

IVSA Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines

DIANA PAPADEMAS AND THE INTERNATIONAL VISUAL SOCIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

The International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA) Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines introduces the principles and ethical standards that underlie professional responsibilities involved in doing visual research. It consists of an introduction, a preamble and a statement of general principles, followed by ten statements of ethical standards. The Code is prefaced by an introduction by Diana Papademas, who led the development and wrote the Code on behalf of the IVSA.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE CODE

The IVSA Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines originated from the expressed needs of IVSA members, professors and graduate students, many encountering local review board challenges as well as the increasing complexity of doing visual research. A decision by the IVSA Board at the 2004 meeting in San Francisco supported our efforts to develop a document, and was followed by an extended review period of other professional association codes, consultations and conversations with many colleagues across the disciplines represented in IVSA. Other efforts evolved during this time, including the British Sociological Association Visual Sociology Study Group's *Statement of Ethical Practice*, a collection by Gross, Katz, and Ruby (2003) on 'image ethics', and a special issue of *Visual Studies* on 'Ethics in Visual Research' (Papademas 2004).

Deep acknowledgement is given to the American Sociological Association (ASA), which, through a long participatory process, produced that association's code of ethics, of which the research code is a part. The ASA code is thorough, but lacks an adequate guide for visual research, which is problematic for many other professional and governmental codes. Adapting relevant sections on research, Diana Papademas elaborated principles and standards in support of visual research, incorporating collegial perspectives. The draft document was presented formally at the Buenos Aires meeting (August 2008), and the IVSA Executive Board

subsequently reviewed and approved the final document later in 2008. The Code is written broadly and in an aspirational tone in order to guide visual researchers in varied disciplines, using varied visual research methods. As stated in the document's introduction, the Code should be used as guidelines for visual research and is designed to aid IVSA members' awareness of ethical issues. Standards are not exhaustive, and any conduct not specifically addressed by the Code is not necessarily ethical or unethical. While encouragement for individual responsibility is given, the Code may provide support for visual researchers undergoing formal approvals with ethics review boards, the academy and prospective sponsors.

The IVSA continues to support professional programmes, sessions and workshops, as well as a collegial network of scholars who are experienced doing ethical visual research. Thus, professional education and training are available to younger scholars and all members who seek to enhance visual methods and ethical research practices. Codes are useful only if scholars follow an obligation to confront, address and attempt to resolve ethical issues. As the final paragraph of the Codes states: 'IVSA may provide consultation in the event of formal complaint or grievances, but does not act as an authoritative body.' Working in cooperation with appropriate entities in the event of dispute, IVSA would seek resolution and the fair treatment of all parties involved. It is understood that the Code emphasises scholarly research, and is not designed to address all areas of professional responsibility, which are established in the disciplinary and professional associations in which IVSA members participate. We hope that the IVSA Code supports the ethical research of visual scholars, and that the Code may challenge and assist the professions to become more enlightened.

While all standards matter, the areas of confidentiality and consent are the most elaborate in the Code. Note, for example, how the standard of informed consent describes the scope of consent standards, the informed consent process, the use of deception in research, the use

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of recording technology, reporting on research and visual data sharing. The Code is written broadly to cover challenges faced by all visual researchers, although different disciplines and professions may vary. A challenge in visual research around the concept of confidentiality is elaborated in the guidelines about maintaining confidentiality, the limits of confidentiality, anticipation of possible uses of information, electronic transmission of confidential information, anonymity of sources, privacy and the preservation of confidential information. Familiarity with the guidelines enables the researcher to address and face possible external challenges. Researchers could also refer to the three basic principles from the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1979): (1) respect for persons and the moral requirement to respect autonomy and to protect those with diminished autonomy; (2) beneficence and the complementary requirement to do no harm and to maximise possible benefits and minimise possible harms; (3) justice and the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research.

