



I. Application: Research Concerns

Concerns about Being a Subject

What's it like to be a subject?

When you hear about a new research finding—such as a drug to control weight or treat depression, or the discovery of a gene related to happiness, or ways to improve memory—you rarely think about the treatment of subjects, humans and animals, used in these experiments.

For example, if you were asked to volunteer to be a participant, you would certainly be concerned about whether someone has checked to ensure that the experiment is safe, that there are safeguards to protect you from potential psychological or physical harm, and that you won't be unfairly deceived or made to feel foolish. These are all real concerns, and we'll discuss each one in turn.

Additionally, a separate and controversial question concerns the use of animals in research. We'll answer this question in some detail, since there are many misconceptions about the use and misuse of animals in research.

We'll begin by considering the concerns of human subjects.



Code of Ethics

If you are a college student, there is a good possibility that you will be asked to participate in a psychology experiment. If you are considering becoming a subject, you may wonder what kinds of safeguards are used to protect subjects' rights and privacy.

The American Psychological Association has published a code of ethics and conduct for psychologists to follow when doing research, counseling, teaching, and related activities (American Psychological Association, 2002). This code of ethics spells out the responsibilities of psychologists and the rights of participants.

Besides having to follow a code of ethics, psychologists must submit the details of their research programs, especially those with the potential for causing psychological or physical harm, to university and/or federal research committees (institutional review boards). The job of these research committees is to protect the

participants (human or animal) by carefully checking the proposed experiments for any harmful procedures (Breckler, 2006).

Experiments are not approved unless any potentially damaging effects can be eliminated or counteracted. Counteracting potentially harmful effects is usually done by thoroughly describing the experiment, a process called debriefing.

Debriefing includes explaining the purpose and method of the experiment, asking the participants their feelings about being participants in the experiment, and helping the participants deal with possible doubts or guilt that arise from their behaviors in the experiment.

During the debriefing sessions, researchers will answer any questions or discuss any problems that participants may have. The purpose of debriefing is to make sure that participants have been treated fairly and have no lingering psychological or physical concerns or worries that come from participating in an experiment (Aronson et al., 2004).



Are my rights protected?

Role of Deception

When recruiting participants for their experiments, psychologists usually give the experiments titles, such as "Study of eyewitness testimony" or "Effects of alcohol on memory." The reason for using such general titles is that researchers do not want to create specific expectations that may bias how potential participants will behave. It is well known that an experiment's results may be biased by a number of factors: by participants' expectations of how they should behave, by their unknowingly behaving according to self-fulfilling prophecies, or by their efforts to make themselves look good or to please the experimenter.

One way that researchers control for participants' expectations is to use bogus procedures or instructions that prevent participants from learning the experiment's true purpose. However, before researchers can use bogus or deceptive methodology, they must satisfy the American Psychological

Association's (2002) code of ethics. For example, researchers must justify the deceptive techniques by the scientific, educational, or applied value of the study and can use deception only if no other reasonable way to test the hypothesis is available (APA, 2002).

Another way to avoid bias from participants' expectations is to keep both the researcher and participants in the dark about the experiment's true purpose by using a double-blind procedure. As discussed earlier (p. 37), a double-blind procedure means that neither participants nor researchers are aware of the experiment's treatment or purpose.

Thus, researchers must be careful not to reveal too many details about their experiments lest they bias how potential subjects may behave.

Will they try to trick or deceive me?



Ethics of Animal Research

How many animals are used in research?

It is estimated that over 25 million animals are used each year in biomedical research, which includes the fields of psychology, biology, medicine, and pharmaceuticals (Humane Society, 2008). Although these numbers seem large, they are small in comparison to the 5 billion chickens eaten annually by people in the United States. However, it is the use of animals in research that has generated the most concern and debate (Rowan, 1997).

In the field of psychology, about 7 to 8% of research involves the use of animals. About 90% of the nonhuman animals used by researchers are rats, mice, and birds, while the remaining 10% are other animals such as cats, dogs, and monkeys (C.A.R.E., 2008). We'll examine the justification for using animals in research and how their rights are protected.

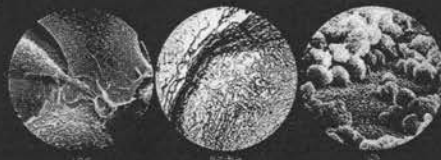
Are research animals mistreated?

You may have seen a disturbing photo or heard about a laboratory animal being mistreated (C.A.R.E., 2008). The fact is that, of the millions of animals used in research, only a few cases of animal mistreatment have been confirmed. That is because scientists know that proper care and treatment of their laboratory animals are vital to the success of their research. To abolish the use of all laboratory animals because of one or two isolated cases of mistreatment would be like abolishing all medical practice because of isolated cases of malpractice. Instead, researchers support the Animal Research Act, which balances the rights of animals to be treated with care with the needs for advancing the medical, physiological, and psychological health of humans (Albright et al., 2005).

Is the use of animals justified?

Adrian Morrison, director of the National Institute of Mental Health's Program for Animal Research Issues, offers this view: "Because I do experimental surgery, I go through a soul-searching every couple of months, asking myself whether I really want to continue working on cats. The

If we stop animal research, who'll stop the real killers?



Without animal research we couldn't have put an end to polio, smallpox, rubella and diphtheria. Now, some would like to put an end to animal research. Obviously, they don't have cancer, heart disease or AIDS.

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The small print in the poster reads, "Without animal research, we couldn't have put an end to polio, smallpox, rubella and diphtheria. Now, some would like to put an end to animal research. Obviously, they don't have cancer, heart disease or AIDS."

It's the animals you don't see that really helped her recover.



Recently a surgical technique perfected on animals was used to remove a malignant tumor from a little girl's brain. We lost some lab animals. But look what we saved.

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answer is always yes because I know that there is no other way for medicine to progress but through animal experimentation and that basic research ultimately leads to unforeseen benefits" (Morrison, 1993).

According to Frederick King, the former chair of the American Psychological Association's Committee on Animal Research and Experimentation, animal research has resulted in major medical advances, new treatments for human diseases, and a better understanding of human disorders (F. A. King et al., 1988).

In the field of psychology, animal research has led to a better understanding of how stress affects one's psychological and physical health, mechanisms underlying learning, the development and treatment of depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia, and critical information about sensory processes of taste, vision, hearing, and pain perception, to mention but a few (C.A.R.E., 2008).

Who checks on the use of animals in research?

Numerous government and university regulations ensure the proper care and humane treatment of laboratory animals. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducts inspections of all animal research facilities to ensure proper housing and to oversee experimental procedures that might cause pain or distress. Also, universities have committees with authority to decide whether sufficient justification exists for using animals in specific research projects (Kalat, 2004).

How do we strike a balance?

One of the basic issues in animal research is how to strike a balance between animal rights and research needs (Albright et al., 2005). Based on past, present, and potential future benefits of animal research, many experts in the scientific, medical, and mental health communities believe the responsible use of animals in research is justified. This is especially true in light of recent rules that regulate the safe and humane treatment of animals kept in laboratories or used in research (C.A.R.E., 2008; OACU, 2008).