

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

INFORMED CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY IN SURVEY RESEARCH

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Research ethics are again in the news. The media report that during the 1960s unknowing patients at a university medical center were exposed to intense radiation in Pentagon-sponsored research on how people might withstand a nuclear explosion. More recently, an external review of the plans for the largest clinical trial ever conducted in the United States found that material prepared for potential subjects was heavily geared toward recruitment and did not make clear the risks associated with a hormone being tested. And the list goes on (Burd 1994; Wheeler 1994). Fortunately, at present, it contains no representation from survey research. Nonetheless, it is useful to take advantage of the calm prevailing when we are not under attack, to ask whether our own house is in order.

Compared to interventions in medical research, the conduct of survey interviews poses little risk to research participants. Discussions of survey risk focus not on the way research is done, but on the possibility that participant identities may be disclosed after the research is over. Yet even here, except for surveys about very sensitive topics, disclosure of respondent identification is unlikely to cause significant material harm. Irrespective of such consequences, however, disclosure is a violation of privacy. Thus every survey engages ethical concerns in terms of protecting respondents' confidentiality. Similarly, all surveys engage ethical concerns in terms of informed consent, to which the main threat is deception.

This article considers these issues as they arose in a survey that was designed for use in litigation. It begins by describing the case and the survey conducted for it; outlines the constraints imposed on surveys in litigation; and then considers the informed-consent and confidentiality

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issues encountered. Although the problems arose in the context of litigation, I hope to make clear that they have broader applicability.

The Alaska Survey

On the night of March 24, 1989, the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska. The result was the worst oil spill in U.S. history. Several colleagues and I were asked by the state of Alaska to estimate the dollar value of the damages caused by the spill so the state could determine the amount to claim in the lawsuit that ensued.

The natural resource that was affected, Prince William Sound, is the source of diverse values. The values stem partly from uses made of the sound, such as fishing, recreation, and tourism. Estimating the dollar value of some of these uses (e.g., commercial fishing) is relatively straightforward. Monetizing the value of other uses (say, recreational kayaking) is more difficult, but economic models that draw on the costs associated with the use can provide informative estimates.

Prince William Sound also has value apart from the uses made of it. People may see the sound's natural environment (the wildlife to which it is home, its pristine beauty) as a "good," even if they have no intention of experiencing it (by visiting the area, e.g.). The existence per se of Prince William Sound may be valued.

Measuring "existence" or "nonuse" values requires a kind of survey, first done about 30 years ago, known as "contingent valuation" (CV). These surveys value a public good by asking respondents what they would be willing to pay for it (Mitchell and Carson 1989). The method is called contingent valuation because the valuation is contingent on the description of the good presented in the survey.

One way to think about the aim of CV for the *Valdez* spill would be as an assessment of what people would have paid to prevent the accident if they had had the opportunity. In order to avoid the counterfactual nature of that task, we substituted a related goal: to estimate how much, if anything, Americans would be willing to pay to prevent another spill just like the *Valdez* from occurring in the sound.¹

The questionnaire for our nationwide survey averaged about 40 minutes in length and was devoted first to depicting the effects of the *Valdez* oil spill and then to describing a program that would prevent another such spill in Prince William Sound. The key question in the survey asked whether the respondent would vote for or against the

1. This provides a measure of total value (use plus nonuse).

prevention program if its adoption meant the respondent's taxes would increase by a specified amount.²

As it turned out, Exxon and the state of Alaska reached a settlement prior to trial, so the survey was never introduced in court. The nature of the survey, however, raised complex informed-consent and confidentiality issues.³

Courtroom Use of Survey Data

Surveys for litigation must be done with an eye toward convincing a judge that they constitute admissible evidence. Until the early 1960s, conventional wisdom held that surveys were not admissible under the hearsay rule.⁴ In 1960, however, a study group of the Judicial Conference of the United States argued that "admissibility is dependent on correct methodology." The conference adopted the study group's position that so long as surveys were "conducted in accordance with accepted principles" they should be an acceptable evidentiary source.⁵ This led to an increasing acceptance of the admissibility of survey data.

