

Research Experience and Agreement With Selected Ethics Principles From Canada's *Tri-Council Policy Statement—Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*

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Abstract

An online survey was conducted of students, instructors, and researchers in distance education regarding principles for the ethical treatment of human research subjects. The study used an online questionnaire based on principles drawn from Canada's *Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS, 2003), which the authors had sometimes found problematic in their own distance education practice (as researchers, in their work with graduate students, and as Research Ethics Board [REB] members). Overall, findings showed that respondents tended to agree with the principles presented, whether consistent or not with the TCPS; however, those with more research experience showed a tendency to agree more with questionnaire items that were consistent with the TCPS, and less with those items not consistent with the Policy, a pattern that was more pronounced in a group of 25 published researchers invited to participate. Conclusions were that research experience was associated with greater agreement with the TCPS's principles, with ethics issues, and with REB experience; that by their own admission many participants were not well acquainted with the TCPS; and that efforts to address the reservations of distance education researchers about ethics review should include the involvement of experienced researchers, as this group probably best represents the ethical norms and practices of the field.

Résumé

Des étudiants, des professeurs et des chercheurs en éducation à distance ont participé à une étude en ligne portant sur les principes d'un traitement éthique des êtres humains en tant que sujets d'expériences en recherche. Le questionnaire en ligne utilisé était basé sur des principes issus de l'*Énoncé canadien de politique des trois Conseils, section Éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains* (EPTC, 2003). Les auteurs ont parfois trouvé cet énoncé problématique dans leur pratique en formation à distance (en tant que chercheurs, dans leurs travaux avec des étudiants gradués et en tant que membres du Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR)). En général, les résultats ont montré que les répondants avaient tendance à être d'accord avec les principes présentés, que ces principes soient cohérents ou non avec l'EPTC. Cependant, les répondants ayant plus d'expérience en recherche avaient

tendance à être plus en accord avec les articles du questionnaire qui allaient dans le même sens que l'EPTC, et à être moins en accord avec les articles qui n'étaient pas compatibles avec l'énoncé de politique. Cette tendance s'est montrée plus marquée chez un groupe de 25 chercheurs reconnus invités à participer. De cette étude, on a conclu que : l'expérience en recherche est associée à un plus grand accord avec les principes de l'EPTC, avec les problématiques d'éthique et avec l'expérience en CÉR; plusieurs participants inscrits n'étaient pas très familiers avec l'EPTC; les démarches entreprises pour étudier la question des réserves qu'ont les chercheurs en éducation à distance vis-à-vis les révisions éthiques devraient inclure la participation de chercheurs expérimentés, puisque ce groupe représente probablement le mieux les normes et les pratiques éthiques du domaine.

Background

In Canada the federally legislated ethical obligations of researchers, and the process by which research must be reviewed and approved, are contained in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS, Medical Research Council of Canada, MRRC, 2003), developed and jointly issued by the Medical Research Council of Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In order to receive federal funds, the TCPS's principles must be applied to all research conducted in the institution, whether federally funded or not.

Canada's adoption of the TCPS is part of a global pattern of increased concern on the part of researchers for the ethical treatment of human research subjects. In 2003 an Internet search of the term *research ethics* resulted in over a million hits, with topics including research in teaching, philosophical principles, workshops on ethical principles, and ethics in social and political contexts. A similar search of journals revealed no fewer than 20 concerned with ethics, including applications in the law, the criminal justice system, nursing, bioethics, business, the environment, religion, and feminism.

Although widespread and positively intended, increased attention to ethics in research has resulted in disputes over the principles (and sometimes the process) by which proposals are judged, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Some disagreements have been marked, revealing researchers' frustration over projects delayed, altered, and even cancelled (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

Researchers have made their reservations plain. Beck and Kaufman (1994) some time ago identified various pitfalls research was beginning to encounter in academic settings, delaying publication and even preventing the conduct of some controversial enquiries in the physical sciences. (The debate over stem cell research is a present example.) Evans and Jacupec (1996) described conflicts of values between review committees and re-

searcher, noting a trend by ultraconservative (often religious or ideology-driven) groups to “challenge or terminate research they find offensive” (p. 73). As problems grew, Vujakovic and Bullard (2001) suggested greater attention to anonymity and confidentiality, to help researchers navigate what they called the “ethics minefield” (p. 279). Some deplored the adjudication process: Rourke et al. (2001) termed an experience with their institutional Research Ethics Board (REB), in which the objections of a single CMC participant resulted in rejection of an externally-funded project, as “tedious,” and not “useful or necessary.”

Associations have also been frank in expressing their concerns. The Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada (HSSFC) voiced the fear that “For some [researchers], the expansion of the purview of the REBs and the TCPS to scholars in the Humanities and Fine Arts will be viewed as a hindrance to research and as an imposition of alien regulatory practices upon these disciplines” (Owen, Robert, Burgess, Golfman, & Sykes, 2001, p. 4). These writers call for efforts “to overcome an underlying current of distrust that exists within the community vis-à-vis the TCPS” (p. 4). The uneasy relations between researchers and ethics review bodies have become newsworthy enough to appear in the popular press: Begley’s (2002) article in the *Wall Street Journal*, sympathetic to researchers (it was entitled “Review Boards Pose Threat to Social Scientists’ Work”), described a growing rift between researchers and ethicists; other articles have questioned standards and accountability in clinical drug trials, especially those involving paid ethics reviews (Munro, 2004; Dohy, 2004).

The problem of judging proposals is made more difficult by the fact that REBs receive little practical guidance from the TCPS. For example, although the Policy briefly refers to research conducted by undergraduates, the needs of a far larger group of student-researchers, graduate students, are ignored completely, as are the well-established roles and responsibilities of advisors, supervisors, and academic committees. We believe these needs are real, having ourselves experienced complications due to REB involvement in graduate student research. We can attest that, unless coordinated with other advice, an REB’s interventions can appear merely intrusive. (One of our students commented after his review, “[The REB] takes its work very seriously. However, I’m not sure it knows enough about [the proposed method]. Probably more than me—but not enough.”)

