**Ethical Dilemmas Activity**

Below are several descriptions of research studies. Each of the studies includes ethical issues to be concerned. After reading each study, answer the questions below.

1. What are the variables of interest (e.g., independent, subject, dependent, predictor, outcome)?
2. What type of research strategy is being used (i.e., descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, experimental)?
3. What methods are being used to collect the data (e.g., observational, case study, archival, content analysis, ethnography, naturalistic observation, survey)?
4. What is the setting (e.g., lab, field, or combination)?
5. What specific ethical issues pertain to the study (e.g., deception, stress, lack of info.)?
   1. How could the ethical problems be remedied? And what impact would your proposed remedies have on the internal and external validity of the study?
6. Middlemist, Knowles, and Matter (1976) conducted a study investigating whether or not invasions of personal space are physiologically, as well as psychologically, arousing. The study was conducted in a men’s lavatory. Men were randomly assigned to have personal space or to have their personal space invaded. The investigators closed off specific urinals. Participants were forced to urinate either in the urinal next to a male confederate or in the urinal one away from the confederate. A second confederate positioned in a toilet stall adjacent to the urinals observed the subjects via a periscope and recorded the latency to onset of urination and its duration.

* The independent variable was interpersonal distance. There were two levels: adjacent or one removed. The dependent variable was psychological arousal as measured by onset and duration of urination.
* It is an experiment because interpersonal distance was manipulated and participants were randomly assigned to different levels of this independent variable.
* It is a field study.
* The observational method was used to collect the data.
* Ethical issues to consider
  + Privacy – should researchers be observing a behavior that our culture deems as private, even though that behavior is occurring in a semiprivate place (i.e., a public restroom)? Is it possible to identify participants who took part in the study? If participants are anonymous, then is this issue less of a concern?
  + Informed consent – Participants did not give prior consent to be in the study. If consent was given, this could influence the validity of the results. Prior consent could lead to a biased sample (i.e., volunteer bias) because only those participants who agree to be in the experiment could be included. The question then becomes is there something different about people who agree to participate and those that do not? Are the results of the study generalizable? This may reduce the external validity of the study. Once participants know about the experiment their behavior may be affected (e.g., demand characteristics, reactivity). It is possible that now the researchers have caused heightened arousal in both conditions; thus, making our IV ineffective – which then reduces the internal validity of the study. Consent could be obtained afterwards by another researcher outside the restroom. This might also led to a biased sample and may leave participants with a negative impression of psychological research if the purpose of the study or importance of it isn’t discussed (or not discussed well).
  + Debriefing – should participants be debriefed? Would this cause greater harm than good? People could now be suspicious and could form a negative view about research.

1. Cognitive dissonance is the theory that internal tension can occur when people’s attitudes do not match their behavior, and this this motivates people to reduce the tension. There are different ways the tension can be eliminated, including changing one’s attitudes to be consistent with behavior. In a study examining cognitive dissonance theory, Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) had participants engage in an extremely boring task. After completing this task, researchers pretended that there was a problem because a researcher had failed to show up. Researchers asked participants if they would serve as assistants in the study. Each accomplice-participant was asked to tell the next participant that the task was really interesting and exciting. For telling this lie, the accomplice-participant was promised payment, either $1 or $20, depending on the condition assigned. After telling the lie, researchers measured accomplice-participants’ attitudes about the task. The study was actually designed to see if the amount of money promised affected the accomplice-participants’ attitudes toward the boring task. Consistent with cognitive dissonance, accomplice-participants who were only paid a $1 rated the task as more interesting than those who were paid $20.

* The independent variable was the amount of money promised (2 levels: $1 or $20). The dependent variable was the accomplice-participants’ attitudes toward the task.
* This is an experiment.
* This experiment was likely conducted in a laboratory. No information suggests it was in the field.
* Although not explicitly stated, this is probably a self-report measure.
* Ethical Issues
  + Participants were induced to lie. This could lead to subtle shifts in the participants’ self-perceptions. They may come into the experiment believing they were honest and leave with some doubts; however, unlikely to be a huge concern.
  + Deception – the researchers lied about the “regular assistant” not showing up and probably the purpose of the experiment. This may impinge on participants’ ability to give informed consent, because they are not fully informed.
  + Informed consent – how could it be obtained without reducing the validity of the results? We have some of the same problems addressed in the previous scenario.
  + Debriefing – could a debriefing session be designed to reduce any negative effects?