In deciding whether to admit a particular survey, courts frequently rely on the features mentioned by the 1960 Judicial Conference as representing "correct" methodology. With one exception, these features accord with usual survey practice. The exception is the injunction that interviewers should have "no knowledge of . . . the purposes for which the survey [is] to be used" (p. 429). This has been interpreted to mean that interviewers and respondents must not know the sponsor's identity. Surveys have been deemed inadmissible in a number of cases at least partly because of sponsorship awareness by interviewers or respondents.⁶ The concern is that knowledge of either the purpose or the sponsor may be a significant source of bias. In the Alaska sur-

2. Our estimate of the aggregate willingness to pay was on the order of three billion dollars. For a complete description of the survey and its results, see Carson et al. (1992).

3. In addition, the study fueled a spirited debate about the merits of contingent valuation (see, e.g., the symposium in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Fall 1994).

4. In some cases, surveys were nonetheless admitted as evidence under one of the exceptions to the hearsay rule. For a review of judicial practice in this period, see Barksdale (1957) and Zeisel (1960).

5. Both quotes come from p. 429 of the *Handbook of Recommended Procedures for Trial of Protracted Cases*, Judicial Conference of the United States, 25 F.R.D. 351 (1960).

6. See, e.g., *Toys "R" Us, Inc., v. Canarsie Kiddie Shop, Inc.*, 559 F. Supp. 1189 (E.D. N.Y. 1983) ("during the briefing of the interviewers, one was heard to whisper to another that the survey was being conducted for Toys 'R' Us"); and *Pittsburgh Press Club v. United States*, 579 F.2d 751 (3d. Cir. 1978) ("respondents were told the purpose of the survey").

vey, for example, answers could have been affected if respondents knew that the amount of money they said they would pay to prevent another spill would be used to set the damages assessed against Exxon.

Thus the interviewers on the Alaska study were not informed of the sponsor's identity. Instead, they were told, "The reason for the anonymity of the sponsor is the concern that a respondent's answers may be influenced by knowing who is sponsoring the study." Likewise, the advance letter sent to respondents did not refer to the sponsor, and nothing about litigation was ever mentioned to either respondents or interviewers.

The justification for silence about sponsorship and purpose seems clear in terms of avoiding bias. But can these steps be squared with informed consent? The question is relevant not only to surveys for litigation but also to other kinds of surveys. Although unusual in some applications, withholding sponsorship is standard practice in much market research as well as most polling for political candidates. There, too, the concern is that knowledge of either the sponsor or the purpose will bias results.

Informed Consent

Deciding whether respondents can give informed consent to litigation surveys (or to product or candidate polls) turns on the judgment of the conditions necessary to making consent "informed." Most ethicists agree that informed consent involves understanding those aspects of the act being consented to that are germane to the consent decision (Faden and Beauchamp 1986). If individuals are to make an "informed" choice they must be aware of matters relevant to the choice. Applied to the present case, it is not hard to see that knowledge of sponsor or purpose could be factors weighed in the decision to participate in a survey. Thus, withholding this information is incompatible with the notion of informed consent.⁷ The idea of informed consent, however, comes from medicine, where the interventions being consented to may carry significant risk and are performed by physicians who have considerable authority (partly because patients depend on them for medical care). Consent procedures were developed as an attempt to ensure people were informed about the risks of interventions and aware they had a choice about whether to agree to them. The resulting procedures impose a responsibility both on researchers

7. If consent is uninformed in these situations, the same is true of the decision not to consent. Some who refuse to be interviewed in the absence of information about sponsor or purpose might cooperate if they were aware of that information.

(who must decide how to convey all the necessary information) and on subjects (who are asked to use the information in deciding whether to consent). By contrast, we do not expect to be so informed in making most of the decisions we confront in daily life. Nor is it obvious that most decisions should involve this kind of informed consent if their consequences pose minimal risk.⁸

Partly as a result, informed consent is not legally mandated for the average survey in the United States. The federal rules on the protection of human subjects exempt surveys unless respondent identification is collected and disclosure of responses could “reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation” (Federal Register 1991, p. 28012).⁹

Informed consent for most surveys is also not required by the ethical codes of some major professional associations.¹⁰ Indeed, informed consent is nowhere mentioned in the code of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. The AAPOR Code does, however, say, “We shall strive to avoid the use of practices or methods that may . . . seriously mislead survey respondents.” Here the test is not whether people are sufficiently informed, but whether the researcher misinforms them to a significant degree.

