Chapter 2. Making Research Ethical

> "[E]very methods-based decision is also an ethical decision."
>
> -Heidi McKee

He wrote a juicy memoir claiming the discovery of the DNA double helix model as his own, casting aspersions on his long-time collaborators.

After she got the results back from her DNA testing kit, she learned of a family predisposition for a genetic disorder that she had passed down to her children unknowingly.

The ancestry software he purchased showed a direct family connection to infamous slave-owners.

They named the genetically cloned sheep Dolly after Dolly Parton, for pretty tawdry reasons.

Although she ran an organic farm, she often found that genetically modified seeds made their way into her fields, distributed by winds from nearby farms.

The brief anecdotes that begin this chapter constitute just some of the ethical quandaries resulting from what some have termed "The Birth of Molecular Biology," the development of the DNA double helix model. This important scientific finding was peopled with unethical behavior and scandal, and the many resulting questions that have arisen from the discovery continue to churn both inside of and external to the scientific community: Should DNA be modified? For food? For people? For sheep? What about ancestry software and genetic testing? Who should have access to genetic data, and what should they be allowed to do with it? Such ethical considerations are an important component of this research project. Consider the following questions that help address ethical issues when conducting research:

- How is research developed and by whom?
- How are data and participants treated and protected during the research process?

- Who claims credit for the work conducted? Who cites others as collaborators and forebears of their work?
- Is research written about intimately, distantly, in first person, in third person?
- How is data stored? Who has access to data?
- Who benefits or is hurt by research?

All of these questions (and more!) make up the ethical component of research design. Understanding research ethics and wrestling with the often complex questions that the ethical component of research design entails are essential elements of conducting effective, responsible research. **Research ethics** address the evolving conventions, codes of conduct, and standards research communities adopt to strive for ethical development and circulation of research and to protect audiences, authors, and their research contributions.

Ethical Approaches to Research

The scientific method, which is often the foundation for much of our understanding about the research process, asks us to strive for objectivity. This is a **positivist** approach to research that assumes that there is one clear answer to a research question. However, in contemporary contexts, and certainly in the example of the development of the double helix DNA model, most scholars have agreed that research is rarely so clear cut. There are usually multiple answers to research questions—some better, some more conventional, some more accepted by **communities of practice** than others. This lack of certainty can sometimes worry apprentice researchers; they might be concerned that any answer is right or that research is more about saying the right thing rather than striving for answers. This is not the case! It just means that in this **constructivist** world of research—an understanding of research that considers the interactions between researchers, research subjects, and their environments—our goal is not objectivity but fairness and an ethical approach to research.

Further, some researchers suggest that the goal of research is **strong objectivity**, an orientation toward research that acknowledges the role of peo-

ple in developing research and encourages researchers to acknowledge their own **subjectivities**, or the potential biases and experiences that might impact their approach to research design and data analysis.*

Accepting that research is complex and that there are no easy, clear answers makes the research process more honest, more exciting, more effective, and, ironically, less biased.

Ethos is Collective and Individual

We often reduce **ethos** to considering whether a particular author is credible, but ethos is largely collective. Pause for a moment and consider where and why you're reading this text. Most likely you've selected a place to sit and read because of a combination of reasons related to convenience, access, necessity, and reputation. Let's focus on the latter in particular. If you're reading at work, a coffee shop, or at home, you may have chosen this place because you've talked with others about the right place to study, or you might have taken friends and family's advice because you trust them. You're reading this book because you're in a class at an institution that values your experiences with writing, and your instructor has selected a text based on many factors, including its reputable publisher and authors who actively conduct research on the subject area. So even though you may be sitting alone with a book, there are many people who stand behind you, impacting the decisions you make and your broader credibility as a student and learner. And even though the names of only three authors appear on this book, there are hundreds of friends, family members, scholars, publishers, and editors who have contributed to the content and collective ethos of this book.

