

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: WHAT IS THE ETHICAL THING TO DO?

Students will get into small groups and based on sociological guidelines produced by the American Sociological Association discuss the following ethical dilemmas.

- 1) A researcher was conducting a study of police department behavior and officer interaction. He spent significant amount of time riding along and participating in extended interactions with officers a staff. At one point several arresting officers where accused of misconduct by a community member. It was discovered that the researcher had on numerous occasions been present when the alleged misconduct had occurred. He also had extensive field notes of some of the interactions that had occurred. The researcher was fully aware that the charges of misconduct where true. However, he claimed that he was ethically committed to protecting his research subjects from harm, as well as maintaining confidentiality, and thus could not provide his data to authorities.

- 2) A researcher was conducting an in depth study of the behavior of young adults in public spaces, in a specific community. During the course of her research she discovered that many of the adolescents and young adults in the community under observation where involved in what she termed “survival crime.” The research observed the purchase, distribution, transportation and use of recreation drugs. As well as prostitution and theft in the form of pick pockets, mugging, breaking into cars and purse-snatchers. The researcher never directly participated in such activities but knew of their existence and never reported them.

- 3) Head Start (free pre-school) is available for low-income children in the US. Previously, children were admitted to pre-school based on need. Those with the lowest income and the highest degree of developmental delay were provided services. Now, the US Government uses Randomized control trials to assess the effectiveness of Head Start Programs in the US. Eligible children are randomly assigned either to an intervention group and are allowed to participate in Head Start Programs, or to a control group, and are denied services. Both groups are followed up over 3 years, and are tested based on academic success, emotional wellbeing and social skills.

- 4) A doctoral student in sociology is researching animal rights activism, one of his sources a research subject is accused of participating in a protest that resulted in property damage and the loss of laboratory animals from a major US animal research laboratory. The researcher was ordered by a US court to give up his field notes and testify about conversations he may have conducted regarding the planning of the event, or face being jailed for contempt of court.