The TCPS enjoins REBs to apply ethical principles “in the context of the nature of the research and of the ethical norms and practices of the relevant research discipline” (TCPS, p. i.9). This position is consistent with the etymology of *ethics*, from *ethos*, *character*, *custom*, or *usage* (Hinman, 2000), suggesting the importance of context in ethics. Determining a discipline’s customary norms and characteristic practices requires REBs to

“understand the human research ethics issues arising from diverse methodologies” (Owen et al., 2001, p. 9). To our knowledge, no reports have appeared that describe the “ethical norms and practices” in distance education research involving human subjects. To assure sensitive compliance with the spirit as well as the letter of the regulations, researchers must know the principles contained in the TCPS; again, no studies of distance education researchers’ knowledge of or views on the contents of the TCPS have, to our knowledge, been published.

This study was intended to address the lack of knowledge in these areas by assessing awareness and acceptance of some fundamental, yet potentially problematic, ethical principles contained in the TCPS, and to evaluate the effect of research experience on ethics by comparing the views of individuals with varying research backgrounds. The key variable in the inquiry was the participants’ self-assessed *research experience*. This term was not defined in the study, and is a weakness in the design to the degree that respondents may have interpreted the term differently from our meaning, or from one another. As shown in the Appendix, participants were told that the study involved the views of “distance education researchers and practitioners” about ethical positions, requiring them to provide information about their “research background.” The actual questionnaire item read, “Describe your research experience (1 = none; 7 = extensive).” Although confusion may have arisen for some respondents over whether the item referred to their experience as a *researcher* or as a *subject*, we feel that any such uncertainty would not affect assessments of the research principles under study—unless respondents applied a separate standard to themselves as researchers, as opposed to the standards they expected to protect them when they were the subjects. Although there is no evidence this was a common interpretation, the point is noted here, with the suggestion that future research might explicitly address the possibility of multiple and potentially conflicting standards and definitions in relation to ethics principles.

Background: Ethics in Human Subjects Research

The TCPS makes plain that ethical standards in human subjects research are not absolute, but must respond to varying contexts, circumstances, and disciplines. There is a tension, which ethics reviews attempt to address, between the right to do research (within the norms and practices—the research ethos—of the discipline) and the responsibility to protect subjects, especially those unable to protect themselves. The TCPS adopts an exceptionist stance (MacFarlane, 2002), a relatively moderate position in which ethical principles are applied pragmatically and flexibly in response to circumstances (researchers are expected to present to the REB the special circumstances that they believe justify exceptions).

As distance education practitioners (faculty members who teach and supervise graduate students) and as researchers, we interact regularly with our institutional REB and with other REBs under which our students and colleagues (sometimes as co-researchers) work. These experiences (and that of serving on our institutional REB) have led us to observe that certain principles of the TCPS tend to be contentious in the ethical review process. The following is a summary of the more contentious principles of the Policy, based on our experience.

Respect for human dignity. This cardinal principle requires that persons not be used solely as means to ends and that “the multiple and interdependent interests of the person” be protected by the REB (TCPS, p. i.5). Historically, interest in this principle arose from the emergence early in the 20th century of systematic programs of medical research (Evans & Jakupc, 1996). Presently, most ethics statements hold that, with a few exceptions, the rights of subjects should take precedence over the advancement of knowledge (TCPS). Under this principle, special protection is accorded to heteronomous groups or persons (those not fully capable of exercising free choice or of independently protecting their own interests), especially those in cultural or power-authority situations who might be the victims of even inadvertent coercion (e.g., patients, inmates, institutionalized people of all kinds, students, clients, etc.).

Respect for human dignity is demonstrated in research by the practice of requiring researchers to obtain and maintain the free and informed consent of subjects throughout the research. Not everyone is protected by this principle, however, as closer examination of the free and informed consent principle reveals.

Free and informed consent. This principle is often spoken of as the cornerstone of ethics in research (McNamee, 2001; Vujakovic & Bullard, 2001; O’Connor, 2002). The TCPS itself calls informed consent “the heart of ethical research involving humans” (p. 2.1). Interestingly, for a concept of such primacy, the TCPS recognizes a wide variety of situations in which informed consent can either be waived completely, obtained post hoc, or otherwise complied with less than fully.

The TCPS allows REBs to waive the requirement for fully informed consent if the following conditions are met:

1. The research is minimal risk.
2. The waiver is unlikely to adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.
3. The research could not practicably be carried out without it.
4. Subjects will be provided with additional information after participation, “whenever possible and appropriate.”

5. A therapeutic intervention is not involved (normally precluded by point 1).

When it is not possible to obtain full informed consent, the TCPS recommends that subjects be debriefed after the fact if “feasible.” It also suggests that subjects who object after debriefing be given the opportunity to remove themselves and their data from the study; however, the REB may grant an exemption to this principle to preserve the integrity of the research, by avoiding “colour[ing] the responses of the subjects and thus invalidat[ing] the research” (TCPS, pp. 2.2-2.3). Also, the rights of the majority to participate in research are protected over the objections of those who may not wish to do so (this is the principle under which the problem encountered by Rourke et al., 2002, mentioned above, might have been addressed).

In cases where a subject expresses concerns about a study, the researcher may give the subject the option of removing his or her data from the project. *This approach should be used only when the elimination of the subject's data will not compromise the validity of the research design, and hence diminish the ethical value of participation by other subjects.* (TCPS, p. 2.3; emphasis added)

Other entities and individuals who enjoy less or no protection under the informed consent provisions of the TCPS include:

1. *Public bodies and corporations*, including governments, political parties, authoritarian organizations, and criminal groups.
2. *Private organizations*. These have the right to decline to participate or to deny access to their private records and may attempt to set limits on the participation of their employees, but may not interfere with or veto research about their own conduct, their participation in any research about their behavior is not required, and they need not be approached for their consent prior to research being conducted.
3. *Public figures*. “Certain types of research ... may legitimately have a negative effect on public figures” (p. 1.6), including all public persons, artists, and performers (and their works), politicians, and business leaders.
4. *Subjects of naturalistic observation techniques*. With the protection of anonymity, the TCPS permits waiver of informed consent.
5. *Students in classroom and course evaluations*. “Nothing in this Section [Article 2.4] should be interpreted as meaning that normal classroom assessments of course work require REB approval” (p. 2.6; emphasis in original).
6. *Those involved in quality assurance and performance reviews*. “Quality assurance studies, performance reviews or testing within normal educa-

tional requirements should also not be subject to REB approval" (p. 1.1).

Privacy and confidentiality. If there truly is a key ethical concept in human subjects research, this may be it. The TCPS notes that "in many cultures, privacy and confidentiality are considered fundamental to human dignity" (p. i.5), and that "privacy is a fundamental value, perceived by many as essential for the protection and promotion of human dignity" (p. 3.1).

