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Abstract

Research on a sensitive and potentially stigmatising topic such as 'radicalisation' begs for a robust ethical framework. Ethical procedures, issuing from an institutional ethics commission, are not sufficient to manage these risks. Arguably, collaborative and participatory research is best suited to overcome the risks of doing research on such a sensitive topic as well as the hierarchy and inequality in the relationship between researchers, gatekeepers and participants. To co-construct a participatory ethical framework in this context, 22 social workers were asked about the core ethical values of their own professional context. In this paper, these social work ethics are brought in tension with the practice of doing research. The paper concludes with the insight that social work ethics are not transferrable to the research context in a straightforward manner. Hierarchy and inequality (as well as much frustration) will persist if only this strategy is adopted.

Keywords

Particatory research, collaborative research, ethics, social work, radicalisation, young people

Introduction

The dominant discourse on radicalisation' rains down on local 'suspect' communities (Lakhani, 2012) and is experienced by the latter as a machine (Aertsen et al., 2020; Claes et al., 2020; De Backer et al., 2020) .This 'radicalisation machine', which produces mechanical and

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seemingly rational answers to collective fears, consists of multiple actors – policy-makers, media, security actors and civil society – but also researchers who, fuelled by the massive public funding which has gone into research of 'radicalisation' in the last five to 10 years, have, in the eyes of local vulnerable communities and community professionals, in large numbers explored these so-called jihadogenic spaces (Khosrokhavar, 2018).

In these circumstances, it is clear that research on a sensitive and potentially stigmatising topic such as 'radicalisation' begs for a robust ethical framework. In research with vulnerable people on this topic, negligent disclosure of information can jeopardise the future and reputation of these people and attract police and security observations (Van Gorp, 2013). It can also seriously harm the reputation of local professionals and their efforts to build trust with their target groups. Ethical procedures, issuing from an internal ethics commission, are not sufficient to manage these risks. They come across as a surrogate in the absence of a social relationship with the participant (Blake, 2007). Furthermore, if we assume that processes of 'radicalisation' occur in silent spaces and are characterised by a high degree of unpredictability, how then are we to enter these silent spaces, to build trust with target groups, collect and interpret data and obtain informed consent, without resorting to deceit about the research goal and in the hope of not producing unintended effects?

Such were the questions posed and dilemmas discussed in the first months of the CONRAD project, which engaged in field research in two Belgian cities (Brussels and Verviers) with young people and with youth workers as local partners, between 2017 and 2019. Because the team had adopted the methodological framework of participatory action research (PAR) and because the youth workers (particularly those of Brussels) had uttered severe reservations about the topic, the original project design and the possible repercussions that this research might bring to the target groups and to the youth workers themselves, an ethical framework was drafted.

True to the philosophy of PAR, the team decided, firstly, that participatory ethics were to be drafted collaboratively. For this purpose, 14 individual interviews and two focus groups with a total of 32 participants were held.[1] After that, researchers and social workers held the pen together in the co-construction of an ethical framework which was positively evaluated by the ethics review board. However, this could not prevent a series of conflicts and difficulties, many of which were related to positionality, different expectations and different ethical attitudes among the researchers.

In this paper, the author will try to give a – partial – answer to the question why the events unfolded as they did. To this end, the following research questions are posed: (1) can inequality and hierarchy in research, particularly with a sensitive topic such as 'radicalisation', be overcome by co-constructing research ethics in a PAR setting? (2) Which ethical guidelines are offered by social workers? (3) To what extent are these guidelines transferrable to the research context? In the paper, an overview is presented of the core ethical values of social work as they were proposed by social workers themselves. After that, social work ethics are brought in tension with research (and research funding) practices. The paper concludes with the insight that social work ethics are difficult to use in a research context in a straightforward manner. Hierarchy and inequality cannot be overcome by only adopting this strategy.

