12 Applied Communication Ethics
A Summary and Critique of the Research Literature

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Communication scholars, particularly those interested in applied issues, have been slow to embrace research questions related to ethics. Since 1982, for example, only seven articles with an explicit focus on ethics have been published in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (*JACR*). In addition, although a 1998 special issue of *JACR* on “Communication and Social Justice Research” (Frey, 1998a) proposed social justice as a value premise for applied communication scholarship, it is not clear that many applied communication scholars have adopted this premise. There is, however, a general recognition that communication plays an instrumental role as both an area around which ethical questions arise and as a process necessary for constituting ethical climates, policies, and practices (Conrad, 1993). The neglect of ethical questions and issues can be attributed to several factors, such as the complexity of moral questions, lack of clarity regarding ethical standards, and traditional emphasis on “amoral” approaches and methods in many applied communication contexts (Redding, 1996). In addition, applied communication typically prioritizes goal-directed strategies and outcomes rather than value-based processes. Underlying these explanations, though, is the fact that examining communication ethics as they are applied in real life is difficult.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and critique scholarship in the emerging field of applied communication ethics. Our goal is not simply to summarize the existing literature on communication ethics but to identify those efforts that are distinct in their applied communication orientation. In so doing, we highlight ethical issues and orientations that applied communication scholars are likely to face, and we examine the emerging value premises of applied communication scholarship. We also seek to situate ethical issues and questions more centrally within the larger area of applied communication and to outline research issues and a research agenda. To meet these goals, we first provide an overview of the applied ethics movement. We then identify and review principal research traditions that address ethics within applied communication, including health communication, organizational communication, and media. We next explore several traditions in applied communication research that highlight value premises, including social justice, empowerment, and voice, as well as free speech and access to information.
We conclude this chapter by outlining a proposed research agenda for this important area of inquiry.

Ethics and Applied Ethics

Ethics is a rich field spanning a wide range of disciplines and critical traditions. In general, *ethics* involves the search for fundamental standards of human conduct grounded in various value perspectives and moral traditions. Most often, ethics draws on values, normative systems, and philosophical and religious frameworks to make judgments of good and bad, right and wrong, and acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Thus, most ethical theories privilege specific value premises or perspectives over others. For example, Rawls (1999) emphasized justice as fairness through the treatment of individuals as essentially equal, without prior knowledge of their background or position. Habermas’s (1984) social ethic emphasizes the emancipation of the individual, with his theory of universal pragmatics exploring ways in which individuals construct mutual understanding through communicative means. Feminist ethicists, such as Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), developed an ethic of care that privileges relationships over rule-based notions of justice. Deontological perspectives, such as Kant’s categorical imperative, emphasize rule-based approaches to ethics. Virtue ethics, initially developed by Aristotle, argue that ethics represent a predisposition to act in a morally compelling way. Virtues, such as honesty, integrity, and responsibility usually are described as internal, character-based tendencies that produce ethical behavior. Recent efforts in ethics and philosophy, however, have turned to the more day-to-day problems of good human conduct to develop theories of applied ethics.

Some observers point to the activism of the 1960s, including the civil rights movement, environmentalism, and the Vietnam War protests, for the germination of applied ethics (e.g., Ozwawa, 2004), in which the public undertook value-driven efforts to right perceived wrongs. The applied ethics movement also is grounded in a larger recognition that philosophy and moral reasoning have not always focused on ethical dilemmas as they are manifest in the real world (Böhme, 2001). Applied ethics is a revolutionary trend in the larger study of ethics. At least two dozen practical and applied ethics centers focusing on a wide array of professional contexts (e.g., the Hastings Center, founded in 1969, to examine practical issues of bioethics) have been established in the last 2 decades. These approaches to the complexities of morality in organizational and professional life largely are interdisciplinary and designed to address specific ethical problems and dilemmas (Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, 2003).

Singer (1986), one of the founders of the modern applied ethics movement, focused on practical issues associated with bioethics. Singer noted that “applied ethics” concerns morality in “practical issues—like the treatment of ethnic minorities, equality for women, the use of animals for food and research, the preservation of the natural environment, abortion, euthanasia, and the obligation of the wealthy to help the poor” (p. 1). Applied ethicists soon recognized that many ethical dilemmas relate to practical issues in professional fields, such as business, law, medicine, computer science, engineering, accounting, and environmental studies. Communication, as a discipline, has been part of this larger applied, practical ethics movement.

Scholars in the applied and professional communication fields have begun to address issues of ethics in a variety of ways. Some, as mentioned previously, have argued for an explicit emphasis on social justice (see Frey & SunWolf, this volume). Journalism and other media scholars and practitioners have a long tradition of addressing ethical questions. A number of professional associations, such as the International Association of...
Business Communicators, Society of Professional Journalists, and Public Relations Society of America, have developed codes of professional conduct. The National Communication Association’s (1999) “Credo for Ethical Communication” is one manifestation of this trend. These codes indicate a growing recognition of the need for ethical standards and discourse within applied communication areas.

Applied ethics, as an area of inquiry and practice, focuses on issues of ethical decision making and problem solving in professional and organizational communities (Rosenthal & Shehadi, 1988; Singer, 1986; Winkler & Coombs, 1993). Typically, the focus of applied ethics is on identifying norms, standards, guidelines, and processes of professional and organizational practices, and methods for promoting ethical decision making (Böhme, 2001). For example, the role of professional codes of conduct in promoting discussion, informing decision making, and resolving practical ethical problems is central to applied ethics (Schwartz, 2001; Stevens, 1994). Professional standards not only help to ensure that ethics are addressed but also elevate the status and effectiveness of various professions. The applied ethics movement also is grounded in a larger recognition that to be relevant to the ethical choices that individuals face on a day-to-day basis, models and standards must accommodate an understanding of organizational and professional life, and adopt a pragmatic stance regarding the issues and dilemmas encountered.

In addition, an emphasis on professional and community standards allows applied ethics to avoid some of the less productive features of the “universal ethics” debate (Singer, 1986). *Universal ethics* involves the search for generalized standards and often is contrasted to *situational ethics*, or *moral relativism*, which seek to accommodate the unique features of a specific context (Harman & Thomson, 1996). Although most ethicists argue that a universal ethic is both desirable and morally appealing, such views break down in the opposition of various ethical theories and competing cultural and social values (Levy, 2002). *Practical ethics*, instead, focuses on the more parochial contexts of specific professional and organizational communities where narrower parameters can be drawn and agreed-on value traditions identified. Any applied ethic, however, still may be subject to criticism from more universal moralities, a criticism that flows, in part, from variability in the definition of applied ethics.

**Communication Perspectives on Applied Ethics**

Communication scholars historically have studied ethics from theoretical perspectives, including the study of philosophies of moral action. The goal of theoretical ethics has been to describe general and abstract moral principles for understanding how moral reasoning might function. In contrast, applied ethics, as described earlier, focuses on day-to-day ethical problems and moral dilemmas in work and professional contexts. Communication researchers, for example, frequently study the meanings, interpretations, and management of ethical issues in organizational settings to enlighten and assist individuals and organizations in acting ethically to achieve organizational goals. Equally important, and a focus of this section, are the ethical challenges encountered by researchers engaged in applied communication scholarship.

