

# Ethics in Research

Week 8

# This Week

- Defining Research Ethics
- General Ethical Issues
- Ethical Issues at Specific Stages
- Resources for Ethical Awareness

# Defining Ethics in Research

- Ethical concern will emerge as you carry out your research from planning, proposal, data collection and analysis and reporting results
- **Ethics is about actions that are valid in all circumstances**
- Your work will have an ethic attached to it that says something about you and your attitude
- Your ethical standpoint could **bias** the work in unexpected ways and **make it invalid**
  - For instance suppose you were a Christian then you might find it hard to work on a research topic that dealt with say ‘premarital courtship’

# Formal Definition

- “Ethics refers to the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work or who are affected by it”

Saunders et al (2009, pg. 183-184)

- “Ethics are norms or standards of behavior that guide moral choices about our behavior and our relationships with others”

Cooper and Schindler (2006, pg. 116)

# Points to Note

- Ethics has to do with our behaviour , the manner in which we conduct our research
- Is it morally acceptable?
- Are we morally responsible?
- We should be guided by social norms- notions of behaviour that ought to be adopted
- This means that there should be some **code of ethics**, set of laws or ethical codes to be followed

- There is no single approach to ethics
- Advocating strict adherence to a set of laws is difficult because of the unforeseen constraint put on researchers
- Alternatively, relying on each individual's personal sense of morality is equally problematic
- Clearly, a middle ground between being completely code-governed or relying on ethical relativism is necessary
- The foundation for that middle ground is an emerging consensus on **ethical standards**

# What does it all mean?

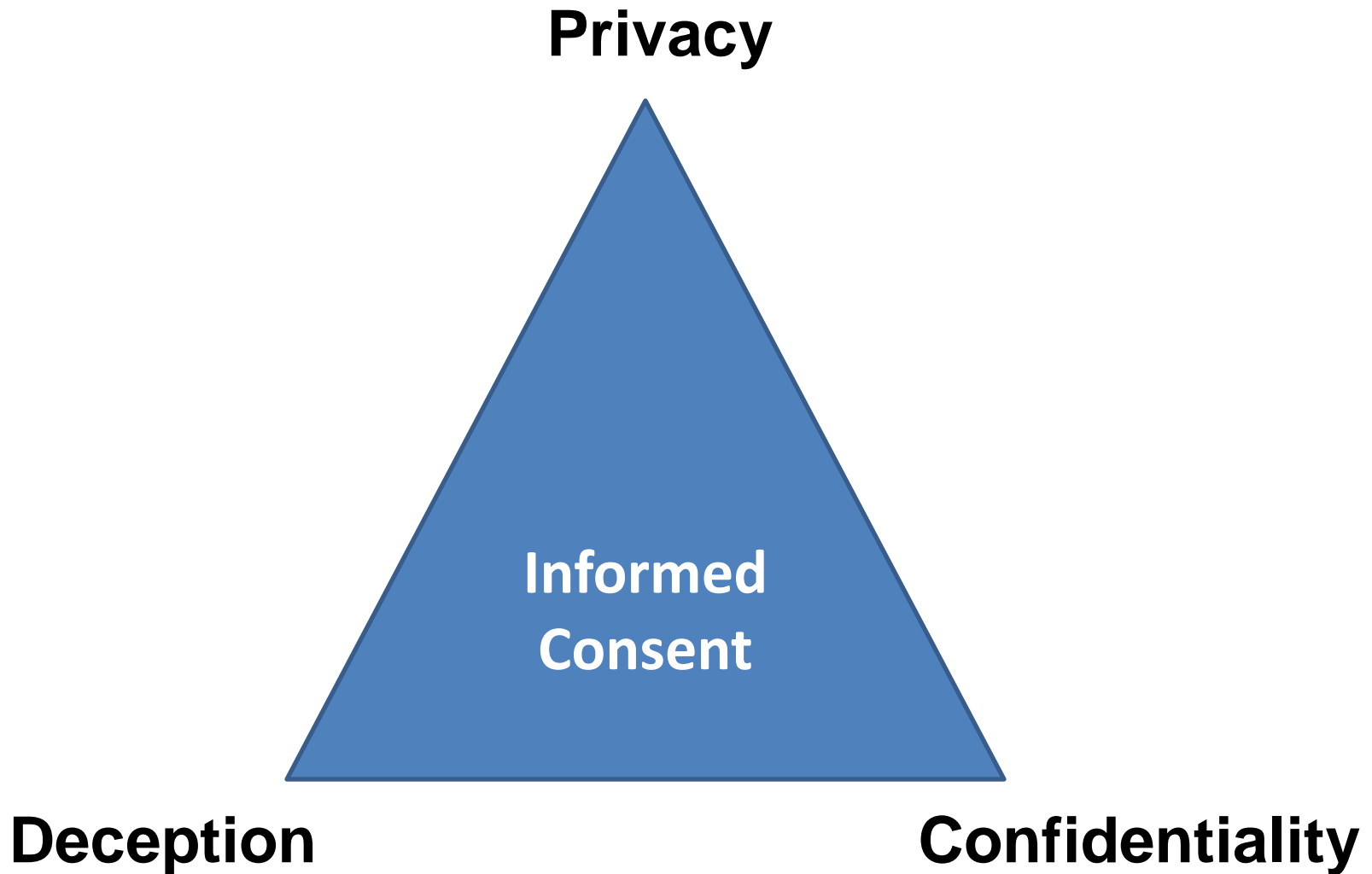
- “Researchers must define for themselves what is ethical in research”

