9

Ethical Concerns and the IRB

Learning Objectives

After reading and studying this chapter, students should be able to do the following:

- **Understand the complexity of ethics and how world events brought ethical guidelines into existence.**
- **Comprehend the different aspects of The Belmont Report (beneficence, respect for persons, justice) and how these concepts apply to research efforts.**
- **Know the function of an institutional review board and understand how informed consent works to protect participants in human research.**
- **Understand the role deception can occasionally play in research endeavors, and realize there are alternatives to deception (simulations, role-playing, honest experiments).**
- **Comprehend the importance of the work of Stanley Milgram to our understanding of social psychology and ethical behavior.**
- **Appreciate the application of anonymity, confidentiality, and debriefing to the ethical research process.**

When human beings provide the data for our studies, this complicates how scientific research is conducted and often makes for an ethically complex situation. Think for a moment about the ethical considerations of a chemist. The chemist does not worry too much about how hydrogen molecules will "feel" about being combined with oxygen molecules. There are safety concerns in the laboratory and ethical principles at work for chemists in how they operate (American Chemical Society, 2007), but for the most part, chemists are not concerned with the perceptions of the reactants and how they will live in society after the chemistry experiment is over. However, working with human beings (and animals) is much more complex from an ethical standpoint: There are basic fundamental principles that we follow regarding ethics and our code of conduct in the social sciences.

9.1 The Ethics of Research

Social scientists have been concerned about **ethics**—moral values and rules—for some time. Part of the motivation for current protections of human subjects comes from German scientists' abuses during the Nazi era, but abuses are not limited to Nazis. From 1932–1972, American scientists conducted what became known as the "Tuskegee syphilis study," in which they recruited "poor black southern men" with syphilis so they could study the course of the disease over a long period of time (Singer & Levine, 2003, p. 149). Inexplicably, even after the discovery of penicillin, these men were not informed about this new and effective treatment. The Tuskegee syphilis study lasted for 40 years, and African American men with syphilis went untreated until death—and then their bodies were autopsied. The behaviors of the scientists here were reprehensible, and a poorly designed and implemented study needlessly perpetuated human suffering for decades. Other research, more of a psychological nature and usually involving deception, accelerated society's interest in the protection of human subjects. This is particularly true of the Milgram obedience to authority studies in the 1960s and 1970s, in which an authority figure ordered participants to electrically shock another person (more about this work in *Pivotal Moments in Research*).

This photo shows participants of the Tuskegee syphilis study circa 1937. Scientists involved in this experiment were interested in studying the disease's course and thus never treated participants for syphilis, even after a cure was developed. The unethical nature of this study contributed to more protections for human subjects, such as the National Research Act of 1974.

9.2 Development and Use of Ethical Principles

Between the biomedical abuses of the Nazis and the Tuskegee syphilis study, and the social sciences "pushing the boundaries" of Milgram's study, more protections were

necessary for human subjects. The **National Research Act of 1974** was enacted to establish human research protections and ensure the rights of participants in both biomedical and behavioral research (Singer & Levine, 2003). This led colleges and universities to develop local institutional review boards (IRBs), which would vet and monitor research to aid in the protection of human subjects. The act also created a board to study these issues, and that board published what became known as the **Belmont Report** in 1979. Various rulings from federal agencies occurred over the years, and eventually all of the rules and previous laws were brought together into the Code of Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects, known as 45 CFR 46 (Singer & Levine, 2003).

Components of the Belmont Report

These federal regulations addressed the three main ethical principles found in the Belmont Report: beneficence, respect for persons, and justice. **Beneficence** is the idea that the potential harm research participants may experience must be balanced by the potential benefits of the research. The principle of beneficence addresses the basic notion that the researcher should do no harm (Striefel, 2001). This is often referred to as a risk-benefit analysis, with the goal being to design research with maximum benefits but also with minimum risks (see also Dell, Schmidt, & Meara, 2006). Because researchers have a vested interest in their own research, it is important that an independent group evaluate the risks and benefits of the research, which is one motivation for the existence of IRBs (more on this later in the chapter). Researchers strive to design studies with minimal risk, that is, the "probability of harm not greater than ordinarily present in daily life or in routine physical or psychological examinations or tests" (Dell et al., p. 179). In a well-designed study, there should always be benefits—for the researchers, but perhaps for the participants—and there will always be risks, even minimal ones. The key question becomes, do the benefits outweigh the risks to the extent that the research should be conducted?