Does silence about sponsorship or purpose seriously mislead respon-

8. Faden and Beauchamp’s (1986) history of informed consent suggests that “consent requirements did not arise with the hope of enabling people to make decisions about health care or research participation that were *more* autonomous than decisions of comparable consequence made in other arenas of life. Much of the initial impetus came from concerns that people were *less* able to act autonomously as patients and subjects than elsewhere” (p. 240; emphasis in original).

9. Surveys conducted by agencies of the federal government, however, are subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, which requires that respondents be notified of, among other things, “the authority under which the information is requested” and “the principal purposes for which information is intended to be used.” For a review of informed consent in federal surveys, see Duncan, Jabine, and de Wolf (1993).

10. The American Sociological Association code requires informed consent only when the risks of research “are greater than the risks of everyday life.” The code of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations says “The research organization . . . shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that the respondent understands the purpose of the interviewer/respondent contact,” but the meaning of “purpose of the . . . contact” is ambiguous. More clear-cut is the American Statistical Association Ethical Guideline that researchers should “inform each potential respondent about the general nature and sponsorship of the inquiry, and the intended uses of the data.” It is my understanding, however, that the framers of this guideline did not consider the case of litigation (or candidate or product) surveys. Two years after the guideline was adopted, the association’s Committee on Privacy and Confidentiality issued an information brochure, “Surveys and Privacy,” that counsels the public, “you should understand that the survey taker may not be allowed to tell you who is sponsoring the survey since that knowledge might affect your answers, or ‘bias’ your responses.”

dents? This is not an easy question to answer, as it is difficult to identify the point at which misleading becomes serious.¹¹

The issues here are somewhat different from those in most treatments of deception in research. Attention has usually focused on outright deception or lies. In some social psychology experiments, for example, subjects are informed that the study is about one thing when it is actually about something entirely different. Thus, in Stanley Milgram's classic experiments, subjects were told they were participating in research about the effects of electrical shocks on learning when the study was in fact about the nature of obedience to authority.

People are likewise deceived in pseudosurveys designed to develop lists either of voters to target in election day get-out-the-vote efforts or of consumers to whom product offers are sent. The "seriously mislead" section of the AAPOR Code clearly applies to these kinds of activities when they pose as surveys. But such deception is not part of the Alaska study, or other common survey applications that maintain silence as to sponsor or purpose. In these cases, respondents are told the survey is being done to develop statistics about the population and that is so.

In a legitimate survey, then, what is it about sponsorship or purpose that is important from the respondent's point of view? Presumably, the significance of these matters arises primarily from a concern about the uses to which the survey will be put. To the extent that respondents care about this, their main concern is apt to be that the survey be used to promote an end of which they approve, or at least not be used to further one of which they disapprove.

However, at least three factors greatly complicate knowing whether a survey will further a given end. To begin with, survey findings are often unpredictable. Patterns other than those expected or hoped for may emerge. Second, even if anticipated findings are obtained, it can be difficult to predict the consequences of putting the data to use in the way originally intended. In the case of litigation, when one side introduces survey results, the other side is given access to the underlying data and has the opportunity to critique the original analysis, as well as carry out analysis of its own. An alternate analysis may not only offset the first but prove even more compelling. Thus data introduced by one side could actually play a major role in its losing a case.¹² Third, once data are in the public domain, they may be used

11. This is ironic, as the code probably uses the modifier "seriously" partly because of the difficulty of defining "misleading."

12. More generally (ignoring reanalysis by the other side), it is not known whether the use of survey data systematically affects the outcomes of judicial proceedings.

in completely unanticipated ways by those having no connection to the sponsors. This is not uncommon in litigation. Respondents to both Michigan's Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey, for example, would have been surprised to learn that data from those studies were introduced at trial by Sears, Roebuck as part of its defense against a large class-action sex discrimination claim.¹³ Although in this instance the data were public, courts have also enforced subpoenas for relevant unpublished data, even when the subpoenas were targeted at researchers not directly involved with the litigation (Marcus 1991).

