Ethics & Medical Research

The Ethics of Behavioral & Social Science Research

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?

2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Readings

- Felice Levine & Paula Skedsvold, "Behavioral and Social Science Research", pp. 336–355.

Questions

1. Based on Levine and Skedsvold's discussion, what exactly is it that unifies research in the behavioral and social sciences? Why do many behavioral and social scientists believe that they should not be held to the same ethical standards and legal regulations as biomedical researchers? Do you agree with their argument?

2. What are the various types of risks, harms, and benefits that subjects face when participating in behavioral and social science research? In addition to the issue of risk, why are there also particular concerns with privacy and confidentiality, on the one hand, and disclosure and informed consent, on the other? How are these three issues raised by the use of deception, incentives, internet research, tracking methods, and third parties?

3. How do the issues of (*i*) risk, harm, and benefit; (*ii*) privacy and confidentiality; and (*iii*) disclosure and informed consent vary according to the different methodological approaches commonly used in behavior and social science research?

4. How are researchers in the behavioral and social sciences supposed to minimize, or otherwise address, all of these concerns?