As noted earlier, an applied orientation to communication ethics includes a variety of issues and questions associated with real-world communication choices and behaviors, and their relationships to accepted values, standards, and norms (see Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 1991; Jaksa & Pritchard, 1988, 1996; Johannesen, 2002; Seeger, 1997). Moreover, the emphasis placed on communication outcomes, strategies, and solutions to problems enhances the ethical significance of applied communication. Applied communication ethics, like the larger domain of applied ethics, focuses on the practical dimensions
of ethical reasoning, choice, and behavior, primarily in professional and organizational contexts. This focus includes recognition of the ubiquitous nature of ethical issues concerning communication in professional and public life, the complexity of those issues, and the larger traditions, standards, and generally accepted norms that guide participants’ behavior.

The ethical dimensions of human communication are ubiquitous. Johannesen (2002) noted that ethical questions arise whenever one’s choices or behaviors have the potential to influence others. Given these parameters, almost all human communication is pregnant with ethical significance, although some aspects clearly have greater moral weight than others (Seeger, 2003). All aspects of the communication process—including messages, languages, channels, senders, and receivers—have the potential to influence others (see, e.g., the essays in Arneson, 2007). Moreover, ethical issues associated with communication never are entirely resolved in some final, unequivocal way but frequently must be revisited and reconsidered.

Applied ethics in communication contexts also acknowledges the inherent complexity in these questions and addresses the intrinsic conflict between alternative value positions. In many communication contexts, these values are associated with the various and diverse audiences participating in the process. The competing value perspective, for example, suggests that for any ethical question, multiple value stances vie with one another for supremacy (Seeger, 1997). For example, in health communication contexts (see Kreps & Bonaguro, this volume), the values of honesty and support often compete as a physician weighs being brutally honest against responding to a patient supportively. A physician may need to bluntly discuss a terminal prognosis to convey the futility of further treatment, yet at the same time, deliver the information in a caring manner. The wants of the patient, values of family members, policies of the hospital, and the larger political, religious, and legal contexts of decision making regarding life further complicate choices in that context. Such competition may create a moral dilemma where different values suggest alternative choices. An applied orientation to communication ethics acknowledges these complexities and suggests two approaches for addressing them.

First, communicators must be sensitive to the ethical implications of their communicative choices. Applied ethics seeks to inculcate sensitivity to value questions and ethical issues. Jaksa and Pritchard (1988) described this sensitivity as the “stimulation of the moral imagination” (p. 5). Part of this sensitivity involves recognition of the ethical dimensions of decisions so that they may be fully considered in the decision process. The goal of applied ethics is to make questions of values and ethics more prominent in efforts to use communication to address problems and create specific outcomes.

Second, communication is viewed as the process whereby decision makers sort through various value positions and determine which should take prominence in a given context. Argument, debate, discussion, and consensual decision making, for example, all have a role to play in sorting through conflicting values (Conrad, 1993; Seeger, 1997). Standards and values that encourage participation, voice, and free exchange of information help to ensure that relevant values are represented (Gorden, Infante, Wilson, & Clarke, 1984; Nielsen, 1974). Organizational democracy, for instance, concerns “principles and practices designed to engage and represent (in the multiple sense of the term) as many relevant individuals and groups as possible in the formulation, execution, and modification of work-related activities” (Cheney et al., 1998, p. 39). Through this diverse engagement, a wide variety of values are considered in relation to one another (see, e.g., Cheney, 2008). In this way, communication is a target or field of ethical decision making and a critical part of the ethical reasoning process.

Like other applied ethics disciplines, applied communication ethics draws on
institutional, professional, and disciplinary traditions, values, and standards in making ethical judgments. In communication, a rich set of these traditions has developed. Journalistic standards of truthfulness, honesty, balance, First Amendment guarantees of free speech, laws and regulations regarding transparency and openness in public communication, and dialogue, as well as the general recognition of communication and information rights, are important influences on applied communication ethics (Conrad, 1993; Johannesen, 2002; Nielsen, 1974; Seeger, 1997). Recently, social justice also has emerged as a compelling value tradition for applied communication research (Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, & Murphy, 1996; Pearce, 1998; see also Frey & SunWolf, this volume). In addition to these disciplinary traditions, important ethical issues surround the research process itself.

Applied communication researchers only recently have begun to consider and question the ethical choices, practices, and outcomes in the research process (Swartz, 1997). This critique has been driven by a realization that applied communication research includes significant ethical issues that often are ignored in strategy and outcome-driven investigations. Some scholars contend that applied ethics in communication research encompass more than ethical considerations in the arena of study and more than the minimum institutional review process for research involving human participants (discussed below). The research process upon inception involves ethical choices, challenges, and constraints (Gadamer, 1975), as researchers decide what to study, how to engage participants (e.g., as respondents or as coresearchers), which method(s) to employ, and how, when, and where to report results (Frey, 1998b; Frey et al., 1996; Oliver, 2003). These considerations take place within situated, historical contexts, political environments, and value domains (Gagnon, 1992; Swartz, 1997). The research process and product(s) never are politically neutral acts, as researchers inherently privilege certain values, practices, and institutions (Frey, 1998b; Frey & Carragee, 2007; Frey et al., 1996). Therefore, if communication scholars hope to conduct ethical applied research, they must begin by scrutinizing research processes themselves (e.g., Varallo, Ray, & Ellis, 1998). Conquergood (1995) contended that praxis is “fundamentally about placement, about taking a stand, marking (not masking) the self, positioning one’s research ethically, politically, as well as conceptually” (p. 86). Such placement also applies to the purposes and methods that guide the research process, and the outcomes and consequences that result from research.

Three common ethical goals for research—“do no harm,” “effect positive outcomes,” and “promote social justice”—provide a useful context for reviewing and problematizing applied ethics in communication research. When employing the ethical goal of do no harm, research purports to avoid harm as a consequence of the research process or outcome, or to balance any potential for harm with anticipated benefits. To demonstrate this commitment, researchers, in coordination with Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), review research proposals to ensure that the anticipated benefits outweigh the risks involved and that participants voluntarily provide their informed consent (e.g., Sieber, 1992).

When employing the ethical goal of effect positive outcomes, scholars develop and conduct research that not only purports to do no harm but also intends to promote positive outcomes. These positive outcomes generally pertain to greater efficiency and effectiveness, such as when improvements within organizational communication processes help institutions to better meet the needs of employees, customers, and communities.

The third goal of promote social justice often requires a transformative orientation. Rather than conducting research for the primary or exclusive purpose of further understanding the topic and testing or building theory, an equally important goal is to promote social justice. Transformational changes occur as a product of the research process or
as outcomes of the research conclusions, when, for example, participants function as researchers, and vice versa, or when changes occur in organizational access to voice and decision making.