Respect for persons led to the requirement of **informed consent**; that is, human participants deserve to know the risks involved in research and what their protections are from harm. (That is, does the participant feel safe from harm.) Respect for persons suggests that those electing to participate in research have the right to make decisions and know what they are doing; additionally, those persons who may not fully understand the research context (e.g., the mentally ill, children) need additional protections to preserve their autonomy. The notion of informed consent helps to provide information to the potential participant but also allows for an informed decision and choice to participate (and documents this choice for the researcher). Respect for persons also addresses critical issues such as privacy and confidentiality: That is, will a participant's individual data be safeguarded? And when it is shared, in what form will it be shared and with whom? For instance, many researchers are interested in groups, so although an individual will provide data, the researcher may be interested only in the group's overall performance. If the researcher wanted to share a specific person's data in such a way that the person's data were identifiable to the public, then informed consent would need to address that request.

Justice is the idea that the burden of research not fall exclusively on any one group or class of individuals in society (Singer & Levine, 2003). Thus, the guidelines established at the federal level are enforced at the local level through an IRB. Both the benefits of participation as well as the associated risks should be equally distributed across participants. For example, in a study designed to develop a new treatment regimen for depression, if the

experimental group is discovered to improve from the intervention, then at the conclusion of the study, the beneficial treatment should be offered to the control group, who initially received no such treatment. To be fair, we do not withhold beneficial treatments—from a researcher's perspective, we would only delay their delivery. To assure justice, no one should be asked to assume all of the risk, nor receive all of the reward. Justice and fairness dictate that the risks and rewards be equally distributed to the extent that they can be.

Comparison of Sociological and Psychological General Ethics Principles

The Code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association (1999) and the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct from the American Psychological Association (2010) are complex documents that set forth the ethical principles of working sociologists and psychologists, respectively. Each of these documents begins with a preamble, followed by five general principles, and then followed by specific ethical standards relative to each discipline. Even though these two social sciences may use different terminology (see Table 9.1 for a comparison of the five broad, general principles of each code), there is a surprising amount of overlap between the two. So although professionals within specialty areas of the social sciences may seem different from one another, there is clearly common ground with respect to ethical principles and behaviors.

Table 9.1: Comparison of general principles from the sociologists' and psychologists' codes of ethics

Sociology	Psychology
A. **Professional Competence**. Sociologists strive to maintain the highest levels of competence in their work; they recognize the limitations of the expertise; and they undertake only those tasks for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience.	A. **Beneficence and Nonmaleficence**. Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm.
B. **Integrity**. Sociologists are honest, fair, and respectful of others in their professional activities—in research, teaching, practice, and service.	B. **Fidelity and Responsibility**. Psychologists establish relationships of trust with those with whom they work.
C. **Professional and Scientific Responsibility**. Sociologists adhere to the highest scientific and professional standards and accept responsibility for their work.	C. **Integrity**. Psychologists seek to promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in the science, teaching, and practice of psychology.
D. **Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity**. Sociologists respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people.	D. **Justice**. Psychology recognizes that fairness and justice entitle all persons to access to and benefit from the contributions of psychology and to equal quality in the processes, procedures, and services being conducted by psychologists.
E. **Social Responsibility**. Sociologists are aware of their professional and scientific responsibility to the communities and societies in which they live and work.	E: **Respect for People's Rights and Dignity**. Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination.

9.3 The Institutional Review Board and the Role of Informed Consent

Prior to any research being conducted, however, approval is required from the appropriate body at a researcher's respective institution. At many universities, this responsibility for monitoring and approving research with human subjects falls to an IRB. (At smaller schools without an IRB, these reviews are typically done by a faculty member or a departmental committee.) Researchers are asked to answer a number of detailed questions about their project in an IRB application. (See *Writing in Action* for an example of an exempt IRB application—a research classification denoting research with the least amount of harms expected.)

