

Engaging Research Communities in Writing Studies

Ethics, Public Policy, and Research Design

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Sixth Interchapter: Questions to
Consider when Designing Justice-Driven
Research

Chapter 6

Centering Practical Ethics in Writing
Studies Research

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Sixth Interchapter

Questions to Consider when Designing Justice-Driven Research

In this interchapter, I offer some prompts for engaging in the research design process reflexively, with research partners—which include Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)—to build efficacious, justice-driven research. The questions are intended for use as you design and develop research programs. They are organized by a general chronology, but it would be remiss of me not to mention that research proceeds along many different chronologies. Exploring these prompts as you begin, reflect on, and revise research programs may help you consider strategies or tools to engage participants ethically toward justice-driven goals. I offer question-based heuristics for reflection on:

- Articulating Axiological and Methodological Commitments
- Considerations for the Research Design Phase
- Questions to Ask Before and During the IRB Review Process
- Questions to Consider Post IRB Review and Approval
- Data Egalitarianism: Sharing with Participants and the Field

Articulating Axiological and Methodological Commitments

In the early stages of research, as you identify and reflect on your methodology/ies, consider:

- Can I advocate, via my methodological choice, for justice-effects in the world?
- What is my ontological approach to this issue? What can we know about the world? How will this shape my approach to how I develop research questions and research with communities?
- What is my epistemological approach to this issue? How can we know what we know about the world? How will this shape the data I collect and the way I interact with participants?
- How do my epistemology and axiology fit in the broader context of research, research with humans, and federal policy (particularly the IRB structure at my institution)?

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- What is the relationship of this research to traditional knowledge-making narratives and in what ways does it uphold and/or dismantle them?
- What outcomes can I expect for participants, readers, and any secondary, tertiary, and extended users and audiences? What goals do my research partners, including participants, have for this research?
- How will the demographics of this research community change in the coming years? How can I, with my research partners, design effective interventions and examine efficacy to support this change?
- While honoring partners' diverse obligations and needs, what control can or should I relinquish to partners and communities who have an investment in research I am working on? Do I trust my research partners to be equally or more invested in this project than me?
- What unexplored sites merit examination and, more importantly, demand my expertise?
- What local and international policies may impact this research, beyond the Common Rule?
- Do these research questions/goals immediately silence some voices? Do they privilege already privileged participants?
- What partnerships would be beneficial for my communities? How can I establish robust partnerships wherein research is simply one component of many for building ethical, reciprocal partnerships?

As we determine what methods to use, we can consider the following questions:

- What new methods and/or tools have been used recently to disrupt hegemonic discourses in the field? Can those methods and/or tools be adopted in this research?
- Do the methods I'm planning to use suit my methodological framework? How and why?
- Are there methods accessible to other researchers? If there is a cost associated with research tools, does that limit the reproducibility of this research?
- What sort of data will these methods generate? Will the data represent my participants appropriately?
- What stories do these methods carry? Have human rights violations occurred in the past with any method I plan to use?
- Are there similar or associated methods that will better represent participants while asking less, offering more, and minimizing risk?
- What sorts of tools does my institution offer, and what sorts of tools do my peers use, that match the methodological framework of this study and provide useful organizational options for my data?

Considerations for the Research Design Phase

Once we've established research site and questions, we will need to address issues related to fairness, validity, and reliability in our design. Validity, in particular, is a fraught and complex concept (see, for instance, in Writing Studies Cushman [2016, 2019]). I'll discuss validity further in Chapter 6. But for now, consider:

- Will the measures we've developed, the metrics we've designed, and/or the tools we plan to use allow us to accurately capture answers to our questions?
- Will our methods for answering research questions afford us the opportunity to determine the *reliability and/or precision* of our measurement tools?

Especially since the “need for precision increases as the consequences of decisions and interpretations grow” (*Standards*, 2014) it is imperative that we ensure our findings impact communities appropriately. Therefore, we should question:

- Am I conscientious of my own approaches and attitudes toward issues of fairness and justice?
- How will these selected methods increase opportunity structures for the communities with which I research?
- Who will the results of this research serve?
- Who will this research serve? (The answer to this question can be a very different than your reply to the question directly above.)
- How will I return the results of this research to the community/ies it impacts?
- What helpful tools exist in my research infrastructure/institution to examine critical, pressing issues and increase access to opportunity structures in pursuit of equity?

And here are some initial starting points to reflect on the generalizability and reproducibility of our work:

- Do these research questions address systemic inequalities among or between populations?
- Will answers to these research questions produce recommendations for action?
- Would those recommendations be useful to partners in different contexts?
- What scholarship and resources have I used to determine the necessary sample size of my population to generalize my findings?
- Who benefits from the data I collect in the classroom?
- Is it possible the data I need already exists? If not, am I willing to share the data I collect with others in disciplinary or national repositories?

6 *Questions to Consider*

The updated regulations regarding broad consent and data re-use require us to be thoughtful about data collected for future research. Here are some guiding questions to consider as we design research with these concerns in mind:

- Do participants' data need to be identifiable? If not, even if I practice a full consent process, what methods does my local IRB recommend for dissociating the consent documents from data?
- What language can I include in any consent processes or materials to ensure participants understand the possibilities, however unlikely, that the confidentiality of their data may be compromised?
- Do I plan to share research data with colleagues? To de-identify it? What are the long-term implications of this present study design for both my and others' ability to re-use data or share with colleagues?