The discourse on research ethics should continue, and the Code is a springboard, not a final arbiter of ethical visual research. Contradictions and conflicts may arise, and the visual researcher, photojournalist or visual artist may find that conventional practices differ from those that guide the research scholar; different social science disciplines also vary. A recent example of this ethical pursuit appeared on the IVSA listserv in the form of a query from Colleen Morgan at the University of California, Berkeley, who wrote:

... As part of a wider research project researching human remains and associated artifacts excavated in 1940s Bahrain and currently curated in our Anthropology museum, we have been developing an ethics statement regarding in part the visual documentation and dissemination of materials related to the project. As many list members may know, the visual display of human remains has become a contentious issue in archaeology and this had become even more complicated by our wish to share research with our colleagues and the public on the internet. Most ethics statements I have seen primarily deal with people who are still living or with museum display standards – I would appreciate any insights regarding the ethics of display of past peoples and artifacts on the internet. As background we are basing most of our practices on the World Archaeological Congress' various ethics accords, but could probably stand to

shore up our arguments from other literature... Again, any comments or insights would be appreciated! (Morgan 2009)

Dilemmas are resolvable using the Code, and consulting with IVSA colleagues may also aid IVSA's institutional development. Strategic, purposeful action may not generate universal principles, but an ethics code may establish value orientations. As Habermas states in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 'it is no longer a question of making orienting contents binding but of opening up structural possibilities for the rationalisation of action' (Habermas 1979, 122). Ethics discourse should continue and values, standards, rules, laws, guidelines and codes should continue to shape the institutional context of our scholarly responsibilities and rights. *Visual Studies* serves as one forum for the consideration, review and debate of visual research ethics.

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IVSA CODE OF RESEARCH ETHICS AND GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

The International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA) Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines sets forth the principles and ethical standards that underlie professional responsibilities doing visual research from a diversity of cultures, disciplinary orientations and methodological approaches, including but not limited to multi-national professions: sociology, anthropology, communications, art, history. These principles and standards should be used as guidelines for research activities in the conduct of professional work. As a guideline this document is intended to aid IVSA members to be aware of ethical issues in the research

process, to encourage individual responsibility for ethical practice, and to provide a supportive document for visual researchers pursuing formal approvals from ethics review boards, academic institutions, and prospective sponsors. The document may be included with proposals to raise awareness of the field and to aid interpreters of ethics standards with additional information that supports visual research.

IVSA's Code of Research Ethics consists of an Introduction, a Preamble, five General Principles, and specific Ethical Standards. Most of the statements are written broadly in order to apply to visual researchers in varied disciplines, using varied visual research methods. The application of this Code may vary depending on the context. Standards are not exhaustive and any conduct that is not specifically addressed by this Code is not necessarily ethical or unethical.

PREAMBLE

The Code is intended to provide general principles to cover professional visual research conducted by IVSA members and other interested parties. It has as its primary goal the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom visual researchers work, while supporting the freedoms and integrity of research that uses visual media and images. It is the individual responsibility of each professional to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct in visual research and practice. Each professional supplements the values specified in the Code based on guidance drawn from personal values, culture, and experience, as well as consultation with others.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The following General Principles are aspirational and serve as a guide for ethical courses of action.

Principle A: Professional Competence

Principle B: Integrity

Principle C: Professional and Scientific Responsibility

Principle D: Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity

Principle E: Social Responsibility

Principle A: Professional Competence

Visual researchers strive to maintain the highest levels of competence in their work; they recognize the limitations of their expertise; and they utilize the appropriate scientific, professional, technical, and administrative

resources needed to ensure competence in their professional activities. They consult with other professionals when necessary for the benefit of their research participants as well as students and clients.

Principle B: Integrity

Visual researchers are honest, fair, and respectful of others in their professional activities and do not knowingly act in ways that jeopardize either their own or others' professional welfare. They conduct their affairs in ways that inspire trust and confidence; they do not knowingly make statements that are false, misleading, or deceptive.

