

Ethical Issues in Researching Immigrant Youth Physical Activity: A New Zealand Perspective

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Abstract—This research provides an insight on ethical issues in researching immigrant youth physical activity from our experience in New Zealand. Ethics is not be an area that is well-explored in immigrant studies, particularly among immigrant youth. The available literature appears to be messy because immigrant studies is highly contextual and case specific and so the ethical considerations and problems raised from an immigrant research project are mostly unique. For this reason, pulling some studies together and organizing them in a paper are quite challenging. However, we found out that the conception of Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) became very helpful. We will use these three ethical dimensions not as categorical but more as technical in organizing our writing so as to make it easy in writing and reading. And in addition to CRRRE, we will include commitment as ethics in studying immigrant youth physical activity. Indeed, the ethics we address could be multi-dimensional and therefore overlapping. More specifically, we should address issues on how these ethical dimensions could become problematic when being practiced *vis-à-vis* (a) the researchers' sociocultural backgrounds and ideologies; (b) the participants' sociocultural background and immigrant experience; and (c) the phenomenon of immigrant youth living in New Zealand.

Keywords—ethics, qualitative methods, immigrant youth, physical activity

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a need to explore some potential ethical issues in our joint research works investigating physical activity among immigrant youth living in New Zealand. While we were developing the proposal of this study, we foresaw some potential issues relating to ethics and it was discovered, from the available books on physical activity, that much has not been done when it comes to studies of the ethical perspective of researching youth physical activity, mainly the immigrant populace. These are what brought about the interest in writing this paper.

The basic conception of ethics in research needed to be well spelt out before moving to the topic proper, which is, discussing the Ethical Issues in Researching Immigrant Youth Physical Activity in New Zealand. Also it is worth mentioning that the writing style used in this study is the third person rather than first person. This is due to our personal philosophies and the fact that we received the bulk of our trainings in qualitative.

II. ETHICS IN RESEARCH

In a general point of view, ethics are “the justifications of human actions, most especially how those actions can affect others” [1]. Taking a cue from this simple definition, we can say that ethics in research involve how researchers' actions are justified and the effects of these actions on “participants, participants' families, the researcher, the research community, and the public consumers” [2]. And according to Lahman et al. (2001), this justification is evaluated to be the one that is right, proper, or moral.

In the United States, Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the body saddled with the responsibility of handling any issue on ethics in research. The institution was established in response research abuses experienced in the twentieth century. Schwandt (2007) explains that the major role of the IRB is: “to determine the risks to subjects involved in the research under review; to know if the benefits of the research is more than its risks; and whether researchers got the full informed consent of the research subjects” [3]. In other words, IRB determines whether or not a proposed study needs to be revised, modified, or even rejected. And their approval includes ethical consideration resulting from “voluntary participation of the subjects, ability not to cause harm or no risk, and its confidentiality” [4]. A body functioning like IRB in New Zealand is the Human Participants Ethics Committee. Unlike in Indonesia where such practice is not common, agencies of ethical review for research projects are common in many countries of the world, so researchers working with partners who are not of Indonesian origin need to pay attention to this practice.

And from our experience, we can boldly say that going through IRB procedures is highly rewarding, especially for novice researchers. We were able to learn how to conduct an ethically sound research. However, this could be a different story for the old researchers especially the qualitative researchers using alternative methodologies and the review boards are filled with positivists or post-positivist oriented people [5]. This is because, in most cases, the ethical dimensions coming from alternative approaches are not common and are just known to a few. Likewise, in our research of studying immigrant youth's physical activity, the ethical issues arising are highly circumstantial and therefore unpredictable.