Questions to Ask Before and During the IRB Review Process

As we prepare to submit studies for IRB review, we should consider the following:

- Is the consent process designed to maximize participants' autonomy?
- Have I budgeted enough time for IRB review given on my local IRB's stated timelines?
- What procedures are in place that allow participants to withdraw? What are the consequences (real and participant-perceived) of withdrawal from the study?
- Does this research involve historically marginalized or vulnerable populations? What best practices have been used to minimize coercion and risk given participants' perceived or self-identified vulnerabilities?
- Have I reviewed my local IRB's guidance materials for researchers? If not, could I search for contents that are specific to this study type?
- Does my university's research administration unit offer support and/or tools specific to research with human participants? Could these tools be used to the advantage of participants? If I am not aware of these opportunities, have I requested information from my local IRB?
- Have I used my local IRB's templates, especially for consent and, if available, recruitment? If so, have I reflected on whether the templates are the best fit for my study?
- If I have not used my local IRB's templates, do I have a justification that is tied directly to my participants' needs and honors their autonomy?
- Is this study high risk or does it involve populations subject to coercion? If so, have I and/or the research team considered scheduling a meeting to meet with an IRB staff person or member to discuss the project?

- What options are available to participants to renegotiate consent?
- Is this a “one-off” study, or a study that doesn’t involve a researcher interacting face-to-face with participants? If so, do participants understand how to redact their consent and/or remove their data from the study?
- If I intend to de-identify data and use it for other research purposes, do participants understand there is a point at which they will be unable to withdraw their data?
- What tools do I have access to so that I can maintain and monitor data efficiently and effectively?
- Under what circumstances would data collection be halted? How will I assess anomalies in the data and determine how to resolve any data collection issues?
- Is it reasonable to assume that there are enough participants interested in this problem to help a researcher such as myself answer it? If not, why not?
- With whom will this data be shared? Who can provide feedback on the data collection elements and the forthcoming or ongoing analysis aspects of this research? How can their access to data be assured?

When researchers receive requested and/or required edits from the IRB, they can consider:

- Do these changes prompt me to engage more clearly with the letter of the law?
- Do these changes enhance protections for participants in ways I may have not noticed before?
- Do these changes recognize the variety of other policies with which I must comply (e.g. G.D.P.R., international policy)?
- Do these changes require me to acknowledge local policies that go above and beyond federal policy?
- Do I feel comfortable asking for guidance and support from IRB personnel as I revise this protocol? If not, why not? To whom can I go to for support?

Questions to Consider Post IRB Review and Approval

As we implement research, we should remain in contact with our local IRB, especially if we encounter challenges or realize something needs to be changed in the research plan. These questions may prompt you to communicate with your local IRBs after the review and approval process is complete:

- After negotiating consent with participants, have I noticed or been informed of strategies to make the consent process and materials more transparent and/or useful to participants?

8 *Questions to Consider*

- How does the integrity of data, as I observe its collection over the course of this study, impact participants?
- Does the data collected thus far address the research questions/inquiry? If not, what data are needed to address the inquiry?
- Have I and/or the research team significantly modified methods, methodological framework, or research questions during the course of this study? Does the study implementation still address the original research questions?
- Has anything in the study design changed? Have things like methods, recruitment practices, or data storage plans evolved?
- How is my local IRB implementing the updated Common Rule policies regarding continuations? How do they manage amendments and study closures?
- Am I interested in using data from this study for other research purposes? If so, have I reached out to the IRB to see what's allowable based on the original review of the study before communicating with participants?

Data Egalitarianism: Sharing with Participants and the Field

The following questions can help us in the preparatory stages of protocol design so that data can be shared widely and with all appropriate communities and individuals:

- Have I de-identified files adequately? Have I considered whether there may be identifiable metadata on any participant supplied files?
- How will this data repository look to peers, were I asked to share it with them? Is it well organized? Can I find participants' data or certain datasets easily?
- How can I more publicly share the results and findings from my research for a broader audience?
- What sort of tangible actions will be taken because of this research? How can I ensure participants understand the impact they've had on future practice?
- If I cannot, or will not, return findings to my participants, why not? Should I, and/or how can I, change that practice?
- Is this data useful to other researchers examining a similar population? If so, can I share my data with other researchers and expect them to find the same results?
- Have I provided enough background and guidance so that researchers can attempt to reproduce this research? Have I clearly articulated my stance toward reproducibility and situated it within a justice-focused methodology?

- Echoing Poe (2019): who are the editors of the journal/press where I intend to send this work? How have they and will they shape the field? Will this work reflect my intention and my participants' engagement?

I hope that these questions provide support as you design your research and engage with your local IRB during the review process. In the final chapter of the book, I'll work one last time on the argument that, while required by law, IRB review is not merely an obligation. Instead, it is a tool for building justice-driven research designs. Chapter 6 invites our continued reflection on the work Writing Studies scholars have done thus far in designing ethical, efficacious research on behalf of participants and the public.

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6 Centering Practical Ethics in Writing Studies Research

This chapter demonstrates how theoretical and applied principles, global and local practice, and immediate and future benefits are balanced in the implementation of the Common Rule. I extend the discussion of balance on multiple scales. First, the Common Rule and the Belmont Report establish foundational principles that broadly concern the human community and guide Institutional Review Boards' (IRBs') practice, which is importantly shaped not simply by policy and principles but also to the interpretations of IRBs to best serve the needs of local communities and individuals. Second, research is born out of local efforts to address local need yet we can use local inquiry to pursue generalizable, robust projects with the possibility of reproducibility. Third, our IRBs require we clearly articulate whether there is immediate benefit to participants, or if the possibility of social benefit is instead intended for future and/or broader communities. Within this vast network, IRBs are tasked to provide a balanced assessment as to the scale and impact research has within a specific, local context. Importantly, Writing Studies scholars are well-equipped to broach these matters in our research design and, therefore, recognize the utility of the central argument of this chapter in building sustainable, reproducible and ethical programs of research:

IRBs are a cornerstone of robust research communities and facilitate balanced research praxis on behalf of participants and the broader human community.

