

So You Want to Run a Sexuality Research Lab: Ethical Issues and Recommendations

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Sexuality research engages with multiple disciplines and methodologies and sexuality researchers can receive a wide range of training. Though a common job duty for academics, researchers rarely receive formal training in how to establish and run a lab to conduct their research. In this paper, I walk through a variety of lab management tasks, such as selecting personnel, launching a program of research, conducting studies, and disseminating findings, and discuss ethical dilemmas that might arise in each of those in the context of sexuality research, such as befriending research assistants, conducting observational field research, and presenting negative results. I also provide specific recommendations for academics looking to establish a lab focused on gender and sexuality topics.

Keywords: *ethics, ethical dilemmas, field studies, research lab management, sexuality research*

Introduction

In addition to the other duties of teaching and service, professors and lecturers frequently work with graduate and undergraduate students on research projects, which can necessitate the management of a research lab. While the stereotype of a “research lab” includes researchers in white lab coats tinkering with chemicals and equipment, labs range in space and personnel depending on institution, funding, and research program. Running any kind of lab requires a different set of skills than teaching or conducting independent research and formal training for these skills is often lacking across academia. In this paper, I discuss some of the practical issues of research lab management in the unique context conducting sexuality research; I explore potential ethical dilemmas sexuality researchers might encounter in the course of running their lab; and I offer recommendations for best practices.

Positionality and Experience

I am a white, middle-class, atheist, queer, nonbinary person based in and educated in the United States. I have been a sexuality and gender researcher for 15 years. My training is in experimental social psychology as well as feminist theory and methodology. I have managed two sexuality research labs for seven years in total, during which time I also managed three multi-method field studies that included behavioral observations, physiological and cognitive data collection, and self-report questionnaires. I

have supervised 32 undergraduate research assistants on a variety of research tasks, including literature searching, data collection and analysis, manuscript writing, and conference presentations. Throughout these experiences, I have encountered different ethical dilemmas, which I will discuss in greater detail below.

Codes of Ethics as a Starting Point

Researchers may choose to focus on topics related to gender and sexuality across several disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, social work, medicine, criminology, and public health (though this is certainly not an exhaustive list). As members of their respective professional and academic associations, researchers, or principal investigators (PIs) are likely to be bound by different codes of ethics. However, there is considerable overlap in these codes, particularly as they relate to treatment of research and research participants. Below I discuss relevant common themes across these multiple codes of ethics, particularly as they relate to managing a sexuality research lab.

Ethical Principles and Standards

After reviewing the codes of ethics for six U.S.-based professional associations (American Psychological Association [APA], American Sociological Association [ASA], National Association for Social Work [NASW], American Medical Association [AMA], American Society of Criminology [ASC], and American Public Health Association [APHA]), I found five major principles that appeared in some form across them: (1) equity and justice; (2) privacy; (3) respect; (4) integrity; and (5) responsibility. These principles

relate not only to the processes of conducting and disseminating research but also can be used as guidelines for setting up and managing a research lab. For example, equity and justice apply to hiring research assistants, compensating them, and treating them well. Responsibility can pertain to a PI's obligation to provide mentorship for colleagues and students. In Table 1, I connect these five principles across each of the codes of ethics and provide practical applications for them in the context of managing a sexuality research lab.

Practical Issues and Ethical Dilemmas

With little formal training in managing a research lab, academics are nonetheless often expected to hit the ground running when they obtain a position at a college or university. Below I consider several aspects of starting and managing a research lab in a higher education setting, incorporating the ethical guidelines discussed above as a way to navigate ethical dilemmas that can arise.

Issue No. 1: Setting Up the Lab

Particularly at research-intensive institutions, academics are expected to set up a lab when they accept a tenure-track position. Your offer might come with start-up funds to get the lab underway, or you may need to seek external funding via government or private grants. As a new PI setting up your lab, determining whether to begin as a sexuality lab is an early decision to make. I cover this topic in more depth in the next section, but in doing sexuality research, there are two major routes to take, with differing levels of risk. Waiting until you have established a non-sex-related line of research can be a better course of action for PIs right out of graduate school, particularly if there is concern over whether your institution would support you or whether you could secure external funding for your research. External funding is increasingly more competitive in the current economic and political climate, and funders and agencies may be less willing to award money to projects exploring sexuality or topics that could be considered controversial by the public.