To further look into ethics in research, there is a need to bring out the contemporary ethical codes expressed by social researchers. These codes could simply be divided into two which are: minimalist codes and aspirational ethical codes [6]. Minimalist codes relate to mandatory codes or procedural ethics. It is otherwise called utilitarian ethics meaning “ethical thought based on utility” [7]. These codes consist of ethics that are foundational in nature, for example, informed consent, no harm and confidentiality that researchers need to take with utmost importance. The regulations of IRB are the example of these codes. Also, Schwandt (2007) lists deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics as minimalist codes. Deontological simply means “concept of duty or what it is right to do” while consequentialist ethics are “based on the idea of achieving some good state of affairs” [8]. Aspirational ethical codes are different from the minimalist coded in the sense that they are unique to individual study pertaining to theoretical framework, methodological approach, and research contexts. These vary from one study to another, though researchers using aspirational codes try to attain the highest viewpoint of ethics which is beyond the minimalist codes. These codes are not mandatory but could be carefully thought before commencing your research and most times, they come up in the course of carrying out your study. According to Lahman et al. (2011), some of the examples of these codes are relational ethics, feminist ethics, virtue ethics, narrative ethics, ethics in practice, caring ethics, and understanding of situational ethics [9]. For the purpose of this paper, we will briefly describe the minimalist codes and then do an extensive work on the aspirational ethical codes using the CRRRE framework.

III. ETHICAL DIMENSION OF RESEARCHING IMMIGRANT YOUTH

Although the ethical dimensions in researching immigrant youth’s physical activity are context specific, the practices are conducted in accordance to minimalist codes and aspirational ethical codes. While the minimalist codes include the IRB procedures and how they can be problematic in PAR, aspirational ethical codes are influenced by the researcher’s socio-cultural background and ideology, as well as immigration experiences and physical activity within two cultural contexts. Then Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) and commitment are the ethics frame to be discussed under the aspirational ethical codes.

A. *Minimalist Codes*

In terms of values or worth, ethical principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, and justice agreed with our study investigating immigrant youth. We made sure that the three principles mentioned in this research were fully implemented. Firstly, respect for others was implemented in the informed consent and we did this by getting our informed consent reviewed by the Institute of Research and Community Service (IRCS), Yogyakarta State University. The participants were not controlled in any way and their participation was voluntary since no one influenced them to participate in the study. Also, they have a full knowledge of the study as stated on the informed consent. Then, talking

about beneficence, which is the second principle, we made sure that the PAR project has no potential of causing any harm to the participants. We assessed all the risks that might come up before, during and after the project and this was clearly stated on the informed consent. For example, the real identity of the participants were not disclosed like their names, location, and so on and special attention was given to their immigration status. We did not look for information of their immigration status and when we knew it, we did not disclose it. The third principle, justice, is to be fair in selecting participants and to ensure equitable benefits and burdens among participants. In this study, we selected our participants not based on favor but in fairness both to the preference of their physical activities and their status.

Doing extensive work on ethical dimensions in studying immigrant youth physical activity according to minimalist codes sounds religious. And all these three ethical principles are very good, especially when they have been institutionalized but in the practical sense, they could become narrowed. So there is need for researchers to critically consider any potential risk that is hard to be assessed because in the real sense, such risk, if not discovered will not be informed. [10].

B. *Aspirational Codes*

In contrast to the minimalist codes, aspirational ethics accommodate some level of dynamism in PAR process and goes beyond the ethical “check list” provided by IRBs. To fully understand this, we used the notion of Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRRE) coined by Lahman et al. (2011) [11]. Our aim is to present these ethical dimensions analytically but they can overlap and in a random manner, we will consider how aspects like researcher/ co-researchers socio-cultural backgrounds, immigration experiences, and PAR method could become problematic in ethical practices.

Culturally Responsive Ethics. Culture can simply be defined as shared beliefs and actions guided by those beliefs (Lahman et al., 2011). It also includes traditions, rituals, lifestyle, language, demeanors, and customs. Culture is learned and not genetically inherited. In the same vein, culturally responsive practices involve awareness of the researchers practiced cultures and the attempt to understand other people’s cultures (Lahman et al., 2011). And in terms of research, Lahman et al. (2001) explains culturally responsive researchers as being able to sensitively accommodate participants so that it enhances trustworthy information [12].