These three ethical goals suggest two perspectives for the research process and resulting outcomes: One perspective accepts the context under study and attempts to produce either no harm or some incremental, positive changes; the second perspective champions the disempowered and underempowered, and seeks to transform society through research. IRBs require scholars to employ the first perspective to obtain approval for research, whereas the responsibility to incorporate and propose strategies consistent with the second perspective primarily lies with researchers, not with the institution approving the research. In some cases, however, IRBs, following federal guidelines, encourage researchers to include more underrepresented participants.

The horrific applied research conducted on human participants in Nazi Germany and the negligent treatment of research participants by U.S. researchers in the infamous Tuskegee syphilis experiment (e.g., Harter, Stephens, & Japp, 2000; Solomon, 1985) inspired the formation of protocols for ethical research. As mandated by the National Research Act, Public Law 93-348, an IRB (or Human Subjects Committee) reviews all institutionally based research proposals prior to initiation to ensure that the research plan has considered ethical dimensions and sufficiently protects the legal and ethical rights of human participants (e.g., Sieber, 1992). The IRB process is the most important regulatory guarantee for ensuring the application of at least minimal ethical standards in any institutionally sponsored research, including applied communication research. As such, IRBs now stand as the first level of protection against abusive research practices (Ashcraft & Byers, 2004).

IRBs are charged with two primary tasks that are consistent among all genres of research on human participants. First, IRBs are responsible for considering the potential benefits in relation to the risks to research participants. If the potential benefits do not outweigh the risks, there is no ethical justification for the research. This consideration, however, often is complicated by the fact that benefits and risks may be poorly understood and do not necessarily accrue to the same groups. Risks most often are associated with individuals, whereas benefits usually apply to larger groups. Second, IRBs oversee the informed consent process, which involves making all potential participants aware of the potential risks and benefits of any research project (Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health Office for Protection from Research Risks, 2001). The informed consent process ensures that people receive the necessary information to assess whether there is good reason for their participation and that the choice to participate is made freely and without coercion.

Currently, three of the most pressing difficulties with informed consent involve the use of deception (Wendler, Emanuel, & Lie, 2004), potential exploitation of children, and research in developing countries using less than worldwide standards for best practice (e.g., Kopelman & Murphy, 2004; Sharav, 2004; Wendler et al., 2004). Deception commonly is used in research on human participants in two ways. First, participants may be deceived if the true intent of research is withheld. Second, participants may be deceived into thinking they will receive a treatment when, in fact, they will receive a placebo (Wendler & Miller, 2004). Because informed consent requires a clear explanation of the research objectives, potential benefits, and reasons for participant selection, studies employing deception may violate these basic ethical principles. Currently, the American Psychological Association’s (APA; 2002) “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” allows deception only when it is justified by the study’s prospective value, alternative procedures are not feasible, and the research does not expect to cause physical
pain or emotional distress. Furthermore, the APA requires that deception be explained to participants as early as is feasible.

Informed consent is problematized further when it involves powerless groups, such as prisoners and children, where the ability to freely give informed consent is reduced. Federal regulations require that children who serve as research participants must first receive consent from a legally authorized representative (e.g., their parents), followed by the children giving their assent. Several scholars have noted that despite these requirements, children are vulnerable to manipulation by their guardians and by profit-seeking researchers (e.g., Kopelman & Murphy, 2004; Sharav, 2004). Kopelman and Murphy (2004), consequently, called for more research to resolve the “growing tension between federal regulations and the courts over how to protect children from harm while advancing pediatric knowledge” (p. 1788).

An additional controversy concerns the development and testing of medical treatments in countries with poorly developed health-care systems and few safeguards for research. Wendler et al. (2004, p. 927) posited four conditions to foster ethical research by foreign scholars in developing countries. First, there must be a scientific necessity to “use less than the worldwide best methods to answer a scientific question.” Second, “answering the scientific question posed by the trial will help address an important health need of the host community.” Third, the trial must have potential to “produce a fair level of benefit for the host community.” Finally, research participants must be assured they will not be “prospectively worse off than they would be in the absence of the trial.”

Beyond adhering to the provisions of IRBs, scholars also have embraced research goals concerning fundamental social and political change. In the JACR special issue edited by Frey (1998a), contributors shared their varied theoretical perspectives and methodological choices (e.g., action research, participatory research, and feminist research) made in conducting social justice communication research. Varallo et al. (1998), for instance, examined the interviews they conducted with adult incest survivors as a possible transformative process, suggesting that the “research interview process itself needs to mirror, or do justice to, the desired effect(s), such as positive change for participants, if it is to serve the purposes of social justice” (p. 266). As another example, Adelman and Frey (1994, 1997) initiated a longitudinal study in an AIDS residential facility that combined action research and participatory methods after volunteering at the residence and being invited to conduct a study in collaboration with administrators and residents.

Applied communication ethics, then, are grounded in the three goals of do no harm, effect positive outcomes, and promote social justice. The primary process of insuring minimum adherence to the first two goals is the IRB review. Some investigators, however, agree in principle with IRB goals but simultaneously point to bureaucratic ironies, tensions, and interferences within the review process (see, e.g., Dougherty & Kramer, 2005; Marshall, 2003; Pritchard, 2002). The IRB process, they suggest, is needlessly bureaucratic, indiscriminate in understanding various research methods, overarching and sometimes arbitrary in oversight, and infringes on academic freedom. Communication scholars, acculturated in values of free speech and the free flow of information, may feel particularly oppressed by the IRB process.

Due to the significant role of the IRB in applied communication research, Kramer and Dougherty (2005) invited essays and narratives of researchers’ experiences with IRBs for a JACR special issue on “Communication Research and Institutional Review Boards.” Contributors identified disturbing ironies in IRB processes, such as emphasizing the protection of the university over that of research participants, shaping scholarship rather than simply supporting it, providing research oversight without answering to any similar oversight, and adding to rather than diminishing the potential risk to research partic-
ipants. Hamilton (2005) reviewed the development and operation of IRBs, highlighting the often-inappropriate application of a medical research model to social-scientific research when conducting reviews. Nonetheless, the IRB review process is well established as an important institutional check on research ethics, although it is not a panacea and dramatic cases of research abuse continue (Philips, 2000).

Domains of Applied Communication Ethics

As noted earlier, ethical issues arise in all communication contexts. Here, we focus on three domains where applied communication ethics are manifest and that have robust traditions: health communication, organizational communication, and media. These domains illustrate the types of ethical issues that arise and ways they have been addressed in applied communication research.

Health Communication

Medical and public health contexts abound with complex ethical issues for communication researchers and practitioners. Four propositions, delineated by Guttman (2003), highlight the ethical underpinnings in health communication interactions, environments, interventions, and campaigns: (1) Health communication entails purposeful efforts to influence people’s health; (2) throughout health communication and related initiatives, from conception to implementation to assessment, researchers/practitioners make decisions that contain inherent, embedded ethical considerations; (3) implicit and secondary ethical issues often create unintended impacts and consequences; and (4) ethical considerations have practical and moral significance.