In addition to figuring out how the lab will cover research equipment and expenses, PIs might be encouraged or interested in hiring undergraduate and/or graduate research assistants. These student researchers can be trained (for the undergraduate level) or assigned to tasks that help the lab run smoothly, such as running participants through lab studies, searching for research articles for a manuscript in progress, double-checking analyses, as well as presenting lab research at conferences. Because of the unique workplace norms of academia – with its greater latitude to accommodate students' needs – managing a lab of students brings with it some unique complications. Ongoing discussions of power dynamics in research labs across academia (Jacy & Hegarty, 2019; Sutton, Culatta, Boyle, & Turner, 2021; Young & Wiley, 2021) and high-profile cases of researchers sexually harassing and victimizing their students (Anderson, 2020; Hartocollis, 2018; Krantz, 2022) point to a larger issue that PIs need to be mindful of. Particularly in a lab where the subject matter can lend itself to more intimacy, it's critical that PIs establish strong boundaries for both their undergraduate and graduate students.

Ethical Dilemma: Is It Unethical to Be Friends with Your Research Assistants?

The academic culture of conference socials, happy hours, and working late nights in the lab can contribute to fuzzy boundaries for relationships. In a greater social context where discussions about sex are taboo, it can be easy to bond with lab-mates around shared interest in a research topic. This can be intensified on research projects that include travel and/or field components, as the traditional norms of the workplace are disrupted. An added complication is that at institutions with graduate programs, undergraduate

research assistants frequently work closely with graduate research assistants who may have supervisory power over them.

All of these elements added together can lead to a variety of situations that range from awkward or uncomfortable to predatory. As the PI, it's imperative to set clear boundaries about expected behavior, whether in the lab or in the field. It should also be clear that while PIs may be friendly with their research assistants, they are not friends, in a way similar to an instructor/student relationship or any other supervisor/employee relationship.

Issue No. 2: Choosing a Topic to Study

The fundamental aspect of a sexuality lab is that the researchers are investigating questions related to sexuality. This can range from basic research, such as biological functions and brain imaging, to applied research, such as therapeutic efficacy or sexual violence interventions, to policy research, such as best practices for sexual education or STI prevention programming. As mentioned in the last section, researchers might start off their career exploring sexuality and gender topics or wait until their lab (and funding) is established before embarking on a sex-related program of research. Because of the potential costs to engaging in sexuality research, such as sparse funding, lack of institutional support, and a reasonable fear of public backlash, researchers should be mindful of the risks of conducting this research.

Some topics and some research questions have the potential to harm the population the research is investigating (e.g., see Tart-Zelvin & Xu, 2016 for a discussion of the shift toward gender equality in neuroimaging). An example of this is gender and sexual minority (GSM) research. In the context of a worsening anti-queer political climate and passage of legislation banning transgender individuals from sports, healthcare, and public space (Burns, 2021; Krishnakumar, 2021), it is important to explore the impact that individual and institutional homophobia and transphobia have on GSM individuals. However, studies that seek to pinpoint a biological cause of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identity can be harmful to GSM individuals, as significant findings can be used to support conversion therapy-style techniques to attempt to “change them back” to heterosexual and/or cisgender identities (see Turban, 2020). Researchers investigating GSM topics, particularly researchers who are not members of a GSM themselves, should be aware of the potential implications of their studies, and should endeavor to include members of the population they are investigating on their research team. Doing so will help researchers process the real-world consequences their work might have on the population under study. Regardless of how well-intentioned researchers are, it's critical to be aware of how the study and outcomes can impact participants and their community.

Ethical Dilemma: Is It Unethical to Study Sexual Victimization Experiences?

