

Ethical Issues and Guidelines in Psychology

Philip Banyard and Cara Flanagan



PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH

ROUTLEDGE MODULAR PSYCHOLOGY SERIES

**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

Ethical Issues and Guidelines in Psychology

How do we know right from wrong? How can we judge the behaviour of other people?

Ethics are the rules and guidelines that we use to make judgements of right and wrong. Psychologists have to consider ethical issues because they deal with people and study their behaviour on a daily basis. The study of ethics is one of the more difficult areas of psychology because there are no clear answers. That might well make it one of the more interesting areas for you, or one of the most frustrating. In this book we offer you the opportunity to develop and express your own opinion in relation to ethics in psychology.

The book explains some key ethical issues and reviews the various ethical principles and guidelines developed by professional bodies. The problems relating to different kinds of research are discussed, as well as the special case of socially sensitive research. Finally the question of the use of animals in research is examined – is it useful and is it right to use non-human animals in psychological research?

Philip Banyard is Associate Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University.

Cara Flanagan is a widely published freelance author and experienced senior examiner.

Routledge Modular Psychology

Series editors: Cara Flanagan is a freelance academic author and an experienced teacher and examiner for AS and A2 level psychology. Philip Banyard is Associate Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University and has 20 years experience as a Chief Examiner for GCSE and A level Psychology.

The *Routledge Modular Psychology* series is a completely new approach to introductory level psychology, tailor-made to the new modular style of teaching. Each short book covers a topic in more detail than any large textbook can, allowing teacher and student to select material exactly to suit any particular course or project.

The books have been written especially for those students new to higher level study, whether at school, college or university. They include specially designed features to help with technique, such as a model essay at an average level with an examiner's comments to show how extra marks can be gained. The authors are all examiners and teachers at the introductory level.

The *Routledge Modular Psychology* texts are all user friendly and accessible and use the following features:

- practice essays with specialist commentary to show how to achieve a higher grade
- chapter summaries to assist with revision
- progress and review exercises
- glossary of key terms
- summaries of key research
- further reading to stimulate ongoing study and research
- cross-referencing to other books in the series

For more details on our AS, A2 and *Routledge Modular Psychology* publications visit our website at www.a-levelpsychology.co.uk

Also available in this series (titles listed by syllabus section):

**ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT AND
ABNORMAL BEHAVIOUR**
**Classification and Diagnosis of
Psychological Abnormality**

Susan Cave

Psychopathology

*John D. Stirling and Jonathan
S.E. Hellewell*

**Therapeutic Approaches in
Psychology**

Susan Cave

BIO-PSYCHOLOGY

**Awareness: Biorhythms, sleep and
dreaming**

Evie Bentley

Cortical Functions

John Stirling

Motivation and Emotion

Phil Gorman

**The Physiological Basis of Behaviour:
Neural and hormonal processes**

Kevin Silber

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Attention and Pattern Recognition

Nick Lund

Language and Thought

Nick Lund

Memory and Forgetting

John Henderson

**Perception: Theory,
development and organisation**

Paul Rookes and Jane Willson

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

**Early Socialisation: Sociability and
attachment**

Cara Flanagan

Social and Personality Development

Tina Abbott

PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH

Cognitive Development

Lisa Oakley

Controversies in Psychology

Philip Banyard

Debates in Psychology

Andy Bell

**Ethical Issues and Guidelines in
Psychology**

*Cara Flanagan and Philip Banyard
(forthcoming)*

**Introducing Research and Data in
Psychology: A guide to methods and
analysis**

Ann Searle

**Theoretical Approaches in
Psychology**

Matt Jarvis

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Interpersonal Relationships

Diana Dwyer

Pro-Social and Anti-Social Behaviour

David Clarke

Social Cognition

Donald C. Pennington

Social Influences

Kevin Wren

COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Animal Cognition

Nick Lund

**Determinants of Animal
Behaviour**

Jo-Anne Cartwright

**Evolutionary Explanations of Human
Behaviour**

John Cartwright

OTHER TITLES

Health Psychology

Anthony Curtis

Psychology and Crime

David Putwain and Aidan Sammons

Psychology and Education

Susan Bentham

Psychology and Work

Christine Hodson

Sport Psychology

Matt Jarvis

STUDY GUIDE

Exam Success in AQA-A Psychology

Paul Humphreys (forthcoming)



Ethical Issues and Guidelines in Psychology

Philip Banyard and Cara Flanagan

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2005
by Routledge
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 2FA
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016
Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group
© 2005 Routledge

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

The publisher makes no representation, express or implied, with regard to the accuracy of the information contained in this book and cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made.

