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Under the Microscope: Shifting Perspectives on an Ethics Case in Participatory Health Research in a German Care Home

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ABSTRACT

This article starts from an academic researcher's written ethics case drawn from a participatory action research project in a residential care home for older people in Germany. The case contains an implicit dilemma for the academic researcher about whether to intervene to protect a resident giving a talk from perceived discomfort and humiliation in front of her peers. The case was discussed and acted out at several meetings of the ethics working group of the International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research. This article comprises: two commentaries on the case from micro and macro perspectives; the case author's further reflections and reframing of the situation as less about protection and more about resident-determined empowerment following the discovery and transcription of an audio-recording; and discussion of the value of multiple perspectives and iterative dialogue in enabling in-depth and new understandings of the ethical nuances of everyday interactions. This article demonstrates the value of the 'ethics co-laboratory' process adopted in the ethics working group as a method of deepening researchers' ethical sensitivity and extending their ethical competence.

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Introduction

This article offers an in-depth analysis of an account of a situation faced by an academic researcher working on a participatory action research project in a care home for older people in Germany. It draws on the work of some of the members of the Ethics Working Group of the International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research. For several years, the group has met online to share experiences and ideas about ethical issues in participatory research in the health and social care field. One of our approaches

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is for a member to present an account of a situation or incident that was or is ethically challenging (an ‘ethics case’) usually written and circulated in advance for the group to discuss. Several of the cases have been written up for publication accompanied by commentaries from members of the group (see Banks and von Köppen 2021; Narayanan et al. 2023; Tayebi et al. 2023).

This article is based on a case presented by Marilena von Köppen, which was discussed in the group on several occasions and raised particularly interesting issues as the ‘case’ developed and changed over time, when more information was discovered about the situation (an audio-recording) in addition to Marilena’s notes and memories. This prompted us not only to reflect on the substantive ethical issues raised by the case about the power, responsibilities and parentalism of academic researchers, conceptions of ‘vulnerability’ and autonomy of older people, but also to consider the construction and framing of the case, the perspectives of multiple actors and the role of memory. The case became multi-layered as materials from the audio transcript both clashed with and amplified the case as first written, feeding into the already multi-faceted insights that surfaced in the group discussions. All the article’s authors were at the meetings, with several other group members also present and contributing to the discussions.

This article begins with the case as originally written by Marilena von Köppen (see Section I). In Section II, Sarah Banks offers brief reflections on the format of the case and an account of our initial discussion after the case was acted out by group members in the first meeting. She then summarises the second meeting, when Marilena gave an account of what she did in the situation and revealed that she had found an audio-recording, which shed a different light on what happened. Sections III and IV comprise reflective commentaries from two pairs of group members focusing on the original case, while acknowledging their changing perceptions following the second meeting. Maree Higgins and Jess Drinkwater explore the micro-ethical aspects of Marilena’s dilemma and the relationships within the research project, while Pinky Shabangu and Michelle Brear consider macro-ethical issues of power structures and agency. In Section V, Marilena offers an account written after she had found, listened to and transcribed the audio-recording, detailing what the recording shows about what happened and reflecting on her actions at the time. In Section VI, Sarah Banks discusses the role of ethical framing and moral perception, the importance of multiple perspectives and taking time to engage in ‘slow ethics’ in professional life.

I. Mrs. Bock and the trip to Egypt: part 1, the dilemma as remembered

Marilena von Köppen

Introduction

This case study is taken from a participatory research project ‘Partizipation in der stationären Altenpflege’ (PaStA) [Participation in Care Homes] conducted in Fulda, Germany, in two nursing homes during 2017–2020. I was the University-based researcher on site in the nursing homes as part of a project team led by two academics at University of Applied Sciences Fulda. The project was designed as participatory action research, with the aim of investigating possibilities for care home residents to participate in shaping their everyday lives. We sought to initiate group processes that promoted participation and

co-determination in ways that contributed to well-being and quality of life (and thus also to health).