The CONRAD project

The main objective of the CONRAD project was to produce alternative, more constructive discourses and understandings of the quite one-sided and superficial treatment of 'radicalisation' in the public and political debate. For this purpose, the team's ambition was to conceptualise and create new spaces of experience and knowledge which would capacitate local communities to explore, to understand and to act on the basis of a relational and plural interpretation of the phenomenon. A series of specific aims were formulated: to achieve a better understanding of the processes and ingredients in the phenomenon of 'radicalisation', to view 'radicalisation' not only as an individual process but also as a phenomenon that can also be viewed in society at large, to study the effects of the dominant discourse surrounding 'radicalisation' and how they affect local communities, to strengthen the resilience of all concerned groups, to develop new perceptions and communications on the topic and to provide insights and preventive tools for public bodies and civil society organisations. The CONRAD project, which took place between 2017 and 2019 in Brussels and Verviers (Belgium), consisted of a literature study, a discourse analysis of policy texts, an inductive analysis of how 'radicalization' is framed in the media and participatory action research in Molenbeek and Verviers.

In Molenbeek (a municipality in the Brussels-Capital Region), the research team worked intensively for 2 years with a group of six vulnerable young people between 15 and 19 years of age, all with a migration background, the majority of them Muslim. They participated in four research activities over a total of 37 days: in the Ardennes, in Istanbul, in the Pyrenees and in the Scottish Highlands. Furthermore, three focus groups were organised, one with five youth workers, two others with a mixed audience of first-line professionals (a mediator, an OCAD analyst, some youth workers, a radicalisation officer, a regional government representative and some youth researchers) and semi-structured interviews were conducted with four youth workers (later, 10 more youth workers were interviewed about the ethics of social work). All this was complemented by field notes and diary entries dating back to the period of the attacks in Paris and Brussels (November 2015–March 2016). Finally, the young people made five digital stories that give a strong and at the same time accessible insight into their world and the injuries they suffered. The results of the analysis by the research team were presented to the young people during three feedback moments and their additional comments were processed.

Several methods were also applied in Verviers. The first consisted of providing a description of the local 'social ecology' with a specific focus on an analysis of local political dynamics and perspectives. This was based on 35 semi-structured interviews with well-placed witnesses in the Verviers context. In addition, the team devoted many hours to participatory observation in which researchers were admitted to various activities with young people within the context of the youth club Terrain d'Aventures asbl. One activity consisted of the rehearsals and performances of a theatre project about underprivileged people by a group of seven young people (the same group made a play about 'radicalisation' the year before), a second consisted of a focus group with six boys between 15 and 17 years old and a third revolved around a few young people who were active in video projects and made a digital story as part of this project. Finally, weekly

discussions took place between researchers and youth workers on the planning of the activities and the interpretation of the data, and two dialogue tables were organised, one to present the analysis of the data to the young people, another with a selection of youth workers and local municipal staff and civil servants from Verviers.

To engage in research on a sensitive topic such as 'radicalisation' with vulnerable young people distrusting researchers, the team adopted the framework of PAR, which, as the following paragraphs show, is suitable to overcome hierarchy and inequality in research and tackles distrust by including research participants as co-researchers.

Ethics, inequality and hierarchy in participatory action research

A growing number of youth researchers since the mid-1990s, and even more so in the last five to 10 years, has opted for democratising, collaborative and participatory research (Edwards and Brannelly, 2017; Henwood et al., 2019). The central insight driving this participatory turn is that research as a social practice is vulnerable to power dynamics, not only while writing the results but also before conceiving of the research setup. Since power imbalances already have a major impact on young people's lives, especially those from low-income families or stigmatised neighbourhoods, it is crucial to spend extra attention to power, hierarchy and inequality in research with these participants. As such, it is a central issue of the ethics of doing research. According to Punch (2002: 326–27), adopting a participatory framework can help to protect young people's vulnerability to unequal power relationships in research, to overcome limited vocabulary and use of different language and to avoid imposing adult views and interpretations.

Participatory research introduces an alternative relationship between researcher and research subject. Rather than studying a subject, the participatory researcher studies *with* them. According to Pain and Francis (2003: 46) '[t]he defining characteristic of participatory research is not so much the methods and techniques employed, but the degree of engagement of participants within and beyond the research encounter'. Participatory action research, as a specific approach within the broader field of collaborative research, involves participants as co-researchers, while also explicitly stating the objective to bring about social change. PAR 'is performed by researchers who collaborate with members of a community or an organisation in order to produce knowledge while taking action with the aim of improving the situation of that community or organization' (Saija, 2014: 191). As a result, PAR is characterised by the belief that 'they' know it better, that people who have experienced historic oppression hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences.

