



Chapter 8.4

Ethics in Research with Homeless Women

EMILY K. PARADIS

Women's homelessness is a specific, concrete product of an oppressive social system critiqued by feminist and community psychologists. It emerges from a complex interplay of factors, including economic injustice, racism, sexism, and marginalization of people with disabilities (Baxter, 1991; Farge, 1989; Ralston, 1996).

Feminist and community psychologists have argued that psychology traditionally has functioned alongside other social institutions to prop up and justify the existing social system (Fine & Gordon, 1991; Mulvey, 1988; Serrano-Garcia, 1990). One role of the institution of psychology in the maintenance of an oppressive status quo has been to obscure social injustice by locating the deficits responsible for marginalization within marginalized communities and individuals (Fine & Gordon, 1991). The conventions of traditional quantitative research—including the study of individual traits without reference to social context, and an emphasis on "objective" measurement of variables—produce research that fulfils this role. For example, Shinn (1997) has pointed out that epidemiological research focused on characteristics of "the homeless" constructs homelessness as an individual trait, rather than a state situated in a social and his-

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torical context. Such research implicitly holds victims of injustice responsible for their own marginalization, because it seeks explanations for homelessness in the behaviour of individuals.

Feminist psychologists have described the structure of traditional research as exploitative (Grossman, Gilbert, Genero, Hawes, Hyde, & Marecek, 1997). Community psychologists Chavis, Stucky, and Wandersman (1983) advocate a shift away from the traditional relationship between researchers and communities, described in some communities as “experimental colonialism” (431). Indeed, research is exploitative if the researcher’s interests alone shape every step of the research process, from the formulation of the question through the collection of the data to the write-up and dissemination of the results. And research resembles a colonial economy when researchers enter uninvited into the world of participants, extract a resource called data, process this resource into a product called theory, and use the product only for their own ends. On the other hand, transforming exploitative aspects of the traditional model can yield research that promotes the interests of marginalized people and advocates for changes to an oppressive social system.

Traditional ethics codes governing psychological research (American Psychological Association, 1992; Canadian Psychological Association, 1991) are written with traditional, quantitative research in mind.¹ They reproduce a positivist scientific model in which the researcher strives to be an objective observer and the advancement of science is constructed as inherently valuable. The research participant’s role is to provide data, and it is assumed that participants lack the ability to interpret their own experiences. Both researcher and participant are reduced to their roles in the process; their social positions, vested interests, histories, and contexts are seen as factors to be set aside lest they impede objectivity (Oakley, 1981).

¹ These codes have been revised since the original publication of the article that is the source for this chapter (APA, 2002; CPA, 2000). As a result, the sections cited may not be valid for the current versions of the codes. In some respects, the codes’ responses to some of the issues raised in this chapter have evolved: for example, the Canadian code now places more emphasis on ethical obligations to communities. The ethical issues explored here, however, remain relevant.

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While recent revisions of ethics codes refer to issues of context and difference, the depoliticized manner in which these are presented allows for interpretations that may be antifeminist rather than feminist, for example, when guidelines that warn against discrimination based on gender are invoked to justify sexual assault research in which the definition of coercive sex includes male participants' experiences of being "coerced" into foreplay as well as female participants' experiences of unwanted sexual activity (Condor, 1991). Add-on statements about issues such as gender or research with marginalized communities do not account adequately for the role of the institution of science in maintaining systemic dominance and oppression.

Arguing that in traditional research, claims of "objectivity" often disguise the researcher's investment in an oppressive status quo, feminist and community psychologists (Fine, 1992; Mulvey, 1988; Serrano-Garcia, 1990) have called for research that is explicit in its support for the interests of marginalized individuals and communities. In this context, research ethics aim to prevent exploitation or oppression within the research relationship (Grossman *et al.*, 1997), and to ensure that research promotes the interests of marginalized groups (Rappaport, 1990). Just as each stage of traditional research can reenact social relationships of dominance and oppression, feminist and community psychology research should manifest a liberatory potential in its purpose, planning, methods, and outcome (Fine & Gordon, 1991; Serrano-Garcia, 1990).

While feminist and community psychologists share the goal of transforming psychology (Mulvey, 1988), they have described different strategies for creating liberatory research. Feminist psychologists often study aspects of women's lives that have been ignored or distorted by traditional research (Grossman *et al.*, 1997). While all methods of inquiry may be used in feminist research (Grossman *et al.*, 1997; Peplau & Conrad, 1989), emphasis is placed on qualitative methods that capture nuance and complexity, or on politicized analyses of quantitative data. Feminists attend to the intersubjective nature of the research relationship and attempt to share power between researcher and participant (Oakley, 1981). Articles on feminist research may reflect these aspects of the process—for example, in the use of first-person voice to challenge the idea of the researcher's objectivity.

