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Things to Consider In Order to Perform Ethical Research

Studies potentially exempt from ethics approval:

1. Studies that observe public behavior with no intervention and no identifying information collected.
2. Analysis of publicly available documents (archival research).
3. Surveys collected anonymously with no pressure to complete.

Studies requiring special care, and that may require an ethical review:

1. Studies involving questions about undesirable personal characteristics (prejudice, discrimination, aggression). These studies should have very carefully worded informed consent forms and thorough debriefings in which people are assured of the breadth of normal responses, and given resources to contact if they desire to speak to someone about the issues raised.
2. Studies that involve participants from a population of concern (see below).
3. Studies that involve deception.
4. Studies that involve participants ingesting anything (food, medicine, etc.) other than water, even if they are only offered the item and not required to ingest it for the study.
5. Studies involving invasive measures (e.g., blood collection).
6. Studies in which personal identifying information about the participants is collected and kept associated with their data or with other information about the study.
7. Studies which collect potentially endangering information (e.g., illegal behavior).

Populations of concern:

1. Children
2. Patients/Ill people
3. Prisoners
4. Mentally disabled people

Personal identifying information includes

1. Name
2. Identifying numbers, such as fiscal number
3. Physical or email address
4. Images (photos, videos)

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Informed Consent and Debriefing

Informing participants in psychological research about what they are agreeing to take part in before they do so, through an informed consent statement; and giving them detailed information about how their information will be used, and the purpose of the study after their participation, in the form of a debriefing are considered a necessary part of ethically performed research. Particularly in an educational setting, where participants are frequently students being used as participants with the intention of teaching them about psychology and research, it is extremely important to follow these norms, and to include the purposes and methods of the study in the debriefing, for educational purposes.

Informed consent

Informed consent requires giving participants information about what is likely to take place during the study, what types of questions they will be asked to respond to and tasks they will be asked to perform. Under normal circumstances, this is usually written using language easily comprehensible by the selected participant population, which the participant reads. Following this the participants are asked to sign and date a document stating that they agree to participate. Informed consent should ALWAYS include a clause stating that participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If reward is being given for participation (e.g., payment), at least a partial reward should be given to participants, even if they do not complete the entire study. For example, if a study is comprised of multiple sessions, a participant who only attends one session should be compensated for their attendance at that session.

When working with participants who cannot legally give consent (e.g., children) their legal representative must be asked for consent. In addition for these populations, and for those for whom collecting information that identifies them as having taken part in the study (e.g., illegal immigrants or a study about undesirable or illegal behavior) oral consent should be obtained. Any study requesting oral consent should be reviewed by the ethics committee before being run. In addition, there are some studies (e.g., purely observational studies) where informed consent would be difficult to collect (particularly before the study). In the case where there is only observation of public behavior with no identifying information collected, informed consent is waved (it is considered tacitly given by performing the behaviors in public). However, if any intervention takes place in the situation, or identifying information is collected, participants should be given the opportunity after the fact to refuse the right to use their data in the research. Any study with an intervention or identifying information collected in public settings must be reviewed by the ethics committee ahead of time. When participants are recruited in institutions (e.g., educative, health, companies, etc.) the formal consent of the institution (its legal representative for these issues) must be obtained.

Debriefing

The post-experimental debriefing is your opportunity to explain to participants in more detail why you asked them the questions you did, or had them do the tasks they did. At this point, ideally you will explain your hypotheses as simply as possible, and what you know about the topic that would be of interest to them. If any deception was used in the study, it should be revealed at this point. Also, if any questions or topics that were raised might be distressing to the participant (including any deception), participant distress should be assessed, addressed as much as possible, and if problems appear to linger, further steps should be taken (e.g., referral to a supportive setting). Debriefings can be done in writing, however, it is generally considered better if they are done verbally to the participant directly after the study. If there is reason to fear exposure of the hypothesis to other potential participants, and there is no short term harm to the participant if they do not immediately learn the purpose of the study, participants can be asked to provide the researchers with their email address and be sent the debriefing at a later time. However, participants should not be required to do this, as it is another link of their personal information to the research study.

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Ethics Checklist

Exempt studies	Yes
Does the study include observation of public behavior with no intervention and no identifying information collection?	
Does the study analyze publicly available documents (archival research)?	
Does the study include only surveys collected anonymously and include a statement that participants can skip any question that makes them uncomfortable or stop at any point?	
Studies needing special care and review for first time researchers	
Does the study involve questions about undesirable personal characteristics (prejudice, discrimination, aggression)?	
Does the study involve participants from a population of concern?	
Does the study involve deception?	
Does the study involve participants ingesting anything (food, medicine, etc.) other than water?	
Does the study involve invasive measures?	
Does the study involve collecting potentially endangering information (illegal behavior, etc.)?	
Does the study involve collecting personal identifying information about the participants and keeping it associated with their data?	

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Useful References and links

Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. Standard 8: Research and Publication. Retrieved from the American Psychological Association website:

http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx?item=11

Getting through ethics review. Retrieved from European Commission Cordis FP7 website: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ethics_en.html

NIH Office of Extramural Research online ethics course (protecting human research participants): http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php

Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses (2011). Regulamento disciplinar da Ordem dos Psicólogos Portuguesa. *Diário da República, 2ª Série*, *140, 22 de Julho de 2011,* 30533-30541.
http://www.ordemdospsicologos.pt/ficheiros/documentos/regulamento_disciplinar_da_ordem_dos_psicaologos_portugueses_nao447_2011_de_22_de_julho.pdf

Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses (2011). Código Deontológico da Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses. *Diário da República, 2.ª série, 78, 20 de Abril de 2011*, 17931-17936.
http://www.ordemdospsicologos.pt/ficheiros/documentos/caodigo_deontolaogico.pdf

If you have any further wuestions please contact CIS Scientific Comission at cis@iscte.pt