**Ethics in Research – Class Exercise, PY-222, Spring 2022**

**1. Belmont Principles.** Read the description of the study below and decide which if any, of the Belmont principle are applicable. Then, decide whether the study conforms to the ethical principle(s) that apply. Defend your answers.

**A.** A researcher is interested in conducting a conformity study. She has enough students in her classes to obtain a reasonable sample size for her study if she simply recruits them. Another possibility is for her to recruit volunteers for her study via the psychology subject pool volunteer website. She decides to recruit students from her classes and give them $2 rather than recruiting volunteers from the subject pool.

**B.** A researcher would like to conduct a study on heart disease. It will involve collecting baseline measures, monitoring physical activity and numerous follow-ups. Specifically, participants will be randomly assigned to two treatment groups and their risk of developing heart disease monitored. Women and African Americans are more likely to develop heart disease, so the researcher recruits more women and African Americans than Whites or men.

**C.** A researcher has proposed to study the effects of alcohol on flirting. He intends to observe consenting adults drinking alcohol (he will record the number of drinks they consume) and then observe the number of flirting behaviors performed by both sexes.

**2. You are to take on the role of an IRB and the researchers of each proposal below.** Take turns assuming the role of the IRB and the researchers. In evaluating these studies, members of the IRB should take into account the various aspects of ethical consideration important for research (*e.g., informed consent, deception, debriefing, right to confidentiality and anonymity, benefits vs. costs/harm to participants and to society, etc.*). For each case, decide whether the study should be approved or not and explain why *by appealing to principles from the chapter on ethics in research*.

***You might consider***:

* Will any violations of the ethical code occur as a result of this study? If so, classify them as potential violation of one or more of the three Belmont principles (e.g., beneficence, justice, respect for persons)
  + Examples:
    - Does the study require informed consent? If so, what do the participants need to be told? What may be withheld?
    - Will the research use deception? If it does, will the participants be fully debriefed? Can you think of a way for the researchers to answer the research question without using deception?
    - Can the participants reasonably refuse to participate or withdraw during the study? If not, what part of the study appears to be coercive?
* Are the participants at risk for harm? Do the potential benefits to the participants and/or to society outweigh the potential risks?
* What responsibility does the researcher have to his/her participants in this study?
* What steps or procedures will the researcher take in order to meet this responsibility?
* What problems may the researchers encounter as a result of conducting their study?
* Is there anything you would change? If yes, what would you change and how would you go about doing it?
* What else would you like to know about the study?

**Proposal A.** Consider a field experiment in which a researcher observes people behaving in a natural setting. For example, in one field experiment, researchers arranged for a confederate to ask people for change for a dollar in a shopping mall. They recorded how many people tried to help. When the confederate asked for help outside a pleasant-smelling store (a cookie store or a coffee store), he received more help than when he asked for help outside a neutral-smelling store (Baron, 1997).

* In addition to a general decision about approval or not (and why), also consider: In this field experiment, would it be necessary to debrief the participants? Consider the costs and benefits of explaining the true nature of the experiment to each participant who was approached for change.

**Proposal B.** This research proposes to study the effects of social exclusion or ostracism. The researchers argue that it is important to understand the detrimental impact of social exclusion as it effects many people, including children, and its effects can lead to issues such from low self-esteem all the way to increasing suicide risks. For this particular study, researchers want to investigate the impact social exclusion may have on helping behavior.

For their study, they propose to go to a conference hall (in an academic building - say in Harbert) where everyone is present for a mandatory meeting. At the meeting, residents will first complete a “demographic questionnaire” about dorm life. Among regular items such as gender, age, how many computers they have access to, etc., several “dorm life” questions ask things like which other residents they have the most complaints about, who they would kick out if they could, who they like the least and the best, etc. Afterward, they are all told by the RAs to return to their residence halls for another mandatory meeting. A confederate will be waiting outside the participant’s residence hall to stop them before entering the building.

The researchers will not examine the actual questionnaires, but randomly assign participants to an ostracized or inclusion condition. The confederate will inform those in the experimental condition that the fellow students in the residence hall have reported the most complaints about her/him, that the fellow residents listed her/him as the least likeable, and as the person they wanted to most seen kicked out. The resident will be informed that because of this, she/he must go see the Director or Residence Life immediately. Participants in the control condition will be told by the confederate that they were the most praised, well liked, and respected member of the residence, and as a result, they are to go see the Director of Res Life immediately to be presented with a “community citizen award.”

On the way to the Res Life office, the participant will pass a table with a clearly labeled sign and donation jar with another confederate sitting at the table. The confederate will tell the resident that he/she is taking up a collection to fund students who need help buying books and ask the resident to contribute anything she/he can. The confederate will note if the participant donates and if so how much. If the participant goes into the Res Life office, she/he will be debriefed about the study.

**Proposal C.** This study proposes to examine conflict resolution between romantic couples. Participants will be romantic couples who have been dating at least 6 months. They will also be asked to separately fill out questions about personal topics (e.g., sexual behaviors, drug and alcohol behaviors). Then the couple will be placed in a room together and asked to talk about an issue in their relationship. The session will be videotaped and later coded for conflict resolution behaviors by the experimenter. To be able to match the questionnaires with the tapes of the sessions, participants will be asked to put their name on the questionnaires when they complete them.

**Proposal D.** Participants are asked to watch one of two movies. They either watch a film about a couple who fall in love over the Christmas holiday, or they watch a film about a group of people who are shipwrecked, tortured, and ultimately killed. The latter film is very graphic and disturbing. Afterward, participants are asked to screen images of bags and locate objects much like a TSA worker at the airport.

**3. Informed Consent?** Although the APA Code of Ethics suggests that informed consent is not necessarily required in studies involving naturalistic observation of public behavior or “similar research” (see Standard 6.10), deciding what is public is not always easy. Consider the following research scenarios and decide whether you think the participants’ informed consent should be required. It may be that you want more information from the researcher. If so, what additional information might you want before deciding? You will see that requiring informed consent can change a research situation dramatically, making it difficult, for example, for a researcher to record behavior under “natural” conditions. Such are the dilemmas of ethical decision-making.

A. A researcher who is gay joins a baseball team, which consists largely of gay men, with the goal of recording behaviors of the participants in the context of team competition during the season. (All games are played outdoors and may be watched by the public.)

B. In a study of the drinking behavior of college students, an undergraduate working for a faculty member attends a fraternity party and records the amount drunk by other students at the party.

**4. How Can We Study That?** Try to devise ethical ways to study sensitive topics. In particular, consider how to minimize risk, think creatively about manipulations, ethically use deception, and employ confederates as ways to conduct ethical research. Choose one of the topics below.

A. Suppose you want to study the effects swearing on pain tolerance. (So, you’ll have to induce pain in your participants in some fashion)

B. Suppose you want to study the influences of alcohol consumption may have on aggression.