

Research Ethics

Ethics

- From the Greek word, “Ethos” meaning character
 - Implies a judgment of character
 - Moral principles
 - Ethical research is guided by larger concerns about fairness, honesty, and public good

Why do we need to worry about ethics?

- Participants are very **cooperative**
 - Orne (1962)
- Participants may cooperate to their own detriment

Example: Milgram obedience studies

- What were the ethical problems with Milgram’s research?
- What are the benefits to society as a result of what we know from that research?



Research Ethics

- Need for a balance between
 - the right of the experimenter to study the behavior
 - and
 - the right of the participants to be protected from abuse

Nuremberg Code (1947)

- In response to the crimes against humanity in the name of ‘science’ during WWII
- Included
 - informed consent
 - right to withdraw
 - justification in scientific principles
 - beneficence

Tuskegee syphilis study

- U.S. Public Health Service
- Begun in 1932, spanned over 40 years
- Effects of untreated syphilis in 400 African American men
 - Denied men available treatment
 - Only 74 left alive at the end of the study
- Clinton apologized in 1997

IRB

(Institutional Review Board)

- 1974: National Research Act
- All institutions sponsoring research must investigate potential risks & benefits
- Protects:
 - Participants
 - Institution
- At NSCC, the Human Subjects Review Committee

The Belmont Report

- Created in 1979 by US Dept of Health, Education, and Welfare (now Health and Human Services)
- Guidelines for behavioral and medical researchers regarding the protection of human subjects
 - Beneficence
 - Respect for persons (Autonomy)
 - Justice

APA Code of Ethics

- APA adopted Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct in 1992
 - deals with both human and nonhuman participants
- Code was revised in 2002, amended in 2010

Beneficence

- Need for research to maximize benefits and minimize harm to participants.
- Risks include
 - Physical harm
 - Stress/Psychological harm
 - Loss of privacy and confidentiality

Assessing Risks

- Exempt, minimal risk, and greater than minimal risk
- Are any potential risks necessary?
- Issues with observation studies and privacy
 - how do we decide if public observation is unethical?

Autonomy

- Informed Consent
- Withholding information and Deception
- Debriefing

Informed consent

- Participant is provided with enough information to make a decision about participation. Includes:
 - Purpose of Research*
 - Benefits
 - Risks
 - Procedures
 - Participation is voluntary, and participants have the ability to stop at any time
- Informed consent forms need to be clearly written and understandable

*Withholding and Deception

- not considered unethical to withhold information that would not affect decision to participate
- active lying/misrepresenting purpose of the study more difficult to justify
 - IRB requires strong reasoning behind necessity to deceive participants
 - any deception must be clearly explained in debriefing

Debriefing

- Explain the purpose, procedure, and get feedback from participants
- May include desensitizing:
 - Helping people cope with acquired negative information
- May include dehoaxing:
 - Explaining that they were deceived

Justice

- Principle of fairness in receiving the benefits of research as well as paying the costs.
 - Selection of subjects must be equitable or soundly justified by research purpose.

Research with Animal Subjects

- Animal studies comprise a small but measurable fraction of psychological research
- risk/benefit analysis
- APA code of ethics requires animals treated as humanely as possible

And this should go without saying...

- FRAUD or Misrepresentation of research methods or results is unethical
- Plagiarism is unethical
 - using another' s words or IDEAS without proper citation