**Case Studies for Human Participants**

Phil 7570, Spring 2007

Prof. Benham

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**Case Study 1: Anthropologist Goes Undercover**

Read the assigned article ([chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i47/47b01101.htm](http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i47/47b01101.htm)) on the course website, and then consider the following discussion questions

1. List the various concerns that are raised in the article that deal with protecting the subjects of research. Are there other concerns that should be raised that are not mentioned by the author of the article?

2. List the protections put in place by the researcher/institution to protect the subjects. Are the protections adequate, in your mind, to protect the research subjects?

3. On a number of occasions the researcher notes that she had to adjust or change the rules she used to direct her research. Do you think these changes are ethical? Were they *ad hoc* or did they lead to ethical confusion on the researcher’s part?

4. Does the fact that the researcher was and would later retake her position as a professor at the university she did her undercover research at give cause for serious concern? Because she holds a position of power over her subjects, both during the research and afterwards, does this suggest the professor should not have done her research at the same institution she teaches at?

5. In follow up articles on this research it was reported that a reporter from *The New York Sun* deduced the identity of the researcher several weeks before the release of the researcher’s book, *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*. After some pressure, the author decided to publicly reveal her identity as a professor from Northern Arizona University. Was this a wise decision ethically? What could the researcher have done differently that would have maintained her anonymity? Should she have expected to maintain anonymity in her published book?

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**Case Study 2: Deviance Study**

(Contributed by Bryan Benham)

A sociologist studying patterns of deviant behavior in two populations (lower- and higher-income groups) involves examining public records, such as census, land ownership, economic trends, and so on. But the research also involves interviews with individuals and families that are part of the local region the research covers. In these interviews the sociologist is interested in the types of deviant behavior (sex, drug use, illegal activity, and so on) and the specifics of the individual’s family and socio-economic background.

Discussion Questions

1. Imagine you are on the IRB board that reviews this research proposal. Without knowing too many of the details, what concerns would you raise? What protections would you want in place? Would you allow this type of research?

2. A chief concern for participants might be confidentiality. What kind of guarantee could the researcher give if, for example, a participant revealed his or her involvement in a serious crime or drug abuse? What responsibilities does the researcher have to secure confidentiality while at the same time upholding laws or providing appropriate care for participants?

3. How should this research be reported? What type of information can or should be left out, altered, etc.? Should it all be reported?
Case Study 3: Anthropologist on Tour  
(Contributed by Bryan Benham)

A cultural anthropologist who as a professor of anthropology in Big U studies tourism and the impact of tourist trade has on local culture. During the summer months, when he is not teaching at Big U the professor takes a job as a tour guide with a travel agency that specializes in package trips in southeast Asia; the very locales that the professor writes about in his own research. The package trips include the usual sightseeing excursions and a number of cultural events, such as local dances, plays, and musical performances.

Although the anthropology professor doesn’t necessarily see his work with the travel agency as part of his research, he has the idea on one of the three-week long trips that he should organize an “educational bonus package” in addition to the usual sightseeing and cultural events. The travelers are not required to attend, but are welcome. On one occasion the professor arranges a dinner meeting with a several of the local Balinese traditional dancers. After attending the dance, which is performed in traditional costume and accompanied by an informative interpretation of the dance moves and theatrical drama, the travelers sit down to dinner with a number of the dancers that just performed. However, rather than being dressed in traditional costume, they wear their everyday clothes of shirts and blue-jeans. In conversation it is revealed that many of the dancers have college educations from U.S. universities and are, themselves, home for a year to two before they pursue careers overseas. In addition, they tell the travelers that they learned their dancing from videotapes of previous dance teachers. Their village didn’t have any teachers but they wanted to develop a dance troupe to draw in tourists for economic reasons.

The anthropology professor was glad to hear that conversations were delving into the tourist trade in a more than superficial way. After the dinner, when everyone went their own way, locals to their homes and tourists to their hotel, they all commented how enjoyable the dinner had been, and that they never thought of traditional displays being recreated just for a tourist economy. It gave the tourists a new perspective on the local culture and their impact on the culture. This pleased the anthropology professor immensely, and he wrote as much in his daily travel journal.

Two years later, the anthropology professor decides to write a scholarly account of his experience as a travel guide. In the process of writing various papers and then fashioning them into a book he drew upon the recollections recorded in his travel diaries. This included snippets of conversations with the travelers and local artisans, and other observations as reported by people he traveled with. It also includes a description and analysis of the dinner with the Balinese dancers, and how this influenced the tourists’ views of their cultural experience. In all this the professor was careful not to reveal any names, and obscured any identifying characteristics of the tourists and locals he talked with.

