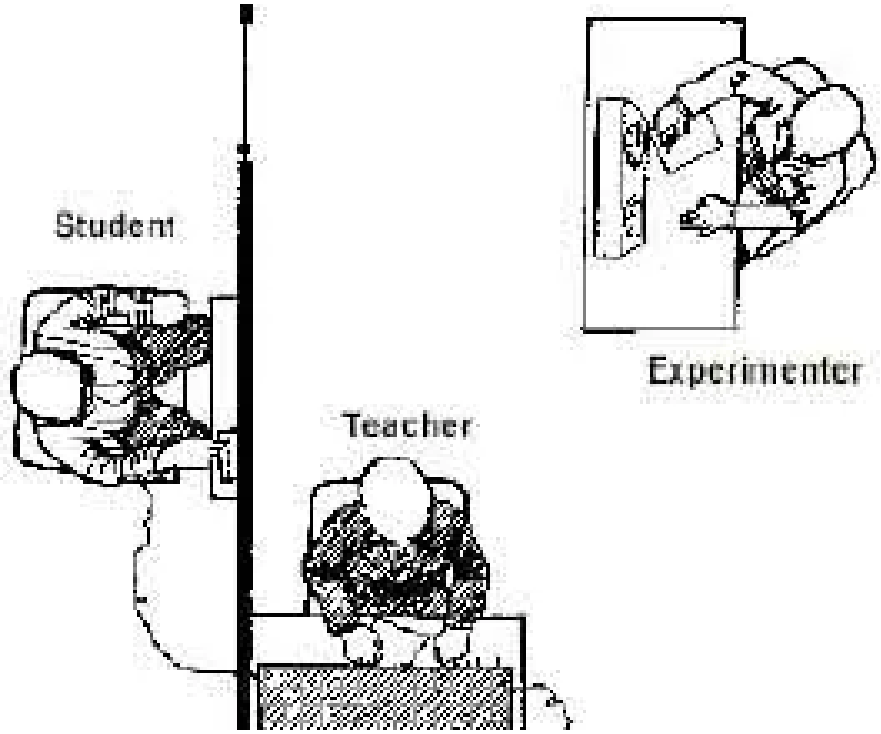
Research Ethics

Reading: 61-82

Moral foundations of ethical research

- Ethics describes what it means to behave morally *and* how moral goals can be achieved
- When designing your research study, keep the following in mind:
  - Do the risks outweigh the benefits?
  - Are you acting responsibly and with integrity?
  - Are any of the procedures unjust?
  - Are the rights and dignity of those who are involved sufficiently protected?

Milgram's obedience study highlighted the malleability of ordinary men and women to orders



Was It Worth It?

Much of the debate over the ethics of Milgram's obedience study concerns the question of whether the resulting scientific knowledge was worth the harm caused to the research participants. To get a better sense of the harm, consider Milgram's (1963) own description of it.

> In a large number of cases, the degree of tension reached extremes that are rarely seen in sociopsychological laboratory studies. Subjects were observed to sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh....Fourteen of the 40 subjects showed definite signs of nervous laughter and smiling. The laughter seemed entirely out of place, even bizarre. Full-blown uncontrollable seizures [of laughter] were observed for three subjects. On one occasion we observed a seizure so violently convulsive that it was necessary to call a halt to the experiment (p. 375).

Milgram also noted that another observer reported that within 20 minutes one participant "was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching the point of nervous collapse" (p. 377)

To Milgram's credit, he went to great lengths to debrief his participants–including returning their mental states to normal–and to show that most of them thought the research was valuable and they were glad to have participated.

From moral principles to ethics codes

- **Nuremberg code**: 10 principles produced in 1947 in response to the atrocities in WW2 deathcamps
- **Declaration of Helsinki:** Built on the former by specifying the need to have a written protocol that details the research in order to be reviewed by an independent committee
- **Belmont report**: Recognized the need for just treatment of individuals from different groups. Highlighted the need for informed consent and the need to protect individual autonomy. Introduced the principle of beneficence, which highlights the need for maximizing research benefits while minimizing harms to participants and society.
- **APA ethics code**: 150 ethical standards tailored to psychologists and their students (pp. 70-74)

Example of a consent form

Psychology Informed Consent Form

What Is the Purpose of This Consent Form?

This consent form provides information about the psychological study you are considering participating in. It will help you understand what to expect and alert you to any potential risks.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are at liberty to withdraw at any time. You should also be aware that withdrawal will not result in any penalties.

The Nature of the Study

The study will be conducted by *[your organization's name]*.

The purpose of the study is to *[briefly describe the purpose of the study and the reasons why it is being conducted]*.

What Does Your Participation Involve?

Participants will be asked to [outline participant tasks]. The initial participation in this study will take *[stipulate the expected duration of the study]*.

All gathered data will be anonymous and will be treated as confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed at any point during the study or in the subsequent discussion of the results.

Further Study

If further participation is needed, we will seek to obtain consent from you again.

Details of tasks associated with further study will be outlined fully. As with previous participation, you will be free to withdraw at any time without any penalties.

Risks and Disadvantages

Potential risks, dangers, discomforts, and side effects include the following: [*list potential risks associated with participation in the study*].

Source: pandadoc

Ethics in practice