After relevant ethics committee approval, the project began with me interning in one of the care homes for several weeks. Then followed an 8-month action phase, in which a project group of interested residents planned and carried out a participation project together with me. The subject of this project was the organisation of 'trips' in the nursing home. The idea arose when the group members realised that the nursing home residents often did not know each other very well. With the help of 'trips' to the different living areas in the home, the fellow travellers (i.e. residents) were supposed to get in touch with each other and to be less afraid of moving around in the home. In the situation, I will now describe the research relationships between one resident, Mrs. Bock (name changed), and the other participants in the project will be discussed.

The case: Mrs. Bock and the trip to Egypt – whether and when to intervene in action research with nursing home residents

Mrs. Bock is an 87-year-old nursing home resident and a member of the project group. She has severe hearing loss and speaks very softly. Since there are several other participants who actively contribute and dominate the discussions, Ms. Bock finds it difficult to speak up during project meetings. Most of the time, she only begins to speak when someone alerts the group that she has something to say. As a result, Ms. Bock is hardly visible during the first 6 months of the project.

At the sixth group meeting, there is a general sense of exhaustion. We have already organised three 'trips' which were very successful and intense. Now many members of the project team are sick with a seasonal virus and seem tired. So the meeting starts in a rather subdued mood. Then, suddenly, Mrs. Bock intervenes. She proposes to organise a trip with a rather special concept that she had thought of. During the trip, she wants to present pottery figures she has made herself with motifs from ancient Egypt (e.g. the head of a pharaoh or a woman brewing beer). She also wants to read out corresponding stories about the time of Tutankhamun to the residents. The project team (including me) is very surprised by this unexpected initiative, but soon we are happy to go along with it.

This proposal for a 'trip to Egypt' changes Mrs. Bock's position in relation to the group considerably. She makes it clear for the first time that she not only wants to be part of the project team but also wants to play an active role. Due to her initiative, the project team builds up new energy: with the help of a care worker, the trip is planned. However, I am a little concerned about the soft voice of Mrs. Bock. When I express this, a group member agrees to organise a microphone. In the further preparations, I hold back and trust that the group has a good grip on their 'trip'. They already had experience from organising the first three activities and seem confident. Myself, I'm rather content: obviously, the project has succeeded in empowering Mrs. Bock to use her voice and expand her agency despite her physical limitations. What a success story!

Finally, the trip to Egypt takes place. The event attracts a large number of interested home residents. The pottery figures displayed in a showcase are looked at attentively and there is a mood of expectation. After a short opening, Mrs. Bock begins to read out some information about Egyptian gods. She is excited and uneasy because she is not experienced in speaking in front of large groups. She does not handle the microphone properly and is reading out dense Wikipedia texts on ancient gods, which are not very

suitable for reading aloud. So the lecture drags on. Mrs. Bock is hardly understandable. The audience starts to talk and stops listening. I feel that I am getting more and more troubled inside. Should I intervene and try to fix the situation? What responsibilities do I have? Does Mrs. Bock need 'protection'? How can I support her without shutting her down?

II. Exploring the case

Sarah Banks

Performing the incident

Marilena had offered to present a case at a meeting of the ethics working group. She had written and circulated the case in advance, based on her research notebook and memory of a situation that had happened 4 years ago. She framed it as a classic 'ethics case' suitable for group discussion in that she had highlighted an ethical quandary in the title (whether and when she should intervene) and had left the ending open (she did not say what she did). She guided the readers with several questions including: 'Should I intervene ...?' and 'What responsibilities do I have?'

The case as written in Section I embodies an implicit ethical dilemma: either Marilena does nothing, and hence fails to support Mrs. Bock; or she intervenes and this will 'shut her down'. This framing of the case draws readers into a micro-ethical analysis (concerned with the ethical decisions, judgements, attitudes and bodily movements of individuals), with the background information about the care home and the research project serving as context. It also draws us into a particular type of micro-ethical discussion, namely the decision-point from the perspective of the author of the case.