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Community psychologists, instead of studying the intrapsychic lives of individuals, focus on issues of concern to marginalized communities (Fawcett, 1990). Research questions seek solutions to community problems through the identification of strengths and resources (Rappaport, 1990), the development of strategies for empowerment or prevention, and the explication of the role of social structures in oppression. Community research sometimes employs participatory methods, in which the community collaborates in the design, data collection, analysis, dissemination, and implementation of research (Serrano-Garcia, 1990). Instead of keeping the research within psychology through the publication of journal articles, community psychologists may return it to the community (Chavis, Stucky, & Wandersman, 1983) through reports, public forums, or action adapted to community needs.

Unfortunately, research by feminist and community psychologists has not always lived up to a stated ethical commitment to liberation. Most research reports published in feminist journals in the late 1980s adhered to traditional, positivist methods in the research and writing (Walsh, 1989). As well, the individualistic focus of most feminist research fails to promote the collective action necessary for liberation (Fine & Gordon, 1991). Meanwhile, macro-level theories in community psychology have not necessarily translated into micro-level research on specific, real-life situations of oppression (Mulvey, 1988). In spite of embracing an ethic of empowerment, community psychology as a discipline has largely failed to take a stand on specific social issues (Mulvey, 1988).

This chapter argues that feminist and community psychologists can and must take a stand on a particular social issue: homelessness. Research offers a means for psychologists to challenge the social injustice at the root of homelessness; however, it is vital that the research itself not reproduce this injustice in its process or products. Feminist and community psychology offer mutually enhancing approaches to the development of just and ethical research on homelessness.

This chapter applies feminist and community psychology ethics to the analysis of examples of research with women who are homeless. I examine some ethical questions that can arise throughout the research process, from the planning stage, through data collection and analysis, to the writing and dissemination of results. I critique the failure of decisions

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based on traditional ethics codes to promote the interests of participants, and explore the challenges women's homelessness poses to the traditional understanding of ethical issues such as consent, privacy, harm, and bias. Finally, I propose some strategies for transforming research with women who are homeless into a means for challenging oppression and promoting liberation.

While this paper is a call to action for feminist and community psychologists on the issue of homelessness, it also serves a second purpose—that of refining feminist and community psychology ethics through application to specific situations. Feminists and community psychologists must ground our ethical development in the messiness of everyday situations instead of abstract principles if we hope to do honourable research in a deeply flawed world. To test our ethics with reference to research with homeless women resonates with the community psychology value of making research accountable to the most vulnerable group (O'Neill, 1989), and with the Black feminist principle that radical change can result only from bringing the knowledge and interests of those most marginalized to the centre of our analysis (hooks, 1984).

Accordingly, this paper brings the interests of women who are homeless to the centre of the discussion of research ethics. The examples that follow illustrate ethical dilemmas that can arise throughout the research process, with reference to situations from research with homeless women. Some of these examples are drawn from my own experience; others are based on current published research or are imaginary situations that reflect existing trends or problems.

Planning the Research: Begin Before the Beginning

Through my work as a graduate assistant, I had access to a database that is maintained by a hospital-based sexual assault care centre. For the past five years, anonymous data have been collected about women and men who have used the centre's emergency services after experiencing sexual assault. The database contains a wide range of information on clients, including their current living situation, details about the assault, their relationship with the assailant, their history of physical and sexual assault or abuse, and their mental health. Using the data about the clients' living situations, I was able to identify a large subgroup of women—10%

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of those in the database—who were homeless at the time of their contact with the centre. Realizing that the database offered a unique opportunity to study sexual violence against homeless women, I wanted to explore the data and document my findings, but I was uncertain how to approach this exploration.

This example from my own experience depicts several concerns that can arise when planning research on women's homelessness. The absence of participants from a research project means fewer, and simpler, ethical dilemmas at the planning stage for the traditional researcher. According to APA standards (APA, 1992, 6.06–6.10), my only obligation was to plan this project "in accordance with recognized standards of scientific competence and ethical research," such as ensuring that the database met criteria for informed consent, minimizing the possibility that the results would be misleading, and performing only tasks I was competent to perform. By contrast, for the feminist or community psychology researcher, the absence of participants raises questions with regard to accountability, point of view, provenance of the data, and formulation of the research question.