I establish this argument via three interwoven sections:

- The first section, “Justice as Obligation in the Research Enterprise: Abstract ↔ Applied Principles” invites Writing Studies researchers to consider additional principles such as fairness, validity, and reliability in the context of research as a public social good.
- The second section, “Engaging in the Policy Process for the Future of the Field: Global ↔ Local Contexts” articulates matters of trust in the research enterprise, and addresses how IRBs work to develop that on behalf of researchers and institutions.

- The third section, “Synthesis” summarizes the chapter and situates its content within the book as a whole and provides conclusory thoughts.

Federal policy moderated by local implementation, local inquiry that systematically applies principles of robust research design, and research inquiries that either directly benefit participants or offer future benefit to the public are all interwoven. We’ve already realized the challenges inherent in establishing internal balance among each of the principles in the Common Rule—autonomy, beneficence, and justice—and the balancing of labor attuned to these issues at the level of IRB review (discussed in Chapter 4). Thinking beyond principles and praxis to get our work underway, it can be helpful—as we prepare to work with our IRBs—to recognize the broader impact of research design in reifying and promoting public support of research enterprise.

Justice as Obligation in the Research Enterprise: Abstract ↔ Applied Principles

I’ve argued that as a field, we can stabilize an approach to research ethics and methodology by assigning justice as our teleological goal. With methodological justice—wherein we have a shared *telos* of justice in all our doings—we have space for the reasonable pluralisms in epistemologies and the increasing representation of diverse ontologies and methodologies in our field.

Reasonable and Purpose Pluralism as Impetus for Prospective Review

While framing IRBs as a response to the legacy of abuse is commonplace in the literature, an equally important discussion is why the reasonable pluralism of American society demands their continued existence. A. J. London—Professor of Ethics and Philosophy and Director of Carnegie Mellon’s Center for Ethics and Policy—suggested recently (2019) that practical ethics is always challenged by the requirement to provide a framework for guidance across contexts. He helpfully situates our current frameworks within a Rawlsian reasonable pluralism. Reasonable pluralism acknowledges that folk do not always agree (or even agree often) upon a conception of the good life.

Given this definition of practical ethics, we can see how IRBs are instantiations of the Belmont Report’s work toward a practical ethics of research. And so while research ethics is only one small component of a broader practical ethics, the implications of reasonable pluralism on the work of IRBs are vast. Ameliorating the disparate impacts of benefits and burdens of research, assessing risk and honoring autonomy,

and ensuring research promotes justice are all subject to interpretation, and reasonable pluralism can be both particularly useful but also particularly challenging for a system like IRB review. Such a framework, while flexible, presents considerable challenges for establishing a *local* practical ethics for use by IRBs and researchers. Usefully, our field has a coordinated approach to ethics and justice. Buttressed by justice-driven research design guided by methodological justice, our field coheres around principles resonant with IRBs' necessary interests, making the issues reasonable pluralism presents less troublesome.

A corollary to reasonable pluralism is Newton's (2017) discussion of "purpose pluralism" in assessment scholarship. Newton suggests that purpose pluralism, in contrast to "purpose purism," is the intentional use of tools for multiple purposes and is both feasible and a reasonable standard. Newton refutes the drive toward "purism," or the mandate that certain tests, for instance, only serve one purpose. Instead, he argues that in seeking to answer questions such as "Why is it important for this particular assessment to exist at all? How will implementing this particular assessment make a positive difference to the world?" we realize there are often multiple strategies for implementing assessments for beneficial purposes. Maximizing benefit in this way correlates to prospective review of research as well. To fully realize the possibility of purpose pluralism (not just in assessment), and the possibilities that drive the current ethics review system in the U.S., Rawls's concept of *reasonable pluralism* is particularly useful.

In response to proposals to dissolve prospective review, given the lack of evidence of its efficacy—e.g. empirical data that IRBs minimize harms, an area of contention for vociferous critics of IRBs—London (2012) notes that many criticisms do not fully consider the broader societal constructs that have led to the necessity of IRBs. London's balanced discussions about reasonable pluralism, practical ethics, and prospective review are useful for us now. Without the broader constructs and principles to guide our local experience, we may feel put-upon, frustrated, and irritated that we are being asked for evidence of why our work is good and ethical. The default, however, to be clear, is not that all researchers start from a deficit space of "proving" their work is good.

Rather, when asked to explain the utility of research beyond the view of the researcher, IRBs demand more. IRBs may seem dubious to our claims of benefits and risks because they may not have sufficient evidence from the broader research enterprise, from their experience reviewing and closing protocols, to trust all researchers' proposals even within a reasonable pluralism. Therefore, the ethos we develop in a particular protocol is fundamental to how our proposed research is received and considered. In this way, again, IRBs are pilot tests for publics. The paperwork and materials they see from us are often their only strategies for determining the social issue our research will address and

the adequacy of our methods and training. Such a perspective of IRBs facilitates an understanding of them as partners for effectively conveying the importance of our work within a society that recognizes reasonable pluralism and purpose pluralism, rather than as barriers or entities bound to a specific practical ethics. When we recognize that our IRBs want to understand our particular approach to a specific issue, yet see so many within the current framework, it is incumbent upon us to clearly articulate the work our proposed research will do in the world.

