
A LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

ENQUIRING ABOUT ETHICS

This activity provides you with opportunities to explore ethical issues and guidelines and apply these to research studies.

You will be working in groups of 3 or 4 and your group is an 'ethics committee' that must decide whether to allow research studies to go ahead. Your job, in your groups, is to decide which of the proposed pieces of research is ethical enough for you to give it the green light.

If you decide to green light the whole study, it will go ahead as the researcher has planned. If, however you think some aspects of it need to be modified to fit in with the British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines then you must outline what the researchers must do to make it ethical. If you decide that the whole study is too unethical, then you can tell the researchers that they cannot proceed with any aspect of their research, however you must be able to justify your decision.

1	Familiarise yourself with the BPS Ethical Guidelines below. For each one, write a short summary of what it is and how researchers are expected to uphold it.
Informed Consent: No deception: Debrief: Protection from harm: Confidentiality: Right to Withdraw:	

2	Read through each proposed study below and discuss it with your fellow committee members. You must reach a unanimous decision and then make your recommendations. Prepare to feed these back to the class at the end of the activity.
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Study 1: Johnson (1939) The 'Monster' study

This 1939 experiment was conducted in USA on a group of children at an orphanage and was conducted by Dr Johnson who wanted to find the underlying cause of stuttering.

Johnson gathered 22 orphans and split them into two groups — stutterers and non- stutterers. Not all the children in the stuttering group actually had stutters. The non- stutterers received praise for their normal speech patterns, while the stuttering group received negative reinforcement. They were reminded to avoid stuttering throughout the study to increase their stress levels.

The children who didn't have stutters in the stuttering group developed a pronounced stutter by the end of the study. Three of the five children who'd had stutters at the start of the study were worse than by then end of the study. The researcher concluded that a negative focus on stuttering makes the condition worse and it's a developmental rather than innate trait.

Your recommendations:

- a) **Allow the study to go ahead without modification**
- b) **Allow the study to go ahead with modifications**
- c) **Do not allow the study to go ahead**

Justify your decision and any important points that were raised throughout your discussion.

Study 2: Harlow and the monkey study

This study was devised to demonstrate the traumatic effects of being denied contact and company of others, and the effects of severe maternal deprivation. The subjects of this study were baby rhesus monkeys. Harlow designed a steel cage that made any contact with other monkeys (or humans) impossible. Harlow placed the baby monkeys in these cages soon after birth, isolating them from others. In some versions of these studies, the monkeys were purposely 'deranged' to see how this would affect their parenting. It would be the equivalent of putting a newborn human infant into solitary confinement in prison.

The monkeys who had been isolated for a year were very disturbed, barely moving, disinterested in their surroundings and could not mate. Two starved to death as they refused to eat. Harlow devised a 'rape rack' to which he tied the female monkeys so that they could be forcibly impregnated by males. Once the monkeys had given birth, he found that they were incapable of parenting their offspring - they abused or neglected them. In some conditions, the monkeys rolled the heads of babies on the floor or bit them.

Your recommendations:

- a) Allow the study to go ahead without modification**
- b) Allow the study to go ahead with modifications**
- c) Do not allow the study to go ahead**

Justify your decision and any important points that were raised throughout your discussion.

Study 3: Zimbardo, the Stanford Prison Experiment (1973)

Zimbardo aimed to examine whether people would conform to the social roles of a prison guard or prisoner when placed in a mock prison environment.

Zimbardo's sample consisted of 21 male university students who volunteered in response to a newspaper advert. The participants were selected from 75 volunteers based on their physical and mental stability and were each paid \$15 a day to take part. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of two social roles, prisoner, or guard.

Zimbardo wanted to make the experience as realistic as possible, turning the basement of Stanford University into a mock prison. Furthermore, the 'prisoners' were arrested by real local police and fingerprinted, stripped and given a numbered smocked to wear, with chains placed around their ankles. The guards were given uniforms, dark reflective sunglasses, handcuffs, and a truncheon. The guards were instructed to run the prison without using physical violence. The experiment was set to run for two weeks.

Zimbardo found that both the prisoners and guards quickly identified with their social roles. Within days the prisoners rebelled, but this was quickly crushed by the guards, who then grew increasingly abusive towards the prisoners. The guards dehumanised the prisoners, waking them during the night and forcing them to clean toilets with their bare hands; the prisoners became increasingly submissive, identifying further with their subordinate role.

Five of the prisoners were released from the experiment early, because of their adverse reactions to the physical and mental torment, for example, crying and extreme anxiety. Although the experiment was set to run for two weeks, it was terminated after just six days. Zimbardo concluded that people quickly conform to social roles, even when the role goes against their moral principles.

Your recommendations:

- a) **Allow the study to go ahead without modification**
- b) **Allow the study to go ahead with modifications**
- c) **Do not allow the study to go ahead**

Justify your decision and any important points that were raised throughout your discussion.

2	Which of the studies do you think is the most unethical? You must reach a unanimous decision as a committee and justify your decision.