Far from wishing to remain "objective," I was determined that my research should champion the interests of women who are homeless, the community implicated in my study. Instead of reducing my ethical obligations, the absence of participants with whom to negotiate the purpose and process of the research left me responsible for determining the community's interests and evaluating unforeseen consequences. O'Neill (1989) points out that this is a common dilemma for community psychologists: how can one remain accountable to the most vulnerable group when they are not directly represented in the research?

Regardless of my good intentions toward the community being studied, I also had to acknowledge that this research would reflect only my point of view, necessarily shaped and limited by my own experiences, including my roles as researcher and student, my work as an activist and service provider with women who are homeless, and my lack of personal experience of homelessness. Feminist and community psychologists see knowledge as situated (Landrine et al., 1995) or socially constructed (Serrano-Garcia, 1990); researchers must articulate their own positions to recognize the limits of their knowledge. Concerned with how to interpret

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the data without access to participants' interpretations, I prepared by exploring sources of information that could help me "read" the data, including sources beyond the traditional psychology literature. These included women's stories about homelessness told to me as a service provider, anecdotal information from centre staff, feminist theory on trauma and violence, and qualitative research representing homeless women's accounts of their experiences (Baxter, 1991; Ralston, 1996).

As a feminist I believed I should take a critical stance in interpreting data gathered in an institutional setting. Women who are homeless often must rely on institutions for their subsistence needs, or are forced into contact with institutions such as the criminal justice or medical-psychiatric systems. The dependence or coercion that may characterize their contact with institutions is one aspect of their "captive" status (Rosenthal, 1991, p. 109). Rosenthal suggests that research with participants who are "captive" reveals as much about the institution and its requirements as it does about the participants, who are likely modifying their behaviour to fit with institutional norms. It was important that my research plan account for the circumstances under which the data was provided: in crisis, in a hospital, possibly in the presence of police. I accounted for this situation, in part, by questioning "silences" in the data. I noted topics on which large numbers of participants had *not* provided information, and wondered which institutional factors might have contributed to these silences.

Finally, formulating the research questions was an issue of concern. Feminist theorists have noted that questions frame the research by identifying what information is relevant, and that they often incorporate the researcher's hidden assumptions or biases about the research topic (Landrine et al., 1995). Though I did not have to worry about direct harm to participants in the course of the study, I was aware that certain questions could produce results that would be harmful to the community as a whole. I wanted to avoid asking questions that might contribute to the stigmatization of homeless women. For example, data were available on whether the victim or assailant had been using drugs or alcohol at the time of the assault, but I believed that to study this area using only categorical data would erase the nuance and complexity of homeless wom-

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en's experiences of substance use, and risk perpetuating both stereotypes about homeless women and victim-blaming myths about sexual assault.

The research plan included consideration of a number of factors relevant to feminist and community research approaches: my accountability to the community being studied, the limits of my ability to interpret the data, the contributions of my own experience, and the potential for perpetuating stereotypes. As a part-time graduate assistant, I lacked the resources to develop a forum for community participation in the research plan, which would have been the ideal approach from a community psychology perspective (Serrano-Garcia, 1990). Instead of attempting to do conclusive research without community participation, I treated the study as an exploratory first step that could lay the groundwork for community-based and participatory interventions.

The data demonstrated that the majority of homeless clients of the centre had multiple experiences of assault in their lifetimes; anecdotal information from staff suggested that homeless women rarely accessed the centre's free, follow-up counselling services. These results suggested that homeless women who seek hospital services after a sexual assault may be especially vulnerable to post-traumatic stress due to their lifetime experience of violence and their current circumstances. Meanwhile, these women are unlikely to use the services that could help them cope with the acute stress of the recent assault. I concluded that while women who are homeless frequently use the centre's crisis services, it appeared that the follow-up services were not meeting the needs of this group.

A fruitful second step for this study would be to ask women who are homeless about their use of services after sexual assault and their ideas for making these services more user-friendly. It may be that these women are coping with sexual assault using other resources, such as crisis lines, informal support networks, or counselors at hostels and drop-in centres. On the other hand, women who are homeless might lack access to support after a sexual assault. If that is the case, participants could provide valuable information about factors that would improve the accessibility of the follow-up services offered by the centre. Service providers who have worked with homeless women might be able to suggest some improvements, such as the location of services outside a hospital setting, availability after business hours, and flexibility with regard to

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appointments. Asking the community directly, though, would enrich the research with women's concrete expertise about their own needs and situation.