Berg (2010)

- “Ethical research requires personal integrity from the researcher”

Cooper and Schindler (2006, pg. 116)

# The Ethics Conundrum





# Overall Importance

- In general ethics is concerned with how you **treat participants in your research**, how you collect data from participants and **maintain confidentiality**, and lastly how you analyse and report your findings
- The goal is to ensure that no one is harmed or **suffers adverse consequences** from research activities
- To avoid your research becoming 'null and void', unacceptable by norms, rescinded

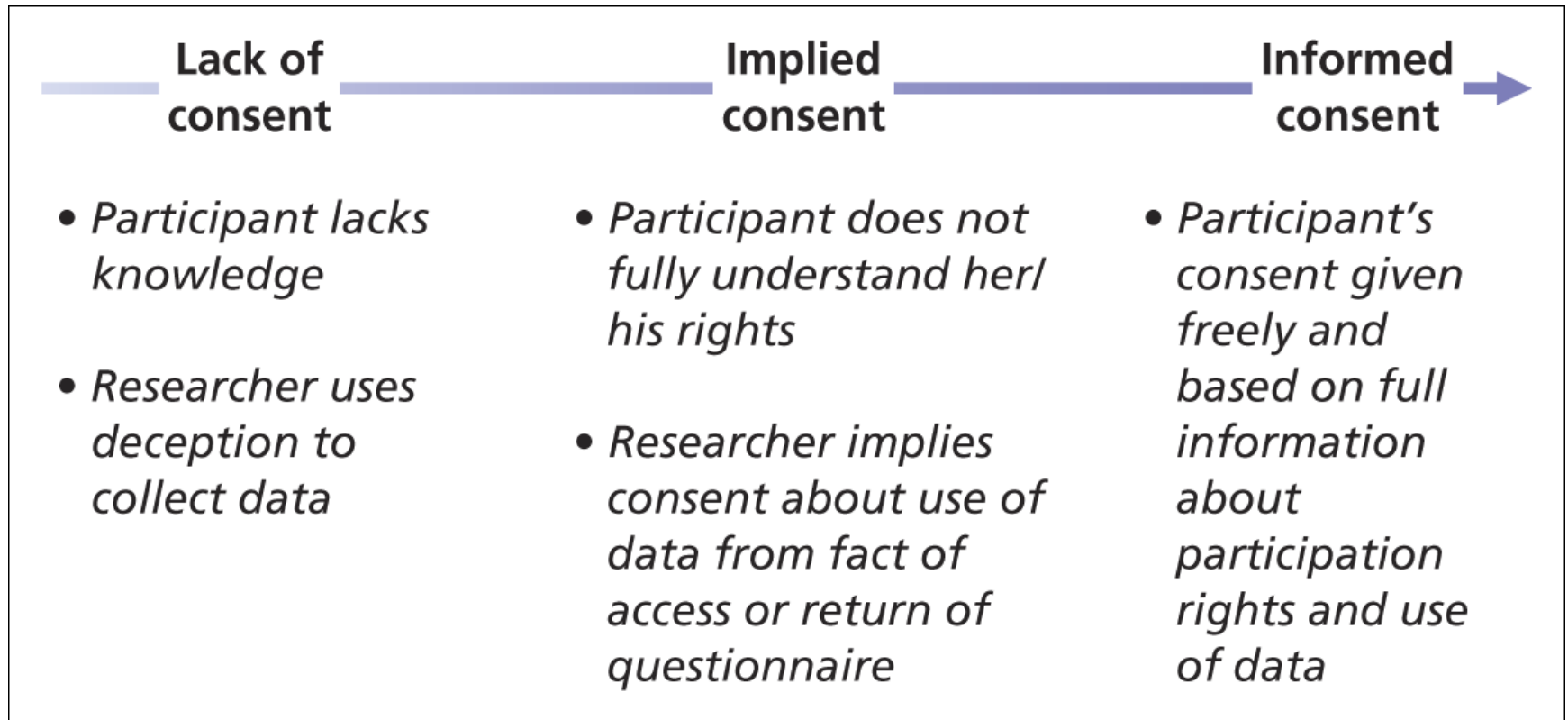
# General Ethical Issues

- Privacy of possible and actual participants
- Voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw
- Consent and possible deception of participants
- Maintenance of confidentiality of data
- Reactions of participants to the way in which you seek to collect data
- Effects on participants of the way data is used
- Behaviour and objectivity of you as a researcher

# It's all about the Participants

- Safeguards
  - Explain study benefits
  - Explain participant rights and protections
  - Obtain informed consent
- Avoid
  - Deception
  - Infringement of Privacy
  - Confidentiality breaches

