

Ethical issues in psychology flashcard



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Use of human participants in psychological research -The specification states that the candidates should consider ethical issues involved in psychological investigations using human participants. This should include the nature and usage of ethical guidelines in Psychology. The guidelines on researchMindful of the problem research such as Milgram's raises, more recently psychologists have taken the question of ethics very seriously. The American Psychological Association's guidelines to ethical conduct are very similar to those issued by The British Psychological Society. The psychological community is answerable to the law, the public and to itself and must set and monitor its own standards of conduct. The BPS guidelines stress that psychological research should be objective, competent and nonwasteful. Psychologists' responsibilities include making their data and findings public but not in such a way that they may be misinterpreted or abused.

Policy changes should not be made on the basis of psychological findings until those findings have been verified by careful replication. One contravention of these guidelines was that of Sir Cyril Burt's research into intelligence, which suggested that intelligence is largely inherited and stable throughout life. Some now argue that his data were fraudulent and, since he did not make them publicly available, there is no way of knowing if his conclusions have any scientific foundation. However, Burt's beliefs about the heritability of intelligence and his faith in psychometric testing were shared by others and helped to influence educational policy in Britain. The introduction of a public examination for all school children between the ages of 10 and 11 - the notorious I 1 + - is one example. Participants- OLD CARDWELL Investigators have a primary responsibility to protect participants

from physical and mental harm during the investigation. Normally the risk of harm must be no greater than in ordinary life. Where research may involve behaviour or experiences that participants may regard as personal and private, the participants must be protected from stress by all appropriate measures, including the assurance that answers to personal questions need not be given. The most recent BPS guidelines were proposed in February 1990. The original BPS guidelines on ethics were introduced in 1978 called 'Ethical Principles for Research with Human Subjects'.

Their revised ethical principles were proposed in February 1990. In the introduction to these revised ethical principles they stress their concern with the following areas: -i) Their recognition that psychologists are in debt to those who agree to take part in their studies. This is reflected in the change from the term subjects to participants. ii) The issue of deception caused the committee considerable problems. iii) Following the research especially when any deception or withholding information has taken place, the committee wished to emphasise the importance of the appropriate debriefing e. g. in an experiment where a negative mood was induced required the induction of a happy mood before the participant leaves the experimental setting. iv) The protection of participants by saying 'Psychologists have legal as well as moral responsibilities for those who help them on their study, and the long term reputation of the discipline depends largely upon the experience of those who encounter it first hand during psychological investigations' (Psychologist June 1990). TEN GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN ISSUED BY THE BPS.

General In all cases, investigators must consider the ethical implications and psychological consequences for the participants in their research.

They go on to advise that this should be done for all participants taking into account ethnic, personality, age and sex differences. Often the best judges of whether a piece of research is ethically acceptable will be members of the population from which the participants are selected. But it is not always possible to do this if, for example, the participants are children or are intellectually impaired. There are other instances of the difficulty in applying this rule. For instance, if you wanted to conduct a survey into the nature of child abuse, who would you approach to judge the ethics of such research?

2. Consent Whenever possible, investigators should obtain the consent of participants in a research project. This usually means ‘informed consent’*, that is, the investigator should explain, as fully as possible, the purpose and design of the research before proceeding. SOMETHING TO TRY Look at the following list of possible participants in research and consider (a) to what extent they can be fully informed, and (b) to what extent they can freely give their consent.

* adults who have learning or communication difficulties* children under 16 years of age* detained persons such as prisoners* people over whom the psychologist may be in a position of authority e. g. students or clients* psychiatric patients* participants who are offered payment or other inducement to take part in research A visual perception experiment involving a rotating disc like this could be very uncomfortable. ALISON WADELEY PAGE 5 Informing participants may well mean that they must be advised that the research procedure may involve discomfort or other risks, which they would not normally encounter. In this case, the researcher should seek the guidance of colleagues before asking for consent. 3. Deception Psychologists

must avoid deceiving participants about the nature of the research wherever possible. However, there are some occasions when it is necessary to conceal the research hypothesis from participants because, without deception, the research would be pointless.

SAQ Milgram deceived the volunteers in his study on at least three counts. Can you recall them? Have you or any of your friends ever had to deceive participants in an experiment? In retrospect, would it have been possible to design the experiment to avoid this? One safeguard to check if deception is justifiable is to consult other individuals similar in age and status to the proposed participants. Researchers can also ask the advice of colleagues and various ethical committees (for example, those set up by the BPS to discuss ethical conduct) and should be convinced that there is no effective alternative procedure to the one proposed. At all times, they should consider how participants are likely to be affected later by the knowledge that they have been deceived. Milgram piloted his research design before carrying out his first experiments. He asked 14 psychology students and 40 professors to estimate how far a sample of 100 participants would go in shocking another person. They estimated that most would stop about half way through and that only one or two would complete the experiment. So what are the alternatives? A novel approach to the problem was tried by Philip Zimbardo (1973) who used role play when he asked volunteers to act out the parts of prisoners and guards in a mock prison in the basement of Stanford University's psychology department.