Collecting Data: Create an Empowering Process

A psychologist receives a grant to do research on stress and coping among homeless women. She approaches the director of a drop-in centre where she has been a volunteer for two years, and receives permission to ask clients to participate. She develops an open-ended interview schedule that focuses on stressors, symptoms of depression, and coping strategies. The interviews and debriefing will take about two hours in total. Reasoning that the women should be considered equal partners in the research, she decides to pay them \$30 each for the interview, as that is the rate her graduate research assistants are paid. She starts looking for participants, beginning with 10 women she has come to know quite well through her volunteer work. Her initial response rate is very high: only one woman refuses. Soon word spreads about the study, and women begin to approach her to ask if they can participate.

In this hypothetical scenario, the context of women's homelessness reframes ethical concerns raised by traditional codes. In data gathering, the researcher must ensure that consent is both informed and voluntary (APA, 1992, 6.11; CPA, 1991, I.14, I.21), that privacy is respected, (APA, 5.03; CPA, I.33), and that participants are not harmed in the process (APA, 1992, 1.14; CPA, 1991, II.2).

The context of homelessness presents particular challenges to ensuring voluntary consent during data collection. First, as already noted, women who are homeless may be in a dependent or coercive relationship with institutions in which research takes place, or with the researchers themselves. In the above example, the agency with which the researcher is associated might represent participants' sole source of subsistence, advocacy, or emotional support. Therefore the APA (1992, 6.11[c]) and CPA (1991, I.31) guidelines about participants in a dependent relationship with the researcher—though usually limited to students or clients—could apply here. Familiarity with the researcher has an attendant danger of blurring the relationship in the mind of the participant, and may lead her to reveal material she might normally share with

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a friend or confidante but not with a person doing research (Liebow, 1993; Rosenthal, 1991).

The question of monetary payment for participation is a complicated ethical dilemma in research with women who are homeless. Honoraria for participants are a standard feature in much psychology research. Some feminist researchers have reinterpreted this tradition, and view money given to participants not merely as an honorarium, but as the compensation due to equal partners in the research enterprise (Landrine et al., 1995). In research with women who are homeless, though, financial rewards for participation may function as inducements (APA, 6.14; CPA, III.31), and are therefore ethically problematic. Thirty dollars may not seem like much money to a researcher, but such an amount (in Ontario, the equivalent of about a week's worth of Personal Needs Allowance, the stipend paid to people staying in hostels) might make a woman who is homeless reluctant to refuse or withdraw participation.

Some researchers working with people who are homeless have addressed this concern by offering in-kind rewards such as a meal, food vouchers, or bus tokens instead of cash (Unger et al., 1997). Liebow (1993) offered needed services to participants such as driving or running errands; this represents a creative solution for researchers whose work is not funded, and it may place participants and researcher on more equal footing because the underlying message is, "You are helping me by telling me about yourself; now, what can I do to help you?"

But the question of inducement is not the only problem with monetary or material compensation. Some researchers point out that participating in traditional research rarely has direct benefits for marginalized populations, including people who are homeless (Rosenthal, 1991), while it often has great professional benefits for the researcher. Paying participants is no substitute for ensuring that research has intrinsic benefits for participants and champions the interests of the community. Feminist and community researchers have demonstrated that homeless participants might benefit from research by making it a medium through which the participants can voice their concerns to policymakers or service providers (Ralston, 1996; Rappaport, 1990). Others have designed projects that include the community's use of the researcher's skills and status to ad-

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vocate for individual participants or to support activism by people who are homeless (Rosenthal, 1991).

Harm to participants is another ethical concern complicated by the context of homelessness. As noted in the previous example, research may be harmful to a community as a whole if it promotes negative stereotypes or misinformation. The research in the current scenario also has the potential to harm individual participants. The majority of homeless women are survivors of traumatic experiences including sexual and physical abuse (Breton & Bunston, 1992; D'Ercole & Streuning, 1990; Goodman, 1991; Ralston, 1996; Schram & Giovengo, 1991). Given their life circumstances of chronic stress and their limited financial resources, few have had the opportunity to heal after these experiences (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991; Milburn & D'Ercole, 1991). Research examining stressors or depressed feelings might trigger women's carefully managed feelings of rage, grief, or despair. The standard debriefing that follows most research is not sufficient, because homeless women might lack the social resources to access other types of support once debriefing is over.

Some feminist researchers have advocated that counselling be made available to homeless women after they participate in research that explores their feelings or experiences (Ralston, 1996); though as seen in the previous example, women may not avail themselves of this service unless its hours, location, and service model are accessible and culturally appropriate.

Feminist psychologists have warned of the potential for exploitation in data gathering (Grossman et al., 1997). For women who are homeless, the combined contexts of dependence on institutions, financial need, emotional vulnerability, and lack of privacy produce a situation that is ripe for exploitation by others, including researchers. Because homeless women are accustomed to accommodating themselves to situations not of their choosing in order to survive (Farge, 1989), it is vital that the researcher take full responsibility for identifying and changing aspects of the research process that might be experienced as coercive.