It goes deeper: your instructor has an impact on your ethos, just as you have an impact on them. If you do well in the class, it suggests that she is a good instructor. This might impact her status at the university, her qualification for a potential promotion, or her standing in the department. If you mention down the road that you had this particular instructor, someone else may expect that you're a good writer because you have had good instruction, and they may hire you for an internship or job, or maybe they'll ask you to complete a challenging project because your instructor has contributed to your ethos as an effective writer. Your classmates impact your ethos, and you theirs. If your classmates are effective writers in their careers post-gradua-

Although we often boil down questions of ethos to individuals, they are just one access point in a network of ethos that is largely collective and constantly shifting and circulating.

tion, graduates from your university may gain a reputation for being particularly well-qualified for careers in communication. This could impact your prospects when you graduate, and your performance will impact students who graduate after you as well. Your college or university impacts your **ethos**.* And the network continues.

When you decide that a particular author is credible and has a reliable ethos, it's because a network of people have helped establish that—the journal in which they have published, the institutions and organizations to which they belong, their partners and families, etc.

Ethics and Secondary Research

As we noted in the introduction, many of our recommendations in this book oscillate between recommendations for **invention**—developing access points

Try This: Consider What Activities and People Impact Your Ethos (30 minutes)

You have had a long history as a reader and writer. The people, places, and activities with which you have come into contact during this history impact your ethos.

Compose a drawing that illustrates the network of influences that collectively constitute your ethos. You may hand-sketch or use clip-art, stick figures, and/or text to develop your composition. The goal is to make tangible the collective nature of your own ethos so that you can consider how this principle extends to other researchers. Consider the following invention questions to help develop your composition:

- What are your earliest reading and writing experiences? Who and what contributed?
- What was the first primary research project you conducted (think of "research" broadly—any time you test a theory or answer a question for yourself, you're doing a form of primary research)? Who influenced the research?
- Who has taught you about conducting research? What are the primary lessons you've learned?
- What formal school and learning experiences impact your approach to research?
- What experiences external to school impact your approach to research?

for your research project, or what some refer to, in part, as prewriting or brainstorming—and **delivery**—the ways in which your research project is communicated, or delivered, to an audience. An ethical approach to research should impact both invention and delivery in relation to your project. A starting place for many research projects includes the invention associated with identifying secondary research that informs your project. Chapter 3: Worknets provides a specific framework for reading sources deeply. In particular, we describe four methods, or phases, for reading secondary research. The first phase is the **semantic** phase, which asks you to be attentive to keywords in the text you've selected. The second phase is the **bibliographic** phase, which asks you to trace intersections between sources. The third phase is the **affinity** phase, which invites you to consider how writers are connected to each other. And finally, the fourth phase, the **choric** phase, asks you to consider the broader rhetorical context in which an article is written. Before you delve into this framework in detail, consider how secondary research that forms a **critical conversation** about an issue is constructed. In this section we'll also work to identify how to establish ethos, evaluate texts and authors, and learn citation systems, processes associated with an ethical approach to secondary research.

Establishing Ethos

One of the primary ways that researchers demonstrate their understanding of research convention and establish **ethos** is by carefully citing the authors they've read who have contributed to the critical conversation they'd like to join. **Ethos** is an author's credibility, or the trust an author establishes with an audience, and it can be a measure of how much **uptake**,* or interest, influence, and sharing, their work gets once they've completed a research project. When researching your area of interest, knowing what a particular community has said about it and finding the niche or gap in the research about it provides an opportunity for you to make a contribution to this conversation. Thoroughly reading secondary sources and genuinely representing others' ideas is part of an ethical approach to secondary research that helps establish your ethos and that may pave the way for you to add your voice in ways that are important to a

Although uptake sounds nebulous, you can see it in action every time someone on social media shares a particular message, meme, or visual.

given community. Chapter 3 helps demonstrate an ethical level of engagement with which researchers should consider secondary sources.

For instance, one of our former students, Gabriel Green, collaborated on a research project that considered the impact of campus crime and safety alerts. The project started with a question that we shared—how do the safety alerts impact the campus community? He engaged in primary research, gathering university records of crime alerts since the beginning of their circulation. He also considered secondary research, the critical conversation surrounding on-campus safety. By effectively citing experts in the field to demonstrate his knowledge of the current, existing discussion, he was able to establish ethos and craft an engaging exigency, or timely reason, to situate the research.

