

Ethics in research

For this session you will be taking on the role of an ethics panel. Below are summaries of three studies all of which have been submitted by researchers to your ethics panel for consideration. You are to get into groups of 5-6 people, read these summaries and discuss them with the other members of your panel considering the following:

- What are the ethical issues raised by this study? Consider issues such as the sample and how they are to be recruited, informed consent, the methods used, possible problems that may arise, confidentiality, and potential benefits of the study. Consider aspects of the study that you consider ethically commendable as well as ethically dubious.
- Would you give ethical clearance for the study to go ahead? If not, why not?
- Are there any additional procedures that you would insist on to ensure the study is ethical before giving approval?

Study 1: Observational study of adolescent gambling in UK amusement arcades.

Background

This observational field study will explore the social world of slot machine playing using data collected via the monitoring of several UK amusement arcades. It will aim to examine the level of adolescent gambling, the behavioural characteristics of arcade clientele and the players' motivations for gambling.

Methodology

Participant and non-participant observation methods will be used, and on occasion informal interviews with participants will also be conducted. In participant observation, the researcher will pose as a 'punter'. Data will be anonymous, confidential and be recorded onto a pocket tape recorder, although on occasions immediate retrospective notes will also be taken. Observation sessions will take place between 11am and 9.30pm. Session length will vary between 30 mins and 3 hours depending on how busy the arcade is at the time. The results of the study will be published in peers-reviewed journals and will expand the psychological knowledge of the reasons behind adolescent gambling.

Study 2: A study of the effects of teachers' expectations and pupil achievement

Background

This study will explore the effects of teachers' expectations on the way they teach their pupils, and on the achievement of their pupils. In particular if children who teachers expect to 'do well' receive more attention and encouragement from their teachers, and if this is also reflected in their school grades.

Methodology

The research will be carried out on the pupils and teachers of year 1 at several local primary schools. The children in these classes will be tested using a conventional intelligence test, and their scores will be recorded. However the teachers will be informed that this is a new type of test that identifies children that are likely to experience a 'spurt' in intellectual development in the coming school year. Following testing, a situation will be set up so that teachers 'overhear' the researchers discussing the specific children that they expect, based on the 'test' scores (but in reality chosen at random) to experience this spurt.

Six months later the researchers will return to the school to engage in some follow up research. They will observe the classes that they tested, and in particular note the nature of the interactions between the teacher and the pupils expected to improve compared to pupils expected to remain at a similar level. It is predicted that the pupils expected to improve will

receive more attention from the teachers, and more encouraging comments. Where available, grades given to school work will also be examined to investigate if children expected to improve do obtain higher grades, and whether or not differences between the two groups of children can be attributed to increased attention and encouragement from the teachers, and not just basic differences in intelligence between the two groups (as measured from the tests used at the initial testing session).

At the end of the study, teachers will be fully debriefed about the nature and findings of the study.

Study 3: A twin study of attachment in preschool children.

Background

Recent behavioural genetic research findings raise fundamental questions about how the family environment influences children's social and emotional development. Current findings underscore the influence of genetic factors on parent-child interaction. The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which individual differences in child-parent attachment are mediated by genetic, shared environmental and non-shared environmental influences

Methodology

Same sex monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twins pairs will be used in the study, all with a mean age of less than 45 months. The twins and parent will be assessed on a task known as the strange situation. This is a seven episode experimental procedure designed to assess how a child uses a parent as a secure basis for exploration. The procedure will be described to the parent and one of the twins will be led to a room within the university department to participate in a range of cognitive tests. The parent and other twin will be led into an adjoining room, equipped with comfortable chairs and various age-appropriate toys. The strange situation procedure will be implemented thus:

1. A brief period of parent-child interaction
2. A stranger will enter the room, approach the child and interact with him/her.
3. The parent will then leave the room in response to a prearranged cue.
4. The parent will return and the stranger will leave the room.
5. The parent will then leave the room leaving the child alone.
6. The stranger will enter the room again.
7. Finally, the stranger departs and the parent will return to the room.

The procedure will last no more than 3 minutes and will be videotaped. At the end, the parent and twins will be given a snack and allowed to engage in free-play behaviour (about 20 minutes). Following this the children will reverse roles and the strange situation will be repeated on the second twin.

Proximity, contact, body orientation, speech, gaze and affect of the observed child will be recorded using a coding manual. On the basis of these measurements, children will be classified as secure (use the parent as a secure base for exploration, show positive, engaged and open style of interaction), insecure-avoiding (downplay involvement with the parent, do not seek contact when they are distressed), insecure-dependent (passive, helpless, immature style, angry, resistant petulant way of dealing with the parent), insecure-disorganised (don't use the parent as a secure base and show confusion, depression, withdrawal and disordered behaviour at reunion with the parent), insecure-controlling (attempt to control the parent or situation) or insecure other (insecure but don't fit in any of the other categories).

It is expected that there will be substantial sibling similarity in attachment, but differences may be found between MZ and DZ twin pairs. Consent for participation will be obtained from parents and task will be terminated if children experience discomfort at any time during the experiment.