Discussion Questions

1. Since the professors’ data for his book is drawn from the tourists and locals he met during his employment as a travel guide, and this was not done in the context of a research project, what concerns does this style of research raise for the protection of human subjects?

2. Since the anthropology professor never obtained informed consent from his subjects, is it ethical for him to use the information? Does he need to go back and obtain consent from those he quotes or describes in his scholarly work?

3. Does he need IRB approval, retroactively? If you were a member of the IRB reviewing his research, would you approve of his use of subject information? What protections, if any, would you insist he put in place?

4. If this were a book written for the general public, and not designed as a scholarly analysis of tourist behavior, per se, would it make a difference to the ethical evaluation of his use of subjects?
Case Study 4: False Memories
(Contributed by Bryan Benham)

Susan Black is a researcher at Southwest University. Her research focuses on how memories are formed and recalled under different conditions of stress. In the course of her research she discovered that in normal conversations with research participants she could, through suggestive language, effectively implant false memories into subjects. For example, a group of subjects were told a story about a child being lost in a grocery store and feeling abandoned by his/her parents. If told in the right context, subjects, at a later session would recall the story as a description of their own childhood experiences. This implanted memory was reinforced as a memory in the subjects so that by the time of a third meeting the subjects were convinced that the story was actually a memory of their childhood.

During the debriefing, subjects were then told that that particular episode was in fact not a genuine memory, but rather the artifact of suggestion and reinforcement that the experiment was testing. The subjects could contact their parents or relatives to confirm that the abandonment story was a fiction. Subjects would appear to accept this debriefing, but there remained a residue of concern. One subject, who was also a graduate student of Black’s reported that she knew that the memory was not hers, but still had a difficult time not feeling as though it was indeed a description of her past history.

Black used the results of this, and similar studies, to argue that memory is not like retrieving a picture from the past that is more or less accurate, but rather extremely malleable to the degree that much memory can be considered complete fantasy. Here work had an impact on the legal implications of “retrieved memories” which included some psychotherapy patients who brought lawsuits against their own parents because during the regression therapy they recalled being molested by their parents at an early age. Blacks work served the purposes of defense lawyers in these cases, and also served to undermine the admission of “retrieved memories” as evidence in a court of law.

Discussion Questions

1. What, if anything, is ethically problematic about this type of research? Keep in mind that this research was approved by the IRB and conformed to all aspects of the procedure for informing and debriefing subjects in this type of research.

2. Black’s graduate student who complained that it was difficult for her to not feel as though the memory was real was later heard to describe the procedure as “perhaps too invasive.” She observed, “although I believe in the work Professor Black is doing, the result is that the experimental design is quite invasive, as if we could get inside someone’s head and rearrange their mind in ways they didn’t realize we were doing.” How does this observation play out in understanding the ethics dimensions of this research?

3. Would your evaluation of the research be any different if the implanted memory was different? For example, imagine the story told was about a child witnessing a rabbit running across a busy road, darting back and forth between the cars, until it finally reached safety in the bushes. Would this memory be less ethically troubling? Why or why not?

4. Do the risks associated with this type of research outweigh the potential benefits for understanding memory processes? Consider what this research might be used for.

Sources for False Memories Case Study


Case Study 5: EAR Research
(Contributed by Bryan Benham)

Professor Slate is a psychological researcher interested in studying intimate relationships. In particular, Professor Slate wants to learn how to forecast the long-term stability of a given relationship. For decades it has been known that the tactics used when a couple argues — that is, their “conflict strategy” — are strongly correlated with their likelihood of breaking up. (Couples in which one partner tends to escalate conflict while the other withdraws are often headed for a split up or divorce). This finding was discovered in studies that asked couples to talk about their conflicts in a laboratory setting, under the watchful eyes of researchers who record and then analyze the conversation.

Although these studies are robust, Professor Slate is interested in phenomena that a laboratory setting may not capture, and for which self-reporting questionnaires are unlikely to capture. He thinks that the styles or strategies couples use during mundane, everyday conversation may provide hints to their long-term prospects. To Professor Slate’s amazement he stumbles across some studies that use, so-called, “electronically activated recorders, or EARs. EARs have been used to study natural language as well as coping strategies after the attacks of September 11. EARs are small recording devices, about the size of an iPod, that research subjects can carry for the time period of the study (say six days). Every 12 minutes, the EARs switch on for 30 seconds, capturing whatever conversation occurs during that time. In the coping study, for example, it was found that those who spent relatively large amounts of time talking about the attacks in one-on-one conversations, as opposed to group conversations, appeared to cope with the emotional trauma more effectively, as indicated on a questionnaire administered after the study period.