Principle C: Professional and Scientific Responsibility

Visual researchers adhere to the highest professional standards and accept responsibility for their work. Members of IVSA understand that they form a community and show respect for others even when they disagree on theoretical, methodological, or personal approaches to visual research, which also places value on the public trust in research activity, demarcating it from other potentially disreputable visual practices. The professional and public trust rests on the ethical behavior of people doing ethical visual research. IVSA is vigilant to separate ethical visual practices from those that intentionally violate that trust. For this IVSA represents a shared responsibility for ethical research.

Principle D: Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity

Visual researchers respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people. They strive to eliminate bias in their professional activities, and they do not tolerate forms of discrimination based on age; gender; race; ethnicity; national origin; religion; sexual orientation; disability; health conditions; or marital, domestic, or parental status. They are sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences in studying groups of people with distinctive characteristics. Universal human rights are respected, with sensitivity to the ever present conflictive contexts of modern social life. The visual representations of people should reflect this regard for rights, dignity and diversity.

Principle E: Social Responsibility

Visual researchers are aware of their professional responsibility to the communities and societies in which

they live and work. They apply and make public their knowledge in order to contribute to the public good. When undertaking research, they strive to advance the field of visual studies and to serve the public good.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

1. Professional Standards

Visual scholars adhere to the highest possible technical standards that are reasonable and responsible in their professional activities. They rely on knowledge; act with honesty and integrity; and avoid untrue, deceptive, or undocumented statements in undertaking research and related activities.

2. Competence

IVSA supports the professional disciplines and guidance that provide for the boundaries of competence, while fostering in a modern multi-disciplinary environment the growth and development of competencies across those boundaries. The expansion of training, professional growth and development is fostered by IVSA, and it is the individual responsibility of members to practice in new areas or involving new techniques when they have taken reasonable steps to ensure the competence of their work in these areas. Professionals who engage in visual research and practice maintain awareness of information in their fields of activity and undertake continuing efforts to maintain competence in the skills they have, with support for expanding knowledge and skills.

3. Professional Responsibilities

The diverse professional fields in which IVSA members belong also serve to provide disciplinary codes and guidance for ethical work, notably for the representation and use of expertise within disciplines. Specific support for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary contexts will be furthered by IVSA and supplementary guidelines will follow. IVSA, in principle, does not depart generally from professional codes in regard to social responsibilities to others, avoidance of conflicts of interest, the conduct of research matters, disclosure regarding sponsors, and avoidance of personal gain that is a result from the exploitation of others.

Professional responsibilities defined by the various professions are expected for members of IVSA; where special circumstances challenge these roles and responsibilities, the IVSA will undertake a review and revision of the IVSA Code.

4. Public Communications

IVSA members adhere to the highest professional standards in public communications about their professional services, credentials and expertise, work products, or publications, whether these communications are from themselves or from others. Such communications include but are not limited to the presentation of one's visual research in: directory listings; personal resumes or curriculum vitae; advertising; brochures or printed matter; interviews or comments to the media; statements in legal proceedings; lectures and public oral presentations; or other published materials. Also, it is expected that IVSA members do not make public statements that are false, deceptive, misleading, or fraudulent, either because of what they state, convey, or suggest or because of what they omit, concerning their research, practice, or other work activities or those of persons or organizations with which they are affiliated. In working with the press, radio, television, or other communications media or in advertising in the media, potential conflicts of interest or appearances of such conflicts should be avoided.

5. Confidentiality

Visual researchers have an obligation to ensure that confidential information is protected. They do so to ensure the integrity of research and the open communication with research participants and to protect sensitive information obtained in research, teaching, practice, and service. When gathering confidential information, researchers should take into account the long-term uses of the information, including its potential placement in public archives or the examination of the information by other researchers or practitioners. Specific challenges to matters of confidentiality when using visual media for recording, presentation, and publication are under continuous scrutiny by IVSA, and shall be elaborated in the guidelines.