This publication has been produced with paper manufactured to strict environmental standards and with pulp derived from sustainable forests.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been applied for

ISBN 0-415-26880-X (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-26881-8 (pbk)

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Illustrations | xi |
| Acknowledgements | xiii |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| Ethical issues | 4 |
| What are morals and ethics? | 6 |
| <i>Absolute and relative morals</i> | 9 |
| <i>Rights and values</i> | 10 |
| <i>Community or individual rights?</i> | 15 |
| <i>Moral and ethical development</i> | 15 |
| <i>Legal requirements and professional standards</i> | 16 |
| <i>Principles, guidelines and issues</i> | 17 |
| Why study ethics? | 18 |
| Summary | 18 |
| 2 Ethical issues in human research | 21 |
| Ethical principles and the issues they bring up | 21 |
| <i>The participant's view</i> | 23 |
| <i>The profession's view</i> | 30 |
| <i>Society's view</i> | 32 |
| Justifying unethical research | 32 |
| <i>Some forms of deception aren't that bad</i> | 33 |
| <i>Validity of research data</i> | 34 |
| <i>Costs and benefits</i> | 34 |

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Resolving ethical issues | 36 |
| <i>Ethical committees</i> | 36 |
| <i>Use of ethical guidelines</i> | 37 |
| <i>Ways to gain consent without asking</i> | 38 |
| <i>Alternatives: role play</i> | 38 |
| Summary | 39 |
| 3 Ethical principles and guidelines | 41 |
| What are ethical principles and guidelines? | 41 |
| <i>The BPS ethical principles</i> | 42 |
| <i>Comments on the BPS ethical principles</i> | 49 |
| Limitations of ethical principles as a way of resolving ethical issues | 52 |
| <i>What's missing?</i> | 52 |
| <i>Using the principles and guidelines to judge research</i> | 57 |
| Summary | 62 |
| 4 Ethical issues in different kinds of research | 65 |
| Experiments | 65 |
| <i>Field experiments</i> | 65 |
| <i>Natural experiments</i> | 67 |
| <i>Laboratory experiments</i> | 69 |
| Non-experimental research | 70 |
| <i>Observational studies</i> | 70 |
| <i>Cross-cultural research</i> | 72 |
| <i>Questionnaire</i> | 72 |
| <i>Research using correlational analysis</i> | 73 |
| Summary | 74 |
| 5 Socially sensitive research | 77 |
| Socially sensitive issues | 78 |
| <i>Examples of socially sensitive research</i> | 78 |
| <i>Cultural sensitivity</i> | 81 |
| Should socially sensitive research be avoided? | 83 |
| How should psychologists conduct socially sensitive research? | 84 |
| <i>Dealing with cultural sensitivity</i> | 86 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Summary | 87 |
| 6 Psychology in practice | 89 |
| Military psychology | 89 |
| <i>Sensory deprivation</i> | 91 |
| <i>Animals at war</i> | 92 |
| <i>Psy-Ops (Psychological Operations)</i> | 93 |
| <i>Ethical issues in military psychology</i> | 95 |
| The conduct of psychologists | 96 |
| <i>Psychologists and the media</i> | 96 |
| <i>Psychologists and therapy</i> | 100 |
| Speaking out | 106 |
| Summary | 107 |
| 7 Psychological research with non-human animals | 109 |
| Examples of research with non-human animals | 110 |
| <i>Harlow's monkeys</i> | 112 |
| <i>Operant training</i> | 113 |
| <i>Sensory deprivation</i> | 114 |
| <i>Field studies</i> | 115 |
| <i>Naturalistic observations</i> | 116 |
| Constraints on animal research | 116 |
| <i>Summarising the constraints</i> | 118 |
| <i>Guiding principles</i> | 119 |
| <i>Exempted species</i> | 119 |
| <i>Commentary</i> | 120 |
| Usefulness | 120 |
| <i>Generalising from animal to human behaviour</i> | 121 |
| <i>Generalising from animal physiology to human physiology</i> | 122 |
| <i>Studying animals to find out about animals</i> | 124 |
| Ethics | 124 |
| <i>Pain and distress</i> | 124 |
| <i>Speciesism</i> | 126 |
| <i>Empty cages</i> | 128 |
| Conclusion | 129 |
| Summary | 130 |
| 8 Study aids | 131 |

