# Research Ethics: Crash Course

**Data, Design, and Society**

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# Activity 1: Writing Prompt (5 min)

What does it mean to act in an ethical way, regarding research?

*And/or*

What is "privacy"? How do you feel about it? Is it important to you?

# The plan for today

1. Idea of ethics
2. Public and private spaces and activities: what can we observe?
3. Informed consent, consent forms
4. Data management and protection
5. Student ethics agreement

# What this session tries to do

- This session Is a **basic orientation** to some ethics issues and paperwork you will need for your projects

- Goal is to **make you aware of requirements and responsibilities** and set your "ethics alarm" so you will check yourself--"hmm, I think there might be a problem with that"

- It WILL NOT tell you everything you may need to know about ethics for your group's project, you WILL need to look things up

# 1. Ethics introduction

# Research ethics as rules, standards

- Ethics are **rules of conduct** [for a person or profession] underpinned by a set of **moral values** (NB: values relative) *(Ransome 2013, p4)*

- Ethics establish a **framework** within which action (or research work) is considered **acceptable.** Outside of that framework, it is not. *(Ransome 2013, p4)*

- "The ethics of research concern the **appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour** in relation to the subjects of the research or those who are affected by it." *(Gray, 2014, p68)*

# Guiding ideas

- Seeking to achieve the greatest good through research, seeking to avoid harm and distress to participants (and communities)

- Weighing the potential risks and benefits of doing a piece of research in a certain way

- Acting with honesty and integrity, as researchers and professionals

- Respect for people's rights and dignity, including their privacy and anonymity (*legal protection varies!*)

# Codes and forms

- Professional, national, Uni **ethics codes** seek to **provide guidance** for decision-making and priorities

- Codes may also establish punishments for poor conduct

- **Ethical approval forms and processes are a form of "checks and balances":** someone else looks at planned research and also considers its risks, benefits, alternatives.

# References for this section

- Ransome, Paul (2013). Ethics and values in social research. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

- Ch 4. Gray, David E. (2014). Doing research in the real world. Los Angeles, SAGE.

- Goodwin, C. James (2008). Research In Psychology: Methods and Design. 5th edition. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

# Other resources for this section

**On why we should care about ethics:**

[Chs 1-2] Israel, Mark (2006). Research ethics for social scientists : between ethical conduct and regulatory compliance. London : Sage

*NB: Newer edition available as an e-book*


**On historical basis of ethical codes, informed consent:**

Gaw, Allan (2011). On moral grounds : lessons from the history of research ethics. Glasgow : SA Press

# 2. Public and private spaces and activities

Warning: lack of consensus ahead

# Trying to define privacy

"I shall define privacy as the **condition of being protected from unwanted access by others**-- either physical access, personal information, or attention." *(Bok, 1984, p.10-11, as cited in Homan 1991, p. 42)*

"The **control of information** about natural living persons, by those persons." *(Michael, 1984, p.135, as cited in Homan 1991, p. 42).*

- Current concepts of privacy as have strong element of self-control, self-determination, people as own "gate-keepers"
- **Privacy not only about information,** but about intrusion into spaces, interference from others (e.g. in decision-making). *Informational sense of privacy historically later!*

# Naturalistic observation in public spaces is generally OK when…

- We are respecting privacy as much as possible (space, interference, information) and with reference to the norms of the place and culture we are in

- Any violations of privacy  are fairly small, and are outweighed by possible benefit

- There is no risk of individual persons being identified (i.e. people are anonymous) or harmed by your data collection. This means that notes are generally always safe, but photos and videos become problematic.

- Our observation does not disturb or change the subjects' behaviour

- We ONLY observe, and do not approach or interact with subjects

This is deliberately a more conservative list—different disciplines also have different norms!

# Two helpful heuristics

"If the study occurs in a place where anyone could be observed by anyone else, then consent is not needed" *(Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998, as cited in Goodwin, 2008).*

"Unless those observed give their consent to being observed, **observational research is only acceptable in situations where those observed would expect to be observed by strangers.** Additionally, particular account should be taken of local cultural values and of the possibility of intruding upon the privacy of individuals who, even while in a nominally public space, **may believe they are unobserved.**" *(British Psychological Society Guidance, as quoted in Gray 2014, p 77)*

# Activity 2: Is that a public space and activity?

**Discuss the following in your team:**

Given this information on how we might distinguish public/private places and activities, look at the **list handout** and decide how to classify each example. Do you think it is a public place and activity?

OR in other words, could we observe/study this activity without consent?

1. Counting the number of people who bought sandwiches at DHT cafe

2. Filming students serving themselves and eating at Pollock Halls

3. Filming people walking through the farmer's market

4. Observing and taking notes on shopper behaviour inside of a grocery store

5. Wall posts and comments in an Edinburgh food sharing Facebook group

6. What people say at a face-to-face meeting of an Edinburgh food sharing group

# References for this section

- Oliver, Paul (2003). The Student's Guide to Research Ethics. Open University Press, Maidenhead, Berkshire, UK.

- Goodwin, C. James (2008). Research In Psychology: Methods and Design. 5th edition. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

- Ch 4. Gray, David E. (2014). Doing research in the real world. Los Angeles, SAGE.

