CHAPTER THREE

Research Ethics

Chapter Checklist

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Address potential ethical issues during the design phase of the research project.
2. Explain how your research project minimizes risk and enhances benefits to participants.
3. Find alternative research procedures to avoid physical or psychological harm to participants.
4. Design a research project that demonstrates beneficence, respect for persons, and justice.
5. Follow procedures and guidelines required by your university's institutional review board.
6. Write an informed consent form that is understandable for participants.
7. Use deception and confederates only if other alternatives are unavailable and only if these practices do not cause undue harm for participants.
8. Devise data collection procedures that maintain participants' confidentiality and anonymity.
9. Identify ethical concerns when a research study uses online technology.
10. Understand any risks associated with videorecording and audiorecording participants' interactions.
11. Provide an adequate debriefing for research participants.
12. Ensure the accuracy of data and findings.
13. Write a research report that does not plagiarize the work of others.
14. Write a description of research participants in such a way as to conceal their identities.

This chapter explores issues of ethics and integrity associated with the research process. Researchers, including student researchers, have a responsibility to conduct their investigations without harming research participants and report their findings without misrepresenting the results. As a consumer of research, you should be aware of the ethical principles that guide researchers in the development, execution, and reporting of research studies. Knowing this information will help you identify where ethical breaches could occur and influence a study's findings.

Various standards and guidelines have been developed in specific scientific fields, particularly to guide researchers who use participants in their studies. In some instances the phrase *human subjects* is used, but many researchers consider this term pejorative and prefer the term *research participants*. Communication researchers generally follow or adapt the more specific ethical guidelines of research adhered to by psychologists or sociologists. Additionally, most universities require their researchers—faculty and students—to adhere to guidelines of ethical research promoted by the National Institutes of Health whether or not the research project is funded by that agency.

It is the researcher's responsibility not only to adhere to the guidelines but also to be familiar with the most recent developments. Ethical standards, "norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior" (Resnik, 2020), change in response to changes in research practices. For example, changes were required because the increased use of technology to collect data focused attention on privacy and identity concerns. Ethical standards have also changed due to research misconduct. Whereas many people are familiar with ethical problems that have occurred in medical research, a survey has documented ethical problems in the social sciences (Swazey et al., 1993) and with researchers whose work is funded by the National Institutes of Health (Martinson et al., 2005). If ethical standards exist for research, why does this happen?

Research designs are developed and research is conducted through a series of decisions—decisions made by the researcher or research team. These decisions require researchers to evaluate what to do or how to proceed based on the setting or context of their research. Also, researchers, just like others, view ethical standards differently. Major ethical violations, such as plagiarism or falsifying data, occur infrequently. But more minor ethical violations, such as not fully describing a research design or keeping inadequate records for the research process, are more common (Martinson et al., 2005).

As a result of these problems, communication researchers in the United States are required to use the general research guidelines from the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), a unit of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These guidelines have been adopted by universities and funding agencies. Communication researchers who study communication about health issues or in health contexts are also required to follow the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These guidelines provide comprehensive federal protection for the privacy of personal health information. The website URLs for these guidelines and others of interest to communication researchers are listed on the author's website (http://www.joannkeyton.com/research-methods). Other countries have developed similar ethical guidelines (see Israel & Hay, 2006).

While the focus of this chapter is on research ethics in the United States, other countries have also developed ethical codes. For example, the RESPECT code has been developed by the European Commission's Information Society Technologies (IST) Programme for socioeconomic researchers, including communication scholars, in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. This single code covers ethical guidelines, intellectual property guidelines, confidentiality guidelines, a directory of professional associations, and professional code. The RESPECT code and its background can be found at http://www.respectproject.org/ethics/. In other parts of the world, some universities have developed their own codes for research ethics. It may be helpful to think of protection for research participants in this way. "Given that social researchers intrude in the social lives of human beings, they must ensure that rights, privacy, and welfare of the people and communities involved in the study are protected" (Ntseane, 2009, p. 296). In addition, most studies conducted by researchers promise some degree of social benefit for participants, directly, or for similar people, more broadly. If participants give the researcher information, then researchers should provide protections for them (Mabry, 2009). But who would ensure that those protections are provided? Typically, governments

step in to develop and administer regulations about research like that conducted by communication scholars. But it would be inefficient, for example, for the federal government to do this for all scholarly research conducted in the United States. Thus, the responsibility for ensuring that protections for research participants are upheld has been delegated to the institutional home of the researcher conducting the study. Researchers also are responsible for securing the well-being of participants, and this means being sensitive to how burdens and benefits are distributed among researcher and participants in data collection. What are you asking of participants? What are you giving back? Leeman (2011) describes the sensitivity with which he conducted ethnographic interviews in a homeless shelter; he also describes the way in which the interview process offered a voice to the participants he interviewed. The balance between seeking and collecting data and providing protections to participants is delicate and must be carefully thought through.

Researchers generally agree that protections should be provided to participants (Ntseane, 2009). However, there are some difficulties with how human subject protections are administered. Two issues are prominent. First of these is that each college or university implements their own interpretation and applications of the federal regulations (Mabry, 2009). This means that a research design allowed at one university may be disallowed at another. The second issue is that the federal guidelines were developed for medical research, not necessarily social science research. Thus, it can be difficult to apply these standards to the types of quantitative and especially qualitative research that communication scholars and students conduct. You will be reminded throughout this chapter to consult with your college or university's IRB, or Institutional Review Board before designing and conducting any research project to learn about their required forms and approvals.

It is worth mentioning that the ethical regulations and guidelines presented below are general so that they can apply to a variety of types of studies. Thus, the regulations and guidelines cannot address the details of each research study. Rather, they point out important ethical features that should be examined and considered (Carusi & De Grandis, 2012). Before you collect any data, quantitative or qualitative, be sure to check with your professor to determine which guidelines you must follow.

ETHICAL QUESTIONS IN PLANNING RESEARCH

Without question, all the ethical issues of conducting and reporting research are the responsibility of the researcher. Researchers must have integrity and be honest and fair in interacting and working with research participants. Additionally, researchers must be concerned with how their research topic and procedures could create physical or psychological harm to participants. While there is a tendency to think of ethical responsibility in terms of regulatory standards, researchers should also contemplate what ethical standards are upheld by their communities and larger societal groups. The study of ethics has long been a part of studying communication. Thus, ethical issues guide all our decisions, including those about whether to conduct research and how, who will be asked to participate and why, and what the benefits are that they and others will accrue. Essentially, it is the social responsibility of researchers to ethically plan and conduct their research (Resnik, 2015).

The researcher has two broad ethical responsibilities (Kvale, 1996). The first responsibility is scientific. This means that researchers are responsible to their profession and discipline. Guidelines developed and prescribed by the researcher's sponsor (e.g., department, university, professional association, or funding agency) must be followed. Further, researchers have a responsibility for developing and conducting research projects that will yield knowledge worth knowing. As part of this ethical responsibility, researchers should write their research reports in a transparent manner. This means that the researcher should write so readers can understand the logic and activities that led to the development of the topic, problem, hypothesis, or research question; understand the definitions of what is being studied; be able to follow the collection, and analysis of data or empirical evidence; and clearly identify the results of the study (Standards for Reporting, 2006). Adhering to this responsibility ensures that participants' time and energy are not wasted or abused.

Second, researchers must consider the ethical issues that arise from their relationships with research participants. Regardless of how close or distant those relationships are, researchers must assess the extent to which the nature of the researcher–participant relationship is affecting the collection, interpretation, and reporting of data.