Nevertheless, as with the principle of informed consent, the right of privacy is not absolute. The TCPS acknowledges that issues related to the public good (e.g., control of contagious diseases, and increasingly, certain security and crime prevention practices) may permit suspension of protection of some kinds of personal information. Use of information already part of the public domain, even involving identifiable nonpublic persons, is permitted, as is subpoenaed information. Naturalistic observation, when anonymous, may also fall under this exemption.

Justice and inclusiveness. This principle assures that no group in society unfairly bears the burdens or enjoys the fruits of research. Respect for justice and inclusiveness holds that as long as the methodology is sound, all contributions are anonymous, and identities are protected in any reports, it may well be a greater ethical violation to deny the rights of the willing majority than it would be to accede to the wishes of the reluctant minority by refusing to approve research. The TCPS asserts, "Nothing in this Policy should be interpreted to mean that research subjects have the right to veto a project, though they do, of course, have the right to refuse to cooperate with the researcher(s)" (p. 1.2). The concept of *secondary use of data* (TCPS) under which, with anonymity as protection, access to certain already-existing data may be gained may also promote inclusiveness by enabling some research to be conducted even over the objections of a minority of subjects. This argument might have assisted Rourke et al. (2001) to pursue the research that was ultimately prevented by the objections of a single subject, noted above.

Balancing harms and benefits. This is the purpose of ethical review of research. Some researchers (O'Connor, 2002) argue that all research is unethical to some degree, and no research is completely harmless; the real question is: "Ethically sound from whose point of view?" (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2001, p. 361).

According to this principle, a balanced assessment of the potential harms and possible benefits of research requires seeing the research from multiple perspectives, without privileging any particular disciplinary or moral perspective (TCPS; Small, 2001). A consequence of this reasoning, as noted above, is that some ethical approaches and forms of research (biography, artistic criticism, public policy research, and investigative jour-

nalism, including whistle-blowing), although having clearly negative effects on identifiable persons, institutions, or organizations, may be ethically permissible because the balance of social benefit and individual harm favors the former despite the obvious presence of the latter.

Key points in relation to the assessment of harms and benefits are: (a) the TCPS does not require that research be free of all risk, only of unnecessary risks; (b) all the risks potentially present in the research do not have to be known or ameliorated before research can be started: indeed, identifying and quantifying risks to humans is often a key purpose of research; (c) obvious and suspected risks may be justified if potential benefits outweigh them; and (d) the researcher's duty is to ensure that participants understand and accept any risks of harm initially, and continue to do so throughout the research.

The Study

Based on the extent of their self-reported research experience (including none), we assessed the views of practitioners, faculty, and students ($n=147$) involved in distance education about selected ethical principles from the TCPS that, in our experience, have proven problematic. Participants volunteered in response to invitations posted on the Web sites of three Canadian distance education organizations: the Alberta Distance Education and Training Association (ADETA), the Canadian Association for Distance Education (CADE), and Athabasca University's Centre for Distance Education. A further group of published researchers ($n=25$ of 83 invited; 30%), whose work had appeared within the past six years in the *CADE Journal of Distance Education (JDE)*, participated in response to a personal invitation to do so. In the analysis, the views of respondents (total $n=172$) were examined on the basis of two criteria: self-described research experience (from *none* to *high*), and a record of recent research publication. The research questions were:

1. To what degree does self-assessed research experience (including none) affect agreement with selected ethical principles (consistent and not consistent with those contained in the TCPS)?
2. To what degree do the views of researchers with a known record of publication (the invited group) differ from those of other respondents?

The survey instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 31 statements about ethics in research (Appendix) reflecting principles that in our experience as advisors, researchers, and REB members, have produced problems of interpretation. Eighteen of the statements used in the questionnaire were consistent with principles found in the TCPS, whereas 13 were not. Items were rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale (Appendix). The instrument was developed by the researchers and piloted with col-

leagues and graduate students in the Centre for Distance Education, Athabasca University. (As a result of piloting, the number of items was reduced from 34 to 31, and wording changes were made to some items. (the Appendix contains the instrument.)

Items that were not consistent either contradicted the TCPS or made assertions not found in the Policy. The ethical content or legitimacy of these not-consistent items was not in question. In fact, the basic approach of the TCPS (“As a condition of funding, we require, *as a minimum*, that researchers and their institutions apply the ethical principles and the articles of this policy”; p. i.2, emphasis added) grants that individuals or institutions may adopt more stringent ethics standards. The question was the degree to which the standards of the TCPS were in fact viewed by respondents of differing research backgrounds as minimal, optimal, or applicable at all.

Some limitations in the study’s design potentially affecting interpretation of the results include, as noted above, the possibility that respondents may have interpreted differently the undefined term *research experience*. They may also have applied the 7-point scale differently (the instrument did not offer interpretations for values other than 1 *none* and 7 *very extensive*). Also, those who claimed research experience were not asked to describe the nature of that experience (whether the experience was as researcher or subject). The reader should consider these facts of the study’s design in relation to the results, and future researchers are advised to control for them in any further study of these questions.

Table 1
Sources of Access to the Survey, by Self-Described Levels of Research Experience

Source of access to the survey	No research experience		Low research experience		Moderate research experience		High research experience		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Athabasca University	11	12.8%	40	46.5	27	31.4	7	9.3	85	50.0
CADE	1	4.8	7	33.3	11	52.4	2	9.5	21	12.2
ADETA	1	12.5	2	25.0	4	50.0	1	12.5	8	4.7
Other	7	21.9	12	37.5	13	40.6	0	0	32	18.6
Invited researchers	0	0	0	0	11	44.0	14	56.0	25	14.5
Total	20	11.6	61	35.5	66	38.4	25	14.5	172	100

Table 2
Personal and Professional Differences, All Respondents, by Self-Reported
Levels of Research Experience

