

Ethics --- Doing the Right Thing

Ethics = treating study participants, researcher (self) and colleagues with respect

Ethical issues arise throughout research process:

research question, how lit is reviewed, methods used, how data is collected,
how data is analyzed, how data is interpreted, how data is disseminated

Examples of Ethical Issues in Research:

Unethical Applications:

Tuskegee Syphilis Study
Milgram's Obedience Studies
Tearoom Trade
Prison Experiment

When To Stop Study:

Women's HRT Experiment

Access to Data:

Kinsey Sex Institute
Criminological study of Mafia and Drug Trade
Animal Liberation study

Uncertain Harm to Participants:

Eye Color Study

Begin to think about ethical issues while forming research questions:

- what is the true purpose of the research?
- what are the costs and benefits of the research?
- is it a worthy pursuit?
- Examples:
 - research on cloning human beings
 - SPOTS
 - Outcomes of Athletic Participation

Ethical issues often involve pitting the needs of the research design against the needs of the participants.

Examples

- Using a student sample vs. spending lots of \$ to get a sample
- Denying control group the “treatment” that could save lives so as to ensure validity of research design
- Using info gained outside of the official research

Ethical Issues

ASA code of ethics statement <http://www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html>

1. Privacy of participants - confidentiality and/or anonymity
 - a. quantitative concerns
 - b. qualitative concerns
 - c. Examples: Staff satisfaction surveys, friendships between gay and straight men
2. Relationship btw. researcher and participants - primarily a qualitative issue
 - a. Do you use all the info you gain? What is the effect of doing so on participants?
 - b. Trust/friendship -- how far do you go?
3. Do no harm - to participants or to researcher

What is the effect of participating on the participants - costs and benefits

- a. experiments - “treatments” or denial thereof can have negative side effects: AIDS research, HRT study, cancer screening, SF-36 and heart disease, students and Internet access
- b. qualitative research - covert observation is unethical
- c. Asking questions on a survey or in an interview - will asking a question cause emotional/psychological harm? Example: Friendships study

4. Get informed consent:

Examples of an informed consent form

<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/pricej/teaching/internprac/index.htm>

Go to Human Subjects Approval Section

- a. Includes: confidentiality/ anonymity, purpose of research, how to reach researcher, benefits/costs to participant of participating in research, how data will be handled and analyzed, (how confidentiality+anonymity maintained), access to research results.
- b. Get informed consent before data collection
 - Can be difficult/impossible/pointless to get informed consent for all non-covert observation -- ex. Ethnography. Use this data to provide context or to enhance understanding of participant's lives
 - Implied consent - surveys
- c. Renegotiate during data collection – qualitative
 - Depends on what information is gained
 - Depends on how the relationship btw. researcher and participant develops
- d. Sometimes a researcher can't give full information, because to do so would jeopardize validity of data collected.
 - If you gave full info you might taint how the participants answered questions or how they behaved
 - Alternative: Give general research topic
 - Alternative: Doing "Blind" studies
 - If withhold important info, debrief participants afterwards
- e. Sometimes participants can't give true consent: children, prisoners, employees, students (power issues)

5. Responsibility to whom you generalize to:

- a. Make sure your conclusions are accurate and come from the data.

Ex. Doctoring the data, doing repeated analyses, or not fully analyzing the data

- b. Make sure study results aren't reported inaccurately. Example: hair color and infidelity; crime and vitamins

- c. Think ahead of time whether data will be released to others:

- Rarely is qualitative data released – too easy to identify people
- Release of quantitative data depends on: who funded research, who is asking for data and what their purposes are, if you can hide the identity of participants
 - Survey data from small geographic areas can reveal individual identities.
 - Outliers can often be identified even in large data sets.

6. IRB, Human Subjects

- a. Required when university and or federal agencies involved in research
- b. Protects University and funding agency
- c. See university IRB requirements before choosing a research question
- d. Example: UNCW student projects, Pediatric Emergencies study

7. Writing and disseminating results:

give credit where due: don't plagiarize
 don't leave out research in lit review that doesn't compliment your purposes
 describe how data were handled and analyzed, don't embellish methods
 ex. Missing data, outliers, omitting disconfirming data
 describe limitations of research
 don't submit to two journals at a time
 don't submit abstract to meetings before paper is written (if do, present as prelim findings)
 do you owe something back to the participants? Not just an academic enterprise.

Ethical Issues to consider during Research Design

Consider the following with regard to your research question

1. What is the purpose of the research? Be true to self and to participants.
 - answer R.Q.
 - solve/understand a social problem
 - advance career
 - get degree
 - get money
 - social justice, expose individuals
2. Who might be affected by/interested in the research? Participants, colleagues, media, boss, researcher. How so?
3. How might your values shape the methods used, data collected, results developed?
4. What could go wrong? How could data be used inappropriately? What ethical issues might arise during research?