Research Methods and Statistics 1st edition Beins Solutions Manual

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Chapter 2--Ethics in Research
Homework 2.1
Ethics in Research

Purpose of the Homework: This homework assignment will help you understand the ethical issues associated with research. The scenario presented here involves research that would not be permitted today but that was theoretically defensible while, at the same time, being morally questionable. You will identify the specific ethical issues that are relevant to this research.

Objectives:
To explain ethical issues associated with this controversial research
To understand how an Institutional Review Board would go about evaluating the research
To develop arguments based on ethical regulations rather than simple intuitions

The Scenario: The theory of behaviorism dominated psychology for the first half of the 20th century. Basically, this theory postulated that all behavior was due to the effects of reinforcement and punishment. We learn to engage in behavior when we are rewarded for it and we suppress behavior when we are punished. In addition, any behavior that can be learned can be unlearned. Although most psychologists today would not label themselves behaviorists, nobody doubts the power and effectiveness of reward and punishment in shaping our behaviors.

During the height of behaviorism, a graduate student named Mary Tudor at the University of Iowa began to study children who stuttered. Her mentor, Prof. Wendell Johnson, had developed a hypothesis that stuttering resulted from children's somehow being reinforced for it; that is, when people called attention to stuttering, a child whose speech wasn't fluent would increase his or her stuttering.

So Tudor began a study of children living in an orphanage in which she identified a group of stutterers and a group of normal speaking children. She had a ready population because the children didn't have parents who could care for them, so they resided in the institution.

Under the guise of providing speech therapy, she created subgroups in which the children were either told that they had speech difficulties or that their speech was progressing very well. The result, very simply stated, was that children who stuttered and who were reminded of it continued to stutter whereas stutterers who were told that their speech was progressing well reduced the extent of their stuttering. When normally speaking children were told that their speech was fluent, they remained unchanged. On the other hand, normal speakers who were told that they were stutterers began to stutter. The stutterers were frequently socially isolated afterward.

When Tudor ended the experiment, there was no program to reverse the induced stuttering among children who were reinforced for stuttering, even though behavioral theory supports that idea that you could undo the stuttering by appropriate reinforcement techniques. In addition, the children were never told that they were participating in the research and only heard about it over half a century later

Incidentally, Tudor's mentor, Wendell Johnson, never mentioned this research in any of his own research or writings. This research occurred during the beginning of the second world war; Johnson probably disavowed the study because people likened it to the behavior of the Nazis.

Questions:
1. Based on today's standards, what ethical principles were violated in this research?

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2. Pretend that you were a behaviorist who firmly believed that behavior is controlled by reinforcement and punishment. Develop an argument from the perspective of a behaviorist in 1939 (when the study took place) in which you justify a research study like this as not being unethical. That is, within the perspective of behaviorism, how could you set up a study like this that would, in the end, be ethical?

3. As a member of an Institutional Review Board, would you approve this study? What ethical issues are important in this situation? Discuss the research with respect to issues of physical and psychological risk.

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ANSWER KEY

1. Based on today's standards, what ethical principles were violated in this research?

a. There was a problem with both physical and psychological harm. Regarding physical harm, the children were turned into stutterers. Psychologically, they suffered the problems of social isolation that stutterers frequently experience.
b. By today's standards, Tudor showed little responsibility for patients in the research, respect for people's rights, or concern for their welfare.
c. You can argue that Tudor invaded their privacy. She certainly did not get informed consent (either from the children or from parents or guardians). According to current law, participants must be free to terminate their participation at any time; there was no provision for this (especially because they didn't know they were involved in research). Likewise, there was no debriefing.
d. One of the most significant lapses is that there was no compensatory followup to rectify any problems that developed.
e. There was also a great deal of deception. The children thought they were receiving speech therapy.

2. Pretend that you were a behaviorist who firmly believed that behavior is controlled by reinforcement and punishment. Develop an argument from the perspective of a behaviorist in 1939 (when the study took place) in which you justify a research study like this as not being unethical. That is, within the perspective of behaviorism, how could you set up a study like this that would, in the end, be ethical?

According to behaviorists, if behavior can be learned, it can be unlearned. So you could create an ethical study in which you induced stuttering through reinforcement, then eliminated it through the reinforcement of non-stuttering behavior. At this point, there was no Nuremburg Code and there were no laws about treatment of research subjects, so the question of the ethics associated informed consent (and parental approval), debriefing, etc. are debatable. At that point, researchers were typically not sensitive to the desirability of such behavior.

3. 3. As a member of an Institutional Review Board, would you approve this study? What ethical issues are important in this situation? Do not rely on intuition or subjective judgments. Discuss the research with respect to issues of physical and psychological risk.

This question calls for students to make a judgment based on ethical principles.

Dyer, J. (2001, June 11). Theory improved treatment and understanding of stuttering. San Jose Mercury News, http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~bigopp/stutter.html, retrieved June 18, 2003.

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