Ethical issues in social research

Lecture 2

Ethical issues

- How should we treat the people on whom we conduct research?

- Are there activities in which we should – or should not – engage in our relations with those people?

Ethics are the rules of conduct in research.

There are **two perspectives** from which you can view the ethical issues in research:

1. The values of honesty and frankness and personal integrity

- Intellectual ownership and plagiarism
- Citation and acknowledgement
- Responsibility and accountability of the researcher
- Data and Interpretations

2. Ethical responsibilities to the subjects of research, such as consent, confidentiality and courtesy

- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Informed consent
- Potential harm and gain
- Interviews and questionnaires
- Intimacy and the involvement of participant (experiment, observations, groups)
- Sensitive material
- Storing and transmitting data

Research ethics scandals (only some examples)

Edward Jenner's smallpox vaccine, England, 1796

This research involved injecting an eight-year-old child with pus from a cowpox infection and then deliberately exposing the child to smallpox to establish their acquired immunity.

The Neisser case, Prussia, 1898

Albert Neisser conducted clinical trials on serum therapy in patients with syphilis. This was done by injecting serum from patients with syphilis into those who were admitted for other reasons, without either informing them of the experiment or seeking informed consent. When, subsequently, some of these patients contracted syphilis Neisser concluded that the vaccination had failed. This was picked up by newspapers, drawing public attention and ultimately leading to the minister for religious, educational, and medical affairs issuing a directive requiring that all non-therapeutic research must have unambiguous consent.

Medical experimentation in Nazi Germany, 1939-45

Experiments carried out on concentration camp prisoners included involuntary sterilisation, subjection to radiation, freezing to induce hypothermia, infection of research subjects with malaria and tuberculosis, and many other unethical experiments, conducted without the consent of the research subjects, and often leading predictably to extreme pain, mutilation and death.

The Milgram experiments, United States, 1961-63

In these experiments, designed to investigate people's obedience to authority, the research subjects were deceived about the nature of the research and led to believe that they (in the process of a different experiment) were administering electric shocks to other research participants. The aim of the research, which turned out to be very distressing for many of the subjects, was to see how far they would be willing to go in risking harm to the other research participants.

The Amy Cuddy case, United States, 2010-16

Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist, studied body language, best known was her work on 'power poses' effects. She manipulated the data, e.g. made a 'P-hacking' (statistical significance level), pretending to have valid outcomes while in fact they couldn't be replicated.

What is “ethical” research?

Based on Diener and Chandall (1978) we can say that behaving ethically means:

- No harm should come to research participants: physical or emotional harm, inducing subjects to perform imprehensible acts etc.
- They should agree to participate and know what the research is about
- Their privacy should not be invaded
- They should not be lied to or cheated

Asymmetric power relations in research

- researchers exploit their resources
- agent provocateur
- physical harm
- financial harm
- social harm
- psychological harm
- ethical dilemmas

How could you harm research participants?

- Physically
- By damaging their development or self-esteem
- By causing stress
- By hurting their career prospects or employment opportunities
- By breaking confidentiality
- By revealing their identity

Research participants must know that is what they are and what the research process is

But, implementing this principle 'is easier said than done' (Homan, 1991:73).

It is extremely difficult to present prospective participants with absolutely all the information that might be required to make an informed decision about their involvement.

In ethnographic research, the researcher is likely to come into contact with a wide spectrum of people, and ensuring that absolutely everyone has the opportunity for informed consent is not practicable, because it would be extremely disruptive in everyday contexts.

Invasion of privacy

- Privacy is very much linked to the notion of informed consent
- The research participant does not abrogate the right to privacy entirely by providing informed consent
- Covert methods are usually deemed to be violations of the privacy principle
- The issue of privacy is invariably linked to issues of anonymity and confidentiality in the research process

Lies, damned lies and research

- Deception usually means we represent our research as something other than it is, so that participants will respond more naturally
- This means it is quite a widespread practice
- So deception means not telling the whole truth, while not actually telling a lie
- We must be vigilant in keeping deception to a minimum, and when it is necessary to the research, mitigating its degree and effects as much as possible
- Apart from moral objections to deception, research participants and funders can become wary of being fooled, or tricked into providing data

So why should there be a problem?

