

## ETHICS

The British Psychological Society issued revised ethical principles in June 1990. In the conduct of their research, psychologists should always consider the following;

**Consent;** Have the subjects of the study made an informed consent to take part? Have the parents of child subjects given informed consent to the research procedures? Have payments been used to induce risk taking behaviour? **Deception;** Have the subjects been deceived? Was there any other way to carry out the study other than by using deception? Have the procedures been approved by other psychologists? **Debriefing;** Have the subjects been effectively debriefed? Has any stress caused by the procedures been removed? **Withdrawal from the investigation;** Are the subjects clear that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or scorn? **Confidentiality;** Participants in psychological research have the right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially. **Protection of participants;** Investigators must protect participants from physical and mental harm during the investigation. **Observational research;** Unless the participants give their consent to being observed, observational research must only take place where those observed could normally be expected to be observed by strangers. **Giving advice;** Psychological advice must only be given if the psychologist is qualified in the area that the advice is requested in. **Colleagues;** Psychologists should take action if they believe that any of the above principles are being violated by a colleague

These principles offer a framework for the conduct of research. They do not, however, address issues of the consequences of the research. Will the results of the investigation have a harmful or beneficial effect on our society, and the individuals within it? George Miller made a plea for the development of psychology in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 1969. He entitled his address '*Psychology as a means of promoting human welfare*', and suggested that we should '*give psychology away*'. Rather than trying to develop a psychological technology to control people, Miller believes that psychology should present "*a new and different conception of what is humanly possible and humanly desirable.*" He goes on to say that we should think "*...not in terms of coercion by a powerful elite, but in terms of the diagnosis of problems and the development of programs that can enrich the lives of every citizen.*"

**ETHICS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH** Look at the following brief descriptions of studies.

- 1) Tick the items that you think are (were) real psychological studies and cross those that you think are made up.
- 2) What are the ethical guidelines that these studies violate? Explain your answers

1. In a busy subway, a person collapses bleeding from the mouth. The person is a confederate of the experimenter and the event is staged. Bystanders are covertly observed to see if they help and how long they take to help. An investigation into bystander responses to emergency situations.

2. An experimenter in a pick-up truck, with a rifle visible in the back, and a sticker on the bumper saying 'VENGEANCE', stops at red lights. The experimenter does not move when the lights turn green thus blocking the traffic. Assessment of the impact of aggressive stimuli on 'horn honking' behaviour.

3. Baby rhesus monkeys reared in complete isolation except for two surrogate 'mothers'; one a wire structure with a plastic face, and the other a wire structure but covered with terricloth. Investigating the nature of mother-child relationships.

4. Rats are given an electric shock to the feet, and soon afterwards a toy rubber hedgehog flies (on wires) across the top of their cage. An investigation into the effects of aversive conditioning.

5. Subjects are presented with 2,000 sheets of random numbers, asked to add up 224 pairs of numbers on each sheet, then tear the sheet into 32 pieces before going on to the next. After five hours of this clearly useless task, some of the subjects are still going and have to be stopped by the experimenter. An investigation into the power of the psychology experiment.

6. Rats are given electric shocks to the brain after they have learnt a maze to see how this affects their memory of the maze.

7. Ammonia used to punish a deaf-blind five year old boy engaging in serious self-injurious behaviour (self mutilation). An investigation based on real life interventions into the relative effects of various types of punishment on self-injurious behaviour

8. Head banging behaviour is shaped (taught) into rhesus monkeys, extinguished (got rid of), and then re-established in order to investigate the hypothesis that some forms of self-injurious behaviour are linked to

reinforcing features in the environment.

9. Electric shocks administered to homosexuals as they view photographs of clothed and naked males. An investigation into the treatment of 'sexual deviations'.

10. A hidden observer in a men's toilet records the time taken before subjects begin to urinate and the time they take urinating. A confederate of the experimenter either stands in the next stall to the subject or one stall away. An investigation into the effects of invasion of privacy on arousal.