Maintaining Confidentiality

- (a) It is expected that visual researchers take reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality rights of research participants, students, employees, clients, or others.
- (b) Confidential information provided by research participants, students, employees, clients, or others is treated as such even if there is no legal protection or privilege to do so. There is an obligation to protect confidential information and not allow information

gained in confidence from being used in ways that would unfairly compromise research participants or confidants.

(c) Visual researchers maintain the integrity of confidential deliberations, activities, or roles, including, where applicable, that of professional committees, review panels, or advisory groups.

(d) Private information about individuals collected is understood to be private information when an individual can reasonably expect that the information will not be made public with personal identifiers.

Limits of Confidentiality

(a) Visual researchers inform themselves fully about all laws and rules which may limit or alter guarantees of confidentiality. They determine their ability to guarantee absolute confidentiality and, as appropriate, inform research participants, students, employees, clients, or others of any limitations to this guarantee at the outset. The negotiation of conditions with research subjects is understood to be an on-going process in many types of qualitative and field research. A procedure of trust-building may extend over a long period of time, subject to changing social conditions.

(b) Researchers may confront unanticipated circumstances where they must balance the importance of guarantees of confidentiality with other principles in this Code, standards of conduct, and applicable law.

(c) Confidentiality is not required with respect to observations in public places, activities conducted in public, or other settings where no rules of privacy are provided by law or custom. Similarly, confidentiality is not required in the case of information available from public records.

Anticipation of Possible Uses of Information

(a) When research requires maintaining personal identifiers in databases or systems of records, efforts to conceal these identifiers (e.g. electronically masking faces, removing names) should be conducted before the information is made publicly available and specifically if this form of confidentiality is a basis of consent from research participants.

(b) When deletion or masking of personal identifiers is not feasible, reasonable steps should be taken to determine that appropriate consent of personally-identifiable individuals is obtained.

(c) IVSA recognizes that formal consent mechanisms are not feasible in all forms of visual research. These terms are to be negotiated with ethical considerations throughout the research. Visual researchers may provide

reasonable bases for using identifying information (e.g. public images of individuals or agreed usage of images by research participants who elect to have information released).

Electronic Transmission of Confidential Information

Extra care is to be given in delivering or transferring any confidential information or communication over public computer networks. Visual researchers are attentive to the problems of maintaining confidentiality and control over sensitive material and data when use of technological innovations, such as public computer networks, may open their professional communication to unauthorized persons. Both sensitive social means (e.g. identifying access participants) and technical means (e.g. pass access mechanisms) should be employed.

Anonymity of Sources

(a) Visual researchers do not disclose in their writings, lectures, or other public media confidential, personally identifiable information concerning their research participants which is obtained during the course of their research, unless consent from individuals or their legal representatives has been obtained.

(b) General and specific consent from research participants may be required to meet ethical and review board standards, when confidential information is used in professional presentations, in publications, and made public. Where formal written consent is not feasible, then the researcher should describe the ethical considerations undertaken to protect subjects.

(c) Various research methods do not require anonymity. Among these are: community/participatory research, and individual case studies involving individuals who consent to using identifying information (e.g. own names and visual representations).

Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy

(a) To minimize intrusions on privacy, a basic guideline is to include in written and oral reports, consultations, and public communications only information germane to the purpose for which the communication is made and with persons for whom the information is appropriate.

(b) Special sensitivity to potential privacy invasion is expected if there is visual recording (in any form) of person's seclusion or solitude, disclosure of embarrassing private facts, publicity that puts the person

in a false light in the public eye, and appropriation of the person's advantage, name or likeness.

(c) While specific laws are followed regarding privacy matters, visual researchers like other members of the public have the means and right to record images that may, at the time, not seem invasive. Subsequent use of these images must be circumspect, given legal standards of public domain and fair use standards.

Preservation of Confidential Information

To transfer confidential records, data, or visual information to other persons or organizations, researchers obtain assurances that the recipients of the records, data, or information will employ measures to protect confidentiality at least equal to those originally pledged.

6. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a basic ethical tenet of research on human populations. The scope, methodological means, cultural and organizational contexts are understood to vary. The visual research should obtain research subject consent in ways that are consistent with the research methodology and in compliance with ethical standards.

Scope of Consent Standards

(a) Visual researchers conducting research obtain consent from research participants or their legally authorized representatives (1) when data are collected from research participants through any form of communication, interaction, or intervention; or (2) when behavior of research participants occurs in a private context where an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or reporting is taking place.

(b) Researchers may seek waivers of this standard when (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk for research participants, and (2) the research could not practicably be carried out where formal informed consent would be required. Such waivers of consent may require approval from institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research.

(c) Visual researchers may conduct research in public places or use publicly-available information about individuals (e.g. naturalistic observations in public places, analysis of public records, or archival research) without obtaining consent. The consent process varies in research methodologies. IVSA supports the ethical research of members whose qualitative work meets ethical considerations for subjects, but may use and

negotiate a variety of consensual means for working with research participants over time. Such means include but are not limited to long-term trust building with individuals and communities; the negotiation of use of photographic and other visual images, specifically including the use of identifying information for subject empowerment; the practice of socially responsible research that seeks to provide justice and the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research.

(d) In undertaking research with vulnerable populations (e.g. youth, recent immigrant populations, the mentally ill), visual researchers take special care to ensure that the voluntary nature of the research is understood and that consent is not coerced. That the 'right to be researched' and the opportunity for empowering the powerless does require special ethical considerations and should be undertaken with the consent of the participants.

Informed Consent Process

(a) When informed consent is required, researchers enter into an agreement with research participants or their legal representatives that clarifies the nature of the research and the responsibilities of the investigator prior to conducting the research, when reasonably possible, given the varied methods.

(b) When informed consent is required, researchers use language that is understandable to and respectful of research participants or their legal representatives.

(c) When informed consent is required, researchers provide research participants or their legal representatives with the opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of the research, at any time during or after their participation in the research.

(d) When informed consent is required, researchers inform research participants or their legal representatives of the nature of the research; they indicate to participants that their participation or continued participation is voluntary; they inform participants of significant factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate (e.g. possible risks and benefits of their participation); and they explain other aspects of the research and respond to questions from prospective participants. Also, if relevant, researchers explain that refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation in the research involves no penalty, and they explain any foreseeable consequences of declining or withdrawing. Researchers explicitly discuss confidentiality and, if applicable, the extent to which confidentiality may be limited.

(e) When informed consent is required, researchers keep records regarding said consent. Consent is a process that

involves oral and/or written consent, and may be negotiated over the duration of the research.

Informed Consent with Children

(a) In undertaking research with children, visual researchers obtain the consent of children to participate, to the extent that they are capable of providing such consent, except under circumstances where consent may not be required.

(b) In undertaking research with children, researchers obtain the consent of a parent or a legally authorized guardian. Researchers may seek waivers of parental or guardian consent when (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk for the research participants, and (2) the research could not practicably be carried out were consent to be required, or (3) the consent of a parent or guardian is not a reasonable requirement to protect the child (e.g. neglected or abused children).

(c) Usually waivers of consent from a child and a parent or guardian require approval from institutional review boards or authoritative body.

Use of Deception in Research

(a) Researchers do not use deceptive techniques (1) unless the researchers have determined that their use will not be harmful to research participants; is justified by the study's prospective scientific, educational, or applied value; and that equally effective alternative procedures that do not use deception are not feasible; and (2) unless they have obtained the approval of institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, with another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research.

(b) Visual researchers do not deceive research participants about significant aspects of the research that would affect their willingness to participate, such as physical risks, discomfort, or unpleasant emotional experiences.

(c) When deception is an integral feature of the design and conduct of research, researchers attempt to correct any misconception that research participants may have no later than at the conclusion of the research.

