The Ethical Dimension in Educational Research: A Dilemma?

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Abstract: - **The paper provides a landscape of some of the main ethical concerns in educational research. The review argues that the ethical procedures not context-free but are dictated by considerable contextual judgement by the researcher. The paper therefore highlights some of the ethical dilemmas inevitably encountered when one intends to enact educational research on one hand, and reflects on some of the possible strategies to circumvent the ethical challenges, on the other. In discussing these strategies, I have illustrated that the achievement of a utopia of a fully ethical educational research is not only controversial but also an unresolved matter.**

Key words: **Informed consent, Anonymity, Confidentiality, Deception**

I. INTRODUCTION

Any research that involves people has the potential to cause harm although this may not be intended. In that respect, educational research involving human subjects has the potential to cause harm and therefore needs to be guided by research ethical guidelines just like other areas of study. Ethics have to do with the application of moral principles in order to prevent harming or wronging others, while at the same time being respectful, good and fair [1]. Simply put, ethics is a matter of adopting a sensitive stance to the rights of others [2]. It entails the determination of what is good or bad, right or wrong and being fully aware of the wrong standards and sub-standards [3].Such a stance inevitably dictates our choices in searching for truth. Although morals underpin ethics, the former and the latter are not synonymous. An`ethic` is a moral principle or code of conduct which governs peoples'behavior [4]. It is therefore concerned with how people act or behave. In this sense, ethical considerations in this paper refer to a set of moral principles held by educational researchers. It is also important to point out that there is no dichotomy between what is ethical and that which is unethical [5]. It is therefore healthy to conceptualize a continuum with one extreme having clear ethical principles and the other with clear unethical principles [5]. In most cases there are no clear-cut and context-free guidelines and it is important to realize that the same are not to be applied without deliberation and judgment [6].

The need for research ethics was recognized many years ago. The revelations of the Nazi atrocities in the 20th century conducted in the name of research are one such prominent example [7]. The 1990 Stanford Prison experiment in which students were simulated in a prison situation had to be discontinued after a few days because the sadistic behaviour of the guards made the students depressed and stressed [8]. While some educational research endeavours may not involve manipulation of the participants cited above, a number of dilemmas will always arise in the course of the research which will have ethical implications. Three examples of dilemma in the following questions [8]: '*What if in the course of an interview you discover that a young person is engaging in illicit drug use or promiscuous sexual behaviour? Or if you learn that someone is an object of abuse by the teacher or family member? Or if you observe that a student is carrying a weapon in school? Are you obliged to do something with this information? [8, p.57].*'

Rationale for Ethical Considerations and Approaches in Educational Research

Enacting educational research entails that the research addresses the main ethical implications apart from the epistemological complexities of the study`s methodological approach and discourse [9], in order for the recipients to trust its customers. It is generally accepted that all human behavior is a subject to a set of rules, principles and conventions which define and differentiate socially acceptable behaviour from that which is unacceptable [7]. In addition, most sponsors in educational researchwill require that ethical guidelines of your research be well articulated before any funding can be guaranteed [6]. In undertaking research in contemporary educational research, one is therefore subjected to ethical review from Institutional Ethical Committees. These committees have not only increased in recent years, but have also placed special emphasis on research involving `human subjects`[10]. Other committees act as overall guides over these smaller institutional committees in setting up broader ethical guidelines within which institutional committees draw their policy guidelines. Well known examples are the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the British Education Research Association (BERA). These assistresearchers 'to reach an ethically acceptable position in which their actions are considered justifiable' [11, P.4]by adhering to a code of conduct which define the actions of researchers and their responsibilities with respect to protecting participants from harm. These mechanisms are designed to protect the rights of participants `who are likely to be in a less powerful position than researchers to shape the agenda and outcomes of research`[9,p.102]. It is important to realize that the ethical codes are not fixed rules and should in that sense

be seen to be continuously evolving as researchers actively reflect on pertinent issues associated with practice according to Roth, 2004 [8]. The foregoing suggests that researchers should abandon go beyond the conventional guidelines and embark on a centered and reflexive approach, focusing not only on participants, but also themselves.

