CHAPTER 3

Research Ethics and Philosophies

The primary focus of this chapter is on research ethics. While each methods chapter in this book provides a discussion of ethical issues devoted specifically to a particular method (e.g., experimental design, survey), this chapter will highlight the general ethical considerations everyone should consider before beginning his or her research. Every researcher needs to consider how to practice his or her discipline ethically. Whenever we interact with other people as social scientists, we must place great importance on the concerns and emotional needs that shape their responses to our actions. It is here that ethical research practice begins, with the recognition that our research procedures involve people who deserve respect. At the end of the chapter, we conclude with a brief discussion of different social research philosophies that will set the stage for the remainder of the book.

WHAT DO WE HAVE IN MIND?

Consider the following scenario: One day as you are drinking coffee and reading the newspaper during your summer in California, you notice a small ad recruiting college students for a study at Stanford University. You go to the campus and complete an application. The ad read as follows:

Male college students needed for psychological study of prison life. $80 per day for 1–2 weeks beginning Aug. 14. For further information & applications, come to Room 248, Jordan Hall, Stanford U. (Zimbardo 1973: 38)

After you arrive at the university, you are given an information form with more details about the research (Zimbardo 1973).
Prison Life Study: General Information

**Purpose:** A simulated prison will be established somewhere in the vicinity of Palo Alto, Stanford [sic], to study a number of problems of psychological and sociological relevance. Paid volunteers will be randomly assigned to play the roles of either prisoners and guards [sic] for the duration of the study. This time period will vary somewhat from about five days to two weeks for any one volunteer—depending upon several factors, such as the “sentence” for the prisoner or the work effectiveness of the guards. Payment will be $80 a day for performing various activities and work associated with the operation of our prison. Each volunteer must enter a contractual arrangement with the principal investigator (Dr. P. G. Zimbardo) agreeing to participate for the full duration of the study. It is obviously essential that no prisoner can leave once jailed, except through established procedures. In addition, guards must report for their 8-hour work shifts promptly and regularly since surveillance by the guards will be around-the-clock—three work shifts will be rotated or guards will be assigned a regular shift—day, evening, or early morning. Failure to fulfill this contract will result in a partial loss of salary accumulated—according to a prearranged schedule to be agreed upon. Food and accommodations for the prisoners will be provided which will meet minimal standard nutrition, health, and sanitation requirements. A warden and several prison staff will be housed in adjacent cell blocks, meals and bedding also provided for them. Medical and psychiatric facilities will be accessible should any of the participants desire or require such services. All participants agree to having their behavior observed and to be interviewed and perhaps also taking psychological tests. Films of parts of the study will be taken, participants agreeing to allow them to be shown, assuming their content has information of scientific value.

[The information form then summarizes two of the “problems to be studied” and provides a few more details.]

Thanks for your interest in this study. We hope it will be possible for you to participate and to share your experiences with us.

Philip G. Zimbardo, PhD
Professor of Social Psychology
Stanford University


First, you are asked to complete a long questionnaire about your family background, physical and mental health history, and prior criminal involvement. Next, you are interviewed by someone, and then you finally sign a consent form. A few days later, you are informed that you and 20 other young men have been selected to participate in the experiment. You return to the university to complete a battery of “psychological tests” and are told you will be picked up for the study the next day (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo 1973: 73).

The next morning, you hear a siren just before a squad car stops in front of your house. A police officer charges you with assault and battery, warns you of your constitutional rights, searches and handcuffs you, and drives you off to the police station. After fingerprinting and a short stay in a detention cell, you are blindfolded and driven to the “Stanford County Prison.” Upon arrival, your blindfold is removed and you are stripped naked, skin-searched, deloused, and issued a uniform (a loosely fitting smock with an ID number printed on it), bedding, soap, and a towel. You don’t recognize anyone, but you
notice that the other “prisoners” and the “guards” are college-age, apparently almost all
middle-class white men (except for one Asian) like you (Haney et al. 1973; Zimbardo et al.
1973).

The prison warden welcomes you:

As you probably know, I’m your warden. All of you have shown that you are
unable to function outside in the real world for one reason or another—that
somehow you lack the responsibility of good citizens of this great country. We of
this prison, your correctional staff, are going to help you learn what your
responsibilities as citizens of this country are. . . . If you follow all of these rules
and keep your hands clean, repent for your misdeeds and show a proper attitude
of penitence, you and I will get along just fine. (Zimbardo et al. 1973: 38)

Among other behavioral restrictions, the rules stipulate that prisoners must remain silent
during rest periods, during meals, and after lights out. They must address each other only by
their assigned ID numbers, they are to address guards as “Mr. Correctional Officer,” and
everyone is warned that punishment will follow any rule violation (Zimbardo et al. 1973).

You look around and can tell that you are in the basement of a building. You are led
down a corridor to a small cell (6’ x 9’) with three cots, where you are locked behind a steel-
barred black door with two other prisoners (Exhibit 3.1). Located across the hall, there is a
small solitary confinement room (2’ x 2’ x 7’) for those who misbehave. There is little
privacy, since you realize that the uniformed guards, behind the mirrored lenses of their
sunglasses, can always observe the prisoners. After you go to sleep, you are awakened by a
whistle summoning you and the others for a roll call periodically through the night.

The next morning, you and the other eight prisoners must stand in line outside your cells
and recite the rules until you remember all 17 of them. Prisoners must chant, “It’s a wonderful
day, Mr. Correctional Officer.” Two prisoners who get out of line are put in the solitary
confinement unit. After a bit, the prisoners in Cell 1 decide to resist: They barricade their cell
door and call on the prisoners in other cells to join in their resistance. The guards respond by
pulling the beds out from the other cells and spraying several of the inmates with a fire
extinguisher. The guards succeed in enforcing control and become more authoritarian, while
the prisoners become increasingly docile. Punishments are regularly meted out for
infractions of rules and sometimes for

Exhibit 3.1  Prisoner in His Cell

seemingly no reason at all; punishments include doing push-ups, being stripped naked, having legs chained, and being repeatedly wakened during the night. If this were you, would you join in the resistance? How would you react to this deprivation of your liberty by these authoritarian guards? How would you respond given that you signed a consent form allowing you to be subjected to this kind of treatment?

By the fifth day of the actual Stanford Prison Experiment, five student prisoners had to be released due to evident extreme stress (Zimbardo 2008). On the sixth day, Philip Zimbardo terminated the experiment. A prisoner subsequently reported,

The way we were made to degrade ourselves really brought us down and that’s why we all sat docile towards the end of the experiment. (Haney et al. 1973: 88)

One guard later recounted his experience:

I was surprised at myself. . . . I made them call each other names and clean the toilets out with their bare hands. I practically considered the prisoners cattle, and I kept thinking: “I have to watch out for them in case they try something.” (Zimbardo et al. 1973: 174)

Exhibit 3.2 gives some idea of the difference in how the prisoners and guards behaved. What is most striking about this result is that all the guards and prisoners had been screened before the study began to ensure that they were physically and mentally healthy. The roles of guard and prisoner had been assigned randomly, by the toss of a coin, so the two groups were very similar when the study began. Something about the “situation” appears to have led to the deterioration of the prisoners’ mental states and the different behavior of the guards. Being a guard or a prisoner, with rules and physical arrangements reinforcing distinctive roles, changed their behavior.

