Science – Between Research Ethics and Plagiarism

Research Ethics and Scientific Integrity

November 12, 2020

GRACE

Doing Research Ethically in the Social Sciences and Humanities

Ron Iphofen FAcSS

A general definition:

'*Ethics are a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others*'

(Bulmer, 2002)

Useful definition for professional associations:

Ethics are "*...a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behaviour – to distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not"*

(Flew, 1979:112)

Ethical theory and moral philosophy:

- Deontology
- Teleology
- Utilitarianism
- Normative ('value') ethics
- Descriptive ethics
- Applied ethics
- Ethical pluralism
- Virtue ethics

Fundamental issues and dilemmas:

- Responsibility of field researcher.

- Balancing harm and benefit.

- Dynamic ethical decision-taking.

- Systems of governance and ethical assurance help maintain trust

- Divided loyalties: to profession/research subjects/employing organisation/the law.

- Role of professional associations – advocacy, mentorship, training, licensing...

Purpose of research ethics appraisal:

- Transparency of ethical decisions
- Estimating and balancing harm & benefit
- Clarifying lines of accountability
- Seeking external, independent and collegial mentorship/advice
- Systematic record of decisions taken

Core Concepts:

- Privacy
- Public space
- Physical intervention (intrusive/invasive)
- 'Sensitive' issues
- Vulnerability
- Free, valid, informed consent

Dealing with 'sensitive issues'.

- Procedural measures for identifying 'sensitivity'
- Pre-established 'topic' list (suicide, pedophilia, illegal behaviour) that 'triggers' special action
- Ad hoc decision-making – Chair and Senior Departmental Member
- Precisely what is proposed?
- How is the sensitivity to be managed – during research engagement and at dissemination?

Dealing with 'vulnerable people'.

- Careful definition of vulnerability
- Disability rights awareness
- Children's participative rights
- Access issues with those in care (gatekeeping)
- 'Membership category' assumptions – e.g. about 'older people'
- Use 'sources' E.g. EHRC – 'vulnerable workers'
- Are patients vulnerable?

Internet and social media based research

- Is the expectation of privacy 'reasonable'
- Criteria needed to clarify public/private spaces
- 'Anonymised' datasets can easily be identified
- 'Published' information is 'intentionally public' e.g. Twitter, Blogs,Vlogs – so not private

See Kandy Woodfield (2017) The Ethics of Online Research, Emerald

Internationally:

- EC = RESPECT project; H2020; PRO-RES
- USA = IRBs – The Common Rule
- Canada = Tri-council (TCPS2)
- Ireland = NDA
- Population Council = research with children
- Scandinavian countries (Norway)

For ethics review: How can consensus be achieved? What if there is no consensus?

- Clarify points of agreement/disagreement
- Identify 'sticking points'
- Offer majority view...
- Be transparent about alternative opinion...
- Allow 'minority' view(s)

For ethics review: How is ethical approval managed for short time-lines?

- Ensure available 'expedited' routes...
- Establish procedural grounds for:
- Chair's action
- Chair plus nominated REC members
- Specialist 'sub-committees'...and...
- Very last resort: retrospective review and action.

Principal Challenges (1):

- Change in ethical concern/awareness.
- Comprehensiveness.
- Avoiding duplication of scrutiny procedures.
- Ease of use.
- Covering all stages of research process.
- Consistency across research community.
- Clarity in lines of accountability.
- Balancing individual and collective responsibility.

Principal Challenges (2):

- Balancing expertise, independence & 'lay-ness'.
- Establishing appropriate procedural mechanisms.
- Ethical practice as a mutual accomplishment of all participants.
- Managing complaints/grievances.
- Willingness/ability to share experience of difficult decisions – building a repository of research ethics knowledge.

History:

- Pasque di Sangue (Ariel Toaff)
- Holocaust studies
- Eugenics – origins of statistics: Fischer, Galton
- Researching aftermath of WWII (Churchill and eugenics

Place hacking:

- Ethnography
- Urban exploration
- Law of trespass
- Overstepping 'researcher' boundary
- Cf. Community Action Research

Basic principles for all effective (and ethical) communication:

· Keep it (not 'too') simple and clear.

· Adjust the 'message content' to the audience.

· Assess potential for cognitive dissonance and prejudicial interpretation.

· Anticipate potential harm arising out of this dissemination?

· Ensure reference to 'detailed' background findings.

· Acknowledge/reference all sources and contributions.

· In doing all the above, bear in mind the particular 'nature' of the media outlet.

Useful links:

- [Ron Iphofen on Ethics Review](#)
- https://soundcloud.com/user-163454702-828217667/how-do-we-conduct-research-ethics-reviews-that-really-work

- The Ethics of Online Research
  https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/S2398-6018201802

Conclusions:

- Ethical scrutiny should be independent of research governance

- Professional associations have a responsibility to raise the ethical awareness of researchers

BUT…

- Researchers must maintain their own professional integrity (virtue ethics)
- Reflect on 'impact' and consequences of publication