Given enough samples from couples over a period of days (a variation of “experience sampling”), Professor Slate is confident that he can capture relevant information for his study interests. The use of EARs promise to capture real-world behavior not constrained by controlled laboratory conditions or the limits of questionnaire methods. But before he can proceed with his study Professor Slate must get IRB approval for the use of EARs for his study.

Discussion Questions
1. Assume Professor Slate has become adequately familiar with the use of EARs to produce competent research. If you were on the IRB that reviews his study, what concerns would you have about the ethical use of EARs, and what would you recommend as a way of addressing these concerns?
2. Consider a slight variation of the study. Imagine Professor Slate was not interested in conversational styles of intimate couples, but instead was interested in how the frequency of topics such as sex, alcohol, and money relate to personality characteristics or propensity for depression. Would this change in the study raise any other concerns about the ethical use of EARs?
3. Suppose that during one subject’s recording, some information was captured that implicated either the research subject or an acquaintance of the subject in a felony. What should Professor Slate do with this information?
4. According to the article on which this case is based (Tales of the Tape, by David Glenn, in The Chronicle of Higher Education, vol. 52, issue 20, January 20, 2006), the central issue that concerned the IRB was recording speech from friends and bystanders who have not signed any consent forms. Two recommendations were implemented: recording time was limited to 30 second intervals so that the chance of identifying bystanders was considered minimal; for those cases in which names were used, the information was to be purged from the transcripts and audio files. In addition, the IRB encouraged subjects to wear the EAR in a visible place, not concealed under clothing, and to explain to their friends and acquaintances the study are involved in. Do you think these measures are sufficient to protect subjects under IRB guidelines?
Case Study 6: Homosexual Behavior Study


A sociologist conducted a study on transient homosexual contacts in public restrooms. This sociologist loitered near public urinals, and established himself as a "lookout" willing to watch for police. This gave him a chance to observe people engaged in acts of fellatio. He noted license plate numbers, using them to trace names and addresses of the men involved. Later, he appeared at their homes and secured permission to interview them, ostensibly conducting research for a social health survey. By way of this subterfuge, he accumulated data on their personal characteristics, such as social and economic background, employment status, health conditions, and marital relations. The investigator defended the research as a means to destigmatize homosexual behavior as a social problem. He took great care to protect the identity of the unsuspecting research subject. Still the project required considerable deception and invasion of privacy, and any lapse in the discretion of the investigator could have brought harm to many of the research subjects.

Discussion Questions
1. Should this sociologist have been allowed to conduct this study? Was this an ethical study?
2. Is there anything wrong with the sociologist's subterfuge of telling the men that the aim of his interviewing them was conducting research for a social health survey? What are the potential social benefits of this study, and do they outweigh the concerns about subterfuge?
3. Assuming that the sociologist did not tell the men that he was collecting personal information about them, was it morally problematic for him to do so, even given that he took special care to protect the identity of the men involved in the study?

Case Study 7: A Change in Research Plans

(Adopted from the American Anthropological Association website.)

A brilliant doctoral student of Professor Lee's is preparing for her dissertation defense in a medical anthropology program. Her research on family relationships and child treatment discusses the borderlands of discipline, child abuse and neglect. She has important theoretical contributions to make in the area of evolving cultural definitions of parent-child relationships among the subpopulation she studied in the US. The student plans to publish her work as an ethnography, complete with many of the candid black-and-white photos she took of the children and families she studied. Lee is stunned by the evocative power of these photographs, but has come to three discomfiting conclusions: (a) When she began her research, the student did not include photographic methods as part of application to the local Internal Review Board; (b) Consequently, the student has no signed permission from any of the individuals pictured in the photographs to use these identifying images in research or publication; and (c) some of the photographs portray evidence of physical violence with children that would likely be considered child abuse by professionals outside the study community.

Discussion Questions
1. Should Lee facilitate the dissemination of this student's important work? Should the student use the photographs? If so, how can Lee do this and help her to protect her research subjects?
2. If you were on the IRB board reviewing the original research proposal, what concerns, if any, would you raise?
3. In many cases, valuable information or new methods of research present themselves well after the research has been designed and approved by oversight committees (IRB, Dissertation committees, etc.). How should researchers deal with changes in their approved plan of research?
4. Should the student have taken pictures if it wasn’t originally part of the IRB application?
Case Study 8: Field Work

An anthropologist is studying the social organization of Pueblo Indians and how modern economic demands are reducing the number of young pueblo peoples who stay on the pueblo lands and actively participate in pueblo governance and traditional gatherings. The researcher consists of summers spent on the pueblo interviewing the population. During the time spend with the Star Pueblo in New Mexico, the anthropologist develops several close relationships with a particular family. In the third summer of research, the anthropologist arrives expecting to finish up with collecting interviews, but finds that the family expects the anthropologist to watch the children while the adults go to work, do chores, etc. The anthropologist is not able to conclude the planned interviews because of this development, and becomes upset with the family for imposing these responsibilities. It may delay the anthropologist’s research for another year.

