Ethics in Research

Week 10
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”
  

• “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

Privacy

Informed Consent

Deception

Confidentiality
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of consent</th>
<th>Implied consent</th>
<th>Informed consent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Participant lacks knowledge</td>
<td>• Participant does not fully understand her/his rights</td>
<td>• Participant’s consent given freely and based on full information about participation rights and use of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Researcher uses deception to collect data</td>
<td>• Researcher implies consent about use of data from fact of access or return of questionnaire</td>
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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
Data Collection in Cyberspace

• The novelty and convenience of communicating by computer have led researchers to cyberspace- an abundant source of data
• Infringements may include:  
  — Monitoring individuals use of websites  
  — Collecting data on customers’ preferences  
  — Data-mining issues
• Google: Tracking Search Patterns
• Google searches getting more social
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:
  - Formulating and clarifying your research topic (Chapters 2 to 4)
  - Designing your research and gaining access (Chapters 5 and 6)
  - Collecting your data (Chapters 7 to 11)

- Stage-specific ethical issues:
  - Researcher’s right to absence of sponsor coercion, Sponsor’s right to useful research, Sponsor’s/gatekeeper’s/participant’s right to quality research
  - Researcher’s right to absence of gatekeeper coercion, Participant’s/gatekeeper’s right to be fully informed, Participant’s right to privacy, Sponsor’s/gatekeeper’s/participant’s right to quality research
  - 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
General ethical issues

Stage of research

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
Ethical Issues associated with Data Processing

• Data Protection Act (1998) UK- 8 principles
• Privacy and Electronic Communication Guide
• Freedom of Information Act
  – www.ico.gov.uk
  – www.ttparliament.org
Other Ethical Issues

• Ethics and the Sponsor
  – Confidentiality
  – Right to Quality Research
  – Sponsor’s ethics

• Research and Team Member’s Ethics
  – Right to Safety
  – Ethical Behaviour of assistants
  – Protection of Anonymity
Resources for Ethical Awareness

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

- Tuskegee Syphilis Study
- Stanley Milgram’s “Obedience”
- Philip Zimbardo’s “Stanford Prison Experiment”
- CIA’s ARTICHOKE program
- Laud Humphrey’s “Tea Room Trade”
- http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/ethics.php
Bibliography