It is important to note that the foregoing rationale on ethical requirements is a stance advocated by absolutist researchers and it is widely accepted. Other researchers have however adopted a relativist and a deception stance. Relativists argue that the real ethical issues can only be dictated by your individual conscience as you strive for an open relationship with the participant [8]. In other ways, ethical considerations will arise from the nature of specific research being conducted; meaning: situation determines behavior [2]. The argument here is that the researcher takes the responsibility. Plummer [12], has cited a weakness with the relativist stance arguing that espousing the same would mean that the door is open for the unscrupulous, and even the immoral researcher.

Other educational researchers take what is known as the deception stance. Those that take the deception stance, claim that any means is necessary in order to understand a particular situation [8]. The controversy surrounding deception as a strategy particularly in social experimental educational psychology is intense and ongoing, and will therefore be given special attention when I discuss dilemmas surrounding informed consent.

Application of Ethical Principles in Educational Research

It is important at this stage to realize that the application of ethical guidelines is not a particular stage in the research process; rather it is an ongoing exercise relevant at each stage of the research process. An educational project could be unethical depending on its design, methods employed, data analysis, reporting of results and recommendations [4]. Although the ethical dimensions of the entire research process are significant, this review cannot handle all the areas, as that would require several papers. This paper will only discuss ethical implications surrounding some key areas of methodology, although it will scantly highlight the ethical dimension in choosing the research topic. The methodology been chosen because almost invariably, it attracts enormous ethical considerations in most research undertakings in the fields of education and beyond. Although this is not in-depth analysis, I have endeavoured to highlight the main ethical dilemmas and in some cases suggested remedies from literature that I find particularly instructive. This discussion is therefore not an exhaustive illustration of the contemporary critical ethical issues in education research but one of many in the landscape of debates in this area.

II. SOME OF THE KEY RESEARCH ISSUES AND THE DILEMMAS

Research aim

Any researcher should ethically aim at researching issues that will benefit the community or society. If the research aim has to do with confirming a personal theory, satisfying curiosity or assisting a researcher to get a desired qualification, without any clear benefits for others beyond self, it is probably unethical to proceed [13].

Research Methodology

In discussing research methodology, I will detail on the following: Negotiation access, Informed consent, Information provision, Withholding information, deception, anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.

Negotiation Access

Entry into research environment requires the researcher to obtain permission from authorities, the participants and in some cases parents, guardians and supervisors.Education authorities, parents', teachers and keepers of documents require proof of integrity and value of your research before they can guarantee their cooperation [14]. It is therefore important to provide honest information on exactly what you want to do, and if your plans change in the course of the research, you need to get their permission in order to proceed [15]. A good approach in negotiating access with participants is to clearly tell them that they are co-researchers other than subjects that are being studied [15]. This removes the notion of manipulation and releases a sense of collaboration. It is recommended that permission from supervisors and parents is sought if one intends to work with children or people under supervision.

Gaining the permission of `gatekeeper`, head teachers or parents may not be appropriate when participants are not in a position to say `no` [13]. Educational research should be sensitive to the implications of the differences with respect to social power between themselves and the `researched` [16]. This is where power differences are inherent within an institutional set up. In school setting for example, pupils may be inwardly compelled to give the researcher access knowing that their head teacher and class teacher have already given him the access. The other side to it is that seeking to get permission from many people along an institution hierarchy, increases the likelihood that it would not be granted; although the risk may be worthy taking in the interest of ethics [13]. In some instances, the nature of the participants being studied simply makes access very difficult and sometimes impossible. Gaining access to a president, high-security prisons and women in brothels can be very difficult [4].

In the process of negotiating access, the researcher needs to pay attention to a number of issues which include attitudes within the research environment, establishing contacts, and making the purpose of the study clear to the concerned [4].

The researcher should be aware that people within the research environment will react to his/her presence differently. 'Attitudes may range from suspicion, mistrust or cynicism, to awe, trust or friendship' [4,p.64]. The researcher should also identify link individuals and consolidate these with e-mails and phone numbers. A clear understanding of the institution`s hierarchy by the researcher is key to using the right protocol. Perhaps the biggest task of the researcher at this point is to make the nature of his study clear to the concerned. This involves being explicit about the demands it will make, reasons for doing it, the likely forms of publications and what is expected of the participants [4].

The researcher should also be on the lookout for any controversial sensitive issues that may arise from individuals or the organizations who hold key stakes in education. It is wise not to proceed until these are sorted out. However, it has to be noted that, due to complications involved in negotiating and gaining access into the research environment some researchers advocate entry by stealth, particularly in observational studies [17]. As this is not a conventional stance in educational research, I do not feel obliged to discuss the arguments in its defensein this particular section, as it is related to issues on deception which will be detailed later.