Are you surprised by the outcome of the experiment? By the guard’s report of his unexpected, abusive behavior? By the prisoners’ ultimate submissiveness and the considerable psychic distress some felt? (We leave it to you to assess how you would have responded if you had been an actual research participant.)

Of course, our purpose in introducing this small “experiment” is not to focus attention on the prediction of behavior in prisons but to introduce the topic of research ethics. We will refer to Philip Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment throughout this chapter, since it is fair to say that this research ultimately had a profound influence on the way that social scientists think about research ethics as well as on the way that criminologists understand behavior in prisons. We will also refer to Stanley Milgram’s (1963) experiments on obedience to authority, since that research also pertains to criminal justice issues and has stimulated much debate about research ethics.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Formal procedures regarding the protection of research participants emerged only after the revelation of several very questionable and damaging research practices. A defining event
occurred in 1946, when the Nuremberg War Crime Trials exposed horrific medical experiments conducted by Nazi doctors and others in the name of “science.” In the 1970s, Americans were shocked to learn that researchers funded by the U.S. Public Health Service had followed 399 low-income African American men with syphilis in the 1930s, collecting data to study the “natural” course of the illness (Exhibit 3.3). Many participants were not informed of their illness and were denied treatment until 1972, even though a cure (penicillin) was developed in the 1950s.

Source: From The Lucifer Effect by Philip G. Zimbardo, copyright © 2007 by Philip G. Zimbardo, Inc. Used by permission of Random House Inc.

### Exhibit 3.2 Chart of Guard and Prisoner Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commands</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insults</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deindividuating reference</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of instruments</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuating reference</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Guards**

**Prisoners**

Source: From The Lucifer Effect by Philip G. Zimbardo, copyright © 2007 by Philip G. Zimbardo, Inc. Used by permission of Random House Inc.
Horrible violations of human rights similar to these resulted, in the United States, in the creation of a National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The commission’s 1979 *Belmont Report* (from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare) established three basic ethical principles for the protection of human subjects (Exhibit 3.4):

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**Exhibit 3.3  Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment**


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**Exhibit 3.4  Belmont Report Principles**

- Respect for Persons
- Beneficence
- Justice
• **Respect for persons:** Treating persons as autonomous agents and protecting those with diminished autonomy
• **Beneficence:** Minimizing possible harms and maximizing benefits
• **Justice:** Distributing benefits and risks of research fairly

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration then translated these principles into specific regulations that were adopted in 1991 as the **Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.** This policy has shaped the course of social science research ever since. This section introduces these regulations.

Federal regulations require that every institution, including universities that seek federal funding for biomedical or behavioral research on human subjects, have an **institutional review board (IRB)** to review research proposals. IRBs at universities and other agencies adopt a review process that is principally guided by federally regulated ethical standards but can be expanded by the IRB itself (Sieber 1992). To promote adequate review of ethical issues, the regulations require that IRBs include members with diverse backgrounds. The **Office for Protection From Research Risks** in the National Institutes of Health monitors IRBs, with the exception of research involving drugs (which is the responsibility of the federal Food and Drug Administration).

The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and the American Society of Criminology (ASC), like most professional social science organizations, have adopted ethical guidelines for practicing criminologists that are more specific than the federal regulations. The ACJS Code of Ethics also establishes procedures for investigating and resolving complaints concerning the ethical conduct of the organization’s members. The **Code of Ethics** of the ACJS (2000) is available on the ACJS Web site (www.acjs.org). The ASC follows the American Sociological Association’s code (ASA 1999).

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**ETHICAL PRINCIPLES**

**Achieving Valid Results**

A commitment to achieving valid results is the necessary starting point for ethical research practice. Simply put, we have no business asking people to answer questions, submit to observations, or participate in experimental procedures if we are simply seeking to verify our preexisting prejudices or convince others to take action on behalf of our personal interests. It is the pursuit of objective knowledge about human behavior—the goal of validity—that motivates and justifies our investigations and gives us some claim to the right to influence others to participate in our research. If we approach our research projects objectively, setting aside our personal predilections in the service of learning a bit more about human behavior, we can honestly represent our actions as potentially contributing to the advancement of knowledge.

The details in Zimbardo’s articles and his recent book (2008) on the prison experiment make a compelling case for his commitment to achieving valid results—to learning how and why a prison-like situation influences behavior. In Zimbardo’s (2009) own words,
Social-psychological studies were showing that human nature was more pliable than previously imagined and more responsive to situational pressures than we cared to acknowledge. . . . Missing from the body of social-science research at the time was the direct confrontation . . . of good people pitted against the forces inherent in bad situations. . . . I decided that what was needed was to create a situation in a controlled experimental setting in which we could array on one side a host of variables, such as . . . coercive rules, power differentials, anonymity. . . . On the other side, we lined up a collection of the “best and brightest” of young college men. . . . I wanted to know who wins—good people or an evil situation—when they were brought into direct confrontation.

Zimbardo (Haney et al. 1973) devised his experiment so the situation would seem realistic to the participants and still allow careful measurement of important variables and observation of behavior at all times. Questionnaires and rating scales, interviews with participants as the research proceeded and after it was over, ongoing video and audio recording, and documented logs maintained by the guards all ensured that very little would escape the researcher’s gaze.

Zimbardo’s (Haney et al. 1973) attention to validity is also apparent in his design of the physical conditions and organizational procedures for the experiment. The “prison” was constructed in a basement without any windows so that participants were denied a sense of time and place. Their isolation was reinforced by the practice of placing paper bags over their heads when they moved around “the facility,” meals were bland, and conditions were generally demeaning. This was a very different “situation” from what the participants were used to—suffice it to say that it was no college dorm experience.

However, not all social scientists agree that Zimbardo’s approach achieved valid results. British psychologists Stephen Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam (2006) argue that guard behavior was not so consistent and that it was determined by the instructions Zimbardo gave the guards at the start of the experiment, rather than by becoming a guard in itself. For example, in another experiment, when guards were trained to respect prisoners, their behavior was less malicious (Lovibond, Mithiran, & Adams 1979).

In response to such criticism, Zimbardo (2007) has pointed to several replications of his basic experiment that support his conclusions—as well as to the evidence of patterns of abuse in the real world of prisons, including the behavior of guards who tormented prisoners at Abu Ghraib during the war in Iraq.

Do you agree with Zimbardo’s assumption that the effects of being a prisoner or guard could fruitfully be studied in a mock prison, with “pretend” prisoners? Do you find merit in the criticisms? Will your evaluation of the ethics of Zimbardo’s experiment be influenced by your answers to these questions? Should our ethical judgments differ when we are confident a study’s results provide valid information about important social processes?

