

# The Ethics of Incorporating Testimonials

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# Overview

- Review how scholars have defined ethics
- Discuss what constitutes ethics and ethical research
- Review writing strategies that can be used to incorporate participant testimonials in research

# Defining Ethics and Ethical Inquiry

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- Ethics is often synonymous with morals or values
- To label something unethical is to imply it is morally-unsound
- However, ethics can also be defined procedurally

# Defining Ethics and Ethical Inquiry

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- **Karen Schrier: contemporary education scholar**
- **Research focuses using participatory- and game-based learning activities to cultivate ethical reasoning skills**
- **Schrier builds upon the work of others in contemporary ethics scholarship**

# Defining Ethics and Ethical Inquiry

- Like many other contemporary scholars, Schrier makes a distinction between morals and ethics



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# Defining Ethics and Ethical Inquiry

- Morals defined as collective value systems
- Ethics "refer[s] to the active, cognitive, and reflective processes related to applying moral principles to specific contexts or choices" ("Designing Games for Moral Learning and Knowledge-Building" p. 309)
- Ethics denotes how individuals arrive at decisions they consider “good” when faced with difficult or problematic situations

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- This revised notion of ethics helps us re-envision the goals of ethical inquiry
- Ethical inquiry  $\neq$  judging actions based on ideal notions of “right” or “wrong”
- Ethical inquiry = understanding how an individual’s logic is shaped by personal experiences and surrounding circumstances

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- Allows us to understand how circumstances and lived experiences shape an individual's decision-making processes
- Can help us better identify productive avenues for change and progress



# Defining Ethics and Ethical Inquiry

- **Important clarification: this revised notion of ethics does not condone moral relativism**
- **Ethical inquiry is a vehicle that we can use to initiate systemic change for the sake of progress and inclusivity**

# Incorporating Testimonials Ethically

- How does this pertain to the incorporation of participant testimonials in research?

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- To treat testimonials ethically is to highlight the logic underlying another person's experiences
- View testimonials as critical narrations of another person's thought processes
- Then, use these narrations as an opportunity to build upon the significance or relevance of your research

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- We want to avoid using testimonials to “prove” that our hypothesis is “correct”
- Using testimonials to prove our hypothesis runs the risk of instrumentalizing participants
- Instrumentalizing = using testimonials as a mere tool to achieve a goal (as opposed to a critical narration of a lived human experience)

# Incorporating Testimonials Ethically

- Review general writing strategies that can help you effectively and ethically incorporate testimonials
- These strategies can help you produce more effective scholarship while also handling testimonials in an ethical manner

# Incorporating Testimonials Ethically

- Explain how testimonials might help you expand or revise your key terms



# Incorporating Testimonials Ethically

- Explain how testimonials might help you expand or revise your key terms
- Do testimonials show more nuanced definitions of your key terms?
- Do testimonials show potential consequences or impact of your key terms?
- Do testimonials show how key terms necessarily adapt to real-world circumstances?

# Incorporating Testimonials Ethically

- Explain how testimonials highlight the broader circumstances surrounding your research

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- Explain how testimonials highlight the broader circumstances surrounding your research
- Do responses show the impact of outside influences?
- Do responses show the priorities that participants bring with them?
- Do responses show the difficulty of isolating your research from external variables?

# Incorporating Testimonials Ethically

- Explain how testimonials might introduce a variable you didn't originally anticipate

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- Explain how testimonials might introduce a variable you didn't originally anticipate
- Do testimonials show an idea or issue that you didn't account for while designing questions?
- Do testimonials show an unexpected cause behind a problem you want to solve?
- Do testimonials show unexpected consequences of important issues or trends?

# Paying Attention to Sequence

- Regardless of how you analyze testimonials, you should consider sequencing when discussing testimonials

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- If you have multiple responses from the same participant, you can group together these responses

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- If you have multiple responses from the same participant, you can group together these responses
- Transition between these responses by explaining the questions being asked
- Also pay attention to how the participant builds upon prior responses



# Paying Attention to Sequence

- If you have multiple responses that revolve around the same theme, you can group together these responses

# Paying Attention to Sequence

- Transition between these responses by explaining how different participants are resonating with the same ideas
- Narrate what we gain when viewing these responses in aggregate (i.e., how do these responses help us outline and identify an important idea)

# Conclusion

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- Yes, we are using testimonials to explore and unpack our thesis
- However, we cannot over-simplify participant testimonials
- Need to be honest in how testimonials necessarily grow or evolve our initial claims

# Conclusion

- Please consult the ORS Lab website for webinars and worksheets that discuss different writing strategies
- Resources dedicated to different research methods (qualitative, quantitative, and AI-assisted)
- Consultants available to discuss best practices for different research methodologies