Informed Consent

All ethical codes and statements of ethical principles have placed informed consent at the heart of the ethical research activity [18]. 'Participants or their guardians in a research study, have a right to be informed about the likely risks involved in the research and of potential consequences for participants, and to give their informed consent before participating in research' [ESRC,2005, Section II.B.Iin 19]. Four facets inherent in the meaning of informed consent which I consider instructivehave been teased out [20].Informed consent encompasscompetence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension. Competence means that responsible and mature individuals will make informed decision armed with the relevant information. Voluntarism means that participants freely choose to participate or not to participate in the research and that the risks are undertaken knowingly and voluntarily. The third element entails that the participants are given detailed information regarding the implications of the research. Comprehension means that the participants understand the nature of the study and the risk involved. This is particularly crucial when the participants are not literate in which case, a consultant could be hired to explain the procedures [2].

Adherence to a truly informed consent, where study participants benefit from a full explanation and do reach a clear understanding of their participations exists more as rhetoric than a reality [21 & 22]. It is very difficult to explain research implications in a manner that a participant can fully comprehend. Further, the possibility of knowing the probable consequences before the start of the study is slim [23]. This is apparent in most surveys where it is not possible to give a comprehensive account of the purposes of the surveys as most of the uses of the data may not be known at the initial stage [24]. In ethnographic studies, the specific focus and outcomes of the research are usually not known in the initial stages. Therefore, to provide information in order to gain consent from prospective participants would be regarded inappropriate because in essence, the prospective participants` would not know what they are consenting to [19]. The case of action research complicates the dilemma further, as it is difficult to determine the extent to which participants can be said to have given truly informed consent since the manner of the proposed change is not known, and will be dictated primarily by the emerging research protocol [25]. It is of interest to note that in the United Kingdom the data protection act specifically exempts research data from the principle of informed consent and accepts 'statistical' purposes as a sufficient justification for data collection [see 24, for information]. There is also a delicate balance between the researcher's motivation to achieve a high response rate and the probabilities that the potential participants will exercise their right to refuse if they are supplied with detailed information of the risks involved [21]. Consequently, researchers have opted for providing less than full information [19]. This issue will be discussed later. However, Frankfort-Nachmias (1992) have suggested that the issue of informed consent should be a requirement in studies where more risks and danger is envisaged. Put differently, the more the risks, the greater the obligation on the researcher to obtain informed consent [26].

In the United Kingdom, there are legal frameworks which regulate the manner, in which informed consent is applied particularly on research done on children and that within the health context [19]. The application of such frameworks to research on children warrants my attention at this juncture. Legal frameworks regarding research in this area are complicated but generally hinge on the notion of 'competence' described earlier [27, 28 &29]. Children aged below 16 are deemed to be legally incompetent generally. If, however, the child demonstrates that he/she understands what participation in research willentail, parental consent is not required. But it needs to be pointed out that assessing children's competence is both a delicate and difficult task. In this task, researcher's understanding, attitudes and competences very considerably, and their assessment depends upon the complexities and risks involved in a particular study [30& 31]. As a way of avoiding the legal complexities aforementioned, it has been suggested that researchers should deliberately assume that school-age children are competent, and that their parents bear the responsibility of having to prove the incompetence of their children [32]. Although most children over 16 are considered competent, consent from parents, guardians or other supervisors is still required where research is dealing with people with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems [19].

It is important to realize that educational research will always be carried out within a cultural context.In this regard,

the principle of informed consent needs to apply within the limits the cultural environment within which research is being viewed as applicable throughout the research process, and the standard letter may require full explanation in understandable language [33].

Undertaking research in the virtual environment presents its own challenges with the principle of informed consent. Since most of the e-mail addresses contain part or all of the individuals' real names, there is a possibility for others to retrieve research information [Eyenbach& Till, 2001 in 9], which is very private to the participants and was provided in strict confidence.In protecting the privacy of online participants with a view to get their consent, Jameson and Busher [9] sent out a framework to the participants that aimed at assuaging their fears regarding protecting privacy. They noted however that by protecting the privacy of their participants, they made it easier for some of participants to start and terminate their interviews at any point.

Information Provision to Participants

The nature of information given to the prospective research participant is a key to influencing their giving or refusing their consent. It is therefore important to exercise great care on provision of information types to different categories of people.