At the beginning of any research project, the researcher must consider the basic ethical issues just described. Although general ethical principles guide the researcher, ethical issues must be considered specific to the design of the study (how data will be collected) and by the nature of the study (e.g., what is being studied and with which participants). All researchers should ask and answer the following questions about their research designs (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014; Sieber & Tolich, 2013):

1. Is the research designed, reviewed, and conducted in such a way as to ensure integrity, quality, and transparency?
2. What are the benefits of this study? How can the study contribute to understanding communication? Will the contributions of the study be primarily for participants? For others similar to the participants? Or for people in general?
3. How will the consent of participants to participate in the study be gained? Should consent be given orally or in writing? Who should give the consent? Is the participant capable of doing so? If not, who is? How much information about the study needs to be given in advance? What information can be given afterward?
4. How can the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants be handled? Is there a way to disguise participants' identity? Who will have access to the data?
5. Are the participants appropriate to the purpose of the study? Are they representative of the population that is to benefit from the research?
6. What potential harm—physical or psychological—could come to the participants as a result of the study?
7. Have the researchers identified and selected their participants in such a way that they are participating voluntarily, free from any coercion?
8. What are the consequences of the study for participants? Will potential harm be outweighed by expected benefits? Will reporting or publishing the outcomes of the study create risk or harm for participants?
9. How will the researcher's role affect the study?
10. Is the research design valid or credible? Does it take into account relevant theory, methods, and prior findings?
11. Is the researcher capable of carrying out the procedures in a valid and credible manner?
12. Has the researcher disclosed his or her affiliation(s) so that participants and research consumers can assess if any potential conflicts of interest exist?

The answers to these questions will affect how the researcher assesses the developing design and conducts the research study.

Because research participants are people, special attention is paid to how they are treated. In 1991, seventeen federal departments and agencies adopted a set of regulations, known as the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Three ethical principles—beneficence, respect for persons, and justice—were identified in this report to guide researchers in designing the aspects of the research process that directly affect or involve research participants. These principles not only guide this aspect of research design but must also be simultaneously upheld, as they are the foundation on which institutional review boards (IRBs) evaluate research proposals.

Beneficence means that the well-being of participants is protected. The researcher must protect the participant from harm as well as meet the obligation to maximize possible benefits while minimizing possible harms. How does this work? Ideally, the outcomes of your research would provide immediate benefits for those who participated and longer-term benefits for individuals like those who participated, while minimizing risk for participants. You can justify a research project that does not provide immediate benefits for those who agree to participate in your study if the long-term benefits improve knowledge or aid in the development of more effective procedures or treatments. In other words, the long-term benefits outweigh the minimal risk participants might encounter.

The balance between risks and benefits must favor the benefits gained. Before research is conducted, researchers should identify risks—emotional, physical, professional, or psychological—and benefits to participants. It is easy for researchers caught up in designing their research study to assume that their method of data collection will not present any risks for participants. One way to avoid this assumption is to talk with people who are similar to the potential pool of participants about their comfort level with the data

collection method planned. You may not mind answering a set of questions, but others can provide insight into how a set of questions or observations may be too uncomfortable, personal, or revealing—too much of an imposition.

In every case, benefits to participants must outweigh the risks. Saying that knowledge will be gained is not an adequate benefit. Rather, researchers should explain specifically how the knowledge gained from the research study poses benefits to the participants or to similar individuals.

Respect for persons involves two separate principles: (1) treating individuals as capable of making decisions, and (2) protecting those who are not capable of making their own decisions (National Commission, 1979). Researchers should treat participants as if they are capable of deliberating about personal goals and capable of determining their own actions. In other words, the researcher should refrain from making choices for participants. The research process should be described and explained, and then the participant should make a choice about volunteering to participate. Unfortunately, the heavy-handed demeanor of some researchers leaves the impression that participants have no choice but to participate. When a researcher communicates with research participants this way, the researcher is being disrespectful.

Another issue of respect arises when individuals are not capable of self-determination. Usually, these individuals are those who are sick or disabled or those whose circumstances restrict their opportunity to deliberate freely. Thus, respect for the immature and the incapacitated is evident when the researcher refrains from placing these individuals in the position where they would be asked to make choices about research participation.

Justice is really an issue of fairness (National Commission, 1979). Ideally, all participants would be treated equally. In the past, however, research in disciplines other than communication has violated this criterion by creating risks for participants and, later, using the research results to generate benefits for those not involved in the research study. Thus, justice was not upheld because the benefits were withheld from research participants who took the risk of participating. Sometimes it is difficult to treat all participants equally, especially if the goal of research is to explore differences between and among groups of people (e.g., differences between supervisors and subordinates or differences between males and females). But justice and equal treatment should always be the researcher's goal.

This type of inequality can also surface in communication research when training is offered to one group of participants and not another before the outcome measures are collected. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher should offer the same training to those who were initially denied it. Hopf et al. (1995) provided this type of justice in their study of public speaking apprehension. In this study, participants who were apprehensive about public speaking, as identified by their self-report scores, were contacted and asked to participate in a study. In two of the conditions, participants were assigned to workshops to receive some type of intervention for public speaking apprehension, a method for reducing anxiety about communicating. Participants assigned to the third condition were the control group and did not participate in any workshop activities. However, after all data were collected, participants in the control condition were given the opportunity to enroll in a workshop for apprehension reduction.

But the issue of justice raises a larger issue. In selecting individuals to participate in a study, a researcher must carefully examine why he or she made those population and sample choices. The researcher should ask, "Am I systematically selecting one group of people because they are (1) easily available, (2) in a position making it difficult for them to deny participating in the research, or (3) in a position in which they can be manipulated into participating?" Ideally, research participants are selected because they have characteristics relevant to the theoretical or practical issue being examined.

Although the three principles—beneficence, respect for persons, and justice—guide the development of the research design with respect to the use of research participants, they do not prescribe a specific set of ethical rules for researchers to follow. Each research situation is unique, causing unique applications of the three principles. At times, these principles may even be in conflict with one another (Vanderpool, 1996). The researcher's goal, however, is to design a research study that upholds these principles to the fullest degree possible.

As you can see, how the researcher treats or interacts with research participants is a significant element of research ethics. As a result, researcher integrity and

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Professional Association Guidelines for Conducting Research

Communication research takes many forms, and ethical principles have been established for both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Quantitative research has traditionally been evaluated with the research guidelines *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association* (APA). For those using qualitative methodologies, the research ethics guidelines and statement on ethnography of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the American Sociological Association (ASA) will be pertinent. For those who conduct research on or through the Internet, the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) will be useful. The URLs for these research guidelines and others can be found on the website at https://www.joannkeyton.com/research-methods

Regardless of method, however, the National Communication Association's (NCA) *Code of Professional Ethics for the Communication Scholar/Teacher* (adopted, 1999, revised by Review Committee, and accepted by Legislative Assembly, 2017) presents these guidelines that should inform all communication research activities.

