

Chapter Three

3

ETHICAL ISSUES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

When a researcher asks individuals to participate in research or observes individuals without their awareness, a number of ethical issues arise. Will participants be harmed by the research? What are the benefits of the research? How will individuals' privacy be protected? Will information provided by participants be confidential? Consider further the ethical questions that arise when animals are used in research. Perhaps you've seen news reports describing conflicts between researchers and individuals seeking to protect animal rights. Should animals be used in research? What may be considered humane use of animals in research? These are important questions that researchers must address. Table 3.1 outlines major ethical issues in psychological research. However, before we address these issues, we introduce you to the research example for this chapter, a study of false confessions by Dr. Saul Kassin and K. Lee Kiechel.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- identify important ethical issues in psychological research,
- describe how researchers attempt to behave ethically, and
- describe the steps involved in ethical decision making.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH EXAMPLE: FALSE CONFESSIONS



The strongest piece of evidence in a criminal trial is the defendant's confession of guilt (McCormick, 1972, as cited in Kassin, 1997). As you might expect, the likelihood of conviction increases greatly when a defendant confesses to committing the crime. But can we believe these confessions? Is there any reason that someone might *falsely* confess—that is, confess to a crime he or she did not commit?

In fact, there are many documented cases of false confession (see Kassin, 1997, for a review). Why do individuals confess to crimes they did not commit? Kassin suggests that police interrogations often include deception (including false evidence and false witnesses) and coercive techniques. Some individuals may be especially vulnerable to these tactics. For example, individuals who are young, naive, suggestible, anxious, stressed, or sleep deprived; those who lack intelligence; or those who are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs may be more likely to submit a false confession and even *believe* their confession (Kassin, 1997; Kassin & Kiechel, 1996).

Little empirical research has investigated the factors that may cause people to confess to crimes they did not commit. The purpose of Kassin and Kiechel's (1996) experiment was to examine two factors: false evidence and individual vulnerability. In this laboratory study, student participants were asked to complete a "reaction time" task with another student (a "confederate," who actually was working with the experimenter). Each participant was asked to type letters the confederate read aloud. They were told not to hit the "Alt" key on the keyboard because this would cause the program to crash and their data would be lost. The computer was rigged to crash after one minute of typing, and the very distressed experimenter accused the participant of hitting the "Alt" key. All participants correctly denied hitting the "Alt" key at this point.

Some of the participants were in a "vulnerable" condition. They were asked to type letters at a very fast pace (67 letters per minute), compared with participants who were

Table 3.1 Ethical Issues in Psychological Research

Ethical standards	Researchers follow the standards identified in the APA Ethics Code to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.
Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)	Before research can begin, an IRB reviews the ethics of a research project.
Risk/benefit ratio	Investigators may conduct a research project if the benefits are greater than the risks.
Minimal risk	Minimal risk means that the harm or discomfort in a research project is not greater than what may be experienced in everyday life.
Confidentiality	Participants' risk of social injury (e.g., personal information becoming public) is protected by making their responses anonymous or confidential (i.e., by using no identifying information).
Informed consent	Before agreeing to participate in research, individuals learn about the nature of the research task, any risks, and the ways in which their rights will be protected.
Privacy	Research participants have the right to decide how their personal information is communicated to others.
Deception	Some projects may require investigators to withhold information or misinform participants about aspects of the research.
Debriefing	After completing the study, researchers inform participants about the research, remove any harmful effects or misconceptions, and explain any deception.
Use of Animals	Researchers must treat animal subjects humanely and protect their welfare.
Publication credit	Individuals who have made significant contributions to a research project are identified as authors when the findings are communicated.
Plagiarism	Plagiarism occurs when individuals present substantial elements of another's work or ideas as their own.

asked to type at a slower pace (43 letters per minute). Because of the higher stress, Kassin and Kiechel believed these students would be more uncertain about hitting the "Alt" key, and more vulnerable to submitting a false confession.

Kassin and Kiechel also manipulated the presence of false evidence. After participants denied the charge of hitting the "Alt" key, the experimenter turned to the confederate. For half of the participants, the confederate "witnessed" that she had seen the participant hit the "Alt" key; for the remaining participants, she said she had not seen what happened.

Did participants confess to hitting the "Alt" key? Kassin and Kiechel stated that 69% of their 75 participants signed a written confession, 28% told a waiting participant in the reception area (actually, another confederate) that they had "ruined the program," and 9% made up specific details to explain how they could have hit the "Alt" key. The likelihood of confession was especially great for participants working at a fast pace and for whom the confederate had "witnessed" their "mistake": 100% of these participants signed a confession, 65% truly believed they had hit the "Alt" key, and 35% made up details to explain their behavior.

Thus, Kassin and Kiechel (1996) demonstrated that it's quite easy to get people to confess to things they did not do. Simply by presenting false evidence in a stressful situation, participants falsely confessed and most even came to believe in their own guilt. Kassin

and Kiechel note that false evidence and false witnesses are common during police interrogations and accepted in many courts (including the U.S. Supreme Court). Thus, their research challenges our criminal justice system and the ways in which police interrogations are conducted.

As we discuss ethics in psychological research we will return to Kasson and Kiechel's (1996) experiment. As you will see, a critical feature of their experiment is that participants were not aware of the true nature of the experiment. We will discuss the risks and benefits of their experiment, and the procedures they used to minimize potential risks faced by their participants.

THE RESEARCHERS' POINT OF VIEW



Question to Dr. Kasson: How did you become interested in studying false confessions?

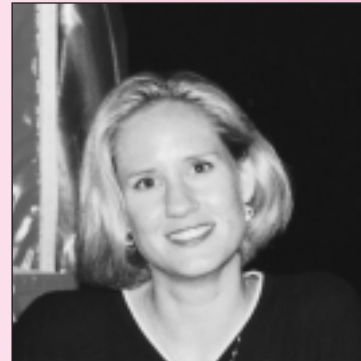
For many years I had studied the psychology of jury decision making. I was interested primarily in some of the ways that juries are influenced by their own personal biases and by factors not in evidence—such as pretrial publicity. In doing this research, I kept noticing that whenever a trial contained a confession, even one that was possibly coerced, jurors almost always voted for conviction. This fact that confessions are so powerful led me to become interested in how that evidence was obtained—which took me into the interrogation room, so to speak.

Question to Lee Kiechel: How did you decide to do an honor's thesis under Dr. Kasson's direction?

As an undergraduate, I anticipated pursuing an advanced degree in psychology and was well aware of the challenges of applying to a Ph.D. program. I realized that I needed to gain research experience in order to be competitive. During my junior year I enrolled in Dr. Kasson's Psychology and the Law course, and it wasn't long before I was fully engrossed in the subject matter. After a week or two of class I introduced myself to Dr. Kasson and told him of my interest in conducting research. That semester I worked as a research assistant, which enabled me to interact with study participants for the first time. Then, as part of a class assignment, I helped design and conduct a study regarding false confessions. The results were unbelievable! Dr. Kasson suggested that I base my honor's thesis on a more refined version of this study.



Dr. Saul Kasson



K. Lee Kiechel

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The American Psychological Association (APA) developed its Ethics Code for individuals who conduct research, teach, conduct therapy, or serve as administrators (American Psychological Association, 1992).¹ The Ethics Code presents *standards* to guide ethical behavior. For example, Section 6.09 of the APA Ethics Code describes how researchers must seek approval before beginning their research:

Psychologists obtain from host institutions or organizations appropriate approval prior to conducting research, and they provide accurate information about their research proposals. They conduct the research in accordance with the approved research protocol.