In another dimension, Ellis (2007) argues that responsive research involves researchers “checking at every stage to make sure that participants are still willing to be part of their projects” [13]. In other words, this technique is also called process consent [14]. Since our project involved young people, they could possibly be engrossed in the project and forgotten that they were in the research. So there is a need by the researchers to regularly remind them of their participation. . Also, this ethical practice is helpful when traditional informed consent given prior the study is no longer meaningful. Traditional informed consent could

possibly not be meaningful because studying immigrant youth using qualitative methods was a journey and the nature of the project was also growing. At this point, the ethical practices suggested by Ellis (2007) and Munhall (1988) became appropriate even though their withdrawals from the study were risky. We were nervous about it, but we needed to be ethically responsible.

Another example of culturally responsive ethics is in attempting to understand participants' historical trauma. This refers to explaining how the assaults/ violence experienced by earlier generations may have physical and mental health effects on the present generations [15]. In the US, this concept is often applied by community-based researchers for studies with Native Americans (e.g. colonization) and African Americans (e.g. slavery). But with the immigrant youth of Indonesia,, we would need to know their historical trauma in relation to leaving their home country. For some immigrants, leaving Indonesia might be due to ethnic or religion conflicts. Some few might have experienced torture, sexual assaults, and the death of family members, neighbors or friends. But in the actual sense, we did not experience any of these and so we are considered historically as outsiders. And the fact that our cultural backgrounds considered as the major in Indonesia include: Javanese, Muslim, middle class and males, all these could still be considered as outsiders from ethics point of view. For this reason, understanding their historical backgrounds was not only an ethical practice but also help in reducing the outsider-insider tensions.

Ethical problems could come as a result of differences in culture and sometimes it could be within same culture. For example, there is Islamic culture in both Indonesia and the U.S, but while their own is of liberal view, we are conservative in nature. And while the conservative Muslims see hijab wearing as something sacred which must be done by every woman, the liberal ones do not see it from that point of view. . The rational notion of putting on hijab is that women should be bodily protected and prevent themselves from being sexually harassed by men. And when anything bad happens, women are always at the receiving end. For example, in the case of sexual assaults, people tend to blame the woman that may be she exposed her body while saying little or nothing about the man. Discussion around this could be endless and without a careful consideration exploring this area could be problematic. And a Muslims, we would not hide our perspective, we might just need to find a good timing to explore it with other Muslim participants.

In addition, feminist ethics is also included in culturally responsive ethics. According to Olsen (2005) who explored the ethical dimensions of feminist research including the notion of justice, non-exploitative, and sensitivity towards women [16]. It should be noted that the practice of feminist research in our project can be complicated by the practice of cultural sensitivity. Culturally, Indonesia has strong patriarchal ideology placing women as second-class citizen to men but we ignored this in this research by looking at both from the same point of view.. Also, physical activity is also within the male territory which put much emphasis on masculine ideology.. And exploring physical activity might

reproduce the discourse of masculinity and challenge the feminine ideals. While this might not be obvious, gendered biased comments, stigma, and marginalization could happen during the data collection process. For example, when the boys pass some gender biased comments, ethically, it could become a problem if we allow them to do so. And if we ask them not to do so, they will see us as not having respect for their culture.

Solving this ethical problem was not an easy task.. Firstly, we explored our own subjectivity with regard to gender and we were aware of gender sensitivity throughout our research processes. Secondly, we were optimistic that the research could be a teaching guide towards having more equitable gender relation among young Indonesians.

Relational Ethics. The subject matter of relational ethics mainly includes what is "true to one's character and responsible for one's actions and the effects on others" [17]. In the study and description of different human societies,, mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness are of high values considering researcher-researched-community relationships

Some ethical considerations in this research may be affected by our closeness with Indonesian immigrant youth. And this proximity includes the fact that we are not acculturated and not part of New Zealand culture. Also, we are not English native speakers and most importantly, we do not experience immigration as they do. And in fact, we interacted with them within limited period of time and social situations. In short, we are not totally engrossed in New Zealand culture. Our efforts to respect, to dignify, and to connect with Indonesian youth could possibly be prevented by our limited understanding about them and their culture. To deal with this, our ethical considerations were not operated in the area of cognition, but rather used our affective domain in initiating, developing, and maintaining the relationship with Indonesian youth. Hopefully, our affection could help us in overcoming the lack of cultural understanding.

