

Chapter 1

Introduction



Ethics must be a condition of the world, like logic

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1969, p. 77)

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Keywords Empowerment · Legislation · Perspectives of ethics · Practice-based and problem-based learning · Protocols · Questionable research practices · Referencing policy · Scientific misconduct

About the Reader Let’s start with you. The audience for this work is you, a student in the social sciences. Many of the problems discussed in this book will probably be new to you, perhaps not entirely, but still. Yet, right from the beginning of your studies, you have been confronted with certain demands, regulations, and procedures, all driven by certain ethical considerations that you’re supposed to be aware of and adopt. You’re supposed to be trustworthy, reliable, honest, impartial, and objective if you want to call yourself a researcher. Ah yes, but how? It seems you’ve got some catching up to do.

Some, such as Steneck (2006), argue that responsible research conduct requires you to learn and follow established protocols and procedures. Others, such as Sim

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et al. (2015), insist that your level of engagement and motivation play a role in how you learn and understand research ethics.

In either case, because the rules and regulations of research ethics may appear ‘vague’ at best, or feel ‘beyond your control’, we feel that it is important that you are offered an opportunity to see those rules and practices ‘in action.’

This book is designed to empower you, to help you grasp research ethics in the most practical sense. By providing you with concrete examples of cases and dilemmas, and confronting them with real questions, we believe you will become more sensible to these problems and will be able to respond to these issues more readily.

Aims and Purpose of This Book Problems regarding research ethics and integrity began to dominate the agenda of social scientists at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Of course, there have always been ethical considerations, but today, more than ever before, we seem aware of the many pitfalls, obstacles, and dangers attached to our research procedures. There are several reasons why this awareness came about in such a relatively short amount of time.

For one, a number of highly controversial cases of scientific fraud within the social science emerged in the early 2000s (among which Diederik Stapel was probably the most prominent). Many of these were widely reported on and helped raise awareness of the dangers of scientific misconduct.

Additionally, and simultaneously, questions were raised regarding what is often referred to as *Questionable Research Practices* (QRPs), which revealed the social sciences’ susceptibility to more subtle forms of data manipulation, affecting the field in an unparalleled fashion.

Finally, legislation in many European and North American countries has changed (and continues to change), putting more emphasis on protecting participants, guarding confidentiality, and demanding stringent data management plans.

In the meantime, several outstanding books have been published on research ethics and integrity (see; Resnick 2005; Israel 2014; Koepsell 2016), however, a textbook specifically designed for students in the social sciences remained elusive. When we took it upon ourselves to fill this gap, we reasoned two stipulations needed to be taken into account.

Firstly, if we wanted students to ‘get the message’, meaning their perspective should be included as much as possible. Secondly, students should be given ample opportunity to ‘experience’ ethical issues in science as real-life questions or problems, and not so much as abstract rules or guidelines.

This then defines the two goals of this book:

- Inform students about research ethics and raise their overall interest in it.
- Create opportunities for students to engage with ethical problems and dilemmas, allowing them to define their own position.

Educational Plan In each chapter, we introduce the student to the fundamental dilemmas, problems, and choices that one may encounter when doing research. We will focus as much as possible on research conduct, and not on the underlying philosophies of ethics (except briefly in the introductory chapters), or on the ethics of professional conduct (interaction with clients, organizations, etc.). While these sub-

jects fall outside the scope of this work, we will provide introductions for them in subsequent chapters.

Most importantly, we do not offer a ‘how-to-do guide.’ Instead, the emphasis is on a combination of practice-based and problem-based learning (as opposed to strictly theory-based learning). Our approach rests on the assumption that the student benefits from concrete examples of problems embedded in location and situation specific contexts. Along with a basic understanding of the most important principles and rules that need to be applied, one can acquire this knowledge.

All chapters are written in accordance with the following three-step educational design:

Step one is to *identify* a particular ethical issue as concisely and clearly as possible. At the beginning of each chapter, short informative sections allow the reader to familiarize themselves with basic concepts, theories, viewpoints, and perspectives.

Step two consists of developing *substantiated approaches* to specific problems or issues. How should one address the issues discussed, resolve the dilemmas involved, or avoid getting caught up in them? Short, concrete cases give direct access to the problems at hand without providing moral judgements.

Step three is the accounting or justifying of moral decisions to others. All chapters contain real-life case studies that can be used in class or in tutorials to discuss and probe the choices and decisions.