Research has shown that researchers require modest amount of information, presented on attractive and friendly information sheets [32]. The need to avoid giving information sheets with an official look to prospective study participants has also been underscored [34]. Those carrying out research withchildren and people with learning difficulties have found scaling down of information and the use of pictures and graphics on the information sheets particularly helpful [35]. Researchers have also indicated the importance of work photos, video and computers in working with children [36]. Studies dealing with socially excluded groups use a different style of information provision. It has been shown that importance of working closely with the communities prior to participant recruitment is central [30].

The setting in some research environment makes it difficult for the researcher to provide information sheets to participants. Examples in this category are criminology research, research relating to illegal activities, and research with young people in a club setting [30&37]. In this category, the formality of written information sheets is considered inappropriate. In such cases oral information is considered adequate [19].

From the foregoing, it is clear that information provision for purposes of obtaining informed consent is a very critical stage in the research process. It is therefore important for educational researchers to assess the information requirements of specific groups of participants and to use such knowledge in order to provide appropriate information to study

participants that will enable them to give informed consent [19].

It is generally accepted that participants need to be given time in order for them to consider whether or not they want to participate in the study. There are however varied views regarding the use of a signature on the consent form. Most researchers do expect to obtain a 'signed' consent from research participants as a way of participants 'opting in' to the research study [19]. In getting a 'signed' consent, researchers trust that the participants have understood research implications and their rights in relation to the research, including the issues of confidentiality and anonymity [19]. Further, consent forms are seen to protect researchers from accusation that may come from study participants later [37]. Signatures are however problematic in some research contexts. In studies on deviant behavior, and research on participants that require protection, the use of a signature may not be feasible [30]. Additional problems are encountered when one undertakes research on participants that are either illiterate or have language problems [23]. Participants with learning disabilities also present another difficulty [19]. In trying to deal with the aforementioned challenges, researchers have devised a range of ways obtaining consent without the use of a signature. These include the use of tape-recorded consent, providing marks on a consent form and holding up a red or green card to indicate yes or no. Other researchers [23 & 37] view the use of consent forms as one way compromising the issues of confidentiality and anonymity which are central to participant protection. Participants may fear that their signatures may be used as clues in tracing them and in studies on domestic and campusviolence for instance, the fear of harm is inevitable.

Proxy consent has been used in research dealing with `vulnerable' groups[38]. These are participants are seen as not having the capacity or `competence' to understand the implications of getting involved in research study and cannot therefore provide consent for themselves [19]. Proxy consent has been obtained on research involving young children, people with disabilities and older, infirm participants [39& 40]. In this regard, ethical review committees would require very strong justification for lack of `capacity' before relatives or caregivers can proxy consent [19].

Some researchers, especially those in participatory paradigms, consider it appropriate to have their transcripts cross-checked by the participants, for them to indicate their willingness to have their interviews included in a study [41]. Participants are also allowed to amend certain sections of the interviews. Others go to the extent of asking the participants how their information should be used; for instance, asking them how their data should be presented in publications, reports and presentations [41]. Some researchers object to this style on the grounds that once data has been collected it becomes the property of the researcher and the interviewee should have no further influence [19].

The consent information sheets are to endorse the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any stage[42 &43]. It has however been noted that some groups of participants are reluctant to indicate their unwillingness to continue [44]. Children find it difficult to tell an adult that they no longer want to be involved and that they do not want to answer particular questions. This is an issue of power differences that exist between the researcher and the participants and can apply to participants in a range of contexts. This dilemma looms high in cases where the researcher's power is linked to pre-established roles, positions, and relationships, for example a head-teacher who is using her students as participants [43]. It is therefore recommended that researchers should be sensitive to the participants' unspoken reactions such as apparent lack of interest or irritation with data collection [45&46]. The use of `stop' cards which participants hold up if they do not want to participate [19], has been recommended in research with young children and people with limited communication.