Variable	No research experience (n=20)		Low research experience (n = 61)		Moderate research experience (n = 66)		High research experience (n = 25)		Total (n=172)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<i>Sex</i>										
Male	8	14.5	12	21.8	20	36.4	15	27.3	55	32.0
Female	12	10.3	49	41.9	46	39.3	10	8.5	117	68.0
Total	20	11.6	61	35.5	66	38.4	25	14.5	172	
<i>Degree</i>										
Diploma	1	25.0	0	0	3	75.0	0	0	4	2.3
Bachelor's	18	15.3	53	44.9	41	34.7	6	5.1	118	68.6
Master's	1	5.3	6	31.6	9	47.4	3	15.8	19	11.0
Doctorate	0	0	2	6.7	13	41.9	16	51.6	31	18.0
Total	20	11.6	61	35.5	66	38.4	25	14.5	172	
<i>Ethics experience</i>										
None	17	41.5	18	13.9	5	12.2	1	2.4	41	23.8
Low	3	3.5	41	47.7	35	40.7	7	8.1	86	50.0
Moderate	0	0	2	5.1	25	64.1	12	30.8	39	22.7
High	0	0	0	0	1	16.7	5	83.3	6	3.5
Total	20	11.6	61	35.5	66	38.4	25	14.5	172	
<i>REB experience?</i>										
Yes	0	0	4	21.1	3	15.8	12	63.2	19	11.1
No	20	13.2	57	37.5	62	40.8	13	8.6	152	88.9
Total	20	11.7	61	35.7	65	38.0	25	14.6	172	
<i>Familiarity with TCPS</i>										
None	16	19.8	27	33.3	29	35.8	9	11.1	81	47.9
Low	3	5.2	28	48.3	23	39.7	4	6.9	58	34.3
Moderate	0	0	6	28.6	7	33.3	8	38.1	21	12.4
High	0	0	0	0	5	55.6	4	44.4	9	5.3
Total	19	11.2	61	36.1	64	37.9	25	14.8	169	
<i>Invited researcher?</i>										
Yes	0	0	0	0	11	44.0	14	56.0	25	14.5
No	20	13.6	61	41.5	55	37.4	11	7.5	147	85.5
Total	20	11.6	61	35.5	66	38.4	25	14.5	172	

Results

The Respondents

A total of 172 usable surveys were returned. Respondents identified the source from which they accessed the questionnaire, as shown in Table 1. (As noted above, *research level* was obtained from self-described research experience based on the 7-point scale from 1 *none* to 7 *very extensive*; thus

as shown in Table 1 and thereafter, 1 = no research experience, 2-3 = low experience, 4-5 = moderate experience, and 6-7 = high experience.)

Response rates for the data contained in Table 1 can only be estimated. The Athabasca University respondents were graduate students in a distance education master's program, which at the time of the study had an overall enrollment of approximately 350 program students. Using this as the denominator, the response rate for the Athabasca University student group was about 25%. Twenty-five of the 83 published researchers who were personally invited to participate did so (30%). The invited researchers were the group most likely to rate their research experience *moderate* or *high*, and the only group to have no members who rated their experience *none* or *low*. (Not all the invited researchers, all of whom had published in *JDE* in the previous six years, rated their experience *high*, whereas some who rated their own research experience as *high* may not have published: this information was not requested.)

Table 2 shows how self-reported research experience was associated with other personal and professional characteristics of the respondents.

Analysis by Levels of Self-Reported Research Experience

In the following discussion the 7-point scale used by the respondents to rate the questionnaire items was interpreted as shown below. (Note that only the polar values 1 = *Disagree completely* and 7 = *Agree completely* were provided in the instrument.)

<i>Scale rating</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Below 1.5	Disagree completely
1.5-3.5	Tend to disagree
3.5-4.5	Neutral
4.5-6.5	Tend to agree
Above 6.5	Agree completely

Table 3
Mean Ratings of Questionnaire Items Consistent and Not Consistent With the TCPS, by Self-Reported Levels of Research Experience

<i>Items' consistency with the TCPS</i>	<i>No research experience (n=20)</i>		<i>Low research experience (n=61)</i>		<i>Moderate research experience (n=66)</i>		<i>High research experience (n=25)</i>		<i>Total (n=172)</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Consistent	4.80	.508	4.74	.595	4.96	.627	4.97	.560	4.86	.598
Not consistent	5.40	.838	5.04	.886	5.07	.768	4.65	1.11	5.04	.878

Table 4
Significant Differences in Agreement, by Levels of Research Experience

<i>Item</i>	<i>Relation to TCPS</i>	<i>Highest agreement</i>			<i>Lowest agreement</i>			<i>t (sig.)</i>
		<i>Grp</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Grp</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>Boldface item consistent with TCPS</i>								
9. In ethical research, human subjects are never subjected to risks of harm	Not consistent	None Low	5.15 4.98	1.73 1.76	High	3.84	2.32	.042 .015
12. The ethical review process has as one of its aims the purpose of blocking research which does not include collaboration with the research subjects.	Not consistent	None	5.80	1.47	High	4.46	2.00	.017
20. Written consent to participate must be obtained, for research to be fully ethical.	Not consistent	None Low	5.45 5.26	1.76 1.48	High	4.16	2.32	.046 .010
21. Corporations must approve of the participation of their employees in research conducted by outsiders involving the corporation.	Not consistent	None Low	4.84 4.97	2.17 1.84	High	3.40	2.06	.032 .002
22. Subjects must always be given full information about the research, as part of the provision for obtaining informed consent.	Not consistent	None Low	5.95 5.33	1.54 1.64	High	4.40	1.92	.004 .040
25. Research must not be conducted in circumstances where subjects do not know they are being observed, or otherwise cannot give their free and informed consent.	Not consistent	None Low	4.89 4.69	1.85 1.61	High	3.64	2.06	.040 .013
28. Anonymity is the best protection of the confidentiality of personal information and records.	Consistent	High	6.13	1.04	Low	5.46	1.44	.021

Table 5
Use of Categorical Terms in Questionnaire Items (from Table 4)

<i>Item #</i>	<i>Categorical term(s)</i>
9	Never
20	Must
21	Must
22	Must, always
25	Must

A general observation about the four levels of research experience (none, low, moderate, and high) was that the responses of all groups were skewed toward agreement on the 7-point scale. The totals in Table 3 show this pattern; all levels of research experience were within the *tend to agree* range for all items, whether consistent or not consistent with the TCPS.

There were differences on specific items, as shown in Table 4 (the Appendix contains the actual wording found in the TCPS for those items not consistent with the Policy; items consistent with the TCPS are in boldface type in the Appendix).

As shown above, the mean ratings of the high-experience group differed significantly from the none/no- and the low-experience group on six items. In all cases the high-experience group showed less agreement with those items not consistent with the TCPS, and more agreement with the consistent item (28), than did the less experienced. (The *t*-test is a commonly used statistic in survey research employing Likert-type scales [Santos & Clegg, 1999]. It is also less sensitive to departures from normality such as those observed here including varying sample sizes and differences in variances [Norusis, 1984].)