Writing in Action: Sample Questions from an Exempt IRB Application

- Anticipated Start Date and Anticipated End Date.
- Will data be collected from individuals through intervention or interaction or interviewing with the individuals?
- Will identifiable private information be collected from other sources (e.g., medical records)?
- Provide a description of your research. Include methods, major hypotheses, and research design. Describe the purpose of the research. Use language understood by a person unfamiliar with this area of research.
- Describe your role in the project. Provide detail of your activity (e.g., overseeing, collecting data, conducting interviews, observing).
- Participant Population: Who will be recruited to participate? Describe the characteristics of the participant population such as gender, age ranges, ethnic background, and health status. If a "captive" population (e.g., students) is being used, please justify.
- Recruitment: Describe the selection process. Specifically, where did you obtain the names of potential participants, and how will you contact them? Attach a copy of the material that will be used to recruit participants (e.g., fliers, e-mails, letters). If recruitment will be done face-to-face (as in a classroom) or over the phone, attach a copy of the script to be used.
- Procedures: Provide a step-by-step description of each procedure, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure. Attach a copy of any consent forms, assent forms (under the age of 18), surveys, questionnaires, acknowledgement letters, introduction/interview scripts, telephone scripts, debriefing statements, advertisements, video display, brochures, flyers/recruitment advertisements, and all other relevant material.
- Consent: (Informed Consent for participants over age 18, Assent for participants age 11–17, and Parent/Guardian Consent for research involving participants under age 18.) Describe the consent process and attach all consent documents.
- Confidentiality: How will confidentiality of the data be maintained? Where will you store data retrieved? Who will have access to the data? Data must be kept within the departmental area, not stored at home.
- Risk: Describe all known anticipated minimal risk to participants and how you intend to deal with those risks. If there is greater than minimal physical, psychological, and social or legal status or information risks, the research is NOT exempt, and you will need to complete the Expedited or Full Board Protocol Application.
- Emergency: Describe your plan for an emergency situation. Even if you feel this situation is unlikely, you must have a plan in case of emergency (e.g., the researcher will carry ***(continued)***

Writing in Action: Sample Questions from an Exempt IRB Application ***(continued)***

a cell phone, there will be additional people observing, the researcher will take a break during interview to ensure participant is comfortable, etc.).

- Benefits: Describe the anticipated benefits to participants and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result.

Source: Boise State University

After researchers have developed a research proposal and have it approved by the local IRB, researchers must assess whether they are ready to collect data. Sometimes an IRB will recommend changes to the study's procedures so that participants are maximally protected while also balancing the need to conduct a meaningful study with a chance to uncover a valuable insight. This is just another reason why the research design process is so crucial. Typically, researchers need additional training before working directly with human participants. A researcher's local department of sociology or psychology might provide this training, or there are national mechanisms for obtaining this training, such as the CITI program at www.citiprogram.org. In fact, anyone can go to this website and complete the training to see what it is like.

But what is the overall purpose of the IRB process? Ultimately, it is to protect human participants who participate in research: "Informed consent is designed to protect subjects and ensure their autonomy" (Agre & Rapkin, 2003, p. 1). In order to protect human participants in research, the IRB needs to understand some of the basic elements of what is going to happen during the research process. At a minimum, participants need to be told about the researchers and the nature of the research, the risks and benefits to participation, who will be able to access the information participants' provide, the right to withdraw, any costs or compensation they will receive, and the responsible party other than the researchers (typically, this would be the IRB of the college, university, or agency) (Binik, Mah, & Kiesler, 1999). See the following list for more comprehensive details of the basic elements of informed consent (Hicks, 2008).

- A statement that the study involves research.
- An explanation of the purposes of the research.
- The expected duration of the subject's participation.
- A description of the procedures to be followed.
- Identification of any procedures that are experimental.
- A description of any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participant.
- A description of the benefits to the subject or to others.
- An explanation of how the institution/investigator will maintain confidentiality of records.
- For research involving more than minimal risk, an explanation regarding whether medical treatment is available if injury occurs.
- Contacts for further information about the research study and about the rights of research subjects. If research-related injury is possible, subjects must be told whom to contact should injury occur.
- A statement that participation is voluntary, that refusal to participate involves no penalty or loss of benefits, and that the subject may discontinue at any time.
- All consent forms must state explicitly that subjects may withdraw at any time and may choose not to answer questions or complete specific tasks.