Since my undergraduate education, I have been interested in studying sexual violence, first from the perpetration side (as with my undergraduate independent study on pedophilia) then shifting to the victimization side, focusing on beliefs and attitudes that shape our perceptions of victims of sexual violence (Klement, Sagarin, & Skowronski, 2022; Bates, Klement, Kaye, & Pennington, 2019; Klement, Sagarin, & Skowronski, 2019; Klement, 2018; Klement, 2017). Studying sexual violence can be risky for participants: individuals who have engaged in sexual violence risk being identified and facing social or legal sanctions, while individuals who have experienced sexual victimization risk traumatic reactions to questions about their experiences. For PIs wanting to attend to the principles of respect and responsibility, there is some research indicating that even for participants with a history of sexual victimization, the benefits outweigh the costs. Yeater, Miller, Rinehart, and Nason (2012) conducted a study with college students to determine if they experienced more negative consequences from participating in studies concerning sexual violence compared to more harmless

Table 1
Concordance of multidisciplinary ethical principles in running a sexuality research lab

Ethical Principle	Organizational Standards	Practical Applications
Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMA (Justice) • APA (Justice) • APHA (Health Justice and Equity) • NASW (Social Justice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring research assistants regardless of skill level • Providing training and skill-building opportunities for all research assistants • Compensating research assistants on the same scale (i.e., ensuring pay equity)
Privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMA (Autonomy) • APA (Respect for People's Rights and Dignity) • APHA (Human Rights and Civil Liberties) • ASC (ASC Members Respect the Rights of Research Populations) • ASA (Professional Competence) • NASW (Competence) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining confidential personnel records • Not disclosing research assistants' and colleagues' marginalized identities
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMA (Autonomy) • APA (Respect for People's Rights and Dignity) • APHA (Human Rights and Civil Liberties) • ASC (ASC Members Respect the Rights of Research Populations) • ASA (Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity) • NASW (Dignity and Worth of the Person) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with research assistants to adjust duties or hours as needed • Accommodating students who may need a break from a specific project(s)
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APA (Integrity) • APHA (Professionalism and Trust) • ASC (ASC Members Strive to Maintain Objectivity and Integrity in the Conduct of Criminological Research) • ASA (Integrity) • NASW (Integrity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining transparency in research processes and procedures • Maintaining transparency around authorship responsibilities and opportunities
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APA (Fidelity and Responsibility) • APHA (Professionalism and Trust) • ASA (Professional and Scientific Responsibility, Social Responsibility) • NASW (Competence) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining appropriate socio-emotional boundaries with research assistants • Writing letters of recommendation for jobs or graduate school • Staying current on best practices for research design, methodology, and analysis

Note: AMA = American Medical Association; APA = American Psychological Association; APHA = American Public Health Association; ASC = American Society of Criminology; ASA = American Sociological Association; NASW = National Association for Social Work

measures, such as cognitive tests. Yeater et al. (2012) found that the group of participants who completed studies exploring sex and sexual violence reported greater positive affect and perceived more benefits and fewer costs to the research than did the other group of participants, and across both groups, participants reported regular life stressors as causing more distress than participating in either of the studies. Further, in a meta-analysis of 70 samples of participant reactions to trauma research, Jaffe and colleagues (2015) found that even if participants experienced emotional distress, this distress did not last long. The studies in Jaffe et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis do not speak to the risks of reporting whether one had committed sexual violence, but if the informed consent clearly explains that participants do not have answer every question, participants' right to privacy should be upheld.

However, the risks to participants are not the only ones to consider when conducting sexual victimization research. Because the research process is long, even conducting one study can mean at least months of reading related literature, talking about the research topic, analyzing and interpreting results, and writing a report. Researchers with emotional connections to their topics should consider strategies for self-care around their work and should be prepared to take breaks if necessary to maintain their health.

Issue No. 3: Conducting Research

Once the lab has been established and the topic selected, it is time to begin conducting the research. Depending on discipline, the methods and designs of sexuality studies will vary greatly. Public health researchers might rely on large-scale epidemiological cohort studies to explore STI risk factors, while medical researchers might utilize randomized control trials to investigate the effects of a new hormonal birth control. Aligned with the principles of integrity and responsibility, PIs should ensure that they have the proper training in methodology and analysis for a given research study.

Ethical Dilemma: Is It Unethical to Observe and Record Sexual Behavior?

Sexuality researchers have employed a variety of methods that can get quite invasive, from interviews and focus groups, to physiological gauges and brain imaging. Sometimes, though, the best way to answer questions about how individuals engage in specific sexual acts is to observe them in those acts. There are many major ethical issues to consider prior to conducting sexuality research that includes observing and/or recording individuals having sex. Below I contrast two field studies that featured behavioral observations as a major component of the project: Humphrey's (1975) tearoom trade study and the Dance of Souls study (Klement et al., 2017).