As you attempt to answer such questions, bear in mind that both Zimbardo and his critics support their conflicting ethical arguments with assertions about the validity (or invalidity) of the experimental results. It is hard to justify any risk for human subjects, or any expenditure of time and resources, if our findings tell us nothing about the reality of crime and punishment.
Honesty and Openness

The scientific concern with validity requires that scientists openly disclose their methods and honestly present their findings. In contrast, research distorted by political or personal pressures to find particular outcomes or to achieve the most marketable results is unlikely to be carried out in an honest and open fashion. To assess the validity of a researcher’s conclusions and the ethics of his or her procedures, you need to know exactly how the research was conducted. This means that articles or other reports must include a detailed methodology section, perhaps supplemented by appendices containing the research instruments or websites or an address where more information can be obtained.

Philip Zimbardo’s research reports seemed to present an honest and forthright account of the methods used in the Stanford experiment. His initial article (Haney et al. 1973) contained a detailed description of study procedures, including the physical aspects of the prison, the instructions to participants, the uniforms used, the induction procedure, and the specific data collection methods and measures. Many more details, including forms and pictures, are available on Zimbardo’s website (www.prisonexperiment.org) and in his recent book (Zimbardo 2008).

The act of publication itself is a vital element in maintaining openness and honesty. It allows others to review and question study procedures and generate an open dialogue with the researcher. Although Zimbardo disagreed sharply with his critics about many aspects of his experiment, their mutual commitment to public discourse in publications resulted in a more comprehensive presentation of study procedures and a more thoughtful discourse about research ethics (Savin 1973; Zimbardo 1973). Almost 40 years later, this commentary continues to inform debates about research ethics (Reicher & Haslam 2006; Zimbardo 2007).

Openness about research procedures and results goes hand in hand with honesty in research design. Openness is also essential if researchers are to learn from the work of others. In spite of this need for openness, some researchers may hesitate to disclose their procedures or results to prevent others from building on their ideas and taking some of the credit. Scientists are like other people in their desire to be first. Enforcing standards of honesty and encouraging openness about research are the best solutions to this problem.

Protecting Research Participants

The ACJS code’s standards concerning the treatment of human subjects include federal regulations and ethical guidelines emphasized by most professional social science organizations:

- Research should expose participants to no more than minimal risk of personal harm. (#16)
- Researchers should fully disclose the purposes of their research. (#13)
- Participation in research should be voluntary, and therefore subjects must give their informed consent to participate in the research. (#16)
- Confidentiality must be maintained for individual research participants unless it is voluntarily and explicitly waived. (#14, #18, #19)
Philip Zimbardo (2008) himself decided that his Stanford Prison Experiment was unethical because it violated the first two of these principles: First, participants “did suffer considerable anguish . . . and [the experiment] resulted in such extreme stress and emotional turmoil that five of the sample of initially healthy young prisoners had to be released early” (pp. 233–234). Second, Zimbardo’s research team did not disclose in advance the nature of the arrest or booking procedures at police headquarters nor did they disclose to the participants’ parents how bad the situation had become when they came to a visiting night. Nonetheless, Zimbardo (Zimbardo et al. 1973; Zimbardo 2008) argued that there was no long-lasting harm to participants and that there were some long-term social benefits from this research. In particular, debriefing participants—discussing their experiences and revealing the logic behind the experiment—and follow-up interviews enabled the participants to recover from the experience without lasting harm (Zimbardo 2007). Also, the experience led several participants in the experiment, including Zimbardo, to dedicate their careers to investigating and improving prison conditions. As a result, publicity about the experiment has also helped focus attention on problems in prison management.

Do you agree with Zimbardo’s conclusion that his experiment was not ethical? Do you think it should have been prevented from happening in the first place? Are you relieved to learn that current standards in the United States for the protection of human subjects in research would not allow his experiment to be conducted?

In contrast to Zimbardo, Stanley Milgram (1963) believed that his controversial experiments on obedience to authority were entirely ethical, so debate about this study persists today. His experiments raise most of the relevant issues we want to highlight here.

Milgram had recruited community members to participate in his experiment at Yale University. His research was prompted by the ability of Germany’s Nazi regime of the 1930s and 1940s to enlist the participation of ordinary citizens in unconscionable acts of terror and genocide. Milgram set out to identify through laboratory experiments the conditions under which ordinary citizens will be obedient to authority figures’ instructions to inflict pain on others. He operationalized this obedience by asking subjects to deliver electric shocks (fake, of course) to students supposedly learning a memory task. Subjects (“teachers”) were told to administer a shock to the learner each time he gave a wrong response and to incrementally raise the voltage with each incorrect response. They were told to increase the shocks over time and many did so, even after the “students,” behind a partition, began to cry out in (simulated) pain (Exhibit 3.5). The participants became very tense, and some resisted as the shocks increased to the (supposedly) lethal range, but many still complied with the authority in that situation and increased the shocks. Like Zimbardo, Milgram debriefed participants afterward and followed up later to check on their well-being. It seemed that none had suffered long-term harm (Milgram 1974).

As we discuss how the ACJS Code of Ethics standards apply to Milgram’s experiments, you will begin to realize that there is no simple answer to the question, “What is (or isn’t) ethical research practice?” The issues are just too complicated and the relevant principles too subject to different interpretations. But we do promise that by the end of this chapter, you will be aware of the major issues in research ethics and be able to make informed, defensible decisions about the ethical conduct of social science research.
Avoid Harming Research Participants

Although this standard may seem straightforward, it can be difficult to interpret in specific cases and harder yet to define in a way that is agreeable to all social scientists. Does it mean that subjects should not be harmed at all, psychologically or physically? That they should feel no anxiety or distress whatsoever during the study or even after their involvement ends? Should the possibility of any harm, no matter how remote, deter research?

Before we address these questions with respect to Milgram’s experiments, a verbatim transcript of one session will give you an idea of what participants experienced (Milgram 1965):

150 volts delivered. You want me to keep going?

165 volts delivered. That guy is hollering in there. There’s a lot of them here. He’s liable to have a heart condition. You want me to go on?

180 volts delivered. He can’t stand it! I’m not going to kill that man in there! You hear him hollering? He’s hollering. He can’t stand it. . . . I mean who is going to take responsibility if anything happens to that gentleman?

[The experimenter accepts responsibility.] All right.
195 volts delivered. You see he's hollering. Hear that? Gee, I don’t know. [The experimenter says: “The experiment requires that you go on.”] I know it does, sir, but I mean—Hugh—he don’t know what he’s in for. He’s up to 195 volts.

210 volts delivered.

225 volts delivered.

240 volts delivered. (p. 67)

This experimental manipulation generated “extraordinary tension” (Milgram 1963):

Subjects were observed to sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan and dig their fingernails into their flesh. . . . Full-blown, uncontrollable seizures were observed for 3 subjects. [O]ne seizure [was] so violently convulsive that it was necessary to call a halt to the experiment [for that individual]. (p. 375)

An observer (behind a one-way mirror) reported, “I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse” (p. 377).

