



Ethics in Social
Research

Ethical
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Specific Ethical
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Researching Crime and Justice

Workshop 2: Ethics and Politics

Jose Pina-Sánchez



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Workshop Content

- Discuss ethics in research
- Discuss politics in research
- Exercises
- Discuss Assignment 1



Learning Aims

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- The consideration of the politics of research might be something useful for your careers in the long-term
- The discussion of ethics needs to be present in any research project in the Social Sciences
- You should apply some of the ideas you will learn in this workshop this very same year
- In particular regarding Assignment 3 and the final Dissertation



The Ethics of Social Research

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- What do we mean by ethics?
- Statements of ethical principles
- Specific ethical concerns
- Exercises



What Do We Mean by Ethics?

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- 'Ethics is concerned with the attempt to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour' (May, 2001, p.59)
- Ethical decisions in research are those which 'arise when we try to decide between one course of action and another not in terms of expediency or efficiency but by reference to standards of what is morally right or wrong' (Barnes, 1979, p.16)



What Do We Mean by Ethics?

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- ‘Ethics is concerned with the attempt to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour’ (May, 2001, p.59)
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- When doing research we normally try to balance convenience/feasibility and rigour



What Do We Mean by Ethics?

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- Ethics could be considered a component of feasibility

What Do We Mean by Ethics?

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- Ethical decisions in research are those which ‘arise when we try to decide between one course of action and another not in terms of expediency or efficiency but by reference to standards of what is morally right or wrong’ (Barnes, 1979, p.16)
- When doing research we normally try to balance convenience/feasibility and rigour
- Ethics could be considered a component of feasibility
- The level of ‘rigour’/quality of the findings, will be determined by the validity and reliability of the method



Statements of Ethical Principles

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- University of Leeds
- British Society of Criminology
- British Sociological Association
- ESRC



Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

- Is there harm to the participants?
- According to the British Society of Criminology Ethical Guidelines (Section 4:i) researchers should:

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Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

- Is there harm to the participants?
- According to the British Society of Criminology Ethical Guidelines (Section 4:i) researchers should:
 - recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of an individual participating in research is not adversely affected by participation in the research

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Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

- Is there harm to the participants?
- According to the British Society of Criminology Ethical Guidelines (Section 4:i) researchers should:
 - recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of an individual participating in research is not adversely affected by participation in the research
 - strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy

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Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

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 - recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of an individual participating in research is not adversely affected by participation in the research
 - strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy
 - consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one, particularly for those who are vulnerable by virtue of factors such as age, social status, or powerlessness and should seek to minimise such disturbances

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 - strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy
 - consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one, particularly for those who are vulnerable by virtue of factors such as age, social status, or powerlessness and should seek to minimise such disturbances
 - consider whether or not it is appropriate to offer information about support services (e.g. leaflets about relevant self-help groups)



Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

- Ensure anonymity to avoid harm
- Examples:
 - Studies on homosexuality
 - Studies on drug consumption

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Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

- Ensure anonymity to avoid harm
- Examples:
 - Studies on homosexuality
 - Studies on drug consumption
- Ensuring anonymity goes beyond the deletion of names
- You may remove the name but if you publish your dataset and it says something like,
 - Name: X
 - Gender: Male
 - Nationality: Canada
 - Income: \$100,000,000

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Ethical Concerns: Avoiding Harm

- Ensure anonymity to avoid harm
- Examples:
 - Studies on homosexuality
 - Studies on drug consumption
- Ensuring anonymity goes beyond the deletion of names
- You may remove the name but if you publish your dataset and it says something like,
 - Name: X
 - Gender: Male
 - Nationality: Canada
 - Income: \$100,000,000
- Question: Who would that be?
How could you have protected his identity?



Ethical Concerns: Informed Consent?

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- Participants are provided with sufficient information so they can make an informed decision as to whether to become involved or not
- Brief consent forms will not be enough, complement them with participant information sheets



Ethical Concerns: Informed Consent?

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Examples

- Participants are provided with sufficient information so they can make an informed decision as to whether to become involved or not
- Brief consent forms will not be enough, complement them with participant information sheets
- Ethical issues raised by covert studies
- See relevant section of British Society of Criminology code of ethics (Section 4:iii)



Ethical Concerns: Invasion of Privacy?

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- The right to privacy is a basic pillar of a democratic society
- We do not expect our communications to be monitored by government agencies
- The same applies to researchers



Ethical Concerns: Invasion of Privacy?

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- The right to privacy is a basic pillar of a democratic society
- We do not expect our communications to be monitored by government agencies
- The same applies to researchers
- ‘the research participant does not abrogate the right to privacy entirely by providing informed consent’ (Bryman, 2008, p.123)
- e.g., interviewees need to be reminded that they can decide not to respond a particular question or to withdraw at any time



Ethical Concerns: Deception Involved?