I suggested we might try acting out the case, with group members taking various roles, along the lines of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (Banks, Rifkin et al. 2014; Boal 2000; 2002). Marilena and the group agreed and at the meeting (held on Zoom) Marilena briefed members and people took on the roles of Mrs. Bock, the care worker, Marilena and residents. Marilena told us she was standing at the edge of the room, while Mrs. Bock was in the centre with a display cabinet of her figurines beside her. The care worker was standing next to Mrs. Bock. There are obvious limitations to the use of Zoom, particularly the lack of positioning in a room, one-to-one eye contact and visibility and use of people's whole bodies. Nevertheless the 'performance' served a purpose in opening up discussion about feelings and emotions. The constraints of Zoom intensified the feeling of chaos, with those playing the residents talking over the person playing Mrs. Bock, as they chatted about looking forward to tea and biscuits after the talk. The people playing Mrs. Bock's care worker and Marilena reported feeling powerless to intervene.

The group then discussed key issues raised by the case, including the micro-ethics of particular situations and relationships, and the dilemmas faced by academic researchers in participatory research, including parentalism versus group/individual autonomy. These themes are elaborated upon in Commentary 1 in Section III.

What happened next?

It was decided to discuss the case again at the next meeting. Issues relating to Marilena's isolation, the extent to which academic researchers should intervene and what to do if community members are not familiar with participation were among the issues raised.

The discussion then became very interesting when we moved beyond the case as written and asked Marilena what happened next in this situation. Marilena said she decided to intervene, going up to Mrs. Bock, standing by her side, and in a pause saying 'let's stop now and have some tea'. Marilena said 'I wrapped the situation up – I sort of cut her off'. Marilena said she had made a recording of the session, but thought it was corrupted. In preparing for this meeting, she had found the recording and checked it and some parts were still intact. Listening to the recording she realised that she had been mistaken about the subject of Mrs. Bock's talk. She had thought it was just about Egyptian gods based on Wikipedia. But Mrs. Bock had actually chosen to talk about a goddess and female Egyptians. She was interested in women taking power. Marilena said: 'I had missed this point totally'. Mrs. Bock was speaking about something close to her heart. She herself had only developed independence after her husband had died.

When Marilena spoke with Mrs. Bock after tea, and thanked her, it was clear it was an important moment for Mrs. Bock to present her figurines to other people and talk about them. In the past, the medical doctor had asked if she wanted to do an exhibition of her figurines, and she had not done it, until now. The care worker said Mrs. Bock should have been trained in the use of the microphone.

This new information raised many additional issues for the group to discuss about variations in different people's perceptions and framing of events, the fallibility of memory, as well as encouraging us to look at the substantive issues raised about vulnerability, support and power in a new light.

III. Reflective commentary 1: micro-ethical issues of parentalism, benefit and reflexivity

Maree Higgins and Jess Drinkwater

This reflection focuses on micro-ethics within Marilena's case. We elaborate on three themes: parentalism, benefit and reflexivity in action.

The most common form of parentalism (the gender-neutral term for what is commonly called 'paternalism') in participatory research is for academic or other professional researchers to assume responsibility to determine what is best for community-based researchers and other research participants (Partridge 2022). This was evident in our initial group reflections on Marilena's case, where the desire to 'care for' Mrs. Bock, or fix the situation, was uppermost in many of our minds (e.g. suggesting practical fixes such as microphone training). These assumptions, although not explicitly elaborated, were not questioned by the group, implying there was a superior understanding or solution to the case. A feature of parentalistic thinking is exerting *power over* rather than *power with* people (Groot and Abma 2019). Closely related is the conviction that some people know what is best for others (Woodill and Willi 2006, 25). These convictions can manifest in errors of judgement, for example, being overbearing and prioritising group benefit over individual benefit, or assuming a controlling stance where responses from specific options are limited. Our group identified elements of this in Marilena's individual intervention when faced with the awkward reality of Mrs. Bock's limitations as a 'tour guide'. However, we also saw it amplified in our group's acceptance of the 'truth' of Marilena's narrative. These stances were only decentred by the rediscovery of the

audio-recordings some time after the case was first presented. A focus on micro-ethics thus revealed everyday interactions in which power-sharing and collaboration were compromised by parentalism, despite (or perhaps because of) good intentions.