Discussion Questions
1. What are the researchers obligations in this context?
2. Is the researcher warranted in being upset about the development?
3. What issues arise regarding protections for the interviewers as a result of this research?
4. How could this situation have been avoided? Should it have been avoided?

Case Study 9: Troubling Deception?
(Contributed by Bryan Benham)

Professor Patrick is a psychologist who studies social conformity. As one might expect of a social psychologists Professor Patrick uses deception in her experiments on human subjects. Two of her experiments are relevant to ethical concerns in the use of deception on human subjects.

The first case is a study performed by Professor Patrick as part of her dissertation in social psychology. It this study she wanted to consider the role of adult development on susceptibility to social influence and confidence in judging both emotional and non-emotional stimuli. The procedure was a modification of an existing experimental paradigm (Asch 1952, Santee & Maslach 1982). A total of 42 women, aged 18-85 years were employed in this experiment. Upon arriving each was seated in one of four soundproof booths equipped with a desk, chair, headphone and microphone. All were told that the purpose of the experiment was to study the way different people judge slides of shapes and faces, and that the tests were being performed in groups to economize data collection. Participants were given a code name, such as "red," "green," "yellow," or "blue." The subjects were presented with two types of stimuli: the first was a series of slides showing a variety of shapes, and the second was a series of slides showing a faces expressing a variety of emotions. Each subject was then asked "What shape is this most like?" and "What emotion is this person feeling?" The subjects were to respond from a list of possible labels provided, e.g., circle, square, angry, sad. The subjects were also asked to rate their confidence they had in their responses on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. The subjects were asked in serial order, with "blue" always being asked last, and each participant could hear the responses of the other subjects. Unbeknownst to the subjects, however, they were all given the code name "blue" and the voices they heard over the headphones were prerecorded answers that, for experimental purposes, either provided mixed answers, or unanimously provided an answer that was not the most likely. The purpose for this deception was to examine the effect of social conformity on the responses to those cases in which the other (recorded) participants were in agreement and answered less than optimally. The findings supported the hypothesis that older participants were less susceptible to social conformity. In this case study, there are examples of both deception by omission and deception by commission. At the beginning of the experiment the participants were not told everything about the purposes of the experiment (omission). Yet, the general environment the participants acted within was manipulated to produce certain beliefs in the subjects, namely that there were others being tested and that they always answered last (commission). It should be noted that a total of 13 younger participants and no older participants were suspicious of the study. These were excluded from the findings, leaving 42 total subjects.
After the experiments participants were duly debriefed about the procedures, and there were no reported problems over the situation, though some (13) did reveal that they were suspicious of the study. Nonetheless, Professor Patrick has expressed some concern that there was too much deception. The deception by omission was, she thought, untroubling, but the amount and degree of manipulation required to establish the proper state of mind in the subject was rather intrusive. According to her, the experimental designed called for an environment that was too far removed from reality; it amounted to a gross distortion of reality that it relied too heavily on the ignorance of the participant and capitalizing on the trust implicit in the researcher-subject relationship.

Discussion Questions
1. This case raises a number of issues regarding deception and experimental design. What alternative procedures could have been implemented in Professor Patrick’s experiment while at the same time reducing the amount of deception involved?
2. Professor Patrick indicated that the troubling aspect of her experiment was that it took advantage of the trust implicit in the researcher-subject relationship. Is this a genuine problem? If social research requires some deception, to what extent can this relationship be exploited and still be considered ethical?
3. Does the fact that none of the research subjects complained about the deception validate the method? W
4. What other issues does this case raise for the use of deception and research design?
Case Study 10: Milgram's Obedience Studies  
(Contributed by Bryan Benham)

