



Reading Assignment

Chapter 3:
Ethical Considerations
and Guidelines

Additional Required Reading

See information below.

Suggested Further Reading

See information below.

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

See information below.

Key Terms

1. Active deception
2. Belmont Report
3. Beneficence
4. Confidentiality
5. Debriefing

Course Learning Outcomes for Unit II

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Identify the ethical principles governing research in psychology.
2. Discuss the use of informed consent in research.
3. Analyze the use of passive and active deception in research.
4. Evaluate the purpose of debriefing in research.
5. Define plagiarism.
6. Discuss the role of the Institutional Review Board.

Unit Lesson

In this unit, we are looking at the ethical considerations in psychological research. You have probably heard of horror stories from experiments conducted throughout history that either inflicted harm on participants purposefully, did not utilize informed consent, used a great deal of deception, or exploited vulnerable participants in the name of research.

One useful example of one such experiment was the Milgram (1963) obedience experiment. In this research study, Stanley Milgram wanted to look at the relationship between obedience, authority, and personal conscious. Subjects in the study were assigned as “teachers” and paired with a “learner”. Learners were not actually study participants, but the study subjects did not know this. Teachers (subjects) were asked to administer an electric shock up to 450 volts every time the “learner” answered a question incorrectly. With each incorrect answer, the subject was instructed to increase the voltage of the electric shock administered. Milgram’s study (1963) found that the majority of subjects obeyed these instructions, even if it meant harming or possibly killing the learner. The outcome of the study suggested that most people tend to obey authority even when requested to hurt another person.

- Now, why is the Milgram study (1963) relevant to our discussion on ethics?

The Milgram study (1963) did not provide full informed consent. In order for informed consent to be valid, the researcher must fully disclose what will occur in the study, including any possible adverse consequences. In this case, subjects were exposed to very stressful conditions that could possibly cause psychological harm. The study was deceptive; its purpose was misrepresented and pertinent information, such as adverse consequences, were not disclosed to subjects. In other words, the subjects were intentionally lied to. The American Psychological Association (2010) has issued ethical guidelines that all psychologists must follow when conducting research. Here are the general ethical principles and how they apply to research specifically:

Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence

Psychologists do not harm those they work with. In research, they specifically take care to not harm animal or human subjects and protect their welfare.

Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility

Psychologists work to develop trust with those they work with. They are aware of their professional and scientific responsibility in research.

Principle C: Integrity

Psychologists are honest and ensure accuracy in their research. They do not use fraud or intentionally misrepresent the truth.

Principle D: Justice

Psychologists do not allow their personal biases and limitations in competence affect their work. They ensure that their work does not cause injustice.

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

Psychologists respect individual autonomy to make their own decisions. In relation to research, this means providing informed consent, respecting individual differences, and respecting privacy. Ensuring confidentiality is essential.

Standard 8 of the APA ethical guidelines (2010) speaks directly to the practice of research.

Let's look at some examples researchers who violated APA ethical guidelines.

Please take a moment to review Standard 8 at:
<http://www.apa.org/>

Sean has developed a research study that looks at how affection impacts attachment style in infants. He chooses infants that come from middle-class families only as he considers himself of this socio-economic status. He purposefully excludes families from other socio-economic statuses by telling them they are not eligible to participate.

Sean has violated Principle D: Justice because he has allowed his personal biases to affect his work. His research may result in injustice as families are discriminated against solely based on their socio-economic status.

Dr. CutCorners recruits 200 research subjects for his experiment on how Drug X affects symptoms of anxiety. He knows that the drug may cause some potential negative side effects and fears his research subjects will not provide consent to participate if they know about the side effects. He decides to withhold this information from them during the informed consent process.

Dr. CutCorners has violated a few ethical principles and standards. First, Principle B was violated because Dr. CutCorners has a professional responsibility to his research subjects. His relationship with his research subjects is not based on trust in this case.

Secondly, Principle C was violated because Dr. CutCorners intentionally misrepresents the truth about his experiment. He intentionally withholds information from research subjects about the study. Thirdly, Dr. CutCorners violates Principle E as he does not allow research subjects to make their own decision about participating in the study. By withholding information about the drug's potential side effects, he has essentially stripped subjects' right to make a free choice. Fourth, Dr. CutCorners has violated Standard 8.02 because he has not provided his research subjects with informed consent. In order for consent to be valid, disclosure is needed and subject consent must be voluntary.

Finally, Dr. CutCorners has violated Standard 8.07 as he has used deception in his research by purposefully withholding important information from research subjects. Dr. CutCorner's research would never get approval from the Institutional Review Board. In fact, he would likely be reported to the APA ethics board and sanctions would very likely be imposed. APA ethics sanctions could include termination of APA membership, and the APA may report their findings to other bodies, such as state licensing boards. Licensing boards can impose fines and even revoke or suspend professional licenses for violations of ethical principles and standards. As a result, it is important for you as a mental health professional to understand the ethical guidelines and requirements of practice and research in mental health.

Examples

Case 1: Andy recruits subjects for his study through a local college. He tells them what the study is about but fails to explain potential adverse consequences or side effects of his research. What ethical principle has Andy violated?

Answer: Principle I: Respect for Persons and Their Autonomy was violated. By not fully informing the subjects of his study of potential adverse consequences, Andy has deprived his subjects of autonomy. In other words, his subjects did not have the freedom to decide for themselves if they truly wished to participate in the study.

Case 2: Maria's study looks at the effects of smoking on an unborn child. As part of her study, Maria has pregnant mothers sit in a room filled with cigarette smoke. What ethical principle has Maria violated?

Answer: Principle II: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence was violated because Maria is exposing her subjects to harmful conditions that can potentially cause harm to both mother and unborn child. An Institutional Review Board would never approve Maria's study under these conditions.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>
- Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. 67, 371-378.

Additional Required Reading

Locate the following article in the CSU Online Library by following the instructions below:

Nelson, C. R. (2012). In remembrance there is prevention: A brief review of four historical failures to protect human subjects. *Journal of Research Administration*, 43(1), 98+. Retrieved from Academic OneFile.

1. Navigate to the CSU Online Library by clicking the "My Library" button on the course menu.
2. Below the heading "Research Databases", click the link to the Academic OneFile database.
3. In the first blank search field on the database search screen, type or copy/paste the following article title: "In Remembrance There is Prevention: A Brief Review of Four Historical Failures to Protect Human Subjects."
4. Click "Search" to retrieve the desired article
5. For help with using these instructions, contact the CSU Online Library at librarian@columbiasouthern.edu or 877.268.8046 (toll free).

Suggested Further Reading

American Psychological Association. (2010). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>

Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. 67, 371-378

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). The Belmont report. Retrieved from <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html>

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

Key Terms

Complete the following activity for additional practice:

- Complete the review exercises at the end of Chapter 3.
- Create your own flash cards for the Key Terms. You may do this in written form on paper or notecards, or by using PowerPoint on the computer.

Non-graded learning activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. These are non-graded activities, so you do not have to submit them.