Good intentions are often aimed at meeting the principle of beneficence. At the micro-level, this means ensuring that everyday actions genuinely benefit all participants (Banks et al. 2013). Importantly, this necessitates meticulous consideration of who benefits *and who might be excluded* (Banks et al. 2013). In Mrs. Bock's case, our initial group discussion focused on the researchers' perspectives (both Marilena's and others participating in the case analysis) of beneficence. In considering Mrs. Bock's presentation, we assumed a traditional logic of the audience benefiting from the performance, and the actor (Mrs. Bock) benefiting from the glory of an excellent performance or being harmed if the performance feedback was not good. Assumptions were made about the aims and expectations of both the audience and Mrs. Bock. However, these assumptions quickly dissipated when we commentators acted out the case, role-playing Mrs. Bock's carer and an audience member respectively. Even with a limited back-story, we perceived that neither character was motivated by the success or not of the performance. Yet despite this, our group discussion still focused on fixing these issues, which persisted until the transcript was found.

From Marilena's summary and the transcript of the audio-recording, it appeared that Mrs. Bock benefitted significantly from participating, with clear indicators such as her preparation, persistence and her composed demeanour during the performance. These factors suggested she was not harmed by the experience. We acknowledge that potential longer-term harms, such as reputational damage or deteriorating community relationships, may exist. However, the experience from the audience role play suggested indifference rather than frustration or anger, and this potential audience misbehaviour did not appear to affect Mrs. Bock directly. In terms of broader benefit, other residents may have missed out on this significant performance due to poor sound. Through iterative group reflexive debriefs, we identified persistent limitations to how we conceptualised risk and benefit to Mrs. Bock, her peers, others present, and Marilena. As a group we benefitted from Sarah's continuous facilitation of reflection, emerging with a renewed attention to the micro-dynamics of interpersonal processes and the underlying values potentially influencing our convictions regarding Marilena's case presentation.

Finally, mutual trust, which underpins participatory research, necessitates a high level of relational reflexive work to avoid parentalistic assumptions and the inhibition of unanticipated benefits (Groot, Haveman, and Abma 2022). Attending to micro-ethics through role play highlighted the importance of giving voice to potential harms and benefits from multiple perspectives. Responding adaptively and responsively in real time to address emerging issues both promptly and effectively is much harder. It requires a relational stance, characterised by flexibility and responsiveness, and broad rather than just individual reflection.

IV. Reflective commentary 2: macro-ethical issues of structural power, participation and agency

Pinky Shabangu and Michelle Brear

In participatory research, supporting the agency of community-based researchers and other participants is a cross-cutting aim. Yet it is inherently challenging to achieve and

sometimes at odds with academic researchers' desires and responsibilities to protect community researchers and participants (Spiel et al. 2018). Marilena's experience of Mrs. Bock's 'trip to Egypt' provides a good illustration of the challenges in creating safe participatory structures that support agency. It also illustrates the value and limitations of reflecting *in action*, as well as reflecting *on actions* involving micro-ethical dilemmas (Ferguson 2018). These are situations in which the best course of action that will optimally enable agency in a particular context is uncertain.

Power structures affect the way that people engage in participatory research, for example whether or not they exert their agency by voicing their ideas and opinions (Brear 2020). Academic co-researchers have power due to education, age, class and other differences, and often also due to their position as leaders of a participatory research project. They ideally use their power to work towards the 'empowerment' of community co-researchers.

Marilena used her power by creating a structure in which Mrs. Bock and other older residents could engage in meaningful everyday activities, which, following Frank, Baum, and Law (2010), we conceptualise as performing 'occupation'. Key to this conceptualisation is that an occupation may be any activity that occupies and gives a person a sense of purpose and enjoyment, and renews their ability to participate socially. Performing the 'occupation' of trip leader, Mrs. Bock exerted agency through which she energised a worn-out group and shifted her position in the group's social relations. Being the trip leader also enabled her to share her artworks, ideas and knowledge, and feel like a valued member of her social group. Although Mrs. Bock did not perform the public speaking aspect of her occupation (nor did her audience perform their role) in the manner Marilena expected, having the opportunity conferred meaning and made Mrs. Bock happy (Frank, Baum, and Law 2010). Despite the audience seeming disengaged, they exerted agency in ways aligned with the project's aim, by striking up conversations amongst themselves.

