

## Reviews

### Research Ethics for Social Scientists

*Mark Israel and Iain Hay*

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Not so long ago it was rare to find any mention of ethical issues in research methodology texts, let alone any analytical or constructive discussion. Now there is a burgeoning literature, albeit often covering the same sort of ground by way of hints and tips on ethical practice with little exploration of 'ethics' *per se* in the context of an increasingly regulatory state in all aspects of professional behaviour. Indeed the first sentence in Israel and Hay (2006: 1) tell us that 'Social scientists are angry and frustrated'. Apparently this is because regulatory practices -- ethics committees and so on -- fail to understand the niceties of social research and are repressive and inhibiting. This somewhat combative stance reappears periodically throughout the book as researchers are invited to educate their local committees, presumably drawing on the wisdom contained in this volume which the authors describe as 'ambitious, practical and realistic' (page 11).

Chapter 2 seems to give a good theoretical introduction to the relevant philosophical literature and the variety of approaches to resolving ethical problems. Having got the theory out of the way however, the authors rarely refer back to this discussion in any of the subsequent chapters and seem to single-mindedly pursue the 'practical' part of their mission, devoting the next two chapters to codifying and regulating practice. Chapter 3 is a fairly dull chronological account of the development of codes of practice which could easily have been summarised. Chapter 4 certainly satisfies the book's claim to be international in scope and is bewildering in its description of differing practices. Yet it lacks analysis, missing the opportunity, for example, to explore the possible relationship between the regulation of social research practice and differing models of welfare state governance.

The twin pillars of ethically sound practice -- 'informed consent' and 'confidentiality' get a chapter each (5 and 6) but contain little that is new and lack much in the way of thoughtful discussion (in contrast to, for example, Mauthner *et al.*, 2002). The authors seem out of step with the idea that consent should be a continuing process throughout the research enterprise, a view which they only mention (page 64) as something of a curiosity. Rather than exploring this sort of ethical dilemma, there is a concentration on legal and judicial issues around data protection. This is the principal problem with the book; its practical emphasis in sensitising researchers to the regulatory and legal challenges is at the expense of encouraging researchers to develop a deeper theoretical understanding of ethical issues and to practise their research in a reflexive and anti-oppressive way. Even in

Chapter 7, 'Avoiding harm and doing good' emancipatory research is dismissed all too briefly, and without any methodological discussion, while there is nothing on participatory practice. Although Chapter 9 should be applauded for extending the ethical discussion beyond that pertaining to the researcher and participant (to cover the relationship between researchers, their peers and the users of research) and explores conflict of interest, the dilemmas of contract research, and evaluation, receive little attention.

The final 30 pages could almost be from an entirely different book. The last chapter -- 'Between ethical conduct and regulatory compliance' - is much more coherent and relevant and the Appendix contains a wealth of provocative learning material. It consists of three case studies presenting situated ethical dilemmas with commentaries from senior research academics. It is a mystery why these earnest and challenging discussions were not included within the body of the text to enliven somewhat dry material.

In summary, therefore, this is quite a frustrating volume; it is particularly strong on regulatory history and practice, and on the role and development of ethics committees. In that sense it would be a useful addition to the ethics literature. However, apart from the occasional insight, researchers seeking to explore and develop their personal conduct and reflective practice may find the work somewhat superficial.

## Reference

Mauthner, M; Birch, M; Jessop, J and Miller, T (2002) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage

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Supervising Offenders in the Community  
A history of probation theory and practice  
*Maurice Vanstone*

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This well-researched book analyses the origins of probation work prior to its statutory enactment in the legislation of 1907. The author then reviews developments in the supervision of offenders through the 20th century – exploring the new influences and the continuing themes and issues which have shaped probation practice.

Maurice Vanstone demonstrates the depth and richness of experience over that period, as practitioners and policy makers have wrestled with some of the enduring dilemmas of

this work – care or control, practical help or personal change, mercy or punishment. His long view also identifies areas of exposure or internal inconsistency – probation’s status as what Vanstone describes as a ‘semi-profession’, its internal conflicts and debates, some premature application of untested theory and the slow development of its evidence base. The historical analysis casts light on why probation, as an area of public provision, may have been particularly exposed to direction, ‘reform’ or political influence. Vanstone’s detailed historical review draws on a large volume of contemporary material that chronicles the policy debates and provides an account of probation practice. He enriches this with material from his own research based on interviews with serving and retired probation staff. Altogether, the book provides access in a slim volume to valuable and fascinating source material. As a first reader, this material is so extensive as to verge on overwhelming, but it provides a rich source of material to return and refer to.