- Unfortunately, a lot of writers about ethics in business differ about what is and is not ethically acceptable.
- The same issues seem to be always with us – they don't seem to get resolved.
- Certain research methods have a bad name because they are identified with a few extreme cases.
- But the real problem is that the potential to behave unethically in research is constant and it does not just depend on particular situations or methods

“Research Effects”

- Hawthorne (Elton Mayo)
- Placebo
- John Henry (super-placebo effect)
- Halo
- Peacock

Researcher's bias

- researcher is highly biased
- deep-seated values
- prejudices – for and against
- '*Know thyself' is the maxim uniquely imperative to on the investigator of social institutions* (Beatrice Webb)
- minimising bias requires **reflexivity**: intellectual self-awareness

Various ethical stances are possible

- Universalism
  - absolute rules about un/acceptable conduct
- Situation ethics
  - case-by-case assessment
  - the end justifies the means?
- Ethical transgression is pervasive
  - virtually all research involves some ethically questionable practices
- Anything goes (more or less)
  - A certain amount of flexibility in ethical decision-making is allowed
- Deontological versus consequentialist ethics

Legal considerations

The 1998 Data Protection Act* states that personal data must be:

- obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purpose and not further processed in any manner incompatible with that purpose or those purposes
- adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose or purposes for which they are processed
- not kept longer than necessary

* a United Kingdom Act of Parliament designed to protect personal data stored on computers or in an organised paper filing system. It enacted the EU Data Protection Directive 1995's provisions on the protection, processing and movement of data.

Copyright is an intellectual property right, extending to interviews – in which the interviewee keeps the copyright to the spoken words. Permission is needed from the interviewee in order to share this data

Data Protection

- Context: IT data storage; state and private sector data banks; personal liberty; IT transfer
- Article 108, Treaty of Rome, 1957; EU Directive 95/46;

- Data Protection Act, 1998 in GB, e**ight 'data protection principles'**
- All data must be:
  - collected lawfully
  - obtained for a lawful purpose
  - adequate, relevant, not excessive
  - accurate, up-to-date
  - not kept longer than necessary
  - processed in accordance with subject's rights
  - kept safe from unauthorised access
  - not transferred outside EEA unless safeguards equal

OECD Principles and Guidelines for Access to Research Data from Public Funding

Data Documentation Initiative (DDI), ISO19115

The difficulties of ethical decision-making: a summary

- The boundary between ethical and unethical practices is not precise
- The potential for deception / lack of informed consent pervades most social research
- There is insufficient guidance on marginal areas of research (but be familiar with the existing guidelines)
- Internet-based research provides new ethical dilemmas, for which we are still debating solutions

New media and ethical considerations

- Information can be found in many places – blogs, discussion groups, email, chatrooms, social media, newsgroups and instant messaging
- The more the site is acknowledged to be public, the less obligation to protect anonymity or seek informed consent
- The distinction between public and private is blurred
- Visual images also throw up ethical dilemmas around consent

Politics in social research

- Values affect every stage of research process
- Social research is not conducted in a ‘moral vacuum’
- It is impossible to do objective, value-free research
- It may be desirable to show commitment to participants

  conscious partiality in feminist research (Mies, 1993)
- Social researchers often have to ‘take sides’

Politics and Funding

- Government, organizations and funding bodies have vested interests
- Which research projects will be funded?
- Calls to bid for funds encourages proposals for research in particular areas
- Morgan (2000) suggests a preference for quantitative, policy-oriented research
- Funders frequently monitor written reports and their dissemination

Gaining access is a political process

- Gatekeepers mediate access to research settings
- They can influence how the investigation takes place; what can be asked and of whom, and even interpret findings
- They are concerned about how their organizations will be represented

Other political issues

- Research done by a *team* of researchers can produce conflicting values
- There may be attempts to thwart publication and dissemination of controversial findings
- Research findings might be used to fuel political debates

Taking sides in social research

- Becker (1967)
  - values shape social research - inevitable partiality
  - responsibility to sympathize with the 'underdog' in hierarchical relationships
  - *accusations of bias* more common when taking the perspective of a deviant or underdog group than when taking the perspective of a dominant group.
- Gouldner (1968)
  - we can consider different points of view without 'taking sides' or engaging in value-laden research

Doing the right thing…..

You can try to do the best you can by making yourself familiar with guidelines set by respectable institutions:

The British Sociological Association: "*Members have a responsibility both to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by their work, and to report their findings accurately and truthfully.*"

The Social Research Association : Includes a guideline that stipulates, "*Social researchers must strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This requires that subjects' participation should be voluntary and as fully informed as possible*".

Codes of Ethics and legal constraints

Ethical codes and guidelines are a means of establishing and articulating the values of a particular institution or society, and the obligations that it expects people engaged in certain practices to abide by.