Researchers and practitioners grapple with ethical decisions regarding which health issues to address; which individuals and populations to target; which methodologies to employ and how to employ them effectively; how to define effective targeting and tailoring of interventions, and by whom; and how to define success and by whom (e.g., Ratzan, 1994). By choosing to address certain health issues, other issues invariably receive less focus and fewer resources. Although targeting and tailoring messages appears to meet ethical obligations to promote equity and comprehensibility, concerns about exclusion and bias surface. Similarly, the effectiveness of communication approaches and intervention strategies depends on perspectives and definitions of “success.” Persuasive strategies may influence health behaviors and affect change, but they concurrently may co-opt, appropriate, and confront cultural values. Such strategies also may affect individuals’ feelings of blame, shame, culpability, and responsibility, which, in turn, may implicitly affect social stigmas, disparity, and gaps between social groups, and societal hyper-valuing of health.

Ratzan, Payne, and Bishop (1996), in a comprehensive review of the health communication field, identified two major challenges: (1) using ethical means to communicate health information and (2) engaging in ethical decision making. Recent issues of Health Communication and the Journal of Health Communication highlight additional ethical challenges: issues of informed consent with vulnerable populations, such as adults who have Alzheimer’s; control of the meaning and practice of informed consent (Olufowote, 2008); communication models, intercultural communication, and medical interpreting (Dysart-Gale, 2005; J. L. Johnson et al., 2004; Simon, Zyzanski, Durran, Jimenez, & Kodish, 2006); questions of access and accuracy of health information (Williams & Sellnow, 1998); patient rights (Ford, Odallo, & Chorlton, 2003); privacy issues and regulations (Brann & Mattson, 2004; Petronio, 2002); marketing and advertising (Cline & Young,
Two of the most discussed areas of applied health communication ethics involve bioethics and public health (Bracci, 2001, 2002; Callahan & Jennings, 2002; Guttman & Ressler, 2001; MacQueen & Buehler, 2004; Sharf, 1999; Thomas, Sage, Dillenberg, & Guillery, 2002). Bioethics focuses on competing values that are inherent to issues such as "organ transplants, genetics, reproductive biology, and resource allocation" (Callahan & Jennings, 2002, p. 170). Attention also has focused on how medical institutions deliberate issues relating to the values of human life and health (Bracci, 2001, 2002). End-of-life issues, for instance (e.g., Barton, 2007) have become increasingly complex with the advent of new life-extending technology. What is of particular importance to communication researchers is how participants with disparate values can manage these deliberations and the attendant discourse (regarding end-of-life, see, e.g., Foster, 2006; Keränen, 2007; Planalp & Trost, 2008; Young & Rodriguez, 2006). As Bracci (2002) explained, "Bio-ethics is built on conflict, and seeks resolution of issues through justification, not consensus, since these disparate voices have failed to locate shared first principles to adjudicate their differences" (p. 153).

Much of the bioethics debate is grounded in the conflict over scarce resources. This justificatory process associated with allocations inherently is communicative and illustrates the process nature of communication in applying ethics. Moreover, clear communication of the advantages and disadvantages of a particular bioethical approach requires informed consent. The communication process of informed consent, therefore, is one of the most critical issues associated with bioethics research. We view informed consent similarly to Sharf (1999), who described it as a process of shared interpersonal meaning between researchers and the persons being studied regarding the risks of participating in a study. For this reason, informed consent fundamentally is a communication process.

Sharf (1999) proposed a research agenda for addressing communication issues in bioethics, arguing that communication researchers should bring their expertise to such problem areas as (a) informed consent (a concept most often treated as a legal or moral requirement rather than as a matter of interpersonal creation of shared meaning); (b) breaking bad news to patients and their families; (c) generating discussions of such difficult topics as people’s life values and advanced directives in preparation for a time when, as a patient, a person may not be able to speak in his or her own behalf, or termination of treatment in the face of apparent futility; (d) negotiating critical differences of opinion and intent between practitioners and patients (individuals who disagree with doctors’ recommendations are often treated as non-compliant, incompetent, or even hateful patients); (e) striving for understanding in the face of dissimilar cultural beliefs, practices, and communicative styles; and (f) persuasively approaching family members for organ donation from a newly deceased loved one. (pp. 197–198)

A second fundamental issue in health communication ethics concerns the free flow of information regarding critical public health issues. MacQueen and Buehler (2004), for
example, argued that “defining the boundary between public health research and practice remains a critical challenge within the evolving field of public health ethics” (p. 928). Key to this issue is how health organizations can communicate effectively and in a timely way to the public about established and emerging public health risks. A principal focus of applied health communication is effectively disseminating information and persuading the public to engage in healthy behavior (see Kreps & Bonaguro, this volume).

Although research on health promotion is extensive, little of this work focuses explicitly on ethical issues, with a few notable exceptions (Ford et al., 2003; Guttman & Ressler, 2001; Williams & Sellnow, 1998). Guttman and Ressler (2001), for example, developed an extensive list of practice-oriented questions that can be used to deliberate about issues of personal responsibility in health campaigns, such as avoidance of blaming, labeling, and stigmatizing; facilitation of personal autonomy; and respect for different value perspectives. In addition, they identified ethical precepts and social values that may be reinforced in health messages, and described specific appeals to responsibility. This work views ethical issues as strategies that may improve the effectiveness of health messages. Similarly, Ford et al. (2003) identified a human rights perspective as an underlying value in HIV and AIDS campaigns in Africa. They drew on the human rights approach employed by the United Nations Children’s Fund to advocate for a communication-based approach that invites an audience into a dialogue and interaction that enhances empowerment and shared decision making. Most important, they advocated for more flexible, audience-centered communication strategies that acknowledge multiple perspectives and diverse needs (see the discussion of such strategies in the context of development by Kincaid & Figueroa, this volume). Williams and Sellnow’s (1998) investigation was similarly grounded in questions regarding the flow of information. They studied the changing criteria for administering mammograms, and concluded that the National Cancer Institute’s shifting standards created a chilling effect on health-care policy discourse.

Two problems with these research approaches are evident, however. First, they advocate for behaviors using value appeals when the resources necessary to support those behaviors may not be available, with one result being the stigmatization of a group as unethical or immoral. Second, they tend to privilege a narrow set of values, such as access to information, as the only ethical issues inherent to these contexts.

The public health community also has worked to develop consensus on general values of open and honest communication with the public. As MacQueen and Buehler (2003) explained:

In January 2002, the National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHSTP) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) convened a 2-day workshop to examine a series of questions in public health ethics, drawing on case studies from NCHSTP projects and the expertise of a diverse group of invited participants. (p. 928)

The goal was to examine a variety of cases and develop “national discussions concerning the ethical conduct of public health practice” (MacQueen & Buehler, 2003, p. 928). From these discussions, standards can be developed regarding the free flow of information about health risks and prevention, and even informed consent regarding medical issues and procedures.

