

# Chapter 3

## Ethics & Politics in Social Research

# Voluntary Participation

- Social research disrupts subjects' everyday lives
- Requires people reveal personal information
- No one forced to participate
- Example: Prisoners & drug testing
- This norm of voluntary participation goes against scientific concern of generalizability

# No Harm to the Participants

- Difficult: Issues of psychological harm
  - Reliving events
  - Revealing demeaning information
- Informed consent – participants base their voluntary participation on full understanding of the possible risks; sign saying they are aware of these risks

# Anonymity

- When neither the researchers nor the readers of the findings can identify a given response with a given respondent
- Methods to ensure anonymity
- Example – mail in survey with no identifiers

# Confidentiality

- When the researcher can identify a given person's responses but promises not to do so publicly
- Courts don't recognize this norm
- Example: Rik Scarce, Washington State University; Animal Rights Activist Research

# Deception

- Supposed to tell truth about your research and who you are
- Can be tricky
- Laboratory experiments – lying is not unusual
- Debriefing sessions – interview participants, discuss deception, to discover any problems generated by the research experience

# Analysis and Reporting

- Ethical obligations to colleagues in scientific community
- Researchers must make technical limitations and failures known to readers
- Must report negative findings

# Institutional Review Boards

- Panel that reviews research proposals involving human subjects
  - Federal funded projects MUST be reviewed/approved by IRB
- Guarantee that subjects' rights and interests will be protected
- Ensure that risks to participants are minimal



# Professional Code of Ethics

- American Sociological Association (ASA) has its own code
- <http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm>

# Two Ethical Controversies

- The Tearoom Trade: Laud Humphreys 1970
- Ethical controversies
  - Invasion of privacy
  - Lying about identity
- Milgram's 1969 human obedience study
- Ethical controversy
  - No harm to participants

# The Politics of Social Research

- Max Weber: sociology should be “value-free”  
-- unencumbered by personal values
- Social science and social action cannot/should not be separated

# Examples of Political Nature of Social Research

- AIDs Research in 1980's
- Census – very political
- Social research has political and ideological dimensions
- Careful, deliberate considerations of ethical and political issues

# How Does It Apply To Us?

- Informed Consent Form required
- See blog
- Institutional Review Board at ASU
- Question about submitting original research to them for review
- <http://www.adams.edu/irb/>