Individual solutions might be found for each of the problems in the above scenario, such as offering nonmonetary forms of compensation. Such solutions would respond to the concerns of traditional research codes by protecting participants, but they would maintain a basic re-

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search structure in which the researcher holds the power and participants are vulnerable.

Feminist and community psychologists would argue that the best way to guard against exploitation in the research relationship is to develop a process that is inherently empowering for participants (Rappaport, 1990; Serrano-Garcia, 1990). A minimum standard for empowering research is participant involvement in data collection (Serrano-Garcia, 1990); such involvement should include dialogue between researcher and participants on the effects of the research relationship and power differences (Bond, 1990). Ideally, it would include full collaboration with the community, so that data collection processes share power between participants and researcher and have some intrinsic benefit for participants (Serrano-Garcia, 1990).

An empowering approach to the research in the current scenario might begin with the researcher approaching service users as a community (and not only the agency's administrator) to request permission to use the drop-in centre as a research site. The data collection process itself could be designed to respond to the needs of the individual participants, the community to which they belong, and the sponsoring agency. For example, the researcher could devote her time and resources to the creation of a community development program for women using the agency. Together, using the researcher's expertise and their own knowledge, a group of service users could identify personal and systemic stressors, examine the effects of these stressors, and explore coping strategies. They could identify goals for this work, which might include education on stress reduction techniques, creation of an ongoing interpersonal support network, or political activism. The social support of the group, and the focus on systemic stressors and active coping, could mitigate some of the emotional toll of the subject matter; the suggestion that the program is for the women themselves, rather than a favour they are doing for the volunteer, could help ensure that participation is voluntary; and participation would have intrinsic benefits. A group structure could help redistribute power between participants and researcher, encourage the participants to contribute their knowledge and expertise, and explode the myth of the researcher as "expert." The research would actively respond to community needs and problems, rather than studying these from a

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disinterested stance. Ideally, the research would leave the community better able to address their own needs than they were before participating.

Analyzing Data: Interrogate Local Meanings

A psychologist conducts a longitudinal study of 100 homeless women. Using assessment instruments and observations, she examines the participants' level of functioning, their patterns of transience, and their mental health over three years. The MMPI and other tests consistently indicate pathology in the whole sample. As well, the psychologist notices that most of the women, when presented with the opportunity to obtain better housing arrangements, generally fail to take the necessary steps to obtain such housing or end up back on the streets in a matter of months if they do obtain it. She writes a lengthy article identifying borderline, antisocial, and self-defeating personality disorders as major factors in the etiology of women's homelessness.

This hypothetical example reflects many problematic trends in current mainstream psychology research with women who are homeless. According to traditional ethics codes, during data analysis the researcher must avoid bias (CPA, III.10) and strive to represent the data as accurately as possible (APA, 6.21; CPA, III.5). As in the previous example, a feminist or community psychology perspective on the context of women's homelessness reframes the meaning of terms such as "bias" and "accuracy," leading to new ethical concerns about data analysis.

In traditional research, avoidance of bias in data analysis is one aspect of research "objectivity." For feminist and community psychologists, who recognize that research is "the subjective creation of a social phenomenon" (Serrano-Garcia, 1990, p. 182), bias represents the tendency of research to reproduce unproblematically the point of view of the dominant group, often to the detriment of the marginalized community being studied. A common example of this tendency is the bias inherent in research using only etic data such as assessment instruments (Koegel, 1992; Landrine *et al.*, 1995).

Etic data are shaped by the researcher's definitions and priorities, giving little information about how participants construct their own experience. Research based solely on etic data is likely to yield a distorted

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picture of the community being studied. The risk increases if the researcher's definitions are embedded in the dominant culture while those of participants are embedded in marginalized cultures, because the researcher's questions and assumptions may be based on dominant stereotypes of the community. For instance, feminists and community psychologists (Herman, 1992; Koegel, 1992; Rosewater, 1985) have pointed out that the effects of trauma or homelessness, such as fearfulness or fatigue, may be seen by psychologists as personality disorders or signs of "mental illness," reflecting popular stereotypes that depict homeless women as crazy (and stereotypes that depict women in general as emotionally unstable). In fact, the emotions and behaviours labeled as "disorders" by the researcher may represent, for participants, the natural outcomes of extreme stress, or an adaptive strategy for surviving trauma or homelessness.