PAR should be distinguished from other forms of social research as it accepts the subjectivity of the researcher and focuses on the relationships between researcher and the researched, on working with community or group members in collaboration, to such an extent that the boundary between 'us' and 'them' fades and ultimately evaporates (Eikeland, 2006). This implies an increased attention to the researcher herself, 'including a recognition that the researcher and her or his social milieu impacts on the other participants and findings and is, in itself worthy of being researched' (Blake, 2007: 413). There are many ways to do action research, depending on the varying starting points and degrees of participation, with researched, practitioners, etc. But all of them pay no heed to

the commonly often-formulated advice in ethnographic research not to 'go native'. Instead they focus on 'indigenous inquiries', gravitating towards and measuring themselves according to, 'standards for how people, as insiders, can and should investigate their own realities and practices' (Eikeland, 2006: 39–40).

In more conventional research setups, the researcher's positionality clearly is above and beyond the research; she is 'simply the vessel into which the subject pours their essence and is conceptualised as having no connection with the data produced' (Blake, 2007: 415). Instead, central to PAR is the attempt to overcome the dilemmas relating to insider–outsider positions. While Eikeland (2006) argues that all action research is in one way or another in a transitional phase towards total absorption of the other into us or vice versa, Back (1996: 23) proclaims his suspicion of those who claim 'insider status' 'through invoking a kind of radical credentialism. It seems to me that such rhetorical moves are little more than micro-political gestures determined by the politics of the academy'. Instead he proposes to focus on the contact zones between insider and outsider perspectives. 'Empathy, translation and understanding within ethnography do rely on an interplay between personal experience and the accounts given by others of their lives' (Back, 1996: 23).

PAR is not *only* a methodology, because it is underpinned by a different set of philosophical assumptions about the nature and purpose of research: its primary focus is often about social change and action rather than just social analysis (Kindon, 2005). That is why '[p]articipatory ethics might be understood as an ethical stance against [academic] neutrality' (Cahill et al., 2007: 306). It is a choice against academic dispassion, or a choice for an ethic of care. This particular (and contested) academic and philosophical position is a translation of the words of Desmond Tutu: 'if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor'.

PAR also addresses issues of positionality. Although some would argue that majority groups should concentrate their efforts on racism in majority contexts, allowing minority researchers to focus on their own communities, there are other, and less extreme, solutions to the issue of positionality in research (Abbas, 2010). A subtler negotiation of 'insider' and 'outsider' roles and perspectives, as in PAR, can yield good results. Spalek (2011), for instance, discusses how research with minorities may be benefitted by engaging members of those communities as co-researchers. This involves investing time and energy in bringing about rapport and trust. Yet, this always entails negotiating and decentring one's identity. To acknowledge the multiplicity of identities can be a 'powerful mechanism through which to non-essentialise individuals who are taking part in research' (Spalek, 2011: 199).

PAR establishes a link between academic work and activism and builds upon longstanding traditions of grassroots social movements, critical race and feminist theories (Cahill et al., 2007: 306). PAR was also adopted as a critique of the marketisation of knowledge which gives birth to yet another inequality potentially present in research: 'research in [...] a time of uncertainty, and in an era when knowledge as power isre-inscribed through its value as a commodity in the global market place, presents tricky ground for researchers' (Smith, 2007: 102). Instead an understanding of 'impact' based on the co-production of knowledge between universities and communities, modelled in research

practice in participatory geographies is proposed. ‘This is more likely to result in more equitable and radically transformative impacts of knowledge, making us socially accountable rather than driven by economic accountancy’ (Pain et al., 2011: 183).

From the above, it seems clear that PAR has the potential to overcome many issues of inequality and hierarchy in research and may provide a fertile ground for doing research in an ethical manner. Particularly in the context of a research project on a sensitive topic, there may be a need for a robust ethical framework, containing guidelines for researchers in which way they ought to enter the field and interact with vulnerable young people, as well as agreements about the collection, analysis and storage of data. Such an ethical framework should go beyond the requirements of academic ethics review boards and should, in fact, be the result of collaborative work. The CONRAD team’s intuition at this point was that such an ethical framework could find interpretation in the deontology, ethics and daily practices of youth workers. In the following section, I will present findings from interviews and focus groups on what social workers consider their ethical core values.