Additionally, IRBs are well-equipped to help us identify design challenges due to our own limited resources. IRBs clearly see both local research communities—via the reviews they conduct—and are attentive as well as to national conversations given their professionalization and ongoing training. At both levels, they observe how issues of recruitment, feasibility, retention, and data collection impact the possibilities of conducting ethical research. IRBs can help us see our work as it will eventually appear to the world, and, more immediately, to the prospective participants we hope to engage.

Within Writing Studies these are all matters related to justice, as are the calls for more empirical work, as such research can help disrupt and dismantle systemically oppressive infrastructures. It is here, perhaps, that I see the call to do better—more just, aggregable, replicable, and rigorous—research as a means by which we support communities in effecting the change they desire. Regardless of paradigm, methodology, or method, methodological justice invites us to ensure research is not only just in design, but also just by design. To honor the important work of study design and development is to critically examine and effectively articulate how our tools and paradigms are not only systematic and offer the possibility of generalization inferences, but also how the research will do justice-driven work in the world. Crucial to methodological justice and clarity in communicating with our IRBs is the ability to articulate why and how principles may be subjugated to others. And this is all a matter of careful balancing of obligations to our research communities.

Complicating Matters: Consequences of (not) Considering Validity and Reliability

Theoretical principles like justice, autonomy, and beneficence don't simply undergird the existence of IRBs. They inform research across disciplines. But other principles are foundational to knowledge construction across the multiplicity of paradigms (thanks to reasonable pluralism) that inform all manner of research with participants. Major considerations beyond autonomy, beneficence, and justice include, for instance, fairness, validity, reliability, and precision. The *Standards* (2014) offer guidance regarding these principles in writing assessment, e.g. and increasingly, fairness, validity, and reliability play an important

role of our research as the scope of our findings expand and we work toward ensuring broader generalization inferences are possible. While the *Standards* offer useful baseline considerations of these principles, and practical strategies for implementing them, the interpretations and applications—including outright rejection—of concepts such as fairness, validity, and reliability have consequences in Writing Studies. Outright rejection of these principles can do considerable damage to our field's ethos, writ large, within broader research infrastructures.

Conversations about validity and reliability, like the discussions surrounding replication work, WEIRD-ness, and recruitment, as well as sample sizes, power, and generalizability, are complex at the theoretical level. When applied, they are even more nuanced. Recognizing their importance as individual principles that stand alone in unique contexts deeply complicates research practice. Consider again the figure of the balanced scale of the three ethical principles (on p. 105)—autonomy, beneficence, and justice—all of which are further necessarily balanced internally. A similar illustration could be drawn of concepts such as validity and reliability, which are critical considerations that relate to the sustainability and reproducibility of research. Fortunately, scholars in Writing Studies have already worked to trouble with these concepts and frame interpretations that serve students, communities, and publics.

In Cushman's pluriversality many worlds can equally coexist, each on their own terms. This means that principles such as validity provide evidence “not as a way to maintain, protect, conform to, confirm, and authorize the current systems of ... knowledge making, but rather as a way to better understand difference in and on its own terms” (2019). And Kelly-Riley (2019) offered a historical look at the ascendancy of validity within the field of writing assessment, in particular, and amplifies the issues of consequences in light of matters of justice and fairness:

consequences became part of the scholarly and epistemological architecture of evaluation of all sorts—including writing. In 2014, fairness resulting out of considerations of consequences became an elevated concern on par with reliability in the most recent revision of the [*Standards*]...The inclusion of consequences means that humanistic concerns about thought, expression, and language provide a check and balance to assessment processes.

(341)

The concept of consequences also determines the interpretation of how assessments are used in local contexts. That these constructs can be de-stabilized in discussions of justice and locality is less of an indicator of their faults and rather suggest that they, too, benefit from greater humanistic interpretation and application. In this way, these broader

principles are open for our use in research design. We can articulate the interpretations and meanings of validity and reliability that we want to see in research and determine if, for instance, reproducibility is a principle that is worthwhile for the participants with whom, and research communities for which, we work.

This book has focused primarily on autonomy, beneficence, and justice because they yoke our good work to that of IRBs'. Yet there are many other central principles in methodologically plural research environments such as Writing Studies. How can we, as a field, grapple with the reasonable pluralism, methodological pluralism, and inevitable rise of multiple principles that all demand equal measure? One answer is to listen to decolonial and Indigenous scholars who share insights from outside the Western constructs that typically demand prioritization among interconnected principles. And, too, more egalitarian approaches to principles and dissolution of certain constructs could be beneficial as we build a disciplinary approach to paradigmatic concerns. While this book has prioritized justice in methodological concerns and autonomy and beneficence in axiological matters, there are many other principles that influence epistemology and ontology. If we wish to build new constructs outside of the one that constrains us, we have much work to do.

