

Thinking/writing within and outside the IRB box: Ethical disruptions of data in qualitative research

LJ Slovin, PhD Candidate, ljslovin@alumni.ubc.ca
The University of British Columbia

Paulina Semeneć, PhD Candidate, paulinas@alumni.ubc.ca
The University of British Columbia

Abstract

Prompted by shared discussions about our doctoral research, this paper focuses on two tensions we identified when applying to our university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The first tension relates to our discomfort with the assumptions about research participants as articulated in the IRB application. We detail how one of us sought to work with/in but also outside of the constraints we discuss. The second tension takes us into a more experimental space. We write 'outside' of the IRB boxes as a form of critique, but also as a way to produce more affirmative ways of thinking about what else can be thought and done within university IRB structures. We focus in particular on the ways that "data" is contained within IRB boxes. We conclude by offering some additional questions that this process of thinking/writing together have generated.

Key words: data, ethical research, experimentation, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), post-qualitative inquiry

Tense/beginnings

As early career scholars at different stages of our doctoral research, we are keenly aware of the necessity and importance of conducting work that is ethical. Moreover, we are aware of how our commitments to ethical research must be legibly articulated to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at our university. These boards were created to regulate scientific research and protect human subjects in the wake of a couple now infamous examples of experiments that provoked tremendous public outcry, such as the Tuskegee study in the United States (Metro, 2014; Swauger, 2009). In the United States and Canada, IRBs act in accordance with a generalized set of ethical principles which frequently rely on positivist and humanist assumptions about research, data, and researcher-participant relationships (Rivière, 2011; Swauger, 2009). Though positivism has been widely

critiqued, it remains the underlying philosophy informing research ethics (Halse & Honey, 2005, p. 2153). In this paper, we turn to post-qualitative inquiry as a generative space for thinking through and beyond the constraints of the IRBs approach to ethics.

In thinking together with/in the spaces of post-qualitative research and engaging in critical, feminist, queer, and decolonizing research, we experience a discordance between our intellectual and community-based commitments and the positivist elements we confronted while applying for ethical certification through the IRB. We note two specific tensions in this paper – the first is in regards to our feeling that the pervasive assumptions about research objectives and participants that are ensconced within the structure of the application and the wording of questions restricts the complexities of our onto-epistemologies and imposes discursive positionings onto our participants that we are actively working to resist through our studies. We explore this first point of tension by giving an example of how one of us (LJ) sought to work with/in but also outside of the IRB constraints. In particular, LJ delves into the application for their dissertation research with gender nonconforming youth in high schools and highlights moments of disruption and the process of navigating the dissension between their ethical commitments and the requirements of the IRB application.

The second tension we discuss (and experiment with) is in regards to the ways in which the positivist lens of IRB applications stultifies the animacy of data by requiring scholars to explicate their research as if data were a knowable, consumable entity. Articulating study elements such as research questions, interview guides, and procedural steps into the application becomes a form of a contract - a commitment to then producing corresponding data, which limits the flexibility and creativity of the scholar (Swauger, 2009). This format is challenging both because it predetermines our data and because it forces us to write about and conceptualize our research in terms that are legible and knowable to a review committee that is (more often than not) situated in conventional, humanist approaches - approaches which may not be amenable to research that does not adhere to these logics. Scholars are tasked with enumerating the qualities of their data while establishing its parameters, in an attempt to contain the potential for risk and harm. This view understands data as inanimate and collectible. We suggest that the act of rendering data as knowable during this process may restrict scholars' future relationships to the project by predisposing certain ideas about the data, including what "counts" as data and when in a study a researcher is interacting with data. We address this tension and concern by experimenting with writing outside of the IRB boxes. We do so not only as a form of critique, but also to produce different, more affirmative ways of thinking and doing something new (see also Gunnarsson & Hohti, 2018). The final section of this paper provides some additional questions and lines of inquiry that writing and thinking together about the IRB process has produced.

