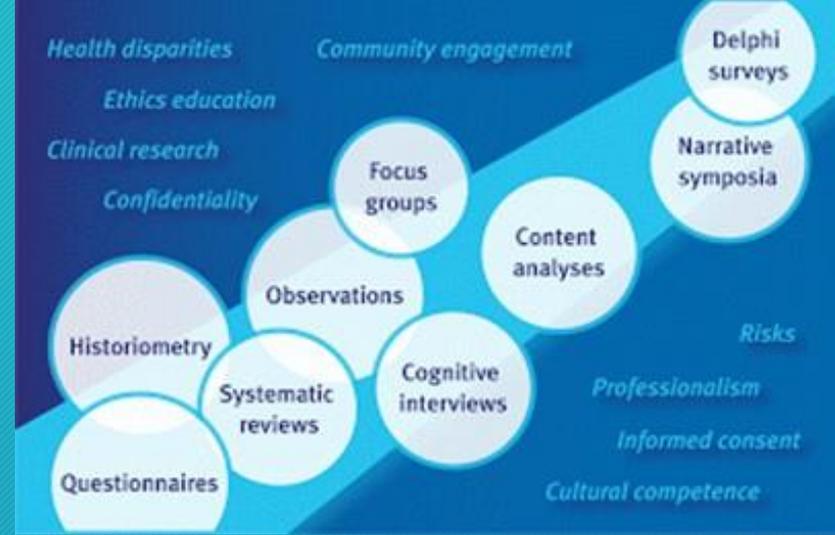


seeks to understand the hows and whys of human behavior



Ethics Issues and Research in Social Sciences, Law and Humanities

Presented by
Dr. Sharmella Roopchand-Martin

When Should Social Science Research be Subjected to Ethical Review?

- The study involves an intervention in the physical integrity of subjects.
- The study deviates from the principle of informed consent (ethical review is not required if the research is based on public documents, registries or archived data).
- The subjects are children under the age of 15, and the study is not part of the normal activities of a school or an institution of early childhood education and care.

When Should Social Science Research be Subjected to Ethical Review?

- The study exposes research subjects to exceptionally strong stimuli and evaluating possible harm requires special expertise (eg. studies containing violence or pornography).
- The study may cause long-term mental harm (trauma, depression, sleeplessness) beyond the risks encountered in normal life.
- The study can signify a security risk to subjects (for example, studies concerning domestic violence).

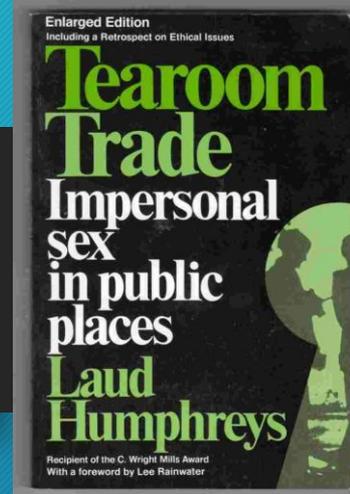
Overt and Covert Research

- “.....we overlook the social scientists behind the hunting blinds who are also peeping into what we thought were our most private and secret lives. But there they are, studying us, taking notes, getting to know us, as indifferent as everybody else to the feeling that to be a complete human involves having an aspect of ourselves that's unknown.”

(von Hoffman, 1970).

Humphreys Tearoom Trade Study (1960)

- Humphreys played the role of “watch queen,” he looked out for intruders while men performed oral sex on men in the public restrooms of parks in major metropolitan areas.
- He gathered data on locations, the frequency of acts, the age of the men, the roles they played, and whether money changed hands.
- He later disclosed his role to some men he had observed and interviewed them on their daily lives.
- In other cases, he recorded his subjects’ license plate numbers to track where they lived.
- A year later, after changing his hair and attire, he interviewed these same men in their homes under the guise of conducting an anonymous public health survey.



Is Deception Permissible?

- What is the justification for the study?
- Could the question be answered through a different approach?
- Researchers must have detailed process for debriefing participants including psychological support in place if needed.
- Risk involved must be no more than minimal.

ETHICAL REVIEW MANDATORY

What About Privacy?