Informed consent is an essential component of the research process because it helps to protect the participant's rights. It is important to note that certain potential groups have additional protections prior to participation in research; these protected groups include pregnant women, neonates, prisoners, and children. For example, if children are to participate in research, they technically cannot give their consent (technically, a minor cannot consent to research participation—only the parent or guardian can). **Assent**, or approval, must be obtained from the child's parent or legal guardian—so the parent must say yes (consent) and the child must also say yes (assent). Even if the minor child says yes and the parents say no, that minor child cannot participate in the research study. In addition to a child providing assent to participate, approvals may also be necessary from a child's teacher, school principal, and so on if the study is conducted in an elementary or secondary school setting. Special populations warrant special protections, and the IRB process is in place (in part) to provide those protections on behalf of vulnerable populations.

Certain groups, like pregnant women and children, have additional protections before participating in research studies.

9.4 Deception

In certain situations, obtaining informed consent might influence the outcome of a study. **Deception**—essentially lying to participants—may be used to gain participation, but participation under a false premise. The general purpose of the deception is to reduce any reaction to the actual hypothesis. Say participants were told, via informed consent, that they were about to take part in a study of helping behaviors. For example, would they stop to help someone on campus whose books had spilled out of his or her backpack? If, then, knowing the premise of the study, the participants walked across campus with the researcher and someone spilled her or his backpack, would the participants be likely to stop to help? Would their decisions be influenced by the fact that they know they are in a helping behavior study? In certain cases, deception may be needed to capture a true behavioral response, that is, what an individual would "normally" do in such a situation. To justify the use of deception (to justify any human experimentation), Fisher and Fyrberg (1994) reiterated that two aspects of scientific merit must be present: scientific validity and scientific value (p. 418):

> A study is scientifically valid provided it is designed to yield reliable information according to accepted principles of research practice. A study may be well-designed relative to its hypothesis but be of no value because the hypothesis itself is trivial or cannot be effectively translated into the body of scientific knowledge or into useful application. Thus, the evaluation of

the usefulness of both the experimental hypothesis and potential results of a study to science or society plays an integral role in cost-benefit decisions.

Another related advantage of deception is that the participant is unaware of the hypotheses being tested. Sometimes participants purposely change their behavior based on the situation and what they believe the experimenter wants them to do (this is called a demand characteristic, as discussed in Chapter 8). If participants are deceived about the nature of the study, then they are obviously unable to behave based on an expectation from the experimenter. Debriefing should follow an experiment involving deception.

Debriefing After Deception

The history of debriefing has its roots in military campaigns (Lederman, 1992), where individuals who were not present at an event informed others as to what happened. In a social sciences context, **debriefing** involves informing participants of the actual events that have just occurred. Debriefing provides the opportunity to inform, educate, check on methods used, and undo negative consequences if necessary. When deception is used, the debriefing also serves as a dehoaxing—that is, letting the participants know fully about the deception used during the study (Lederman, 1992). If a researcher was to conduct a study using deception, the debriefing would typically consist of three elements: The researcher would tell the participant about the nature of the deception, the true purpose of the experiment, and the reasons why the deception was necessary (Lederman, 1992). Debriefing also allows the participants to ask questions about the research and make comments.

In a study about the effectiveness of debriefing, Brody, Gluck, and Aragon (2000) found that the most common problems with debriefings are that they are unclear or that participants desired more information. The next most frequently reported negative outcome of debriefings is that they were short. What does this mean to researchers? The debriefing portion of research is important in order to assure that participants can gain as much as possible from the study. When designing the study, researchers should make sure that they include details about the hypothesis and what they hope to find and also that they leave enough time in the experimental session to answer participants' questions. Debriefing is an important part of the research process and should, if possible, follow immediately after the deception.

Alternatives to Deception

In areas such as social psychology, deception is an often-used technique, used in about 33% to 40% of studies published in journals such as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Hertwig & Ortmann, 2008). Even with a debriefing, the decision to use deceptive practices should not be taken lightly. The potential disadvantages are great, and the protection of the participants' psychological well-being is of utmost concern. A study using deception must—as with any study—show that the potential benefits outweigh the risks or potential harms to the participants. A second drawback to deception is that once participants are deceived, they are likely to become skeptical and perhaps defensive about psychology in general or participating in research. Deception should be used sparingly and only when the potential research benefits are great while the potential costs and harms can be minimized.