In the opening chapters, Vanstone reviews previous accounts of the origins of probation work in England and Wales. He examines probation’s early antecedents, how the Probation of Offenders Act 1887 established the sentence without a framework of statutory supervision and the developments that led to the provision for statutory supervision by probation officers in 1907. In analysing this early period and the formative influences on the 1907 legislation, he suggests that the experience of the Police Court Missions and the interest of policy makers in North American developments (especially, earlier legislation in Massachusetts) were of equivalent influence. As he digs deeper into his material, he sets these immediate influences in a wider context as he argues that this humanitarian reform has also been shaped by political, social and religious ideology of the period. Vanstone involves himself in the academic discourse on these issues. For the lay reader, his analysis will be helpful, but perhaps not surprising, as he identifies how early probation reformers were influenced by wider ideological certainties, debates and tensions – linked to class, faith or belief. His analysis of these influences is fascinating, identifying influences which have had a relevance to several stages of the service’s development, such as Christianity or socialism, and those which now seem more of historic interest, such as eugenics.

In later chapters, the book takes us on a fascinating journey through successive eras of probation work. He describes the early focus on temperance, employment and placement in a ‘home’ and how assessment developed to provide a basis for the advice given to courts on who should have the opportunity to reform. He charts the rise and fall of treatment theories and language, the broadening range of practice models in the later years of the twentieth century and the aspiration to evidence-based practice in its closing years. For the modern reader, the continuity of issues is as fascinating as the changes over that period. Vanstone argues persuasively that probation work has a focus on the individual at its heart. He usefully distinguishes between the early, often premature, adoption and application of untested theory to the later development of practice models capable of evaluation. Probation’s involvement and negotiation with the courts is another continuing theme. Through each era, probation’s practitioners and champions have needed confidence to sustain them to keep working with offenders who reform and relapse and to argue their case with a society which both applauds and criticises that endeavour. Vanstone

describes how that confidence has arisen and been sustained, whether it be from faith or self-belief, theory or evidence.

Vanstone's source material provides some fascinating historical parallels to contemporary issues. He chronicles the public concern and panic ready to lay the responsibility for serious offending on those prisoners released early on 'ticket of leave' in the 1850s. The focus of 19th century reformers and the early probation officers on alcohol abuse and unemployment as key factors linked to re-offending provide more common ground with probation practice today. Vanstone examines how issues of race and gender have been considered in these successive eras of probation practice. He gives a sobering description of how far early 20th century probation practice was shaped by dominant views of black people and women – providing examples of how practice was based on a 'blend of sympathetic interest with gendered, class-laden antipathy' (p.88) and of racial stereotyping. Later, his narrative discusses, but only briefly, more recent developments in provision for black people and women and in anti-discriminatory practice. In his account of the last quarter of the 20th century, he reminds us of the range of models and theories shaping probation thinking in that period – rich but sometimes disparate sources and not yet representing a shared or consensual model of probation practice. The policy developments on 'effective practice' in the late 1990s could be seen as an attempt to develop and promote such a shared model, but they were soon to be overtaken by wider political and institutional developments.

Vanstone's closing chapter was written in the early months of NOMS – the National Offender Management Service. This was too early to evaluate the depth and nature of the challenges these institutional changes may present. Many of the key issues of policy and practice from probation's history remain relevant in this new era – the dialogue with the courts, the role of the probation officer ('offender manager') in engaging with and brokering provision for the individual, the importance of arrangements for supporting prisoners on release. But the influence of emerging forces of commercialisation and 'the market' will be left for the historian of the 21st century to chronicle and evaluate. All involved in shaping, negotiating or being part of probation's future should read this book and learn from it.

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Social Work, Critical Reflection and the Learning Organization

*Edited by Nick Gould and Mark Baldwin*

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The editors have brought together an impressive line-up of academics and practitioners from Australia, Canada, Finland and the UK as contributors to this book.

Since Gould and Taylor's book "Reflective Learning for Social Work" was published in 1996, reflection has become an accepted and key component of professional training for health and social care practitioners.

Gould provides a helpful introduction to the book that includes reference to the learning organization and linkage between individual and collective learning. The term "learning organization" has now become more widely used but I have doubts about its shelf life or universal acceptance. Baldwin sums up and draws out key messages from the text for readers in the conclusion.

The first two chapters provide an interesting and historical account of supervision that opens up exciting possibilities for supervision to be used as a creative mechanism to help staff to construct and invent new knowledge and ways of working to deal with ever-changing social problems. Managerialism and the commodification of care have led to supervision being shaped by the organisational agenda for accountability, the achievement of targets and the regulation of its workers leaving little room for personal and professional development. The authors advocate a model that will accommodate both professional and organisational aspirations and ostensibly lead to a more effective service.

One chapter is devoted to working within multi-professional teams and the inclusion of service users for learning in and by organizations. Issues raised are very relevant as social care workers struggle to retain their identity and value base within a dominant health culture.

Several of the writers have used case material to illustrate learning from an individual and an organisational position. One chapter presented reflective accounts from three perspectives that clearly highlighted some of the challenges and limitations of critical reflection in practice. All of the chapters include reference to some degree to relevant theory; service user involvement and practice. Effecting change is not an easy process but this collection points to the strengths of a reflective process that when embedded within the culture of the organisation has the potential to transform, develop and improve relations as well as promote good practice.

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