
Human Subjects and Ethics Review

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Stanley Milgram

“Stanley Milgram's experiments on obedience to authority—sometimes referred to as the "shock" studies—are the most influential and controversial in modern social psychology.”

“The experiments also had fallout on the world of ethics. Virtually every university in the United States now has an Institutional Review Board that must preapprove studies using human subjects. Although the obedience studies aren't the only reason for these review boards, they are certainly Exhibit A.”

**Robert V. Levine, “Milgram’s Progress”,
American Scientist, July-August 2004.**



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Tenure



Stanley Milgram (source wikipedia.org)

“Several years after completing what were already the most widely influential experiments ever conducted in social psychology, Milgram was turned down for tenure at Harvard.”

**Robert V. Levine, “Milgram’s Progress”,
American Scientist, July-August 2004.**



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When is ethics approval necessary?

All research, funded or not, that involves the use of human subjects must be reviewed and certified as acceptable by the appropriate University Research Ethics Board.



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checklist

- A vulnerable or dependent population (e.g. children, mentally disabled)
- Is there a situation where participants may feel obligated to take part, or participation may not be voluntary (e.g. students in a class, employees in their workplace, prisoners)
- Deception
- A survey / questionnaire
- Interviews
- Access to records that include personal information
- Observing people
- Any risk of creating psychological stress?
- Any risk of identifying distressed or disturbed individuals?
- Any risk to a participant's reputation?
- Any risk that individuals or groups might suffer any economic loss by participating the study?
- Any risk that individuals or groups might be stigmatized by participating in the study?
- Any political or physical risk to a subject/researcher in an international setting (e.g. unauthorized contact with a foreigner)
- ...



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Why?

- To protect subjects
 - *human dignity*
- To protect institutions
- To publish
 - journals may require evidence of approval of ethics review board



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Where do you apply

- in faculty of science, et al.
 - Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)
- in kinesiology, medicine, nursing
 - Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board
- in either case, start with
 - UofC Research Services web pages
 - URL subject to change (as always)



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guiding principles

- respect for
 - human dignity
 - free and informed consent
 - vulnerable persons
 - privacy and confidentiality
 - justice and inclusiveness
- balancing harms and benefits
 - minimizing harm
 - maximizing benefit



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Whose authority

- the university
- tri-council
 - CIHR
 - NSERC
 - SSHRC
- international conventions



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for computer science

- most never use it, but
 - human-computer interaction
 - computer vision
 - tracking people
 - biometrics
 - evaluating human motion
 - SENG



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excuses

- there are none
- easier to get away with plagiarism
- must ask for permission
 - not for *forgiveness*



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good news

- if you need ethics approval
 - lots of info, templates, guidelines, forms
- if none to minimal risk (as in cpsc)
 - approval is not hard to get
- if you have human subjects
 - make sure you get approval
- see research services web pages



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timing

- allow time
- CFERB advertised 2-3 weeks
- experience suggests 5-6 weeks more usual
- trying to set up “umbrella” approval
 - pre-approval for certain kinds of experiments
 - should speed up process



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sources

- Research services
 - <http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/research/html/ethics/ethics.html>
- Government of Canada
 - tri-council policy statement: ethical conduct for research involving humans
 - <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm>



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