Five of the six not-consistent items in Table 4 contained the emphatic and categorical terms *must*, *never*, and *always*, as shown in Table 5. Because of the inflexibility inherent in these terms (and typically not found in the TCPS), agreement implies less willingness to consider context in making judgments and greater willingness to impose restrictions on researchers.

Based on the above data, it appeared that self-reported research experience affected agreement with the principles presented: although the instances where significant differences were detected were relatively few (7 of 31 items; 23%), those respondents with more research experience were consistently more likely to express greater agreement with ethics principles consistent with the TCPS than those with less experience; those with less research experience expressed more agreement with items not consistent with the TCPS and more agreement with items not consistent with the Policy containing unconditional language.

Table 6
Invited Researchers Compared With Others, Items Consistent With the TCPS

<i>Item</i>	<i>Grp</i>	<i>Others (n=127)</i>		<i>Invited researchers (n=25)</i>		<i>t (sig.)</i>
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
2. Ethics review should incorporate a reasonable flexibility in implementing common principles (p. i.2).	Mod.	5.44	1.24	6.04	1.02	.028
	High	5.09	1.22			.038
6. Treating subjects as a means (mere objects or things) fails to respect their intrinsic human dignity and thus impoverishes all humanity (p. i.5).	High	6.09	1.04	4.36	2.12	.015
13. In assessing a research proposal, the ethical review process should consider the nature of the research and the ethical norms and practices of the relevant research discipline (p. i.9).	Low	5.52	1.15	6.24	1.23	.017
	Mod.	5.51	1.20			.018
16. Research subjects do not have the right to veto a project (p. 1.2).	Low	3.38	1.69	4.57	2.29	.011
	Mod.	3.42	1.60			.015
	High	2.64	1.57			.008
18. The principle of proportionate review permits research which exposes human subjects to minimal risk or less to receive only minimal review (p. 1.11).	Low	4.04	1.17	5.32	1.80	.001
	Mod.	4.37	1.42			.050
19. Under some circumstances, the requirement for informed consent may be waived (p. 2.1).	Low	3.41	1.91	4.84	2.27	.008
	Mod.	3.50	1.91			.014
	High	3.09	2.02			.031

Views of Invited Researchers

The second study question concerned the degree to which the views of the invited researchers ($n=25$) agreed with those of the rest of the respondents who reported at least some research experience. In addressing this question, those who indicated they had *no* research experience ($n=21$) were removed from the analysis, making this an examination of researchers' views only (though, as noted above, without information about the actual nature of that experience).

Tables 6 and 7 show statistically significant differences for items consistent and not consistent respectively with the Policy.

Table 7
Invited Researchers Compared With Others, Items Not Consistent With the TCPS

<i>Item</i>	<i>Grp</i>	<i>Others (n=127)</i>		<i>Invited researchers (n=25)</i>		<i>T (sig.)</i>
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
1. Canada's <i>Tri-Council Policy Statement</i> (TCPS) may be regarded by researchers as a source of definitive answers to contentious ethical questions they may face in their research.	Mod.	4.54	1.24	3.52	1.69	.006
	High	5.11	0.93			.014
9. In ethical research, human subjects are never subjected to risks of harm.	Low	4.98	1.76	3.76	2.40	.010
	Mod.	4.80	1.73			.031
12. The ethical review process has as one of its aims the purpose of blocking research which does not include collaboration with the research subjects.	Low	4.77	1.66	3.43	2.14	.004
	Mod.	5.23	1.58			.000
	High	5.36	1.36			.011
20. Written consent to participate must be obtained, for research to be fully ethical.	Low	5.26	1.48	3.88	2.47	.002
	Mod.	4.85	1.72			.046
	High	5.64	1.36			.035
21. Corporations must approve of the participation of their employees in research conducted by outsiders involving the corporation.	Low	4.97	1.84	3.40	2.18	.003
	Mod.	4.81	1.68			.002
25. Research must not be conducted in circumstances where subjects do not know they are being observed, or otherwise cannot give their free and informed consent.	Low	4.69	1.61	3.40	2.00	.002
	Mod.	4.72	1.77			.007

Tables 6 and 7 extend the pattern seen in Table 4: invited researchers differed from the others on 12 of 31 items (39%); on these 12 items of difference, the invited group tended to agree more with items consistent with the TCPS and less with those inconsistent with the Policy; further, the disagreement tended to be greater among those who had less research experience (the invited researchers disagreed 9 times with the low-experience group, 11 times with those with moderate experience, and 7 times with those who rated their research experience high). This pattern, as a function of research experience and in relation to total mean and median agreement levels for all consistent and not consistent items, is shown in Table 8 (higher scores indicate higher agreement).

Table 8
Invited Researchers' Views Compared With Others', Overall Agreement With Consistent and Not Consistent Survey Items

Consistency with the TCPS	Others (n=127)			Invited researchers (n=25)			t (sig.)
	Mean	SD	Median	Mean	SD	Median	
Consistent (18 items)	4.81	.575	4.83	5.34	.694	5.50	.019
Not consistent (13 items)	5.10	.815	5.23	4.32	.988	4.23	.006

Comments From the Free-Response Portion of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire invited all respondents to provide "additional comments." Thirty-three of 172 respondents (19%) commented, consisting of 10 of the 25 invited researchers (40%) and 23 of the 147 others (16%). Comments appeared to fall into five broad categories.

- *Greater awareness*: participation increased the participant's awareness of the issue of ethics in human subjects research.
- *Interpretation*: comments on problems interpreting the questionnaire.
- *Lack of background*: the participant felt poorly prepared to address the questionnaire due to lack of ethics or research background.
- *Elaboration*: provided further elaboration on a questionnaire response; suggestions about the questionnaire; critique of the instrument or methodology.
- *Anecdotes*: personal examples or experiences related to ethics review.

Table 9 summarizes the categories of the responses for both groups.

The *greater awareness* and *lack of background* comments are relevant to the first study question (degree of familiarity with the TCPS). As shown in Table 9, no comments of these two types were made by the invited researchers, although from several remarks it was evident that ethics issues were often not familiar to the *other* group. Examples of these two types include:

Table 9
Categories and Numbers of Free-Response Comments

Group	Greater awareness	Interpretation	Lack of background	Elaboration	Ethics anecdotes	Total
Invited (n=25)	0	2	0	9	2	13
Other (n=147)	3	3	8	10	1	25
Total (n=172)	3	5	8	19	3	38

- Interesting questions: You've sparked my interest in this topic (Awareness).
- After completing this questionnaire I realize I know even less about the issues of ethical review than I thought I knew (Awareness).
- Because I am relatively new to formal research I have had to limit my passion with regard to most of the statements. This is because I do not have enough experience to think through all of the possible ramifications of some of the statements. In other words, I am not familiar with how badly research may be abused (Lack of background).