Psychologist Diana Baumrind (1964) disagreed sharply with Milgram’s approach, concluding that the emotional disturbance subjects experienced was “potentially harmful because it could easily affect an alteration in the subject’s self-image or ability to trust adult authorities in the future” (p. 422). Stanley Milgram (1964) quickly countered, “As the experiment progressed there was no indication of injurious effects in the subjects; and as the subjects themselves strongly endorsed the experiment, the judgment I made was to continue the experiment” (p. 849).

When Milgram (1964) surveyed the subjects in a follow-up, 83.7% endorsed the statement that they were “very glad” or “glad” “to have been in the experiment,” 15.1% were “neither sorry nor glad,” and just 1.3% were “sorry” or “very sorry” to have participated (p. 849). Interviews by a psychiatrist a year later found no evidence “of any traumatic reactions” (p. 197). Subsequently, Milgram (1974) argued that “the central moral justification for allowing my experiment is that it was judged acceptable by those who took part in it” (p. 21).

Milgram (1964) also attempted to minimize harm to subjects with post-experimental procedures “to assure that the subject would leave the laboratory in a state of well being” (p. 574). A friendly reconciliation was arranged between the subject and the victim, and an effort was made to reduce any tensions that arose as a result of the experiment. In some cases, the “dehoaxing” (or “debriefing”) discussion was extensive, and all subjects were promised (and later received) a comprehensive report (p. 849).

In a later article, Baumrind (1985) dismissed the value of the self-reported “lack of harm” of subjects who had been willing to participate in the experiment—and noted that 16% did not endorse the statement that they were “glad” they had participated in the experiment (p. 168). Baumrind also argued that research indicates most students who have participated
in a deception experiment report a decreased trust in authorities as a result—a tangible harm in itself.

Many social scientists, ethicists, and others concluded that Milgram’s procedures had not harmed the subjects and so were justified for the knowledge they produced, but others sided with Baumrind’s criticisms (Miller 1986). What is your opinion at this point? Does Milgram’s debriefing process relieve your concerns? Are you as persuaded by the subjects’ own endorsement of the procedures as was Milgram?

Would you ban such experiments because of the potential for harm to subjects? Does the fact that Zimbardo’s and Milgram’s experiments seemed to yield significant insights into the effect of a social situation on human behavior—insights that could be used to improve prisons or perhaps lessen the likelihood of another holocaust—make any difference (Reynolds 1979)? Do you believe that this benefit outweighs the foreseeable risks?

Obtain Informed Consent

The requirement of informed consent is also more difficult to define than it first appears. To be informed consent, it must be given by the persons who are competent to consent, can consent voluntarily, are fully informed about the research, and comprehend what they have been told (Reynolds 1979). Still, even well-intentioned researchers may not foresee all the potential problems and may not point them out in advance to potential participants (Baumrind 1985). In Zimbardo’s prison-simulation study, all the participants signed consent forms, but they were not “fully informed” in advance about potential risks. The researchers themselves did not realize that the study participants would experience so much stress so quickly, that some prisoners would have to be released for severe negative reactions within the first few days, or that even those who were not severely stressed would soon be begging to be released from the mock prison. But on the other hand, are you concerned that real harm “could result from not doing research on destructive obedience” and other troubling human behavior (Miller 1986:138, italics original)?

Obtaining informed consent creates additional challenges for researchers. The language of the consent form must be clear and understandable to the research participants yet sufficiently long and detailed to explain what will actually happen in the research. Examples A (Exhibit 3.6) and B (Exhibit 3.7) illustrate two different approaches to these trade-offs.

Consent form A was approved by the University of Delaware IRB for in-depth interviews with former inmates about their experiences after release from prison. Consent form B is the one used by Philip Zimbardo. It is brief and to the point, leaving out many of the details that current standards for the protection of human subjects require. Zimbardo’s consent form also released the researchers from any liability for problems arising out of the research (Such a statement is no longer allowed.).

As in Milgram’s (1963) study, experimental researchers whose research design requires some type of subject deception try to minimize disclosure of experimental details by withholding some information before the experiment begins but then debrief subjects at the end. In the debriefing, the researcher explains to the subjects what happened in the experiment and why, and then addresses participants’ concerns or questions. A carefully
INFORMED CONSENT

ROADS DIVERGE: LONG-TERM PATTERNS OF RELAPSE, RECIDIVISM, AND DESISTANCE FOR A RE-ENTRY COHORT (National Institute of Justice, 2008-IJ-CX-0017)

PURPOSE: You are one of approximately 300 people being asked to participate in a research project conducted by the Center for Drug and Alcohol Studies at the University of Delaware. You were part of the original study of offenders in Delaware leaving prison in the 1990s, and we want to find out how things in your life have changed since that time. The overall purpose of this research is to help us understand what factors lead to changes in criminal activity and drug use over time.

PROCEDURES: If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey, which will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. We will ask you to provide us with some contact information so that we can locate you again if we are able to do another follow up study in the future. You will be asked about your employment, family history, criminal involvement, health history, drug use, and how these have changed over time. We will use this information, as well as information that you have previously provided or which is publicly available. We will not ask you for the names of anyone, or the specific dates or specific places of any of your activities. The interviews will be tape-recorded, but you will not be identified by name on the tape. The tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet until they can be transcribed to an electronic word processor. After the tapes have been transcribed and checked for accuracy they will be destroyed. Anonymous transcribed data will be kept indefinitely – no audio data will be kept.

RISKS: There are some risks to participating in this study. You may experience distress or discomfort when asked questions about your drug use, criminal history, and other experiences. Should this occur, you may choose not to answer such questions. If emotional distress occurs, our staff will make referrals to services you may need, including counseling, and drug abuse treatment and support services.

The risk that confidentiality could be broken is a concern, but it is very unlikely to occur. You will not be identified on the audiotape of the interview. We request that you not mention names of other people or places, but if this happens, those names will be deleted from the audiotape prior to transcription. All study materials are kept in locked file cabinets. Only three members of [the] research team will have access to study materials.

BENEFITS: You will have the opportunity to participate in an important research project, which may lead to the better understanding of what factors both help and prevent an individual’s recovery from drug use and criminal activity.

COMPENSATION: You will receive $100 to compensate you for your time and travel costs for this interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your records will be kept confidential. They will be kept under lock and key and will not be shared with anyone without your written permission. Your name will not appear on any data file or research report.
A Privacy Certificate has been approved by the U.S. Department of Justice. The data will be protected from being revealed to non-research interests by court subpoena in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative or other proceedings.

You should understand that a Privacy Certificate does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about yourself or your involvement in this research. If you give anyone written consent to receive research information, then we may not use the Certificate to withhold that information.

The Privacy Certificate does not prevent research staff from voluntary disclosures to authorities if we learn that you intend to harm yourself or someone else. These incidents would be reported as required by state and federal law. However, we will not ask you questions about these areas.

Because this research is paid for by the National Institute of Justice, staff of this research office may review copies of your records, but they also are required to keep that information confidential.

**RIGHT TO QUIT THE STUDY:** Participation in this research project is voluntary and you have the right to leave the study at any time. The researchers and their assistants have the right to remove you from this study if needed.