In her discussion of validity, Cushman questions "For whom do we make knowledge and why? This question could not be timelier as humanists and administrators seek to make disciplines appear more relevant to students, applicable to social problems, and attendant to political, social, and economic exigencies" (2019, p. 351). Indeed, as we move into the third decade of the 21st century, the challenges we face and the choices we make in response to these questions will shape communities, student experience, and the field. Once again the principle of validity offers an example of our common, sometimes unarticulated prioritization in practice. Cushman (2019) challenges us: "*what counts as knowledge and who gets to decide?*" (352). Such a question builds upon the concept that "*valuable knowledge is valid knowledge*" because novel ways of discussing validity can demonstrate how valuable knowledges heretofore ignored, silenced, or marginalized are powerful in response to injustice. These interpretations and their subsequent applications are robust in the face of disciplinary scrutiny, and IRB review, when they clearly articulate value for the human community, on balance. But this balance cannot be oriented around or manipulated by the researcher. Instead, in the context of research with human participants, IRBs help remind us to whom we are accountable, because IRBs are accountable to the broader publics and communities they serve. We, too, thereby are obliged to articulate principles for practice within both reasonable and purpose pluralisms on behalf of these communities.

Forward Motion

Throughout the book, the matters of autonomy, beneficence, and justice have been brought to bear as testaments to the importance of IRB review. They are embedded in the whole of the research enterprise. So, too, are principles such as fairness, validity, reliability, generalizability, systematicity, and reproducibility. These principles, and many more, matter to the research communities in which we circulate and directly impact the work we do for our campuses, students, and communities. Therefore, the principles are foundational to our work, whether we apply and/or acknowledge them or not. The reception of our prospective work by IRBs—and peers, reviewers, and students—are shaped by these conversations and the existing narratives of these principles.

How do we manage when we are confronted by an interpretation of a principle with which we do not agree? How do we engage productively in a process, particularly with our local IRBs, that exhibits alternative, equally valid interpretations of foundational principles or broad policy language? Such work requires us to understand the broader infrastructure and the possibilities of engaging productively within it. Wright's (2012) publication on informed consent documents, McKee's personal experience on an IRB (2003), as well as Barton et al.'s (2018) empirical research on IRBs suggest Writing Studies scholars are adept at working with IRBs to develop institution-specific interventions and strategies. We can collaborate with fellow researchers in action research, education, community-based participatory research, assessment, and the social sciences to establish strategies for navigating the IRB review process, especially as justice-driven methodologies and Black, Indigenous, feminist, and similar epistemologies challenge and reshape the field.

Working with participants is a privilege, and IRBs do not assume all research results in justice-outcomes for participants and/or the public. And so, I challenge researchers frustrated by prior experiences with IRB review, or concerned about prospective IRB review, to question: what can I learn from this experience? And: how can I make plain the meaningfulness of this work? IRBs are not gatekeepers; their review instead is a critical opportunity for researchers to crystalize their principled work in support of research communities.

Engaging in the Policy Process for the Future of the Field: Global ↔ Local Contexts

Recognizing our privileged position is something for which we should account, if we are able to research with participants. Part of unpacking this privilege is recognizing that simply engaging with prospective participant about research, like when we share an informed consent document, breaches their autonomy. It demands their attention to a matter

that, heretofore, was not of their concern. This alone implies we believe it is our right to encroach on participants' worlds with research; in top-down research scenarios such as classrooms, or in spaces where research is not driven by community interest or need, this is potentially a violation of all three foundational principles of the Belmont Report. We should recognize that working with our IRBs means we must illustrate how leveraging any intrusion into participants'—and/or research communities'—worlds will result in a proportional benefit to the public. While many participants view it a civic and/or social responsibility to participate in research, the advantages taken by researchers in the past have necessitated a default perspective of a “no access” to participants, which results in our necessary prospective review by IRBs for proposed work with participants.

Framed this way, part and parcel of any research design that proceeds easily through IRB review, especially from qualitative frameworks, is a researcher's demonstration of community buy-in. And such efforts require considerably more time and investment in research communities. By their very structure, IRBs demand time and attention be paid to issues of time and attention. This, in turn, reifies and promotes the success of research across all communities, to the benefit of the public—and, lest we forget—researchers as well.

Public Trust in the Research Enterprise

London (2012) suggested that IRBs are, in some ways, a legitimating factor for research produced for the public good, because “Research is an enterprise that uses social resources to provide social benefits” (p. 943). This claim parallels Kane's (2013) acknowledgement regarding validity that “Public claims require public justification” (p. 1). As a component of knowledge building for the public good, London argues that prospective review of research not only limits researchers' “arbitrary exercise of social authority” but also that while “the requirement to reduce research risks has been widely viewed as a protectionist and paternalistic...”

review before committees of diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including lay representation from the community, helps to ensure that risks that cannot be eliminated from research are necessary and proportional, and that the decision to conduct such research is a legitimate avenue of trying to answer an important social question.
(p. 941)

In this interpretation, IRBs are a strategic bench mark, a pilot test of research for the future publics that will necessarily both participate and consume the findings from the research. In this quote, London alludes to the reality that all researchers are advantaged by their research in some

form—whether through further or continued funding, publications or prestige, or even promotion. These benefits are not always tangible, but they are commodities that ultimately benefit researchers in our present research infrastructure. To deny our own self-interest in conducting research definitively warrants increased scrutiny of our work—whether through our own reflection, in conversations with mentors or disciplinary leaders, and even with our IRBs.

This simple point, made eloquently by London, is one of many arguments that helps contextualize experiences with local IRB review in the broader philosophical and ethical frameworks that demand IRBs' existence. As much as our experience of IRBs is local, and relies on a policy with which not all researchers agree, the broader philosophical concerns that drive IRBs' existence are not so contentious. The beauty of these premises, like London's, is that they lay bare that research has historically been predominantly beneficial for researchers and small subsets of the population, but now, U.S. society overtly demands this benefit must be widely and equitably—justly—distributed. It would be foolhardy to ignore the impact this has on our present framework for research ethics. Both recognizing our own self-interest and promoting some social benefit with adequate tools and strategies are only a couple of London's critical points in support of prospective review of research. London is quick to acknowledge that while the present system may not be ideal, doing away with it all together is not prudent.