# The Nature of Participant Consent



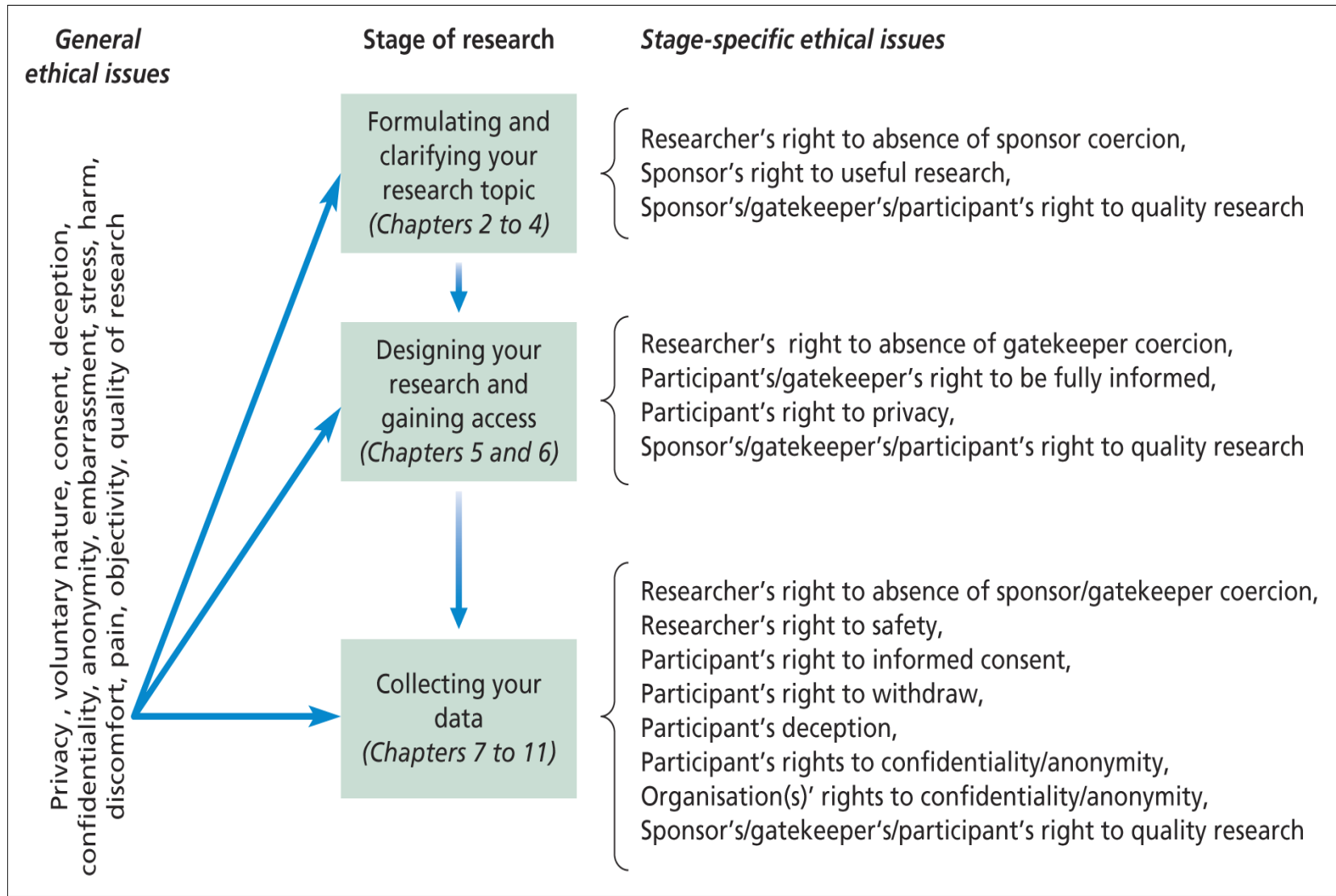
# Deception

- Telling part of the truth or when the truth is fully compromised
- Two reasons for deception:
  - To prevent biasing the participants
  - To protect confidentiality of a third party e.g. sponsor
- Deception should not be used to improve response rates

# Rights to Privacy and Confidentiality

- All individuals have a right to privacy and researchers must **Respect** that right
- Privacy guarantee is important to retain validity of the research and
- To encourage participants to answer truthfully
- Protect Confidentiality by:
  - Obtaining signed nondisclosure documents
  - Restrict access to participant information
  - Reveal participant info only with written consent
  - Not disclosing data subsets

# Ethical Issues at different Stages of Research



## General ethical issues

Privacy, voluntary nature, consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, embarrassment, stress, harm, discomfort, pain, objectivity, quality of research

## Stage of research

Collecting your data  
(Chapters 7 to 11)

Processing and storing your data  
(Chapters 12 and 13)

Analysing your data and reporting your findings  
(Chapters 12 to 14)

## Stage-specific ethical issues

Researcher's right to absence of sponsor/gatekeeper coercion,  
Researcher's right to safety,  
Participant's right to informed consent,  
Participant's right to withdraw,  
Participant's deception,  
Participant's rights to confidentiality/anonymity,  
