Ethics Seminar I
Ch. 4 - Handling of research material

THINK FIRST

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Intro to chapter

- **Conflict:**
  - openness in governmental organizations is written in law
  - information of test subjects should be treated responsibly (protect privacy)

- **Four concepts in the debate:**
  - Secrecy
  - Professional Secrecy
  - Anonymising
  - Confidentiality
What the issue is?

- Researcher promised confidentiality of data
- Findings are questioned and other researchers want the source data
- Researcher refuses to hand them over

Solution:

- Other colleagues destroy the source data on their own initiative
Ethical problems or conflicts

Informants
- Ethical problem: Right to privacy for the informants - solved

Researcher/Group
- Ethical Problem: Researcher made a promise of confidentiality - solved
- Conflict: Between scientific openness and privacy - conflict can no longer be solved

Outside Researchers
- Conflict: want to continue their research - can no longer be solved
Ethical problems or conflicts

This alternative solved some ethical issues/conflicts but opened up others
Alternatives

- Provide the data
- Provide the data while anonymizing it
- Provide the data while anonymizing it and tell the informants
- Go back to the informants and ask for permission to provide the data while anonymizing it
- Tell the other researcher’s they need to get a court order because the sensitivity needs to be weighed by an outside party against the need to replicate
What groups/organizations are affected?

- Informants
- Researcher
- Researcher’s colleagues
- The other researchers
- The university
- Funding parties
- The journal it was published in
- The research field
- Institutions who’ve used this research
- The public
What values, standpoints, attitudes

- Privacy
- Keeping promises
- Openness of science
- Reproducibility
- Interest of society to know your research is valid
Strengths/weaknesses of each solution

Delete the data
- Strength - keeping promise
- Weakness - violate openness, reproducibility, right of society to have proper information

Anonymising or going back for permission from the informants
- Strength - might allow for openness, reproducibility, right of society to have proper information
- Weakness - informants might say no, or anonymity could be broken

Hand over the data
- Strength - allow openness, reproducibility, right of society to have proper information
- Weakness - break promise to and potentially endanger informants
How to make the issue optimal with regards to ethical aspects?

- Go to a higher level
- Outside party makes the decision on what to do
- Anonymize data
- If not possible to anonymize completely then that ethical dilemma needs to be relayed to outside parties
Conclusions

- The researcher shouldn’t have made that promise
- External mediation would be ideal
- Deleting data is a BAD solution
- Many other possibilities that are more ethical
- Never a good solution to hide mistakes