Ethical Issues in Psychology

Instructions: For each of the following studies, please indicate whether you consider it to be ethical or unethical and justify your decision by discussing the ethical principles involved.

Study #1. A social psychologist sits in a crowded bar all evening and records the number of people who come into the bar alone, who leave alone, or who leave with someone else, and the time at which they left.

________ ethical  ________ cannot decide  ________ unethical  
Ethical principle(s):

Study #2. A researcher wants to administer a new drug hypothesized to affect aggressive behavior. Reasoning that aggression is more common in prisons, he chooses prison inmates to be his participants. In order to persuade prisoners to participate, they are promised favorable letters to their parole boards which may facilitate earlier release.

________ ethical  ________ cannot decide  ________ unethical  
Ethical principle(s):

Study #3. A researcher was interested in reactions to feedback about the self. He manipulated people’s self-esteem by having them take a personality test and then afterwards giving them either a favorable or unfavorable report about their personality on dimensions such as hostility, maturity, and social sensitivity. After participants completed some questionnaires, they were carefully debriefed and shown how the false feedback was created.

________ ethical  ________ cannot decide  ________ unethical  
Ethical principle(s):

Study #4. A psychologist is interested in studying discrimination against homosexuals as a result of AIDS. She carefully trains a confederate to portray stereotypical “macho” and “gay” behavior. In the laboratory, naive participants interview the confederate for a hypothetical job. Without their knowledge, the psychologist observes their nonverbal gestures, eye contact with the confederate, and so forth. In order to assure that participants do not talk to their friends about the study, the psychologist never reveals to them that the true purpose was to study discrimination.

________ ethical  ________ cannot decide  ________ unethical  
Ethical principle(s):
Study # 5. Deception was employed in a study examining the relationship between attributional style and self-esteem. Prior to participation, research subjects were informed of the requirements and purpose of the experiment to the extent possible given the deception component. Freedom to withdraw from the study at any time was emphasized. Following an assessment of attributional style, all participants were given false feedback on a test of a particular intellectual ability and were told that their scores indicated that they performed below average. Attribution and self-esteem measures were then administered. Immediately upon completion, subjects were thanked for their participation and promised a detailed report of the study. Two months later, subjects received the report, which fully described the deception.

________ ethical   ________ cannot decide   ________ unethical

Ethical principle(s):

Study #6. 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 they have been in an experiment.

________ ethical   ________ cannot decide   ________ unethical

Ethical principle(s):

Study # 7. Participants are invited to be “confederates” of the experimenter who is ostensibly doing a study on the effects of stress on job interview performance. The participant’s role is to give the other study participant (who is in fact the “real” confederate) negative feedback about his interview performance. They are to tell him that he is performing poorly at the task he is working on, is unlikely to get the job, and to make demeaning remarks about the interviewer’s personality. If the participant protests, the experimenter gives him prods such as, “The experiment requires that you must continue.”

________ ethical   ________ cannot decide   ________ unethical

Ethical principle(s):