Demonstrating understanding of critical conversations and research conventions is key to establishing ethos, but having personal experience related to an issue can also make a researcher particularly well-suited for a particular

Try This: Making an Argument for Your Research by Identifying an Opening (1 hour)

Effective research proposals (Chapter 1) spotlight for readers how the researcher is connected to the work of others. Such gestures can deepen the researcher's ethos because they acknowledge that this new work bears relation to what has preceded it. Based on his work examining how scholars introduce research projects by demonstrating a gap in the critical conversation, John Swales developed a model to show apprentice researchers to do the same. Swales observed that scholars make the following basic moves:

- **Name the critical conversation.** This might include scholarly discussions of strategies for success in university writing, ethical considerations for the research process, concerns about the financial stability of a particular institution, etc.
- **Identify threads or themes related to the research area.** In this step, writers narrow their focus and cite authors their work draws from and to which they hope to respond.
- **Articulate what has not been said before** and explain why it is important that we consider this particular aspect of the issue.
- **State their argument** and demonstrate its importance in contributing to the identified opening in the research conversation.

Try it out for the secondary research you do!

project. Student researcher Zepher Barber developed a project about the best ways for students to prepare for first-year writing and to acclimate to the university. Because she was a successful, experienced, first-year student herself, Ms. Barber was an especially effective researcher to develop such a project. By claiming her status as a first-year student, and thus her privileged proximity to the area of research that she was writing about, she helped establish her ethos. Ethos is thus emplaced: it is related to the "where"of a writing situation, the "who" conducting the research, and the "when" that animates the experience.

Evaluating Texts and Authors

When you approach an article, you want to consider the venue and the authors' collective ethos. If you search for **peer-reviewed** secondary research through a library database, research that has been considered and shared by a community of experts, this technology helps you identify credible sources. Database searches often (though not always) filter out sources that have not been verified as credible by peers within a research community. But why is peer review so important? Why are peer-reviewed sources often privileged over other types of sources? It helps to know how the peer review process works.

Consider this textbook. Before this book got to you, it went through a long peer review and editorial process in which multiple people reviewed the work and provided feedback. This process is demonstrated in Figure 2.1. We first developed a book proposal, which went to the publisher. It then went out for peer review to eight experts in the field, writing teachers from all kinds of universities and colleges. They provided feedback, and we developed a draft of the book based on those reviews. Then we sent the complete draft to our editor, received feedback from her, made changes, and then chapters of the book were again sent to expert peer reviewers. The whole process took a few years!

Journal articles are a little different. Once you complete the research and write the article, you send it to a journal. The editor decides whether the article is appropriate to send out for review by asking questions like the following: Are these authors credible? Do they use evidence to support their claims? Are

Figure 2.1. The development and review process for this book.

they arguing something totally wacky and empirically wrong? If the editor decides it is appropriate to do so, she sends the chapter to at least two experts in the field, and any of the authors' identifying aspects are removed so that they are anonymous. The reviewers decide whether the article is appropriate for publication and whether the authors should make any changes. This part of the process usually takes at least a year.

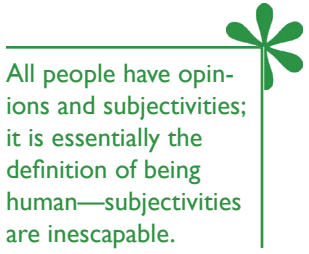
So why bother? Why engage in such a long process? The time, multiple perspectives, opportunities for revision and reflection, and multiple layers of review help ensure that the ideas that are shared represent rigorous, effective, and ethical research. Peer review ensures that there are multiple experts who vouch for the ideas shared, and in this way the article shares the collective ethos of the community who has engaged with the work. This is in contrast to a newspaper article, which usually has at least one other person who has

read the work, and a blog or independent website, in which the author may be the only one who has read and reviewed the material. This doesn't mean that information from other sources is incorrect; it just means that you have to be even more careful about considering the ethos of the author and article because the peer review process hasn't helped do that for you. You are forced to rely more on the author's individual ethos rather than consider the collective ethos that is communicated through peer review.