Social work ethics

Social workers often have strong and rather negative opinions on research and researchers. Peter, for instance, argues that researchers do not grasp the needs on the ground: ‘we have joined this [research project] because we, as youth work organisation, want to join the battle against the academic world, (…) we want to enter the debate and say the way you approach things is for us not the right way’. The same goes for review panels of scientific funding agencies, Elise adds:

> “there is a problem in the projects that have been submitted [that they] are judged by academics, so academics think that they know what they want to see (…). Wouldn’t there be a need to involve youth workers and stakeholders in the evaluation of projects?”

Research and social work can be brought closer to each other, but that involves an open-hearted discussion Aswad stresses: ‘we need to have a shared aim and we need to make it explicit’. Chloé points out that her organisation is generally in favour of research projects, ‘but it depends on what we want to investigate because it usually confirms existing ideas’. According to several youth workers, project outlines often reinforce dominant ideas and miss a critical angle to their own basic premises and starting points. Researchers, politicians and scientific funds are accused of not listening to experiences in the field.

> Peter: “Everything that’s happening on the topic of radicalisation is just very frustrating, because colleagues were already talking about it eight years ago that we need to do something about those people who are leaving for Syria and that nobody listened. (…) Reading the subsidy calls for radicalisation you realise that they haven’t understood it at all.”

Another often-heard complaint is that most research leans too heavily on the services of gatekeepers such as youth workers.

> Martine: "what disturbs me the most in these things is that (…) from a desk some sort of research is done, safely behind a computer and in which a lot of work is fired at the middleman, the youth worker or whatever, and that is not realistic."

Researchers also often forget that the research project and its activities need to be beneficial for participants. Danny: 'you can write your research and score with it (…) but for them [young people] it does not yield anything, so it needs to be, okay, for them it needs to be interesting'.

It is clear that, ethics are extremely important for social workers working with vulnerable groups. Researchers wishing to collaborate with these practitioners may wish to study their deontology. The youth work organisation (D'Broej) involved in the CONRAD project did not, at the start of the project, have a deontological code of its own. In order to give the research project a robust grounding in ethical self-reflection, the CONRAD team decided to do interviews and focus groups focussing on the essential ethical building blocks, supporting a youth worker's daily practice. From the interviews and focus groups with a total of 32 social workers (and some related professions), nine building blocks constituting social work ethics can be identified.

Among the social workers interviewed there is a consensus that they use high ethical standards, but they also acknowledge a lack of reflection, discussion, theoretical background and coherence within their profession. Aicha for instance argues the following:

> "But to really work in an ethical way I think you need a bit of baggage or something like that or a bit of knowledge about the duty of discretion, about all those things that you can maybe learn while you are working or something like that, so I am not saying that you have to have a diploma or that you are a youth worker for sure, but uhm yes you must have some knowledge I think. It's good that you work a lot on the basis of your gut feeling, but sometimes you have to think twice before you do something."

Peter emphasises the importance of the implicit knowledge of the youth worker (which Foucault (1980) called 'savoir' as opposed to the more explicit and institutionalised 'connaissance'): 'social workers have an enormous ethical sensitivity, I think there are not many people who have such an ethics as youth workers, but it is not on paper, right, that way of acting, that way of non-acting'. Both accounts, stressing the importance of implicit knowledge and gut feeling and the relative lack of a shared ethical framework would imply that there are grey zones and degrees of disagreement between social workers about appropriate attitudes and ethics.

According to the deontological code of Uit De Marge, the Dutch-speaking Belgian support centre for youth work with children and young people in a socially vulnerable situation, young people need to be approached in a transparent way, with an offer that is attuned to their needs and possibilities, considering them as unique and authentic persons

and with respect vis-à-vis every child's philosophical, religious or ideological convictions. In relationships with other actors (such as researchers), the responsibility and freedom of choice of children and young people are put central, and contact with these outside actors should benefit the interests of children and young people. Neither the youth welfare worker nor the youth welfare organisation can cooperate in a way that goes against the interests of children or young people. Youth workers are asked to accommodate open communication between young people and these actors but always in the interest of the children and young people. Children and young people are asked to communicate as much as possible for themselves, with the encouragement and support of youth workers. Youth workers are expected to handle confidential information about children and young people and their environment with discretion. This information is not passed to third parties without their consent. On the other hand, youth workers are compelled to inform young people about ongoing collaborations with external actors.