Perhaps the most widely discussed example of deception in research design are the Milgram obedience studies conducted between 1960 and 1964. Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist at Yale University, was interested in explanations for the atrocities of German soldiers during World War II, especially conformity to orders that result in the mass death of thousands. He wanted to know if "following orders" was a genuine explanation and justification for actions that individuals would not ordinarily perform independently. Milgram couldn't reconstruct the situations of World War II, but he thought he could devise an analogue for examining whether people will follow orders under the presence of authority. He recruited several participants for a study that was allegedly on the effects of punishment on learning. When participants arrived, they were "randomly" assigned the role of "teacher" and another participant was assigned the role of "pupil." The task was for the teacher to teach a list of words to the pupil for a test of memory. However, the "pupil" was really a confederate of the experiment, and the assignment of roles was fixed so that the participant was always selected as the teacher. After selection, and with the help of the participant teacher, the pupil was strapped into a chair and an electrode was attached to the pupil's wrist. The teacher was then led into an adjoining room in which an elaborate electrical control panel was placed. Switches on the control panel were labeled with voltage indicators in increasing order from 15-450 volts. Several switches were also labeled as "Extreme-Intensity Shock," "Danger - severe shock," and the highest voltage switch was labeled "XXX." The teacher/participant was instructed to read a pre-selected, randomly ordered list of word pairs to test the pupil's ability to correctly match words. Whenever the pupil answered incorrectly, the teacher was instructed to throw one of the switches, starting at the lowest voltage and progressing to the higher voltages. The pupil, of course, was not actually receiving shocks, but he would act out preplanned mistakes and feign pain upon receiving the "shocks." About midway through the series of switches, the "pupil" would complain loudly that he wanted to stop, kick the wall, and scream. At the highest levels of shock the pupil would remain silent. All the while, the experimenter, wearing a white lab coat and carrying a clipboard, would instruct the teacher to continue with the "learning experiment." No answer was to be considered a wrong answer, and objections raised by the teacher/participant were answered with continued prompts to continue the experiment. Once the teacher reached the highest voltage switch or refused to go on after repeated prompts by the experimenter, the experiment was ended. At the end of the experiment, the teacher/participants were told the real purpose behind the experiment, that the voltage switches were not connected, and that the "pupil" was unharmed, never having received any shocks.

The actual experiment tested for how long the teacher/participant would obey the experimenter even though the "pupil" was in apparent pain. In an survey performed by Milgram prior to the study many predicted that people would be able to resist authority when ordered to do something ordinarily considered brutal, such as deliver painful shocks to others. At the most, people thought subjects would go no higher than 115 switch. The experimental results were quite different, however. The experiment showed a high degree of obedience to authority. A number of variations on this experimental design were used, but in a typical set-up of forty adult men who served as "teachers" in the experiment, all continued increasing the shock level until the "pupil" starting kicking the wall and yelling. However, even at that point, only five refused to continue and twenty-six of the forty men (65%) continued to increase the voltage level to the maximum intensity of 450 volts. Throughout the experiments, many subjects became highly agitated, exhibiting uncontrollable nervous reactions, such as giggling, shaking, sweating, and expressing concern about the health of the "pupil." The experiment demonstrated the extent to which ordinary people are capable of cruel or brutal behavior under the direction of an authority figure.

Milgram's obedience studies received high praise. In 1964 he was awarded the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS) prize for research, and his work was seminal for psychological studies about obedience to authority. However, his experiments were also highly criticized for being unethical. Diana Baumrind was one of the first to argue that Milgram's experiment did not provide adequate measures to protect participants from the stress and realization that they were capable of brutal actions; that the entire experiment should have been terminated at the first indication of discomfort in the participants; and that because of the intensity of the experience, participants would be alienated from future participation in psychological research. Others, such as H. C. Kelman, argued that the use of deception in these experiment were not necessary because other, non-deceptive methods could have obtained similar results. Milgram defended his work, arguing that adequate measures were indeed taken to protect participants; participants could withdraw from the study at any time; and that the deception was
explained at the conclusion of the experiment. He argued that deception was necessary as evidenced by the mistaken predictions of the results. Furthermore, Milgram maintained there were no indications that the stress undertaken by participants had any lasting or injurious effects. In fact, in follow-up questionnaires and interviews, several months and a year after the experiment, showed that participants were not alienated from future research and that the experience was worthwhile, even positively life-altering for them.

Discussion Questions

1. Identify the various types of deception used and the various risks involved in Milgram's experiment. Do you think the use of deception in this experiment was ethically justified? Why or why not?

2. Many subjects became highly agitated during the experiment. Does the potential knowledge gained by such an experiment justify subjecting participants to this stress? What if the results were different, so that a large percentage refused to obey at the first signs of discomfort by the "pupil"?

3. For some individuals in the experiment, the psychological effect of learning that they were capable of harming, possibly killing another person was quite real, and may have had lasting and severe harm. Does this change your ethical evaluation of the experiment?

4. What non-deceptive methods might have been used to study obedience? Do you think they would produce the same results?

5. If a similar experiment were proposed today, do you think it should be permitted? Why or why not?

Sources for Milgram Case:


