

**Discuss the ethical considerations of research into the development of attachment. (15 marks)**

Ethical guidelines are outlined in the UK by the British Psychological Society (BPS) for the protection of participants in psychological research. The code of conduct focuses on principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. In research with human participants this includes guidelines such as informed consent, right to withdraw and protection from harm. One ethical consideration in the research into the development of attachment could be protection from harm. This suggests that participants should leave the investigation in the same physical and mental state for which they entered. In Ainsworth and Bell (1970) during the strange situation procedure infants were exposed to separation and stranger anxiety. This created high levels of distress within the children and broke the ethical guideline of protection from harm. However, it could be argued that this was necessary to test the internal validity of the investigation, as Ainsworth and Bell (1970) used the 8-stage process to measure infants' responses to separation and stranger anxiety. They needed to measure anxiety to assess attachment types. In addition, many classic animal studies in Psychology investigating attachment have also broken the guideline of protection from harm. This was evident in both Lorenz (1935); study of goslings and Harlow (1958); study with rhesus monkeys. Another ethical consideration in attachment research is the right to withdraw. This is the idea that all participants have the right to leave an investigation at any point without any further obligation. In Ainsworth and Bell (1970) the children did not have any opportunity to withdraw from the strange situation, especially when it became uncomfortable. There was evidence from the observation that children attempted to leave when their mother left the room but they were unable to do so. This meant that they experienced extreme distress and anxiety. However, as the children were only 49 and 51 weeks old, they could not ask to leave the study. They were too young to vocalise their request to leave, and also their anxiety was measured as part of the strange situation method. Nevertheless, the researchers made sure that if distress became too much they would intervene and stop the procedure. One way in which research into attachment could be considered ethical is through informed consent. This is where participants are given full information about the nature of the study and consent to take part. In Ainsworth and Bell (1970) as the children were too young to give consent, this was done on their behalf by their mothers, who were also partaking in the procedure. This makes the procedure ethical because the mothers were made fully aware of the 8-stage procedure and were told that if at any point they felt uncomfortable, they could stop the process. This ethical consideration was less evident in Bowlby's (1944) study of juvenile thieves. His sample included 44 boys who were referred to a Child Guidance Clinic for stealing, most of whom were under the age of 11. As they were referred to the clinic they did not give their full informed consent. Another way in which research into attachment could be seen as ethical is that the researchers themselves are credible, competent professionals. Both John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth were qualified psychologists specialising in attachment theory. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) designed the strange situation method in order to test differences in attachment types and measured anxiety as part of the process. They would argue that this was a necessary process, so the 'ends justify the means' suggesting that they had to expose the infants to anxiety in order to understand more about how attachments are formed. This research led to real life applications and offers a greater understanding of infant-parent interactions and attachment bonds.