From the interviews and focus groups with social workers, nine building blocks constituting social work ethics can be identified. The first refers to working with young people from a position of equivalence. Younes puts it like this: 'we try to put the young people on an equal footing. We also try not to mother them, treat them like children' In the words of Berta: '[o]ften youth clubs are the only places (…) where a young person is viewed as a citizen (…), someone who co-constructs society like a political actor'. This principle is also put central in the deontological code treated above – it is probably the starting point of every social work ethics. Young people deserve the same respect as adults, they should be viewed as individuals with agency, with convictions of their own, unique and authentic. This position of equivalence is based on trust, a quality which is emphasised over and over again. Aswad: 'every day is a new day and a new round, new chances'.

The second building block identifies the need to work without an agenda. Lies: 'a youth worker is like a gardener, giving water and fertiliser, but the power of life is in the seed, so the young person in fact is able to do everything. Like a baby, nobody teaches a baby to walk, a baby walks and you just make sure he does not stumble into anything'. Youth worker Suraya adds: 'to see your own contribution as limited, that is what I think is beautiful, that your role is small yet fundamental and grand'. Cathy concurs that if you have a hidden agenda, you may risk not gaining access:

> "just act normal, try not to think too far ahead in the vision, in things, (…) sometimes it is better to know less so you can work in practice with a white sheet of paper. (…) If you say as a person or an organisation that you want to do this type of work you might have a big stamp on your head and then you're not gaining access."

A third building block emphasises that a social worker needs to feel and understand that she ought better not have big ambitions when working with vulnerable youth.

> Peter: "you don't say 'we're going to build a pyramid,' rather, you put two stones on one another and then you slowly continue to build. (…) You're working with a group of young

people who are used to putting three stones on one another and then let them tumble down again."

Fien argues that 'this is the reason why we work with the masses; we know that if we only work with five young people the chance of failure is just too big'. Aswad adds that he is happy with the small things, 'like someone winning a game or someone losing weight, it is the small things that young people are tackling, with these elements you can work'. This entails flexibility and empathy, Khalid argues: 'there is no such thing as following the textbook; you can learn certain things, certain methodologies, and deal with certain things more consciously, but you cannot say, "Now I have to say this, now I have to do this, now I have to do that"'.

A fourth building block of social work ethics is identified in the imperative to offer a safe space and a soft framework. The former refers to spaces where young people can be themselves; the latter to the minimal guidance and support that is offered by youth workers and by rules and regulations in the youth club. Kristel: 'to provide a safe environment for young people is also a very important value to me. We have the luck that we have a space, we do see that as a safe haven for them'. Safe spaces and soft frameworks offer young people the opportunity to experiment and to fail. Sara: 'that you can make mistakes, that you can experiment, but that there is always a soft framework (…) I think that has as a result that young people feel better and, in the end, will function better'. Kim: 'I like to offer young people a place to experiment with their identity and all possible facets that have something to do with this'. Several youth workers, in this regard, talk about the value of professional closeness (as opposed to the professional distance which being kept in many professional-client relations). Kamal explains professional closeness as follows: 'that is about distance and proximity. That you have to be professionally close, very often professionals are advised to keep a distance. "You cannot let young people get too close to you in your private life", but we go the other way round. We build a relationship of trust so we have to know the young people, so we work on proximity in a professional way'.

Fifthly, honesty and authenticity of the social worker are identified as key characteristics. Lien puts it like this: 'to be honest and authentic in who you are and to show that you try in the same way to fight for something'. Walt adds: 'being yourself, make sure that you are not doing anything else behind the young people's backs'. Aicha:

> I think as a youth worker it is especially important to be sincere and real to your young people and you don't necessarily have to like everything they do and they don't have to like everything you do, but you just have to be honest in everything you do. Because young people find out very quickly if you play a role or something and their confidence is very low.

She continues by arguing that honesty and authenticity also imply an open attitude: 'You cannot expect young people to expose themselves to you if you keep yourself completely closed off'. Karel concurs: 'so you have to be authentic, you have to be able to open up a bit yourself because young people trust you and will give you information, but you also have to do that for them. Uhm I am, I am yes they can know things from me. Not

everything, sometimes I say, yes, you have no business with that you do not need to know that'.

A sixth ethical building block, one which is mostly endorsed by youth workers operating in highly precarious environments, is the advice to be committed. Sarah:

> "young people appreciate that they know that they are not a number, and that I am not the kind of person who is at a desk and says 'but it is five to five sorry I have to uhm (…) at five o'clock it is done'."

