Ethical Research

Psychology 280 Lecture
Orange Coast College

Brief History of Ethics

- Until the end of World War II, investigators were expected and presumed to establish their own ethical standards and safeguard.
- Over the past few decades, professional organizations, government agencies and scientists have moved away from individual determination of ethics.
- The reports of brutal experiments performed on prisoners in Nazi concentration camps were one important stimulus in ethics movement.

In 1966, Beechler found that US human subjects placed at considerable risk in medical research.
- Although medical ethics fueled the movement, issues in social research were also deemed important.
- In early 1970's, APA appointed a committee on ethical standards.
- In 1973, APA's ten ethics principles established.

Milgram's Obedience Experiment

- Series of experiments (1963, 1964, 1965) designed to examine obedience to an authority figure.
- Participants (all male) were paid $4.50 to participate in a "scientific study of memory and learning" that was being conducted at Yale University.

Milgram's Obedience Experiment (con't)

- Scientist explained that the study would examine the effects of punishment on learning.
- Confederate, middle-aged “Mr. Wallace” was the learner and received the punishment.
- Participant was the teacher and administered the punishment.

Milgram's Obedience Experiment (con't)

- What happened if the teacher wanted to quit?
- Approximately what percentage of participants continued to deliver shocks all the way to 450 volts?
- What about the ethics of the study?
  - Results of Milgram's study challenged common beliefs about the ability to resist authority … very important findings.
The Belmont Report

- Current ethical guidelines have their origins in the *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*
- Three basic ethical principles
  1. Beneficence
  2. Respect for persons (autonomy)
  3. Justice

Assessment of Risks and Benefits

- The ethical principle of beneficence
  - Refers to the need for research to maximize benefits and minimize any possible harmful effects of participation.
  - Risk-benefit analysis
    - What about Milgram’s study and the Stanford Prison Experiment?

Assessment of Risks and Benefits (con’t)

- Potential risks
  - Physical harm
  - Psychological stress
    - All precautions taken?
  - Loss of confidentiality and privacy
    - Caution with data
    - Privacy issues with observation
  - Potential benefits

Respect for Persons (Autonomy)

- Ethical principle of autonomy
  - States that participants are treated as autonomous
    - Some psychologists believe the problem is exaggerated.
  - Capable of making deliberate decisions about whether to participate in research
    - Application is informed consent

Informed Consent

- Potential participants should be provided with all the information that might influence their decision to participate
  - Purposes of the study
  - Risks and benefits of participation
  - Their rights to refuse or terminate participation

Informed Consent (con’t)

- A written informed consent form should be written so that participants understand the information in the form.
  - Simple and straightforward language
  - Generally 6th to 8th grade level
  - Written using the second person
  - If participants are non-English speakers, there should be a translated version of the form.
Informed Consent (con’t)

- Autonomy issues
  - What happens when the participants may lack the ability to make a free and informed decision to voluntarily participate?
    - Minors (requires assent)
    - Patients in psychiatric hospitals
    - Adults with cognitive impairments

Informed Consent (con’t)

- Coercion
  - Any procedure that limits an individual’s freedom to consent is potentially coercive.
    • Such as, an instructor requiring students to participate in a study in order to pass a class.

Informed Consent (con’t)

- Use of deception
  - Informed consent might affect the outcome of the study
    - Altered or unnatural behavior
    - Bias participants’ responses
    - Bias the sample

Informed Consent (con’t)

- Objections to the use of deception
  - Morally wrong
  - Harms the reputation of the field

In informed Consent (con’t)

- Is deception a major ethical problem in psychological research?
  - Deception is mainly in social psychological research and primarily involves the use of false cover stories.
  - What about the Stanford Prison Experiment and Milgram’s study?
Informed Consent (con’t)

- Three primary reasons for the decrease in the type of elaborate deception seen in the Milgram study.
- Research in cognitive variables rather than emotions and the methodology used differs.
- General level of awareness of ethical issues has led researchers to conduct studies in other ways.
- Ethics committees at universities and colleges now review proposed research and are less likely to approve the use of elaborate deception.

The Importance of Debriefing

- Debriefing occurs after the completion of the study.
- Researcher must
  - Explain why the deception was necessary
  - Make sure that the participant has “calmed down” if participant’s physical or psychological state was altered
  - Provide additional resources if necessary
  - Make sure the participant leaves the experiment without any ill feelings toward the field of psychology

Alternatives to Deception

- Role-playing
- Simulation studies
- Honest experiments

What are the main criticisms of these approaches?

Justice and the Selection of Participants

- Ethical principle of justice
  - Issues of fairness in receiving the benefits of research as well as baring the burdens of accepting risks
    - Tuskegee Syphilis Study
      - Issues of equity
        - Must be a scientific rationale for including or excluding certain people

Researcher Commitments

- Implicit contracts with participants
  - Researcher should be there for the study and on time.
  - Researchers that promise to send a summary of the results of the study to participants should do so.
  - If participants are to receive course credit, researchers should immediately inform the instructors when a person takes part in a study.