This standard, and 20 others, inform researchers how to conduct their research in an ethical manner. In addition to the standards for research procedures, the Ethics Code deals with issues such as sexual harassment, fees for psychological services, test construction, classroom teaching, and expert witnesses.

Psychologists are expected to act ethically and to encourage others to act ethically. Psychology students also need to make this commitment, and should become familiar with the Ethics Code and make every effort to live up to its ideals and standards of behavior.

The ethical standards in the APA's Ethics Code tend to be general, and specific situational factors help determine how the standards are applied. Often, more than one ethical standard can be applied to a research situation, and at times the ethical standards may even appear to contradict one another. For example, ethical research requires that human participants be protected from physical injury. However, even ethical research involving drugs or other treatments may potentially harm participants. The Ethics Code also states that the welfare of animal subjects should be protected; however, certain kinds of research involve inflicting pain or other suffering on an animal. Solving these ethical dilemmas is not easy. Thus, researchers must become familiar with the ethical standards and consult with others to solve ethical problems.

In some situations, it is a *legal* requirement that research plans be reviewed by a committee of persons not involved in the research *before the research can begin* (review Section 6.09 above). The 1974 National Research Act requires that institutions, such as colleges and hospitals, form committees to review research sponsored by those institutions. Such committees, referred to as *Institutional Review Boards* (IRBs), review psychological research in order to protect the rights and welfare of human participants (see Table 3.2). An IRB has the authority to approve, disapprove, or require modifications in a research study. Once IRB approval is obtained, the proposed research may begin.

Similarly, in 1985, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Public Health Service formulated new guidelines for the care of laboratory animals (Holden, 1987). Every institution doing research with animal subjects is required to have an

¹A copy of the complete APA Ethics Code can be obtained from the APA Order Department, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20002-4242.

Table 3.2 Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)

According to federal regulations, an Institutional Review Board must meet the following criteria:

1. It must include at least five members with varying backgrounds and fields of expertise.
2. It must have at least one member not affiliated with the institution (e.g., someone from the community).
3. It must include both women and men.

Source: Kimmel (1996).

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to protect the welfare of animal subjects. In addition to reviewing research procedures, IACUCs review how researchers maintain appropriate animal living quarters and how researchers train personnel who work directly with the animals.

Nearly every college and university requires that all research conducted at the institution be reviewed by an independent committee. Violation of federal regulations regarding the review of research can stop all research at an institution, lead to the loss of federal funds, and result in large fines (Holden, 1987; Smith, 1977). *Therefore, any individual who wants to do research should consult with the proper authorities, prior to starting research, about the appropriate procedure for institutional review.*

FALSE CONFESSIONS: ETHICAL STANDARDS



Before Kassin and Kiechel (1996) could conduct their experiment on false confessions they had to seek approval from their university's *Institutional Review Board*. IRB proposals include sections that describe the purpose of the investigation, procedures that will be used to recruit and compensate participants, procedures and tasks participants will complete during the study, risks participants may experience and ways in which individuals will be protected from risk, informed consent procedures, and an evaluation of the risk/benefit ratio. Additionally, when completing an IRB application for approval, investigators are asked to affirm that they are familiar with the ethical guidelines associated with their particular area of study.

THE RESEARCHERS' POINT OF VIEW



Question to Dr. Kassin: *As you indicated in your article, it's very difficult to study processes associated with false confessions using experimental methods. How did you come up with the idea for this study?*

I had struggled for a couple of years to come up with an experimental paradigm to study false confessions. The problem was to create a method that was ethical. It would have been easy to stage a situation in which we offer participants money to do well on a test, provide an opportunity to cheat, and then try to get them to confess. But this procedure would mean

inducing participants to do something they would later regret and find embarrassing. I was talking about the problem in my Psychology and Law class one day when Lee Kiechel, along with two other students, said they wanted to work on a project related to false confessions. That's when we came up with the idea of creating a situation in which we accuse participants of producing a negative outcome through an act of negligence—without casting them in a negative light.

THE RISK/BENEFIT RATIO

In addition to checking if ethical principles are being followed, an IRB considers the *risk/benefit ratio* for a study. When deciding to do a research study, researchers and members of an IRB rely on a *subjective* evaluation of the costs and benefits both to individual participants and to society. Society and individuals benefit from research when new knowledge is gained and particular treatments improve the human condition. There are also potential costs if research is *not* conducted: New knowledge is not gained and, ultimately, opportunities to improve the human condition are lost. Research can also be costly to individual participants. For example, research participants risk injury when exposed to potentially harmful circumstances. The principal investigator must, of course, be the first one to consider these potential risks and benefits. However, before research may be conducted, the IRB considers the risk/benefit ratio.

The **risk/benefit ratio** asks the question, *is it worth it?* There are no mathematical answers for the risk/benefit ratio. Instead, the IRB asks, *are the benefits greater than the risks?* If the benefits seem to be greater than the risks, the research is approved. However, if the risks outweigh the benefits, the research is not approved.

In determining the risk/benefit ratio, researchers also consider whether valid and interpretable results will be produced. Rosenthal (1994) argues that when research is done poorly and has little scientific value, researchers cannot justify participants' time spent in the study, money spent on the research, and the use of other valuable resources required for the study. *Thus, an investigator has an ethical obligation to do research that meets the highest standards of scientific excellence.*

When there is potential risk, a researcher must make sure there are no alternative, low-risk procedures that could be substituted. The researcher must also be sure that previous research has not already successfully addressed the research question being asked. Without careful prior review of the psychological literature, a researcher might carry out research that has already been done, thus exposing individuals to needless risk.

Determining Risk

Determining whether research participants are “at risk” illustrates the difficulties involved in ethical decision making. Life itself is risky. Commuting to work or school, crossing streets, and riding elevators have an element of risk. Simply showing up for a psychology experiment has some degree of risk. To say that

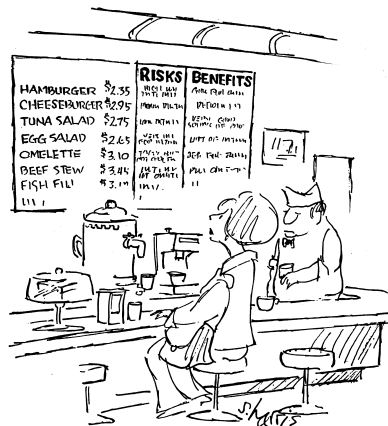
human participants in psychological research can never face any risks would bring all research to a halt. Participants wouldn't even be able to use a car, travel in a bus, or take the elevator to get to the research lab! Decisions about what constitutes risk in research must consider risks that are part of everyday life.

We must also consider the characteristics of the participants. Certain activities might pose serious risk for some individuals but not for others. Running up a flight of stairs may increase the risk of heart attack in an elderly person, but the same task probably would not be risky for most young adults. Similarly, individuals who are exceptionally depressed or anxious might show more severe reactions to certain psychological tasks than would other people. Thus, when considering risk, researchers must consider the specific populations or individuals who are likely to participate in the study.

We often think of risk as the possibility of physical injury. Frequently, however, participants in social science research risk social or psychological injury. For example, if participants' personal information were revealed to others, a potential for social risk such as embarrassment exists. Personal information collected during psychological research may include facts about intelligence; personality traits; and political, social, or religious beliefs. A research participant probably does not want this information revealed to teachers, employers, or peers. Thus, failure to protect the *confidentiality* of a participant's responses may increase the possibility of social injury.