Thinking with(in) and against IRBs

Institutional Review Boards have been critiqued for privileging quantitative and positivist research over qualitative work as well as for delimiting a specific ethical perspective (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2007; Metro, 2014; Swauger, 2009). In particular IRBs pose challenges for researchers who are attempting to move away from (let alone actively disrupt) conventional research methods (Bhattacharya, 2007). Writing from a Canadian context, Rivière (2011) explains that the guidelines regulating the review process "[do] not fully acknowledge the paradoxical and contradictory nature of research...As such, these guidelines [fail] to fully engage critical, qualitative researchers in an exploration of the ethical entanglements in which they would find themselves..." (p. 197–198). This critique echoes Lincoln & Tierney's (2004) earlier argument that, specifically within the field of education, the IRBs' stance towards qualitative research has a negative impact on early career researchers. They note that researchers "trained in alternative epistemologies and research methods, will find their inquiries rejected before they even begin careers in educational research" (p.

223). This unbalanced approach has ethical implications considering what type of research is recognized as valid and thus gets passed through with ease and reproduced in the academy as valuable and what research gets stalled and may never move forward. Moreover, the reliance on rigid, predetermined understandings of ethics facilitates the confusion “between ‘ethics’ as a noun (i.e. a process for ‘ethics’ review), and ‘ethical’ as an adjective (i.e. a research review process that is ‘ethical’)” (Rivière, 2011, p. 195). We are critical of the ways in which ethics is currently being framed within qualitative research in education.

Furthermore, the positivist structure of IRB applications neglects the ways in which researchers, through being ethically accountable to their participants and communities, may have to adapt their projects in response to shifting relationships, needs, and contexts over the course of a study (Bhattacharya, 2007). Bhattacharya (2007) shared the story of her increasingly enmeshed role in a participant’s life and the complexity of the multiple types of responsibilities that connect researchers to participants. In that example, Bhattacharya’s ethics transcended the format of an IRB application, spilling out from the tidy boxes into the lived entanglement. Even though our commitment to our participants and onto-epistemologies may conflict with the positivist framework of the applications, we are pressed to draw on more conventional language and concepts that facilitate legibility for the review committees.

As scholars who work with children and youth, we are each familiar with the task of explicating our research in language that can fit into prescribed categories of understanding. We are often confronted with the task of discussing our participants within discourses that we seek to intentionally disrupt through our research. For instance, one of us works with gender nonconforming youth in schools. Gender nonconforming youth disrupt dominant understandings of gender by performing their genders outside of and/or in rejection of a cisheteronormative system (Meyer & Pullen Sansfacon, 2014, p. 5). Analyzing cisheteronormativity underscores how a system of binary gender is inextricable from heterosexuality since the latter is naturalized through the establishment of two discrete genders that are formed in opposition to each other and linked through their sexual, romantic desire (Butler, 1990, p. 31). From the mainstream media to scholarship in education, gender nonconforming young people are consistently constructed as vulnerable and “at-risk” (Airton, 2013; Gilbert, 2014; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Pritchard, 2013; Talburt, 2004). Gender nonconforming students are highlighted as the “problems” in schools, rather than the system of cisheteronormativity (Loutzenheiser, 2015; Woolley, 2015). The IRB application likewise locates risk within individual bodies and special populations. The application reifies the view of gender nonconforming youth as “at-risk” by demanding heightened standards for research that involves them and, notably, requiring consent for their participation from parents/guardians. Categorizing studies according to a “risk matrix” that understands youth, and especially gender nonconforming youth, as particularly vulnerable, reproduces destructive discourses regarding young people (Swauger, 2009; Wilson and Neville, 2009).

Informed by thinking with post-qualitative scholarship, one of us (LJ) endeavoured to re-conceptualize notions of risk, consent, and the researcher-participant relationship in the IRB application by signaling an awareness of their role in participants’ safety while also articulating a divergent perspective on harm and ethical accountability. More specifically, LJ challenged the predominant designation of gender nonconforming youth as a higher risk population, petitioned for a waiver of parent/guardian consent, and positioned themselves as both a researcher and youth worker. In the following section, we provide an example of how LJ navigated this terrain in order to show not only the tensions evident in the IRB process, but also how we can re-imagine working with these tensions.

Working with/in and re-imagining the IRB process: An example with gender non-conforming youth

In an attempt to respond to the application's approach to risk, I (LJ) noted how even though the participants in my study are considered to be from "vulnerable populations", the project still qualifies as Minimal Risk because the possible "harms" associated with involvement in the study are no greater than those faced by the participants in their everyday life. My intention was to assert that the participants are not in fact more vulnerable than other youth, even though the risk matrix would classify these participants at an increased risk. I both acknowledged the function of the matrix as well as rejected the tidiness of that framework. By insisting that a project based around the lives of gender nonconforming youth is Minimal Risk, I refused to understand the students' relationship to harm and violence through the IRBs prescribed structure. The review committee agreed, and my application moved forward as Minimal Risk. Though this section of the application was still mired in the language of risk, there were subtle shifts in the way risk was theorized, for I consistently disrupted the pervasive perspective that risk is an individual attribute possessed by a young person.