The Tearoom Trade

The case of Humphreys' (1975) tearoom trade research is widely discussed in psychology and sociology. Humphreys investigated men's experiences with casual sex partners for his doctoral dissertation. In particular, he observed men in public restrooms seeking and receiving anonymous sex from other men, without initially disclosing that he was a researcher (Lehmiller, 2012). He would offer to be a lookout for his participants against police officers, observe the men, then disclose his researcher status and ask the men questions about their motivations. Additionally, he followed some men to parking lots, noted their license plate numbers, and later visited their homes for interviews, disguised as a health service interviewer (Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

There are several ethical issues with how Humphreys conducted his research, but I will focus on the aspects that are relevant to fieldwork. First, Humphreys did not disclose his status as a researcher when he first approached potential participants. While this choice allowed him to observe criminal and taboo sexual behavior, the participants did not have informed consent, and did not have adequate information to be able to determine whether they would want to participate in the study. Second, Humphreys' actions violated

the participants' right to privacy (Sieber & Stanley, 1988): because they were unaware of being observed by a researcher, they were unable to decide what information or behavior they did not want to disclose. Finally, by copying down license plates for a later follow-up interview, Humphreys did not allow the participants determine how much of the study they wanted to participate in, or what parts from which they could withdraw.

When conducting field studies, it is important that individuals are fully informed about the expectations, risks, and benefits for participating prior to giving consent. Researchers engaging in fieldwork should also be aware of any inherent power dynamics with participants through culture, gender, ethnicity, or other identities (Sultana, 2007). By hiding his status from participants who were engaging in illegal sexual activity in a public restroom, and by tracking down individuals via license plate, Humphreys was not considering his position as a researcher. Further, he was putting individuals at risk for legal and social sanctions. Particularly when engaging in fieldwork for a sexuality study, the context of the sexual behavior must be taken into account; in this situation, Humphreys should have identified himself prior to engaging in any behavioral observation, even if it meant that he would collect fewer data, or that the data collection would take longer.

The Dance of Souls

The ethnographic investigation of the Dance of Souls provides a counter-example to how sexuality fieldwork can be conducted with the concerns of participants foregrounded. Members of the Science of BDSM Research Team (myself included) conducted a field study in Phoenix, Arizona at a BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism) conference (Klement et al., 2017). The field study was centered around an event called the Dance of Souls, a "160-person ritual involving temporary piercings with weights or hooks attached and dancing to music provided by drummers" (Klement et al., 2017 p. 453). Participants for the study were recruited throughout the weekend-long conference and the procedures for the study were explained. Participants could opt-in to any of the study's measures; all questions and samples were voluntary. The entire procedure comprised three temporal surveys (pre-Dance, during-Dance, and post-Dance), a cognitive test, and saliva samples collected during the Dance. Those who opted into any of the measures were able to choose when to complete them while they were available (e.g., participants could not complete a pre-Dance survey after the Dance). Following the BDSM conference, an email was sent to individuals who had signed up for the researchers' mailing list with a thank-you message. After the data were analyzed, the researchers returned to the conference the following year to present the findings.

There are several distinctions between Humphreys' (1975) study and the Dance of Souls study (Klement et al., 2017). First, the researchers were identifiable at all times during the conference. They staffed a table in a visible spot of the conference hotel and were available throughout the conference to answer questions about the study. Second, Klement et al. provided an extensive informed consent procedure. Due to the social and legal taboo nature of practicing BDSM, indication of consent was verbal; after reading the informed consent document, participants were asked to verbally consent prior to completing any measures. Further, individuals were able to begin participating in the study at any point, whether prior to or during the Dance. Third, participants were informed about the opt-in nature of the measures and thus the ease with which they could withdraw from any aspect of the study. Finally, no identifying information was collected from the participants. They chose codenames for themselves to identify their data across administrations; participants were advised that these codenames should not have any names or numbers that could be traced back to them. Separately, any conference attendees (whether or not they were study participants) were able to add their emails to a mailing list sheet; thus, there was no record of identifying information regarding who did or did not participate in the study.