1. Ethical principles apply to all communication researchers, regardless of the form or method of inquiry. Ethical communication researchers should employ recognized standards of research practice, conduct research that they are properly trained to perform, and avoid procedures for which they have not been adequately prepared or trained. The primary goal of ethical communication research is to avoid harm to others—whether direct emotional or physical harm or harm to the reputations of research participants. Ethical communication research requires respect for human dignity, integrity, privacy, and right to confidentiality. Researchers have the obligation to protect vulnerable populations and to strive for accurate representations of all cultures and communities. If in doubt about any ethical matter, ethical researchers seek advice before proceeding.
2. The value of confidentiality demands that the identity of those being researched be kept confidential except in cases where the research is carried out on public figures or publicly available material. Criticism of another's language, ideas, or logic is a legitimate part of scholarly research, but ethical researchers avoid ad hominem attacks. However, avoiding personal attack does not mean that critics or reviewers refrain from commenting directly and honestly on the work of others. Professional responsibility requires that ethical communication researchers know and comply with the legal and institutional

the rights of participants in research studies are closely intertwined. These issues are so central to academic research that formalized procedures have been established to ensure both. Universities and funding agencies sponsor most academic research, and they require that research conducted under their sponsorship follow guidelines for informing participants of their rights and the potential risks of participating in research studies. These formal procedures require the researcher to gain permission to conduct research before any aspect of the research is conducted. In most universities and colleges, the IRB reviews the research proposal and grants the researcher approval to conduct the research.

Institutional Review Board

Federal agencies that sponsor research (e.g., the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation) require that universities have a formal

guidelines covering their work. They do not use the work of others as their own, plagiarizing others' ideas or language or appropriating the work of others for which one serves as a reviewer.

Responsibility to others entails honesty and openness. Thus, the ethical communication researcher:

- Obtains IRB approval from the appropriate institution(s) before conducting the research.
- Obtains informed consent to conduct the research, where appropriate to do so.
- Avoids deception as part of the research process, unless the use of deception has been approved in advance by an appropriate review body.
- Provides adequate citations in research reports to support theoretical claims and to justify research procedures.
- Discloses results of the research, regardless of whether those results support the researcher's expectations or hypotheses.
- Does not falsify data or publish misleading results.
- Reports all financial support for the research and any financial relationship that the researcher has with the persons or entities being researched, so that readers may judge the potential influence of financial support on the research results.

Likewise, the value of personal responsibility mandates that:

- Communication researchers will not accept research funding for projects that are likely to create a conflict of interest or where the funder controls any of the research design or procedures. If funding is accepted, communication researchers honor their commitments to finish the work on schedule.
- Communication researchers who work with human subjects honor their commitments to their subjects. Those who work with communities honor their commitments to the communities they research.
- Communication researchers share credit appropriately and recognize the contributions of others to the finished work. They decide before research is conducted how authorship will be determined and the order of authorship. They also decide through mutual consultation whether authors should be added or deleted from the finished product.

process in place for considering the soundness and reasonableness of research proposals. These formal considerations are usually conducted by groups typically identified as **institutional review boards (IRBs)** or **human subjects review committees**; universities require their faculty and students to develop and submit a research proposal for the board's or committee's approval before any data are collected. Policies and procedures differ among universities, but if you intend to use the data collected to prepare a paper for distribution to any audience other than your professor, or if there is any possibility you will do so in the future, approval is probably needed.

The primary role of such university groups is to determine if the rights and welfare of research participants are adequately protected. By examining a research protocol or proposal before the researcher starts a project, an IRB can ensure that the research project adheres to both sound ethical and scientific or systematic principles. After its review,

the board or committee can take one of several actions: (1) the research proposal can be approved and the researcher conducts the research as proposed; (2) the committee or board can request the researcher to change some aspect of the research proposal and resubmit the proposal for approval; and (3) the research proposal can be denied or not approved.

Each university or college has its own procedures for submitting a research protocol for review. Generally, however, the following items are required in submitting a research protocol proposal:

- The research questions or research hypotheses
- Relevant literature to provide a foundation for the research project
- A description of how participants will be recruited and selected, and a copy of the intended informed consent form
- A description of research methods and procedures (e.g., copies of questionnaires, measuring instruments, instructions or stimuli given to participants, interview schedules)
- A statement of how benefit is maximized and risk is minimized
- A statement of how subjects' anonymity and confidentiality will be protected
- A description of the investigator's background and education

After your research protocol is approved, it carries legal implications. The protocol must reflect what you will actually do. You must follow the procedures detailed in your proposal. Even minor changes to your procedures will require a separate approval (Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

Must all researchers adhere to these responsibilities? That depends. Each university or college interprets all rules and revisions about conducting research with human subjects. So even if you have recently conducted research, some aspects may have changed. Check with your professor and look for your school's IRB regulations on your institution's website. However, having IRB approval before conducting your study will likely be required if you have the expectation of presenting your study at a conference or submitting it for publication.

In general, however, the 2018 version of the U.S. Federal regulations established new exempt categories of research based on their risk profile. Under some of the new categories, exempt research would be required to undergo limited IRB review to ensure that there are adequate privacy safeguards for identifiable private information.

Fitch (2005) offers advice for preparing your IRB application and for interacting with those who administer your university's IRB or human subject review if they have questions about your proposal. First, carefully consider the risks and complexity of the research you are proposing. Have you designed your study to do good, but do no harm? Second, take the training that your university recommends or requires. Third, read the directions of the IRB application and fill in the information requested. Leaving a section blank will inevitably result in the return of your proposal. In completing the application, pay particular attention to the rationale you present for your study. Fourth, consider asking questions before submitting your proposal and be willing to answer questions from those who administer your university's IRB or human subject review. As you can see, Fitch recommends treating the research proposal process as a communicative process in which both sides (the researcher and IRB) need information from one another.

Informed Consent

Following a form agreed upon by federal agencies, researchers must give research participants **informed consent**. This means that a potential participant agrees to participate in the research project after he or she has been given some basic information about the research study. Of course, a person's consent to participate in a research study must be given voluntarily. No one should be coerced into participating in research against his or her will or better judgment. In other words, participants cannot be threatened or forced into participating.

Informed consent is generally thought of when researchers need to create research relationships with individuals. However, there can be instances in which a community or organization needs to assent, or agree, that you, the researcher, can collect data in that setting (Kaiser, 2012). If you are collecting data in a formal community, such as an organization or town council,

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Research Ethics for Collecting Online Data

The number of social media sites and the messages users post make social media sites an interesting choice for data collection. At first glance, it seems easy to determine that these sites are public, and informed consent would not be required. Researchers (Reilly & Trevisan, 2016), however, have raised important points about the ethical dilemmas of collecting data from these so-called public sites. Their primary question was "Is it ethically appropriate for researchers to freely download content, metadata, and personal information from group and individual social media pages or does it breach the privacy of these unaware participants?" (p. 421). In other words, are social media posts the property of the person who posts them or should these posts be treated as published text? Most important, terms of services change for digital platforms—more often than you might think. Always examine the Terms of Service for any digital platform you want to collect data from. Also see Franz et al. (2019). Reilly and Trevisan further argue that directly quoting public posts may reveal the poster's identity. They recommend using only "direct quotes that cannot be located via conventional search strategies" as the best way to "protect unaware participants from any reputational harm" (p. 431).

What does your IRB require of researchers who are collecting data from social media sites?

How would you design a search strategy to determine if a poster's identity could be determined from a post?

How would you feel or respond if researchers used one of your posts without your knowledge and that use caused your reputation to suffer?

or an informal community, such as a support group or a tightly knit neighborhood, asking for and gaining permission for the group to conduct the research is appropriate and can be beneficial. "Although community support does not supercede individual rights to informed consent, community involvement prior to and throughout the project facilitates study recruitment and the identification of potential risks" (Kaiser, 2012, p. 460).