Uniform standards are particularly important because of the complexities associated with ethics in public health communication. For instance, HIV, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, and other infectious diseases often are complicated by “stigma, poverty, and discrimination [that] are interwoven with the conditions that affect both the
transmission and the outcome of these infections” (MacQueen & Buehler, 2003, p. 929). Thus, ethical issues in health communication also are associated with larger values of social justice, including access to treatment, equality, and empowerment. As with other efforts to articulate applied ethics, the American Public Health Association adopted a code of ethics that features issues pertaining to communication, such as collecting input from community members regarding efficacy of public health programs, including the public in making decisions, and communicating in an expeditious manner regarding public health issues (Thomas et al., 2002).

The applied orientation to health communication ethics primarily consists of developing a fuller understanding of ethical issues and processes in decisions concerning bioethics and health-promotion campaigns. At the time of this writing, this research focuses on developing ethical standards that concern open and honest information exchange about risk and about health issues between health officials and the public, and that clarify the larger value domains of health communication. Similarly, efforts have been made to employ communication to improve health decision making and to represent various competing values in important biomedical questions, such as the use of technology to extend life. Open and honest communication leading to empowerment and informed choice generally has been privileged over other value perspectives in health communication, such as mutual responsibility and care, which actually may be undermined by an exclusive focus on individual responsibility and empowerment.

Organizational Communication

Due to the ongoing ethical challenges that organizations and the people working with or within them face, an elaborate body of scholarship has developed. This includes an extensive body of research and commentary in business ethics encompassing issues such as corporate social responsibility, employee rights, management and leader ethics, environmental exploitation, multinational ethics, executive compensation, ethics codes, and conflict of interest, among many others. Among the primary issues of communication ethics that applied scholars have explored in organizations are privacy and voice (Botan, 1996; Gorden et al., 1984); free speech (Seeger, 1986); honesty, deception, social influence, persuasion, and coercion (Redding, 1996; Seeger & Ulmer, 2003); diversity (Mattson & Buzzanell, 1999); whistleblowing (Near & Miceli, 1986); change, power, domination, authority, and control (Mumby, 1988); organizational democracy (Cheney et al., 1998; Deetz, 1992); discourse and dialogue (Jovanovic & Wood, 2006; Meisenbach, 2006); leadership (C. E. Johnson, 2005; Simms & Brinkman, 2002); legitimacy and corporate social responsibility (Boyd, 2000; Daugherty, 2001; May & Zorn, 2003); recruitment and socialization (Pribble, 1990); ethical climate (Victor & Cullen, 1988; Waters & Bird, 1987); and public relations (Curtin & Boynton, 2001). Case studies of ethical perspectives and practices associated with organizational communication also have been offered (e.g., May, 2006). In addition, scholars have engaged in more general critiques of organizational communication ethics (e.g., Conrad, 1993; Redding, 1986; Seeger, 1997, 2003). Moreover, Cheney and Christensen (2001) argued that the external organizational communication designed to create and maintain organizational identity includes ethical and moral dimensions of:

1. the posited character or integrity of the source of the message,
2. the defensibility of a particular message,
3. the legitimacy of a pattern or campaign of messages,
4. the practical impact of a messages or the cumulative effect of a series of message,
5. the openness of the structure of communication between an organization and its
publics/audiences, (6) the articulation/representation of genuine public interests, and (7) the question of shared responsibility. (pp. 258–259)

Others working from critical approaches to organizational communication have emphasized equity, empowerment, diversity, and institutional democracy (e.g., Cheney, 1999; Deetz, 1992; Mattson & Buzzanell, 1999; Mumby, 1988, 1996; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Clearly, organizational communication includes a wide range of profound ethical issues.

Many current paradigms of organizational inquiry, including cultural, interpretive, and critical approaches, emphasize ethics and values (Putnam, 1982; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Nicotera and Cushman (1992) argued that an organization’s culture creates a unique value system for making ethical assessments, and Mattson and Buzzanell (1999) applied feminist critical perspectives to judge organizational ethics.

Ethical principles are applied in organizational communication contexts through three general approaches, either individually or as part of an integrated ethics program: (1) ethical codes of conduct; (2) ethics training; and (3) strategies to create more accessible, open, and responsive structures and procedures. First and most common approach is ethical codes in their various iterations (Schwartz, 2001, 2002; Stevens, 1994). Schwartz (2002) reported that over 90% of large corporations have a code of ethics, ranging from general statements of values and goals, usually described as “aspirational codes,” to highly specific legalistic prescriptions for employee conduct, often characterized as “legalistic codes” (Frankel, 1989). These codes serve a variety of functions, including reducing legal liability, clarifying ethical issues and responsibilities, enhancing an organization’s reputation, and encouraging members’ ethical conduct. Such codes now are a standard part of corporate life, although it is not clear how broadly they are communicated and disseminated or how they are used by employees. Several studies have supported the view that codes are at least somewhat effective in promoting organizational ethics (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1996; Pierce & Henry, 1996).

Codes and general standards of ethical conduct also have been described for communication consulting. Browning (1982), for example, drew on counter-rational theory and the APA’s statement on ethics to explore the ethics of communication consulting. Harrison (1982) approached communication consulting from a rhetorical standpoint, emphasizing participatory and dialogic perspectives as ethical standards. Montgomery, Wiseman, and DeCaro (2001) proposed a wide-ranging code of ethical conduct for consultants that addressed issues such as competency, community service, conflict of interest, confidentiality, and privacy.

A second approach to applying communication ethics in organizations is ethics programs (Seeger, 1997), which include promotions and communication regarding specific types of ethical conduct, sponsored training in ethical decision making, ethics audits and surveys, and the use of ethical codes, as well as related programs and promotions regarding ethics. Training often is a response to specific accusations of organizational or employee wrongdoing. In 2006, for example, military commanders ordered training in core values following accusations that U.S. troops in Iraq had killed civilians. Many organizations also actively promote employees’ involvement in social and community causes, including volunteering for projects such as Habitat for Humanity, tutoring in inner-city schools, or helping with recycling programs, to encourage and publicize an image of “good corporate citizenship.” These examples of social responsibility acknowledge that organizations have obligations to the larger society (Buchholz, 1990). Good corporate citizenship often is publicized and featured in corporate annual reports, and may represent what Boyd (2000) described as “actional legitimacy.” Chief executive officers’ speeches often include
references to corporate values and missions as a way of enhancing their organization’s positive reputation and promoting its ethical conduct (Waters & Bird, 1987). Codes of conduct and corporate value and mission statements often are posted in prominent locations in organizations and on their Web sites, and new employees may be trained in the code of ethics and mission statements as part of larger corporate socialization efforts (Pribble, 1990). In some cases, major decisions are vetted through the organization’s code of ethics. However, although codes are an indication that an organization has at least considered ethics, one problem is that ethical codes and programs actually may mask unethical conduct (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003).