To ensure accuracy in the representation of data, a researcher working from a positivist tradition might acknowledge that environmental factors may have confounded the results of some screening instruments, or might use instruments that have been re-normed on a homeless population to account for the effects these factors. For feminist and community psychology researchers, a more fundamental issue remains. As some theorists have pointed out, psychological research focused on identifying the individual problems of women who are homeless contributes to societal victim blaming (Shinn & Weitzman, 1990), and generalizations drawn from this literature create a "pathology" of the poor" (Montgomery, 1994, 36). Such research implicitly lays the blame on marginalized people for the difficulties they experience in living, instead of accounting for environmental factors that shape participants' experiences.

Some feminist and community researchers have responded to the pejorative and pathologizing trend in the psychology literature on homelessness by creating research focused on the strengths (Montgomery, 1994) and coping skills (Banyard, 1995) of women who are homeless, in which the definitions of "strength" and "coping" emerge from participants' frames of reference rather than from standard indices. Instead of viewing the participants as the problem, such research constructs them as active subjects grappling with the problems presented by homelessness. The research question implicitly shifts from "Why do homeless

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women fail to integrate into society?" to "How do women who are homeless survive in a society that fails to serve the needs of all of its members?" In the current scenario, an analysis that views participants as active copers might begin from the understanding that for many women, homelessness itself is a product of their determination to escape and survive violence in their homes (Breton & Bunston, 1992).

Rappaport suggests that empowering research in community psychology should "give voice to participants' definition of reality" (1990, 56) through the use of methods such as interviews, which enable participants to influence the researcher. Feminist researchers, as well, point out that research should "interrogate local meanings" (Fine, 1992, 13), using an analysis that emerges from the perspective of participants. Koegel (1992) applied these principles to the study of transience in homeless men, asking participants to explain why they often rejected what appeared to be "better" housing. Participants explained that they remained in or returned to the hostels due to loneliness, or in response to problems such as the distance of housing from needed services. A comparable approach in the study of transience in homeless women might yield similar explanations.

This approach to research has a number of benefits. First, it empowers individual participants because it validates their "expert" knowledge about their own needs and experiences. Also, it challenges dominant stereotypes of the community, depicting women who are homeless as competent copers rather than as sick, irresponsible, or lazy. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, its conclusions have concrete beneficial applications to the development of appropriate housing for women who are homeless, whereas the information that homeless women can be diagnosed with personality disorders contributes little to changing their situation.

Writing and Disseminating Research: Making Voices Heard

For a course on qualitative research, I worked with a woman living with her son at a hostel. When I first approached her, I planned to interview her about her experiences with mental health interventions. As we worked together to plan and undertake the research, however, a much more complex analysis developed. We explored several issues including,

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(a) her experiences of oppression and how these affected her well-being; (b) the stigma of being labeled “mentally ill” and how service providers treated her as a result of this label; and (c) her strategies for surviving and challenging the system. We developed this analysis over a two-month period of “hanging out” that included formal taped interviews, informal discussions, and my participation in her meetings with institutional gatekeepers. This process had intrinsic benefits for both of us. My co-researcher taught me lessons I still refer to daily in my work with people who are homeless, and she states that she benefitted from my advocacy and validation. One of the course requirements was to write a final report on the process and results of the research.

The few guidelines that ethics codes provide for the write-up stage—such as accuracy and honesty in reporting (APA, 1992, 6.21; CPA, 1991, III.5) or concealing the identity of participants (APA, 1992, 5.08; CPA, 1991, I.40)—do not adequately support feminist and community psychologists’ aims of producing research that privileges participants’ accounts of their experiences (Grossman et al., 1997; Rappaport, 1990), that honours the mutuality of the research relationship (Fine, 1992), and that responds to participants’ needs (Fawcett, 1990). These were my chief concerns in writing the research report.

First, I wanted to leave my co-researcher’s voice in its rightful place at the centre of the text and not marginalize it. Also, I wanted the writing to reflect the mutuality of our relationship, rather than turning my co-researcher into an object I was writing about. Finally, I intended the text to be useful to both myself and my co-researcher, just as the process had been. Bringing these feminist concerns into academic writing can be risky, as work that challenges the marginalizing tendencies of traditional research may itself be marginalized in psychology (Grossman et al., 1997). I decided to write the report to my co-researcher, in the first and second person rather than the third person. This approach required me to situate myself in the text, own my opinions, and abandon the authority conferred by an anonymous stance, all crucial elements of feminist scholarship (Fine, 1992). This writing style honoured the relationship by keeping the report within our mutual dialogue, rather than placing it within an academic discourse that excluded the co-researcher.