Some psychological studies may induce serious mental or emotional stress in participants. Imagine the stress a participant may experience when smoke enters a room where she is waiting. This smoke may be created by a social psychologist to simulate an emergency. Until the true nature of the smoke is revealed, participants may experience a substantial amount of emotional stress. In addition, simply participating in a psychology experiment is anxiety-provoking for some individuals. For example, after learning a list of nonsense syllables

Everyday life has risks and benefits.



(e.g., HAP, BEK), a student participant once said he was sure the researcher now knew a great deal about him! The student assumed the psychologist was interested in discovering his personality by examining the word associations he used when learning the list. In reality, it was a simple memory experiment designed to measure forgetting. Even here, the researcher is responsible for putting the participant's mind at ease and for making sure he left the experiment knowing the true nature of the experiment. *Thus, a researcher is obligated to protect participants from emotional or mental stress, including, when possible, stress that might arise due to participants' misconceptions about the psychological task.*

Minimal Risk

A distinction is sometimes made between a participant who is "at risk" and one who is "at *minimal* risk." **Minimal risk** means that the harm or discomfort participants may experience in the research *is not greater than* what they might experience in their daily lives or during routine physical or psychological tests. As an example of minimal risk, consider the fact that many psychology laboratory experiments involve lengthy paper-and-pencil tests intended to assess various mental abilities. Participants may be asked to complete the tests quickly, and they may receive specific feedback about their performance. Although there is likely to be stress in this situation, the risk of psychological injury is probably no greater than that of being a student. Completing paper-and-pencil tests and receiving feedback is a routine part of a student's life. Therefore, college students would be judged to experience only minimal risk in such experiments.

When the possibility of injury is judged to be more than minimal, individuals are considered to be at risk. When this occurs, more serious obligations fall on the researcher to protect the welfare of such participants.

Dealing with Risk

Even if the potential risk is small, researchers should try to minimize risk and protect participants. For instance, simply by stating at the beginning of a memory experiment that the tasks do not measure intelligence or personality reduces the stress that some participants experience. In order to protect research participants from social injury, data collection should keep participants' responses anonymous by asking individuals not to use their names or any identifying information. When this is not possible, researchers should keep participants' responses confidential by removing any identifying information from their responses during the research task. This situation arises when individuals participate in several sessions of an investigation or when individuals provide their name so they can receive course credit for participating. *Thus, a researcher should obtain information about participants in a manner that does not require individuals to be identified, or the researcher should remove any identifying information.*

Making sure participants' responses are anonymous or confidential can also benefit the researcher if this leads participants to be more honest and open when responding. Participants will be less likely to lie or withhold information if they do not worry about who will have access to their responses. Box 3.1 presents sample research situations. Do you think participants would be at risk in the studies?

Box 3.1**MINIMAL RISK: WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

For each of the following research situations, do you think only “minimal risk” (i.e., risk not greater than that of everyday life) is present, or is more than minimal risk present? If more than minimal risk is present, then participants are judged to be at risk. In this case, you might think of safeguards researchers could use to reduce risk. As you do so, you will undoubtedly begin to anticipate some of the ethical issues yet to be discussed in this chapter.

1. College students complete an adjective checklist describing their current mood. The researcher seeks to identify depressed students so that they can be included in a study examining cognitive deficits associated with depression.
2. A psychologist administers a battery of achievement tests to elderly adults in the dayroom at their nursing home. The psychologist seeks to determine if there is a decline in mental functioning with advancing age.
3. Students in a psychology research methods class see another student enter their classroom in the middle of the class period, speak loudly and angrily with the instructor, and then leave. As part of a study of eyewitness behavior, the students are then asked to describe the intruder.
4. A researcher recruits students from introductory psychology classes to participate in a study of the effects of alcohol on cognitive functioning. The experiment requires that some students drink 2 ounces of alcohol (mixed with orange juice) before performing a computer game.

FALSE CONFESSIONS: THE RISK/BENEFIT RATIO

Were there any *risks* to participants and others in the Kassin and Kiechel (1996) study? What were the *benefits* of the study? These are the questions asked when considering the *risk/benefit ratio*.

One risk to some participants in their study was the stress they may have experienced in the fast-paced condition. This, however, may be an example of *minimal risk* because college students often need to complete tasks quickly and under pressure to do well (e.g., on exams). In contrast, all participants in their study were falsely accused and deceived about the true nature of the research. Many of the research participants believed they were guilty of ruining the experiment. This probably caused some participants to be anxious and upset. Was this deception necessary? To answer this question we need to consider also the benefits of the study. Kassin and Kiechel’s (1996) study contributed to our understanding of factors that may influence false confessions. These findings have important implications for our criminal justice system. Their careful methods allowed them to make valid interpretations of their findings.

The subjective evaluation of the risk/benefit ratio is difficult. Participants faced risk because of the experimental procedures. Additionally, deceptive research practices can pose a risk to society as individuals learn to be suspicious of psychologists’ activities. In contrast, the benefits to society include gaining knowledge about criminal justice practices that may lead to false confessions. Kassin and Kiechel also reported that their participants experienced satisfaction because once they learned the true nature of the research, they believed they contributed to an important study.

How did Kassin and Kiechel (1996) protect their participants from risk? First and most important, they fully *debriefed* participants about the true nature of the experiment and reassured them that they did not “ruin the experiment.” Second, all participants’ responses were *confidential*; no individual can be identified in the report of their findings. Thus, in considering the risk/benefit ratio and procedures to protect individuals from risk, the IRB at Kassin and Kiechel’s university approved their research proposal.

THE RESEARCHERS’ POINT OF VIEW



Question to Dr. Kassin: What were the risks in your study?

The risks we were concerned about were that participants would become stressed by the accusation and later be upset about being deceived. Our study was approved, however, because we were very careful to create a situation that did not make participants seem like bad people. We also built into the procedure a complete debriefing in which we told participants all about the study, assured them that they had not damaged the computer, and pointed out why the deception was necessary to study such a potentially important social problem.

INFORMED CONSENT

Successful psychological research depends on the willingness of students, patients, clients, and other members of the community to take part in scientific investigations. In some research, participants are given money or other compensation for their time and effort. Often, people simply volunteer to participate in research with no compensation. In either case, researcher and participant enter into a social contract. The contract may be informal—for example, a verbal agreement may be made. In other circumstances, the contract includes written statements signed by both researcher and participant, and possibly witnesses. As part of this research contract, *a researcher has an ethical responsibility to make clear to the participant what the research entails, including any possible risk to the participant, and to respect the dignity and rights of the individual during the research experience.*

The research participant also has an ethical responsibility to behave in an appropriate manner—for example, by paying attention to instructions and by performing tasks in the manner requested by the researcher. *In other words, lying, cheating, or otherwise fraudulent behavior by research participants violates the scientific integrity of the research situation.*

Ethical research practice requires that research participants be informed of all features of the research that might be expected to influence their willingness to participate. The researcher must respond to any questions individuals have about the research. By doing this, participants can make an *informed* decision about their participation. Participants should also be informed that they are free to withdraw their consent at any time without penalty or prejudice. Consent must be given freely, without undue inducement or pressure. *Written informed consent is absolutely essential when participants are exposed to more than minimal risk.*

Box 3.2**SAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

[DATE]

I, [NAME OF PARTICIPANT], state that I am over 18 years of age and that I voluntarily agree to participate in a research project conducted by [NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, TITLE, INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION]. The research is being conducted in order to [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE GOALS OF THE RESEARCH]. The specific task I will perform requires [DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH TASK, INCLUDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE DURATION OF PARTICIPANT'S INVOLVEMENT. ANY POSSIBLE DISCOMFORT TO PARTICIPANT MUST ALSO BE DESCRIBED].

