

## Research Ethics Problems

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Discuss the ethical problems raised by the following research examples.

1. (Hypothetical) A criminologist meets a professional fence through an ex-convict he knows. As part of a study, the researcher convinces the fence to talk about his work—why he sticks with this kind of work, what kind of people he deals with, how he meets them, and so forth. To gain the fence's cooperation, the researcher promises not to disclose any personal details that would get the fence in trouble. However, when subpoenaed, he agrees to reveal his informant rather than go to jail. Has the researcher violated an ethical principle in agreeing to talk?

2. (Hypothetical) A researcher gains access to a clinic serving AIDS patients by responding to a call for volunteers. While working at the clinic, she makes a record of patients' names and later approaches them, identifies herself as a social scientist, fully explains the nature of her research, and asks for their cooperation in her in-depth survey of AIDS victims. Most patients agree, although some react negatively to the request. What aspects of the researcher's strategy are ethically problematic?

3. Stephen West, Steven Gunn, and Paul Chernicky (1975) tested a proposition from attribution theory in social psychology regarding the way people perceive reprehensible acts. To do this they tempted subjects to participate in a burglary and then tested whether those agreeing to participate differed from those refusing and from subjects not approached with regard to their perceptions (attributions) about this illegal act. One of the experimenters, posing as a local private detective, contacted students and presented an elaborate plan for burglarizing a local advertising firm. In two of the conditions, subjects were told that the burglary was to be committed for a government agency; in another condition, subjects were promised \$2000 for their participation. The subject's agreement or refusal to take part in the burglary and his or her reasons for the decision were the major dependent variables. The researchers did not, of course, carry out the crime. What ethical problems does this study pose? Describe how you would debrief subjects in this study