FIGURE 3 Zimbardo's simulated prison experiment. Deindividuality seemed to lead guards to punish the prisoners more severely and the prisoners to

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accept passively. ALISON WADELEY PAGE 6 Here, in contrast to Milgram's work, the participants gave their full, informed consent. Yet, even with this knowledge, there was no preventing the emergence of power relationships and deference to authority. In fact the role playing became so realistic that Zimbardo had to stop the experiment after only six days because of distress experienced by the 'prisoners' and the increasing brutality of the 'guards'. He had hoped to run the experiment for two weeks. Like Milgram, Zimbardo found himself defending his research (Zimbardo et al. 1973).

Milgram's participants were quite grossly deceived. Not only did they believe they were shocking an innocent victim and that the victim suffered terribly, but also the whole purpose of the research was completely distorted as concerning the effects of punishment on learning. Deception is exceedingly common in psychology experiments. Menges (1973) reviewed about 1000 American studies and found that 80% involved giving participants less than complete information. In only 3% of studies were participants given complete information about the independent variable, and information about the dependent variable was incomplete in 75% of cases. Some of this deception seems fairly innocuous. Some participants are told a baby is male, others that it is female, and their descriptions of it are compared.

Participants performing a sensori-motor task, where the true aim is to record the effect of an observer on performance, are told that the observer is present to note.

Debriefing Debriefing means more than just informing the participants of the nature of the research and the findings. It must take the form of 'active intervention'. (In other words, the psychologist should be prepared to discuss

the procedures with participants and work hard to ensure that they leave the research situation, as far as possible, in the state in which they entered it. However, the intention to debrief participants later is no excuse for exposing them to unacceptable levels of risk, neither is the inability to debrief them (see 'observational research' later in this section.) EG: After the experiment was over Milgram went to great lengths to debrief the participants. He reunited them with the 'learner' to show them no harm had been done. He held post experimental interviews and reassured participants that their reactions were not unusual. He also conducted follow-up interviews to check that there was no long-term damage.

In all research studies, the investigator has a responsibility to DEBRIEF each participant. The true purpose and aims of the study are revealed and every attempt is made to ensure that participants feel the same about themselves when they leave as they did when they arrived. Where participants have been seriously deceived, this responsibility must obviously be taken very seriously and quite some time may need to be spent in reassuring them. The debriefing itself may have to involve a little more deception, as when children are told they 'did very well indeed' whatever the actual standard of their performance and when any suspicion that a participant really is 'poorly adjusted' is not communicated to them. Applying this to Milgram's experiments, participants who went to the end of the scale were told that some people did this quite gleefully, in order that they could then compare their own unwillingness to proceed, along with their felt anxiety, fairly favorably. (Milgram has never reported that any participant did proceed at all happily). However, at least 26 out of 40 participants knew, when they left,

that they were capable, under pressure, of inflicting extreme pain, if not death, on an innocent human being. It seems hardly possible that these people left the laboratory feeling the same about themselves as before they entered.

In Asch's (1956) classic paradigm too, participants find they have 'conformed' to silly answers to simple problems because a group of confederates gave the answers first. These participants also exhibited great anxiety during the experimental sessions. 5. Withdrawal from the investigation Investigators must inform participants of their right to withdraw, without penalty, at any stage of the research. This may be difficult to achieve with children, for instance, or in observational research, but it should still be attempted. Participants, who are unhappy about the situation after debriefing, have the right to require that their data are withdrawn and destroyed in their presence. In Milgram's experiment, the experimenter used verbal prods when participants showed reluctance to continue. Recall the prods used.

Can their use be justified? 6. Confidentiality Participants have the right to expect that any information provided by them will be treated confidentially and that their identities will not be revealed unless they have given prior informed consent. (The Data Protection Act (1984) enshrines this right in law.) Some of the participants in Zimbardo's study chose later to tell their stories to Life magazine, but the choice to do this was theirs and not Zimbardo's. ALISON WADELEY PAGE 7 Apart from any ethical considerations, there is a purely pragmatic argument for guaranteeing anonymity for participants at all times. If psychologists kept publishing identities along with <https://assignbuster.com/ethical-issues-in-psychology-flashcard/>

results, the general public would soon cease to volunteer or agree to research participation. An investigator can guarantee anonymity or request permission to identify individuals. Such identification may occur, through the use of video recordings as teaching materials for instance, as in Milgram's film *Obedience to Authority*.