I acknowledge that [NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR RESEARCH ASSISTANT] has explained the task to me fully; has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice or penalty; has offered to answer any questions that I might have concerning the research procedure; has assured me that any information that I give will be used for research purposes only and will be kept confidential. [PROCEDURE FOR PROTECTING CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESPONSES SHOULD BE EXPLAINED].

I also acknowledge that the benefits derived from, or rewards given for, my participation have been fully explained to me—as well as alternative methods, if available, for earning these rewards—and that I have been promised, upon completion of the research task, a brief description of the role my specific performance plays in this project. [THE EXACT NATURE OF ANY COMMITMENTS MADE BY THE RESEARCHER, SUCH AS THE AMOUNT OF MONEY TO BE PAID TO INDIVIDUALS FOR PARTICIPATION, SHOULD BE SPECIFIED HERE.]

[Signature of researcher]

[Signature of participant]

Box 3.2 presents a sample informed consent form for use with a normal adult population.

True informed consent cannot be obtained from certain individuals, such as the mentally impaired or emotionally disturbed, young children, and those who have limited ability to understand the nature of research and the possible risks. In these cases, consent must be obtained from the participants' parents or legal guardians. They, too, must be informed fully about the nature of the research, they must be allowed to withdraw consent without any negative consequences, and their consent must be given freely without any undue inducement or pressure.

In some situations it is not necessary to obtain informed consent. For example, informed consent is not required when researchers simply observe individuals' behavior in public places and do not identify specific individuals. An investigator, for instance, may gather evidence about race relations on a college campus by observing the frequency of mixed-race vs. unmixed-race groups sitting at tables in the college cafeteria. Such student behavior can be considered public, and the method is naturalistic observation (see Chapter 4). However, deciding what is public or private is not always easy (see Box 3.3 for examples).

Box 3.3**INFORMED CONSENT: WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

Although the APA Code of Ethics suggests that informed consent is not necessarily required in studies involving naturalistic observation of public behavior or “similar research” (see Standard 6.10), deciding what is public is not always easy. Consider the following research scenarios and decide whether you think the participants’ informed consent should be required. It may be that you want more information from the researcher. If so, what additional information might you want before deciding? You will see that requiring informed consent can change a research situation dramatically, making it difficult, for example, for a researcher to record behavior under “natural” conditions. Such are the dilemmas of ethical decision making.

1. In a study of the drinking behavior of college students, an undergraduate working for a faculty member attends a fraternity party and records the amount drunk by other students at the party.
2. As part of a study of the gay community, a gay researcher joins a gay baseball team with the goal of recording behaviors of the participants in the context of team competition during the season. (All games are played outdoors and may be watched by the public.)
3. The public bathroom behavior (e.g., flushing, hand washing, littering, graffiti writing, etc.) of men and women is observed by male and female researchers concealed in the stalls of the respective washrooms.
4. A graduate student investigates the cheating behaviors of college students by concealing himself in a projection booth in an auditorium during an exam. From his vantage point, he can see with the aid of binoculars the movements of most students. He records head movements, paper switching, note passing, and other suspicious exam behaviors.

Privacy is the right of individuals to decide how information about them is communicated to others. Diener and Crandall (1978) identify three major dimensions to consider when deciding what information is private: sensitivity of the information, setting, and dissemination of the information. Clearly, some information is sensitive. Individuals interviewed about their sexual practices, religious beliefs, or criminal activities are likely to be very concerned about how their information will be used.

The setting also plays a role in deciding whether behavior is public or private. Some behaviors, such as attending a baseball game, can reasonably be considered public. In public settings, individuals give up a certain degree of privacy. Some behaviors that occur in public settings, however, are not easily classified as public or private. When you ride in your car, use a public bathroom, or enjoy a family picnic in the park, are these behaviors public or private? Decisions about ethical research in these situations depend on the sensitivity of the information being gathered and the manner in which the information will be disseminated. When information is disseminated using statistical averages or proportions, it is unlikely to reveal much about specific individuals’ behaviors. In other situations, code systems can be used to protect participants’

confidentiality. *Dissemination of sensitive information about individuals or groups without their permission is a serious breach of ethics.*

As in other areas when ethical dilemmas arise, researchers must seek advice from knowledgeable individuals regarding the appropriateness of their procedures. Decisions regarding what is public *vs.* private behavior and procedures for obtaining informed consent should always be made with the goal of protecting the rights of research participants.

FALSE CONFESSIONS: INFORMED CONSENT



Before participating, student volunteers in Kassir and Kiechel's (1996) study signed a *consent form*. This consent form described the typing task students would perform to assess their reaction time. It did not mention anything about false confession, the true purpose of the research. The consent form also stated that participants' responses would be confidential, that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and that they would receive extra credit for participating.

Did participants give their *informed consent*? The ethical standard that applies here is that individuals must be provided any information that may influence their willingness to participate. Usually, investigators and IRBs consider what individuals are asked to *do* in the study when considering factors that may influence their willingness to participate. In fact, participants in Kassir and Kiechel's study *did* perform a typing task, as described in the consent form. A serious ethical breach would occur if Kassir and Kiechel had exposed individuals to serious physical or emotional pain during their procedures without the participants' consent.

Kassir and Kiechel (1996) noted that for ethical reasons, participants "were accused merely of an unconscious act of negligence, not of an act involving explicit criminal intent" (p. 127). It could reasonably be argued that accusations of "negligence" are part of many people's everyday lives—for instance, when they forget an appointment or accidentally bump into someone. Thus, by accusing participants of negligence, the researchers sought a compromise between achieving their research goals (i.e., learning more about false confessions) and protecting individuals from undue risk. As you can see, the ethical issues raised in psychological research are not easy to resolve, and compromises that protect both the individual participants and the integrity of the research are necessary.

DECEPTION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The most controversial ethical issue related to research is deception. **Deception** can occur when information is withheld from participants or when participants are intentionally misinformed about an aspect of the research. Some people argue that research participants should *never* be deceived because ethical practice requires that the relationship between experimenter and participant be open and honest (e.g., Baumrind, 1985). Deception contradicts the principle of informed consent. Despite the increased attention given to deception in research over the past couple of decades, the use of deception in psychological research has not declined and remains a popular research strategy (Sharpe, Adair, & Roese, 1992). Table 3.3 presents the pros and cons of deception in psychological research.

How is it that deception is still widely used, despite ethical controversies? One reason is that it is impossible to conduct certain kinds of research without

Table 3.3 Pros and Cons of Deception**Pros**

- Deception allows researchers to study individuals' natural behavior.
- Deception allows opportunities to investigate behaviors and mental processes not easily studied using nondeceptive methods.