The norms of modern research ethics were codified by the Nuremberg Code in 1947 in response to Nazi medical research and further developed by the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki in 1964. Concerns about the effectiveness of the existing regulation led to the 1975 revision of the Declaration of Helsinki, which introduced the requirement of a formal independent committee review of research protocols.

Some prominent examples of codes and laws which bear on researchers' conduct :

The Nuremberg Code

Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law 10, no. 2 (1949): 181-2. http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/nuremberg.html

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

European Union, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01). http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default_en.htm

The European Convention on Human Rights

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rome, 4.XI.1950). http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm

International ethical codes and guidelines for social research

- **The RESPECT guidelines** (a voluntary code for European socioeconomic research) http://www.respectproject.org/code/
- **The Research Ethics Guidebook (**a resource for social science researchers) http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/ http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/EthicsPrinciples
- **UNESCO Code of Conduct for Social Science Research** http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/files/6497/10951456011Soc_Sci_Code.pdf/Soc_Sci_Code.pdf
- **UNESCO Ethical Guidelines for International Comparative Social Science Research** in the Framework of M.O.S.T. http://www.unesco.org/most/ethical.htm
- **ISA Code of Ethics** http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa_code_of_ethics.htm
- **ASA Code of Ethics** http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm
- **ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics** http://www.isi-web.org/images/about/Declaration-EN2010.pdf
- **Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guidelines** http://aoir.org/ethics/
- **NASW Standards for Integrating Genetics into Social Work Practice** http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/GeneticsStdFinal4112003.pdf
- **FP7 EC Ethics for researchers** http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/fp7/89888/ethics-for-researchers_en.pdf

Commonly-used terms

Scientific fraud

"Fraud" is no longer widely used in this context. It was replaced by **"misconduct in science" or "scientific misconduct"** because most legal interpretations of the term "fraud" require evidence not only of intentional deception but also of injury or damage to victims. Proof of fraud in common law requires documentation of damage incurred by victims who relied on fabricated or falsified research results. Because this evidentiary standard seemed poorly suited to the methods of scientific research, "misconduct in science" has become the common term of reference in both institutional and regulatory policy definitions.

Research misconduct is significant misbehavior that improperly appropriates the intellectual property or contributions of others, that intentionally impedes the progress of research, or that risks corrupting the scientific record or compromising the integrity of scientific practices. Such behaviors are unethical and unacceptable in proposing, conducting, or reporting research, or in reviewing the proposals or research reports of others.

- **Misappropriation**
- **Interference**
- **Misrepresentation**

Questionable research practices

- Failing to retain significant research data for a reasonable period.
- Maintaining inadequate research records, especially for results that are published or are relied on by others;
- Conferring or requesting authorship on the basis of a specialized service or contribution that is not significantly related to the research reported in the paper;
- Refusing to give peers reasonable access to unique research materials or data that support published papers;
- Using inappropriate statistical or other methods of measurement to enhance the significance of research findings;
- Inadequately supervising research subordinates or exploiting them; and
- Misrepresenting speculations as fact or releasing preliminary research results, especially in the public media, without providing sufficient data to allow peers to judge the validity of the results or to reproduce the experiments.

Normal Misbehavior

(de Vries, Anderson, & Martinson, 200

- Serious (but rare) scientific infractions
  - F.F.P.
    - Falsification
    - Fabrication
    - Plagiarism
- Misconduct is generally more mundane
  - 4 categories
    - The meaning of data
    - The rules of science
    - Life with colleagues
    - The pressures of production

Normal Misbehavior

(de Vries, Anderson, & Martinson, 2006)

TABLE 1. Percentage of national sample of scientists reporting forms of misconduct* (N = 3,247).

Category	Item	% Yes
Meaning of Data	Dropping observations or data points from analyses based on a gut feeling that they were inaccurate	15.3
	Inadequate record keeping related to research projects	27.5
	Cutting corners in a hurry to complete a project	23.0
Rules of Science	Ignoring minor details of materials-handling policies (biosafety, radioactive materials, etc.)	36.1
	Using funds from one project to get work done on another project	51.7
Life with Colleagues	Providing an overly positive or overly negative letter of recommendation	20.8
	Using one's position to exploit others: Self	1.6
	Colleagues†	46.3
Pressures of Production in Science	Changing the design, methodology or results of a study in response to pressure from a funding source	15.5
	Withholding details of methodology or results in papers or proposals	10.8
	Using another's ideas without obtaining permission or giving due credit:	
	Self	1.4
	Colleagues†	45.7

*Unless otherwise specified, percentages reflect "yes" answers to the question: "Please tell us if you yourself have engaged in any of these behaviors within the last three years?"