Though these two studies are contrasted here, there are important differences of both temporal and sociocultural context. At the time of Humphreys' project, sexual behavior between same-gender partners was still criminalized; the risk to participants would have been high. This risk was potentially offset by the potential benefit of scientific knowledge, both in the sense of understanding how and why men were having sex in public toilets, but also with a goal of destigmatizing queer sex. While using an opt-in system of participation led to lower sample sizes for some measures than desired, Klement et al. (2017) felt the trade-off, where participants were able to participate or withdraw as they were comfortable, was worth it. This field study allowed the researchers to build a relationship with the conference attendees, and when the researchers returned to present their research the following year, they were well-received. This study led to a second field study at a later Dance of Souls ritual, which included more invasive procedures (Lee et al., 2016). Because the researchers had laid the groundwork of the relationship of trust within the conference community, they were able to develop more intensive research protocol, and answer more detailed questions.

Issue No. 4: Disseminating Research Findings

Once the data have been collected for a given project, the time has come to analyze them and prepare the results to be presented in some format (assuming the findings are statistically significant or otherwise viable). Particularly in a lab of both graduate and undergraduate students, there are several possibilities for how the data can be presented, including student-focused or campus conferences, (inter)national or regional conferences, and publication in a peer-reviewed journal. For research conducted with a specific community or population, a presentation might be arranged for an audience of participants or community stakeholders.

Under the principles of justice, respect, integrity, and responsibility, PIs should be transparent about authorship responsibilities related to any presentations or publications. Ideally, authorship credit and obligations would be determined prior to the beginning of a project, so that the PI, the research assistants and any colleagues are aware of what they need to contribute in advance. However, with the changing nature of the academic year, funding, and other surprises (like a global pandemic), the authorship order may be subject to change, with open discussion of everyone on it.

Sharing research findings may also happen online, via social media accounts or a lab website. Hosting presentation visuals and journal articles on a lab website can be a way around the paywalls common in academic publishing, which can increase the reach and accessibility of your lab's work. Similarly, by posting major research findings on social media, the lab can reach a wider audience, which can lead to further funding, conference presentations, and project collaborations. There are drawbacks, however, to having a large web presence as a sexuality researcher. Sex-positive, queer- or trans-centered, or otherwise progressive sexuality research can attract negative attention from conservative outlets and internet trolls which may open the possibility of receiving harassing messages and emails. This risk is higher for PIs belonging to marginalized groups. Thus, an open and exhaustive cost/benefit analysis may be necessary in deciding whether or not to have lab social media accounts. I address this further below in the recommendations.

Ethical Dilemma: Is It Unethical to Present Problematic Findings?

For PIs working with marginalized communities, there may be an underlying concern through the research process about what the results will say: will they confirm stereotypes and outdated beliefs? Could a study's findings harm the community the research is trying to help? In the discussion of Issue No. 2, I mentioned that consideration of a study's potential outcomes is necessary when working with specific populations, such as GSM, who have

historically been pathologized in psychology and medicine. This consideration must come at every step of the research process, yet what is to be done if the results of the study are unfavorable despite the researchers' engaging in reflexivity, having a mixed research group, and utilizing available participant protections?

Under the principles of integrity and responsibility, PIs have a duty to accurately report a study's findings. However, there are still strategies that researchers can use to put a study's results in the proper context. First, consider the analysis; is a deficit model or a strengths-based model being used? For example, say a study finds that one group of participants reports a greater number of sexual partners than another group. Are the results being presented as frequencies of sexual partners, or are they being compared? What is the need of comparison and what are the implications of making that comparison? Who is the anchor group? Historically, white participants, straight participants, cisgender participants, and middle-class participants have been used as anchor groups to compare against other marginalized participants. PIs can consider the need to compare groups at all and for marginalized groups, can consider what unique features this community can bring to scientific knowledge about the topic.

Recommendations for Ethically Running a Sexuality Lab

In the sections above, I have detailed issues that may arise during the course of establishing and running a lab that studies sexuality. In this section, I will provide concrete recommendations for running a sexuality lab centered on ethical practice and participant care.