Cons

- Deception contradicts the principle of informed consent.
- The relationship between researcher and participant is not open and honest.
- Frequent use of deception may make individuals suspicious about research and psychology.

withholding information about some aspects of the research. In other situations, it is necessary to misinform participants in order to have them adopt certain attitudes or behaviors. This was true in Kassin and Kiechel's (1996) study of false confession. If participants had known that the procedures were trying to elicit their false confessions, they probably would not have confessed. It is important to remember that although deception is sometimes justified on methodological grounds, deceiving participants for the purpose of getting them to participate in research in which they would not normally take part, or research that involves serious risk, is *always* unethical.

A goal of research is to observe individuals' normal behavior. A basic assumption underlying the use of deception is that sometimes it's necessary to conceal the true nature of an experiment so that participants will behave as they normally would, or so they will act according to the instructions provided by the experimenter. A problem occurs, however, with frequent and casual use of deception (Kelman, 1967). If people believe that researchers often mislead participants, they may expect to be deceived when participating in a psychology experiment. Individuals' suspicions about the research may prevent them from behaving as they normally would. This is exactly the opposite of what researchers hope to achieve.

Therefore, it's important that researchers use deception only in very special circumstances. Deception is justified only when the study is very important, when no other methods for conducting the research are available, and when the deception would not influence individuals' decision to participate (Kelman, 1972). *When deception is used, the researcher must inform participants after the experiment of the reasons for the deception, discuss any misconceptions they may have, and remove any harmful effects of the deception.* One goal of this *debriefing* is to educate the participant about the need for deception in the study. Research on deception in psychological research has shown that, on the average, participants do not appear to react negatively to being deceived (e.g., Christensen, 1988; Epley & Huff, 1998; Kimmel, 1996) and that, although suspiciousness about psychological research may increase, the overall effects seem to be small (see Kimmel, 1998). This

seems to be the case in Kassin and Kiechel's (1996) study, as participants reported that the study was meaningful and their own contribution was valuable.

Beginning researchers sometimes believe that unless they tell participants *exactly* what they expect to find (that is, the hypothesis being tested), they are deceiving participants. This is not necessarily the case. Information about the specific hypothesis being tested is often withheld from participants in order not to bias them to behave in a certain way. In most situations, good research procedures include *not* telling participants exactly what the researcher is testing. Of course, *the researcher can never ethically withhold information that might seriously influence a participant's willingness to participate* (APA Ethical Standard 6.15). Debriefing provides an opportunity to inform participants about the specific goals of a study and to educate them about the need to do psychological research.

FALSE CONFESSIONS: DECEPTION



As we've already noted, Kassin and Kiechel (1996) used *deception* in their study of false confessions. Participants were unaware that the other "student" was actually working with the experimenter (called a "confederate"), that they did not hit the "Alt" key, that the confederate lied when providing false evidence against the participant, and that the study was really about false confession.

When evaluating the use of deception, investigators and IRBs consider whether there are *alternative methods* to answer the research question. Could the same study be done without deception? That is, what if Kassin and Kiechel had told participants that the other person was a confederate who would provide false evidence against them? Would they have been able to document evidence for false confessions?

The likely answer to this question is no. If participants had known the whole time that the entire procedure was "rigged," Kassin and Kiechel probably would have learned nothing about false confessions. They used deception so that individuals would behave as they normally would. Could they have used other procedures? One alternative is "naturalistic observation" of actual (or videotaped) interrogations that occur naturally in police settings. In fact, Kassin and his colleagues have conducted many such observations—this is the multimethod approach to conducting research we discuss throughout this book. However, an advantage of using the control technique of manipulation (i.e., the different conditions in their study) is that Kassin and Kiechel were able to state that individual vulnerability and false evidence *caused* individuals to submit false confessions. Obtaining this type of causal evidence is possible only with experimental methods. Thus, the use of deception seemed justified in this study—but remember that this is a subjective decision, and reasonable people disagree about the use of deception in psychological research.

THE RESEARCHERS' POINT OF VIEW



Question to Lee Kiechel: Deception can often be hard on the experimenters. Did you find this to be true in your study?

I served as a confederate (the provider of "incriminating evidence") in this study, and a friend served as the experimenter. The use of deception was hard on us only in that it required considerable stamina and acting ability. Including pilot work, we ran over 100 sessions, each of which lasted well over a half hour. We had to ensure that every participant's experience was

exactly the same. This required us to act (and react) in a consistent manner across sessions—our words, gestures, and facial expressions were all scripted. To do this we had to maintain a high energy level, regardless of how we may have felt at the time.

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Over the years, many researchers have fallen into the trap of viewing human participants in research as “objects” from which to obtain data in order to meet their own research goals. Researchers sometimes have considered that their responsibility to participants ends when the final data are collected. A handshake or “thank-you” was frequently all that marked the end of the research session. Participants likely left with unanswered questions about the research situation and with only the vaguest idea of their role in the study. It is important when planning and conducting research to consider how the experience may affect the research participant *after* the research is completed, and to seek ways in which the participant will benefit from participation. These concerns follow directly from the moral principle of respect for individuals.

Earlier we discussed that protecting the confidentiality of a participant’s responses benefits both the participant (e.g., by safeguarding him or her from social injury) and the researcher (e.g., by increasing the probability of honest responding). **Debriefing** participants at the end of a research session benefits both participants and researchers (Blanck et al., 1992). As we saw when discussing the use of deception, *debriefing is necessary to remove any harmful effects or misconceptions about participation, and to explain to participants the need for deception. Debriefing also has the important goals of educating participants about the research (rationale, method, results) and leaving them with positive feelings about their participation.* Researchers should provide opportunities for participants to learn more about their particular contribution to the research study and to feel more personally involved in the scientific process.

Debriefing is an opportunity for participants to learn more about research methods in general. Because the educational value of participation in psychological research is used to justify the use of large numbers of volunteers from college introductory psychology classes, researchers testing students have an important obligation to educate participants about psychological research. However, it is unethical to *require* research participation (e.g., as a course requirement). Therefore, psychology departments with a “subject pool” must also offer an alternative experience for students to learn about research in psychology.

Debriefing also helps researchers learn how participants viewed the procedures in the study. A researcher may wish to know whether a particular experimental procedure was perceived by the participant in the way the investigator intended (Blanck et al., 1992). For example, a study of how people respond to failure may include tasks that are impossible to complete. However, if participants don’t judge their performance as a failure, the researcher’s hypotheses cannot be

Box 3.4**SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DEBRIEFING**

After completing a research project with a participant, the researcher may wish to learn how the participant perceived the procedures. The following general questions will help participants begin to talk about their experiences:

- What did you think about your experience in this research?
- What do you think we are trying to find out?
- Do you have any questions about the experiment—things we might not have explained fully?

These questions may be followed by more specific questions about the procedures.

After recording the participant's responses, the researcher should carefully explain the purpose of the experiment, reasons for any deception, and expected findings, and should provide a way for the participant to contact the researcher.

tested. Debriefing allows the investigator to find out how participants perceived their performance on the task.

When trying to learn participants' perceptions of the experiment, researchers shouldn't press them too hard. Research participants generally want to help with the scientific process, and they may fear that they will "ruin" the research if they reveal their guesses about the experiment. Thus, debriefing should be informal and indirect (see Box 3.4). The investigator should use general questions with an open-ended format (e.g., What do you think this study was about?). More specific questions can be used to follow up participants' responses, but these questions should not cue the participant about what responses are expected.