Finally, issues of organizational democracy, participation, voice, dissent, and whistleblowing can broadly be classified as efforts to create more open and ethical organizations characterized by less restricted flows of information and more equality of participation and influence (Cheney et al., 1998; Kassing, 1997; Near & Miceli, 1986). These efforts are supported by values of openness, pluralistic dialogues, and reductions in hierarchical domination (Deetz, 1992). In addition, efforts to create more diverse workplaces on the basis of ethnicity, race (see Nicotera, Clinkscales, Dorsey, & Niles, this volume), gender (see Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Sterk, & Turner, this volume), and sexual orientation, among other characteristics, serve to expand the range of ideas and perspectives (e.g., Buzzanell, 1994; Mattson & Buzzanell, 1999). These pluralistic dialogues can be expected to create freer flows of information, enhanced decision making, and broader employee participation. Moreover, as Conrad (1993) noted:

It is through discourse that individuals develop their own views of morality; through discourse that organizations develop and inculcate core values and ethical codes; and through discourse that incongruities within individual and organizational value-sets are managed and contradictions between the value sets of different persons are negotiated. (p. 2)

Application of communication ethics regarding openness, democracy, and pluralism sometimes requires a change in management philosophy and in specific organizational structures and procedures. These changes may include open meetings between managers and employees, ombudspersons who facilitate the free flow of communication between various levels of organizations, and hardcopy and virtual suggestion boxes. Some stakeholder models of organizational communication ethics go so far as to include a variety of external audiences and constituencies in these pluralistic conversations. Scholars advocating these approaches, however, generally have failed to grapple with the fundamental values conflicts and tensions between organizations as hierarchies of domination and as democratic and inclusive systems.

Stewart (2001) summarized work on applied organizational communication ethics with four major conclusions:

1. Our theories of applied ethics must reach beyond the individual level and posit ethical principles for organizations as well as for individuals.
2. Ethics and organizational effectiveness are inextricably linked.
3. Codes of ethics are not just a means of regulating employee and other professionals’ behavior, they also provide an important means of facilitating communication with employees and clients.
4. Thinking about ethical issues in organizations must be multidimensional to examine not only the rational dimension of decision making but also the emotional and spiritual. (p. 3)
These core conclusions have helped to unify the study of applied communication ethics in organizational contexts. Issues of organizational and corporate ethics, however, remain diverse because they concern the entire range of organizational stakeholders, structures, industries, technologies, markets, and locations. Some of the most complex questions concern the intersection between the values and ethics of individual managers and other organizational members and the larger institutional values and culture. Although efforts have been made to apply ethical standards to organizational and institutional contexts, these efforts largely are in their infancy. Moreover, codes, ethics programs, and efforts to build more inclusive dialogues often come into direct conflict with the profit motive that dominates so much of modern corporate life. Finally, it is not clear that codes of ethics, ethical climates, or ethical leadership necessarily translate into more ethical organizational communication.

Media

The media have a long tradition of addressing a wide range of ethical issues, such as the standards and values inherent to journalism, including First Amendment protections for free speech and a free press (Elliott, 1986; Entman, 1989), standards regarding truthfulness and accuracy (P. Patterson & Wilkins, 2001), general norms for appropriateness (Lauzen, 2005), ethics and international media (Rao & Lee, 2005), ethics and new technology (Tompkins, 2003), moral development of journalists (Coleman & Wilkins, 2002), and issues of diversity (Biagi & Kern-Foxworth, 1997; Zeldes & Fico, 2005). In addition, issues of privacy, plagiarism, equal access, media ownership, advertising, sex and violence, deception, conflict of interest, and libel have been raised in general critiques of media ethics (Belsey & Chadwick, 1992; Christians et al. 1991; Day, 2000; Gordan & Kittross, 1990; Meyer, 1987).

Given their social impact, the media carry particular moral significance. Journalistic ethics, for example, promote truthful and accurate reporting, in part, because inaccuracy can create widespread harm (Meyer, 1987). The reporting of the Florida results for the 2000 U.S. president, for instance, created widespread confusion and disruption of political institutions. Journalists also are unique in facilitating the free flow of information necessary for a democracy to function (Seigel, 2002). In addition, important standards have developed about the appropriateness of media reporting, including how violence, gender, representation of various groups, diversity, age, and sexuality are portrayed (Christians et al., 2001). Finally, ethical issues in the media are associated with commercialism, including advertising, promotion of consumerism, and the exportation of media culture (Kerr, 2003).

Journalists often face specific ethical dilemmas associated with conflicts between standards for accuracy, truthfulness, and objectivity and other values and standards that are manifest in specific news stories or with larger social values. Covering stories about rape, for example, may create conflict between values regarding truthfulness and privacy (Lake, 1991). A news story regarding violence often comes into conflict with norms regarding appropriateness of graphic coverage (Parsons & Smith, 1988). Reporting of beheadings in Iraq, for instance, raised critical questions regarding whether graphic images should be used to accurately portray a news story. Journalists may be forced to confront conflicts between “objectivity” in news coverage and concerns for the human dignity of individuals involved in the tragedies, as many did in reporting on the AIDS crisis (Childers, 1988). In addition, questions involving conflict of interest arise in the media business, most often around ownership or advertiser interests. Finally, journalists often choose a standard of balance in seeking to manage these dilemmas by weighing the need to cover a story
accurately and completely against subject- and audience-based values and sensibilities (M. Johnson & Babcock, 1999).

As with applied ethics in medical and organizational contexts, media organizations have relied primarily on professional training and codes of ethics to promote ethical conduct. Codes of journalistic ethics have existed since at least the early 1900s and were associated with the emergence of journalism as a profession (Boeyink, 1998; Gordan & Kittross, 1999). Codes now are associated with nearly all professional communication or media associations, including advertising, public relations, marketing, television and radio broadcasting (including children’s, educational, public, and religious), and, of course, journalism. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (2002) developed its first formal code of conduct in the form of “Canons of Journalism” in 1922 (renamed “Statement of Principles” in 1975). The Society of Professional Journalists (2004) has an elaborate ethical code, adopted in 1996, that is based on four principles: (1) seek truth and report it, (2) minimize harm, (3) act independently, and (4) be accountable. Ethics programs and ombudspersons also are common in many newsrooms. Dramatic cases, such as Jayson Blair plagiarizing and fabricating stories at *The New York Times* (Hindman, 2005; M. J. Patterson & Urbanski, 2006), reiterate the need for journalists to be vigilant in attending to ethics. Many news organizations have developed codes of ethics, which regularly are revised and updated to reflect changes in media practices and social norms, as well as in response to specific ethical lapses (e.g., *The New York Times* undertook a major revision of its ethics code following the Blair scandal). In addition, professional organizations, such as the American Society of Newspaper Editors, frequently survey their members about ethical issues.

Journalism also has addressed many of these ethical dilemmas through extensive training and education. The Poynter Institute, for instance, maintains an extensive set of educational resources for professional, working journalists (http://www.poynter.org/). Among other things, Poynter hosts ethics workshops and training (e.g., on diversity in the profession) and an on-call group is available to provide counseling on ethical issues. The Society of Professional Journalists offers similar resources. In addition, most university degree programs in journalism require ethics as part of the curriculum (Christians, 2008; Hanson, 2002; Whitehouse & McPherson, 2002).