Especially if your project requires that you do research outside of peer-reviewed venues (and there are lots of good reasons for this!), you might ask the following questions of the sources with which you engage (and make sure to visit Chapter 3, which provides a framework for working deeply with sources):

- What are the authors' relationship to the area of research?
- What credentials do they have that help establish their expertise in this area?
- Do the authors have any subjectivities that might compromise their ability to develop credible research?

Remember, providing an opinion or having subjectivities does not mean that an author lacks credibility.* You just have to consider how honest an author is about those opinions and subjectivities and whether they let their values and beliefs compromise their ability to do ethical research. These considerations function in everyday life, too. If someone invites you to a restaurant they own and tells you that it's the best restaurant in town, you might question their ability to make an informed opinion. They have a vested, economic interest in you visiting their restaurant. However, if a friend eats at that restaurant every week and tells you it's the best restaurant in town, you might take their opinion more seriously. They have a clear opinion, and they're subjective about the restaurant (they love it!), but their ideas aren't compromised by their relationship to the restaurant. If you hear from multiple friends whose opinions you respect that it's the best restaurant around, you'll probably plan to go check it out. All of this is to say, awareness of an author's opinion or subjectivity doesn't mean that an article is not credible. Folks who are honest about their subjectivities should actually be viewed as potentially more credible than others who aren't aware of how their experiences impact their approach to research.



Learning Citation Systems

Once you've selected effective articles and spent time with them, how do you cite them in your research project? And why should you cite them? Citing sources provides a breadcrumb pathway for your audience so they can follow the research path you've taken, make their own judgments about what you've found, and perhaps disagree with your findings or add to what you've contributed. You demonstrate your ethos as a credible, ethical researcher by correctly citing research and being attentive to the conventions of research practice. Unfortunately, citations are often talked about as simply a vehicle to avoid plagiarism, but we hope that you'll move beyond such a perspective. Citations are important because they're trail markers or signposts on the research path. You put them down so that both you and your audience remember where you've traversed. Because research—when it's good, when it's engaging—is quite a ride. It takes you to unexpected places, and if you don't leave clear trail markers, it is very possible to get lost. Further, research is a conversation between you and the other researchers you're citing and drawing on in the project you've developed. When you cite, you highlight the different voices in the project. This multiple voicing is indicative of how we communicate. We always bring other people's ideas into our communication, both written and spoken. This characteristic of communication is known as **intertextuality**, a concept that describes how other people's language is seamlessly embedded in our own. Citation celebrates this natural aspect of communication and makes it visible.

Every choice—to include an author's full name or use their initial instead, to capitalize every word in an article title (or not!), to italicize or abbreviate, to use a comma, period, or semicolon, or even to emphasize the placement of the year of publication—is meaningful and has reasons behind it.

There are many different citation systems. Communities in the humanities often use Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Social science research communities often use American Psychological Association (APA) style. Many STEM fields have citation styles that are specific to individual journals or subdisciplines. Other disciplines use a version of Chicago Style. It can be easy to feel that citations are arbitrary, but when you look at them closely and alongside each other, the differences and conventions become more meaningful. In fact, the conventions function as clues to what a particular discipline values and what kind of sources they use most.* This is part of why citation styles are updated so frequently; disciplinary values grow and change, particularly as the kinds of evidence they cite changes.

Consider the style variations in Figures 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 of a single citation that represents an article we read to inform the beginning of this chapter:

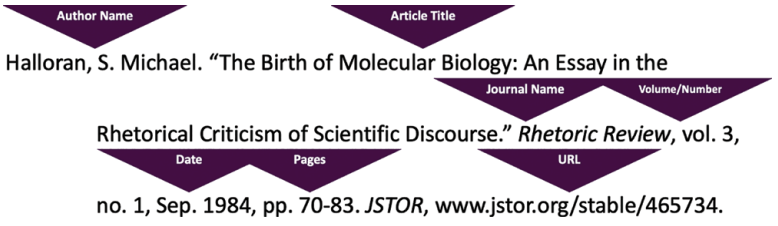


Figure 2.2. Annotated MLA style citation.