Informed consent creates obligations and responsibilities for the researcher. To gain a potential participant's informed consent, the researcher must provide certain information in writing to participants. This information includes the following:

- Identification of the principal researcher and sponsoring organization
- Description of the overall purpose of the investigation
- Main features of the research process including a description of what data will be collected
- The expected duration of participation

Not only must these details about the research process be provided, but the consent form should also be written in a manner that participants can easily understand. Thus, the consent form should be written in everyday language rather than scientific language. Finally, a copy of the consent statement should be given or offered to each participant. An example of an informed consent form is shown in Figure 3.1. Whatever form your university or college follows, informed consent should be clear, friendly, and respectful of participants. It should also be an accurate representation of what participants will experience.

The concept of informed consent implies that the researcher knows what the possible effects of conducting the research are before the research is conducted (Eisner, 1991). This is more easily accommodated in quantitative research than in qualitative research. For example, a researcher using unstructured interviews to explore a relatively new research topic would find it quite difficult to develop a complete and comprehensive interviewing guide. The exploratory nature of the study precludes complete

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study Communication Tasks at Work

Principal Investigator Dr. Joann Keyton

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to identify the communication tasks or activities that individuals engage in throughout their day (shift) at work.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to identify on a checklist the communication tasks or activities that you hear or observe others engage in on three different work days (shifts). You will be asked to complete one checklist for each of three days (shifts). Time to complete each checklist should be between 5 and 10 minutes. Across three work days (shifts), your total participation should be no more than 30 minutes. You may choose to complete your checklists at work at the end of your work day(shift) or after you leave the workplace.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this study. You will not be asked for your name or the name of your organization. You will receive the checklists in an electronic document. You will be provided a website for its return. All identifying information from your email account will be stripped before the checklists are given to the researchers.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study. However, you may become more aware of your communication behavior at work and the communication behavior of others by reflecting on and checking off the communication tasks and activities at the end of each work day (shift). Information gained through this study will be used to better understand the communication skills needed for the workplace.

Confidentiality

The information in the records of the study will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in electronic files on the researcher's computer at North Carolina State University. The computer is password protected and within a locked office. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Dr. Joann Keyton at Dept. of Communication, PO Box 8104, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-8104; xxx-xxx-xxxx; jkeyton@ncsu.edu

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (xxx-xxx-xxxx).

Consent To Participate

I have read and understand the above information. I have the opportunity to print and keep a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. By completing the checklists, I give my consent to participate in this study.

FIGURE 3.1 Example of Informed Consent Form

DESIGN CHECK

Do You Need Informed Consent for Your Research Project?

The Office of Human Research Protections of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides an Internet site (https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/decision-charts-2018/index.html) that can help guide you in deciding if you need to provide your research participants with informed consent. Most universities follow these standards, but you should also check your university's rules and procedures. Your university's IRB will post information about informed consent and research compliance on your school's website. Check to see if you can find it using the key terms *institutional review board, human subjects,* or *research compliance.*

- Any possible risks to and benefits for research participants
- An explanation of how confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured or the limits to such assurances
- Any physical or psychological harms that might occur for participants and any compensation or treatment that is available
- Any incentives for participating
- A statement of whether deception is to be used; if so, the participant should be told that not all details of the research can be revealed until later, but that a full explanation will be given then
- The name and contact information for the principal investigator to whom questions about the research can be directed
- Indication that participation is voluntary
- Indication that a participant can decline to participate or discontinue participation at any time during the research process
- Indication that refusal to participate or to continue to participate will not result in a penalty
- Indication that the participant should keep a copy of the consent form

planning. Additionally, in such situations, the researcher is unable to predict how participants will answer. Thus, there is no way he or she can identify all of the probing and clarification questions that will be needed to conduct the study before the interviews begin. Still, the researcher must design as much of the research project as possible, develop a proposal, and request a review by the IRB.

How does the researcher know that a participant consents? In most cases of communication research, participants can simply refuse to participate. In other words, they can hang up the phone on a telephone survey. Or if data are being collected in person, a potential participant can turn and walk away from the research room or refuse to answer an interviewer's questions. Thus, a participant's behavior—for example, answering interview questions or filling out a survey—indicates consent.

For most communication research projects, informed consent is adequate. The research protocol is reviewed with participants, they are given a copy, and their participation implies their consent. In cases where the IRB requires participant-signed informed consent, participants read and sign one copy of the written consent form, return it to the researcher, and keep a copy for themselves. In extremely risky research, the institutional research board may even require that a witness sign the consent form as well. Signed consent forms create a paper trail of the identities of those who participated in your study.

AN ETHICAL ISSUE

Would You Participate?

Imagine that one way you can receive extra credit for a communication course is to volunteer to participate in one of three research projects. The first is a study examining how strangers interact. When you sign up for the project, you are told to meet at a certain time and date at the information desk of your university's library. The second research project is described as a study of how relational partners talk about difficult topics. When you sign up for the project, you are asked to bring your relational partner (significant other, wife, husband) with you to the research session. The third project is a study of how people react in embarrassing situations. When you sign up, you are told that you will not be embarrassed but that you will participate in interaction where embarrassment occurs. For each of these three studies, what information would need to be included in the informed consent for you to agree to participate? Would you be willing to withdraw from a study after it had already started? If yes, what would activate such a response in you?

Recognize the difference between the two. For informed consent, participants receive all the information they need to make a decision about participating, based on the written information you provide them. For participant-signed informed consent, participants receive the same information, but they must all sign a copy of the informed consent and return it to you, the researcher. When this is the case, you should keep the consent forms separate from any data collected. In either case, however, you may even want to read the consent form out loud as potential participants follow along.

Recall that one of the ethical principles for conducting research is respect for persons and that some types of research participants may not be able to speak for themselves. This is the case with minor children. In no case can the researcher rely upon the consent of a child to participate in a research project. Rather, the parents or guardian of each child must agree that the child can participate in the research project. If you want to collect data from children in a school environment, you should get approval for your project from your university's IRB, as well as obtain permission for conducting the research from the superintendent of schools, the principal of the particular school, the teacher or teachers of the children you want to use, and the children's parents or guardians.

The committee that reviews research proposals for your university or college will prescribe the type of consent required for your research project. Be careful, however. Even if written, or signed, consent is not needed, a participant's informed consent is still required. A researcher cannot forgo this step in the research process.

Informed Consent and Quantitative Research Traditionally, quantitative communication research conducted as lab or field experiments has required informed consent. Quantitative research requires considerable planning. As a result, the consent form is able to describe the exact procedures the participant will encounter. For example, in Paul and Linz's (2008) study of child pornography, college students were recruited for "a marketing and advertising study that would include likely exposure to intense pornographic sexual depictions" (p. 12). Thus, the researchers could assume that students who came to the lab were not offended by the topic of the study. When participants arrived at the research lab, they were asked to read, sign, and date an informed consent form indicating that they would likely view intense sexual depictions. All of the undergraduates who volunteered to participate in the study did so.

Informed Consent and Qualitative Research How do these standards and traditions apply to qualitative research? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. In some qualitative research settings—for example, watching how teenagers interact as fans of the X Games—

asking fans to agree to informed consent would disrupt the naturalness of the interaction. Thus, in these types of public and naturally occurring settings, asking for participants' informed consent would not only disrupt the interaction but would also divulge the identity of the researcher and expose the research purpose—all of which has the potential for stopping the interaction the researcher is interested in observing.