Structure of This Book We have divided this textbook into four sections that, more or less, represent the various ‘orientations’ in research ethics, namely a focus on theory, fraud, trust, and formalities, respectively. The division is as follows:

Part I: Perspectives (Chaps. 2 and 3)

Part II: Ethics and Misconduct (Chaps. 4, 5 and 6)

Part III: Ethics and Trust (Chaps. 7, 8, and 9)

Part IV: Forms, Codes, and Types of Regulations (Chap. 10)

The first section presents a brief overview of what science is and what discussions exist in the field of research ethics. There is a short section on what characterizes science, what its outlining principles are, and on different perspectives of ethics. We will focus on three views, each with different assumptions regarding what constitutes moral behavior. The defining question of this section is: *Which perspectives are relevant for the social sciences researcher?*

The second section discusses classical forms of fraud; *Plagiarism, Fabrication, and Falsifying* (PFF). Related to these issues are concerns about cheating, free riding, paper mills, and other fraudulent practices. The defining question here is: *How do forms of fraud impact the social sciences, and why should it be of concern to us?*

The third section deals more broadly with defined issues of research ethics, such as those relating to trust, concerns over confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and questions concerning science and politics. The defining question in this section is: *How should the social sciences define itself in light of the changing political and social landscape today?*

In the final section, which consists of only one chapter, we present a general review and step-by-step discussion of relevant procedures within university codes of conduct, informed consent forms, and other types of regulations found in the social sciences today. The defining question here: *How to design a proper research application?*

A Note About Shaming Over the course of this book, we will discuss ways to tackle ethical issues, sometimes by example of the individuals who chose the incorrect path. This raises the following question: In a book about ethics, is it appropriate to mention the names of those who've crossed the line, committed fraud, or misbehaved in one way or another? Should they be 'named and shamed,' or would it be better to discuss their cases in a more anonymous manner? This is in itself an ethical problem.

We've adopted a pragmatic approach to this question. In some cases, the individual has come to exemplify the problem, such that it would only create an unnecessary distraction were mention of the persons involved avoided. This is true, for example, of the cases of Diederick Stapel, Brian Wansink, and Cyril Burt, among others, which are discussed at some length here. However, if it was at all possible to protect privacy, then we have done so, believing that this principle should prevail.

A Note About Our Referencing Policy It may strike the reader that the authors in this book refer to themselves as a collective 'we' throughout the entire volume, even though only three chapters are authored by multiple writers and two of the case studies were written by different authors, with the remaining majority authored by a single author.

Apart from the fact that it is much more consistent to refer to a single author-identity throughout, there is another reason to speak in the 'majestic plural': all chapters have been read and critiqued by so many different people, who contributed in so many ways, adding so many valuable insights, that it would be almost presumptuous to consider any one chapter the product of a single mind. For this reason, we gladly revive this respected but somewhat forgotten practice.

When referring to unidentified others, we adopt a different policy. At one point it was common practice to use 'he' throughout and forewarn the reader in a footnote that they should understand this as referring to both male and female persons. Later the formula 'he or she' or even 's/he' was adopted. Today, in accordance with the style and grammar guideline in the APA *Publication Manual*, singular 'they' is used when referring to a generic person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context. We've decided to follow this recommendation, as you have perhaps already noticed when in the sentence above we spoke of 'the reader... they' (see Lee 2019 for a discussion this policy).

Beginning, Not the End This book will provide an introduction into research ethics and integrity, but not much beyond that. This is just a beginning, but with two important considerations in mind. First, one will find that many of the questions we carefully separated in this book are anything but separated in real life, and that trying to answer one question has consequences for many other related parts. Ethical questions in real life are rarely simple.

Secondly, one will find that many of the issues discussed in this book are still being debated, and our views on them continue to develop, in part because science itself is in continuous development. Additionally, the fact that science's place in society is changing, how we perceive of ethical questions changes with it.

So, there remains work to be done even after the reader has finished this book. We understand that this may sound somewhat discouraging, but please remember what poet Wislawa Szymborska (2002) wrote in 'A Word on Statistics':

*Out of a hundred people
those who always know better:
fifty-two
Unsure of every step:
nearly all the rest.*

This book is dedicated to 'nearly all the rest', namely all those students out there who struggle to do the right thing. We hope this book will help them know how to get there.

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