Debriefing also benefits researchers because it can provide clues to the reasons for participants' performance, which may help researchers interpret the results of the study or may provide ideas for another study. Errors in experimental materials such as missing information or ambiguous instructions are sometimes detected during debriefing. As previously mentioned, *debriefing is good for both the participant and the scientist.*

FALSE CONFESSIONS: DEBRIEFING

Because Kassin and Kiechel (1996) used *deception* in their research, it was absolutely essential that they fully *debrief* their research participants. Thus, at the completion of the study they explained to each participant the true nature of the research and why they felt their use of deception was justified. Kassin and Kiechel reported the following about their debriefing:

Most subjects reacted with a combination of relief (that they had not ruined the experiment), amazement (that their perceptions of their own behavior had been so completely manipulated), and a sense of satisfaction (at having played a meaningful role in an important study). Subjects were also asked not to discuss the experience with other students until all the data were collected. Four subjects reported during debriefing that they were suspicious of the experimental manipulation. Their data were excluded from all analyses. (1996, p. 127)

Thus, it seems that participants in Kassin and Kiechel's study felt good about their participation, despite the deception. Note, too, that Kassin and Kiechel learned some valuable information during the debriefing: They learned that some individuals were suspicious. It's likely these individuals responded differently than the others to the procedures, so their data were not included in the analyses.

THE RESEARCHERS' POINT OF VIEW



Question to Dr. Kassin: How did participants respond to debriefing?

These debriefing sessions told us what was “right” about this study. I think the word participants used most to describe their experience (particularly those who internalized guilt) was *awesome*.

RESEARCH WITH ANIMALS

Each year millions of animals are tested in laboratory investigations aimed at answering a wide range of important questions. New drugs are tested on animals before they are used with humans. Substances introduced into the environment are first given to animals to test their effects. Animals are exposed to diseases so that investigators can observe symptoms and test various cures. New surgical procedures—especially those involving the brain—are often first tried out on animals. In the process, however, many animals are subjected to pain and discomfort, stress and sickness, and death. Although rodents, particularly rats and mice, are the largest group of laboratory animals, researchers use many species, including monkeys, fish, dogs, and cats. Specific animals are chosen because they are good models for human responses. For example, psychologists interested in hearing processes sometimes use chinchillas because their auditory processes are very similar to those of humans.

The use of animals as laboratory subjects has often been taken for granted. In fact, the biblical reference to humans' “dominion” over all lesser creatures is sometimes invoked to justify using animals as laboratory subjects (see, for example, Johnson, 1990; Rollin, 1985). More often, however, research with animal subjects is justified by the need to gain knowledge without putting humans in jeopardy. Most cures, drugs, vaccines, and therapies have been developed through experimentation on animals (Rosenfeld, 1981).

Many questions have been raised about the role of animal subjects in laboratory studies (see, for example, Novak, 1991; Shapiro, 1998; Ulrich, 1991). The most basic question is whether animals should ever be used in scientific investigations. Other questions concern the care and protection of animal subjects. Clearly, according to the APA principles, *the researcher who uses animal subjects in an investigation has an ethical obligation to look out for their welfare and to treat them humanely*. Only individuals qualified to do research and to manage and care for the particular species being used should be allowed to work with animals. When research exposes animals to pain or discomfort, it must be justified by the potential scientific, educational, or applied goals. As noted earlier, animal review committees (IACUCs) are now in place at research facilities receiving funds from the Public

Health Service. These committees determine the adequacy of procedures for controlling pain, carrying out euthanasia, housing animals, and training personnel. IACUCs also determine whether experimental designs are sufficient to gain important new information, and whether the animal model is appropriate or whether nonanimal models could be used (Holden, 1987).

Partly in response to concerns expressed by members of animal-rights groups during the 1980s, investigators must satisfy many federal and state requirements, including inspection of animal facilities by veterinarians from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (see, for example, Landers, 1987a, 1987b). These regulations are often welcomed by members of the scientific community, and many animal researchers belong to groups, such as the APA Committee on Animal Research and Experimentation (CARE), that seek to protect laboratory animals.² As with any ethically sensitive issue, however, compromises must be made. For example, until alternatives to animal research can be found, the need to conduct research using animal subjects in order to battle human disease and suffering must be balanced against the need to protect the welfare of animals in laboratory research (see, for example, Goodall, 1987).

REPORTING PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

As we discussed in Chapter 2, once a psychological investigation is complete, the investigator usually prepares a manuscript to submit to a psychology-related scientific journal. Ethical issues arise when considering publication credit and plagiarism.

Conducting a research study often involves many people. Colleagues offer suggestions about a study's design, graduate and undergraduate students assist an investigator by testing subjects and organizing data, technicians construct specialized equipment, and expert consultants give advice about statistical analyses. When preparing a research manuscript, should all of these people be considered "authors" of the research? "*Publication credit*" refers to the process of identifying as authors those individuals who have made significant contributions to a research project. Because authorship of published scientific studies frequently is used to measure an individual's competence and motivation in a scientific field, *it is important to acknowledge fairly those who have contributed to a project.*

It's not always easy to decide whether an individual should be credited by being an author of a scientific paper or whether an individual's contribution should be acknowledged in a less visible way (such as in a footnote). Also, once authorship is granted, then the order of authors' names must also be decided. "First author" of an article generally indicates a greater contribution than does "second author" (which is greater than third, etc.). Authorship decisions should be based mainly on the scholarly importance of the contribution (e.g., aiding the conceptual aspects of a study), not by the time and energy invested in the study (Bridgewater, Bornstein, & Walkenbach, 1981; Fine & Kurdek, 1993).

²CARE has developed a list of specific guidelines to be followed when animal subjects are used in psychological research. A copy of these guidelines can be obtained by writing CARE, c/o Science Directorate, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20002-4242.

A rather troublesome area of concern, not only for some professionals but frequently for students, is **plagiarism**. Again, the ethical standard seems clear enough: Don't present substantial portions or elements of another's work as your own. But what constitutes "substantial portions or elements," and how does one avoid giving the impression that another person's work is one's own?

Sometimes acts of plagiarism are due to sloppiness (for example, failing to double-check a source). Errors of this kind are still plagiarism; *ignorance and sloppiness are not legitimate excuses*. On other occasions, especially among students, plagiarism can result from failure to use quotation marks around passages taken directly from a source. *Whenever material is taken directly from a source, it must be placed in quotation marks and the source must be properly identified*. It's important to note, too, that when material from a source is *paraphrased*, or put into your own words, you must also cite the source. *The ethical principle is that you must cite the sources of your ideas when you use the exact words and when you paraphrase* (see Table 3.4 for an example of plagiarism and a correct citation).

Plagiarism also occurs when individuals fail to acknowledge secondary sources. A *secondary source* is one that discusses other (original) work. Most textbooks can be considered secondary sources because they describe research done by others. Rather than citing a secondary source, you should try to locate and read the original source. If that's not possible, inform the reader that you did not read the original work (for example, by using the phrase "as cited in . . ." when referring to the original work). This tells the reader you are presenting another person's interpretation of the original material. Again, ignorance

Table 3.4 Example of Plagiarism and Correct Citation

Actual Text (an Example of a Correctly Cited Direct Quote)

"Informed by developments in case law, the police use various methods of interrogation—including the presentation of false evidence (e.g., fake polygraph, fingerprints, or other forensic test results; staged eyewitness identifications), appeals to God and religion, feigned friendship, and the use of prison informants" (Kassin & Kiechel, 1996, p. 125).