Research participants who have been seriously deceived have the right to witness destruction of any such records they do not wish to be kept. If records are kept, participants have the right to assume these will be safeguarded and used only by thoroughly briefed research staff. Usually, though, results are made anonymous as early as possible during analysis by using a letter or number instead of a name. There are very special circumstances where an investigator might contravene the confidentiality rule and these are where there are clear, direct dangers to human life. An investigator conducting participant observation into gang life would have a clear obligation to break confidence where a serious crime was about to be committed. A psychiatric patient's plan to kill himself or a roommate would be reported. The ethical principles involved here are broader than those involved in conducting scientific research. The participant obviously has the right to privacy, and procedures should not be planned which directly invade this without warning.

Where a procedure is potentially intimate, embarrassing or sensitive, the participant should be clearly reminded of the right to withhold information or participation. Particular care would be required, for instance, where participants are being asked about sexual attitudes or behaviour. This principle is difficult to follow in the case of covert participant observation,

and serious criticism has been leveled at users of this approach on these grounds. Investigators would usually send a copy of the final research report to all participants, along with a justification of it in terms of its contribution to scientific knowledge and benefit to society in general. This procedure can be difficult where covert observation in a field situation has occurred, and expensive where a survey has used a very large sample. COOLICAN PAGE 2407. Protection of participants Psychologists must protect participants from mental or physical harm during their investigations. Risks greater than those likely to be encountered in everyday life should be avoided.

Participants should also be asked to reveal any medical conditions, or other problems, which might put them at special risk. Participants should also be told how to contact the investigator should some unforeseen consequence of the research arise. The researcher is then obliged to correct or remove the problem. In order to assess any possible long-term harm done to the participants in his study, Milgram used a post experimental questionnaire. He obtained the following responses: * 84% said they were ' glad' or ' very glad' to have taken part 15% were ' neutral'* 1. 3% said they were ' sorry' or ' very sorry' to have taken part* 80% said there should be more research of that kind* 74% said they had learned something of personal value. In fact, a year after the experiment, Milgram received a letter from a participant saying how he continued to appreciate the importance of not hurting another person even if encouraged to do so by someone in authority. S.

aQDiana Baumrind (1964) is a vociferous critic of Milgram's research. In addition to the problem of deception, she claims not enough was done to protect participants from harm, many of whomn suffered from stress during

the experiment. What was the range of these reactions? ALISON WADELEY PAGE 8

If the procedures involve encroachments of privacy, it is important that participants are not deceived about the purpose of the research and that they understand that they have no obligation to reveal anything of a private or personal nature. Where research involves children, great care must be exercised in discussing the results with parents, teachers, or anyone who may give the information undue weight. Personality or intelligence test results are just two examples of the kind of information which can be misunderstood by the layperson and this could cause the parents unwarranted worry, affect relationships within the family and influence the self-esteem of the child. Think of three ways in which parents' or teachers' expectations might influence children.

8. Observational research (Observational research into posture mimicry.

Where observations of individuals who do not give their informed consent is concerned - for example, the behavior of people on the bus - it is important to respect people's privacy and well-being. Observation should take place only in those situations where people would normally expect to be in public view and not where they expect to be unobserved. The use of a one-way mirror - in an interview or a consulting room, for example - would not be permissible unless the interviewee knew its purpose. In 1970 Humphreys was able to observe homosexual acts in a public washroom by agreeing to act as lookout. The men were unaware that they were part of a study and their car registration numbers were taken so that more information could be obtained later. Were these procedures justified? ALISON WADELEY PAGE 99.

Giving advice On occasion, in the course of research, the investigator may become

aware that a participant has a significant psychological or physical problem of which they are unaware. In such a case, the researcher is obliged to tell the participant and to provide information about how to obtain appropriate professional advice.

However, if a participant solicits advice about a personal problem, as sometimes happens, it is only appropriate for the investigator to give it if it were agreed beforehand as part of the research design. EG: In research involving reading or writing, a psychologist may suspect that a participant is dyslexic and unaware of this. The psychologist has an obligation to reveal this information as sensitively as possible and then suggest where help may be obtained should the participant wish to know. 10. Colleagues' research

Investigators share responsibility for maintaining high ethical standards in their research and should monitor their own work and that of others. This applies at any level of research whether it is at GCSE level, AS, A level or above. Research projects need careful thinking through before they are put into action. SOMETHING TO TRY

In an experiment to test the tendency of people to help others in distress Piliavin, Rodin and Piliavin (1969) used as participants people traveling on the New York subway.

A student stayed a collapse while the train was in motion. Observers in the carriage noted the tendency of members of the public to help under a variety of conditions. Variables tested were the race of the student, apparent drunkenness and apparent illness. Identify as many ethical issues as possible in this research. Summary

Psychology aims to understand human behavior and to improve the quality of human life. To do this, it is necessary for psychologists to carry out research yet they must do so in such a way that

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the rights and dignity of the people who take part in it are respected. In addition to this, psychologists must consider the damage