Recommendation No. 1: Know Your Subject

Multiple professional codes of ethics include the standard of competence (ASA, 2018; NASW, 2021). Researchers should be knowledgeable about their area of study. This knowledge encompasses the entire research process, from the selection of the topic to the training of research assistants to the dissemination of the results. Section 2.01(b) in the APA's Code of Conduct specifically mentions that researchers should be aware of intersectional factors that may affect the research process (APA, 2017): sexuality researchers need to understand the historical and cultural context of their subject. For example, if working on a project related to HIV education and prevention, researchers should be aware of racial disparities in HIV diagnoses, particularly as Black individuals are less likely to have access to health care (Priest & Williams, 2018) and more likely to be stereotyped as hypersexual (Miller, 2019). Further, Black men who have sex with men may carry internalized stigma around their HIV diagnosis on top of their experiences with externalized and internalized homophobia (Overstreet et al., 2013), which also highlights the necessity of using intersectional theory as a framework (Bowleg, 2008; Hill Collins, 2019).

Recommendation No. 2: Locate Your Position

While more common in qualitative research, a sexuality lab using any research methodology would benefit from creating a positionality statement, whether for the lab, for individual researchers, or both. Positionality is the space that researchers occupy in their social categories (e.g., racial identity, gender identity) and in their academic privilege relative to participants (Gabbidon & Chenneville, 2021; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Particularly with research on the experiences of marginalized populations, creating a statement that acknowledges historical and contemporary privilege and context can create transparency and trust with participants (APA, 2017; ASA, 2018; NASW, 2021; Lake, Majic, & Maxwell, 2018). Discussing how researchers' social lens can impact the research process will also allow for richer interpretation of data, whether they are quantitative or qualitative.

Recommendation No. 3: Connect with a Subject Matter Expert When Studying a Population

As a different perspective to the competence standard, it is also important to make connections with a community whose behavior or attitudes are being investigated. If a researcher is interested in studying puppy play, or role-playing as a dog (Wignall & McCormack, 2017; Wignall, 2022), they should seek to connect with a member of the puppy play community. This is important for four reasons: (1) this member can act as a gatekeeper, granting the researcher access to community events, and vouching for them to other members; (2) this member can be a source to provide feedback for research questions, including what variables to assess and what measures to use; (3) this member can provide the researcher with the correct language to use, particularly if there are community dialects; and (4) this member can provide feedback for the researcher's interpretation of the study's findings.

Recommendation No. 4: Provide Extensive Training for Research Assistants

Regardless of what type of research a lab investigates, research assistants should be properly trained in research protocol and ethical treatment of human subjects. For a lab investigating socially sensitive topics such as sexuality, research assistants should receive additional training in three key areas: (1) using the correct language for marginalized populations under study, such as correct gender pronouns for trans and non-binary participants; (2) handling participant problems, either those who are affected emotionally by the content, or those who may harass the assistants; and (3) informed consent for the assistants themselves. Research assistants should be aware of the area of study and its implications for their work; they should be instructed that they also have a right to withdraw and a right to privacy, particularly for more intensive data collections, such as field studies (Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

If research assistants are undergraduate students, there are additional implications. First, because of the power disparity they face, undergraduates may be more inclined to work on research they find unsettling because they are unaware they can choose not to. Similarly, it is important that they only be given tasks that fall within their zone of competency (ASA, 2018; NASW, 2021). Second, consider whether lab activities and projects can be aligned with any potential discipline-relevant comprehensive learning goals, such as the APA's (2016) Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major. In particular, a sexuality lab project could fit with Goal 3, Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World, by having students explore and predict how beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors might be influenced by sociocultural factors. Goal 4, Communication, and Goal 5, Professional Development could also fit with research presentations and lab duties.

Graduate research assistants can also benefit educationally from being a part of a sexuality lab, beyond content mastery. Graduate assistants can have increased responsibility in training undergraduates, designing studies and analyzing results, and presenting findings to a variety of audiences. Particularly for those farther in their program or ABD, graduate students can take on more of a management role under the mentorship of the PI.

Recommendation No. 5: Have Detailed Procedures in Place for Handling Data

Prior to beginning data collection, the lab should have a document outlining the procedures for collecting and storing data. If data will be on paper, a fireproof lockbox should be used to store them until they are entered into statistical software; after the data have been entered, they can be moved to a larger safe for a pre-determined length of time (e.g., 5 years). This can also apply to signed informed consent forms. Identifiable data, such as participant sign-in sheets or study run sheets that track participants across conditions and administrations should be kept separate from the data. When the data across different administrations are matched, there should

be procedures for how to handle the identifiable information. One option is to purge this part of the data from the larger dataset while destroying any identifiable data on paper. However, the destruction of these data can interfere with further data collection, as in a longitudinal project, or a follow-up study. Further, there are some governmental and institutional guidelines that require data storage for a set period of time. In the U.S., federal regulations require researchers to maintain research records for at least three years (45 CFR 46), while some institutions require original data to be retained for at least five years (University of Arkansas, 2016; University of Virginia, n.d.). If maintaining research data with identifiable information for long-term storage, use best practices such as encryption and restricted access to ensure the data remain safe.