This value, importantly, not only refers to an everyday commitment to the wellbeing of young people. Often this ethical attitude also implies a political commitment to have their voices heard in the public debate, or a commitment to bring about social change. Hanan: 'yes, we are not boy scouts, if you only want to do activities that work out, well then you become a boy scout, then you do not do our work'. However, some also make the nuance that this political commitment can never get in the way of working for and with individual people.

> Fien: "youth work is a social commitment, I think there might have been an idealist idea in the beginning, of wanting to change society and the longer you're working the more you look at the person and the young people themselves and ask yourself how can I signify something for that person?"

The commitment to put youth first, some add, goes hand in hand with the practices of sensitisation and (respectful) confrontation. Aswad for instance adds that 'they have just had a conflict with the police and you are going to make them reflect, "OK, maybe you have done something wrong too"'.

The seventh building block of social work ethics can be found in the non-judgemental approach, an attitude which accepts young people as they are and does not discriminate. Khalid: 'for example, you sometimes have young people of whom you already know the story even if you haven't talked with them yet. (…) But I try to start from scratch anyway'. Yamila adds the following:

> I come across young people, (…) on the one hand I have some young people with a migration background, but on the other I have the die hard Vlaams Belang [the Flemish extreme-right party] youth, I say, the extreme right. Look, I have to try and get along with all the groups, and that's important. I also say that everyone is entitled to their opinion, if that's your opinion then fine, and I always want to talk about it. I think that's where it starts, that you don't push all the young people into a corner or ignore them because they have a different opinion, no, everyone is allowed to join in. Everyone, to everyone I offer my ear for listening.

In line with this is the eighth building block, which consists of the aim to build resilience in young people through an individual approach, to 'discover the talents of these young people and reinforce them' as Gilles calls it. Sarah: 'resilience, the fact that you learn as a young person to appreciate yourself and get some self-esteem, those are

Table 1. Social work ethics versus research practice.

1	Position of equivalence	Position of privilege
2	Work without an agenda	Work with an agenda
3	Realistic ambitions	Research funding practices
4	Safe space and soft framework	Time is money
5	Honesty and authenticity	Leaving the field
6	(Political) commitment	Academic neutrality
7	Non-judgemental approach	Critical analysis
8	Bring about social change	Scientific excellence
9	Build resilience	The 'helicopter researcher'

essential things for our young people, the lack of self-esteem, to go from failure to failure, and to try to break that circle because that's where their distrust comes from'.

Lastly, the nineth ethical value in social work is the belief that the work implies bringing about social change. Elise sums it up: 'to bring diverse people in contact with each other, to bridge the Canal, also to bridge financial borders'. Jean: 'I think it is our role to try to change things, to kick some people in the shins, to try to have the voices heard of those who are not heard. But I have the feeling that we are not succeeding, that we do not have enough capabilities at the moment'. Peter: 'it is not noncommittal anymore (…) at the moment when we start to lose guys to the war in Syria, then (…) we were all deeply affected and, in that regard, we have no solutions and, in that sense, it has changed a lot for me. (…) This is maybe one of the motivations for me to start to look for this type of research projects'.

Discussion

In the above, a preliminary list of ethical principles deployed by social workers is drafted. It is likely that more interviews and focus groups would yield even more principles or building blocks or that these would bring further nuance to the picture. In other words, the list above should not be considered an exhaustive overview. But, for the present purpose, that is not necessarily a problem. The intention of this paper is to assess to what extent an ethical framework in a research project can be established based on social work ethics and whether these values are compatible with research practice, irrespective of the fact that *all* social work principles and core values are identified (Table 1).

When having a closer look at the nine building blocks, it becomes clear that all of them to a certain extent are at odds with how research is done and how it is funded. As we will see, some of these contradictions are solved by adopting PAR as a methodological framework, but most of them are not. The ethical prescription to adopt a position of equivalence (1), for instance, contrasts sharply with the privilege of researchers, who are often middle-class and highly educated, or with the position of power extended to them by the institutions they represent. This is, of course, one of the main reasons why participatory research was developed in the first place. It allows for researching *with*, rather than

researching *of*. As a result, hierarchy and inequalities are avoided as much as possible, although a difference in terms of power will probably always exist.