You may ask and will receive answers to any questions concerning this study. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Ronet Bachman or Daniel O’Connell at (302) 831-6107. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the Chairperson of the University of Delaware’s Human Subjects Review Board at (302) 831-2136.

**CONSENT TO BE INTERVIEWED**

I have read and understand this form (or it has been read to me), and I agree to participate in the in-depth interview portion of this research project.

________________________________________________________________________

Participant Signature Date

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Witness/Interviewer Date

**CONSENT TO BE CONTACTED IN FUTURE**

I have read and understand this form (or it has been read to me), and I agree to be recontacted in the future as part of this research project.

________________________________________________________________________

Participant Signature Date

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Witness/Interviewer Date

Ronet Bachman, PhD
Principal Investigator
University of Delaware
Telephone: (302) 831-6107
CONSENT

Prison Life Study
Dr. Zimbardo
August 1971

________________________________________________________

(date) (name of volunteer)

I, _________________________________________, the undersigned, hereby consent to participate as a volunteer in a prison life study research project to be conducted by the Stanford University Psychology Department.

The nature of the research project has been fully explained to me, including, without limitation, the fact that paid volunteers will be randomly assigned to the roles of either “prisoners” or “guards” for the duration of the study. I understand that participation in the research project will involve a loss of privacy, that I will be expected to participate for the full duration of the study, that I will only be released from participation for reasons of health deemed adequate by the medical advisers to the research project or for other reasons deemed appropriate by Dr. Philip Zimbardo, Principal Investigator of the project, and that I will be expected to follow directions from staff members of the project or from other participants in the research project.

I am submitting myself for participation in this research project with full knowledge and understanding of the nature of the research project and of what will be expected of me. I specifically release the Principal Investigator and the staff members of the research project, Stanford University, its agents and employees, and the Federal Government, its agents and employees, from any liability to me arising in any way out of my participation in the project.

________________________________________________________

(signature of volunteer)

Witness: ____________________________________________

If volunteer is a minor:

________________________________________________________

(signature of person authorized to consent for volunteer)

Witness: ____________________________________________

(signature of relationship to volunteer)
designed debriefing procedure can help the research participants learn from the experimental research and grapple constructively with feelings elicited by the realization that they were deceived (Sieber 1992). However, even though debriefing can be viewed as a substitute, in some cases, for securing fully informed consent prior to the experiment, debriefed subjects who disclose the nature of the experiment to other participants can contaminate subsequent results (Adair, Dushenko, & Lindsay 1985). Unfortunately, if the debriefing process is delayed, the ability to lessen any harm resulting from the deception may also be compromised.

If you were to serve on your university’s IRB, would you allow this type of research to be conducted? Can students who are asked to participate in research by their professor be considered able to give informed consent? Do you consider “informed consent” to be meaningful if the true purpose or nature of an experimental manipulation is not revealed?

The process and even possibility of obtaining informed consent must take into account the capacity of prospective participants to give informed consent. For example, children cannot legally give consent to participate in research. Instead, minors must in most circumstances be given the opportunity to give or withhold their assent or compliance to participate in research, usually by a verbal response to an explanation of the research. In addition, a child’s legal guardian typically must grant additional written informed consent to have the child participate in research (Sieber 1992). There are also special protections for other populations that are likely to be vulnerable to coercion—prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, and educationally or economically disadvantaged persons. Would you allow research on prisoners, whose ability to give “informed consent” can be questioned? If so, what special protections do you think would be appropriate?

Avoid Deception in Research, Except in Limited Circumstances

Deception occurs when subjects are misled about research procedures in an effort to determine how they would react to the treatment if they were not research subjects. In other words, researchers deceive their subjects when they believe that knowledge of the experimental premise may actually change the subjects’ behavior. Deception is a critical component of many experiments, in part because of the difficulty of simulating real-world stresses and dilemmas in a laboratory setting. The goal is to get subjects “to accept as true what is false or to give a false impression” (Korn 1997: 4). In Milgram’s (1963) experiment, for example, deception seemed necessary because the subjects could not be permitted to administer real electric shocks to the “student,” yet it would not have made sense to order the subjects to do something that they didn’t find to be so troubling. Milgram (1992) insisted that the deception was absolutely essential. The results of many other experiments would be worthless if subjects understood what was really happening to them while the experiment was in progress. The real question is this: Is that sufficient justification to allow the use of deception?

There are many examples of research efforts that employ placebos, ruses, or guises to ensure that participants’ behavior is genuine. For example, Piliavin and Piliavin (1972) staged fake seizures on subway trains to study helpfulness. Would you vote to
allow such deceptive practices in research if you were a member of your university’s IRB? What about less dramatic instances of deception in laboratory experiments with students like yourself? Do you react differently to the debriefing by Milgram compared to that by Zimbardo?

What scientific or educational or applied “value” would make deception justifiable, even if there is some potential for harm? Who determines whether a nondeceptive intervention is “equally effective” (Miller 1986: 103)? Diana Baumrind (1985) suggested that personal “introspection” would have been sufficient to test Milgram’s hypothesis and has argued subsequently that intentional deception in research violates the ethical principles of self-determination, protection of others, and maintenance of trust between people and so can never be justified. How much risk, discomfort, or unpleasantness might be seen as affecting willingness to participate? When should a post-experimental “attempt to correct any misconception” due to deception be deemed sufficient?

Can you see why an IRB, representing a range of perspectives, is an important tool for making reasonable, ethical research decisions when confronted with such ambiguity?

**Maintain Privacy and Confidentiality**

Maintaining privacy and confidentiality is another key ethical standard for protecting research participants, and the researcher’s commitment to that standard should be included in the informed consent agreement (Sieber 1992). Procedures to protect each subject’s privacy, such as locking records and creating special identifying codes, must be created to minimize the risk of access by unauthorized persons. However, statements about confidentiality should be realistic: In some cases, laws allow research records to be subpoenaed and may require reporting child abuse; a researcher may feel compelled to release information if a health- or life-threatening situation arises and participants need to be alerted. Also, the standard of confidentiality does not apply to observation in public places and information available in public records.

There are two exceptions to some of these constraints: The National Institute of Justice can issue a “Privacy Certificate,” and the National Institutes of Health can issue a “Certificate of Confidentiality.” Both of these documents protect researchers from being legally required to disclose confidential information. Researchers who are focusing on high-risk populations or behaviors, such as crime, substance abuse, sexual activity, or genetic information, can request such a certificate. Suspicions of child abuse or neglect must still be reported, as well as instances where respondents may immediately harm themselves or others. In some states, researchers also may be required to report crimes such as elder abuse (Arwood & Panicker 2007).