The IRB in Canada requires parent/guardian consent for youth participants who are eighteen years of age and under. Scholars have critiqued the IRBs' processes of consent for its lack of cultural competency (Metro, 2014), the way it stultifies researcher-participant roles (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2007), its reductionist approach to harms and risk (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2007), and, as is particularly relevant in this article, for the ways it positions children and youth as in need of adult protection (Swauger, 2009). I concur with Swauger (2009) who explains, "the IRBs protective nature enacts a consent process that assumes adults can and must speak for children" (p. 76). The act of requiring young people to ask their parents/guardians for permission to join a study can adversely colour their relationship to the researcher and the project.

Challenging IRB protocol is itself a "risky" act. Metro (2014) describes her process of becoming what Jack Katz (2006) refers to as an "IRB outlaw", explaining that she chose to forgo transparency with her university's IRB out of fear of the repercussions. Metro (2014) notes that had she presented an argument explaining why consent forms were not appropriate for her project it is possible the review board would have agreed. Asking youth to obtain signed permission from their parents/guardians in order to participate in my own study runs counter to the political, ethical, and theoretical foundations and intentions of the project. Therefore, in my IRB application I requested a waiver of parent/guardian consent to allow youth starting at fourteen years old to enter themselves into the study, arguing that requiring young people who may have difficult relationships with their legal families to get consent may actually endanger them. This request complicates the assumption that families, whom are identified by the IRB to be protectors of youth, are inherently safe. Not only was my waiver approved by the IRB and subsequently by the local school board's ethical review committee, but this element of my project has been a celebrated point by the youth workers and school counselors who were among my first contacts in the high schools that are my field sites. Furthermore, the reconceptualization of the family as a site of safety in the IRB application invites a further interrogation of the stability of the concepts of harm, safety, and consent in the study.

However, not all of my attempts to interrupt the positivist framework of the IRBs were approved by the review committee as smoothly. Since my academic work reflects and builds on the learning inspired by my time as a sexual health educator and youth worker, in my application I discussed my intention to approach my dissertation research in high schools as a researcher as well as a former youth worker. This positioning was interwoven throughout my proposal and surfaced explicitly in response to a number of specific questions. For instance, in discussing recruitment I began by explaining:

Many gender nonconforming youth, who are unable to find adult mentors in their schools that reflect and understand their gender identities, seek out these adults

elsewhere. As a gender nonconforming adult and former youth worker, the co-investigator has the experience to be this mentor.

This section was highlighted as a problem when I received provisos from the review committee. In blurring what are meant to be the distinct roles of researcher and youth worker, I had signaled a potential liability issue to my university's IRB. I could not be both a mentor and a researcher to these young people. In fact, the term "mentor" was specifically noted as an ethical issue of my study.

I am compelled to ethnographic research in high schools with gender nonconforming youth in part because of my experiences as a youth worker. In response to the IRBs ethical concerns of my dual role, I enumerated the meaning of a mentor and the importance of gender nonconforming youth to have the opportunity to form relationships with other members of their community. I explained:

...the co-investigator will fully and deliberately explain the parameters of their role during the first meeting with the students and reiterate as necessary throughout the course of the study, especially whenever the boundaries of the role are in question. The co-investigator will explain to the students that they are present as a researcher and what they are researching in this study. They will also explain that, given their background in youth work and experience as a gender nonconforming person, it is important to them that the research be experienced as meaningful and beneficial for the youth who participate. Therefore, the co-investigator aims to be present in the school in a way that is positive and affirming for the students. The co-investigator will work with the students to best understand what that may mean for them and be responsive over the course of the study to their feedback.

I addressed their concerns for the safety of the young people while also conveying the importance of a dual role in the ethnography. In explicating, I worked to allay their fears that I would portray myself as a counselor to the participants; however, I remained committed to the position of a mentor. My intention was to reimagine the type of relationship a researcher can desire to cultivate with youth over the course of a year. Furthermore, I argue that it is more ethical and accountable to understand my relationship to these young people through the lens of a researcher *and* mentor than to attempt to maintain a strict researcher role.

