Ethics

- “Conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group”

- Agreements shared by researchers about what is proper & improper in the conduct of scientific inquiry.

- You should act ethically.
FIVE foundational elements for an ethical research:

- I. Voluntary Participation
- II. No harm to Participants
- III. Informed Consent
- IV. Anonymity & Confidentiality
- V. Analysis & Reporting
I. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Voluntary Participation

- Participation must be voluntary, no subject should be forced to participate.

- Challenges:
  - disruption of life
  - requires that people reveal personal information than may be unknown to others
  - Purpose doesn’t directly or immediately serve personal interests of subjects.
II. INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

- Subjects base their voluntary participation in research project on a full understanding of the risks involved.

- Issue with participant observer method & timing.

- Primary safeguard—sensitivity to issues & experience with research method
HIV Research Example

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION:

- You are being asked to participate in an important study to learn more about women's experiences with HIV infection. This study is being conducted by Desiree Ciambrone, a graduate student in the Sociology Department at Queens College.

- During this interview, I will ask you about your illness, how HIV infection affects your daily life, and about the people who help you if, and/or when, you need assistance.
I (THE SUBJECT) UNDERSTAND THAT:

- This interview will be tape-recorded.

- In order to participate in this project I must be 18 years old or over.

- I may be contacted for further questions regarding this study.

- My participation in this project is completely voluntary; the decision to participate is up to me and no one else.
• I do not have to answer every question; I may choose not to answer certain questions.

• I can ask the interviewer to leave at any time. Even if I sign this form, I can change my mind later and not participate in the study.

• The only known risk to me is the possibility of some emotional discomfort.

• The information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent of the law.
A direct benefit of participation in this study is the opportunity to talk with an interested listener and to think reflexively about my own experiences. I understand that the information obtained by this study may help other women who have had similar life experiences and may help professionals understand and treat women with HIV infection.
IV. ANONYMITY & CONFIDENTIALITY
Anonymity & Confidentiality

RESEARCHER:

- Must work to avoid revealing sensitive information.

- Study may cause subject to focus on aspects of their lives that they do not usually think about.

- Can’t protect against all risks but a sound research design can reduce the possibilities
• Techniques to protect subjects’ interests and well-being by protecting their identities:

• Anonymity—Researcher cannot identify a given response with a given respondent (mail survey).

• Confidentiality—Researcher can identify a given person’s identity but promises not to do so publicly.
How to Protect Confidentiality

- Interviewer training
- Removing identifying information as soon as it is no longer needed (replacing with ID numbers)
- Thorough understanding of research method
Identifying Your Role as the Researcher

- Deception is unethical—must be justified by compelling scientific or administrative concerns

- Researchers sometimes conceal affiliation—still raises ethical questions

- Lying about Purpose of Research to protect findings of study (lab experiments)—Is this sometimes appropriate?
Safeguards—Debriefing of Subjects

- Allows researchers to discover any problems generated by research experience so that they can be corrected.

- Should be done with care and to make sure that subjects aren’t left with negative feelings regarding study—Why does this matter?
III. NO HARM TO PARTICIPANTS
No Harm to Participants

SOCIAL RESEARCHERS:

- Should never injure the people being studied; regardless of whether they volunteer for study

- Must never reveal information that would embarrass subjects or endanger them (home lives, relationships, employment)

- Must safeguard against subtlest dangers to protect subjects from being harmed psychologically
V. ANALYSIS & REPORTING
Analysis & Reporting

- Published material can have an impact on the study’s participants.
- Obligation to other researchers
- Rigor of data analysis & reporting of findings
- Report both positive & negative findings
- Open about both the progress & pitfalls of research
Institutional Review Board

- Reviews the ethics of research proposals that request federal funding to ensure that the subjects’ rights and interests are protected
- Board includes faculty and other researchers
- Universities and other funders adopt similar standards
Professional Code of Conduct

- Most professional associations have published formal codes of conduct

- Scientific Community keep a continue debate over ethics

- Two examples:
  - Trouble in Tearoom
  - Observing Human Obedience
Ethics & Politics

- Research involves the intersection of both
  - Ethics—methods employed
  - Politics—Substance & Use of Research

Example: Research on School Segregation
  - Coleman (1966) finding that family & neighborhood had most influence on academic achievement
  - Questions about methodology & political consequences of his research
Thank you!!