

Reflection Paper on Ethics in Research

Kateri Oakley

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Angelo State University

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On the first day of class, I remember walking in with no expectations. I had just moved to a new city with new people, acquired a new job, and moved into a new house. There was a whole lot of “new” and I was overwhelmed. I felt like I was not smart enough to even be in the program and was just eager to see how long it would take until the faculty realized it. With all of that, I was still enthusiastic to give it a go and try out all the “news.”

I started to have good days and bad days. Somewhere I felt like I made a mistake leaving what I had come to know as a home, and others where I was so glad that I was out of Midland-Odessa. Once I started to get to know my cohort a little better it was easier to start liking this new life I was creating for myself. I started to tell myself “this is okay”, “I can do this”, and most importantly “I belong here.” I started to dive deeper into our workload for the class as we started to go more in-depth with research ethics. When the conversation regarding who the program head was, I started to have those negative thoughts again, I said to myself “I don’t even know the program director's name.” That day I should have taken the time out of my day to research his name so that I could visually see it, however, I did not, and that embarrassment taught me that taking the initiative on my own to look things up is very important in life and future careers.

There were many things that I absorbed from this class that ultimately taught me something about myself. I learned that I did not know as much about ethics as I originally thought. I knew the more obvious things about research ethics, such as, do not plagiarize, data that is shown must be true, a researcher must obtain IRB approval prior to collecting data, and that faculty-student relationships were prohibited (Penslar, 1995). I was not aware of how to deal with more in-depth situations in research ethics, such as, who to go to if a concern arises, how to determine authorship and the ethical ways to go about researching humans and alcohol (Penslar,

1995). If I were to ever find myself in one of these situations in the future I would be much more knowledgeable as to what to do in the position.

The most impactful part of the class for me as an ethical researcher was the discussions and case studies because we were looking at situations and finding the best method to resolve the scenarios. For example, in the future, if I want to perform research that involves administering alcohol to humans, I would need to take necessary precautions. I would need to look over every detail, making sure the participants have an adequate amount of screening to ensure women participants are not pregnant. As an ethical researcher, it is very important to make sure all risk factors are taken into consideration to eliminate the risk for the participant (Penslar, 1995). Another impactful part of the semester for me was going over citations. This helped me as a researcher to ensure that I am properly citing my sources and eliminating any chances of plagiarism, as well as, properly giving the authors of my sources recognition for their work.

The least impactful part of my semester was the role plays. While they were fun to do, they did not help me gain knowledge about ethical dilemmas in research. When the groups were deciding what topic we were going to use for our role play, we already knew how to handle the situation. Therefore, we were not learning new material. Most of the time groups chose obvious, extreme, scenarios that would be unlikely to happen. In the unlikely chance of them happening, we would already know how to act. With that, I definitely did enjoy the role plays though, however, they had less of an impact in comparison to other areas of the class.

My thought process of ethical issues remained consistent for the duration of the class, however, I did become more knowledgeable on certain topics that pertained to research ethics. I had previously studied the Belmont report briefly in other psychology classes during my undergrad, however, I never fully understood what each principle meant. The discussions made

us apply each principle to a real-life scenario. These discussion posts were very helpful to be able to understand each principle. I used to think that as long as a research project made sure the benefits outweighed the risks that it was an ethical study. While this is an important aspect of research ethics it does not cover all aspects of research ethics. Learning about the Belmont report helped me realize this.

The moral model helped me to grasp each step that goes into an ethical dilemma. The chart that was given to us in class sums up each step as mindful, observe, responsible, able, and launch. If an individual goes through each of these steps it will lead that individual to moral decision making when it comes to research ethics. If an individual does not go past mindful or chooses the wrong way during the launch period, he or she will end up not engaging in moral decision making. While we were displaying this moral model through our role plays I found that I am also an awful actor. Although, apparently I do better without a script so I will have to take this into consideration if and when the situation ever arises that I have to act again.

There are numerous things that I will take away from this class that I predict will help me in my future career. As I stated before, going over citations as a class was really beneficial for me. We went over several different citations that could mimic any citation that we may encounter in the future. My future career is to become a professor, in which I hope to also conduct several research projects. I need to be able to know the correct way to cite sources so that I can also teach my students how to correctly cite sources. Another aspect of the class that I will take with me into my future career, was the ability to improve my grammar. It was pointed out to me that I am not very consistent with my pronouns, which was something that had never been pointed out to me. I am very thankful that this now has been pointed out to me so that I can progress my writing skills and become a more credible writer.

The most important aspect of the class that I will carry out into my future career is the ability to look more in-depth at research. I will now be able to think of possible aspects of research that I may not have thought about prior to taking this class. The discussion posts forced me to do this type of thinking by looking at situations from both sides. At some points, this was very difficult for me because I tend to be a very opinionated woman. I tend to think of situations from one side and stick to it without thinking of the opposite perspective. One of the most difficult discussions was the one take we had to look at the perspective of the faculty member and the student. We had to give each point of view, explaining the reasoning for the decision made. This was difficult for me because I could not comprehend the point of view of the faculty member who was coercing his student to falsify the data in order to get the project in to qualify for a specific grant. Another situation we were challenged to look at different points of view was the time that a faculty member forgot to add the student as an author, who had worked hard on the project with the faculty member. This forced me to be able to look more in-depth with small and uncommon details pertaining to research. Which is one of the most important things to be observant of as a researcher, to ensure nothing is overlooked and to avoid any possible moral dilemmas.

Overall, this class provided me with a broader perspective on research, which will benefit me in my future career. By broadening my perspective I will be able to look more in-depth at research, ensuring I will not be missing any possible ethical dilemmas. I also became a better writer in the process. I am now able to accurately cite my sources, stay more consistent with pronouns, and provide the reader with more information to be able to comprehend the specific message.

Reference

Penslar, R. L. (Ed.). (1995). *Research ethics: Cases and materials*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.