Withholding Information to Research Participants

I have pointed out earlier that in ethnographic research it is difficult to provide information to participants, as the specific focus and outcomes of the study are unclear in the initial stages [19]; making it difficult for the researcher to predict implications to participants. Withholding of information in observational and ethnographic studies may be both deliberate and inevitable [47 & 48]. An observation being carried out in a pub or street makes it difficult for the researcher to gain informed consent of all the people entering the research environment. Although in settings such as a school and a home, researchers may inform students, staff and residents that observation is in progress, other people may enter the research environment unawares. Some researchers have argued that in observation studies it is not appropriate to provide information in order to gain consent. They contend that once the participants are made aware that they are being observed, they are likely to change their behavior [49]. Many studies in psychology adopt a style in which researchers provide information about participation with regards to the actual focus of the study [50& 51]. A much stricter stance is advocated by some researchers who consider provision of information and gaining of participants consent as inappropriate. They argue that it is the only way to expose some of the ills of social life and bad practices in organizations, and the public are entitled to know[21]. Covert research methods have sparked a lot of criticism. For instance, it has been argued that even without employing covert methods, the same objectives can be achieved using open methods and further, the use of covert methods is believed to spoil the research environment making social science a less dignified discipline [49, 52 & 53].

In using covert research methods, researchers employ various forms of deceit; a subject to which I know give attention.

Deception

Deception is a situation `where the researcher knowingly conceals the true purpose and conditions of the research, or else positively misinforms the subjects, or exposes them to unduly painful, stressful or embarrassing experiences, without the subjects having knowledge of what is going on' [2, p.63]. This definition has been underscored: `there is a world of difference between not telling subjects things and telling them the wrong things. *The latter is deception, the former is not'*[54, p37, his emphasis]. The notion of `intentional and explicit misrepresentation' inherent in deception is a shared one across disciplinary borders [54].

In psychology deception has been commonly employed to increase experimental control. Its use has however sparked a lot of controversy. A number of arguments have been put forward by those that favour its use. Some proponents argue that without the use of deception it would be impossible to investigate many significant problems in contemporary experimental methodology [55]. Some researchers feel that the only way to discover the important truths is to use a deception experiment, and the truths so discovered far outweigh the harm of lies told in the process [56]. It is also felt by some that some researchers that it is an indispensable tool in achieving experimental control in studies of social significance [57, 58& 59]. Further, there is evidence that suggests that the deceived participants do not express resentment upon learning that they had been fooled [57], once they understand the necessity of it [60]. Further, the effects of suspiciousness on research performance have also been insignificant [57]. Others have however advanced three arguments against the use of deception [56]. First, they note that the style of cheating, lying and indeed deceiving, contradicts the ethical norms of everyday life. It is therefore reprehensible to use deception in research[42]. Secondly, studies that use deception, disregard the rights of the human subjects to exercise choice and self-representation. Finally, they contend that the use of deception is methodologically unsound. In practice, it relies on a continued supply of participants that are unaware of the intentions of the researcher. Once participants discover the hidden intentions, recruitment becomes difficult, and potential participants end up suspecting that they will be deceived. Ethical concerns loom large particularly when second order deception is involved. This happens when persons are deceived into believing that they are researcher`s accomplices when in essence are serving as subjects [2].

Deception is so pervasive in experimental studies that it is built into many of the measurement devices since it is crucial to `keep the respondent ignorant of the personality and attitude dimensions that we wish to investigate' [2, p. 64]. As such, a number of ways have been suggested on how to deal with it. Three ways of circumventing deception can be noted [55],andit is thesethat warrant my attention now. The first step in dealing with the problem of deception is to increase our active awareness that is indeed a potential problem. This first

step is apart of the solution because its use will require discussions, deliberations, investigation and making prudent choices. Secondly, the researcher needs to counteract and minimize the negative use of deception. This can be done for instance, by excluding subjects who are vulnerable, minimizing harmful manipulation, being sensitive to the reactions of the subjects and dealing with crises as soon as they emerge. It is important to debrief the end at the end of the research or study session, although this should be done carefully. Unscrupulously conducted debriefing can be more damaging than no explanation at all [61]. Thirdly, it is important to try out emerging procedures that are being developed aimed at dealing with the challenges posed by deception. In this connection, researchers are faced with the challenge of being creative themselves. In this regard, role play has been envisaged by some researchers as an upcoming strategy aimed at dealing with deception. Supporters of this strategy cite the use of the same in the Stanford Prison study (mentioned earlier) as a classic example where spontaneity was successfully introduced in role play which simulated real life analogies that were represented [2]. This thinking has however been challenged on four counts [62]. First,researchers need to be reminded thatrole play is unreal, considering the variables being studied in that, the subject reports what she/he would do which is understood as though she did it. Second, it has been noted that in active role-playing the behavior of the subject is far from being spontaneous. Also, it is apparent that the verbal reports in role-playing are products of simulated influence such as social desirability. Finally, procedures in role play do not lend themselves well to complex interactions inherent in deception designs. Other critics of role-playing view science as involving the discovery of natural truths, and that there is no way in which role-playing can play the substitute [2].