Thus, two questions provide guidelines in considering the necessity for asking participants for informed consent. The first one asks "Is the interaction occurring naturally in a public setting?" Let's look more closely at this question. Hammersley and Traianou (2012) suggest that privacy has several overlapping criteria. First, are observations to occur in a home (or home area) for some group or type of people? Is the place of observation privately or publicly owned? Are there restrictions on who can or cannot enter this place? Does engaging in a private activity in a public place create a temporary sense of privacy? Now, let's look at the second question, "Will my interaction with participants in that setting create negative consequences for any of the participants being observed?" If the answer is "yes" to the first question and "no" or "minimal consequences" to the second, then it is likely that the researcher will not need to adhere to the protocol of informed consent. If the answer to the first question is "in some ways" or "no," and acknowledgeable effects can be discerned, then the researcher must follow the principles of informed consent.

For example, interviewing is one type of qualitative research. The researcher may seek and conduct interviews at the public library, so the interaction is public, but it is not naturally occurring. The researcher is significantly influential in and purposely directing the interaction. Thus, informed consent is needed. Alternatively, a qualitative researcher wants to observe how patients approach the nurses' station in an emergency medical center to ask for help. This interaction is public—everyone in the waiting room has the opportunity to see and hear the interaction—and it is naturally occurring. The researcher is not involved in staging the interaction in any way. But this is an interesting case. Even though the interaction is public, interaction in an emergency medical center may be sensitive, and personal health information may be unintentionally revealed to the researcher. Researchers should be sensitive to private interaction even when it occurs in public spaces. For example, a couple saying goodbye to each other at an airport should be regarded as acting in a private setting, even though the interaction occurs in public. So what should a researcher do?

Despite the public nature of the interaction you want to observe or your opinion about whether or not informed consent is necessary, it is always wise to take the most prudent course of action. For each research project—quantitative or qualitative—develop a research proposal to be reviewed by your university's IRB. This committee will guide you as to when informed consent is needed and, when it is, as to what type of informed consent is required.

Indeed, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) see applying for IRB approval as an expected and necessary aspect of qualitative research design. Completing the IRB proposal and approval process will strengthen your thinking about and planning for interacting with or observing people in the field. Admittedly, special challenges exist in qualitative research, such as balancing the protection of participant identity against the need to describe unique features and people in the setting. The process can be to your benefit if you view it as a "critical reading of a study's ethical character" (p. 119).

ETHICAL ISSUES IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Ethical issues must first be considered in the design and development phase of research. But ethical decisions made in the design phase must be carried out. Six areas of ethical concern—use of deception, use of confederates, the possibility of physical or psychological harm, confidentiality and anonymity, video- and audiorecording, and debriefing participants—affect the interaction between research participants and researcher. Each of these can contribute to or detract from developing positive relationships with research participants.

Intentional Deception

When experimentation is the primary method of data collection, deceptive scenarios or practices are often used. Actually, the broad use of intentional deception, particularly in social psychology, caused federal granting agencies to establish guidelines and ask universities

DESIGN CHECK

Private or Public?

All research participants should have the right to decide what information and how much information researchers may know about them. This aspect of research integrity can be especially tricky when conducting research on the Internet, because it is more difficult to untangle private from public and because issues about informed consent were established before the prevalence of online communication (Elm, 2009). As a result, current ethical guidelines, including informed consent, need to be reconsidered for Internet-based data (chat rooms, e-mail, bulletin boards, listservs, and posted videos). Researchers using Internet-based data must address the continuum between private and public domains. In fact, researchers must acknowledge that many of these data are produced in private situations within a larger, public context (Elgesem, 1996). Markham (2004) reminds us that some people who communicate in the public space of the Internet can be angered by intruding researchers or prefer not to be studied. Because technology and societal acceptance of technology changes fairly quickly, a researcher who wants to collect Internet-based data should seek the advice of his or her university's IRB early in the design phase of the project. Not only have digital technologies provided new ways to conduct research, but also these technologies allow researchers to invite people to participate in research when previously this would have been impossible (Miller, 2012). Reviewing the recommendations on ethical decision making and Internet research from the Association of Internet Researchers (https://aoir.org) will help you make decisions about your research design and help you in describing your research project in your IRB proposal.

to establish human subjects committees to monitor research in which people participate.

With **deception**, researchers purposely mislead participants. Deception should be used only if no other way exists to collect the data and the deception does not harm participants. Deception is used when it is necessary for participants to be uninformed of the purpose of a study so that they can respond spontaneously. Communication scholars regularly practice this type of deception. Deception might also be used to obtain data about interactions that occur with very low frequencies.

Researchers who use deception must be sure that it is justified and that the results are expected to have significant scientific, educational, or applied value. Additionally, researchers must give sufficient explanation about the deception as soon as is feasible. Even in these conditions, however, it is never advisable to deceive participants if there would be significant physical risk and discomfort or if the deception would cause participants to undergo unpleasant or negative psychological experiences.

Recall that a major question of informed consent is how much information should be given to research participants and when. If full information is given about the research design and the purpose of the research, procedures that require deception cannot be used. Generally, however, IRBs will allow researchers to conceal some aspects of their studies if participants are debriefed and given all the information at the end of their involvement.

Researchers can underestimate as well as overestimate the effects of their techniques. Thus, a good source of information about the potential use of deception in research can come from potential research participants (Lasser et al., 2020). If you plan to use deceptive techniques, consider discussing them with persons who are similar to those who will be participants in your research project. Specifically, prospective participants can help you determine (1) if some significant aspect of the research procedure is harmful or negative, (2) if knowing some significant aspect of the research would deter their willingness to participate, and

(3) the degree of explanation needed after the use of deception.

If you are thinking about using deception in a quantitative study, use it with caution. Answering the following questions will help you determine if your decision to use deceptive practices is justified. Will the deceptive practice cause the data collected to be invalid? Are there other equally effective ways to collect data? Of course, if deceptive practices are used, participants should be informed of this in their debriefing.

Researchers should consider alternatives to the use of deception. In some cases, the same information could be collected through role-playing, observing interaction in its natural settings, or using participant self-reports. However, deceptive practices can also create ethical problems when researchers use qualitative data collection methods.

For example, the extent to which participants in a qualitative study know that the researcher is, in fact, a researcher and that he or she is conducting research on them is an issue of deception. Chapter 15 describes four types of researcher participation in qualitative research. The role of the strict participant—in which the researcher fully functions as a member of the scene but does not reveal this role to others—is deceptive. Is it ethical? This question can be answered only by examining the entirety of the research design. If the interaction is public and individuals in the interaction scene are accustomed to outsiders visiting, it is doubtful that a question of ethics and integrity would arise. However, if a researcher joins a group for the express purpose of investigating the communication within that environment and has no other reason or motivation for being there, then an ethical question is raised. This type of research design would need a strong justification, and the expected benefits would need to be substantial.

Using Confederates

One type of deceptive practice is for the researcher to use a **confederate**, or someone who pretends to also be participating in the research project but is really helping the researcher. The use of confederates is a type of deceptive practice because research participants do not know that someone is playing the confederate role. In most cases, confederates are used when the researcher needs to create a certain type of interaction context or to provide a certain type of interaction to which an unknowing research participant responds.

In their experiment to better understand social support messages, Rains et al. (2019) asked research participants to arrive at the lab in pairs. When the pair arrived, two confederates posing as fellow students were already there. As a group of four, participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. All participants including the confederates completed IRB paperwork, and were told that the experiment "examined how people talk about personal events," and that "they would serve as the confidant and listen to their partner (who was a confederate) discuss a problem either face-to-face or via instant messaging" (pp. 277–278). Participants and confederates completed a pre-test questionnaire. Next, the "participant–confederate pairs engaged in a discussion about the confederate's issue." Conversations between participant and confederate partners were recorded. Next, participants completed a posttest questionnaire and were debriefed. This experimental process took about 45 minutes to complete.

