Pressure and Choice

Weighing the ethical costs of two psychology studies

SS24.P.17a "Critique the ethical issues found in Stanley Milgram's work with obedience and S. E. Asch's work with conformity."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one source of ethical concern in each study. Circle a reason someone might defend each study, then number the concerns from 1 to 2, with 1 marking the concern you think is more serious.

When Research Creates Pressure

1. In the 1960s, psychologist Stanley Milgram asked volunteers to act as "teachers" in a study presented as research on learning. An experimenter told them to give stronger electric shocks whenever a "learner" answered incorrectly. The learner was an actor, and no shocks were delivered, but the teachers did not know that. Some heard cries and continued when the experimenter urged them on. Although nobody received shocks, believing they were causing pain could bring real distress.

2. In the 1950s, psychologist Solomon Asch placed one real participant in a group of people secretly working with the researcher. Group members sometimes gave the same clearly wrong answer about which line matched a sample line. Asch watched whether the participant agreed with the group. The hidden arrangement helped reveal social pressure, but it kept participants from knowing what they had joined. A participant who disagreed might also feel embarrassed or anxious, even though no one was asked to harm another person.

3. Both studies used deception to examine behavior that might change if participants knew the true purpose. That scientific value does not erase the costs. Milgram's misleading instructions and repeated prompts could make refusing feel difficult, threatening a participant's freedom to stop. Asch's false group answers carried less risk of severe distress but still limited informed consent. Researchers today should weigh likely benefits against harm, make withdrawal clear, limit distress, and explain the deception afterward. A debriefing cannot undo every uncomfortable experience.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why is Milgram's study ethically troubling even though the shocks were not real?

2. How did Asch's hidden group arrangement limit participants' ability to make an informed choice?

3. Which study presented the greater risk of distress? Defend your judgment with evidence from the passage.

4. Why might explaining the deception afterward help without fully settling the ethical concerns in either study?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a researcher asks teens an easy spelling question while planted group members all give the same wrong answer. In 4 to 5 sentences, critique two ethical risks and propose two safeguards that still allow the researcher to study conformity.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one source of ethical concern in each study. Circle a reason someone might defend each study, then number the concerns from 1 to 2, with 1 marking the concern you think is more serious. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why is Milgram's study ethically troubling even though the shocks were not real?	**Participants believed they were causing pain, which could cause real distress.**
2	How did Asch's hidden group arrangement limit participants' ability to make an informed choice?	**Participants did not know the other group members were working with the researcher or that the study tested social pressure.**
3	Which study presented the greater risk of distress? Defend your judgment with evidence from the passage.	**Milgram's study presented the greater risk because participants believed they were hurting someone and were urged to continue. Accept a well-supported alternative that distinguishes the studies' risks.**
4	Why might explaining the deception afterward help without fully settling the ethical concerns in either study?	**A debriefing explains what really happened, but it cannot undo distress or embarrassment participants already felt.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Because the group members are planted, teens cannot fully understand the task before joining. Hearing everyone disagree with them could make them anxious or embarrassed. The researcher could warn volunteers that some details will be withheld, make it clear they may stop without penalty, and avoid questions that shame anyone. Explaining the setup afterward would preserve the test of conformity while helping participants understand what happened, though it would not erase any discomfort.

Accept supported judgments about relative risk, including answers that weigh emotional discomfort differently. For the open task, look for two distinct risks and two safeguards that do not reveal the planted answers before the task.