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Improving your essay writing skills | 131 |
| Practice essay 1 AQA(A) style ethics question | 133 |
| Practice essay 2 OCR style ethics question | 136 |
| Practice essay 3 | 139 |
| Journal articles | 142 |

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Glossary | 147 |
| Notes | 151 |
| References | 155 |
| Index | 167 |

Illustrations



Figure

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| 4.1 | Distributions of binkiness in males and females | 68 |
|------------|---|----|

Table

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| 6.1 | Studies on the sexual relations between therapist and clients | 105 |
|------------|---|-----|

Acknowledgements

Phil Banyard would like to acknowledge the support he gets from his colleagues, family, friends and students in his work. In particular he would like to thank them for humouring his irrational rants against the world and everything. He would also like to thank the following for providing absurd and pointless behaviour for him to rant at: media psychologists, weather forecasters, the management of Heathrow airport and Nottingham Forest football club. He would also like to acknowledge the support of his co-author Cara for her patience and tolerance. Maybe he will develop those qualities himself one day.

Cara Flanagan would like to thank her partner and children for their willingness to remain friendly despite the long hours she spends conversing with her computer. She also thanks her co-author for his special gift with words and ideas.

The authors would also like to thank Matt Jarvis and Andy Bell for their very useful comments on the first draft of this book, and the team at Routledge for their forbearance. Finally we would like to thank Mike Cardwell for giving us this opportunity.

Introduction

- ✘ Ethical issues
- ✘ What are morals and ethics?
- ✘ Why study ethics?
- ✘ Summary

In this chapter we will look at what we mean by ethics. We will consider an array of terms such as morals, ethical issues, ethical guidelines, human rights, ethical relativism and utilitarianism, to name but a few. These can be easily confused by the reader (and by authors to be fair) but we will try and work our way through as best we can in order to better understand how psychologists develop their ideas of right and wrong and how we end up with the ethical codes that guide our behaviour. First though, look below at two examples of scientific studies that have raised some serious ethical concerns.

The Tuskegee experiment

In 1932 the US Public Health Service began an investigation into the long-term effects of untreated syphilis. The researchers promised 400 men free treatment for ‘bad blood’ – a polite word for syphilis which was rife at that time in the state of Alabama. The Tuskegee experiment

lasted for 40 years and was finally exposed by a journalist, Jean Heller, in 1972. It emerged that there had never been any intention to treat the men suffering from syphilis. The aim of the study was to observe the natural course of the disease. Untreated syphilis can lead to mental illness and early death, and it is estimated that between 28 and 100 of the men died as a result of their syphilis. It is also likely that many of the men passed on the disease to partners and children. It may not surprise you to know that the men were all black and all poor. These men were duped. They were offered incentives to participate: free physical examinations, free rides to and from the clinics, hot meals on examination days, free treatment for minor ailments, and a guarantee that a sum of \$50 would be paid when they died. They were given a medication but it was just something for the common cold (Jones 1993).

Why did the researchers do it? Perhaps they felt it was important to record objective data about syphilis and the value of this research should justify the liberties they took. With retrospect this has been called 'America's dirty little secret' as well as 'America's Nuremberg'. The reference to Nuremberg is that this was where Nazi war criminals were tried, some for their participation in medical experiments without the consent of patients (we will discuss this shortly).

What happened to the men from Tuskegee, and their survivors? After the study was publicised in 1972 the participants sued the US government and an out-of-court settlement was made to the men or their surviving relatives. In 1997 President Clinton gave an official apology.

One important outcome of the Tuskegee experiment, and some other medical experiments, has been the introduction of stricter ethical standards. It made officials aware of the potential for harm in scientific research and of researchers' responsibilities.

HM

The case study of HM appears in many introductory psychology texts. It concerns a man who lost the ability to remember information after a brain operation. He is very famous in psychology and 'he has probably had more words written about him than any other case in neurological or psychological history' (Ogden and Corkin 1991: 195).