Pivotal Moments in Research: Stanley Milgram and Obedience to Authority

Starting in the late 1950s in Norway and France, and continuing at Princeton, Yale, and eventually Harvard, Stanley Milgram completed a series of systematic studies that examined obedience to authority. Although obedience can be productive and is necessary for a civilized society, obedience to authority can and has been abused. Milgram (1963) said it more eloquently: "Obedience may be ennobling and educative and refer to acts of charity and kindness, as well as to destruction" (p. 371). Part of Milgram's interest in obedience to authority was to understand the behavior of soldiers leading up to and during World War II who carried out atrocities against millions of innocent people. Even if one or two people were the masterminds of such evil acts, those acts could not be accomplished without the help of many who were obedient to authority.

Stanley Milgram, circa 1965

To better understand the conditions by which obedience occurs, Milgram used a laboratory on the grounds of Yale University to conduct a study of "learning and memory." He advertised in the local newspaper for participants—they were paid $4.50 and comprised skilled and unskilled workers, salesmen and businessmen, and professionals. (In this particular study, they were all men.) On the day of the experiment, two participants showed up to the laboratory—one of whom was part of the study as an actor, known as the **confederate**. Each of the participants drew a slip of paper to determine who would be the teacher and who would be the learner in the learning and memory study, but this was rigged as well; the actual participant was the "teacher," and the confederate was always the "learner." The supposed purpose of the experiment was to determine how effective the delivery of punishment would be in helping someone learn word pairs. As it would turn out, the "learners" in Milgram's studies weren't very good learners at all: The point of the study was to determine how much punishment the teacher would deliver when told by an authority figure to do so.

Before learning word pairs, the learner was strapped into a chair in an adjacent room. To test to see if the equipment was working (and to convince the teacher about the delivery of shock), both the teacher and the learner receive a 45 volt shock when the 45 volt shock lever is switched. Note that this was the only time in the experiment when actual shocks were delivered. When data collection began, no actual shocks were delivered. The teacher would attempt to teach word pairs to the learner; the teacher would then state one of the words in the pair, and the learner was supposed to respond with the other word. The learner was intentionally bad at this task, and the teacher was instructed to flip a switch on a shock generator each time the learner made a mistake (although, remember, no actual shocks were delivered).

There were 30 shock switches on the apparatus, labeled from 15 volts to 450 volts in 15-volt increments. Thus, the dependent variable for the "teachers" was the number of shocks they were willing to deliver over the course of the "learning and memory" study. For each mistake, a shock was delivered, and on the next mistake, the teacher delivered the next (higher) voltage level. The question: How high a voltage would a teacher deliver in this situation? That is, how obedient to authority would the participant be in delivering electric shocks?

Milgram (1963) was methodologically very rigorous in his approach. During the study, he was prepared for teachers to ask to stop the study or to stop delivering shocks. The experimenter ***(continued)***

Pivotal Moments in Research: Stanley Milgram and Obedience to Authority ***(continued)***

in the room, often dressed in a white lab coat, said the following "prods" each time the teacher expressed a willingness to stop:

- Prod 1: Please continue or please go on.
- Prod 2: The experiment requires that you continue.
- Prod 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.
- Prod 4: You have no other choice; you must go on.

Remember that although the learner was strapped in, the teacher was not. The teacher could stop at any time. If the teacher asked about permanent injuries to the learner, the experimenter replied, "Although shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on."

So to what degree would the teacher shock the learner who was not very good at learning word pairs? First, it is important to realize how realistic and dramatic this experiment was. The following is a direct quote that describes it in some detail (Milgram, 1965). Also note that in this quote, the "victim" is the learner—the confederate who is receiving the "electric shocks."

> The victim indicates no discomfort until the 75-volt shock is administered, at which time there is a light grunt in response to the punishment. Similar reactions follow the 90- and 105-volt shocks, and at 120 volts the victim shouts to the experimenter that the shocks are becoming painful. Painful groans are heard on administration of the 135-volt shock, and at 150 volts the victim cries out, "Experimenter, get me out of here! I won't be in the experiment any more! I refuse to go on!" Cries of this type continue with generally rising intensity, so that at 180 volts the victim cries out, "I can't stand the pain," and by 270 volts his response to the shock is definitely an agonized scream. Throughout, he insists that he be let out of the experiment. At 300 volts the victim shouts in desperation that he will no longer provide answers to the memory test; and at 315 volts, after a violent scream, he reaffirms with vehemence that he is no longer a participant. From this point on, he provides no answers, but shrieks in agony whenever a shock is administered; this continues through 450 volts. (p. 62)