1. Humphreys (1975) was interested in understanding the rationale and classification of sexual behaviors. He observed interactions among men who congregated in “tearooms,” the name is given to public restrooms where men gathered to engage in sexual activity. He assumed the role of a “watchqueen”, in which he was allowed to observe an exchange for serving as a look out. He was interested in the lifestyles and motives of the men. While serving as a lookout, he took the license plate numbers of those he observed. He found the addresses of those people and visited their homes disguised as a health-service interviewer. Afterwards, he destroyed the names of participants so their identities would not be revealed. He learned that many of the men did not consider themselves to be homosexual and were married.

* This nonexperimental research involving descriptions of observations in the field and may also include some elements of a correlational study, if the researcher is examining the relationship between the researcher’s observations and participants’ characteristics (i.e., demographic information obtained later). Additionally, the researcher utilized a face-to-face survey method by interviewing participants in their homes.
* Ethical Issues
  + Privacy – not only are there questions regarding the ethics of observing this behavior in a semiprivate place, but then the researcher collected the license plates numbers and went to participants’ homes. Thus, participation is not anonymous because participants are identifiable.
  + Observing illegal activity – should researcher abstain from involvement?
  + Deception – the researcher falsely identified himself as a health service worker.
  + Informed consent – the researcher did not obtain consent. Consent would have introduced reactivity in participants, social desirability concerns, and demand characteristics - especially because illegal activities were involved. This could create a biased sample if consent was obtained afterwards. There are similar concerns mentioned in the previous studies.
  + Debriefing – would it cause more harm than good?

1. In a simulation study of plea bargaining, Gregory, Mowen, and Linder (1978) gave false feedback to undergraduate participants. Participants sat in a waiting room for a study to begin. In one condition, another participant who had just been in the experiment (actually a confederate of the experimenter) told the waiting participant that most of the answers to the test that would be taken are “B.” In a second condition, no information was given to the waiting participant. After the participant took the test, the researcher accused participants of cheating and said that it was a serious matter that would have to be presented to a review board for action. Participants were led to believe that the consequences of the accused cheating were severe. Researchers measured whether or not participants confessed to cheating.

* The independent variable was prior information or cheating (2 levels: guilty vs innocent). The dependent variable is whether or not participants would admit to cheating.
* This was an experimental study conducted in the laboratory.
* Ethical issues
  + Stress – How stressful is the situation?
  + Informed consent – Is it possible to inform participants that the experiment would involve high levels of stress, without specifying the source? If this were done, would this result in a biased sample, because only participants who thought they could endure the stress would remain in the experiment? This could influence both the internal and external validity of the study.
  + Deception – telling the participants this was a serious matter that would be presented before a review board.
  + Debriefing – could participants be restored to the same state they were before entering the experiment?

1. In a study conducted by Harari, Harari, and White (1985),male participants walking alone or in groups were exposed to a simulated rape. As participants walked along a path to a parking lot, a male and a female confederate acted out a simulated rape. The man grabbed the woman around the waist, put his hand over her mouth, and dragged her into some bushes. The woman screamed for help. Researchers stationed at various points recorded the number of participants who offered help. Prior to actual intervention, researchers stopped participants and told them the true purpose of the study. The results showed that 85% of the participants walking in groups offered help to the victim, whereas 65% of the participants walking alone offered help. Support was found for the idea that individuals in groups are as likely, if not more likely, to help when the victim is clearly in need of help.

* The subject or quasi-independent variable is the number of people around (2 levels: alone vs group). The dependent variable is the behavior of participants (i.e., intervening, going for police, or neither – not helping)
* This would be a field/observational/quasi-experimental study. The researchers are influencing the natural environment, but they are not systematically assigning participants to conditions and they are influencing the environment in the same way for all conditions.
* Ethical issues
  + Informed consent – no prior consent appeared to be obtained. Could it have been obtained in this case? Researchers could get informed consent waived by an IRB if the researchers demonstrate the potential importance of the research findings. Would it be possible to obtain consent afterwards? Informed consent could influence both the internal and external validity of the study (see explanations discussed earlier).
  + Stress & High risk – exposing participants to a highly stressful event and the unpredictability of participants’ reactions to it. For example, what if one of the participants had a gun and used it to save the “raped” individual?
  + Debriefing – should participants be stopped afterwards? What about participants who chose not to help? How should they be debriefed? What can the researchers say to alleviate the potential negative effects of participants knowing that they did not help in this situation? In the original article, authors mention that a short debriefing was given, but nothing else is said.