Problems in applying ethics to the media are diverse, complex, and characterized by competing values. For example, as the media have become more widely available and more homogenized, competing value positions have emerged. The U.S. Supreme Court’s use of a “contemporary community standard” to determine whether materials are obscene was one effort to address these competing values. Similar tensions have emerged as the media have become more international (Overbeck, 2008) and as globalization increases (Rao & Lee, 2005; Ward, 2005; Wasserman, 2006; Wasserman & Rao, 2008; see also Parrish-Sprowl, this volume). Developing countries often accuse U.S. mainstream media of a type of imperialism by exporting U.S. values. The controversy over competing values is a major source of conflict, as broadcasters claim expansive First Amendment rights to air a wide range of content, whereas community members and interest groups argue that much of that content is objectionable based on specific value positions. Another source of complexity concerns media organizations as businesses. Although the media serve a variety of public interest functions, some of which are constitutionally protected, most media organizations are profit-driven enterprises, and, consequently, competition between profit and public interests dominates many questions of applied media ethics. One place where public values have come into conflict with profit motives is in media convergence (e.g., Lawson-Borders, 2005; Sparks, Young, & Darnell, 2006).

In general, the problems of applied ethics in the media are extensive. Media organi-
zations and professional groups have been active in monitoring ethics issues, educating journalists, and offering resources, such as ethics ombudspersons, ethicists on call, and ethics codes. The competition of values and the profit-making nature of the media suggest that applied ethical issues are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Moreover, several efforts have been undertaken at community levels to create more access to the media, efforts that have been enhanced by new communication technologies (see Lievrouw, this volume). In addition, the community or public journalism movement has grown as a response to a belief that traditional journalism is disconnected from community needs and values (e.g., Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg, 1994; Glasser, 1999). Community or public journalism involves aligning journalistic practices more closely with community interests and needs by engaging the public in the process of news gathering and reporting. Two efforts to engage media ethics described in the literature are Gerbner’s cultural environmental movement and the Media Research and Action Project.

George Gerbner, a prominent scholar of media violence and the primary force behind cultivation theory, founded the cultural environmental movement (CEM), which was modeled after the 1960s to 1970s environmental movement and addresses the decay in the cultural environment associated with the media. The cultural environmental movement, according to Gerbner (1999), is founded on three truths:

1. That all persons are endowed with the right to live in a cultural environment that is respectful of their humanity and supportive of their potential.
2. That all children are endowed with the right to grow up in a cultural environment that fosters responsibility, trust, and community rather than force, fear, and violence.
3. That when the cultural environment becomes destructive of these ends, it becomes necessary to alter it. (p. 351)

The CEM currently exists as a loose association of independent groups and affiliated organizations that has been active in lobbying, education, and research efforts throughout the world. What is most interesting about CEM from an applied communication ethics perspective is Gerbner’s (1999, p. 348) conclusion that traditional “research is not enough” and that a new, active approach to answering questions about the media is required. This same recognition helped to launch the initial applied ethics movement in the 1960s.

The Media Research and Action Project (MRAP) is a programmatic effort to create social movement dynamics around efforts to “broaden the discourse in the mainstream media” (Ryan, Carragee, & Schwerner, 1998, p. 166; see also Ryan, Carragee, & Meinhofer, 2001). Founded in 1986 at Boston College, MRAP is a joint effort involving scholars in sociology, political science, education, history, and communication to provide media training and consultancy to community, labor, and nonprofit organizations, giving these organizations the tools to shape media coverage and, thereby, influence the media’s agenda and provide more voice to social issues. MRAP has been described as an example of promoting the social justice values of applied communication research (Frey, 1998b).

The efforts to take applied approaches to media ethics are robust and well developed. Many of these approaches are grounded in a larger ethic of social justice, as well as traditional journalistic values of democracy, diversity of voice, and free access to information. In these cases, the values largely complement each other. The impact of these efforts, however, is less clear. The effort to create and maintain a set of ethical guidelines for journalists also is well developed, but the efficacy of these efforts is poorly documented. Despite robust efforts to educate journalists in ethics and to create and maintain codes of ethics, dramatic cases of unethical conduct continue to emerge.
Value Dimensions of Applied Communication Research

Applied communication research is a comparatively new field that has generated more than its share of criticism. As the field has matured, applied scholars have begun to explore underlying ideological values. This discussion, initiated by Frey et al. (1996), tends to center on social justice as a primary ethical frame (see Frey & SunWolf, this volume). In addition, the larger value tradition of communication scholarship on empowerment and voice, and on free speech and access to information, inform applied communication scholarship. Although applied communication scholars appear reluctant to define precisely what they mean by social justice, the concept clearly is grounded in issues of justice, equality, and empowerment. Frey et al. (1996) suggested that a “social justice sensibility” underlying communication inquiry “(a) foregrounds ethical concerns, (b) commits to structural analysis of ethical problems, (c) adopts an activist’s orientation, and (d) seeks identification with others” (p. 111). Conquergood (1995) described “engaged” applied communication research as requiring scholars to recognize that they are “entangled within world systems of oppression and exploitation” (p. 85). Wood (1996) also described work in diversity, gender, empowerment, and sexual harassment within the larger frame of social justice. The evolving notion of social justice in applied communication research is most associated with Rawls’s (1999) concept of justice as equality. In Rawlsian justice, every individual should have equal access to basic rights, liberties, and opportunities. Social justice as the attainment of human rights, most often referring to a universal set of rights and status that accrue to individuals based solely on their humanity, and the fulfillment of the social contract is evident in applied communication research.

In the 1998 JACR special issue on communication and social justice, five research reports focused primarily on programs of social change. The people who were studied were engaged not only as research participants but also as partners in the process of change. In addition to the Varallo et al. (1998) and the MRAP project described earlier (Ryan et al., 1998), articles focused on serving learning and cross-cultural communication (Crabtree, 1998), improved race relations (Artz, 1998), and empowering education of prisoners (Hartnett, 1998). These studies addressed the consequences or outcomes of the applied communication research, as each project was concerned with achieving good consequences as a research outcome, including attaining fairness and equality. This interest in positive outcomes and good consequences occurs in addition to more traditional research concerns, such as methodological rigor and theory building (Frey & Carragee, 2007).

In addition, these and the other applied communication research projects described foreground a specific set of value orientations, among which are empowerment and voice, free speech, and access to information. Empowerment and voice are reflected in much of applied communication work in organizational settings, as well as in investigations framed from a social justice orientation. Empowerment and voice entail offering skills, tools, and opportunities to disenfranchised or powerless groups and individuals so that they can participate and express themselves more effectively and challenge dominant power structures. These values and goals are closely associated with specific processes and methods of communication. Free speech and access to information constitute a well-established value orientation in communication scholarship and are related to voice and empowerment. Access to information is a form of empowerment; moreover, it facilitates critical evaluation and effective decision making. Free speech and access to information often are framed as rights and, like empowerment, are associated with specific processes and structures of communication. Informed consent and the First Amendment role of the media both follow this larger value tradition.
A Research Agenda for Applied Communication Ethics

Although much work has been done in communication ethics, this work is disjointed and isolated by general contexts of communication and by specific issues, such as healthcare privacy, organizational codes of ethics, or access to information through media. Moreover, applied communication scholars are only beginning to identify shared ethical issues (e.g., privacy issues) that cut across these contexts. One immediate goal is to connect those areas of inquiry that share an ethical orientation to applied communication scholarship.