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) passed by Congress in 1996 created much more stringent regulations for the protection of health care data. As implemented by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2000 (and revised in 2002), the HIPAA Final Privacy Rule applies to oral, written, and electronic information that “relates to the past, present, or future physical or mental health or condition of an individual.” The HIPAA rule requires that researchers have valid authorization for any use or disclosure of “protected health information” (PHI) from a health care provider. Waivers of authorization can be granted in special circumstances (Cava, Cushman, & Goodman 2007).
The Uses of Research

Although many scientists believe that personal values should be left outside the laboratory, some feel that it is proper—even necessary—for scientists to concern themselves with the way their research is used. Philip Zimbardo made it clear that he was concerned about the phenomenon of situational influence on behavior precisely because of its implications for people’s welfare. As you have already learned, his first article (Haney et al. 1973) highlighted abuses in the treatment of prisoners. In his more comprehensive book, Zimbardo (2007) used his findings to explain the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib. He also urged reforms in prison policy.

It is also impossible to ignore the very practical implications of Milgram’s investigations, which Milgram (1974) took pains to emphasize. His research highlighted the extent of obedience to authority and identified multiple factors that could be manipulated to lessen blind obedience (such as encouraging dissent by just one group member, removing the subject from direct contact with the authority figure, and increasing the contact between the subject and the victim).

The evaluation research by Lawrence Sherman and Richard Berk (1984) on the police response to domestic violence provides an interesting cautionary tale about the uses of science. As you will recall from Chapter 2, the results of this field experiment indicated that those who were arrested were less likely to subsequently commit violent acts against their partners. Sherman (1992) explicitly cautioned police departments not to adopt mandatory arrest policies based solely on the results of the Minneapolis experiment, but the results were publicized in the mass media and encouraged many jurisdictions to change their policies (Binder & Meeker 1993; Lempert 1989). Although we now know that the original finding of a deterrent effect of arrest did not hold up in other cities where the experiment was repeated, Sherman (1992) later suggested that implementing mandatory arrest policies might have prevented some subsequent cases of spouse abuse. JoAnn Miller’s (2003) analysis of victims’ experiences and perceptions concerning their safety after the mandatory arrest experiment in Dade County, Florida, found that victims reported less violence if their abuser had been arrested (or assigned to a police-based counseling program called “Safe Streets”) (Exhibit 3.8). Should this Dade County finding be publicized in the popular press so it could be used to improve police policies? What about the results of the other replication studies where arrest led to increased domestic assault? The answers to such questions are never easy.

Social scientists who conduct research on behalf of specific organizations may face additional difficulties when the organization, instead of the researcher, controls the final report and the publicity it receives. If organizational leaders decide that particular research results are unwelcome, the researcher’s desire to have findings used appropriately and reported fully can conflict with contractual obligations. Researchers can often anticipate such dilemmas in advance and resolve them when the contract for research is negotiated—or simply decline a particular research opportunity altogether. But other times, such problems come up only after a report has been drafted, or the problems are ignored by a researcher who needs a job or needs to maintain particular professional relationships. These possibilities cannot be avoided entirely, but because of them, it is always important to acknowledge the source of research funding in reports and to consider carefully the sources of funding for research reports written by others.
The withholding of a beneficial treatment from some subjects also is a cause for ethical concern. Recall that the Sherman and Berk (1984) experiment required the random assignment of subjects to treatment conditions and thus had the potential of causing harm to the victims of domestic violence whose batterers were not arrested. The justification for the study design, however, is quite persuasive: The researchers didn’t know prior to the experiment which response to a domestic violence complaint would be most likely to deter future incidents (Sherman 1992). The experiment provided clear evidence about the value of arrest, so it can be argued that the benefits outweighed the risks.

In later chapters, we will continue to highlight the ethical dilemmas faced by research that utilizes particular types of methods. Before we begin our examination of various research methods, however, we first want to introduce you to the primary philosophies.

SOCIAL RESEARCH PHILOSOPHIES

What influences the decision to choose one research strategy over another? The motive for conducting research is critical: An explanatory or evaluative motive generally leads a researcher to use quantitative methods, whereas an exploratory motive often results in the use of qualitative methods. Of course, a descriptive motive means choosing a descriptive research strategy.

Positivism and Postpositivism

A researcher’s philosophical perspective on reality and on the appropriate role of the researcher also will shape his or her choice of methodological preferences. Researchers with a philosophy of positivism believe that there is an objective reality that exists apart from the perceptions of those who observe it; the goal of science is to better understand this reality.
Whatever nature “really” is, we assume that it presents itself in precisely the same way to the same human observer standing at different points in time and space. . . . We assume that it also presents itself in precisely the same way across different human observers standing at the same point in time and space. (Wallace 1983: 461)

This philosophy is traditionally associated with science (Weber 1949), with the expectation that there are universal laws of human behavior, and with the belief that scientists must be objective and unbiased to see reality clearly.

**Postpositivism** is a philosophy of reality that is closely related to positivism. Postpositivists believe that there is an external, objective reality, but are very sensitive to the complexity of this reality and the limitations of the scientists who study it. Social scientists, in particular, recognize the biases they bring to their research as they are social beings themselves (Guba & Lincoln 1994: 109–111). As a result, they do not think scientists can ever be sure that their methods allow them to perceive objective reality. Rather, the goal of science can only be to achieve *intersubjective agreement* among scientists about the nature of reality (Wallace 1983: 461). For example, postpositivists may worry that researchers’ predispositions may bias them in favor of deterrence theory. Therefore, they will remain somewhat skeptical of results that support predictions based on deterrence until a number of researchers feel that they have found supportive evidence. The postpositivist retains much more confidence in the ability of the community of social researchers to develop an unbiased account of reality than in the ability of any individual social scientist to do so (Campbell & Russo 1999: 144).

**Positivist Research Guidelines**

To achieve an accurate understanding of the social world, a researcher operating within the positivist or postpositivist tradition must adhere to some basic guidelines about how to conduct research:

1. **Test ideas against empirical reality without becoming too personally invested in a particular outcome.** This guideline requires a commitment to “testing,” as opposed to just reacting to events as they happen or looking for what we want to or expect to see (Kincaid 1996: 51–54).

2. **Plan and carry out investigations systematically.** Social researchers have little hope of conducting a careful test of their ideas if they do not fully think through in advance how they should go about the test and then proceed accordingly.

3. **Document all procedures and disclose them publicly.** Social researchers should disclose the methods on which their conclusions are based so that others can evaluate for themselves the likely soundness of these conclusions (Kincaid 1996).

4. **Clarify assumptions.** No investigation is complete in itself. Whatever the researcher’s method(s), the effort rests on some background assumptions. For example, research to determine whether arrest has a deterrent effect assumes that potential law violators think rationally and that they calculate potential costs and benefits prior to committing crimes.
5. **Specify the meaning of all terms.** Words often have multiple or unclear meanings. “Recidivism,” “self-control,” “poverty,” “overcrowded,” and so on can mean different things to different people. In scientific research, all terms must be defined explicitly and used consistently.

6. **Maintain a skeptical stance toward current knowledge.** The results of any particular investigation must be examined critically, although confidence about interpretations of the social or natural world increases after repeated investigations yield similar results.

7. **Replicate research and build social theory.** No one study is definitive by itself. We cannot fully understand a single study’s results apart from the larger body of knowledge to which it is related, and we cannot place much confidence in these results until the study has been replicated.