Of the 40 men in the Milgram (1963) study, how many went on to deliver the thirtieth shock at 450 volts? In this study, 26 out of 40, or 65% delivered the full amount of shocks to the learner. After the study was complete, the learner came out to meet the teacher, and the teacher was assured that no actual shocks were delivered. The teacher is debriefed and dehoaxed about the deception used in the experiment. Milgram followed up with a sample of participants to make sure they were OK one year later, and they were.

Milgram conducted many variations of this study, such as the location where the study was conducted, how much access the teacher had to the learner, and testing with individuals versus groups (Milgram, 1965). Although the percentages vary (not always 65% who shock to 450 volts), the percentages are higher than experts typically expected (Milgram, 1965). These studies provided important insights into obedience to authority. In fact, in a review of Milgram's work, Packer (2008) determined that these findings are relevant to the treatment of prisoners, whether helping to understand the atrocities of the Holocaust or torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Milgram's legacy and influence in social psychology continues to be strong to this day (Benjamin & Simpson, 2009). When thinking about these results, we might like to assure ourselves that we would not act as those participants did in the 1960s; however, Burger (2009) recently completed a partial replication of the ***(continued)***

Pivotal Moments in Research: Stanley Milgram and Obedience to Authority ***(continued)***

Milgram obedience to authority study and found comparable percentages of individuals willing to administer shocks.

Questions for Critical Thinking and Reflection

- Certain studies in the social sciences emerge as key, central works in the field; these are called *seminal* works. The Milgram studies are certainly seminal works, but why? Other researchers must have certainly studied topics such as obedience to authority prior to Milgram, so what makes his work so vital to the field?
- Topics like obedience to authority in social psychology can sometimes highlight the best and worst in all of us. What do you think were those internal influences that did govern a small minority of participants to discontinue "shocks" early on? What would you do? Perhaps more importantly, why are we (in general) so poor at predicting our own behavior as well as the behavior of others?
- What do you think about the use of a confederate in the study? What steps would the researchers need to follow in accordance with IRB and ethics guidelines to utilize a confederate, and what would need to occur at the conclusion of the study regarding deception?

Given the drawbacks of using deception, researchers developed different approaches as alternatives, including role-playing, simulations, and honest experiments.

Role-playing is a procedure in which a participant is asked to think about a particular situation and report about how they think they would act in that situation. For example, how do people *think* they would act if they saw a female on the sidewalk screaming that she just broke her leg? Although this procedure is certainly less dramatic and intrusive and requires no deception (as compared to a female on the sidewalk acting like she broke her leg), the important question for researchers is "Are the results the same when role-playing when compared to real situations?" For example, in Milgram's (1963) classic experiment in obedience to authority, psychologists and psychiatrists were asked to predict the outcome of the actual research. Whereas most experts predicted that about 1% of participants would deliver the maximum amount of "shock," in the actual study, over 60% of participants delivered the full amount of "shock."

It makes good sense that role-playing results do not perfectly match our real-world behavior. When we role-play we do just that—take on another role—and the implications of our decisions made during role-playing are certainly different from how we truly behave. In fact, this feature of role-playing may help to explain why Internet chat rooms and social networking websites are so popular with so many people—the ability to remain somewhat unknown or avoid interacting face-to-face allows people to assume a different identity.

Another alternative to deception is a **simulation**. In terms of approximating reality, simulations fall somewhere in between a study using deception and role-playing. In a simulation, the situation and characters are manipulated to make the environment as real and believable as possible. Probably the most famous simulation study is Zimbardo's (1973) Stanford Prison Experiment. In this study, Zimbardo recruited undergraduate males to participate in a study examining perceived authority figures. At the beginning of the study, the participants were

randomly assigned to either the role of prison guard or inmate. Zimbardo had arranged to use the basement of the psychology building at Stanford University as a makeshift prison for two weeks. Doors to rooms were removed from their hinges, and metal gates were placed into the doorways. Guards received uniforms and clubs, while inmates were searched, fingerprinted, and jailed. Although this was not a real-world situation, it was certainly a realistic simulation, because after six days the research had to be called off—the participants were taking the roles too seriously. Guards were repeatedly punishing and disciplining prisoners, and the prisoners were planning to hurt the guards and escape from prison. Most simulation studies do not create as realistic a situation as Zimbardo did, and most simulation studies are shorter in duration.