Federal Regulations and the IRB

- Every institution that receives federal funds must have an Institutional Review Board (IRB)
  - The IRB has five individuals, one member must be from outside the institution
  - All research conducted by faculty, students, and staff associated with the institution is reviewed in some way by the IRB.
  - Federal regulations for the IRB
Federal Regulations and the IRB (con’t)

- Exempt research
  - Research in which there is no risk
    - Anonymous questionnaires, surveys, educational tests, naturalistic observations in public places, etc.
- Minimal risk research
  - Research when the risk of harm is no greater than risk encountered in daily life or in routine physical or psychological tests.

Federal Regulations and the IRB (con’t)

- Greater than minimal risk research
  - Subject to thorough review by the IRB
  - Complete informed consent and other safeguards may be required
- Do you think that Zimbardo submitted the Stanford Prison Experiment for approval to the Stanford University IRB?

APA Ethics Code

- APA – The Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct
  - Known as the “Ethics Code”
  - Revised in 2002
  - Five general principles relate to beneficence, responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of others.

APA Ethics Code (con’t)

- Ten ethical standards address specific issues concerning the conduct of psychologists in teaching, research, therapy, counseling, testing, and other professional roles and responsibilities.
- Ethical standard 8 focuses on conducting research

In Class Case Study

- Adapted from a real life example

Research With Human Participants

- Ethical Standard 8
  - 8.01 Institutional approval
  - 8.02 Informed consent to research
  - 8.03 Informed consent for recording voices and images in research
  - 8.04 Client/Patient, student, and subordinate research participants
Research With Human Participants

- 8.05 Dispensing with informed consent for research
- 8.06 Offering inducements for research participation
- 8.07 Deception in research
- 8.08 Debriefing

Ethics and Animal Research

- According to APA, 7%-8% of psychological research involves the use of animals
  - 90% of animals are rodents and birds; 5% monkeys or primates
- Are animals necessary?
  - There is potentially valuable research that cannot be done with humans
  - Researchers have greater control over extraneous factors when using animals as subjects

Ethics and Animal Research

- Examples of behavioral research with animals
  - Rehabilitation of persons suffering from stroke, head injury, spinal cord injury, etc.
  - Detection of eye disorders in children early enough to prevent permanent impairment
  - Control of chronic anxiety without the use of drugs
- Sheds light on basic principles of learning and cognition
  - Programmed instruction in education and industry
  - Improved approaches to treating obesity, alcoholism and substance addiction

Ethics and Animal Research

- Alternatives?
  - Computer programming to model animal behaviors, but program needs to be model based on actual observations
  - Tissue cultures vs. animals? Difficult because tissues don’t develop depression or other problems psychologists study
  - Natural settings – this is done but cannot answer certain questions such as impact of air pollution on aspects of human health
  - The laboratory is the only setting where researchers can eliminate outside factors that alter results

Ethics and Animal Research

- Criticisms of animal research:
  - Frequency – a large number of experiments use animals
  - Concern for small animals as a species
  - Concern about all life
  - Procurement – where do they come from?
  - Living conditions – even good lab environments cause animals to suffer psychologically and physically
  - Disposal
  - Value of the research versus impact on the animal
  - Cruelty

Ethics and Animal Research

- Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)
  - Reviews animal research procedures and ensures that all regulations are adhered to
- APA Ethics Code:
  - Prescriptions for the humane and ethical treatment of research animals
  - 8.09 Human care and use of animals in research
APA Ethics Code - Animals

- APA Ethics Code:
  - Research should have clear scientific purpose
  - Purpose should justify the use of animals
  - The species chosen should be best suited to answer the question(s)
  - Protocol needs to be approved by an animal care committee/IRB
  - Research and animals' welfare needs to be monitored throughout the study

- Provisions for the lawful acquisition of animals, including transport guidelines and use of endangered species
- Experimental procedures – humane consideration for the well-being of animals needs to be considered in the design of the experiment and the procedures used.
- Detailed guidelines for a variety of procedures
  - Surgical procedures
  - Procedures involving restraint
  - Anesthetized and insensitive to pain
  - Etc

- A variety of personnel guidelines to ensure personnel is aware of guidelines, conforming with federal guidelines, and familiar with the behavioral characteristics of the animals they are studying
- Care and housing guidelines expect facilities should meet or exceed USDA guidelines; procedures on animals be reviewed by IRB; and researchers responsible for conditions within and outside of the experiment

Misrepresentation

- 8.10 Reporting research results
  - Fabrication of data is fraud.
  - Serious implications to the foundation of science.
  - Fraud detected when attempts to replicate previous work fails
- 8.11 Plagiarism
  - Misrepresenting another's work as your own, even if the other work is cited occasionally

The End