Additionally, prior to data collection, the researcher should determine whether the data will be posted in a public forum, such as the Open Science Foundation website (<https://osf.io/>). If there is a plan to publicly post data, this should be included in the informed consent information, so that participants are aware that their data may be viewable after the study (though it will be de-identified), with an option for participants to opt-out of having their data included in a public dataset.

Recommendation No. 6: Communicate Through Regular Meetings

Because of the sensitive nature of topics studied in sexuality labs, it is important to touch base regularly with all lab members. Weekly or biweekly meetings can help to bring issues and problems immediately to the PI's attention and to resolve them quickly (Danovitch et al., 2010). Regular meetings can also help research assistants in interpretation of data, especially if they are working on qualitative projects, such as interview or focus group data. These meetings can also serve as a way to check in on the research protocols in use and to determine if there are any unexpected negative effects being reported by participants.

Recommendation No. 7: Have a Plan for Dealing with the Press

While the public may not always express enthusiasm at general psychology findings, sexuality is a broad topic that most individuals have strong attitudes about. As a result, particularly provocative sexuality research findings may be picked up by popular media. This can lead to interviews with researchers, either in print or on camera. While this can certainly be an exciting experience for a researcher, it is important to be circumspect when being interviewed. Researchers should be careful not to stray too far from their paper's conclusions and the limits of the data. However, once the journalist has finished the interview, the researcher's contributions are generally over, and they have no way of altering a narrative set up by the journalist. For example, if a researcher is interviewed about the finding that individuals can reach a certain altered state during orgasm, no matter how cautiously the data are interpreted by the researcher in the interview, the journalist may extrapolate those data into other domains than sexuality. In turn, other journalists may catch onto that narrative, and the story may take interesting turns from there.

A good procedure to have in place when publishing sexuality research is to keep in contact with the university marketing department. Likely they will employ individuals who can send out press releases to media organizations to generate interest in the research, and they can establish the right tone and boundaries of the results through these press releases (Rhodes, 2015).

Recommendation No. 8: Maintain a Social Media Presence

In direct relation to Recommendation #7, having a social media presence can be extremely helpful for a sexuality researcher. First, if there is popular press coverage on a paper that is inaccurate about key points, the researcher can attempt to correct the inaccuracy via a blog or social media page, such as Facebook or Twitter.

Second, social media is a good way to maintain connections with other sexuality researchers, as well as members of a population under study. Potential participants can reach out to researchers over social media, which can be a less intimidating interaction medium than the phone or email. Third, being active on social media can lead to ideas for new directions in research, by observing trending sexuality topics in popular media and by direct conversations with other individuals. Finally, maintaining a social media presence can be a job easily delegated to a research assistant, as a way for them to be involved in a less-intense aspect of the lab.

There are also a few things to keep in mind when using social media to promote your research, particularly if your projects could be considered explicit or graphic. Each social media platform has rules about the type of content they allow; ensure that whoever is running your account(s) is aware of the rules and standards around sexual content. Depending on the platform, text or visual euphemisms may be necessary or preferred when talking about your project findings. Engaging with fellow researchers and a broader audience via social media can be rewarding, but if the energy and attention needed gets to be too much, step back and focus on a different method of dissemination.

Conclusion

Running a sexuality lab can be challenging, but it can also be extremely gratifying. Researchers who seek to explore sexuality topics should be aware of potential ethical issues that may arise in the course of their research, from the collection and management of data, to the observation of participants' rights, to the dissemination of research results. Above, I have discussed several different types of potential ethical issues and made recommendations for how to ethically manage a sexuality research lab. However, other issues could develop through the course of such research. Sexuality researchers should always be proactive about educating themselves and their assistants regarding ethical treatment of participants. Doing so will help them maintain valuable relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and most importantly, participants.

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