Confederates can also be recruited from participants who agree to participate in a research study. Wanting to examine how people explain their failures, researchers recruited students for a study with the condition that they had to bring along a friend or sign up to be paired with a stranger (Manusov et al., 1998). When the dyad came to the research site, the person standing on the left was assigned the confederate role by the researcher, although the researcher did not provide the dyad that information at this point. The individuals were separated and taken to different rooms. While the participant in the confederate role was given instructions to get the partner to discuss a failure event, the unknowing partner completed a questionnaire.

After the confederate was clear about his or her interaction goal, both individuals were brought to a room where they were asked to talk for 10 minutes while being videorecorded. Remember that in the role of confederate, one member of the dyad was responsible for bringing up the topic of a failure event and getting the partner to discuss it. After the interaction task was completed, the partners were separated again to fill out questionnaires. After that phase of the data collection, the unknowing partner was debriefed and told that the researchers were interested in the way people offered accounts or explanations for their failures and that the interaction partner had been asked to play the role of

the confederate. Participants were further told that the confederates were supposed to get their unknowing partner to talk about a failure, unless the partner offered it without encouragement.

Without using one of the research partners in the role of confederate to encourage the other partner to talk about a failure, this topic may have never occurred in the limited time the interaction was being videorecorded. After debriefing, participants in the study did not seem overly concerned with this deceptive practice, because they perceived that talking about failures was commonplace (V. Manusov, personal communication, January 26, 2000). In this case, deception was necessary to create the interaction condition the researchers were interested in studying. Recognize that the deceptive practice did not create any unusual harm for the unknowing partner, who still had control over which failure was discussed and how much detail was given.

Physical and Psychological Harm

Some research has the potential to harm participants. Whether the harm is physical or psychological, harm should always be minimized to the greatest extent possible. In communication research, it is unlikely that research participants would face many instances of physical harm. Researchers in the communication discipline do not engage in the type of invasive procedures more commonly found in medical research. Infrequently, however, communication researchers do take physiological measurements from participants to test how individuals respond to different stimuli. Generally, these are restricted to routine measurements of participants' heart rate, skin temperature, pulse rate, saliva, and common blood tests (e.g., see Bailey & Kelly, 2015; Denes et al., 2020). Of course, these procedures must be explained to participants as part of the informed consent procedure.

Communication research can create psychological harm when researchers venture into sensitive topics like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the use of animals in laboratory research, the death of a child, or intimate partner violence. The sensitive content of such studies seems obvious. Psychological harm can also occur for participants when they are asked to role-play interactions that are uncomfortable or are not normal for them or when they are asked to relive distressing or painful experiences through interviews or focus groups or even in self-report surveys. Such research experiences can create negative reactions with long-term effects (Sapsford & Abbott, 1996). However, more recent research suggests that while emotional stress and negative mood can be heightened during and immediately after responding to research surveys, nonvulnerable participants generally return to their baseline levels of stress and mood with no long-term effects (Labott et al., 2013).

It is doubtful that you would design your research project to include a topic or procedure you find distasteful. But we make attribution errors when we assume that research participants would not find the topic or procedure distasteful either. To help overcome our biases, it is a useful practice to ask at least ten individuals who are like the people you expect to participate if they would agree to participate in and complete the research experience. Use their feedback to guide you in redesigning the research project to minimize any harm and to guide you in the type of explanations participants are likely to require as part of the informed consent. Some risks are inherent anytime humans participate in research, and we should never assume that our research topics or procedures are immune to this element.

Upholding Anonymity and Confidentiality

In scholarly research, anonymity and confidentiality are two types of protection given to participants (see Figure 3.2). **Anonymity** means that names and other pieces of information that can identify participants are never attached to the data. That is, the source of the message is absent, largely unknown, or unspecified (Scott, 2005). In fact, in many quantitative studies, the researcher has no idea who the participants are. Researchers do not ask participants to reveal information that would aid the researcher in identifying and finding them in the future. For example, in collecting data, a researcher should never ask for the participant's Social Security number or student ID as a way to keep track of data.

If your study requires data collection at multiple times, you can give participants instructions about creating self-generated identification numbers to be used for only the study. See Yurek et al. (2008) for

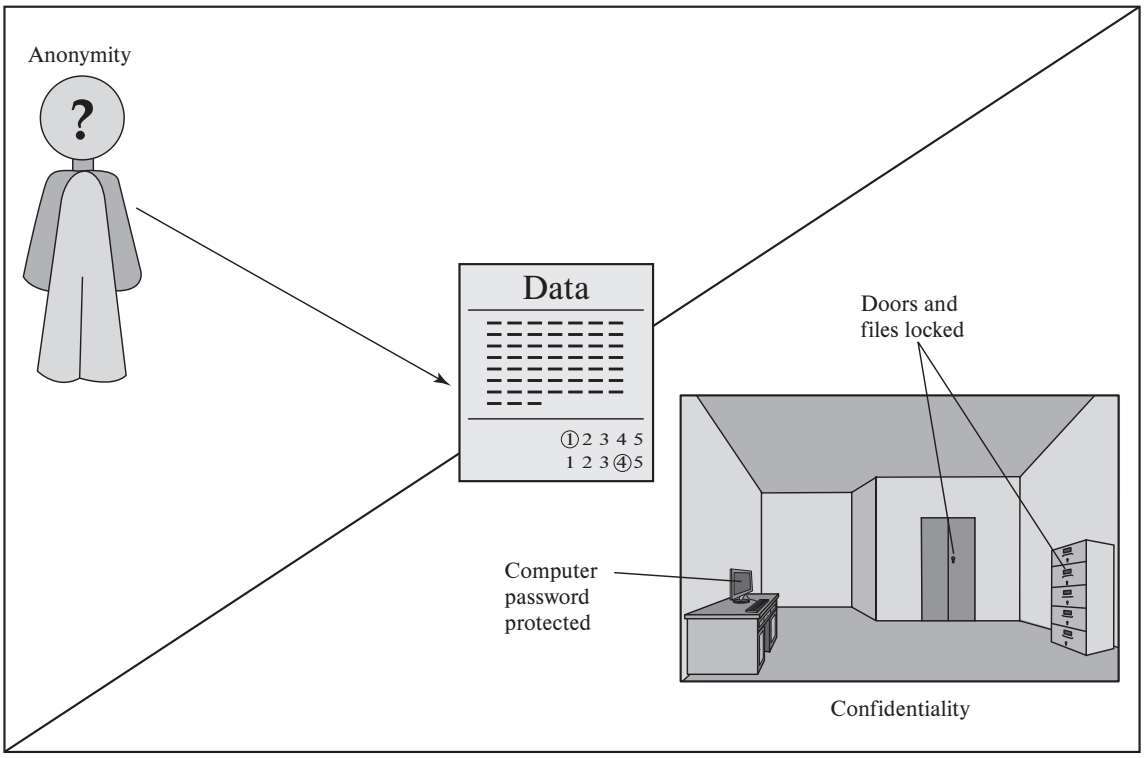

FIGURE 3.2 Researcher Is Responsible for Protecting Both Participant Anonymity and Data Confidentiality

a method in which participants answer researcher-constructed questions to create their unique participant identification number. This method is preferred because the questions used to create the unique identifier are age appropriate, specific to the research project, and based on information that rarely changes.