MLA style: Halloran, S. Michael. "The Birth of Molecular Biology: An Essay in the Rhetorical Criticism of Scientific Discourse." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, Sep. 1984, pp. 70-83. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/465734.

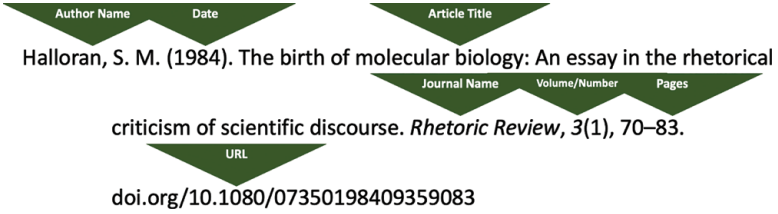


Figure 2.3. Annotated APA style citation.

APA style: Halloran, S. M. (1984). The birth of molecular biology: An essay in the rhetorical criticism of scientific discourse. *Rhetoric Review, 3*(1), 70–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198409359083

Try This: Comparing Citation Systems (30 minutes)

1. Locate a peer-reviewed source that aligns with your research interests.
2. Cite the source using different citation systems.
3. Next, compare citations, and examine them rhetorically.
   a. What are the differences?
   b. Consider, how does citation demonstrate disciplinary values?
   c. How can order and punctuation be rhetorical and meaningful?

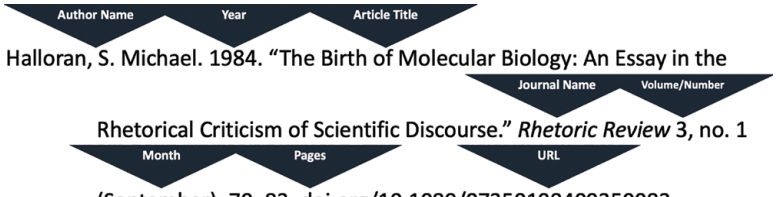


Figure 2.4. Annotated Chicago style citation.

If you work towards making sense of the citation systems rather than just committing to memory where the various commas go, it will make more sense to you and you will be more flexible in moving between citation styles if necessary. It will also be less confusing when you have to update to a new version of the citation system.

Chicago style: Halloran, S. Michael. 1984. "The Birth of Molecular Biology: An Essay in the Rhetorical Criticism of Scientific Discourse." *Rhetoric Review* 3, no. 1 (September): 70–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198409359083.

You do not have to memorize a particular citation system, because it will inevitably change as research conventions change. Instead, try to understand the citation system that you use most frequently. Consider the components and think through the relationship of this citation system to the disciplinary values that you see reflected.*

Ethics and Primary Research

In subsequent chapters we will address numerous research methods for working with words (Chapter 4), people (Chapter 5), places and things (Chapter 6), and visuals (Chapter 7). Each set of methods requires different thinking when it comes to ethics, but many of these considerations are related to the impact research has on people, the safety of their environment, and the potential benefits or detriments to their privacy.

Working with Human Subjects

When you conduct primary research with human subjects (which might include texts, images, or places) you need to take into account particular ethical aspects of your research. Imagine if the scientists who discovered the DNA Double Helix had considered how their discovery might impact subsequent generations. What if they had suggested guidelines? Or, what if they hadn't

fought over ownership of the model? How might their interactions with each other have changed ethical approaches to the treatment of DNA data? Nowadays, universities have **Institutional Review Boards (IRB)** that approve and make recommendations about research with human subjects. If you do not intend to publish your research, your research is not necessarily replicable, or it won't contribute to *generalized knowledge*—conversations about research to which particular communities and bodies of research orient, then you do not necessarily need to have your research plan approved by an IRB. When in doubt, you can always ask a faculty member or contact your IRB representative to see if your work is exempt. Even if your research need not be approved by IRB, it is useful to consider their recommendations for ethical research with human subjects because these regulations were developed to protect people. Unfortunately, all of these regulations were developed because researchers have conducted incredibly unethical research. Joseph Breault and other scholars have detailed how our current guidelines have come to be. In brief, many of our guidelines are a version of the 1976 Belmont Report, a report developed by a commission, the purpose of which was to ensure **informed consent** and **ethical treatment** of research participants. Informed consent is required when you are conducting research with human subjects. This just means that you ensure that the person you are surveying or interviewing (see Chapter 5 for detailed focus on research methods designed for working with people) fully understands the research in which they're taking part and that they agree to participate. It is important to let participants know what the research is about; if there will be any benefits, danger, or threat to them; and that they can choose not to participate at any time.