- Homan, Roger (1991). The ethics of social research. London : Longman. *NB: This is an older resource, but highly recommended especially for its discussion of public spaces and norms*

# Other resources for this section

**Privacy and norms, especially as related to technology**

Tavani, Herman T. (2011). Ethics and technology : controversies, questions, and strategies for ethical computing. Hoboken, N.J. : Wiley.

*NB: In many respects this book is sadly outdated, as it is a 2011 update of an older book. However, the privacy content (Ch 5) is a very useful addition to what is in the social science ethics books.*

# 3. Informed Consent

# Quick overview

- Where we are not observing anonymous, public behaviour, people must explicitly agree to participate in our research

- This means using an **information sheet** as starting point to inform people about the work, information collected, how we will use it

- People can ask questions and freely say yes or no to all (or part) of participation, recorded on a **consent form**

**Informed Consent= Saying yes or no, without coercion, to something I can understand**

# INFORMATION…

- What research project is about, or tries to do, and why
- What participant would be asked to do, time commitment
- Information about any research benefits, lack of benefit, any risks of harm
- How you will manage data
- Confidentiality and anonymity of their personal data
- What you plan to do with the information you collect

*Information sheets should be truthful, simple, direct, suitable for a non-specialist*

# … PLUS CONSENT

- Person indicating that they are **voluntarily agreeing** to participate in the research and **understand**  what they are agreeing to, including risks and benefits.

- Agreeing to have their data used in certain ways (e.g. analysis presentation, publication)

- Person agrees s/he has opportunity for questions, these have been answered

- Person can withdraw at any time for any reason with *no consequences,* have their data destroyed

# Exception!

- **Anonymous questionnaires/surveys** (NO personal information collected at all) do NOT need explicit, fully informed consent.

- There are a few other exceptions to informed consent—they don't apply here

# Resources for this section

- Howitt, Dennis, & Cramer, Duncan (2011). Introduction to research methods in psychology. Harlow : Prentice Hall

- Ch 4. Gray, David E. (2014). Doing research in the real world. Los Angeles, SAGE.

- Goodwin, C. James (2008). Research In Psychology: Methods and Design. 5th edition. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

- **On history of informed consent:** Gaw, Allan (2011). On moral grounds : lessons from the history of research ethics. Glasgow : SA Press

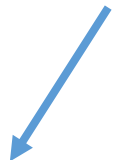# 4. Data management and data protection

# Data management

"Data management refers to all aspects of creating, housing, delivering, maintaining, and archiving and preserving data." *(MANTRA data management unit)*

Essential for responsible research, and your sanity!

About **having a plan** for what data you will collect, who will have access, storage, naming, documentation…

# This means tasks like...

So important for teams! Save your sanity!

- Choice of naming conventions and file formats to be used across project

- Identifying software and tools you will need to collect, store, analyse, visualise data

- Addressing copyright and intellectual property issues

- Deciding who is responsible for data management and maintenance during and after project

- Plan for backing up data!!!

- Documentation re: how data collected, when, what it is

If you looked at this in a year, would you know what was in this spreadsheet?

# Data protection—legal responsibility

Overlaps with data management, but is not the same thing!

**From MANTRA unit on data protection:**

*"Data protection refers to the rights of the individuals whose data are being collected, held, and processed. Individuals have the right to have inaccuracies corrected and to know what data are being held and how they are being used.*

*The 1998 Data Protection Act (DPA) regulates how personal data may be held and processed...This is a UK Act passed to comply with the European Data Protection Directive."*

# Data Protection Act (1998)

Under the act, "personal data must be

- *Obtained fairly and lawfully (i.e. with permission from the 'data subject')*

- *adequate, relevant, and not excessive in respect of the purpose for which it has been gathered*

- *stored securely*

- *accurate and kept up to date*

- *kept only for as long as is necessary for the stated purpose\**

- *not transferred from one country to another without permission from the 'data subject'"*

Act text, as re-stated more simply by Ransome (2013, p.40-41)

# What is this "personal data"?

"**Personal data** simply refers to records or other information that on its own or linked with other data, can **reveal the identity of an actual living person**. So, for example, you may use numbers rather than names as identifiers in a survey, but if you hold another record linking those numbers to the actual names, then each record is considered to contain personal information." *(UoE MANTRA course unit on data management)*

There is also **sensitive personal information** (e.g. race, political beliefs) BUT you are unlikely to deal with this in your projects.

# Activity 3: Personal information

**Make a few notes for yourself:**

1. Try to define ***personal information*** in your own words—in a simple way that you can remember it.

2. Try to generate two examples each of something that IS, and something that IS NOT personal information.

# References for this section

- Ransome, Paul (2013). Ethics and values in social research. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

- Rice, Robin & Ekmekcioglu, Cuna (2011? unclear). «Data protection, rights and access". In University of Edinburgh MANTRA research data management online course. http://datalib.edina.ac.uk/mantra/protectionrightsandacces s/

- Ekmekcioglu, Cuna (2011? unclear). "Data management plans". In University of Edinburgh MANTRA research data management online course. http://datalib.edina.ac.uk/mantra/datamanagementplans/

- University of Edinburgh Records Management (2015). "What is data protection?". http://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/data-protection/what-is-it

# 5. Student ethics agreement

# Activity 4: Ethics agreement

**With your team, read through the ethics agreement.**

1. Do you understand what you are being asked to do or not do?

2. Can you explain why the agreement asks you to do/not do those things?

*Flag up any questions or terms you cannot interpret!*

References are at the end of each section