8. **Search for regularities or patterns.** Positivist and postpositivist scientists assume that the natural world has some underlying order of relationships, so that unique events and individuals can be understood at least in part in terms of general principles (Grinnell 1992: 27–29).

Real investigations by social scientists do not always include much attention to theory, specific definitions of all terms, and so forth. However, all social researchers should be compelled to study these guidelines and to consider the consequences of not following any with which they do not agree.

**A Positivist Research Goal: Advancing Knowledge**

The goal of the traditional positivist scientific approach is to advance scientific knowledge. This goal is achieved when research results are published in academic journals or presented at academic conferences.

The positivist approach regards value considerations to be beyond the scope of science. In Max Weber’s (1949) words, “An empirical science cannot tell anyone what he should do—but rather what he can do—and under certain circumstances—what he wishes to do” (p. 54). The idea is that developing valid knowledge about how society is organized, or how we live our lives, does not tell us how society should be organized or how we should live our lives. The determination of empirical facts should be a separate process from the evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (p. 11).

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**Intersubjective agreement** An agreement by different observers on what is happening in the natural or social world

**Positivism** The belief, shared by most scientists, that there is a reality that exists quite apart from our own perception of it, although our knowledge of this reality may never be complete

**Postpositivism** The belief that there is an empirical reality but that our understanding of it is limited by its complexity and by the biases and other limitations of researchers
Interpretivism and Constructivism

Qualitative research is often guided by a philosophy of interpretivism. Interpretive social scientists believe that reality is socially constructed and that the goal of social scientists is to understand what meanings people give to reality, not to determine how reality works apart from these interpretations. This philosophy rejects the positivist belief that there is a concrete, objective reality that scientific methods help us to understand (Lynch & Bogen 1997); instead, interpretivists believe that scientists construct an image of reality based on their own preferences and prejudices and their interactions with others.

Here is the basic argument: The empirical data we collect all come to us through our own senses and must be interpreted with our own minds. This suggests that we can never be sure that we have understood reality properly, or that we ever can, or that our own understandings can really be judged more valid than someone else’s.

Searching for universally applicable social laws can distract from learning what people know and how they understand their lives. The interpretive social researcher examines meanings that have been socially constructed. . . . There is not one reality out there to be measured; objects and events are understood by different people differently, and those perceptions are the reality—or realities—that social science should focus on. (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 35)

The paradigm of constructivism extends interpretivist philosophy by emphasizing the importance of exploring how different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 44–45). It gives particular attention to the different goals of researchers and other participants in a research setting and seeks to develop a consensus among participants about how to understand the focus of inquiry. The constructivist research report will highlight different views of the social program or other issue and explain how a consensus can be reached among participants.

**Interpretivism** The belief that reality is socially constructed and that the goal of social scientists is to understand what meanings people give to that reality. Max Weber termed the goal of interpretivist research *verstehen*, or “understanding.”

**Constructivism** A perspective that emphasizes how different stakeholders in social settings construct their beliefs.

Constructivist inquiry uses an interactive research process, in which a researcher begins an evaluation in some social setting by identifying the different interest groups in that setting. The researcher goes on to learn what each group thinks, and then gradually tries to develop a shared perspective on the problem being evaluated (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 42).
Interpretivist/Constructivist Research Guidelines

Researchers guided by an interpretivist philosophy reject some of the guidelines to which positivist researchers seek to adhere. In fact, there is a wide variety of specific approaches that can be termed “interpretivist,” and each has some guidelines that it highlights. For those working within the constructivist perspective, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest four key steps for researchers, each of which may be repeated many times in a given study:

1. Identify stakeholders and solicit their “claims, concerns, and issues.”
2. Introduce the claims, concerns, and issues of each stakeholder group to the other stakeholder groups and ask for their reactions.
3. Focus further information collection on claims, concerns, and issues about which there is disagreement among stakeholder groups.
4. Negotiate with stakeholder groups about the information collected, and attempt to reach consensus on the issues about which there is disagreement (p. 42).

An Interpretivist or Constructivist Research Goal: Creating Change

Some social researchers with an interpretivist or constructivist orientation often reject explicitly the traditional positivist distinction between facts and values (Sjoberg & Nett 1968). Bellah et al. (1985) have instead proposed a model of “social science as public philosophy.” In this model, social scientists focus explicit attention on achieving a more just society.

Whyte (1991) proposed a more activist approach to research called participatory action research. As the name implies, this approach encourages social researchers to get “out of the academic rut” and bring values into the research process (p. 285).

In participatory action research, the researcher involves as active participants some members of the setting studied. Both the organizational members and the researcher are assumed to want to develop valid conclusions, to bring unique insights, and to desire change, but Whyte (1991) believes these objectives are more likely to be obtained if the researcher collaborates actively with the persons studied.

An Integrated Philosophy

It is tempting to think of positivism and postpositivism as representing an opposing research philosophy to interpretivism and constructivism. Then it seems that we should choose the one philosophy that seems closest to our own preferences and condemn the other as “unscientific,” “uncaring,” or perhaps just “unrealistic.” But there are good reasons to prefer a research philosophy that integrates some of the differences between these philosophies (Smith 1991).

And what about the important positivist distinction between facts and values in social research? Here, too, there is evidence that neither the “value-free” presumption of positivists nor the constructivist critique of this position is entirely correct. For example, Savelsberg, King, and Cleveland (2002) examined influences on the focus and findings of
published criminal justice scholarship. They found that criminal justice research was more likely to be oriented to topics and theories suggested by the state when it was funded by government agencies. This reflects a political influence on scholarship. However, government funding did not have any bearing on the researchers’ conclusions about the criminal justice processes they examined. This suggests that scientific procedures can insulate the research.

Which philosophy makes the most sense to you? Do you agree with positivists and postpositivists that scientific methods can help us understand the social world as it is, not just as we would like to think it is? Does the interpretivist focus on meanings sound like a good idea? Whatever your answers to these questions, you would probably agree that developing a valid understanding of the social world is not an easy task for social scientists.

CONCLUSION

The extent to which ethical issues present methodological challenges for researchers varies dramatically with the type of research design. Survey research, in particular, creates few ethical problems. In fact, researchers from Michigan’s Institute for Social Research Survey Center interviewed a representative national sample of adults and found that 68% of those who had participated in a survey were somewhat or very interested in participating in another; the more times respondents had been interviewed, the more willing they were to participate again. Presumably, they would have felt differently if they had been treated unethically (Reynolds 1979). On the other hand, some experimental studies in the social sciences that have put people in uncomfortable or embarrassing situations have generated vociferous complaints and years of debate about ethics (Reynolds 1979; Sjoberg 1967).

The evaluation of ethical issues in a research project should be based on a realistic assessment of the overall potential for harm and benefit to research subjects rather than an apparent inconsistency between any particular aspect of a research plan and a specific ethical guideline. For example, full disclosure of “what is really going on” in an experimental study is unnecessary if subjects are unlikely to be harmed. Nevertheless, researchers should make every effort to foresee all possible risks and to weigh the possible benefits of the research against these risks. They should consult with individuals with different perspectives to develop a realistic risk–benefit assessment, and they should try to maximize the benefits to, as well as minimize the risks for, subjects of the research (Sieber 1992).