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To keep my co-researcher's story and her voice at the centre of the work, I organized the report around long quotes transcribed from the interviews, and based the analysis on the language and content of these quotes. In this process I was sensitive to the concerns Fine (1992) points to about the use of voice in research. I wished neither to exploit my co-researcher's voice by choosing quotes to suit my analysis, nor to romanticize her voice by presenting it uncritically. The dialogical style of the report enabled me to present my own critiques and arguments alongside my co-researcher's accounts, in keeping with the feminist and community psychology view of research as a pooling of resources between researcher and participant (Bond, 1990) in which both parties bring valuable contributions.

Instead of presenting a monolithic analysis of the data, as a traditional report would, the text of this report laid bare the dialectical process of the analysis, in which the co-authors' differing perspectives on the same "facts" were situated in our different social contexts. As a result, one topic in the paper was the tension between how the mental health system is experienced by a woman with a disability who is poor, Black, Jamaican-born, and a service user, and how it is experienced by a woman without a disability who is middle-class, white, Canadian-born, and a service provider.

Finally, I wrote the report in the same language my co-researcher and I used when speaking, ensuring that it would be accessible to her. We each kept a copy of the report for our own uses. I was initially concerned that an academic report would not fulfil any of my co-researcher's needs. When I asked her about this recently, she informed me that she refers to the report when she is feeling crazy and needs to be reminded of her strength. She also uses it in her interactions with service providers and family members, to demonstrate to them that an "expert" believes she is worth listening to.

It is important to note here that my professor's support of a participatory feminist approach made it feasible for me to write the report as I did. Too often, psychologists are forced to choose between doing empowering work and meeting the demands of the academy (Grossman et al., 1997). While I was satisfied that the write-up honoured my relationship with my co-researcher, it failed to fulfil some ethics of participatory fe-

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minist scholarship. For example, writing the report took my time away from practical work we were doing to try to change my co-researcher's situation. Her goal for the research was to produce a document that could be used to raise public awareness and rally support for herself. In the end, an academic report written in an alternative narrative style did not fit this bill. Other formats for the report—such as writing it as an article for the local newspaper—might have been more useful in effect, if less radical in form. This disparity between our goals for the dissemination of the research reflects the unequal distribution of power in our relationship, a reality even in the most radical research (Bond, 1990).

In feminist and community work with people who are marginalized, ownership of the products of research should be returned to the community (Chavis et al., 1983). In research with women who are homeless, it is not adequate simply to hand over the research product to the participants. The researcher should also support the participants in acquiring the means to use the research for concrete changes in their own lives. This may mean sticking around after the research is over (that is, after the researcher's goals have been met) to support participants' action. In my own case, it means planning future writing with my co-researcher as the circumstances of our lives permit, and remaining available to her in the meantime as an advocate with an inside knowledge of the social services system and the persuasive power of a white, educated voice.

Conclusion: Uses of Research Toward the Elimination of Oppression and Inequality

In Ontario, a task force was created to study and make recommendations on homelessness in the province. After a process that included consultations with "stakeholders" and service providers in several municipalities, the task force released its findings. The task force report (Provincial Task Force on Homelessness, 1998) grouped "the homeless" in Ontario according to the main "causes" of their homelessness, including addiction, mental health problems, and failed immigration sponsorships. Grinding poverty—exacerbated by the current provincial government's 21.6% cut to welfare rates—was not mentioned as a cause of homeless-

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ness, nor was it considered a factor in people's substance use, mental well-being, or relationship breakdowns. The message was clear: people become homeless because they are addicts, "mentally ill" and untreated, or irresponsible immigrants; government policies on welfare and social housing have nothing to do with it. The recommendations accordingly proposed means for controlling these "high-risk groups" and eliminating the problems "the homeless" cause for businesses, public safety, and the social assistance system.

Research is always political, whether it uncritically reflects the status quo or explicitly challenges it (Mulvey, 1988; Serrano-Garcia, 1990). This example from homelessness research in Ontario illustrates that research on homelessness is especially political because it can be used by governments to legitimize the very economic policies that cause homelessness. Psychological research on homelessness lends itself to such misuse when its questions construct the "subjects" as the problem; when its methods disempower participants and communities; when its analyses measure the complex experiences of marginalized people by comparisons to dominant norms; when its writing silences or distorts the voices of participants; and when its dissemination delivers ownership of the research only into the hands of "experts" and institutions.