These considerations suggest the complexity of judging the effects of a survey based on information about sponsor or purpose, but they do not tell us whether respondents feel seriously misled when they are not given such information. Unfortunately, the only systematic evidence on respondent reactions is both limited and indirect. Some of the evidence suggests that for many respondents sponsorship and purpose are not salient. Only 3 percent of a recent national face-to-face sample inquired about sponsorship during the preinterview contact (Groves and Couper 1992).¹⁴ Over a third of the respondents to another survey could not recall anything about sponsorship at the end of the interview (Panel on Privacy and Confidentiality as Factors in Survey Response 1979). A day or two after being interviewed in a third national study, about half the sample could not recall either sponsor or purpose (Cannell, Fowler, and Marquis 1968).¹⁵

Experiments with survey introductions also suggest that purpose may be of low salience to many people. In one study, a paragraph-long description of purpose was compared to silence about purpose, and in that study and one other, a brief, vague description of the survey's content was compared to a longer, more informative one. Overall, there was little evidence of significant effect on either cooperation or data quality (Singer 1978; Singer and Frankel 1982).¹⁶

13. EEOC v. Sears, Roebuck & Co., 628 F.Supp. 1264 (N.D. Ill. 1986).

14. Thirty-one percent asked a question about "purpose," but this included very general queries like "What's this about?"

15. To assess what respondents imagined about sponsorship in the Alaska study, the last question in the survey asked, "Who do you think employed my company to do this study?" One-quarter of the sample was unable to make any guess, gave conflicting answers (e.g., "the oil industry or the Coast Guard"), or offered vague responses (e.g., "lobbyist group" or "research company"). Of the remaining three-quarters (many of whom guessed only after their initial "don't know" was probed), roughly half said Exxon or the oil companies and half identified a government or environmental group.

16. Sobal (1978) reports similar results. It is possible, however, that the treatments in these studies were not fully implemented. Morton-Williams (1993) shows that interviewers experience pressures at the doorstep that cause them to depart from intended introductions. Despite instructions to follow a script (and despite the presence of a tape recorder), interviewers frequently made major changes to the introduction.

Sponsorship has likewise been manipulated experimentally in a few studies. The results show that federal government sponsorship promotes greater cooperation than university auspices, which in turn produce higher response rates than business sponsorship (Presser, Blair, and Triplett 1992). Although the small number of studies makes generalization hazardous, the effects appear to be most pronounced in mail surveys. In interviewer-administered surveys, the effect of sponsor seems considerably diminished.

Of course none of this evidence speaks directly to the question of whether respondents are seriously misled when they are not informed about sponsor or purpose. Moreover, the findings are at odds with Singer's (1984) report that about half the respondents to a nationwide survey thought most people would feel it was very important to know who was paying for a study before deciding whether to be interviewed, and well over half felt most people would find it very important to know how the information was going to be used and why the survey was being done.¹⁷

How then should we determine whether people feel seriously misled when they are not told sponsorship or purpose? One way is to ask them after they have participated in such a study. At the end of an interview in which respondents had not been told sponsor and/or purpose, an explanation of why that information was withheld could be provided. The interviewer would then reveal the information, and respondent reactions could be assessed.¹⁸

Discovering respondent reactions to learning sponsor and purpose after the fact would provide a way to understand the implications of withholding this information. If results indicated that people felt seriously misled, then current practice should be changed. It would be possible, for example, to notify respondents of sponsorship and/or purpose after the fact and then give them the opportunity to request their interview be destroyed. (In cases where interviewers were also unaware, a separate, postinterview contact would be necessary.)¹⁹ Of

17. The three items were part of a series prefaced, "For each of the following please tell me how important you think it would be to most people to have this information before they decide whether or not to be interviewed."

18. Although identifying sponsor is usually not difficult, describing purpose can be complicated. As with many activities, the purpose of a survey may be a complex blend. In addition, even when there is only a single goal, it may be described in different ways. Consider, for instance, a survey done to better understand antiblack feelings. Should the purpose be described as an attempt to understand racial attitudes or to understand racism? Suppose the researcher's objective is to use the data to design programs to reduce prejudice. Should that be included in the statement of purpose? Complications like these, however, do not arise in most market research applications, candidate surveys, or litigation studies.

19. The International Statistical Institute's Ethics Declaration recommends that "where informed consent cannot be acquired in advance, there is a case, where practicable, for

course, if significant numbers of respondents ask that their data be deleted, this will introduce a potential source of bias. Thus in this case there may be no escaping the conflict of ethical obligations with research ends.²⁰

Confidentiality

The other major obligation researchers owe respondents is to keep identifying information confidential. The AAPOR Code states, "Unless the respondent waives confidentiality . . . we shall hold as privileged and confidential all information that might identify his or her responses." No exceptions are mentioned.

