

# Research Ethics: Ethical Theories

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# Research ethics: introduction

- Not always right answers – though definitely some wrong ways
- Complex topic, and interesting
- Linked to big issues such as inequalities, injustice, power
- Ethical theories
- Ethical principles
- Ethical practice

# Ethical theory: deontology

- Euro-Western paradigm
- Acts are good or bad in themselves, regardless of consequences
- Example: telling a lie is bad, even if it makes someone feel better
- Privileges rules and laws over morality
- In practice, those with this perspective support a universal code to guide research in any situation
- BUT no universal code can cover every eventuality

# Ethical theory: consequentialism

- Euro-Western paradigm
- The outcome of an act is what matters
- Example: telling a lie is fine if it makes someone feel better, bad if it causes harm
- Privileges morality over rules and laws
- In practice, those with this perspective believe ethical practice should be decided with respect to the context
- BUT not always easy to foresee consequences and their implications

# Ethical theory: virtue ethics

- Euro-Western paradigm
- Good people are ethical and so do good research
- Argument: you need to be as good a person as possible to be a researcher
- Neoliberal
- Privileges individualism over collectivism
- In practice, most of us may struggle to live up to such high standards, though the effort may be worthwhile

# Ethical theory: value ethics

- Euro-Western paradigm
- People base ethical decisions on their personal and/or agreed values rather than on external principles
- Argument: shared values lead to ethical conduct
- Based on values, i.e. moral priorities
- On the whole, privileges collectivism over individualism
- In practice, most people in the West draw on a combination of theoretical perspectives for help, depending on the problem they are facing and the context they are in

# Ethical theory: Indigenous research ethics

- Southern paradigm
- People work together to find out what they need to know, and to solve problems – everyone holds knowledge and owns the research
- Based on community
- Privileges relationships
- Values respect, connectivity, and reciprocity
- Acknowledges and works to strengthen links between research and social justice

# Indigenous vs Euro-Western ethical theory

“Postcolonial indigenous ethical theory defines research as respectful when it benefits the participants.” (Chilisa 2012:174)

Why doesn't Euro-Western ethical theory include this perspective?

Next: ethical principles, then ethical practice



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