Example of Plagiarism (No Citation Accompanying Paraphrased Material)

Research investigations of deceptive interrogation methods to extract confessions are important because police use false evidence (e.g., fake test results) and false witnesses when interrogating suspects. Interrogators also pressure suspects by pretending to be their friends.

Paraphrased Material with Correct Citation

Research investigations of deceptive interrogation methods to extract confessions are important because police use false evidence (e.g., fake test results) and false witnesses when interrogating suspects (Kassin & Kiechel, 1996). Kassin and Kiechel also state that interrogators also pressure suspects by pretending to be their friends.

concerning the proper form of citation is not an acceptable excuse, and on unfortunate occasions researchers—professors as well as students—have seen their careers ruined by accusations of plagiarism.

Mistakes are easily made. For example, what constitutes a “substantial” element of another’s thinking? Often, individuals assume that “substantial” refers only to the quantity of words and that sources should be cited when “a lot of words” are used or a large portion of someone’s material is paraphrased. However, a key idea or concept, even if it is expressed using a single word or short phrase, may be considered a substantial element. “Substantial” refers to the importance of the idea. A simple rule to follow is this: *If the idea you are presenting is not your own, you must cite the source of the idea.*

FALSE CONFESSIONS: REPORTING PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH



Kassin and Kiechel (1996) reported their findings in the psychology journal, *Psychological Science*. As the two authors for the study, they are credited for making the important scientific contributions reported in the article. The *order* of the two authors’ names indicates the nature of their contributions. Lee Kiechel conducted the study as part of her honor’s thesis in psychology, and Dr. Saul Kassin was her mentor. Kassin has worked in the area of false confession and psychology of law for many years, and he guided Kiechel in her work. Kassin’s scientific contribution to this research project warrants “first” authorship because he contributed the most to the conceptual development, interpretation of the study, and preparation of the manuscript. Note that an experimenter and additional confederate were involved in the procedure. These individuals’ contributions, although important for actually running the study, were not part of the *conceptual* development of the research. Therefore, they did not earn *publication credit*.

Kassin and Kiechel (1996) cited 27 *sources* in their article; the full references for their sources can be found in the “References” section at the end of their article. Most often, they *paraphrased* information from their sources. Each time they paraphrased they included a *citation* to the appropriate source. They also used *quotation marks* when using a phrase directly from a source. For example, when citing a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, they used quotation marks around the words *harmless error*. They regarded this concept to be a *substantial element* because it referred to a very important Supreme Court judgment that it is sometimes acceptable for courts to allow coerced confessions to be admitted as evidence against a defendant.

Throughout our discussion of Kassin and Kiechel’s research, we cited their research using *paraphrases*, *direct quotes*, and a *secondary source* (see the first citation in the introduction to this research example for a citation of a secondary source). We also contacted the authors and requested permission to print their responses to our questions about their research. When writing about research, the writer is responsible for making clear to the reader the source of the ideas that are presented.

THE RESEARCHERS’ POINT OF VIEW



Question to Lee Kiechel: It’s not often that students publish their research in a prominent psychology journal. What was this process like for you?

I graduated within several weeks of completing my honor's thesis. Dr. Kassin then condensed and revised my thesis so that it would be suitable to submit to a journal. When he informed me that it had been accepted for publication, I was thrilled. It wasn't until I was a graduate student, however, that I realized how difficult it actually is to publish a research study. Now I'm even more grateful for the experience.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ETHICAL ISSUES

Should research participants be placed at risk of serious injury to learn about bystander apathy? Should psychologists use deception to learn about false confessions? Is it acceptable to make animals suffer in order to learn about human drug addiction? These questions require answers; however, you know by now that the answers are not easy. It's often not clear what the "right" answer is or even if there is a right answer.

What are the steps to take when making ethical decisions about research? By following a series of steps, researchers can think critically about the ethical issues involved in conducting research. Critical thinking about these issues will help protect the rights and welfare of humans and participants. The following are steps based on reading the ethics literature, and discussions with philosophers involved in ethical decision making.³

STEPS FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

1. Find out all the facts of the situation. In other words, determine exactly what is involved in terms of procedure, nature of participants, and so on.
2. Identify the ethical issues that are relevant. An important part of this inquiry will be consulting ethical guidelines that are available, such as the APA Ethics Code, as well as policy statements from various professional organizations. Also, make sure that you are aware of state and federal regulations or laws in this area.
3. Decide what is at stake for all parties involved (participants, researchers, institutions). This will mean taking different viewpoints—for example, by asking what is at stake from a scientific point of view, from society's viewpoint, from the view of participants, and from an overall moral viewpoint.
4. Identify alternative methods or procedures, discussing the consequences of each alternative, including their ethical implications. As part of this discussion, consider the consequences of *not* doing the proposed research. Examine the practical constraints of each alternative.
5. Decide on the action to be taken. Judge the "correctness" of the decision not in terms of whether it makes you feel happy (you may not) but, rather, in

³The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions in this section of various members of the Loyola University of Chicago Center for Ethics, especially David Ozar, Mark Waymack, and Patricia Werhane.

terms of the process that was followed. Is it the best that can be done given the circumstances?

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH EXAMPLE: FALSE CONFESSIONS



As you have seen, many ethical issues were involved in Kassin and Kiechel's (1996) study of false confessions. You probably have learned that ethical decision making is not easy. As we described Kassin and Kiechel's research in this chapter we tried to follow the steps for ethical decision making. First we learned the details of their methods (the participants, procedures), paying particular attention to procedures that placed participants at risk or protected participants from risk. We discussed the ethical issues in their study: risk, informed consent, deception, and debriefing. We also identified the stakes involved: the risks and benefits of the study for participants, researchers, and society. We discussed alternative methods, and whether these methods would allow the researchers to gain the same information with less risk.

If you were a member of the IRB that evaluated their proposal, would you have approved the research? Would you have required any modifications to their procedures?

THE RESEARCHERS' POINT OF VIEW



Questions to Dr. Kassin: Were you surprised by any of the findings?

I was shocked by our results. I was not surprised that so many participants signed a confession. This simply indicated that we had created a situation, as police often do, where the immediate benefits of confessing, such as terminating an unpleasant experience, outweighed the long-term negative costs. What was most surprising was the number of participants who came to internalize their guilt. These, after all, were bright college students—not highly suggestible, and not under the kinds of stress typical of suspects who are badgered for hours in an isolated interrogation room.

In retrospect, is there anything you would have done differently in this experiment?

If I could re-do one aspect of this study it would have been to ensure that we videotaped the sessions. On paper, the results are impressive. Up close and personal, they have impact.

What most would you like people to learn from this study?

More than anything, I'd like people to learn that each and every one of us is vulnerable to manipulation by social pressure, more so than we realize. Many people think they could never be induced to confess to a crime they did not commit. I want this study to plant a seed of doubt and to show that it is possible, at least in a small way.

Are you conducting any follow-up studies?

Currently, my students and I are testing the troubling proposition that when the police believe someone is guilty, they conduct more coercive interrogations, cause the person to behave more defensively, and in a way procure support for the conclusion that the suspect is guilty.

Question to Lee Kiechel: What did you learn about conducting psychological research while completing your honor's thesis?

I cannot even begin to describe all the things I learned while completing my honor's thesis. I definitely gained a true appreciation of all the work that goes into conducting a laboratory study. Conceiving an appropriate experimental design is just the beginning. I also learned how to standardize data collection procedures, conduct appropriate statistical analyses, and write an American Psychological Association (APA)–style paper.