Comments containing *elaboration* and *interpretation* (or both) showed the kinds of difficulties the survey (and in some cases the instrument itself) presented. The more experienced group of invited researchers posted proportionately more of both of these types of comments, and were more detailed in their observations.

- In some research studies, it may be necessary to withhold the details of the study from the subjects to prevent contaminating the study. In this case proper debriefing must be conducted after the study (Elaboration).
- Some of my responses are extreme, both in favor of subjects' ethical treatment, and in favor of keeping certain information from them if it might impair the research. Too much information can be harmful to human subjects, even when the information is overtly in their interests, and not prejudicial. Other responses are more intermediate, when the question raises points that may generate opposing ethical views (Elaboration).
- Some of the answers have to fall in the *it depends* category, because the capacity of the potential research participants and the power (actual or perceived) that the researcher has are so important in achieving ethical research. For example, if a video of behavior at red lights is being used for safety research, I don't think it is reasonable to try to get the informed consent of every blob on the video who stops for the red light or jaywalks.
- One problem that is particularly important for distance educators is the issue of the on-line survey and multi-site research. I conducted research on adult distance students with 2 other researchers from 2 other universities. We wanted to post the survey on a web-site, making it TOTALLY anonymous. We had to get permission from three different REBs. Each wanted to have different changes, so we took MONTHS to-ing and fro-ing to get an on line survey and information home page that all would agree to.

- When participants are not vulnerable, the risks are minimal and consent is informed, some REBs spend a great deal of time on trivia and grammar, not on protecting the vulnerable. My concern is the volume of work they create for themselves if they do not have an expedited review process. (For example, I've had trouble getting permission to contact graduates over whom no one has any control). They may miss ethically questionable projects in the volume of reading required (Interpretation; Anecdote).
- When working with minimally literate populations, written consent is not possible. When working with other cultures, the whole notion of "informed consent" needs to be re-examined and probably re-shaped (Elaboration).

As shown in some comments, some respondents found items difficult to rate (*it depends*) because of the possibility of more than one defensible response: "the question raises points that may generate opposing ethical views." Also, the problems outlined in free responses offer insights into important emerging areas of concern for researchers: providing more guidance to cross-cultural researchers and assuring that collaborative proposals are not penalized by the requirement for multiple institutional reviews.

Summary of Findings

The survey questionnaire used in this study was constructed so that items not consistent with the TCPS were more restrictive, imposing limitations not actually required by the TCPS. The general agreement with these items by the respondents, therefore, amounted to the imposition of more restrictions on researchers than the Policy itself demands. Those agreeing with these nonauthentic principles were in effect "more royalist than the king," in comparison with the TCPS's actual requirements.

The results also suggested that a restrictive view of ethics could not be attributed to study or reflection on the issues, as most participants admitted little familiarity with the TCPS or with ethics (overall, 82% rated their familiarity with the Policy low or none, and 74% rated their ethics experience low or none). On the free-response portion of the questionnaire, one-third of the comments either acknowledged the respondent's lack of background or stated that the respondent's awareness of the issues had been sharpened by participation in the study. These results suggest that the Policy's goal of serving as an educational resource had apparently not yet been achieved for many respondents.

Research experience was the criterion that most distinguished respondents: greater self-reported research experience was associated with several factors, including academic credentials (holders of graduate degrees were more likely to report high levels of research experience) and

experience with ethics, REBs, and the TCPS (higher levels of researcher experience accompanied higher self-reported levels of ethics and REB experience, and greater self-assessed familiarity with the Policy, whereas low research experience was accompanied by less or no experience in these areas). Respondents with high self-reported research experience (6 or 7 on the 7-point scale) differed from the rest of the sample on seven specific survey items (of 31; 23%): they were more likely to agree, or to agree more, with items consistent with the TCPS and to agree less on, or to be neutral toward, items not consistent with the Policy.

The invited researchers' views were in the same vein as those with high self-reported research experience, but more marked: on 12 of 31 items (39%), the invited researchers were more likely to agree, or to agree more strongly, with items consistent with the TCPS, whereas they more often disagreed or were neutral on items not consistent with the Policy. Overall, the ratings of the invited researchers on consistent items were higher (more in agreement), whereas they were lower on not-consistent items. In the free-response section, the invited researchers as a group were more likely to comment, and their comments more often referred to direct personal experience with specific issues of ethics or of the review process, whereas the less- or inexperienced more often merely commented on their lack of background on these issues.

Discussion and Conclusions

These findings relate to the composition of REBs and may explain some of the problems REBs have encountered in their work with researchers. The findings indicate that the group with the best understanding of the TCPS were the invited researchers, especially those with TCPS familiarity and REB experience. Similarly, by virtue of their backgrounds, these individuals may be regarded as representatives of distance education's present and evolving "ethical norms and practices" (p. i.9). However, the TCPS legislates that REBs must comprise a minimum of five members: "at least two [with] broad expertise in the methods of the areas of research that are covered by the REB"; "one member ... knowledgeable in ethics"; "one member ... knowledgeable in the relevant law" (suggested, but not required, for nonbiomedical research); and "at least one member who has no affiliation with the institution, but is recruited from the community served by the institution" (p. 1.3). The objective is "to ensure the expertise, multidisciplinary and independence essential to competent research ethics review by REBs" (p. i.3). By the above criteria, a five-member REB might be constituted with as many community members as experienced researchers. The REB will also have an ethics expert, intended "to alert the REB to potential ethics issues and options." Neither the community representatives nor the ethics expert are required to have any relevant research

experience or any specific knowledge of the ethical norms and practices of the disciplines served. Thus the Policy's intentions notwithstanding, REBs may not actually possess "both the training and the expertise to make sound judgments on the ethics of research proposals involving human subjects" (p. 1.3), when they review proposals from fields such as distance education. (Pertinent to the requirement for professional "ethics expertise" is Small's, 2001, warning: "One idea should, I think, be ruled out at the start: any notion that a training in philosophy brings with it some special authority where ethical judgments are concerned" [p. 387].)

