepts, and the unwitting reproduction of these errors of logic via future use. The products of research (e.g., monographs, journal articles, and conference proceedings) become sources of future reference. As such, it is incumbent on researchers to present reasonable accounts of research strategies.

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[15] This argument borrows from the requirements of analytic philosophy to explicate the ordinary uses and logical grammar of concepts to theoretical formulations: "Another [discipline's] concepts must be described correctly" (Sharrock & Anderson, 1986, p. 121).

4. Conclusion

In interdisciplinary studies, it may be difficult to organize and coordinate members' theoretical and disciplinary commitments toward a common research agenda (Bott, 1964, pp. 35–39). Interdisciplinary programs face different issues, which may be contingent on the institutional support received by their practitioners (e.g., the establishment of the program and allocation of departmental space within the academy, the recognition of publications in core or peripheral journals, and recruitment and retention of research and teaching staff; Bird, 2001). As respondents to a survey of Women's Studies programs attest, however, the potential pitfalls of maintaining interdisciplinary programs are balanced by the challenge of teaching and researching phenomena unavailable to other disciplinary programs (Bird, 2001).

Guidelines for good practice designed in one sphere or discipline to protect the "subjects" of research may be inappropriate and therefore inapplicable in another sphere (Cassell, 1978). Extensive and useful work on the area of research ethics has been carried out elsewhere, however, and it is possible to learn from the experiences and subsequent procedures of others. The British Sociological Association has produced a "Statement of Ethical Practice,"[16] acknowledging the "Code of Ethics" produced by the American Sociological Association (ASA);[17] the ASA Code of Ethics is, in turn, a furtherance of the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists" produced by the American Psychological Association.

With a nascent theoretical base, LIS must borrow or import elements of formal theory from other fields, and take advantage of research methods common to other disciplines. This article does not advocate that research ethics become a Shibboleth or touchstone of research carried out under the auspices of LIS. The recent history of sociology (and, to some extent, psychology) suggests that disciplines can seemingly experience a period of "paralysis" while current issues of the day — proverbial "hot potatoes" — displace the activities of research.

LIS can and should avoid the situation where doing research is sublimated to considerations of research ethics. LIS can learn from studies and debates within other disciplines, and from codes of ethical practice developed by professional associations in these disciplines. LIS should have an informed debate about research ethics before a study that damages the trust between colleagues, between researcher and participants, or between disciplines arises. This article is timely, then, at a stage when LIS needs to discuss issues of ethics and develop its own code for research.

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[16] Available at http://www.britsoc.org.uk/about/ethic.html.
[17] Available at http://asanet.org/members/ecostand2.htm.

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