To work without an agenda (2) may be a good ethical principle in social work, but in the context of a research project that is rather difficult. A project design nearly always consists of methodologies, outcomes and deliverables stated at the onset, often already at the grant writing stage, and also quite often without a proper discussion with project partners, gatekeepers and eventual research participants. The researcher always has an agenda. Ideally, in PAR, research starts with the input of gatekeepers and research participants: what are their needs, which kind of research is evaluated as relevant, which questions need to find an answer? Yet, this is often not possible in the context of contemporary funding practices, which are increasingly project-based, short-term and inspired by 'hot topics' in the public debate.

This leads to the third incompatibility: to have realistic ambitions (3) often contrasts with the way projects are set up, particularly in the application phase when overly ambitious project proposals are drafted in order to secure the grant but without having consulted the field. As Wilson et al. (2018) note, in the research project, conflicts can arise from diverging timelines and expectations. This is also why Aswad stresses the need to a shared and explicit aim, between researchers and youth workers. To involve gatekeepers such as youth workers in the early stages of the grant writing may partly mitigate the risk of having unrealistic ambitions and expect that the 'middleman' will solve the subsequent problems.

The fourth building block of a social work ethics, which is the imperative to offer a safe space and a soft framework (4) where young people can experiment and things are allowed to go wrong, will in many cases contrast be at odds with the often hurried scientific process of having to work in limited time-frames. Particularly in the case of 'helicopter research', when researchers swoop in, gather data, and leave the field, a researcher will not contribute to a safe space or a soft framework. 'Helicopter researchers build no capacity, recommend no change, and invest no funding' (Oberly and Macedo, 2004: 357). As Ritterbusch (2012: 22) notes, building networks of care during the research project can help to overcome this contradiction, particularly if the researcher establishes networks that can persist after the completion of the project, without her presence.

To adopt an honest and authentic attitude (5) towards research participants, such as young people and their gatekeepers, is an ethical principle which most qualitative researchers will spontaneously (try to) adopt. Yet, here as well, (the perception of) adherence to this ethical value will depend for a great part on the researcher's presence in the field and their relation to the field after leaving it. A researcher may also feel dishonest and disloyal when critically analysing the data after having left the field. Absence and failed promises are tantamount to the feeling among vulnerable youth of not being worth caring about. Being dishonest and inauthentic will reinforce feelings of abandonment (Ritterbusch 2012).

A similar reflection can be made about the principle of a non-judgemental approach (7). Researchers may struggle with the contradiction between being non-judgemental in the field, while being compelled to engage in a critical analysis of data after having left it.

This critical analysis may imply the formulation of statements about behaviours or convictions of research participants (take, for instance, the example of tolerance and racism among young urbanites in Author (2019)). Geertz (1988) refers to it as being here and there. Typical for this phase is the researcher's emotional struggle with authenticity and loyalty while engaging in a critical analysis. It is about the deception of the researcher who 'cultivates the subject as a source of information but abruptly terminates collaboration in the writing of the story' (Lake and Zitcer, 2012: 391). This dilemma may, to a certain extent, be overcome by engaging in PAR by allowing research participants to comment on the analysis made by the researchers and, ultimately, to involve them in the writing.

For many researchers, the call for political commitment (6) may be incompatible with their epistemological position of neutrality and objectivity. Of course, this difficulty is appropriately addressed by adopting a PAR framework which, by definition, implies that the researcher considers the nature of research as something going beyond the collection of data. Participatory ethics adopt a stance against academic neutrality (Cahill et al., 2007: 306). The same argument can be made regarding social workers' ethical obligation to bring about social change (8). Some researchers might feel that this objective lies beyond the scope of research and that excellence always trumps social impact. This dilemma, as well, is overcome by engaging in PAR which always aims to have an impact on the living conditions of research participants and the communities they belong to.

The last ethical building block, which prescribes that youth workers need to build resilience among youth (9), is, like some of the above, dependent on the researcher's epistemological (and personal-political) positions. Yet, it is also clear that building resilience requires an amount of time usually not available for researchers. As Liebenberg et al. (2019) write, resilience cannot be achieved without critically examining the conditions in which young people are involved in the research project. This is often not possible in tightly formatted research projects. Researchers taking the resilience of participants seriously need to be willing to (sometimes drastically) question and adapt the original work plan and its concurrent timetables.