Ethical feminist and community psychology research with women who are homeless must begin with consideration of the personal, interpersonal, community, and political ramifications of research. Recognizing that homeless women are vulnerable to harm as individuals and as a community because of the extreme victimization, stigmatization, and marginalization they endure, researchers' first challenge is to plan our research so that it does not exacerbate the suffering of individual participants. We also must be aware of the potential for our research to reinforce stereotypes and contribute to discrimination against the "community" of women who are homeless. Finally, we must grapple with the reality that economic and social exclusion of women who are homeless makes it unlikely that they will benefit in a meaningful way from traditional psychological research.

The scenarios discussed in this paper demonstrate that some ethical concerns may be addressed by building in safeguards while retaining a traditional research structure. But feminist and community psychology

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research must move beyond the ethical necessity of avoiding harm, and make an active commitment to the well-being of participants and their communities. This shift entails a transformation of the very structure of research.

Serrano-Garcia (1990) proposes six steps that community researchers should take in order to direct our efforts toward the elimination of oppression and inequality: (1) inform the community about the research and the research plan; (2) obtain ongoing, informed consent from the community via its representatives; (3) maintain confidentiality; (4) involve community members in the collection of data; (5) seek community authorization for publication of research; and (6) disseminate the data to the community. While these steps represent a collaborative model in which researchers retain most of the control, Serrano-Garcia asserts that communities included through these steps will begin to demand a more participatory approach in which the community shares control of the research process.

Given the social context of marginalization of women who are homeless, and the individual sense of vulnerability or disempowerment that may result from internalized oppression, transformation of the research process is necessary to create an alternative context in which participants and communities are empowered to use research in their own interests. While it may not always be possible for researchers to follow all of Serrano-Garcia's guidelines, this paper has proposed some methods to promote the well-being of women who are homeless and their communities at each stage of the research process.

At the outset, we can evaluate the feasibility of community participation, and plan the research accordingly. If participation is not possible, we can attempt to predict possible consequences of the research questions and process, and take responsibility for unforeseen consequences. The research plan can draw upon alternative sources of information including homeless women's own accounts. Instead of treating quantitative research without community involvement as an end in itself, we can construct it as a foundation for the development of future participatory research.

While gathering data, we can use our time and resources creatively, striving for a process that has intrinsic benefits for participants and func-

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tions as a site for community empowerment. When analyzing data, we can champion the point of view of participants, and represent women who are homeless as competent copers. When writing research, we can position ourselves as interested subjects rather than objective experts, maintain the integrity of participants' voices, and ensure that the language and structure of the writing is accessible and useful to participants. When disseminating research, we can respect the community's ownership of the research, and assist participants to acquire the means to use the research for their own benefit.

Transforming the structure of research can be difficult and risky. Marginalized communities may have neither the skills nor the energy for the level of participation this type of research entails (Bond, 1990; Serrano-Garcia, 1990); in such a case the researcher is challenged to fit the methods to the capacities of the community (Bond, 1990), or train the community to employ the methods (Chavis et al., 1983). This problem is exacerbated when doing research in which the community is not directly represented (O'Neill, 1989), or with a group such as women who are homeless, who may not see themselves as a "community" at all. As researchers trained in traditional methods, we too may lack the skills required to mobilize community involvement (Serrano-Garcia, 1990).

If the community does collaborate, we risk losing control of the research, particularly if our aspirations are different from those of the community (Chavis et al., 1983). The planning, process, and writing of such research may be more time- and resource-consuming than traditional methods (Serrano-Garcia, 1990). Meanwhile, research that stays true to feminist and community psychology values may not be competitive for funding (Grossman et al., 1997). This is particularly true in research on homelessness, where governments and their granting agencies are far more likely to fund large-scale, quantitative, epidemiological research on the "deficits" of people who are homeless than to fund research that empowers homeless women or examines political and economic policies responsible for homelessness (Shinn & Weitzman, 1990). This might place researchers in a difficult ethical position, forcing us to choose between our professional self-interest and doing research that is truly beneficial and meaningful.

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Luckily, taking the high road is not all about self-sacrifice. As psychologists doing ethical research with women who are homeless, we have the opportunity to participate in work that is more interesting, complex, challenging, meaningful, and valuable than most traditional research. To examine homelessness dispassionately through the eyes of dominance not only is an abdication of our ethical responsibility, but also impoverishes our work. Our efforts (as imperfect as these may be) to embody feminist and community psychology values in our research will enrich the field and contribute to the transformation of lives, including our own.

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Emily Paradis is Research Manager at the Cities Centre, University of Toronto, and an instructor in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. This chapter was written during her M.Ed. studies, which were funded by the Fonds pour la Formation de Chercheurs et l'Aide à la Recherche (FCAR) of the government of Québec.

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