More so, we saw some connectedness with these young people that could help us in getting close to them. We disclosed early on the research that we are Muslims, historically from working class families, sportspersons, and second language learners as most of them. Also, as critical educators, we were too enthusiastic to work with the socially disadvantaged community including the immigrant youth. By acknowledging all of our common situations and status, we believed it can help us to achieve intimacy. And having certain degree of intimacy would, however, generate another ethical issue. When these youth became friends, we would need to acknowledge interrelation bonds among us, to be mindful for not exploiting them, and to maintain the connectedness after the study [18].

Language used during researching the immigrant community could be challenging to the relationships among co-researchers and the researched subjects. English for most of us (researchers and the researched) is a second or even third language. This could be a real obstacle not only in starting relationships but also in developing culturally responsive ethics. In addition, these youth speak English at

different levels and based on that abilities, marginalization could set in among them. Language can also be the source of power differential as each of us have our own unique patterns of language [19]. For example, we have been trained in higher education institutions and because of this, we can use technical language. And when we approached the youth, the term research itself seemed already strange to them. According to Lofman et al. (2004), substituting academic terms into layman terms are not the solution. This attempt can not only reduce the meaning of a term and possibly lower the status of the study in academic contexts but can also be another practice of patronizing. Lofman et al. (2004) offer a way to solve this issue by learning each other language and moving “from one discourse to the other as the circumstances demanded” (p. 359). In addition, language differential has long been a concern in PAR since its initiation. For example, Fals-Borda (2001) states that the ethical dimensions evolved from PAR history are relational ethics showed by genuine horizontal relationships [20]. With this, there is a concern with as regards the language gap between the elite academicians and the popular people. To bridge this gap; researchers could use alternative representations such as family archives, oral tradition, and historical booklets. Using more artistic approaches in reporting PAR projects since “we promoted a 'Logos-Mythos technique to combine with hard core data with imaginative, literary and artistic 'cortex' interpretation within cultural frames.” [21]. These strategies will reduce the power differential in the context of the use of language. We have identified some alternative research representations that are manageable to the PAR project such as a picture exhibition in a gallery, theatrical performance, murals, or even presentation at a conference when possible.

Another practice pertaining to relational ethics is reciprocity. The term reciprocity refers to “an ongoing process of exchange with the aim of establishing and maintaining equality between parties” [22]. In research, reciprocity leads to respectful and good research relationships. The practices of reciprocity should take place throughout all research processes (Maiter et al., 2008). In addition, reciprocal/ equal dialogues may have the potential to resolve potential ethical problems in the research. For example, at the earliest stage of the research, initiating relationship will begin from a small network of relationship between us and the few Indonesian youth. This aligns with what McTaggart (1991) suggested which is to start a project from a small cycle. Starting from couple among young Somalis who are already friends will also eliminate ethical issues in the recruitment [23]. More specifically, exclusion of youth with certain criteria (e.g. limited English, lack of social status, and marginalized ethnics) might be overcome since the group was small and reciprocal dialogue was done.

Again, with respect to the ethics of reciprocity, we considered power relations and the issues of knowledge production [24]. In doing this, we used Foucauldian perspective stating that power can be both repressive and productive [25]. Similarly, power “can be in place to constrain and empower in different sociocultural contexts”

[26]. Power is not permanently possessed by certain people but rather moves from one individual to another under certain social situations and contexts. For example, in the contexts of our research with Indonesian youth living in New Zealand, we acknowledged power differential between the researchers and the researched. In other words, there was a hyphen between us and we illuminated how we worked “at the hyphens”: exploring the power dynamic within self-other; researchers-the youth [27]. Status as adult and position especially of those that had higher education, could be the reasons for power differential in social interaction within the research. In an adult-controlled world, age provide us with better rights compared with the adolescent age. And one’s academic background can provide one with better knowledge that those with it. According to Foucault, the existence of power relies on the reproduction of knowledge and its use in various discourses including physical education in higher education [28]. Furthermore, our knowledge about young people, physical education, and research methodology could also be sources of power that have potentials for justifying and substantiating control over individuals and groups. We should not deny these facts but rather pay more attention to them and be able to navigate them, according to McCabe and Holmes (2009), towards the productive aspect of power. This practice where we do not ignore power differential and positions, according to Holland et al. (2010), is ethical.