But IRBs do not exist because of scrupulous researchers. Such researchers design projects that proceed easily through IRB review. IRB review can be a pro forma process for careful, ethical researchers familiar enough with the policy and their local IRBs. But even scrupulous researchers, and certainly unscrupulous ones, can overrate the value of their work to the broader human community. When there is a mismatch between researcher expectations and the results of the study, especially when risks are miscalculated or participants are harmed, the public loses trust in the research enterprise. London (2012) clearly articulates this useful point:

Researchers who scrupulously inform subjects of risks and benefits or who use trial designs that reduce burdens on participants voluntarily and unilaterally increase their own costs. Moreover, without prospective review, investing time and resources in this aspect of research is unlikely to be salient or visible to stakeholders such as participants or the public. Scrupulous researchers thus bear the costs of implementing these safeguards, but there is no direct mechanism for rewarding them for doing so. At the same time, using resources in this way may put such scrupulous researchers at a competitive disadvantage relative to their peers. Researchers who do not incur these costs may be able to stretch scarce resources further and use

their cost savings to bolster the depth or breadth of their research portfolio.

(p. 934)

While economic and theoretical in its framing, London's argument is a direct rebuttal to criticisms of IRB review. Despite the likelihood that the majority of researchers are prudent, but are inconvenienced by IRB review due to unscrupulous researchers, the broader principle of justice, and beneficence and autonomy, too, demand a systematic approach to issues of research malfeasance. Our present system, codified in the Common Rule, is our society's effort to redress the significant injustices done in the all too recent past.

This context allows London (2012) to reasonably suggest that there are *system level* benefits with a framework like the one mandated by the Common Rule. This systematicity in application of broad ethical principles in the prospective review of research

create the conditions necessary to preserve public trust and therefore facilitate social support of the research enterprise. These benefits become most clear only in comparison to a model of the counterfactual situation in which all researchers have the same unfettered freedom to act on their own initiative without public oversight.

(937)

In this latter case, any success on a researcher's part could be the result of unchecked, and perhaps unwitting, power differentials, coercion, and inattention to issues of vulnerability at both the individual level, e.g. in matters of autonomy, and the societal level, regarding matters of justice. He suggests that researchers "chafe" at the requirement for prospective review because it requires researchers to develop protocols that will be acceptable to informed and free participants. Moreover, IRB review requires researchers to recognize and articulate a public justification of the social and scientific merit of the research. Together, the templates IRBs are criticized for illustrate these merits for reviewers, our pilot test for publics. But there is rarely a question that asks us to speak to the issue directly. Instead, through questions about sampling plan and size, recruitment, enrollment, and context, including exigence, our local IRBs help us build this narrative in a usable, codified file that corresponds with the broader systematic review of research that a specific IRB coordinates.

Each research project does not need to be grand, nor should they be. But each research project should address a social issue with a reasonable method. Clearly articulating this alone is no small feat. Indeed, the gravity of such prompts and requirements for researchers can put researchers on the defensive—I have felt this myself on more than one occasion. Yet the benefits of a system like IRB review are not always clear to

researchers, unless we recognize our research is *not* always beyond reproach in terms of design, execution, and output. Contextualized this way, IRB review is not about compliance and legalities. Premised upon ethical principles, it is instead an opportunity for us to tell justice-driven story that amplifies goals beyond our own. This story shares with our IRBs, and the public, how the research we propose can build a better world.

I am certain the goals of most Writing Studies researchers are in alignment with these values. As a field we espouse the importance of supporting communities and the public good; we are a part of these communities and our research therefore exists within them. I also think we agree that in our present research infrastructure, IRB review can be a useful preliminary metric for evaluating researchers' claims about the benefits of research. Ultimately, in this context, prospective review provides publics, writ large, our society's best effort toward a "credible social assurance" that communities can support research, which include funding both directly and indirectly with taxpayer dollars and drawing upon the goodwill of participants. And while London notes that other possibilities for review infrastructure may exist, the present infrastructure is what guides us. Recall then, that this is a "conservative" approach to justice (p. 41), rather than one that offers an ideal version with no strategies for implementation. This further informs our interpretations and applications of justice along other planes, as well. Within this context, Writing Studies researchers can recognize their ability to enact and embody policy with such an end in mind as they proceed through IRB review: "advance[ing] the common good by generating high-quality, socially relevant information without compromising the rights, welfare, or moral standing of those who make such advances possible" (London, 2012, p. 942).

Working toward Futurity and Paradigmatic Development: Finding Partners in IRBs

Balancing and amplifying concordant and robust interpretations of justice, beneficence, and autonomy is not only our local IRBs' responsibility in applying the Common Rule; it is our responsibility, too. Intrinsic to research design, formal ethics review, and discipline building is determining why we exist and why we do what we do. Engaging effectively with our local IRBs requires us to articulate this work, even if nebulous and burgeoning, toward balanced review across the many dimensions—ethical, pragmatic, time, benefit—that impact public's engagement with and trust of the research enterprise.