However, even with a unique identification number, some participants will be hesitant to respond to demographic questions for fear that supplying this information will make it easy to trace their responses back to them. If your study requires participants to be employees, they can be sensitive to providing too much information. For example, you ask employees to identify their race or ethnicity and sex, as well as identify whether they are an hourly or salaried employee. If there is only one Black female manager, she may be particularly hesitant to provide the researcher with three pieces of data that could potentially identify her and her responses. Even if the information is not used to identify her, the participant may have the perception that the data could be used to do so, causing her to be less than truthful as she responds to the questionnaire. Whereas some demographic information generally is useful to collect, be careful of asking for more demographic information than you really need.

Protecting anonymity in qualitative studies that use interviewing, focus groups, and some participant-observation methods is difficult. In many of these cases, you would need to know the identity of participants to set up the interviews, focus groups, or observation periods. In some instances, knowing who the participants are is important for interpreting and understanding the data they provide. However, even though you may know the full identity of a participant, you can protect her identity in your notes and

in your research report by referring to her as Female #1 or in some other way that does not reveal her true identity.

If you are taking notes on a focus group, it will probably be more convenient to do so using participants' names. But when you write up the results of the focus group, you will probably want to change the names to pseudonyms. One way to do this is to pick any letter of the alphabet—for example, *R.* Assign the first person that speaks a same-sex name beginning with *R,* such as Roger. Assign the next person who speaks a same-sex name beginning with the next letter of the alphabet—for example, Saundra—and so on. If the ethnicity of participants is important to your study, assign names from the same ethnic group as well. If you use this method, readers of your research report will be able to clearly distinguish among the different participants' comments, and you have provided participants with anonymity. Table 3.1 demonstrates this type of name-change procedure.

Confidentiality is related to privacy. In the research process, **confidentiality** means that any information or data the participant provides is controlled in such a way that it is not revealed to others; nor do others have access to it (Scott, 2005). For example, the data from students participating in a research project are never given to other students or their professors. The data from employees are never given to other employees or their supervisors. In each of these cases, results from all participants may be summarized and distributed as a research report, but in no case should the data provided by any one person be released to anyone except the participant. Providing confidentiality for participants is respectful and protects their dignity. The researcher who provides confidentiality is attempting to ensure that no harm or embarrassment will come to participants.

TABLE 3.1 One Method for Ensuring Participant Anonymity

Speaker Sequence	*Real Name*	*Name in Written Research Report*
First speaker, male	Ted	Roger
Second speaker, female	Amy	Saundra
Third speaker, female	Shameika	Tiana
Fourth speaker, male	Melvin	Upton
Fifth speaker, female	Jamila	Vanessa

Recognize that data may be a participant's responses to a questionnaire, an audiofile or videorecording of a participant interacting with another person, their comments on a chat log, or your notes from an interview. Confidentiality needs to be expressly addressed in each research situation. Any materials or data you collect from participants should be carefully stored out of sight of others and away from the data collection site. In no instance should you deliver a participant's data to a parent, teacher, colleague, or relative.

Collecting Data Online

Digital technologies have changed how researchers interact with research participants. Use of these technologies has also changed how researchers should protect their privacy. How both parties create and maintain their identities is one issue. Another issue is how both researcher and participant establish and maintain their relationship. Consider this example from Beaulieu and Estalella (2012).

Estalella's aim was to study bloggers. So he became a blogger to better understand the technology and experience he was researching. Having his own blog also allowed him to present his research and himself. At the same time, his blog was one way to identify participants for his ethnographic research project. Two tensions developed. First, how could he both inform his research participants about his presence and role as an ethnographer, and provide them anonymity in this online environment? Second, being *in the field* in this case meant *being online*. Being in both places at once, Estallela found that boundaries were becoming blurred, as tension was created between his fieldwork and his analysis, and between discussions with informants and discussions with his research colleagues. Given his online presence and activity was in the form of blog postings and responses from others, how could Estalella maintain the anonymity of research participants? Beaulieu and Estalella (2012) argue that in some types of online research, especially qualitative research about online research practices, seeking to maintain participant anonymity may be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. These researchers suggest that anonymity may not be the most appropriate standard. Questions like these

TRY THIS!

What Would You Include?

Imagine that you want to collect data about other communication researchers, including their motivations for conducting and publishing research as well as information about their family backgrounds that you believe could have had an influence on their careers. What information about the research participants would you include in your research report? Their name? Age? Sex? Race or ethnicity? Marital, family, or relational status? Their parents' marital status or educational level? Number of siblings? First-born, middle child, or last-born status? Name of their university? Their communication research and teaching specialties? Be able to explain each of your choices. Would your choices to reveal or conceal participant identity differ if you were one of the research participants? Why or why not?

have not been settled. If your research takes you online, be sure to check with your instructor and your IRB for guidance. For more on online research practices and controversies, see Richterich (2020) and (Clark-Gordon & Goodboy, 2020).

Videorecording and Audiorecording Participants

Much communication research focuses on the interaction between or among people. Videorecording and audiorecording are good tools for providing researchers with accurate accounts of these processes. But videorecording and audiorecording raise special ethical concerns. First, research participants should be recorded only if the researcher has told them what is to be recorded and how. Second, participants' consent to be recorded must be specifically obtained through informed or written consent. Third, video and audio records must be treated like any other data. A video or audio record is not anonymous. Thus, maintaining the confidentiality of such data is paramount.

One study of patient communication skills illustrates these principles (McGee & Cegala, 1998). Patients with appointments who met the selection criteria for the study were contacted by phone prior to their appointments. The research procedures, including information about videorecording and audiorecording, were described to them. After patients agreed to participate, their physicians were contacted to obtain their permission to record the doctor–patient meetings. When patients arrived at the doctor's office, they were again briefed about the study procedures and asked to sign a consent form. Patients were also told that they could choose not to participate.

For those who agreed to participate in the study, data collection occurred in one of two examination rooms equipped with videorecording and audiorecording equipment. The equipment was unobtrusively placed but visible to both patient and doctor. Especially important in this interaction setting, the video camera and examination table were intentionally placed, so the video camera could not capture the patient on the examining table. Thus, the patient's visual privacy was maintained even though verbal interaction with the doctor could still be audiorecorded. At the conclusion of the project, the research team maintained the video- and audiorecords, honoring its original agreement with patients about privacy (Cegala, personal communication, January 31, 2000).

Debriefing Participants

Debriefing is the opportunity for the researcher to interact with participants immediately following the research activity. Generally, the researcher explains the purpose of the study and what he or she hopes to find. Any information that was withheld from participants before the research activity began can be shared at this time.

Debriefing can accomplish several other objectives as well (McNallie et al., 2020; Sieber, 1992). First, this informal interaction is a good opportunity for researchers to obtain participants' observations on taking part in the research project. Information obtained here may help the researcher better interpret the results. Second, debriefing gives participants an opportunity to ask questions and express their reactions to participating in the research.

If your research deals with sensitive matters, each participant should be debriefed separately. Likewise, if several types of people participated in the research—for example, parents, teachers, and children—separate debriefings may need to be held, a different one for each type of research participant. In general, your debriefing should include the purpose of the study, a description of the condition individuals participated in, what is known about the problem and the hypotheses tested or questions asked, and why the study is important. In some cases, you may even want to provide participants with a brief written description, including resources for their follow-up. Regardless of the information provided or the form of debriefing, this step should be a positive one for participants. If negative or difficult information must be conveyed, the researcher should consider providing participants with remedies such as counseling assistance or referrals, reading materials, or personal follow-up.