Philip Zimbardo giving a lecture in 2007 on the Abu Ghraib prison. Zimbardo is most known for the Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971.

Another method of avoiding deception in studies is to avoid studying areas where knowledge of the research area influences performance. This approach has been called doing **honest experiments**—the participant is told everything upfront with no effort to deceive or hide components of the research. Although this might be an ideal approach, it is certainly not practical in a number of areas in sociology and psychology. In general, researchers should try to be as fair as they can with participants. When possible, researchers should put themselves in the participants' shoes, sharing everything *they* would want to know about the study if *they* were signing up to do research.

9.5 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality are two additional concepts to which researchers need to be sensitive when conducting research. Anonymity refers to the absence of a connection between a specific participant and the data that he or she provides. Data collection records are anonymous when there can be no link between a specific individual and the data they provided. This is usually achieved by telling participants NOT to put their name or any identifying number (for example, student ID number or social security number) anywhere when responding in the study. By providing the protection of anonymity to participants, researchers protect their privacy. These privacy protections are directly related to the underlying expectations of beneficence and trust (Folkman, 2000).

However, sometimes anonymity is not possible. For example, a study might require videotaping its participants. Given the nature of the recording, it is virtually impossible to guarantee anonymity because identity is inherently linked to the data: Their visual images

comprise the data. Protecting privacy and providing anonymity can be challenging, especially with the emergence of new methodologies for data collection, such as the Internet (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002).

Confidentiality differs from anonymity in that **confidentiality** refers to the experimenter's promise not to reveal the results from a particular individual unless that individual explicitly allows the experimenter to do so. In other words, the results of any one participant are held in confidence with the researchers, and they promise not to reveal specific information. Researchers can achieve extra levels of security in protecting participants' data by obtaining a Certificate of Confidentiality (COC) from one of various units of the federal government (Catania, Wolf, Wertleib, Lo, & Henne, 2007; Wolf & Zandecki, 2006): "The Certificate of Confidentiality is designed to protect identifiable, sensitive research data against compelled disclosure in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceeding" (p. 1). COCs are relatively new, and knowledge about this additional protection to confidentiality does not appear to be widespread.

If for some reason the researchers desire to identify a particular person with his or her data, they must acquire written consent from the participant. Most of the time, confidentiality is not an issue because researchers are not interested in particular individuals but the performance of a group of individuals. If individual data are important, researchers can use codes to protect the identity of the participant while still communicating the data of an individual. For example, in memory research, an occasional individual comes along who is studied in depth, and these findings can be of great interest. Researchers can report these individual findings while also keeping confidentiality, and this is often done by using the initials of the person (e.g., H. M., N. A.). Or a researcher may be interested in testing the same participant twice, separated by one week in time. The researcher will need some mechanism by which to "connect" the data from Week 1 to Week 2; oftentimes this information is used until the connection is made, and then the identifying data are destroyed.

Conducting research is a complicated enterprise, not only from a research methods point of view but also from an ethical perspective. Social scientists have an utmost responsibility to protect the health and welfare of their participants and at the same time pursue worthy research projects that enable them to test their hypotheses (both scientific validity and scientific value). Finally, ethical decisions are not made in a vacuum but can be politically charged at times (Baarts, 2009). Human behavior is complex, and humans behaving ethically within context can mean that scientists must discuss and sometimes debate the proper actions and procedures of science. These discussions and debates are healthy and should continue to occur publicly such that our collective wisdom about ethical research and ethical behavior continues to grow.

Chapter Summary

Designing research to better understand human behavior, attitudes, and perceptions becomes more complex when researchers are charged to act ethically in their treatment of those being studied. Although sociologists and psychologists, for example, may use different terminology in describing the ethical principles that govern these professions, many of the underlying concepts are quite similar. At the college level, institutional

review boards are charged with the protection of human participants, and by using honest experiments with informed consent, risks are typically minimal. In the case where an alternative to deception (e.g., role-playing, simulation) is not adequate, extra protections and debriefing processes are more relevant. Other key considerations in research endeavors include the confidentiality of the data provided and the anonymity of the participants. Much can still be learned from studying Milgram's classic studies to understand both the research contributions and ethical issues that surround this seminal work.