Recently, Cushman (2019) argued that when making knowledge in an imperial academy, we should ask "up front for what purpose and for whom we undertake" our work; this, she points out, is decolonial praxis. We cannot escape our institutions', and our field's, imperial legacies. But

she points out that we, “the individual agents within institutions, whose everyday practices make up these institutions, can be decolonial in [our] praxis” (355). This requires decolonizing programs and assessment by embodying decolonization in all our work. This call, Kelly-Riley (2019) observes, is consistent with changes in sister disciplines such as educational psychology and measurement wherein the importance of the local contexts invariably impact the ways principles are practically applied and assessed (e.g. Kane, 2013, 2016). In the same way, the revisions to the Common Rule and their 2019 implementation suggest that the overarching framework of human research ethics has shifted to accommodate not only the changing contexts and methods that facilitate research, but, and perhaps more importantly, the endless possibilities of a researcher-base that is more diverse than ever before working to serve communities who are more diverse than ever before.

Yet this policy change does not excuse us of our history, as a field participatory in oppressive practices, including the perpetuation of racist, ableist, and colonialist epistemologies via associated methods. The impossibility of absolution in this regard is not limited to revisions to materials such as public policy. It also applies importantly to ethical principles and constructs such as fairness, validity, and reliability, too. As Kelly-Riley notes about validity constructs, “thousands of years of colonial reinforcement of a certain standard are not simply erased in a few years with a revised concept for professional practice” (343). Similarly, recent revisions to the Common Rule do not absolve the historical, and ongoing, Western, colonizing work with “human subjects.” But the revisions to the Common Rule do more effectively recognize and promote principles that resonate with researchers and IRBs working in 21st-century contexts, and we can find common parlance within this framework, given our present obligation to do so.

Until such a time as we no longer need IRBs, in a future paradigm, in an “ideal” version of a just world, where participants are never means to some end but rather always valued as whole—in and of themselves—our experience with IRBs can be part of an ecology wherein we embody and articulate our futurity as a field committed to justice. Certainly, the demands of IRBs’ specific rhetorical construct—including our local IRB’s forms, review processes, systems, and individual reviewers—require specific narratives to address how and why our proposed research honors autonomy, promotes beneficence, and works toward justice. Approaching IRBs as partners and educators as we acclimate to telling the story of our work effectively and doing it ethically is but one useful orientation toward IRB review.

Synthesis

Chapter 1 offered a broad framework to contextualize the work of this book by providing methodological, epistemological, and ontological

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discussions in conjunction with axiological concerns and commitments in Writing Studies research; the first chapter called for greater systematicity and methodological justice within our disciplinary paradigm while acknowledging the most effective opportunities to engage with the Common Rule is with local IRBs. Chapter 2 provided historical context from Writing Studies researchers to demonstrate our perception of IRBs; the second chapter synthesized our experiences with IRBs and offered strategies for individual researchers as they work with IRBs. Chapter 3 consolidated the perceptions and experiences of leading researchers in the field to discuss what IRB review and ethical research design afford the field of Writing Studies. Chapter 4 presented census data and information to facilitate our understanding of how IRBs both balance many principles and directives while building local communities of research; their work necessarily informs our experience as a discipline. And Chapter 5 provided contexts for application of the updated regulations in common sites of Writing Studies research. Together, these chapters suggested:

- IRBs are a pilot test for publics (Chapter 1)
- IRBs have a bird-eye-view of research communities (Chapter 4)
- IRBs' foundational principles are concordant with the field's (Chapters 1 and 5)
- Updates to the Common Rule are advantageous for our sites of research and demand we reflect on research in productive ways (Chapter 5)
- Writing Studies researchers are familiar with the prior Common Rule and with this firm groundwork are well-equipped to work collaboratively with IRBs as the current Common Rule is promulgated (Chapter 2)
- IRBs are helpful research partners (Chapter 3).

Finally, in this chapter, I discussed the often-competing demands of broad theoretical frameworks and their application in local contexts. Such application of theoretical principles within IRB protocols demands both hubris and humility, both confidence and uncertainty. Narrativizing research in IRB forms is a matter of both scale and care. This work demands we understand that others who may seem on the periphery of research, especially prospective participants and reviewers who serve on IRBs, and IRB personnel themselves, have so much to teach us. And we have much to learn. We should certainly exhibit confidence in our designs, our strategies, and our plans, but we can also work with research partners across disciplines, sites, and communities, including IRBs, who are able to offer critical and useful feedback on our work.

I've emphasized working with local IRBs for a number of reasons: (1) our disciplinary response to policy change at the federal level was

inadequate, (2) the Common Rule is implemented variably by local IRBs (recall the floor/ceiling discussion and the kitchen illustration), and (3) IRB members and personnel, street-level bureaucrats, are, unlike a federal policy, humans with whom we can work as we proceed through IRB review. And while each IRB is different, the Common Rule is now, in its updated form, carefully designed for researching in the 21st century. It is the bare minimum that is expected of any researcher claiming to benefit the human community. Therefore, when we consider the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice, it is apparent they only matter, or carry weight, in as much as they are applied within local contexts.

Rather than a broad heuristic that *all* Writing Studies researchers can use with their local IRBs, this book contains foundational principles we can use to understand and identify the benefit of IRB review. IRBs and their review can support our understanding of the interplay among research design concerns such as recruitment, methods, sampling, enrollment, and the use of novel tools—which are equally and further influenced by sites of research. IRBs' considered feedback on design can facilitate our efforts to get research underway. Research can be context specific but generalizable to other similar contexts when well-designed toward such ends. Similarly, helpful and transferable insight into IRBs comes from one's lived experience with IRBs. But data from the IRBs and Writing Studies Survey suggest we typically do not have the opportunity to work intensely with our IRBs to generate enough data to make claims about the field's orientation toward IRB review.

