Ethics of research in social sciences

I. Context

II. Applications

III. Debates, evolutions, tensions

Irène Hirt

June 2022
III. Debates, evolutions, tensions

1. Standardization
2. Increased bureaucracy
3. Legal requirements/litigation
4. Practical problems
1. Standardization

• “Universal” ethical principles vs diverse, locally and culturally-based systems of values and norms
• Imposition of Western/Eurocentric notions of research ethics: the risks of “unethical ethics”
• The need for dialogical approaches of ethics

Agder, Ryen, Anne. 2007. « Do western research ethics work in Africa? A discussion about not taking ‘the taken-for-granted” for granted ». Mosenodi 15 (1) : 31-45
Some communities are setting up their own review procedures

Example


---

**The First Nations Principles of OCAP®**

The First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession – more commonly known as OCAP® – assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes, and that they own and control how this information can be used.

[https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/](https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/)
2. Increased bureaucracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedural ethics</th>
<th>Processual ethics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“[…] administrative actions based on legal requirements and aiming to protect participants in advance by means of the application of standardized ethical protocols […].”</td>
<td>”[…] approaches which refer to a comprehensive, relational and positional understanding of research ethics and which adapt their principles to the specifics of each research site.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Legal requirements/litigation

• « Ethics creep »: the regulation through research ethics boards is expanding towards aspects broader than ethics *per se*

• Protecting institutions vs avoid harm to participants?

4. Practical problems

a. Restriction of academic freedom
b. Research on specific issues or in particular research sites is discouraged
c. Challenges in the application of "free and informed consent"
d. Absence of legal protection for researchers
Some research strategies are no longer possible according to research ethics boards' standards.

b. Research on specific issues or in particular research sites is discouraged

- Less social science fieldwork, especially among students
- Impoverishment of methods and avoidance of certain research topics, for instance those involving 'sensitive' issues or data

c. Free, informed and ongoing consent?

- Written consent? Oral consent? (see video no 2)
- How much information should research participants receive? Is information associated with free will?
- What does consent mean in societies with social practices and notions of consent different from those of the researcher?
- How to implement free and informed consent when using ethnographic methods?
d. Absence of legal protection for researchers

- Tensions between the right to conduct research and the rights of research participants (Laurens, Neyrat 2010)
- What happens when a researcher is asked to breach confidentiality, e.g. during a police investigation?
- Cf. research on illegal social practices
- Towards a professional secrecy for researchers?

More coming soon….

“I HAVE SO MUCH TO TELL YOU…”

Références