For Marilena, unlike Mrs. Bock, the lack of audience engagement presented a micro-ethical dilemma. Marilena felt a responsibility to intervene to protect Mrs. Bock from assumed embarrassment. Reflecting *in action*, she decided to cut off Mrs. Bock's presentation as unobtrusively as she could. Reflecting *on* her action, Marilena was highly critical of her decision. The feelings of discomfort and concern for Mrs. Bock that overwhelmed Marilena in practice and which were influenced by her professional responsibility to protect her participants, seemed mistaken when reflecting on her actions.

Yet there is a fine line between protecting a participant such as Mrs. Bock and restricting their agency. Judging how best to act is complicated by the different situations and perspectives of different actors. Experiences deemed mediocre or as failure by academics might be perceived as successful by community co-researchers who have different historic experiences and future goals, and who do not bear the pressure of complying with academic standards that are assumed to apply universally (Brear 2020). Enabling agency means also paying attention to the different perceptions of others and recognising the limitations of reflections (Ferguson 2018) that arise because of the impossibility of knowing what another thinks or feels, and thus never being able to know what is best for them. Perhaps the best participatory researchers can do is keep the cross-cutting aim of enabling agency at the forefront of their practice (Spiel et al. 2018), and not be too hard on themselves if their reflections in action lead to decisions that are questionable when reflecting on action (Ferguson 2018).

V. Mrs. Bock and the trip to Egypt: part 2, reflections in the light of the audio-recording

Marilena von Köppen

The case description given in Section I of this article was based solely on the notes I made immediately afterwards in my research diary and my memory of events. I did not consider the audio-recording I had also made, which I thought was damaged. So it was my subjective perception of the ethical conflict that guided our thinking in the first working group meeting. Later on, however, I was able to restore the recording with the help of special software and to make a transcript of it. As a result, I suddenly had a second account of the situation in addition to my memory log. This gave me a new access to the event and thus a new perspective on its ethical challenges. It is important to note that my initial formulation of the ethical dilemma, based on the notes, was not invalidated by the recording. Rather, the case description remains an authentic account based on my memory of how I experienced the situation and the ethical questions I asked myself. However, by analysing the audio transcript, I was able to broaden my perspective and discover new aspects.

Perhaps the most important insight I gained from this analysis was the extent to which my beliefs about the meaning of participation and empowerment influenced my perception of what was happening. My internal assumptions led to a 'participatory bias'.

As I have described, I was not very involved in the actual preparation of the event. However, I assumed that Mrs. Bock as a person would be central. I expected her to talk about how she developed her passion for Ancient Egypt and the idea of making clay figurines. But Mrs. Bock had a different intention, as the reconstruction of the lecture based on the audio-recording shows. She did not talk about her personal connection to the subject, but was giving a very professionally prepared talk. She addressed the role and status of women in ancient Egypt, explaining, for example, that the achievements of female rulers were not recognised by society at the time, and that their names were therefore erased from official historiography by subsequent pharaohs. In terms of structure and language, Mrs. Bock's lecture followed the usual conventions in an academic context. She did not present herself as an individual, but rather as an expert. Her aim was to share her knowledge of ancient Egypt with the audience.

However, this understanding of her role was not something I was able to realise during the acute situation. My aim for the event was to make it an empowering experience. I subconsciously assumed that empowerment meant Mrs. Bock receiving maximum affirmation and recognition from the audience. That presumption led me to focus my attention not on Mrs. Bock but primarily on the audience's reactions. I was so preoccupied with the problem of the volume and the mishandling of the microphone that I did not listen to Mrs. Bock, but only paid increasing attention to the restlessness of the audience. I was aware of *how* Mrs. Bock was giving her talk, but not of *what* she was saying.

