

Research Ethics

For each of the following studies, please indicate whether you personally consider it to be ethical or unethical, given your reading of your textbook and the Lesko reader.

1. A social psychologist sits in a crowded bar all evening and records the number of people who come into the bar alone, and who either leave alone or with someone else. The researcher also records the time they come in and the time they leave.
 ethical unethical cannot decide

2. A researcher wants to administer a new drug hypothesized to affect aggressive behavior. He chooses prison inmates to be his participants, reasoning that aggression is more common in prisons. In order to persuade prisoners to participate, he promises them favorable letters to their parole boards; these letters might well facilitate earlier release.
 ethical unethical cannot decide

3. A team of researchers is interested in studying helping behavior. They stage a scene in a subway in which a confederate falls off his seat and bleeds from the mouth. The dependent variable is how quickly bystanders help the “victim.” The bystanders are never told that they were part of an experiment.
 ethical unethical cannot decide

4. A psychologist is interested in studying discrimination against gays as a consequence of the AIDS epidemic. She carefully trains a confederate to portray stereotypical “masculine” and “effeminate” behavior. In the laboratory, participants interview the confederate for a hypothetical job. Without their knowledge, the experimenter observes and records their initial nonverbal gestures, eye contact with the confederate, and so on. To ensure that participants do not talk with their friends about the study, the psychologist never reveals to them that the true purpose of the study was to document subtle discrimination against gays.
 ethical unethical cannot decide

5. Deception was employed in a study examining the relation between task performance and defensiveness. Prior to participation, participants were informed of the requirements and purpose of the experiment to the extent possible, given the deception component of the study; they were also told that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time without prejudice. Some participants were given false feedback on a test of intellectual ability and were told that their scores were well *above* average; other participants were told that their performance was well *below* average. After the false feedback, participants completed measures of defensiveness, so that researchers could determine if failure makes people more defensive. After collecting the measures, the experimenter thanked participants for their efforts, and promised a detailed report of the study results. Two months later, participants received the report, which fully described the deception used.
 ethical unethical cannot decide

Once you have completed this questionnaire independently, discuss your responses with other group members. When disagreements occur, you should explain to other members of your group the reasoning you used to decide whether a particular study was ethical. As a group, please construct clear, concise answers to the following questions.

1. Were there any disagreements about which studies were ethical? Did you disagree more about some studies than others? Why do you think those disagreements occurred?
 2. Among members of your group, which issues seemed the most important in determining whether a particular study is ethical?