Post-qualitative inquiry creates the possibility of an approach to research that does not invest in fixed conceptualizations of the relationships between researchers and participants. For those of us who do research with gender nonconforming youth, who are already perceived as blurring the lines of gender and sexuality, these alternative ways of (un)knowing static approaches to an ethical role in the field provokes exciting possibilities for thinking and researching differently.

Re-imagining and re-animating data in the IRB (over coffee)

Our inquiry in this paper is informed by shared conversations in a local coffee shop, where we met often to discuss our research – particularly the various struggles we have each faced in regards to gaining access to the "field". While we are at different stages in the research process, we shared a sense of frustration over the IRB process, and the ways we were made to feel "boxed in" when it came to writing about what counts as "data" in our research. Our discussions about our institution's IRB process became more animated as we began to think and play with/in the spaces of post-qualitative inquiry; a theoretical and methodological space we both find generative for our own research practices. Our conversations moved from what "is" (current IRB process), to what might be instead. We wondered – could thinking and playing with/in the "posts" shed new light on what the IRB was about? While we do not wish to diminish the importance of doing ethical research (as we have already stated earlier), we began to notice the various ways in which the IRB process worked to appease a very positivist, neo-liberal logic; one in which certainty about what the research was and

could become, was paramount. This unsettled us. How could we know in advance what the research would produce? How could we say in advance what “data” would be generated? How could we account for the unforeseen, fleeting, and animate data that resists representation and thus knowing? These questions revitalized us because they made thinking something new possible. Our chats over coffee morphed into a collaborative writing exercise, where we began to explore the edges of the IRB process. While playful at first, this writing outside of the IRB boxes allowed us to take seriously the often problematic assumptions made about qualitative research and data in IRB applications more specifically.

The rest of this article is structured in a way that allows us to speak back/to the constrained “box” format of the IRB application. Additionally, we weave a discussion on the ways that post-qualitative inquiry facilitates a reimagining of data, including the researcher’s relationship to data throughout this writing experiment. Writing in this way has allowed us to experiment with ideas about data and to confront the challenges we experience in both demonstrating the ethics of our projects to a review committee as well as remaining ethically accountable to our research participants and communities. Through exceeding the bounds of the IRB format and writing our contradictions into, over, and through the IRB application, we have attempted to illustrate the multiple tensions we experience by participating in this phase of our doctoral programs. In the end, we are left with more questions - questions that our understandings of ethical accountability require we grapple with as we continue to do/think/write our research differently. We outline some of these in the conclusion of this paper, in order to consider some possible ways forward.

Writing outside of the IRB boxes

I knew immediately what this question wanted of me. This fill-in box was my opportunity to gesture toward the ‘ideal’ academic. Though I may never look the part, I know what that role means.

	<p><i>I did write down everything I thought would “count” or seem important here – past research done in schools, my Master’s degree, courses I’ve taken that relate to this current study...you know, to prove my worthiness to conduct research.</i></p>
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<p>Researcher qualifications: Who will actually conduct the study and what are their qualifications to conduct this kind of research? (e.g., describe relevant training, experience, degrees, and/or courses).</p> <p><i>Yeah, trade in your classes, training, workshops, past projects, research assistantships, and fellowships here for proof of ethical readiness.</i></p>	
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Was the data present before the researcher?

When do we start being responsible to/for it?

What are the boundaries of data?

Can data be contained?

<p>Access to data: Who will have access to the data (e.g., co-investigators, students or translators)? How will all of those who have access to the data be made aware of their responsibilities concerning privacy and confidentiality issues?</p>	<p><i>Does data flow?</i></p> <p><i>Sink?</i></p> <p><i>Breathe?</i></p> <p><i>Where can it travel?</i></p> <p><i>Where does data start?</i></p> <p><i>Where does it end?</i></p>
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What happens to data in the process of containing it?