This selective perception had an impact on the way in which I acted. From the perspective that the event would only be successful if the audience was well pleased, I judged the presentation as inappropriate. Without even considering its content I felt compelled to intervene. This intervention can now be traced in detail in the transcript. During the

first 15 minutes of the lecture, there had been a number of interjections relating to the volume of Mrs. Bock's speech, which led to admonitions to hold the microphone correctly. Despite these interruptions, Mrs. Bock continued with her presentation. She remained a subject and had agency. It was then, however, that I took over the decision as to how to manage the situation. During the following 16 minutes, I first suggested to Mrs. Bock that I should handle the microphone. Then I decided to take the clay figures out of the display case and carry them through the rows of the audience. Simultaneously, I kept interrupting Mrs. Bock, trying to engage her in conversation about the artefacts. As a result of these initiatives, Mrs. Bock became more and more confused. I was asking for a high degree of flexibility, which even more experienced lecturers might not have been able to muster. In this way, I took more and more control away from Mrs. Bock. She became the object of my endeavours. And when my efforts failed to have the impact I wanted, I took it upon myself to call a halt to the presentation. Instead, my suggestion was that Mrs. Bock should remain seated next to the display case so that interested members of the audience could approach her. In doing so, however, I had reversed the relationship between Mrs. Bock and the audience: Mrs. Bock was no longer the active protagonist, but was forced into passivity. Whether she was able to share her knowledge now depended on whether others sought her out.

After the event, there was a brief conversation between Mrs. Bock, a care worker and me. Both the carer and I praised Mrs. Bock for having the courage to speak in front of an audience. This shows that, for me, the most important aspect of the event was that a woman who was in a vulnerable position because of her severe disability had raised her voice. To me, it meant that the participatory project had succeeded. What Mrs. Bock had said was not crucial. But Mrs. Bock did not respond to our praise as expected. She did not express pride that she had dared to give a presentation. On the contrary, she simply said that she didn't mind. What interested her, however, was whether her talk had been instructive for me. Her concern was that I had valued her expertise. In retrospect, this request seems only reasonable. At the beginning of the project, Mrs. Bock had told me her life story, focusing on the fact that she was left alone to care for her little brother during the chaos of the second world war and was only able to attend school for a couple of years. She had suffered greatly from this lack of education and had persistently tried to acquire it in other ways throughout her life. But my internalised understanding of empowerment prevented me from recognising this deeper meaning in the acute situation.

Looking at the situation from this new perspective, I would now reframe the ethical dilemma I faced. I would focus less on how I should have protected Mrs. Bock from a critical audience and more on how I could have enabled Mrs. Bock to appear as a knowledgeable expert. With this shift in perspective, my focus would not be on Mrs. Bock's vulnerability, but rather on her strength and potential.

VI. Ethical framing work: the role of moral perception and memory

Sarah Banks

The cumulative unfolding of this case over time offered the group a richness of insights that went beyond the diversity of perspectives that we had gained from earlier case

discussions. We had discussed several other cases over more than one meeting, which allows time for reflection and exploration of new ideas from different perspectives. This is particularly valuable as the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of group members (coming from varied countries and continents such as Australia, Europe, southern Africa and India) can add depth and new dimensions.

However, the discovery of the audio-recording in this case affords yet another perspective. Although it is tempting to regard the audio-recording as having greater 'truth-value' than Marilena's recollections, it is also only a partial account of what happened. The recorder picked up the sounds, not visual information, and was placed in a specific position which would result in nearby sounds being more audible. Quite likely the recorder was on the table near Mrs. Bock, so would have recorded her talk more clearly than Marilena heard it, and the chatter of the residents would be less prominent.

Learning from Marilena in Section V about the impact of listening to and transcribing the recording after writing the case and engaging in the group discussions gives insights into how we construct an ethics case and tell, select and highlight certain parts of a story. For Marilena, it shows how her experience at the time was 'narrow' due to her sense of responsibility and anxiety; how selective her memory was; and what she misremembered or forgot. This links to the work of what I call 'ethical framing', which entails identifying and focusing on the ethically salient features of a situation, as described by Banks (2016, 39):

The term 'frame' brings to mind a picture frame enclosing the work of an artist or photographer. Certain features of the landscape and figures are foregrounded, others are in the background, while others are not in the picture at all. The work of 'ethical framing' (framing work in the sphere of ethics) involves us making sense of what is going on specifically in relation to matters of harm, benefit, rights and responsibilities. This entails seeing situations in particular ways – being alert to what may be important but is not in the picture we first see or are given by others, and being aware of the background contexts that give the picture its shape and meaning. This involves 'moral perception' (Audi 2013; Blum 1994; Vetlesen 1994), that is, identifying and attending to ethically salient features of situations – for example, seeing a particular incident as a case of racism. It also entails critical reflexivity (Taylor 2006), for example seeing the bigger picture of social inequality of which a particular incident is part and recognising one's own role both in framing the picture and featuring in it. Being conscious of one's own framing work and aware of that of others also entails a willingness and ability to re-frame – to see a situation in a different light, to see new features as significant.