(d) On rare occasions, researchers may need to conceal their identities in order to undertake research that could not practicably be carried out were they to be known as researchers. Under such circumstances, researchers undertake the research if it involves no more than minimal risk for the research participants and if they have obtained approval to proceed in this manner from an institutional review board or, in the absence of such

boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research.

(e) Ethical and legal considerations apply to the technical potential of specific recording technologies (e.g. the concealment of cameras and recording devices).

Use of Recording Technology

Researchers obtain informed consent from research participants, students, employees, clients, or others prior to photographing, videotaping, filming, or recording them in any form, unless these activities involve simply naturalistic observations in public places and it is not anticipated that the recording will be used in a manner that could cause harm. Efforts to respond ethically to unintended circumstances and consequences are necessary in a multi-mediated environment. Reasonable efforts may include the visible use of technology (e.g. the led light on video cameras). Informal as well as subsequent formal permissions to record and make public these recordings may be in addition to formal informed consent procedures for research subjects.

The IVSA recognizes and supports the variety of recording technologies in use as well as the diversity of disciplinary standards and methodologies. Conflictive concepts of ethical practice should be presented for deliberation and consultation with authoritative boards and/or senior experts in the different fields.

Reporting on Research

Researchers do not fabricate data or falsify results in their publications or presentations and report findings fully, including and/or omitting visual data that are consistent with ethical considerations above. Disclosure of underlying assumptions, theories, methods, and use of recording technology is expected.

Visual Data Sharing

(a) Share data and pertinent documentation as a regular practice, except where proprietary agreements with employers, contractors, or clients preclude such accessibility or when it is impossible to share data and protect the confidentiality of the data or the anonymity of research participants (e.g. raw field notes or detailed information from ethnographic interview).

(b) Share data in a form that is consonant with research participants' interests and protect the confidentiality of the information they have been given.

(c) Share recordings and images as part of the research methodology agreed with research subjects. For example:

provide photographs to research participants as part of a shared experience and/or form of photo-elicitation methodology.

7. Plagiarism

(a) In publications, presentations, teaching, practice, and service, visual researchers explicitly identify, credit, and reference the author when they take data or material verbatim from another person's written work, whether it is published, unpublished, or electronically available.

(b) The difficulty of using unattributed documents, images, and internet sources poses specific challenges to all researchers, and visual researchers will make attribution and give credit whenever possible. Images produced by others are not claimed as one's own. Analytic research that uses the images produced by others is a methodology, and attribution and credit whenever possible should be indicated.

8. Publication Process

(a) Visual scholars adhere to the highest ethical standards when participating in publication and review processes. Conventional professional norms are standards for IVSA.

(b) Specific issues associated with the publication of images and the reproduction of imagery are addressed. When publishing or exhibiting visual material researchers take account of research participants' interests and proceed in accordance with the consent they have been given by image creators, image owners, and subjects who are visually represented.

(c) Researchers clarify their right to publish and disseminate the results of their research, and seek prior permission for the reproduction of visual material where appropriate. Publications make transparent such matters as sources of funding, sponsors, and/or clients, within ethical guides specified in this document.

(d) IVSA follows laws and regulations on copyright, privacy, and the reporting of ethical research.

9. Education and Training

IVSA supports professional programs, sessions, workshops as well as a collegial network of scholars who are experienced doing ethical visual research. Information and consultation supports younger scholars and all members seeking to enhance visual methodology and ethical research practices.

10. Adherence to the Code of Research Ethics

Visual scholars have an obligation to confront, address, and attempt to resolve ethical issues according to this Code of Research Ethics, by being familiar with the Code, confronting ethical issues informally and, if necessary, formally through authoritative professional bodies and/or knowledgeable review boards. IVSA may provide consultation in the event of formal complaint or grievances, but does not act as an authoritative body. IVSA may work in cooperation with appropriate entities in the event of dispute. Efforts for resolution with fair treatment is an expected principle.