[Post qualitative scholars are reimagining data. St. Pierre (2000) argues that qualitative methodologies have remained limited by humanist philosophy because they are either explicitly informed by its essentialist notions or constrained by responding to them. However, in the turn to post qualitative inquiry, scholars are intentionally dismantling these foundational elements, for instance, by disrupting humanist underpinnings in approaches to voice (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012), interviews (White & Drew, 2011), and coding (Childers, 2014; Alecia Youngblood Jackson, 2013). Post-qualitative inquiry embraces not only the (ongoing) deconstruction of these elements of qualitative methodology but especially the intellectual space this work creates for thinking, writing, and researching differently (Bhattacharya, 2013; Lather, 2013; Mazzei, 2007; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; St. Pierre, 2011).]

Retention and Destruction of Data: UBC policy requires that data be kept for at least 5 years within a UBC facility. If you intend to destroy the data at the end of the storage period describe how this will be done to ensure confidentiality (e.g., tapes should be demagnetized [OUTDAT(A)ED], paper copies shredded). UBC has no explicit requirement for shredding of data at the end of this period and it may be kept indefinitely. Please note that the responsibility for the security of the data rests with the Principal Investigator.

What does it mean to “destroy” data? Can this ever be done? And does experimenting with data also imply a kind of destruction?

Data follows us around, haunts us, occupies our dreams. How to “store” it? Means we can keep ourselves separate from it.

*Data sure needs to be **secure**. I used this word 3 times in my response.*

If I remember my data, should I stay locked in a cabinet for 5 years? [Asking for a friend.]

Someone once asked me if I thought “experimenting” with data was “honest” – their main concern was that in doing something different with one’s data, it would become less authentic. This kind of orientation towards data is a result of the ways in which we are trained to think about certain concepts in qualitative research. It seems that even graduate students (like IRBs) are caught up in thinking about data (and what can be done to/with it) in limited ways.

<p>Future Use of Data. Are there any plans for future use of either data or audio/video recordings? Provide details, including who will have access and for what purposes, below.</p>	<p>...</p>
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Hell yes, future use. How could data have an expiry date?

Who can even tell the future? Data continues into the future. If data is animate, do we know its future?

We grow as scholars and we recreate relationships to older data. Should we amend our ethics application to revise our thinking regarding 'old' data? The idea of revisiting data many years later - is this ethical? Even if data has been "destroyed"?

[A salient intention of post qualitative inquiry is to think with theory (Childers, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lather, 2013; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; St. Pierre, 2011). By thinking with theory, this onto-methodological approach de-emphasizes assured knowledge and invites uncertainty and novel forms of creativity into qualitative research (Childers, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lather, 2013; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; St. Pierre, 2011). Through resisting certainty, scholars not only expose how qualitative research is a human creation but also the ways that the quest for 'truth' remains enmeshed in conventional methodologies, for instance through projects that code for validity (St. Pierre, 2011). Scholars highlight the importance of a shift away from assuredness by instead theorizing knowledge as becoming (Ringrose & Renold, 2010), arguing against clarity (St. Pierre, 2000), "getting lost" (Lather, 2013), and generally esteeming incoherence, instability, and uncertainty (Lather, 2013; MacLure, 2013; McCoy, 2012; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; Pearce, 2013). To think with theory, then, is to move away from the textbook style instruction of qualitative methods and insistence on the superiority of coding (Ringrose & Renold, 2010; St. Pierre, 2011; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). This move away from "methods" invites scholars to envision research as a "journey" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 3) as opposed to a linear progression in which if we follow the "correct" steps the outcome will be a successful, data rich, and "rigorous dissertation.]

<p>Inclusion Criteria. Describe the participants being selected for this study, and list the criteria for their inclusion.</p>	<p><i>What about non-human participants? St. Pierre (2017) asks: “How would one write an IRB proposal for a posthuman study or for a study that assumes human being is not prior to the world but always already entangled in it?” (p 45).</i></p> <p>We wonder this too, and take this question seriously. The non-human participants (can we call them this?) in our studies enliven relationships, produce affects, curiosity, risk. If we speak of the non-human as also participating, how might this impact the ethical dimensions of (post)qualitative research in education?</p>
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Participants also select whether or not they are selected. I cannot control my study to the extent you would like me to.