Informed consent and recommendations for ethical treatment of human subjects is a response to inhumane research conducted by Nazis on people during World War II. There have been other problematic, unethical studies—too many to mention here—but one particularly heinous, well-known study is the Tuskegee Study in which African American men infected with syphilis went untreated for forty years so that researchers could examine the impact of the disease. Subsequent regulations ensure that research does not hurt participants and that participants are fully aware of what a study in which they take part fully entails.

This notion of informed consent is central to ethical treatment of research participants. Folks need to fully understand what they are agreeing to when you ask them to participate in your research. There are some populations of people—children, prisoners, mentally disabled persons, and pregnant women—who receive additional protections according to IRB protocols, so you might take this into account if your research includes members of one of these groups. Further, face-to-face research with people can differ from research that you conduct in digital spaces. For instance, if you conduct an informal poll through social media for the purposes of a research project, it may not feel like you're doing research, but you are! You will need to get consent from your participants, though it might look different than obtaining consent in person.

Interacting with Audiences

The thing is, even if you don't set out to interview or survey folks, your research still might involve interaction with people, and ultimately, the goal of research is to share your ideas with an audience. If you're taking photographs as part of your research, as you'll spend time with in Chapter 7, you'll have to

Try This: Learn About Your Institution's IRB Office (30 minutes)

Every institution has their own IRB office, complete with their own guidelines and reporting structures. To get a sense of your institution's ethical approach to research, find your IRB office's website, and consider the following:

- Who is on your institution's IRB board? Are they faculty members? Staff members? What disciplines do they represent?
- What is the process on your campus for conducting research with human subjects?
- Are there different expectations for undergraduate student, graduate student, faculty member, and staff member researchers?
- How does your institution define research with human subjects? How does it define ethics?

You might also identify a nearby institution or a school you considered attending. Find its IRB office website and compare it with the one at your school. Where are the overlaps? What is different? And what is the significance of the comparisons you have made?

consider whether or not people will end up in those images. And if so, do they know they're being photographed? If you're doing textual research on a blog or a Facebook community, even though the texts you're considering are public, folks might not think of that space as public. You'll need to think through how you interact with your potential research participants, data, and audience.

For instance, Kate is currently conducting a project that examines the impact of plagiarism accusations on students and faculty members. All people in her study are asked to consent to participate in the study. However, in talking to research participants about their experiences, she has learned about other students who have plagiarized. What is Kate's responsibility as a researcher in writing about these people who have plagiarized but who have not consented to participate in her study? As a researcher, she needs to consider the expectations for student privacy, the sensitivity of the material, and the potential harms and/or benefits to the university community. Can she anonymize the students in the stories she has heard, or would sharing any part of these narratives cause the students to suffer? Key aspects to consider when making such decisions are the relationship between the researcher and the research population—or **proximity**—and potential **beneficence*** of the research. In this case, Kate is a faculty member, and her research participants are students, so although they all interact in the same sphere, there is a power differential that complicates the relationship. The findings of Kate's research have significantly beneficial potential for the university, but not at the expense of outing students who have not shared their plagiarism stories publicly.

Beneficence asks whether the research is charitable, equitable, and fair to participants by taking into full account the possible consequences for the researcher and the participants.

Designing Writing That Does Ethical Work

Hopefully you are already on board with the importance of approaching research ethically, with ethics and fairness as your primary research objective rather than objectivity. If you still have questions, or if you're not sold on these ideas yet, please don't hesitate to talk to your instructor and colleagues (and us!) about your questions, engage in your own research on ethics, and see the end of this chapter for further reading recommendations. But if you are ready to start designing ethical research, some important written products to develop are **research protocols**, or your plan for research; **scripts**, or the

particular way you will describe your research to participants, particularly for focus groups in which a group of people participate in the research or there are multiple research facilitators; and **participation** or **consent forms**.