- Observing subjects in a public place does not require their consent or review from the ethics committee.
- Technical recording equipment can be used in a public place PROVIDED THE PRINCIPLES REGARDING PRIVACY AND DATA PROTECTION are observed in the use, storage and archiving of data.
- A photo taken in a public space but focused on an individual may be viewed as invasion of privacy in a civil lawsuit.

Committees Must Consider the Following.

- What is being observed.
- The environment in which observation is taking place.
- Are activities being staged for the purpose of research.
- The expectations of privacy that persons may have.
- Method of recording information.
- Will research reports or publications contain identifying information.
- Procedure by which participant's permission will be sought if identifying information will be used.

Diversity in Approaches

Ethnography

Oral
History

Participatory
Action
Research

Grounded
Theory

Discourse
Analysis

Narrative
Inquiry

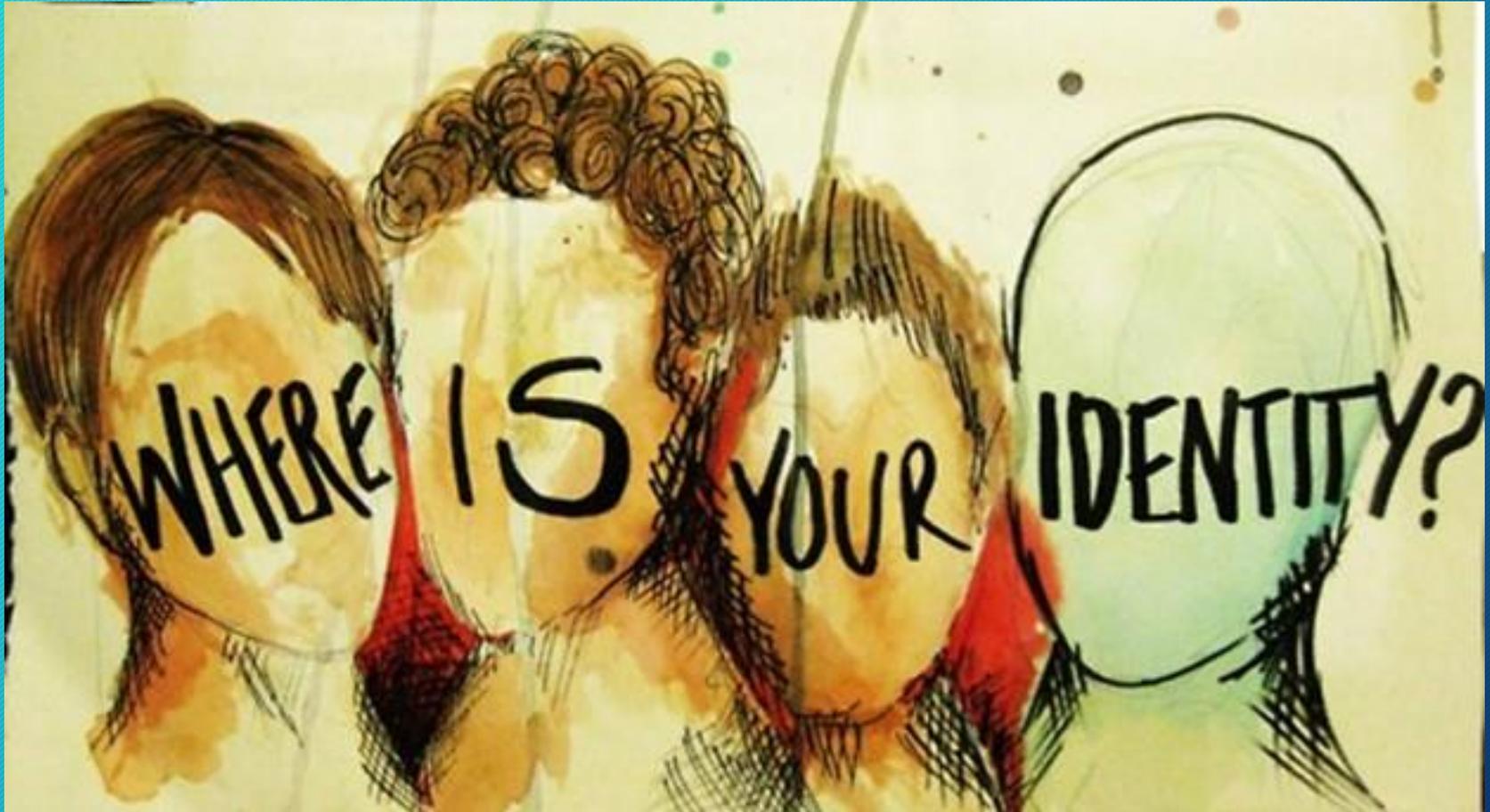
Emergent Designs

- Researchers must consult with the ethics committee when data collection methods change.
- Once final versions of instruments have been developed they must be submitted to the committee.
- If risk level changes research must go through ethical scrutiny again.

Issues With Sample Size and Selection

- Sound methods must be used - why 3, 6... persons for a focus group?
- Why this key informant?
- What are the risks to the person?
- In small societies can anonymity be truly obtained?
- Methods to protect the participant?

Changing Relationships?



Changing Relationships



“The irony I now perceive is that ethnographic method exposes subjects to far greater danger and exploitation than do more positivist, abstract, and “masculinist” research methods. And the greater the intimacy—the greater the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship—the greater is the danger.”

Ethnographer Judith Stacy Cited in *The Ethics of Social research*

Divided Loyalties



<https://www.google.tt/search?>

Divided Loyalties



- Linda Nutt social worker and researcher?
- Noticed an unambiguously sexually explicit picture in the hallway of the carers home where she just completed research interview.
- New carers are instructed to assume that all children have been sexually abused unless specifically told otherwise.
- There is a statutory responsibility to disregard confidentiality where children are at risk.

Bell & Nutt, 2002 cited in Ethical Issues in Social Research

Generalizability of Results



Regard for Third Parties



- Has the researcher adequately considered all the possible third parties that may be affected by this research?
- What mechanisms have been put in place to protect these persons from harm.



Respect for Posthumous Reputation



- Graves and human remains must be treated with utmost respect.