Anonymity

This basically means that information supplied by the participants should not in any way reveal their identity or be used to reveal their identity [38 & 42]. In this regard, a questionnaire that bears no identifying marks, names, addresses, occupational details or coding symbols is considered as having total anonymity [2 & 42].Other ways of making the participants anonymous have also been suggested [26]. This can involve asking the participants to use an alias of their own creation, or to transfer well-remembered personal data such as birth places, birth days, and name of mother. Anonymity can further be enhanced if these names and other identifiers are removed and replaced by ID numbers, which are further scrambled to achieve absolute security of data [24]. However, such measures have often resulted in practical inconvenience in merging and matching data sets [24].Others have noted there are problems with maintenance of anonymity particularly where categorization of data may uniquely identify an individual or an institution [12].

The assumption that participants always want to be anonymized has also been questioned by others. Researchers

in palliative care contexts have noted that participants more often than not would want their names to be used [63]. Similar findings have been noted with the use of visual data, such as photographs [64].

Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that while the researcher may know who has provided the information or are able to identify the participants from the identifiers given, they will not in any way make that connection known publicly [2]. The obligation on the researcher increases where information obtained is sensitive, intimate and discrediting [2]. Potential participants have refused their consent, where they have perceived confidentiality to be weak, vague, or has a likelihood of being breached [57]. However, there are several strategies of ensuring confidentiality while the public access data and information [26]. One way is to delete identifiers (names, addresses, or other means of identification), on data released on individuals. Researchers can also report using crude categories. This means for instance, releasing the year of birth rather than the birth date, profession but not the specific. Another strategy is the micro aggregation of data. This means the deliberate creation 'average persons' from data on individuals and the dissemination of this data rather than data on individuals. Sometimes researchers may introduce errors, also deliberately, into individual records to create slight distortions on the individual records while leaving the aggregate data unchanged.

Betrayal has been defined as a particular instance where information given to the researcher in confidence has been revealed to the public in a manner that has caused embarrassment, anxiety, or perhaps suffering [2]. Action research is particularly vulnerable to betrayal. For instance,where teachers are used as collaborators in the daily interactions, it will appear like a betrayal of trust if they are recorded and used as evidence [65]. It is therefore necessary for the researcher to submit reports and evaluations of teacher reactions to the teachers involved to solicit their comments, and get them asses their own changing attitudes [2]. Obviously, this is a delicate issue, particularly if the researcher if faced with the task of an honest but critical report. Sometimes betrayal in action research may be difficult to avoid. For instance, a situation where a teacher is associated by a group of students during data collection, can give the community a clue as to who were the key players and informants [25].

In endeavouring to avoid betraying the participants the researcher is in essence protecting their privacy. Privacy has been examined from three angles [20]: sensitivity of the information being given, the setting being observed, and the dissemination of information. Sensitivity of information refers to the extent to which the information being given is personally or potentially threatening. Information on racial prejudice, sexual practice, religious preferences, income, illness and personal attributes is more sensitive than for

instance, name or rank. The setting being observed may vary from that which is very private to that which is completely public. A home for example, is considered by many as a private setting and entry into such requires prior consent of the owners. Where the public is able to match the information and the identity of some participants, privacy has been seriously violated.

III. CONCLUSION

In the preceding paragraphs, I have endeavoured to illustrate that the task of enacting educational research is not clear-cut and context-free, and cannot be applied without discretion by the researcher. Although in a number of cases strategies to circumvent potential challenges have been suggested, researchers still have a long way in their efforts to create water-tight guidelines in research ethics. These challenges loom large in action research and ethnographic studies, where the nature of the proposed change cannot be forecasted at the onset of the study. This is true in those studies where the application of full ethical guidelines can compromise access to information.

The use of deception is and continues to be controversial in the area experimental psychology. Notwithstanding the preponderance of evidence suggesting that most of the significant problems can only be investigated with the use of deception, it needs to be balanced with consideration of the potential ethical violations. It is therefore imperative that researchers use their powers ethically and responsibly.

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