Try This Together: Considering Ethical Research (45 minutes)

In groups, consider the following situations, which include complex ethical components from research projects scholars have developed. Talk through the ethical issues at hand: how might you handle them?

- In 2012, scholar Jody Shipka bought six boxes from a yard sale that included personal photographs, diaries, and scrapbooks from a couple she did not know. These boxes inspired her project, "Inhabiting Dorothy," in which she attempted to travel and record the same paths that the couple had catalogued in their materials. Dr. Shipka invited audience members to also participate in the project, reenacting experiences and images of folks they do not know. What are the ethical components at work here?
- Technical Communication Scholar Fernando Sanchez examined a 2017 court case in response to gerrymandering in two Texas districts. He examined the ways that legislative mapmakers used GIS software to create maps that make political arguments. How might maps and their representations of people represent ethical or unethical research practices? How do images and their representation impact audiences? How might subsequent researchers take up Sanchez's findings?
- Heidi McKee described how in 2008 she read a research project that accidentally included contact information for one of the research participants who was supposed to be anonymous. The authors had included a screen capture of a newspaper article that described the research participant's brush with the law. Although the researchers meant to keep the subject's identity secret, the screen capture was easily enlarged, and the article and identifying information about the person was easily accessed. How does this experience highlight the complexities of maintaining research participant anonymity? How does digital research and publication impact this complexity?
- Photographer Christine Rogers developed a series of images between 2007-2008 titled "New Family" in which she posed for family photos (complete with the quintessential hand on shoulder pose) with people who were strangers to her. In what ways would Ms. Rogers have to approach participants? What are the ethical considerations of such a project?

Below, we'll focus in particular on developing a participation form, which is necessary for conducting research with human subjects. In Chapter 5, we outline specific research methods for working with people, including surveys, interviews, and case studies, but before you do that work, you'll need to make sure that participants understand and want to participate in your research.

Often in working with human subjects, we are asked to "do no harm" and to weigh the potential benefit to society in relation to the potential discomfort to research participants. We hope that this chapter helps demonstrate why it is so important (and complicated) to consider ethical questions in conducting secondary research and designing primary research, but we invite you to go a step further. In the chapters that follow, you'll be introduced to multiple research methods and invited to develop invention activities for potential research projects. Instead of merely considering how to avoid harm, consider how your research might actually do good. How can we use these research methods to not just perform ethical research but to in fact be more ethical?

Focus on Delivery: Composing a Participation Form

The primary purpose of a participation or consent form is to ensure that research participants understand what is being asked of them if they choose to participate in your research so that they can fully and knowledgeably consent (or choose not to consent). However, designing such a form is also important invention work. Thinking through and writing down what participation in your study entails helps you think through what you're asking participants to do, and it might help you revise and reconceive your project in productive ways.

If you plan to publish your research (or you even just think you might want to), if your research is replicable, if your research will contribute to generalizable knowledge, or if you would like to work with protected populations, you will need IRB approval for your research. Each IRB is a little different, and they offer recommended templates as part of their resources for authors.

If your research does not require IRB approval, your form may include many of the same components that IRB templates include, but the structure may change depending on your project needs and interests. Your participation form should address the following aspects of the research project:

- What, in detail, does your research entail?
- What will research participants be asked to do?
- Are there any risks or potential benefits to participants? Risks are pretty obvious for medical research, but don't forget that research about writing can also elicit discomfort and potential risk for participants. Consider whether your research might make someone uncomfortable. Might your research have the potential to reveal something personal regarding their sexuality, gender, citizenship, religion, etc.?
- Explain what product will be created out of the research—who will the audience for that product be and in what venue will the findings be shared?
- Will the research participants remain anonymous? Do you want them to have the option to be anonymous or not? Perhaps they'll want credit for the ideas they've shared with you.
- Will research participants have an opportunity to comment on drafts of the research or view the completed project?

Finally, make sure to give your research participants an out, meaning—let them know that they don't have to participate and that they can choose to not participate at any time. This includes after the research is complete! Any time before research is published, participants should have your contact information so that they can let you know if they change their minds.

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