*[Whereas “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2011) tends toward research design, methods, and writing practices that cohere data into fixed meanings, post qualitative inquiry opens up to the ‘animacy’ of data (MacLure, 2013). In this move away from stable and knowable researcher-data relationships, scholars transform what “counts” as data. Notions about data (and all that follows it: coding, analysis, writing) are being expanded upon and re-imagined to include dreams, the elements, silence, darkness, non-human others (as well as **not** coding data) ...and... and... and... (see: Rautio & Vladimirova, 2017; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014; Andersen et al. 2017; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014; Augustine, 2014). MacLure (2013) encourages scholars to recognize this animacy as wonder and follow its glow, explaining: “These moments confound the industrious, mechanical search for meanings, patterns, codes, or themes; but at the same time, they exert a kind of fascination, and have a capacity to animate further thought” (p. 228). MacLure (2013) theorizes wonder as liminally positioned between unknowing and knowing – an amenable context for inviting thinking that challenges conventional notions of coherence and disrupts a humanist framing of the researcher’s relationship to data.]*

<p>Exclusion Criteria. Describe which participants will be excluded from participation, if any, and list the criteria for their exclusion.</p> <p><u>Word bank:</u></p> <p><i>Relationships</i></p> <p><i>The study</i></p> <p><i>I</i></p> <p><i>Not</i></p> <p><i>Exclude</i></p>	<p><i>In an ethnography, what does it mean to _____ something? When should ___ consider the start of the project? What types of other _____ and interactions that are technically ____ part of the project (outside of the school, for instance, or with adults) end up informing my approach to _____ and my thinking. Am I excluding that thinking? How could I?</i></p>
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<p>Risks: Describe what is known about the risks of the proposed research for participants.</p>	<p>Loutzenheiser (2015), discussing school policies in British Columbia that are aimed at addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender, and Two-Spirit youth, argues:</p> <p>“Youth who are perceived as ‘at-risk’ are already a problem because of their threat to dropout, fail and/or engage in dangerous behaviors. The categorization of ‘at-risk’ presumes a body in need of protection or altering...embedded within notions of at-risk is a construction of the youth as the problem” (p. 107).</p> <p><i>The youth are not the problem. This study is not the root of risk.</i></p>
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A way(s) forward

Like many scholars who think with post-qualitative research, we are not “willing to give up, surrender, or replace labels such as data, qualitative, subjectivity, and data analysis quite yet” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 2; also Koro-Ljungberg, Tyonnen & Tesar, 2017). We need these concepts to think against the limits they provide and in order to think research otherwise (Lather, 2013). While at times constraining, these concepts continue to work for us in different ways - ways that we continuously attempt to reimagine in our work. “Data” in particular, continues to be a productive concept for us to think with. Thinking with this concept has enabled the two of us to have generative conversations about the limits that are often placed on writing/thinking/doing research differently, and about the ways in which ideas about “data” with IRBs often push us into boxes we do not want to (and cannot) fit into. Moreover, and in relation to our first tension in this paper, we join with Rivière (2011) in imagining an ethics review process that no longer requires researchers to force their projects into a pre-existing ethical framework and instead privileges being ethical. We also advocate for:

research ethics review process to support researchers differently as they reflect on the ethical dilemmas, tensions and issues that are specific to the nature and context of research they are conducting, by deliberately troubling their assumed understandings of “informed consent”, instead of expecting them to twist, bend, and otherwise reshape their research such that it conforms to an a priori set of definitions” (Rivière, 2011, p. 203).

This thinking/writing within and outside of the IRB boxes has not only allowed us to “speak back” in a sense, to the constraining process of applying for research access, but has also moved us to consider what else “might be”. In line with St. Pierre’s (2017) questioning around the privileging of the human in IRBs for example, we continue to wonder how reimagining the “ethics” of the IRBs might address the ways participants are already positioned differently in relationship to humanness without relying on discourses of risk? How might the wording of questions and the assumptions within the IRB format invite research that disrupts the very concepts of research? Could the language framed around “participants” enable researchers to feel better supported to do work that so often falls outside of neoliberal logics and moves towards bigger and bigger “data”?

At this moment, we are grappling with our desire to think with theory while recognizing the ways in which we are concurrently bound by the concepts of the human subject and data as a commodity to be known, collected, mined for information, and distributed. Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2017) suggest, now is “the time to problematize simplified understandings and controllable conceptualizations of ‘data’ as known, familiar, and inert objects often produced and governed within neoliberal discourses and practices and always already positioned as controllable and evidence-based” (p. 63). Perhaps thinking and writing with/in these tensions (together and with others) is a starting place for doing/thinking research (still yet to come) otherwise?

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