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- Deception occurs when the research is presented as something which is not
- A classical example is the Stanford experiment



Ethical Concerns: Deception Involved?

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- Deception occurs when the research is presented as something which is not
- A classical example is the Stanford experiment
- To a lesser extent most of us are guilty
- e.g. I have run questionnaires in the past and consciously avoided to inform the respondent of the expected duration
- In practice, it is often difficult to draw a line

Ethics Committees

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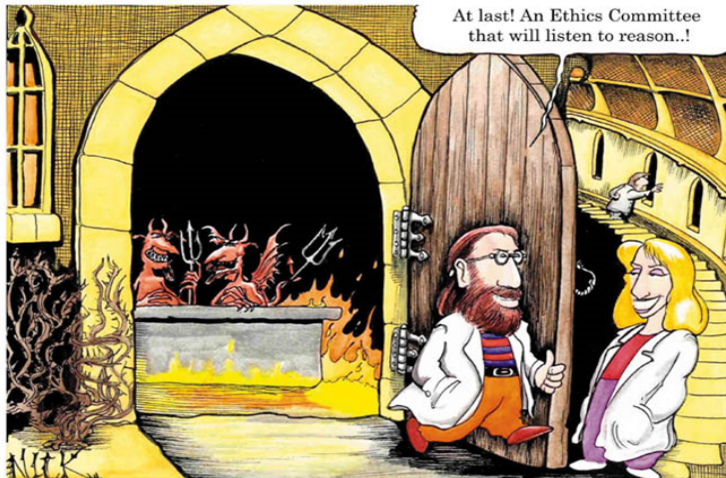
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Examples of Ethical Concerns

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- Sam's prisoner dilemma
- The facebook experiment



Ethical Concerns: Assignment 3

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- As part of your Assignment 3 you will need to present a research proposal
- Within this, a section on Ethics is crucial (especially if you are considering collecting your own data)
- Make sure that you can write a paragraph addressing each of the ethical concerns seen above
- My advice: do it now because it is still fresh in your minds



Politics in Social Research

- If you have already worked for a complex organisation you will have noticed that they strive to achieve a common goal

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Examples

- If you have already worked for a complex organisation you will have noticed that they strive to achieve a common goal
- However, you may have noticed as well that there are plenty of personal interests:



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Examples

- If you have already worked for a complex organisation you will have noticed that they strive to achieve a common goal
- However, you may have noticed as well that there are plenty of personal interests:
 - often these involve strategies to maximise the probability of promotions; e.g. taking undeserved credit
 - minimise the probability of being fired; e.g. becoming indispensable
 - avoiding extra work; e.g. lecturers not advertising their office hours
 - influencing decisions to make the organisation pursue personal goals; e.g. politicians seeking to be re-elected



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Examples

- If you have already worked for a complex organisation you will have noticed that they strive to achieve a common goal
- However, you may have noticed as well that there are plenty of personal interests:
 - often these involve strategies to maximise the probability of promotions; e.g. taking undeserved credit
 - minimise the probability of being fired; e.g. becoming indispensable
 - avoiding extra work; e.g. lecturers not advertising their office hours
 - influencing decisions to make the organisation pursue personal goals; e.g. politicians seeking to be re-elected
- A research project is not much different than that



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Examples

- Research projects don't take place in the vacuum
- They take place in a particular social reality, and affect different actors with different interests
- Depending on your actions and how you approach the key political actors your work will become harder or easier



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- Whose side are we on?
- The political role of the 'stakeholder'
- Political pressures at every stage



Whose Side Are We On?

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Examples

- The first political situation that you will have to deal with
- This is often unavoidable, even if you try to be completely neutral
- Specially significant if you are going to do research on socially controversial topics



The Political Role of 'Stakeholders'

- To navigate the politics involved in any project is essential that you identify the 'stakeholders' involved
- i.e. those who will be affected by your research and/or those who have in their hands the fulfilment of the project

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The Political Role of 'Stakeholders'

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Examples

- To navigate the politics involved in any project is essential that you identify the 'stakeholders' involved
- i.e. those who will be affected by your research and/or those who have in their hands the fulfilment of the project
- Stakeholders include:
 - Sponsors
 - Gatekeepers
 - Audiences



The Political Role of 'Stakeholders'

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Examples

- To navigate the politics involved in any project is essential that you identify the 'stakeholders' involved
- i.e. those who will be affected by your research and/or those who have in their hands the fulfilment of the project
- Stakeholders include:
 - Sponsors
 - Gatekeepers
 - Audiences
- Learn about their interests
- and try to align your priorities to their interests without compromising the validity of your research

Political Pressures at Every Stage

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- ① Getting started
- ② Gaining support and sponsorship
- ③ Gaining access
- ④ Collecting the data
- ⑤ Publishing the results
- ⑥ Utilization of the research



Examples from Our Own Research

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Examples

- ① Getting started
- ② **Gaining support and sponsorship**
- ③ **Gaining access**
- ④ **Collecting the data**
- ⑤ **Publishing the results**
- ⑥ Utilization of the research



Example: Gaining Sponsorship

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Examples

- I am writing a research proposal to evaluate the impact of the new Sentencing Guidelines in England and Wales
- In order to get the funding that I need from the ESRC it would be really important to obtain the endorsement from both the Sentencing Councils for England and Wales and Scotland
- Question: How would you do that?