Articulating a larger research agenda for applied communication ethics is complicated by the complexity and range of ethical issues and by the lack of consensus regarding what values and standards should be prominent in various contexts. One outcome of the trend toward greater diversity, inclusion, and voice in professional and organizational contexts has been a greater diversity of values, which has made the resulting conversations both more inclusive and complex. There is not always clear consensus, for example, as to what constitutes a good or ethical consequence. In addition, ethics, values, and standards are sensitive areas for investigation that sometimes carry powerful stigmas and sanctions. Many research participants, organizations, and investigators may not be willing to openly discuss these issues. Researchers often must rely on the artifacts of ethics, including decisions, justifications, and documentation of formal values, such as codes of ethics and content-analytical (see Query et al., this volume) or critical methods. Some investigations have employed survey data to assess how members of particular professional communities perceive ethics. Fewer investigations, however, have gone beyond descriptive, critical, or exploratory approaches. These difficulties continue to provide fruitful areas for the study of applied communication ethics.

Another area for future research concerns an expanded understanding of the ethical traditions and standards that are germane to various forms and contexts of applied communication. This understanding includes the value traditions of empowerment and voice, free speech and access to information, and the social justice orientation. All three domains of communication described here include issues of free speech and access to information as important values, but questions remain about how applied communication research can further these values.

In addition, within most applied and professional contexts of communication, core values compete with one another in fundamental ways—one of the defining complexities of applied ethics. Few efforts have been made to understand how these conflicts are managed through communication processes, such as ethics codes. In fact, beyond investigations of whistleblowing, little is known about how individuals use communication to resolve issues of ethics in their professional/organizational life. This represents another significant deficiency in the current understanding of ethics and applied communication scholarship.

Concerns also surround the proposition that social justice should be a guiding ethic in applied communication. This orientation, however, first needs to be clarified more specifically with regard to how applied communication research can promote social justice. Applied communication scholarship, for example, is well positioned to help develop information sources and communication systems that nontraditional groups can use to empower themselves. In addition, applied communication in the form of social influence has the potential to address social wrongs.

Another area of inquiry concerns how applied communication research and other practices can lead to good or ethical consequences. The studies we reviewed suggest at least two modes. First, research results or outcomes can inform or lead to empowerment
of communities and audiences in ethically appealing ways. For instance, an investigation into the effectiveness of health communication can result in better understanding of how to reach disempowered groups with health messages, meaning that research results may help indirectly to produce an ethically appealing outcome. Second, the research project itself can be directly structured around ethically appealing questions and issues, which is a departure from more traditional approaches to research and where a social justice orientation most often comes into play. Some of the studies reviewed here, for instance, involved communication programs that were designed to create positive social change, and the researchers then investigated the effectiveness of those efforts. Other scholars have adopted an explicit advocacy stance within their research, targeted toward some larger issues that they see as unethical or unjust.

In addition, scholars should focus on applied communicative practices that lead to negative consequences. Some observers have gone as far as suggesting that applied scholars focus explicitly on the structural impediments to ethical conduct (Stewart, 2001). Thus, investigation of unethical communication and the factors that foster such communication can further this research agenda. Some studies, for example, have investigated the role of culture and ethical behavior (Waters & Bird, 1987); other studies have suggested that an equivocal context may create unethical communicative practices (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003). Moral development also has been examined as a factor in unethical professional communication (Coleman & Wilkins, 2002).

An additional area for research involves expanding the ethical standards for applied communication research. Beyond the provisions of IRBs and considerations of social justice, what research methods and procedures are most appropriate for achieving ethical applied communication research? Do some methods and procedures, for instance, better promote voice and empowerment?

Some of the studies examined here treated people as coresearchers by involving them in the design of projects and shifting ownership of the data to them. Are there other ways in which research projects can be constructed so that research participants are treated in ethically appealing ways? One of the clearest needs for ethical orientations to applied communication research concerns the research process itself. As described earlier, many of the IRB provisions, such as informed consent, essentially are communication phenomena. Scholars interested in applied communication ethics, therefore, should turn their attention to the informed consent process to examine questions of efficacy, clarify how informed consent functions with intercultural audiences or with audiences that have a limited capacity to understand research, and investigate forms of persuasion that influence an informed consent decision (Sharf, 1999).

A final issue concerns how fully the applied communication field should focus on questions of good consequences. Should all applied communication scholars consider ethical issues, beyond the IRB review, in undertaking research? To what degree do applied scholars have a moral obligation to seek good consequences beyond acquiring new knowledge? For example, are practical applications of research leading to desirable outcomes an essential component of ethical applied communication scholarship? Should the reporting of anticipated ethical consequences be part of a published applied communication report? What are the most appropriate ways to stimulate the moral imagination of applied communication scholars? How can conversations about the ethical consequences of applied communication be encouraged? We noted earlier that an emphasis on outcomes, strategies, and solutions enhances the ethical significance faced by applied communication scholars. Given this stance, questions of value and ethics should be central to all aspects of applied communication inquiry.
Conclusion

We began this review by noting that communication scholars, particularly those interested in applied issues, have been slow to embrace research questions related to ethics. Existing research is diverse and poorly integrated around larger themes of communication ethics. Although important value traditions have been established in the larger communication field, these have not always been carried forward in applied communication research (e.g., there are few examples of applied communication research with a social justice orientation). Moreover, many scholars and journal editors may not view such research as meeting established standards for rigorous scholarship. This scarcity of research exists despite almost universal agreement that ethics are central to communication processes and practices, and that applied communication research carries a particularly salient moral obligation. Although the lack of research is problematic, it also suggests opportunities for applied communication scholars. An applied orientation to issues of communication ethics not only has the potential to fill significant gaps in understanding how communication helps to solve problems and create desirable outcomes but, ultimately, also will elevate the moral standards of applied communication theory, research, and practice.

Notes

1. Even a cursory review of ethics and philosophy is beyond the scope of this chapter. This description, however, presents a very small sample of some major themes in ethics.
2. The distinction between theoretical and applied ethics is a matter of emphasis. In some ways, all ethicists are interested in applied issues because they are concerned with judgments of human behavior. The applied ethics orientation, as described here, emphasizes more limited and parochial contexts for ethics rather than develops broad theories that have universal or near-universal application.
3. A journalism colleague of one of us was told by an IRB member that he must receive IRB approval for every story he wrote and have all sources provide written informed consent before they could be quoted. When confronted with a copy of the First Amendment, the IRB representative backed down.

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