Further, although the TCPS states, "members of the REB ... should contain a majority of those whose main responsibilities are in research or teaching" (p. 1.3), the Policy does not address how this is to be assured, nor does it insist that the "research or teaching" backgrounds of REB members be relevant to the research under review. The TCPS specifically warns against "the imposing [of] one disciplinary perspective on others" (p. i.2), and we describe above examples of the chagrin of researchers in the face of "alien" standards (Owen et al., 2001). Our results suggest, however, that unless provision is made to secure and give prominence to the judgment of experienced disciplinary researchers, the review process could fail to represent the appropriate ethical norms and practices as directed by the Policy.

Training is another issue for REBs, especially for members with less experience in research or ethics, as a way of avoiding unnecessary conflicts with researchers. The TCPS presently does not mandate training of any kind for REB members, apparently assuming that boards will be self-sufficient on appointment: "The majority of members of an REB should have both the training and the expertise to make sound judgments on the ethics of research proposals involving human subjects" (p. 1.3). Without the provision for training, however, the possibility of misjudgments due to lack of appropriate background cannot be discounted. Some of the anecdotes shared by the respondents in this study and found in the literature reviewed suggest that ongoing REB training might help avoid some of the issues that have arisen.

This study focused on the views of researchers and consumers of research in distance education. It did not address the views of REB members or of those responsible for the development of the TCPS and its contents (Interagency Advisory Panel, 2002). Research involving these bodies, a wider sampling of social science researchers, and those with cross-disciplinary backgrounds might produce more information on the congruence between the thinking of researchers, REB members, the framers of Canada's ethics policies, and the Policy itself.

Also timely would be some review of the workings of REBs as they are now constituted, to identify and share with the social sciences and

humanities research communities any issues that have been identified to date. REBs have existed long enough to have a record capable of evaluation. In the spirit of openness and consultation, managers of the ethics review process at the national level should share with researchers whatever data they have gathered, or develop data if none exist, on the present system. Of special concern would be any evidence of inconsistency among REBs. The TCPS aspires to be a national, cross-disciplinary guide; lack of consistency in the application of core principles, which our findings warn might occur if the process is placed in inexperienced or unknowledgeable hands, could suggest excessive subjectivity, even caprice, in a vital part of the research process, potentially placing an unnecessary constraint on competent researchers and ethical research.

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Appendix Ethics Survey

Introduction and instructions:

The purpose of this study is to assess the agreement of distance education researchers and practitioners (you and others participating in this survey) with various ethical positions. In the questionnaire below, some of the statements are based on principles found in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS)*, Canada's official position on ethics in research, and some are not based on the TCPS.

You are asked to provide some information about yourself and your research background (Section A), and then to rate each of the statements on a 7-point scale (Section B). Leave blank any item you cannot or do not wish to rate. If at any time you decide not to complete or submit the form, you may simply destroy or delete it and no questions will be asked (you will not be contacted again).

In any reports to be produced based on this data, you will be completely anonymous, and your personal information will be kept completely secure and confidential throughout the study.

A. Personal information: Please provide the information requested below.

- A. Gender: _____
- B. Describe your research experience (1 = none; 7 = very extensive): _____
- C. Describe your background in ethics (1 = none; 7 = very extensive): _____
- D. Describe your familiarity with Canada's official policy of ethics in research, the *Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS)* (1 = none; 7 = very extensive): _____
- E. Have you ever been a member of any body or position empowered to pass judgment on the ethical appropriateness of research, such as a Research Ethics Board (REB)? _____ (y/n)

Summary of Questionnaire Results (Scale: 1 = disagree completely, 7 = agree completely)

B. Questionnaire Items (Bold items consistent with TCPS. Actual wording from the TCPS provided in italics for inconsistent items. All page references to the TCPS, 2003.)	No research experience (n = 20)		Low research experience (n = 61)		Moderate research experience (n = 65)		High research experience (n = 25)		Total (n = 172)		Overall Rank
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
<i>Goals of the TCPS</i>											
1. Canada's <i>Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS)</i> may be regarded by researchers as a source of definitive answers to contentious ethical questions they may face in their research. <i>(The Policy does not offer definitive answers to [contentious] ethical questions (p. i.3).)</i>	5.00	1.09	4.22	1.33	4.34	1.40	4.33	1.56	4.37	1.37	25
2. Ethics review should incorporate a reasonable flexibility in implementing common principles (p. i.2).	5.50	1.40	5.59	1.13	5.51	1.25	5.72	1.14	5.57	1.20	8
3. The contexts of specialized research disciplines may have needs which ethical review should respect (p. i.2).	5.22	1.93	5.17	1.55	5.36	1.58	5.33	1.69	5.27	1.61	13
4. One of the purposes of a national policy on research ethics is to serve as an educational resource (p. i.2).	5.26	1.66	5.73	1.08	5.57	1.46	5.54	2.06	5.60	1.46	7
<i>Context of an ethics framework</i>											
5. Ethically, the quest to advance knowledge should always benefit research subjects. <i>(The quest to advance knowledge sometimes benefits research subjects (p. i.4).)</i>	4.25	1.74	4.33	1.60	4.52	1.66	4.20	2.22	4.38	1.73	24

6. Treating subjects as a means (mere objects or things) fails to respect their intrinsic human dignity and thus impoverishes all humanity (p. i.5).	5.26	1.63	4.63	1.85	5.22	1.82	4.84	2.15	4.98	1.87	15
7. Individuals are generally presumed to have the capacity and right to make free and informed decisions (p. i.5).	6.05	1.13	5.33	1.49	5.80	1.24	5.88	1.36	5.67	1.36	2
8. Research in some areas may ethically result in the harming of the reputations of organizations or individuals in public life.	6.05	1.72	6.07	1.54	5.78	1.68	5.46	1.98	5.88	1.68	1
9. In ethical research, human subjects are never subjected to risks of harm. <i>{Research subjects must not be subjected to unnecessary risks of harm... (p. i.6).}</i>	5.15	1.73	4.98	1.76	4.70	1.86	3.84	2.32	4.72	1.91	18
10. Research may not be ethically commenced until the magnitude and kind of benefits or harms that attend it are known and assessed. <i>{Because research involves advancing frontiers of knowledge, its undertaking often involves uncertainty about the precise magnitude and kind of benefits or harms that attend proposed research (p. i.6).}</i>	5.90	1.02	5.36	1.55	5.41	1.40	5.64	1.71	5.48	1.47	9
11. Some research may be deliberately and legitimately opposed to the interests of the research subjects (p. i.7).	3.67	1.82	4.48	1.49	4.13	1.88	4.58	2.21	4.27	1.79	27