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Example: Gaining Access

- Last autumn Carly and I sent a freedom of information (FOI) request to the Ministry of justice to gain access to a dataset capturing information on the sentences passed to offenders involved in the 2011 riots
- FOI Act gives you the right to access recorded information held by public sector organisations
- The dataset exists



Example: Gaining Access

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Examples

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- FOI Act gives you the right to access recorded information held by public sector organisations
- The dataset exists
- Question: What do you think happened?



Example: Gaining Access

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- FOI Act gives you the right to access recorded information held by public sector organisations
- The dataset exists
- Question: What do you think happened?

What would you have done differently?



Example: Collecting Data

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- This summer I started trying to ‘data mine’ information from sentences captured in the Law Pages
- After ten requests a ‘captcha’ pops up



Example: Collecting Data

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Examples

- This summer I started trying to ‘data mine’ information from sentences captured in the Law Pages
- After ten requests a ‘captcha’ pops up
- Last year a new copyright law allowed a text and data mining exception for reasons of research
- You have to explain your case and ultimately it goes to the Secretary of State who ultimately decides



Example: Collecting Data

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- After ten requests a ‘captcha’ pops up
- Last year a new copyright law allowed a text and data mining exception for reasons of research
- You have to explain your case and ultimately it goes to the Secretary of State who ultimately decides
- Question: How would you have proceeded?



Example: Publishing Results

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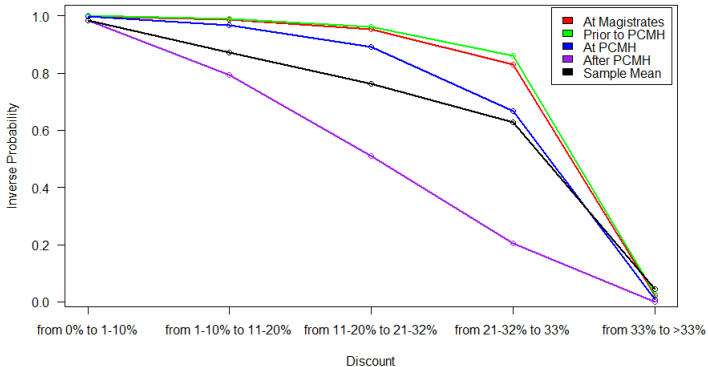
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Examples

- In 2013 while working as an ESRC intern at the Sentencing Council I studied the degree of compliance of the Guilty Plea Guidelines
- This established that the percentage of the reduction in sentence length should only be determined by the timing of the guilty plea
- However, I found that other factors, such as the offender expressing remorse, also had an effect on the sentence reduction

Example: Publishing Results

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Example: Publishing Results

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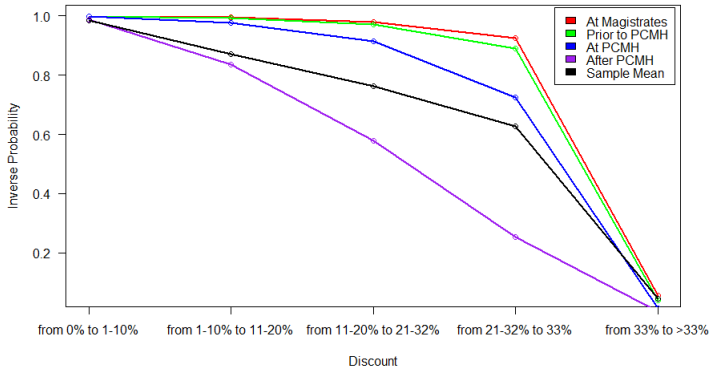
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Example: Publishing Results

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- Question: What do you think ended up happening?



Example: Publishing Results

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- Question: What do you think ended up happening?

What would you have done as the Head of Analysis and Research?



Example: Publishing Results

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- Question: What do you think ended up happening?

What would you have done as the Head of Analysis and Research?

What would you have done in my place?



Example: Publishing Results

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- In subsequent research that I have carried out on the topic I have been careful on how to report findings
- Never lose academic integrity, but try not to seem belligerent when there is no need for it



Example: Publishing Results

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'[...] we find that the base case of an assault of ABH committed against a vulnerable victim is 8.6 months, but may vary by 1.3 months. [...]

These findings show that, [...] the variability in sentencing amongst courts is moderate.'