Organisation(s)' rights to confidentiality/anonymity,  
Sponsor's/gatekeeper's/participant's right to quality research

Participant's rights as individuals to the processing and storing of her/his personal data

Researcher's right to absence of sponsor/gatekeeper coercion,  
Organisation(s)' rights to confidentiality/anonymity,  
Participant's rights to confidentiality/anonymity  
Sponsor's/gatekeeper's/participant's right to quality research



# Resources for Ethical Awareness

- Applied Research Ethics National Association (ARENA) [www.primr.org](http://www.primr.org)
- Business Ethics Conferences [www.conference-board.org](http://www.conference-board.org)
- Centre for Ethics and Business [www.ethicsandbusiness.org](http://www.ethicsandbusiness.org)
- Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) [www.carso.org](http://www.carso.org)
- Electronic Privacy Information Centre [www.epic.org](http://www.epic.org)
- European Business Ethics Network [www.eben.org](http://www.eben.org)
- The Program in Ethics and Professions, Harvard University [www.ethics.harvard.edu](http://www.ethics.harvard.edu)
- World Association of Research Professionals [www.esomar.nl](http://www.esomar.nl)
- See Saunders et al (2009, pg. 185) for further resources

# Bibliography

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- Salkind, N. (2003) Exploring Research, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Prentice Hall
- Cooper, D.R., Schindler, P.S. (2006) Business Research Methods, McGraw-Hill
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