Yet in litigation, particularly high-stakes litigation like the Alaska case, the prospect of subpoenas being issued for respondent identification is very real. As a result, it has been recommended that identifying information be destroyed in surveys designed for adversarial proceedings as a way to guarantee confidentiality. If the information is not preserved, it cannot be subpoenaed.

In the Alaska study it was not legally possible to adopt this strategy. Almost immediately after the state filed its lawsuit, the court issued a protective order, instructing all parties to the matter not to destroy any information relevant to the spill. The state wanted to ensure that the defendants preserved evidence of liability, and the defendants sought to ensure the state retained any evidence that the spill's consequences were worsened by government action (or inaction). Although that was the point of the order, it was written so broadly that it covered everything related to the litigation. Thus, destroying information from the CV study would have violated the court's order.

Protective orders are extremely unusual, but even in the vast majority of cases without them, destroying respondent identifiers may not

seeking it post hoc, once the methodological advantage . . . of withholding information has been achieved." Similarly, the Code of the American Psychological Association says that "deception that is an integral feature of the design and conduct of an experiment must be explained to participants as early as feasible, preferably at the conclusion of their participation, but no later than at the conclusion of the research." But in cases where subjects or respondents feel seriously misled after being debriefed, the ethics of the research is called into question.

20. Ruebhausen and Brim (1965, p. 1203) argue that "the method of resolution [of such conflicts] must be an expression of community consensus," by which they mean that the judgment of whether the social good in the research outweighs the ethical harm must be informed by the views of the larger society (not just those of the researchers). From this vantage point, silence about sponsor or purpose may be justified in some cases, but not others. In part, this involves an empirical claim that people may feel seriously misled about information being withheld in certain instances and not in others. But it also involves an ethical claim that even if people feel seriously misled, such harm may, in some instances, be outweighed by the benefits derived from the survey.

meet with approval. Recall that in order to be admissible a survey must be shown to have been properly conducted "in accordance with generally accepted standards."²¹ Does the destruction of respondent identification meet this test? Some organizations destroy such information at the end of a study, but many retain it for at least some period of time. So destruction of identifiers at the end of data collection is not general practice.

If identifiers are destroyed, not only may opposing counsel attack the admissibility of the survey on the grounds that it departs from general practice, but they may suggest that the departure was motivated by a desire to conceal some serious flaw: that a cover-up has occurred. In the face of this prospect, a litigator may be reluctant to approve of destroying respondent identification.²²

This turned out to cause no problem for the Alaska CV study, as the case for which it was commissioned was settled before the start of discovery (the process by which opposing sides are provided an opportunity to learn about the evidence they will confront at trial). Other researchers, however, in separate *Valdez* spill litigation were not as fortunate.

Shortly after the spill, 22 Alaskan towns and villages commissioned a household survey to assess the effects of the spill on their communities. The resulting data, including identifiers, were subpoenaed by Exxon and its codefendants. In response, the research firm moved that the subpoena be quashed. Despite its arguments that providing all the requested information would violate promises of confidentiality made to respondents, the firm was ordered to turn over the information, which it did (Marshall 1993).²³

Various proposals have been offered to protect against this result. President Nixon's Commission on Federal Statistics recommended legislation that would make data collected for statistical purposes im-

21. This quote from the Judicial Conference's *Manual for Complex and Multidistrict Litigation* 2.612 (1969), which superseded parts of the *Handbook of Recommended Procedures for Trial of Protracted Cases* (see n. 5), is incorporated in the *Federal Rules of Evidence* 901(b)9.

22. On the other hand, firms that routinely destroy identifiers at the conclusion of a study can argue that it is their standard practice. For a discussion of this issue, see the articles by Harry O'Neill, Burns Roper, and Mervin Field in the Winter and Spring 1992 issues of *AAPOR News*.

23. This was an especially difficult case, as the surveyed communities were small enough that a handful of background variables made it possible to identify particular respondents, without names or addresses. In ordering that the data be produced, the court directed that access to them be given only to attorneys and their support personnel, including experts, and forbade any contacts with respondents based on information acquired from the survey. A separate court also upheld a subpoena for data from another study of the spill's effects carried out by a university professor. These data, moreover, were not from a study commissioned by parties to the litigation, but from research funded by the National Science Foundation (Marshall 1993).

mune from legal process (President's Commission on Federal Statistics 1971, p. 222). Such protection has long been accorded to surveys done by the Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics.