- The fact that the dead cannot object does not relieve the researcher of the obligation to be meticulous in their approach.



Internet Research



- Research on the internet itself (design, coding , programming....)
- People using the internet to administer instruments.
- Research on production, communication and interaction on the internet (social media, blogs etc).

The Facebook Experiments



- For one week in January 2012, data scientists skewed data feed to almost 700,000 Facebook.
- Some people got a preponderance of happy and positive feeds.
- Others got negative and sad feeds.
- Results published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
- In the company's current terms of service, Facebook users relinquish the use of their data for "data analysis, testing, [and] research."

IS THIS IT ETHICALLY ACCEPTABLE?

The Facebook Experiments



- During 2010 midterm elections in the U.S. 61,279,316 users over the age of 18 were included in this experiment.
- Facebook offered test subjects an 'I Voted' button at the top of their News Feeds and information on how to find their polling place. Some users also saw the names of their friends who had clicked the button.
- The control group got no prompt to vote.
- Then the researchers checked public voting records to see which of the millions actually voted.

The Facebook Experiments



Conclusions

Peer pressure works. People were more likely to click the “I Voted” button if their friends’ names appeared there. When researchers checked actual voting records, they found that people who got the “I Voted” message in their News Feed were 0.39% more likely to have actually voted, and were more likely to have voted if their friends’ names appeared.

Those are miniscule percentages but the researchers think their experiment resulted in 340,000 votes that wouldn’t have otherwise happened.

Questions to Consider



- Is there only minimal risk of harm?
- Are the integrity and the autonomy for research subjects adequately secured?
- Is the method adequate?
- Is the knowledge produced relevant enough?



Is data posted public or private?

Extract data from the internet from persons profile.

Perform content analysis to create a profile.

Publish information that reinforces traditional gender and racial stereotypes

What Did we Agree to in User Contracts?



Using social media for social research: An introduction

Social Media Research Group

May 2016

References and Resources

- Canadian Tricouncil Policy Document
- National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway. Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities.
- National Advisory Board on Research Ethics.
- Ethical Guidelines for Internet Research. National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), December 2014
- Qualitative Practice. Chapter 4. The Ethics of Social Research: Why is ethical practice so important. Sage Publications. retrieved from http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/34088_Chapter4.pdf