Ethics, in the simplest terms, provide broad norms that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable conduct. Research ethics provide broad guidelines for responsible conduct of research in a given discipline. Disciplinary ethical norms provide perspective for deciding how practitioners in a given discipline act and how they ought to go about analyzing and reporting on complex issues in a manner that maintains public trust in their discipline.

Research ethics is intended to provide ethical guidelines for responsible conduct of research. The evolution of research ethics stemmed from historical misdeeds of researchers, who consistently postulated the best of intentions, each pointing out that they were working for the best interest of humanity. Notable revelations of research studies that ignored ethical considerations were: the Nuremberg doctors’ trial of 1946-1947, the Milgram study, untreated syphilis (Tuskegee) study, the human radiation experiment, and the Thalidomide tragedy. Lessons from these and a many other research work that blatantly violated the simplest codes of decency prompted the evolution of ethical guidelines for the conduct of research were developed, starting with the Nuremberg Code, which paved the way for the Helsinki Declaration. Each of these prominent examples violated the first ethical principle of harm to human subjects, and as such could be easily seen as reprehensible and deplorable. Evolving areas of ethical concern in research such as research in cyberspace as medium may not inflict harm that is readily visible as those discovered in the experiments referred to here, but the physical, psychological, and long-term impact on subjects and erosion of public trust in research may be just as devastating or worse.

Research ethics must thus focus on education of researchers about ethical principles and guidelines. The field of research ethics has expanded beyond the initial focus on protections for human subjects to providing ethical guidelines that must cover all aspects of research from concept generation to research design through dissemination of research results. It is the responsibility of all researchers to be familiar with ethical principles in their field and all other disciplines related to the study. The transdisciplinary nature of contemporary research further underscore the need for broadened awareness, demanding that researchers acquire up-to-date knowledge of
the policies and procedures across applicable disciplines that are designed to guard against irresponsible research, because ignorance of codes and policies designed to protect the integrity of each research work and maintain public trust is never an acceptable excuse for ethically questionable work.

Ethical dilemmas that present-day researchers face, how they navigate these challenges, the notion of their individual responsibilities as well as the shared responsibilities of the research community in the search for truth are all challenges that are escalating, trending with complexities in society. Disciplinary ethical norms are expected to maintain integrity as advances are made to deepen knowledge in the discipline, in the search for truth, and in error avoidance as researchers conduct and disseminate their findings. Technological advances provide tools and means for researchers to dig deeper, acquire and digest more data faster, and thus speed up the pace of discovery. With the escalation of the pace of research breakthroughs comes and even more urgent call for researchers at all levels to remain ever vigilant to ensure ethical assessment, interpretation, and application of applicable rules in intersecting fields impacted by their research to ensure persistent objectivity, integrity, honesty, and accountability to the public. The multifarious nature of potential ethical dilemmas that researcher might face makes this book a very valuable resource since authors from disparate disciplines present a range of disciplinary perspectives on ethical research methods and practice in a single volume. Given the variety of topics covered and the disciplines represented, this volume promises to be a source for an even richer erudition as researchers ponder ethical dilemmas in their disciplines.

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