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| **Ethical Implications of Research Studies and Theory AO1 and AO3** | | | |
| **Ethical Implications of Research Studies and Theory AO1** | | | |
| **Ethical Implications**  Although researchers may exercise considerable control over the methods they select and the way they treat PPs, they may have relatively little say in terms of how their research findings are represented (or misrepresented) in the media, the impact of their work on public policy, and how it may influence our perception of particular groups in society. This amounts to a concern with the wider ***ethical implications*** of research. | | | |
| **Socially Sensitive Research**  Some areas of research are likely to be more controversial, and be subject to greater ***social sensitivity*** than others e.g. researching long-term memory is unlikely to have far-reaching consequences for those being studied or broader social groups, whereas a genetic basis for criminal personality might have. Studies that tackle socially sensitive ‘taboo’ topics such as aspects of race or sexuality also attract a good deal of attention; not merely from other psychologists but also from the media and the general public.  However, this should not discourage researchers from investigating these topics and ‘shying away’; in fact it should do the opposite and encourage them as psychologists may have a social responsibility to carry these pieces of research out. | | | |
| **Ethical Issues in Socially Sensitive Research**  Sieber and Stanley (1988) identified a number of concerns that researchers should be mindful of when conducting socially sensitive research:  Implications – the wider effects should be carefully considered as some studies may be seen as giving ‘scientific’ credence to prejudice and discrimination, such as studies examining the racial bias of intelligence. However the implications of research may be difficult to predict at the outset.  Uses/public policy – what is the research likely to be used for? And what would happen if it was used for the wrong purpose? This is related to the idea that findings may be adopted by the government for political ends or to shape public policy.  The validity of the research – some findings that were presented as objective and value-free in the past have actually turned out to be highly suspect, and in some cases, fraudulent (e.g. Cyril Burt). However many modern social constructionist researchers are much more up-front about their own biases and preconceptions, and include comment on the ***reflexive*** nature of their work in their publications.  [http://tse1.mm.bing.net/th?&id=OIP.Mb1f40d09d586c178a9b35864d063610eo1&w=129&h=173&c=0&pid=1.9&rs=0&p=0](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=cyril+burt&view=detailv2&adlt=strict&id=B35FD358080AC1F9DE26F69B1E7BFB39E569BAEE&selectedIndex=1&ccid=sfQNCdWG&simid=607993303881288707&thid=OIP.Mb1f40d09d586c178a9b35864d063610eo1)[Image result for exam hall](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=exam+hall&view=detailv2&adlt=strict&id=914A2D7ADC3C435FD7B97D1794A8EF8A61D0159A&selectedIndex=2&ccid=j8fA4Tj3&simid=608012240395176538&thid=OIP.M8fc7c0e138f733e4a1ad335a2cc8b888H0) | | | |
| **Ethical implications of research studies and theory AO3** | | | |
| **Benefits of socially sensitive research**  P: Despite the ethical implications associated with research into controversial and ‘taboo’ topics, there are many benefits.  E: For example, research into the reliably of eyewitness testimony has reduced the risk of miscarriages of the justice within the legal system.  E: It has also been argued by Sandra Scarr (1988) that studies of underrepresented groups and issues may promote a greater sensitivity and understanding towards them.  L: This suggests that socially sensitive research may play a valuable role in society. | **Framing the question**  P: Misinterpretation is likely to occur when investigating minority groups.  E: For example, Kitzinger and Coyle (1995) note how research into so called ‘alternative relationships’ has been guilty of a form of ‘heterosexual bias’ within which homosexual relationships were compared and judged against heterosexual norms.  E: Sieber and Stanley (1988) go on further to explain that the way in which research questions are phased and investigated may also influence the way in which findings are interpreted.  L: This suggests that investigators must approach their research with an ‘open mind’ and be prepared to have their preconceptions challenged if they are to avoid misrepresenting minority groups. | **Who gains?**  P: Socially sensitive research has been used by the government and other institutions to shape social policy, despite the sometimes dubious nature of its findings. This does not always benefit everyone.  E: For example, Burt’s research into IQ was very influential establishing the 11+ examination. Burt’s views were based on the evidence he produced that intelligence was genetic, citing studies of twins that showed a heritability coefficient of .77. Discrepancies in his data later revealed Burt had made much of it up.  E: The 11+ however, and the idea that children should be separated on the basis of their ‘natural’ intelligence, remained for a good few years afterwards and still lingers!  L: This shows that research that seeks to manipulate the public has obvious ethical implications, it also raises the issue of who benefits from such research. | **Social control**  P: Socially sensitive research can been used to support discriminatory practises.  E: For example, in America during the 1920’s and 30’s, a large number of US states enacted legislation that led to the compulsory sterilisation of many citizens on the grounds that they were ‘feeble-minded’ and a drain on society. This included people deemed to be of low intelligence, drug or alcohol addicts and the mentally ill.  E: The rationale was supported by many sections of the scientific and psychological community at the time was that such feeble minded people were unfit to breed.  L: This suggests that socially sensitive research can be used to demonise minority groups and cause more social problems rather than minimising them. |