HM is always given initials to protect his identity, though that might seem ironic after you read about what the psychologists did

to him. He was born in 1926 and had a head injury at the age of 7 that started a lifetime of epileptic seizures. These seizures got worse over the years and in his mid twenties he was having uncontrolled grand mal attacks (health-threatening seizures). It was proposed to attempt a brain operation to a cure the epilepsy and a surgeon called Scoville performed the first 'bilateral medial temporal lobe resection' in the world (an operation that involved cutting out that part of HM's brain). On the good side, HM survived the operation and his epilepsy was now less damaging, but on the very big downside he had profound retrograde and anterograde amnesia. More precisely, he had lost much of his memory for the ten years prior to the operation (retrograde amnesia), and even more damagingly, he had lost the ability to store new information (anterograde amnesia). He had a memory span of just a few minutes, so he was effectively waking up every few minutes not knowing where he was or who he was talking to:

[The first psychological examination] was performed on April 26, 1955. The memory defect was immediately apparent. The patient gave the date as March, 1953, and his age as 27. Just before coming into the examining room he had been talking to Dr. Karl Pribram, yet he had no recollection of this at all and denied that anyone had spoken to him. In conversation, he reverted constantly to boyhood events and seemed scarcely to realize that he had had an operation. (Scoville and Milner 1957: 16)

This was clearly a disaster for HM though he probably never understood that because he could never learn what happened to him, or if he did he would forget it within a couple of minutes. This was a tragedy for HM, but an opportunity for psychologists who became aware of the case. They queued up to study HM's memory, assessing it with all kinds of tests and checking out a wide range of hypotheses concerning the theoretical distinctions between long-term and short-term memory, and between explicit and implicit memory. They used all sorts of stimuli including electric shocks and white noise (for a review see Corkin 1984, or Parkin 1996). One of 'the most striking characteristics is that he rarely complains about anything . . . is always agreeable and co-operative to the point that if . . . asked to sit in a particular place he will do so indefinitely' (Corkin 1984: 251). In other words he was an ideal subject of study.

The tests continued for 40 years until HM was in his late sixties and his mental faculties were starting to show a general deterioration. One of the psychologists wrote of the major contribution this work had made to our understanding of memory and commented ‘the fact that he has no conscious memory of this work does not in any way detract from the debt we owe him’ (Ogden and Corkin 1991). The story of HM is commonly presented without comment in psychology books, but ask yourself this: how did HM give consent for the 40 years of constant experimentation? He did not know what was being done to him or even who was doing it. Is this ground-breaking science or cruel exploitation of a man whose life has been ruined by experimental brain surgery? Are the benefits of this research outweighed by the costs? An interesting and disturbing footnote is that the tragedy of HM is often presented as a unique case but the operation was carried out on a number of people with psychiatric conditions who also experienced memory loss (Scoville and Milner 1957). This raises a further ethical issue because it is possible to make a mistake and carry out an operation with unforeseen consequences but after the first one, the consequences must have been expected.

Ethical issues

These two cases highlight some central **ethical issues**: First there is the issue of **informed consent**, which refers to the idea that any participant in an experiment should be informed about what the research entails and asked formally to consent to take part. This basic human right was first recognised by the Nuremberg trials. During World War II (1939–45) Nazi doctors conducted various experiments on prisoners. For example, the doctors tested their reactions to fatal diseases such as typhoid, and to extreme temperatures by immersing them in freezing water to see how long it would take for them to die. After the war a ten-point code (Nuremberg Code) was produced which has formed the basis for many contemporary ethical codes in both medical and behavioural research (Box 1.1).

The second issue raised by the two studies above is the one of *costs versus benefits*. All researchers believe that their research offers potential benefits and they recognise that there are certain costs. The difficulty is in assessing the costs and benefits, and then deciding whether the research is justified. In the case of medical research, it is

Box 1.1 The Nuremberg Code (1946)

1. The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential.
2. The experiment should yield fruitful results for the good of society, that cannot be obtained by other means.
3. The experiment should be based on previous research so that the anticipated results can justify the research.
4. All unnecessary physical and mental suffering should be avoided.
5. No experiment should be conducted where there is reason to believe that death or disabling injury may be the result.
6. The degree of risk should also be less than the potential humanitarian importance of the research.
7. Adequate precautions should be in place to protect the subjects against any possible injury.
8. Experiments should only be conducted by qualified persons.
9. The human subject should always be at liberty to end the experiment.
10. The scientist in charge should be prepared to terminate any experiment if there is probable cause to believe that continuation is likely to result in injury or death.

Source: Adapted from Katz (1972).

Consider the case of HM described on pages 2–4. Which of the above points were violated in the research conducted with HM?

Progress exercise

easier to assess benefits but, as we will see, this is much harder in the behavioural sciences because the potential benefits to others are less easy to define. These issues are explored again in Chapter 2.

The third issue raised by these studies is the modern expectation that scientists treat all people with respect and take all reasonable steps to *protect their welfare*. If we see some people as less important than