Questions for Critical Thinking

- This chapter highlighted the ethical codes of sociology and psychology. How do these disciplines' ethical codes compare to other social sciences, such as anthropology, criminal justice, economics, political science, or social work? Are there unique aspects of any particular discipline that are not identified in most other social sciences?
- If you were about to design a research project, what concepts of this chapter would be most relevant to you? Would an informed consent form be necessary for your research? Would you collect the data anonymously, or would participant identities be linked to their data? How would you deliver a debriefing so that the educational value of research participation can be realized by participants? As you can see, the research enterprise can become quite complex quite quickly.

Concept Check

1. When the potential harms of experiment participation are balanced by potential benefits, _____ describes this situation.
   a. beneficence
   b. confederacy
   c. single blind
   d. anonymity

2. Children under the age of 18 cannot technically provide their informed consent to participate in a research study, but they provide
   a. normality.
   b. assent.
   c. confirmation.
   d. acculturation.

3. Which of the following describes a role-playing approach to research?
   a. Placing participants in a driving simulator and asking them to navigate a wet roadway.
   b. Requesting accident records from motor vehicle citations to determine dangerous intersections.
   c. Asking participants to think about how they would help someone stranded on the highway.
   d. Asking participants a series of surveys and questionnaires about their feelings of helplessness.

4. In an honest experiment, _____ information is withheld from the participants.
   a. all
   b. consent
   c. assent
   d. no

5. In research, the idea that a person's identity cannot be linked to a person's responses as part of an experiment is known as
   a. beneficence.
   b. informed consent.
   c. anonymity.
   d. confidentiality.

Answers: 1) a, 2) b, 3) c, 4) d, 5) c

Web Links

This website describes the official governmental rules and regulations for conducting research with human participants: http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html

This website describes nicely the details involved in offering and obtaining informed consent, with multiple examples and explanations: http://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/consent.html

This website links to a journal article that describes the theory, practice, and existing evidence regarding debriefing after participation in a psychological research experiment: http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleid=175501

This website describes the historical details of the famous Stanford Prison Experiment (a simulation study) conducted in the 1970s by Phillip Zimbardo at Stanford University: http://www.prisonexp.org/

This website describes the procedures that a university researcher would need to follow in order to protect a participant's confidentiality and anonymity by participating in a research study: http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/confidentiality.htm

Key Terms

assent This is the approval that a minor can give to participate in a research study; a minor cannot provide informed consent but must give assent as a sign of an agreement to participate.

Belmont Report Emerging from the National Research Act of 1974, the Belmont Report codified a set of regulations by which colleges and universities would need to protect research participants.

beneficence An ethical principle found in the Belmont Report that states the potential harm that research participants may experience must be balanced by the potential benefits of the research.

confederate An individual who is part of a research study who acts as a participant during the research project.

confidentiality The experimenter's promise not to reveal the results from a particular individual unless that individual explicitly allows the experimenter to do so.

debriefing A process that occurs at the conclusion of a study that informs participants of the actual events that have occurred during the study, especially if deception was involved.

deception An approach in a research study in which participants are not informed about the true purpose of the study until the study is complete, with the belief that knowledge of the topic under study may influence the results of the research project.

ethics The outlined principles followed by a given group or organization to uphold a moral code of conduct.

honest experiments A type of research study in which no deception is necessary, and participants can be fully told about the nature of the study prior to its commencement.

informed consent Involves notifying participants of risks involved in research and their protections from harm, thereby ensuring participants' autonomy and protecting their rights.

justice The burden of participating in research projects should not disproportionately fall on any one class of individuals in society.

National Research Act of 1974 A law passed in the United States enacted specifically to protect humans when participating in biomedical and behavioral research.

respect for persons An ethical principle found in the Belmont Report that led to the requirement of informed consent; that is, human participants deserve to know the risks involved in research and what their protections are.

role-playing Rather than directly participating in an experimental situation, role-playing asks research participants to report how they would behave if they were placed in a particular situation.

simulation Rather than directly participating in an experimental situation, simulation studies place participants in a replica of a real situation in order to study behavior, such as a driving simulator.