

NAME(S): _____

ETHICAL DECISIONS Group Work

Part I. Listed below are several vignettes describing research situations that involve possibly questionable ethical decisions. Choose from the following options to indicate which aspect (s) of research ethics is not being followed. *Note:* Examples may have more than one ethical flaw.

No Fabrication of Data
Must Provide Confidentiality
IRB Approval
Deception has IRB Approval

Informed Consent Required
No Physical Harm
Participants may quit at any time
Deception is debriefed

Debriefing Required
No Psychological Harm
Voluntary Participation

1. After completing IRRB preapproved research on individuals who suffer from bipolar disorder the psychologist in charge of the project publishes his findings in a scientific journal. The participants signed informed consent forms that stated their identities would not be released. Although he does not reveal the specific names of his participants enough specific detail is given that a reasonable person who knew the individual could identify them. The psychologist feels that there has been no ethical violation because the journal where the data was published is not available to the general public.
2. To test the extent to which people may try to save face by expressing attitudes on matters they are unsure about, the researcher asks for their attitudes regarding a fictitious issue. The participants were told they were only going to be asked a series of yes or no questions about various high profile news stories. Most of the participants stated on record that they understood the issue being presented, but they later were unable to answer even basic questions about the topic in front of others.
3. A researcher's questionnaire is circulated among students as part of their university's registration packet. The questionnaire asks for students to provide opinions about their study, and recreational habits. Although students are not explicitly told they must complete the questionnaire, the hope is that they will believe they must, thereby ensuring a higher completion rate. The data is then used in a research project about college student life but the names of the students are not published.
4. Researchers obtain IRRB approval and provide participants with an informed consent document to participate in a memory study. During the study the participants spend 5 hours completing various memory tasks. The participants were told that a summary of their results and how they compare to others in the study will be mailed to them two weeks later. Later, due to a budget cut, the summary is not sent out.
5. A psychology instructor tells students in an introductory class to complete questionnaires that she will analyze and use in preparing a journal article for publication. The assignment is not mandatory but the students may feel pressure to participate even if they do not want to to make a good impression.

6. Researchers who have IRRB approval conduct a 3-year long study on the effects of meditation on reducing pain among those suffering from chronic back pain. Each of the participants provided informed consent and all were debriefed. After completing the final draft of the results from this research project, the researcher discovers that the graduate students who conducted the interviews altered 25 of the 2,000 surveys to make them sound more convincing. The researcher chooses to ignore that fact that some of the data are incorrect and publishes the book anyway.
7. The IRRB approves the use of a survey on drug and alcohol use among teens at a large urban school district. The researchers obtain informed consent from both students and parents and participation is voluntary (those who do not wish to participate are not required to do so). The researcher discovers that 85% of students smoke marijuana regularly either before or during school hours. Additionally the results indicate some other more positive facts. Publication of this finding will probably create a furor in the community. Because no extensive analysis of drug use is planned, the researcher decides to ignore the finding and keep it quiet.

Part II. This section includes 2 studies. One concerns human research (A) and the other animal research (B). For each of the studies listed below, indicate what possible ethical issues are raised and if this study would be approved or not and why.

A. Your committee is the IRB for Stevenson State University. Dr. Jones is interested in the effect of stress on performance on the *McCord Intelligence Test*. She feels that the test, which is very widely used in public schools, gives misleadingly low scores to kids who are under stress. She wants to randomly divide her subjects (college students) into two groups of 20 each. All subjects will take a phony pretest and will be given their "results." The experimental group will be told that they failed the test and that it is surprising that they were able to do well enough in high school to get into college. The control group will be told that they passed the test with flying colors. All of the students will then be given the actual *McCord Intelligence Test*. Dr. Jones' hypothesis is that the experimental group will not do as well on the IQ test as the control group. At the end of the experiment, all students will be debriefed and told that the pretest was not real and explained the true purpose of the study.

What issues are raised by this study? Approve or reject? Why or why not?

B. Your group is the IRB at Animal State University. Professor King is a neuroscientist working on transplantation of brain tissue, what he considers believes is a research area on the cutting edge of science. Previous studies have shown that neural tissue can be removed from the brains of monkey fetuses and implanted into the brains of monkeys that have suffered brain damage. Dr. King wants to conduct an experiment in which he will transplant neural tissue from monkey embryos into the entorhinal cortex, an area that appears to be associated with Alzheimer's disease. The experiment will involve 20 adult rhesus monkeys as subjects and 20 pregnant females whose embryos will be used to supply the neural tissue. First, all the subject monkeys will be subjected to surgery. This procedure will involve anesthetizing the animals, opening their skulls, and making lesions in the entorhinal cortex. Three months later, the experimental group consisting of 10 of the animals will be given transplant surgery. The pregnant females will be operated on and their embryos will be removed. Neural tissue taken from the embryos will be immediately implanted into the area of the brain damage in the experimental subjects. The 10 control animals will be subjected to a phony surgery. All of the monkeys will then be allowed to recover for 2 months. Finally, the animals will be given a learning task to test the hypothesis that the animals having brain grafts will show better memories than the control group. According to Dr. King, this research is in the exploratory stages and can only be done using animals. He feels that this research will be a significant step toward developing a treatment for the devastating memory loss that afflicts Alzheimer's victims.

What issues are raised by this study? Approve or reject? Why or why not?

C. Your committee is running the IRB for Stevenson State University and you have received a request by psychologists at the University to replicate a famous experiment on obedience conducted by Stanley Milgram that will be done in the exact same manner. In 1963, Stanley Milgram hired people to help him with a learning

Discussing Ethical Issues in Psychological Research - Harold Herzog, Ph.D., Western Carolina University

experiment to examine the effects of punishment on learning. He told them that they were to go to teach people, the "learners," by giving the "learners" shocks when they gave wrong answers. The shocks would be given in various intensities from slight to severe (the shock machines were fake; the learners received no shocks at all; and the "learners" themselves were part of his research team who had been trained to act as if they were hurt). To be clear, the participants in the study ("teachers") were the people being told to administer the shocks which they believed were real.

The people were told to increase the intensity of the shock each time the "learner" made a mistake. As the shocks increased in intensity, the "learners" began to protest that they were being hurt. They cried out in pain and became increasingly upset as the shocking continued. The people giving the shocks often became concerned and frightened and asked if they could stop. But the experimenter politely but firmly pointed out that they were expected to continue. Incredibly, 65 percent of Milgram's participants did go all the way, even though the learner stopped answering toward the end and many subjects worried that the shocks might have done serious damage. Milgram was investigating obedience not learning. He wanted to find out whether anyone in the situation just described would actually go all the way and give the highest level of shock.

What issues are raised by this study? Approve or reject? Why or why not?