Maiter et al. (2008) suggests that at the end of the study, researchers should pay attention on the dissemination as an ethic of reciprocity in a way that it is actually an exchange of information and resources. Ethical concerns raised from this stage included how the youth and the community in which they lived could benefit from the study. Some presentations done in various way will be helpful in making the information about the outcomes available publicly and highlight its benefits on the youth [29]. However, these benefits might be considered as indirect and there could be ethical demands to have the direct ones for the youth and their community such as funding or forming policies concerning the immigrant youth and their physical activities. And for sure, we were not in any position to allocate resources or to influence policy but we expose them to be knowledgeable as they continue participating in the study as it progresses.

Reflexive Ethics. In general sense, reflexive means looking back at one’s actions and how these actions affect others. And in research, reflexivity can mean “thoughtful or self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between researchers and the researched” [30]. Describing researcher’s reflexivity seems now to be an everyday practice in qualitative research. In practical terms, Lahman et al. (2011) caution qualitative researchers about the difference between reflection and reflexivity. The former occurs after the experience while the later occurs before, during, and after the experience. In this paper, we do not view these two terms as differently but rather, we focus more on how researchers do the reflexivity referring to ongoing activities throughout all research processes. Furthermore, reflexivity provides researchers with the opportunities to “notice the reactions to

a research situation and adapts in a responsive, ethical, moral way, where the participant's dignity, safety, privacy, and autonomy are respected" [31].

Example of reflexivity in project planning and initiation include the consideration of how youth will be recruited. More specifically, we considered not only the level of intimacy but also the factors that may limit the individuals from participating in the project. Boser (2006) suggests focusing on groups that are most marginalized or disempowered. We needed to carefully assess within-the-group-marginalization based on social status, family roots and clans, ethnicity, and gender. Further, working with most marginalized youth should also "ensure that multiple barriers to participation are anticipated and immediately addressed" at the initiation stage [32]. Reflexivity at the stage of designing the research methods is another example we considered. Boser (2006) argues that the design of research methods should give the participants serious awareness of some ethical issues. Imagine we had a group of Indonesian youth having a focus group about sensitive topics related to physical activity. If some of these youth have experienced wariness about issues relating to research and those of academics, our presence might make them not comfortable. We had to be able to reflect on this possible situation so as to make research design that will address any possible disturbances they might have.

Commitment as Ethics. In early development of PAR, Fals-Borda (2001) indicates that commitment among researchers, especially among PAR researchers, can improve the life of the disadvantaged people. And for the intellectuals, it means that producing knowledge production is not without a value [33]. And it should be loaded with the intents for social transformations. Fals-Borda (2001) criticizes researchers whose studies are merely for career advancement. He also advocates Gramscian notion of organic intellectual which describes that researchers should not only isolate themselves in the academic world but stand with the popular people and also speak for them. Furthermore, commitment in this study was also inspired by praxis, a term coined by Freire (2010) as action and reflection [34]. And this praxis-inspired commitment evolves from our journey to the academy. For us, the researchers, we all grew up in peasant families, with working class parents and from a third world country. We got involved in physical activities while we were still very young and we also believed that sport and various physical activities have educated us in various forms and have helped us in our development to adulthood. So we so much have confidence in the notion of providing education for young people through/with/in physical activities because these backgrounds and experiences provide strong ethical bond and commitment with the marginalized youth. We have done several projects with street children in Indonesia, however, Fals-Borda (2001), reminds us that being an activist is not enough. Therefore, our project was our prolonged aspirations and commitments.

IV. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, ethical considerations in research with immigrant population can be framed into two general categories. The first ethical considerations are covered in minimalist codes while the second are in the aspirational ethics codes. And studying immigrant youth physical activity is highly contextual and to some cases minimalist codes established might not be meaningful. Many more ethical considerations are aspirational and they need to be carefully assessed before, during, and after the study. Although ethics in research with immigrant youth are multi-dimensional, they can fit into culturally responsive, relational, and reflexive ethics (CRRRE) as well as commitment as ethics.

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