



Social influence 4: ethics in social influence research

Module PSYB2

Section A - Social Psychology

3.2.1 social influence

What we will be learning about

Over the past few weeks we have seen examples of social psychological research into topics like social facilitation, conformity and obedience. In the course of doing these studies, psychologists have deliberately misled their participants, put them under social pressure, exposed them to stressful conditions and radically altered their perceptions of themselves and the world. In this topic we ask whether it is legitimate for a psychologist to do these things to people in order to advance their scientific knowledge. We will examine some ways of deciding what is and is not permissible for psychological researchers and look at some of the mechanisms that regulate what is done in the course of research. Everything you learn about ethics in this topic can potentially be applied to psychological research in all areas, not just social influence.

What you could be tested on

| | A01 – knowledge & understanding | A02 – application, analysis & evaluation | A03 – methods, statistics & ethics (how science works) |
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| You must be able to... | Outline what is meant by ‘ethics’. Describe aspects of studies of social facilitation, conformity and obedience (at least one of each) that raise ethical issues. | Analyse studies of social influence in terms of the ethical issues raised. | State two or more ethical issues that may arise in the course of studying human behaviour. |
| You should be able to... | Describe information relevant to assessing the ethical status of studies of social influence (could include e.g. criticisms made by other psychologists, information about the social impact of research findings, feedback from participants in the studies etc.) | Analyse studies of social influence in terms of their costs and benefits. Assess whether classic studies of social influence would be allowed under current regulations. | Explain cost-benefit analysis as a process for making ethical decisions. Outline a range of safeguards against ethical abuses (e.g. ethical guidelines, ethical committees). Identify and outline strengths and weaknesses of safeguards against ethical abuses. |
| You could be able to... | Outline the utilitarian and deontological approaches to ethics. | Evaluate studies of social influence in terms of their ethical implications Assess the implications of adopting utilitarian/deontological views of ethical issues.. | Evaluate the effectiveness of ethical guidelines etc. Consider the implications of the (apparent) conflict between scientific progress and ethical responsibility to participants. |