†"Colleagues" indicates agreement with this statement: "I have observed or had other direct evidence of this behavior among my professional colleagues including postdoctoral associates, within the last three years."

"Scientists Behaving Badly" (Martinson, Anderson, & de Vries, 2005)

Table 1 | Percentage of scientists who say that they engaged in the behaviour listed within the previous three years ($n = 3,247$)

Top ten behaviours	All	Mid-career	Early-career
1. Falsifying or 'cooking' research data	0.3	0.2	0.5
2. Ignoring major aspects of human-subject requirements	0.3	0.3	0.4
3. Not properly disclosing involvement in firms whose products are based on one's own research	0.3	0.4	0.3
4. Relationships with students, research subjects or clients that may be interpreted as questionable	1.4	1.3	1.4
5. Using another's ideas without obtaining permission or giving due credit	1.4	1.7	1.0
6. Unauthorized use of confidential information in connection with one's own research	1.7	2.4	0.8 ***
7. Failing to present data that contradict one's own previous research	6.0	6.5	5.3
8. Circumventing certain minor aspects of human-subject requirements	7.6	9.0	6.0 **
9. Overlooking others' use of flawed data or questionable interpretation of data	12.5	12.2	12.8
10. Changing the design, methodology or results of a study in response to pressure from a funding source	15.5	20.6	9.5 ***
Other behaviours			
11. Publishing the same data or results in two or more publications	4.7	5.9	3.4 **
12. Inappropriately assigning authorship credit	10.0	12.3	7.4 ***
13. Withholding details of methodology or results in papers or proposals	10.8	12.4	8.9 **
14. Using inadequate or inappropriate research designs	13.5	14.6	12.2
15. Dropping observations or data points from analyses based on a gut feeling that they were inaccurate	15.3	14.3	16.5
16. Inadequate record keeping related to research projects	27.5	27.7	27.3

What does your own institution require?

https://www.hse.ru/org/hse/us/academic_ethics

Most colleges and universities have developed their own guidelines for ethical research. Some of the questions they might pose are as follows:

1. Is the study funded?
2. Is the research compromised by the source of funding?
3. Are there potential conflicts of interest in the financial or organisational arrangements?
4. Will confidentiality be maintained appropriately at all stages of enquiry?
5. Will human rights and dignities be actively respected?
6. Will highly personal, intimate, or other private or confidential information be sought?
7. Will there be any harm, discomfort, physical, or psychological risks?
8. Will participants be involved whose ability to give informed voluntary consent may be limited?
9. Will the study involve obtaining or processing personal data relating to living individuals?

Home reading

- A. Bryman Social Research Methods 4th edition. Chapter 6 (Dropbox)
- U. Flick Introducing Research Methodology. Chapter 3. (Library & Dropbox).
- Managing and Sharing Research Data. A Guide to Good Practice. Chapters 6, 7, 8 & 10 (Dropbox).
- Consent for data sharing and example consent forms: https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical/consent-data-sharing/consent-forms
- Pimple K.D. (2002) Six Domains of Research Ethics. A Heuristic Framework for the Responsible Conduct of Research. *Science and Engineering Ethics, Volume 8, Issue 2, 191-205. (Dropbox)*
- De Vries R., Anderson M.S. & Martinson B.C. (2006) Normal Misbehavior: Scientists Talk About the Ethics of Research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics, 1(1), 43-50.* http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1483899/

Questions to think over before the seminar

1. Using internet search engines, find a real example of ethical misconduct in academic research (or academic life in general). Provide a link to the description of this fact, explain the issue shortly, give it a definition and suggest a solution. For classification and definition, use Appendix in Pimple, K.D. 2002. "Six domains of research ethics: A heuristic framework for the responsible conduct of research." Science and Engineering Ethics 8:191-205.

2. While the principles underpinning ethical practice are fairly straightforward and easy to understand, their application can be quite difficult in certain situations. Not all decisions can be clear-cut in the realm of human relations. What ethical "red flags" might arise with the following research endeavors? Explain the ethical component in each situation. What would be an ethical approach to the research in each case?

a) observing people's routines at ATM machines for a marketing research project;
b) interviewing residents at an assisted living facility about their SWB and life satisfaction;
c) an instructor asks students in introductory psychology class to complete questionnaires that the instructor will analyze and use in preparing a journal article for publication.