Ultimately, these decisions about ethical procedures are not just up to you, as a researcher, to make. Your university’s IRB sets the human subjects’ protection standards for your institution and will require researchers—even, in most cases, students—to submit their research proposal to the IRB for review. So we leave you with the instruction to review the human subjects guidelines of the ACJS or other professional association in your field, consult your university’s procedures for the conduct of research with human subjects, and then proceed accordingly.
HIGHLIGHTS

- Philip Zimbardo’s prison-simulation study and Stanley Milgram’s obedience experiments led to intensive debate about the extent to which deception could be tolerated in social science research and how harm to subjects should be evaluated.

- Egregious violations of human rights by researchers, including scientists in Nazi Germany and researchers in the Tuskegee syphilis study, led to the adoption of federal ethical standards for research on human subjects.

- The 1979 Belmont Report, developed by a national commission, established three basic ethical standards for the protection of human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

- The Department of Health and Human Services adopted in 1991 a Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. This policy requires that every institution seeking federal funding for biomedical or behavioral research on human subjects have an institutional review board (IRB) to exercise oversight.

- The ACJS standards for the protection of human subjects require avoiding harm, obtaining informed consent, avoiding deception except in limited circumstances, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

- Scientific research should maintain high standards for validity and be conducted and reported in an honest and open fashion.

- Effective debriefing of subjects after an experiment can help reduce the risk of harm resulting from the use of deception in the experiment.

- Positivism is the belief that there is a reality quite apart from one’s own perception of it that is amenable to observation.

- Intersubjective agreement is an agreement by different observers on what is happening in the natural or social world.
Postpositivism is the belief that there is an empirical reality but that our understanding of it is limited by its complexity and by the biases and other limitations of researchers.

Interpretivism is the belief that reality is socially constructed, and the goal of social science should be to understand what meanings people give to that reality.

The constructivist paradigm emphasizes the importance of exploring and representing the ways in which different stakeholders in a social setting construct their beliefs. Constructivists interact with research subjects to gradually develop a shared perspective on the issue being studied.

**EXERCISES**

**Discussing research**

1. What policy would you recommend that researchers such as Sherman and Berk follow in reporting the results of their research? Should social scientists try to correct misinformation in the popular press about their research, or should they just focus on what is published in academic journals? Should researchers speak to audiences like at police conventions in order to influence policies related to their research results?

2. Now go to this book’s study site at www.sagepub.com/bachmanfrccj2e and choose the Learning From Journal Articles option. Read one article based on research involving human subjects. What ethical issues did the research pose, and how were they resolved? Does it seem that subjects were appropriately protected?

3. Outline your own research philosophy. You can base your outline primarily on your reactions to the points you have read in this chapter, but try also to think seriously about which perspective seems the most reasonable to you.

4. Researchers should consider their research philosophy as well as their theoretical stance prior to designing a research project. The “Theories and Philosophies” lesson on the text’s study site will help you think about the options. To use these lessons, choose one of the four “Theories and Philosophies” exercises from the opening menu for the Interactive Exercises. Follow the instructions for entering your answers and responding to the program’s comments.

**Finding Research on the Web**

1. The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) offers an extensive online training course in the basics of human subjects protections issues. Go to the public access CITI site at www.citiprogram.org/rcrpage.asp?affiliation=100 and complete the course in social and behavioral research. Write a short summary of what you have learned.

2. Philip Zimbardo provides extensive documentation about the Stanford Prison Experiment at www.prisonexperiment.org. Read several documents that you find on this website, and write a short report about them.

3. Read the entire ACJS Code of Ethics at www.acjs.org. Discuss the meaning of each research standard.
4. There are many interesting websites that discuss philosophy of science issues. Read the summaries of positivism and interpretivism at www.misq.org/archivist/vol/no28/issue1/EdCommentsV28N1.pdf. What do these summaries add to your understanding of these philosophical alternatives?

**Critiquing Research**

1. Investigate the standards and operations of your university’s IRB. Interview one IRB member and one researcher whose research has been reviewed by the IRB (after receiving the appropriate permissions!). How well do typical IRB meetings work to identify the ethical issues in proposed research? Do researchers feel that their proposals are treated fairly? Why or why not?

2. Continue the debate between positivism and interpretivism with an in-class discussion. Be sure to review the guidelines for these research philosophies and the associated goals. You might also consider whether an integrated philosophy is preferable.

3. How do you evaluate the current ACJS ethical code? Is it too strict, too lenient, or just about right? Are the enforcement provisions adequate? What provisions could be strengthened?

**Making Research Ethical**

1. Should criminologists be permitted to conduct replications of Zimbardo’s prison simulation? Of Milgram’s obedience experiments? Can you justify such research as permissible within the current ACJS ethical standards? If not, do you believe that these standards should be altered so as to permit this type of research?

2. Why does unethical research occur? Is it inherent in science? Does it reflect “human nature”? What makes ethical research more or less likely?

3. Does debriefing solve the problem of subject deception? How much must researchers reveal after the experiment is over as well as before it begins?

**Developing a Research Proposal**

Now it’s time to consider the potential ethical issues in your proposed study and the research philosophy that will guide your research. The following exercises involve very critical “Decisions in Research.”

1. List the elements in your research plans that an IRB might consider to be relevant to the protection of human subjects. Rate each element from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates no more than a minor ethical issue and 5 indicates a major ethical problem that probably cannot be resolved.

2. Write one page for the application to the IRB that explains how you will ensure that your research adheres to each relevant ASA standard.

3. Draft a consent form to be administered to your subjects when they enroll in your research. Use underlining and margin notes to indicate where each standard for informed consent statements is met.
Performing Data Analysis in SPSS or Excel

1. Access HOMICIDE.por. Obtain a pie chart for MURCON, which is a variable that gives the disposition of a homicide case according to three values: (1) no conviction, (2) a murder conviction, or (3) some other felony conviction. What do you conclude about this sample of homicide cases after analyzing the pie chart for this variable?

2. Using these same data, ask for a bar chart to be made for the variable giving the number of prior arrests the homicide defendant had (PRIARR). What do you conclude about the criminal history for this sample of homicide defendants?

3. Access YOUTH.por. Ask for a frequency distribution for the variable V63, which provides information on how often respondents’ parents know where they are when they are away from home, using the following response options: 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = usually, 4 = always. You can also ask for a bar chart to be included in the output. What do you conclude about parents’ knowledge of the whereabouts of their children from this sample of adolescents?

Student Study Site

The companion Student Study Site for Fundamentals of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice can be found at www.sagepub.com/bachmanfrccj2e.

Visit the Student Study Site to enhance your understanding of the chapter content and to discover additional resources that will take your learning one step further. You can enhance your understanding of the chapters by using the comprehensive study material, which includes interactive exercises, e-flashcards, web exercises, practice self-tests, and more. You will also find special features, such as Learning From Journal Articles, which incorporates Sage’s online journal collection.