In light of our discipline's explosive methodological growth, in regard to our local IRBs and their context within national infrastructure, and given the Common Rule's recent revision, in the coming decade or two, we've an opportune moment to further establish our field with rigorous, reproducible, and justice-driven research. I hope this research is practiced on behalf of the public good and our findings are based on robust data that can be generalized. I hope that our students benefit, actively, from participating in research. And I hope that our participant populations from traditionally marginalized groups find, in thoughtful research design, ways to not only amplify *their* voices but also feel empowered to reject requests for participation. As Sieber and Tolich (2012) so pointedly offered: "It is unethical to build one's professional and financial attainments on the backs of research participants and populations whom we never benefit in one serious way or another and hence do not truly respect. That is exploitation (29)." No participant should feel that their contribution is a token; no participant should wonder why they are participating.

Moving Forward with Meaning

For those of us working with students or texts, it can feel that the risks of research are trifling matters, matters of forms and matters for forms.

But the critical work we do in Writing Studies to amplify students' and communities' voices are resonant with the principles that undergird IRB review. Understanding how these principles are applied in research and articulating how they manifest for participants is a simple and straightforward way to engage IRBs with language they understand. If researchers place blame on IRBs for delays because of their perception that IRBs are largely concerned with liability or quantitative empirical practice, they miss crucial opportunities to be challenged by IRBs as a pilot test for publics, peers, and prospective participants.

An important theme of this book is an effort to trouble with the reliance on exigence, and immediacy, when it comes to research. A wise colleague once told me that exigence is implied in research and the issue with contextualizing research within exigence, like many of the challenges interpreting and applying the multiple principles in this book, is one of scale. Immediate exigence does not necessarily serve the broadest possible constituency. Rather than existing and subsisting as a responsive field, we can choose for research to be progressive. Exigence based research is reactive. It can only work on short timeframes since, once exigence is established, it demands we move quickly to data collection and analysis to address immediate concerns. This immediacy also crowds out situational analysis and principled paradigmatic considerations. In an exigent timeframe, IRBs can be viewed as a roadblock by the rushed researcher. But when we look at research as progressive, IRBs are important partners, a way point along the path, rather than a hurdle in the sprint. Census and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data tell us what we can look forward to, and the work across disciplines regarding generalizability and reproducibility, for instance, further challenge us to build beyond exigence. With this information, we can anticipate who we will be serving, and how we can improve our practices and processes to support the changing communities we are both accountable and hopeful to serve. In such a context, addressing exigence remains necessary, but is not sufficient.

The IRB review process, with its singular consideration of policy that is built upon principles resonant with our field's own, demands we recognize the variables that intersect to design and deploy robust, sustainable, and innovative research. IRBs can help researchers through questioning, education, and insight into paradigms, methods, and ethical frameworks. This, in turn, helps us understand our local contexts within a broader, principled stance toward research with participants. This keen insight is useful as we move into an unprecedented and exciting era of teaching and research in Writing Studies. IRBs challenge us to exercise humility, articulate the goals of our work, tell a compelling story about its purpose, and make a reasonable argument as to why a particular issue warrants the engagement of participants. IRBs also offer a measured consideration of the ethical principles—autonomy, beneficence,

and justice—we espouse as core to all our work. For these reasons, IRBs are key partners in our research communities.

Writing Studies researchers are well-situated to critically engage with the narrative aspect of IRB review. This includes the completion of IRB materials, as components of the research process. But we know that critical work can quickly overwhelm our praxis-based projects. The future of our field, and the futures of those we serve with our work, demands something beyond critical inquiry. Our IRBs are supportive evaluators of our commitment to continual improvement of research design. Such work is effectively incorporated in the framing of our purpose, an articulation of methodology, the selection of sites, recruitment of participants, and implementation of methods. As illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5, it also encompasses what happens after data collection is done, how we share data, and how we share our process, so that others can learn and iterate. Context-specific research can still be generalized, but non-generalizable research has little utility beyond its context. IRBs can help us widen our context so that the contributions from participants have the broadest possible impact on the human community.

IRBs provide space for us to pilot our projects, to determine whether we will reinvigorate the public trust in research. If we understand that IRBs exist because of and for the publics they represent—not only in their composition, but also in their review, function, and educative opportunities—we recognize occasions to collaborate with them as an engaging and educative research partners. Recall from interviewees' discussions in Chapter 3 and Stark's observation (2012) that our study proposals for IRB review are our character reference. We illustrate ourselves and our work through words, in an IRB protocol or conversation with staff. Cultivating such learning experiences can foster a perception of, and the reality that, Writing Studies research is designed for the public good. Moreover, it is built with considered intent and toward that future we see for the largest of research communities—the human community.

Regardless of our definitional approach to the principles of justice, beneficence, and autonomy, framing research in terms of value for the public are concordant at the metalevel with the tenets that undergird the reasoning behind prospective IRB review of research. IRB review does not encroach on our liberty and autonomy in ways different from how we, as researchers, propose to encroach on participants' autonomy in conducting research. When we think beyond the immediate work, and even beyond the work of our field, we get a glimpse of the crux of it all, our society's trust in the research enterprise to help build a better world. This trust is established participant by participant. Every human—ourselves included—comprise the engaged and engaging research communities with which we have the good fortune to work as Writing Studies researchers.

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