In the quarter of a century since the commission's recommendation, the most notable changes have involved the Public Health Service Act. In 1975 it was amended to give the Department of Health, Education and Welfare the power to issue Confidentiality Certificates to research (federally funded or not) on mental health, alcohol, or drugs. Researchers to whom certificates are issued "may not be compelled in any Federal, State, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings to identify . . . the names or other identifying characteristics" of research participants (Federal Register 1979, p. 20382). This legislation was further amended in 1988 to make sensitive research on any topic eligible for Confidentiality Certificates (Department of Health and Human Services 1989). Unfortunately, the use of these certificates has been limited by the fact that they have not received wide publicity.²⁴ The surveys on the effects of the oil spill in the Alaskan towns and villages, for example, should have been eligible for this protection as they included important sections on mental health and alcohol abuse. More typical surveys, however, would not be eligible.

Proposals have also been made for courts to recognize a researcher's privilege, akin to the doctor-patient privilege. The argument, likewise made in support of a privilege for journalists, is that violating respondent confidentiality disrupts the free flow of information to the public. Yet, with isolated exceptions, judges have shown little inclination to extend this privilege to either researchers or journalists. Moreover, even those courts recognizing such a privilege have made clear it is not absolute but is to be weighed against competing considerations, on a case-by-case basis (Boruch and Cecil 1979; Marcus 1991).

Progress on this issue is worth pursuing in both legislative and judicial forums, as it is important for survey research as a profession to

24. Requests for certificates for alcohol, drug, and mental health research are handled by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute of Mental Health, respectively. Certificates to cover research in all other areas are obtained from the Office of Health Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services. According to John Fanning, the responsible official of that office, there has been little change in the number of certificates issued by his office since the most recent amendment took effect in mid-1989 (28 during 1993, 25 in 1992, and 27 prior to that). Notably, a few certificates have been issued "where the information sought is not conventionally sensitive, but the subjects are likely to be involved in litigation (like studies of [the] effect of rehabilitation after injury) and the certificate is a way of preventing the information from being used in the litigation" (personal communication, May 6, 1994).

strive to influence society in ways that contribute to the profession's integrity. But it is equally important for professions to regulate themselves. Moreover, the prospects for self-regulation, not being dependent on the actions of others, are much greater than those for change in the legislative or judicial arenas.

Consider two forms of self-regulation that would enhance respondent confidentiality. From the vantage point of litigation, the threat to confidentiality stems partly from the fact that destruction of respondent identifiers is not general survey procedure. If a consensus can be forged that identifiers ought to be destroyed in these cases, it might overcome the objection that doing so departs from standard practice. Thus my first proposal is to amend professional codes of ethics to mandate the destruction of identifiers in surveys designed for adversarial proceedings.²⁵

Another part of the problem stems from the fact that subpoenas are sometimes issued for data so they may be analyzed by expert consultants who are researchers. If the research community agrees not to advise parties whose requests involve violating respondent confidentiality, these requests will diminish. Thus my second proposal is to amend professional codes to make it unethical for researchers to serve as consultants to parties who demand identifying information.

The Role of Ethics

These proposals require careful consideration before they can be adopted. Exceptions or other significant revision may be needed. Closer examination may reveal fundamental flaws. Likewise, there may be better alternatives to determining whether silence about sponsor or purpose "seriously misleads" than my call for research on how respondents react to being given that information after the fact. But the fate of these particular proposals is less important than that the survey research community attend more closely to ethical issues than it has in the past. Concern about ethical matters tends to be cyclical, concentrated around the occasional times when the profession is under attack or its code is undergoing revision. This is in stark contrast to the concern for other aspects of the profession, which is ongoing. For example, as a profession, survey research regularly engages in

25. This would make it impossible to reinterview respondents to assess survey quality. But researchers should be in a position to evaluate a survey without knowing respondent identities (or having reinterview data), especially as the interviewers, supervisors, and others who conducted the survey would be known and available for questioning.

conducting methodological research to improve what it does. Surely ethical matters merit the same kind of continuing attention.

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