Question to Lee Kiechel: What are you doing now?

I am currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at George Mason University (Fairfax, Virginia).

READ MORE ABOUT IT

You can read about Kassir and Kiechel's research in the following article:

Kassin, S. A., & Kiechel, K. L. (1996). The social psychology of false confessions: Compliance, internalization, and confabulation. *Psychological Science*, 7, 125–128.

Information about additional research on false confession can be found in Dr. Kassir's review article:

Kassin, S. A. (1997). The psychology of confession evidence. *American Psychologist*, 52, 221–233.

Information about how prosecutors use confession evidence may be found in the following book:

McCormick, C. T. (1972). *Handbook of the law of evidence* (2nd ed.), St. Paul, MN: West.

If you would like to learn more about the growing area of psychology of law, you may wish to consider reading:

Wrightsmann, L., Nietzel, M., & Fortune, W. (1998). *Psychology and the legal system* (4th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

KEY CONCEPTS

risk/benefit ratio
minimal risk
informed consent
privacy

deception
debriefing
plagiarism

KEY POINTS TO LEARN

Ethical Standards

- Research projects must be reviewed to determine if they meet ethical standards.

The Risk-Benefit Ratio

- A subjective evaluation of the risks and benefits of a research project determines whether the research should be conducted.

- Potential risks in psychological research include the risk of physical, social, and psychological injury.
- Risks must be evaluated in terms of potential participants' capabilities, everyday activities, and physical and mental health.
- When a research study involves procedures or activities that are similar to those experienced by participants in their everyday life, the study is described as having minimal risk.
- Whether at risk or at minimal risk, research participants must be protected. More safeguards are needed as risks become greater.
- To protect participants from social risks, the information they provide should be anonymous, or, if that is not possible, their information should be kept confidential.

Informed Consent

- Researchers and participants enter into a social contract, often using an informed consent procedure.
- Researchers are ethically obligated to describe the research procedures clearly, identify any potential risks that might influence individuals' willingness to participate, and answer any questions participants have about the research.
- Research participants are ethically obligated to behave appropriately during the research by not lying, cheating, or engaging in other fraudulent behavior.

Deception in Psychological Research

- Deception in psychological research occurs when researchers withhold information or intentionally misinform participants about the research.
- By its nature, deception may seem to violate the ethical principle of informed consent, yet it is a widely used research strategy.

Additional Responsibilities to Research Participants

- Researchers are ethically obligated to seek ways to benefit participants even after the research is completed—for example, by using debriefing procedures.

Research with Animals

- Animals are used in research to gain knowledge that will benefit humans—for example, by helping cure diseases.
- Researchers are ethically obligated to protect the welfare of research animals.
- The use of animals in research is widely debated and involves complex issues.

Reporting Psychological Research

- Investigators attempt to communicate their research findings in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and the APA Code of Ethics provides guidelines for this process.
- Decisions about who should receive publication credit are based on the scholarly importance of contributions.
- The ethical reporting of research requires recognition of the work of others, using proper citations and references; failure to do so may result in plagiarism.

Thinking Critically about Ethical Issues

- Because ethical dilemmas may have no right or wrong answers, individuals need to follow guidelines for ethical decision making.

CHECKING THE ESSENTIALS

1. When should a researcher consult with the proper authorities about the appropriate procedure for institutional review of a research project?
2. What role does the risk/benefit ratio play when an Institutional Review Board (IRB) considers a research proposal?
3. Describe how researchers should treat the information obtained from participants in their research in order to protect the participants from social injury.
4. Under what conditions is it absolutely essential to obtain written informed consent from the participants in a research study?
5. Identify and briefly describe the three major dimensions that researchers should consider in deciding what information is private.
6. What three elements should be included in the debriefing that follows a research study in which deception has been used?
7. Under what conditions is it *always* unethical to deceive research participants?
8. Explain how the use of debriefing is beneficial for both the participant and the researcher.
9. According to APA ethical principles, what two responsibilities do researchers have when they test animal subjects in their research?
10. Indicate how material taken directly from a source should be identified in a research report and indicate how material that is paraphrased from a source should be presented.

APPLYING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Assume you are a member of an Institutional Review Board (IRB). Besides you, the committee includes a clinical psychologist, a social psychologist, a social worker, a philosopher, a Protestant minister, a history professor, and a respected business executive in the community. The following is a summary of a research proposal that has been submitted to the IRB for review. (An actual research proposal submitted to an IRB would include more details than presented here.) After reading the proposal, you are to respond to each of the five steps for ethical decision making, which are presented following the proposal.

Proposed Research

Psychological conformity occurs when people accept the opinions or judgments of others in the absence of significant reasons to do so or in the face of evidence to the contrary. Previous research has investigated the conditions under which conformity is likely to occur and has shown, for example, that conformity increases when people anticipate unpleasant events (e.g., shock) and when the pressure to conform comes from individuals with whom the individuals identify. The proposed research examines psychological conformity in the context of discussions about alcohol consumption among

teenage students. The goal of the research is to identify factors that contribute to students' willingness to attend social events where alcohol is served to minors and to allow obviously intoxicated persons to drive an automobile. This research seeks to investigate conformity in a natural setting and in circumstances where unpleasant events (e.g., legal penalties, school suspension, injury, or even death) can be avoided by not conforming to peer pressure.

Method

The research will involve 36 high school students between the ages of 16 and 18 who have volunteered to participate in a research project investigating "beliefs and attitudes of today's high school students." Participants will be assigned to four-person discussion groups. Each person in the group will be given the same 20 questions to answer; however, they will be asked to discuss each question with members of the group before writing down their answers. Four of the 20 questions deal with alcohol consumption by teenagers and with possible actions that might be taken to reduce teenage drinking and driving. One member of the group will be appointed discussion leader by the principal investigator. Unknown to the participants, they will be assigned randomly to one of three groups. In each group, there will be either zero, one, or two students who are actually working for the principal investigator. Each of these confederates has received prior instructions from the investigator regarding what to say during the group discussion of the critical questions about teenage drinking. Specifically, confederates have been asked to follow a script. The script presents the argument that most people who reach the legal driving age (16) and all individuals who are old enough (18) to vote in national elections and serve in the armed forces are old enough to make their own decisions about drinking alcohol. The script goes on to argue that it is up to each individual to make this decision about drinking alcohol and that other individuals do not have the right to intervene if someone under the legal age chooses to drink alcohol. Each of the confederates "admits" to drinking alcohol on at least two previous occasions. Thus, the experimental manipulation involves either zero, one, or two persons in the four-person groups suggesting they do not believe students have a responsibility to avoid situations where alcohol is served to minors or to intervene when someone chooses to drink and drive. The effect of this argument on the written answers given by the actual participants in this experiment will be evaluated. The researchers plan to make tape recordings of the sessions without participants' knowledge, and the contents of these tapes will be analyzed. Following the experiment, the nature of the deception and the reasons for making the tape recordings of the discussions will be explained to the participants.

Steps for Ethical Decision Making

1. Find out all the facts of the situation.
2. Identify ethical issues that are relevant.
3. Decide what is at stake for all parties involved (participants, researchers, institutions, society).
4. Identify alternative methods or procedures, discussing the consequences of each alternative, including their ethical implications.
5. Decide on the action to be taken (approve the proposal, request modifications, or fail to approve the proposal).