Ethical framing is part of what I call 'ethics work' – the effort people make not only to see ethically salient aspects of situations but also to develop themselves as good practitioners, work out the right course of action and justify who they are and what they have done. This effort includes psychological and bodily processes of noticing, attending, thinking, interacting and performing (Banks 2016, 36). To do ethics work takes time and requires dedication and focus. The capacity to do ethics work also develops over time with practice.

Working on the case in the group highlighted the importance of moral perception in ethics work, including the willingness and ability to attempt to view situations from the perspectives of others, to move vantage points and use a wide angle lens as well as a microscope. In this sense, the activities of the ethics working group can be

viewed as a kind of ethics co-laboratory – bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to study closely, and engage in experiments with, experiences of participatory research.

In social research, we usually start with audio (or video) recordings and transcribe them. We regard the recording as giving the fuller picture and then usually select important episodes, moments or themes to analyse and/or to create vignettes or cases for use in publications or teaching. In the case of Mrs. Bock, we followed a reverse process, perhaps more like one that occurs in a criminal investigation. In a criminal investigation, the starting point is often the stories and memories of protagonists/witnesses, which are framed by the questions asked by investigators, and based on memories and ways people choose to construct their accounts of what they saw, felt, heard and did. The investigators may then gather the recordings (e.g. the video camera evidence) to corroborate, challenge or elaborate upon people's accounts. If a criminal case is heard in court, we are very aware of multiple experiences and versions of events. We also pay attention to the credibility of witnesses and how they construct their stories. In our case discussions, we usually only have the perspective of one protagonist who was present (the person telling the case). This can be challenged by questions from others in the group and by the experience of acting out the case. The additional challenge from the audio-recording reminds us of the dangers of group think and the importance of attempting to 'bracket off' our presuppositions and engage in multiple perspective taking.

Concluding comments

The experiences of the group's work on this case illustrate the value of in-depth reflection and collaborative reflexivity (Banks et al. 2014) as a tool for learning from practical experience in ways that can shape future practice. The detailed analysis of one case over time, from multiple perspectives, allowed us to reflect not only on the case and Marilena's reflections and actions but also on our own assumptions. It is noteworthy that our initial discussions seem to have been framed by traditional academic research values of protecting community members from harm and empowering them according to our views of what counts as 'empowerment'. Through shifting the framing of the case with the help of the audio-recorder, these assumptions were challenged. This took time and effort, despite the fact that we all do participatory research, one of the assumptions of which is parity between academic and community co-researchers.

As Marilena commented as we were writing this conclusion:

For me, a particularly important point in our reflection is that we were able to 'experience' the situation in different ways. As is usual in our group work, we started with a description of the case, which, particularly using present tense, aimed to put the reader in the situation. This allowed the group to relive how I felt in the situation and how I had remembered my feelings in the research diary immediately after the situation. The role play via Zoom provided a further experience. Here we tried to experience how the other participants might have been feeling in the situation, both individually and in relation to the other participants. The audio tape, in turn, allowed me to relive the situation in its speech acts. Neither of these forms of experience is more valuable than the other. Together they allow a deep penetration into the complexity of human interaction.

Working on this case together has also involved the writing of this article. The writing, reading and commenting on the writing of others have been an iterative and reflective learning process, as is common in co-authoring. It has helped take the analysis further than is often achieved in simply engaging in a case discussion or when one person writes a case and others write commentaries. In conclusion, our experiences of experimenting with ethics cases suggest the value of the 'ethics co-laboratory' in heightening ethical sensitivity, developing moral perception and imagination and enhancing our capacity to do 'ethics work' (Banks 2016).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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