



## Discussing ethical issues

### This activity will help you to...

- Identify ethical criticisms of Milgram's obedience research
- Consider how we might respond to ethical criticisms
- Improve your essay discussion skills

### Responding to ethical criticisms

Ethics in Psychological research are rarely clear cut. Rather, there are many grey areas, and it is often possible to answer ethical criticisms by bringing in other considerations. Some of the factors that can be used to discuss ethical issues where the acceptability of a study is in doubt are outlined below.

Issue	Factor for discussion	Questions it raises
Deception	<b>Cost-benefit analysis.</b> Deception may be justifiable if the research is of potentially great benefit and the results cannot be obtained without the use of deception.	How do we decide what the costs/benefits of research are before we've done the study?
	<b>Debriefing.</b> At the end of the study, the deception and its necessity are explained and the participant made fully aware of the purpose of the research and their feedback sought.	To what extent can the effects of a study be undone after the fact?
Informed consent	<b>Presumptive consent.</b> Where it is impossible for the researcher to ask the actual participants, a similar group of people can be asked how they would feel about taking part. If they think it would be OK then it can be assumed that the real participants will also find it acceptable.	Might there be a mismatch between how people <i>think</i> they would feel/behave and how they <i>actually</i> feel and behave during a study?

### Discussing the Ethics of Obedience Research

One of the main ethical critics of Milgram's research is Baumrind (1964). She took issue with many aspects of Milgram's obedience experiments. What you need to do is consider how Milgram could respond to these criticisms. Some of Baumrind's points are summarised below. For each one, write a short paragraph defending Milgram's experiments. Some hints are given to help guide your comments. You will need to use your text or another source to obtain some additional information.

<b>Criticism &amp; hints</b>	There was a lack of informed consent and the participants were heavily deceived.	Presumptive consent? Necessary deception?
<b>Criticism &amp; hints</b>	The participants were harmed by the experience.	Views of participants? Use of debriefing?