Conclusion

From the above, we can conclude that the ethical core values of youth workers and the (funding) practices of research are not easily combinable. While some incompatibilities are overcome by adopting a committed and collaborative research design, other problems are not so easy to deal with. I will treat two of them here.

Firstly, some issues of incompatibility are related to the different ways in which research and social work are organised. There is a truth to Hanan's statement that 'researchers have a deontology and youth workers have a deontology and it is not the same, because we have other aims in our work'. Youth workers usually have a long-term perspective, which involves building trust with a gradually expanding (and fluid, ever-moving) group of young people. Researchers, on the contrary, usually are hired on successive, shorter-term projects and experience more difficulty in building a more permanent relationship with participants, associate partners and research themes. As a result, social workers may experience the

passage of researchers (even participatory researchers) as frustrating and hypocritical, with a relationship between researcher and youth worker that is potentially instrumentalising the latter. Yet, also within social work organisations, there is a certain turnover of personnel, which disturbs relationships of trust having been built up earlier. There is no objective reason why the temporary passage of a social worker should be viewed as ethically sounder than that of a researcher. Much will depend, in both cases, on the attitudes and ethical sensitivities of the person involved.

Secondly, social work ethics and research practice are also difficult to combine due to the organisation of research funding. Priority themes in research calls are usually 'hot topics' in the public debate. This can lead to – and this was certainly the case with 'radicalisation' – sites being 'inundated' by researchers for a certain period of time. Cathérine: 'already after Charlie Hebdo there were young people coming to talk to us saying "*again* we've had to talk about radicalisation and Islam the whole day"'. It happens just as often that, when the social agenda shifts to other themes, these 'inundated' sites are left abruptly, and former participants and associate partners are forgotten. However, we can also add that project funding in social work has developed in a very similar ways, with project calls focussing on 'hot topics' in the public debate and with funding increasingly dependent on projects rather than structural funding. For this reason, it is relevant to wonder whether youth work continues to truly 'work without an agenda'.

After the above reflections and insights, the question is no longer whether social work ethic and research practice are compatible (because certain problems and power hierarchies are unresolvable), but whether it makes sense to transfer ethical values of social work to research practice in the first place. Should such a transfer guarantee ethical research. It may be more sensible to partly set aside the basic ethical values of youth work and instead adopt ethical *research* principles or draft a layered ethical framework, one which guides physical interactions with young people (based on social work ethics) and one which guides the rest of the process, including analysis of data and dissemination (based on participatory action *research* ethics). After all, even in PAR the primary aim and finality of the research project lies in collecting data; to bring about social change, build resilience and have a (political) commitment are, arguably, important but still secondary aims.

With Lohmeyer (2019), we can argue that even if youth researchers develop and adopt a variety of techniques and principles to engage young people as research participants, 'some of the power asymmetries of participation might be unsolvable' (p. 39). To engage in participatory ethics does not necessarily imply adopting the professional ethics of gatekeepers, nor should it. Participatory ethics should signify that all the partners co-write an ethical framework, one which is sensible to all and one which is in line with the research practice (it does not make sense to promise ethical principles which one can not hold). This framework should contain both moral principles and practical arrangements and should be validated by the research participants if not, indeed, also written and negotiated by them.

Of course, reality is not black or white. Everything will depend on the negotiation between researchers and their partners and on the willingness of the involved actors to find a compromise in order to reconcile their ethical principles and practices in an equitable

manner. Yet, what I wanted to tease out in this paper is the fact that the positionality of a research can only be partly adapted by choosing a respectful and intensely collaborative research design. A researcher may work in the context of a youth club, shoulder to shoulder with social workers, but he or she will not suddenly become a social worker. In order for this collaboration to work, both parties may have to change their approach.

Now, are we to conclude that the exercise of building a research ethics framework on the basis of the deontology and ethical intuitions of youth workers has been a failure? Certainly not. Not only has this *démarche* led to the insight that such a framework needs to be built up from scratch, albeit in a collaborative manner. It has also yielded a valuable reflection which can be used by participatory researchers in the very early stages of a project. It shows how both groups have their own aims, practices and ethical framework and may bring about enhanced reciprocal understanding and empathy.

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Note

1. Four interviews were held in the beginning of the project. Ten additional interviews were done afterwards, in preparation of this paper.

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