In some cases as a part of the debriefing, the researcher can promise that the findings of the research project will be made available to participants. Some researchers write a one-page summary of the results and distribute this to participants. Organizational communication researchers often promise to deliver a report of the research results as an incentive for executives to permit entry into the organization. If this is the case, be sure to specify how and when the findings will be delivered and give assurances that all findings will mask the identities of participants.

If delivering research results to participants is difficult or impossible, the researcher could provide a brief summary of the relevant literature and the rationale for the research questions or hypotheses. Prepared in advance, this type of summary sheet could be handed to participants at the conclusion of the study as part of the debriefing to satisfy their curiosity and needs (Sieber, 1994).

ETHICAL ISSUES IN REPORTING RESEARCH

Whether the report of a research study is presented to an instructor as a class paper or submitted to a communication conference or for publication, two longstanding ethical principles are adhered to by scholars in all disciplines. The first principle is ensuring accuracy of the information presented. The second principle is protecting intellectual property rights. A third principle, a carryover from ethical issues that surface in conducting the research, is protecting the identities of individuals.

Ensuring Accuracy

The principle of accuracy is fairly broad. Not only must you present the data accurately, but also data cannot be modified or adjusted in any way to better support a hypothesis or research question. Likewise, you cannot omit any data or results that are difficult to interpret or whose interpretation calls other results into question.

To be accurate in reporting your data, you must have been accurate throughout the research process. One way to increase the accuracy of your reporting is to document every step in the research process—from designing and developing your study, to collecting the data, to the methods used to interpret the data. Complex research projects can take months or even years to complete. Thus, relying on memory for details of the research process may not be adequate.

After your research report is written, you are responsible for checking the manuscript for errors caused in typing or editing. When these aspects of accuracy are achieved, your results should be verifiable by others using the same data or be repeatable with data and procedures similar to those you used.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Researchers protect intellectual property rights and avoid plagiarism in three ways. First, researchers must indicate with quotation marks when they use the exact words of others. Moreover, researchers must give complete citation and reference information for each of these occurrences. Second, citation and reference information must also be given when summarizing or paraphrasing the work of others. Even though the exact words of other researchers may not be used, those researchers deserve to be recognized when their ideas are used. Third, complete citation and reference information must be given when mentioning or making reference to the ideas or significant contributions of others. In any of these cases, it is not permissible to present the work of authors as one's own. Take a look at an example of each of these cases.

Dixon and Linz (1997) studied how listeners make judgments about the offensiveness of sexually explicit lyrics in rap music. Here are three excerpts from their

AN ETHICAL ISSUE

Ethics in Proprietary Research

Many of you will graduate and take jobs in business, industry, nonprofit, or government rather than pursue academic careers. How would the ethical issues discussed in this chapter be relevant for research conducted in your organization for your organization? This type of research, labeled proprietary research, is quite common. In these instances, results are shared only with members of the organization that conducted or outsourced the survey; results are not disseminated to a wider audience. For example, many organizations ask employees to fill out surveys as a way of assessing organizational culture and climate, or for tracking employee satisfaction. Organizations also have confederates interact with their customer service representatives to determine the level and quality of assistance they provide. Finally, many organizations conduct research with customers or clients to assess corporate image or to determine clients' satisfaction with their services. Which ethical principles do you believe should be upheld in these situations? Why?

journal article, each one providing an example of the cases described above.

The first example demonstrates how Dixon and Linz directly quote the work of other scholars. A reader is alerted to the fact that these three sentences were written by Dyson, rather than Dixon and Linz, because quotation marks identify the quoted passage:

> "At their best, rappers shape the tortuous twists of urban fate into lyrical elegies. They represent lives swallowed by too little love or opportunity. They represent themselves and their peers with aggrandizing anthems that boast of their ingenuity and luck in surviving" (Dyson, 1996, p. 177).

The second example demonstrates how Dixon and Linz summarize or paraphrase the work of other scholars. A reader knows that these are not the exact words of Hooks because quotation marks are not used.

> According to Hooks (1992) rap music is a form of male expression that provides a public voice for discarded young Black men, although it has led to the expression of unacceptable levels of sexism.

Finally, in the third example, Dixon and Linz are calling readers' attention to the research on rap music that precedes their study:

> There has been little research on listeners' perceptions of rap music and how these perceptions are related to the components of obscenity law. Only a handful of studies have examined listeners' responses to sexually explicit music in general, and rap music in particular (Hansen, 1995; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995; Zillmann, Aust, Hoffman, Love, Ordman, Pope, & Siegler, 1995).

In using these techniques, Dixon and Linz have avoided representing the work of others as their own. Because the citation information is provided in the text for these cases, the reader can turn to the reference section of the manuscript or article and find the complete reference for any work—and then go to the library and find the original information. See Chapters 13 and 18 for more information about citation and reference styles.

Protecting the Identities of Participants

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed ways to protect and conceal participants' identities. Generally, participant identity is not an issue in quantitative research reports because a single participant is not the focus or interest of the research study. Rather, the report is about the findings of a group of people described by their demographic characteristics. For example, most researchers report the number of participants, their age, sex, and any other demographic characteristics important to the study. Seldom would a reader be able to identify exactly who participated. If the researcher reports on participants' organizational affiliation, the

name of the participating organization is generally changed or referred to only generically.

Protecting the identities of participants in qualitative research can be more difficult. When identities must be concealed, the advice given earlier about changing names can be applied to the writing of the research report. In other cases, only partial concealment is necessary or preferred.

For example, in Tye-Williams and Krone's (2017) study of workplace bullying, the authors report that "pseudonyms were used in place of the actual names of targets, bullies, co-workers, social support network members, and locations in order to protect participant identity" (p. 223). Another method for concealing identities of interview participants is demonstrated by Cooper and Mitra (2018). They created a table of participants in which each participant was labeled by a participant number. Each entry on the table also included a pseudonym, gender, age, highest education, former religious affiliation, years affiliated with that religion, and years since leaving that religious affiliation.

SUMMARY

1. Issues of ethics and integrity are an integral part of the research process and must be explored as the research project is designed and developed.
2. Researchers have three broad responsibilities: a scientific responsibility, a responsibility for developing and conducting research that will yield knowledge worth knowing, and a responsibility for verifying or validating the data they collect.
3. Three principles—beneficence, respect for persons, and justice—must be simultaneously upheld.
4. Universities and colleges have IRBs, or human subjects committees, that review the research proposals of professors and students to determine if the rights and welfare of research participants are being adequately protected.
5. Obtaining informed consent, or a research participants' agreement to participate in the research project, is almost always required.
6. Informed consent contains information about the research procedures, including any possible risks and benefits.
7. Informed consent should be written in language participants can easily understand, and each participant should receive a copy.
8. Researchers use deception to purposely mislead participants when it is necessary for participants to be naive about the purpose of a study, or when telling participants all the information beforehand would trigger unnatural responses.
9. Identify ethical concerns when a research study uses online technology.
10. Upholding confidentiality and anonymity of research participants during the collection of data is another ethical principle to which researchers must subscribe.
11. Digitally recording participants as part of research procedures can be done only with their express knowledge and consent.
12. Debriefing gives researchers the opportunity to provide participants with additional knowledge about the research topic or procedure, especially when deception is used.
13. The ethical issues of ensuring accuracy, protecting intellectual property rights, and protecting the identities of individuals in research reports are researcher's responsibilities.

KEY TERMS

anonymity
beneficence
confederate
confidentiality
debriefing
deception
human subjects review committees
informed consent
institutional review boards (IRBs)
justice
respect for persons

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