12. The ethical review process has as one of its aims the purpose of blocking research which does not include collaboration with the research subjects. <i>{[Research in the social sciences and humanities that may be critical of public personalities or organizations] should not be blocked ... because it may not involve collaboration with the research subjects (p. i.7).}</i>	5.80	1.47	4.77	1.66	4.93	1.81	4.46	2.00	4.91	1.77	17
13. In assessing a research proposal, the ethical review process should consider the nature of the research and the ethical norms and practices of the relevant research discipline (p. i.9).	5.90	1.07	5.52	1.15	5.66	1.20	5.96	1.24	5.68	1.17	2
14. Ethical principles used to judge research proposals admit flexibility and exceptions (p. i.9).	5.42	1.26	4.90	1.43	5.21	1.29	5.36	1.47	5.14	1.37	14
15. Merely on the grounds of harms/benefits analysis, research on public figures should not be blocked (p. i.9). <i>Section 1: Ethics review</i>	3.74	1.37	4.65	1.53	4.65	1.33	4.75	1.87	4.56	1.51	21
16. Research subjects do not have the right to veto a project (p. 1.2).	2.63	1.50	3.38	1.69	3.60	1.72	3.71	2.31	3.42	1.79	31

17. Above the threshold of minimal risk, research should be blocked, or redesigned to minimize any avoidable risks. <i>(Above the threshold of minimal risk, the research warrants a higher degree of scrutiny and greater provision for the protection of the interests of prospective subjects (p. 1.5).)</i>	5.75	1.37	5.49	1.21	5.32	1.35	4.82	2.11	5.37	1.44	11
18. The principle of proportionate review permits research which exposes human subjects to minimal risk or less to receive only minimal review (p. 1.11).	4.38	1.03	4.04	1.17	4.64	1.46	4.57	1.72	4.38	1.37	25
<i>Section 2: Free and informed consent</i>											
19. Under some circumstances, the requirement for informed consent may be waived (p. 2.1).	3.21	2.10	3.41	1.91	3.68	2.00	4.20	2.36	3.61	2.04	30
20. Written consent to participate must be obtained, for research to be fully ethical. <i>(For most people in our society, a signed statement is the normal evidence of consent. However, for some groups or individuals, a verbal agreement ... is evidence of trust...(p. 2.2).)</i>	5.45	1.76	5.26	1.48	4.88	1.82	4.16	2.32	4.98	1.81	16

<p>21. Corporations must approve of the participation of their employees in research conducted by outsiders involving the corporation. <i>{Private corporations and organizations have the right ... to refuse to cooperate with researchers or to deny them access to their private records ... and may have rules governing the conduct of their employees. However, such organizations need not be approached for consent ... nor should institutions be given the right to veto research projects (p. 2.2).}</i> <i>[Where a corporation, government or political party may wish to prevent research] individuals over whom the organization has some authority may be willing to participate. ... REBs should not prevent such research, but should ensure that potential subjects are fully informed of the view of the organization's authorities and the possible consequences ... (p. 2.4).]</i></p>	4.84	2.17	4.97	1.84	4.66	1.77	3.40	2.06	4.60	1.94	20
<p>22. Subjects must always be given full information about the research, as part of the provision for obtaining informed consent. <i>{When the needs for the research justify limited and/or temporary exemption to the general requirements for full disclosure} subjects may be given only partial information or may be temporarily led to believe that the research has some other purpose.... (pp. 2.2-2.3).}</i></p>	5.95	1.54	5.33	1.64	5.49	1.58	4.40	1.92	5.33	1.69	12

23. Misleading subjects or withholding full disclosure of the purposes of research is ethically permissible if the purpose is to prevent colouring of subjects' responses (p. 2.3).	3.58	1.92	4.49	1.89	4.15	1.73	4.58	1.91	4.27	1.84	28
24. Whenever a subject demands removal of his or her data from a study, such a request must be respected. <i>{{Giving a subject the option of removing his or her data from the project} should be used only when the elimination of the subject's data will not compromise the validity of the research design, and hence diminish the ethical value of participation by other subjects (p. 2.3.)}</i>	6.00	1.16	5.49	1.59	5.77	1.54	5.33	1.90	5.63	1.58	5
25. Research must not be conducted in circumstances where subjects do not know they are being observed, or otherwise cannot give their free and informed consent. <i>{{Because subjects' knowledge of the research can influence their behaviour} naturalistic observation generally implies that the subjects do not know that they are being observed, and hence can not have given their free and informed consent (p. 2.5).}</i>	4.89	1.85	4.69	1.61	4.58	1.81	3.64	2.06	4.52	1.81	22

<p>26. Ethics review boards must exercise a protective role over all potential research subjects. <i>{(Especially in cross-cultural situations) REBs should not assume an unnecessarily protective role which suggests that those who do not share the culture of the researchers ... are incapable of making rational decisions in their own interest (p. 2.6).}</i></p>	6.00	0.86	5.24	1.42	5.45	1.30	5.23	1.69	5.41	1.37	10
<p>Section 3: Privacy and confidentiality 27. Access to personal information always requires informed consent of the subjects to whom the data pertains. <i>{The values underlying the respect and protection of privacy and confidentiality are not absolute.... The public interest thus may justify allowing researchers access to personal information (p. 3.1).}</i></p>	6.05	1.23	5.54	1.49	5.61	1.73	5.44	1.96	5.61	1.63	6
<p>28. Anonymity is the best protection of the confidentiality of personal information and records (p. 3.2).</p>	5.55	1.64	5.46	1.44	5.68	1.50	6.13	1.04	5.65	1.45	4
<p>29. Secondary uses of data are of concern only when the data can be linked to individuals (p. 3.4).</p>	4.55	2.04	4.36	1.85	4.74	1.85	4.28	2.15	4.51	1.91	22
<p>30. If it is impossible to identify individuals whose records exist within a database, then researchers should be allowed to access it (p. 3.5).</p>	4.65	1.87	4.61	1.51	4.58	1.76	4.68	1.91	4.61	1.70	19

31. If identifying information is not involved, REB approval need not be sought for secondary use of data (p. 3.5).	4.50	1.87	3.93	1.79	3.78	2.01	3.83	2.17	3.93	1.95	29
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