Use of Deception

There may be an occasion when to answer a research question, a researcher may need to use an element of deception. This can be a valuable research technique; however, by default the IRB will review all protocols that involve an element of deception at a fully convened IRB meeting. Also note that Federal regulations prohibit the use of deceptive techniques that place participants at greater than minimal risk.

When reviewing protocols that involve deception, the IRB members will consider:

1. The scientific value and validity of the research.
2. The efficacy of alternative procedures.
3. The certainty that deception does not extend to influence participants’ willingness to participate.
4. The possibility of experimentally induced harm and the ability of the proposed procedures to remove such harm through debriefing.
5. The potential of deception to facilitate unwanted and inappropriate invasions of privacy.

General Considerations associated with studies that involve deception:

1. The justification of research to include deception evolves into a question of costs and benefits: the benefits gained by knowledge relative to the potential harm caused by deception.
2. Use of deception must be scientifically and ethically justified and approved by an IRB.
3. In cases where the study can only be conducted with subjects who are less than fully informed, the missing information should not increase the risks of the study.
4. Deception may not be utilized to obtain enrollments.

The researcher(s) must address justifying the use of deception in the protocol:

1. In the deception section of eProtocol:
   1. Justify the use of deception and explain in the appropriate section of your protocol why deception is necessary to achieve the goals of the study.
   2. State whether or not you believe the withheld information will affect the participant’s decision to participate in the research and why.
   3. Explain if alternative methods not involving the use of deception were considered, and why these methods are not being used.
2. Include a description of why you believe participants will be exposed to no more than minimal risk related to the use of deception. In the risk section of your protocol, explain if the use of deception is likely to cause the participant psychological discomfort (i.e., stress, loss of self‐esteem in response to experimental manipulations, embarrassment at being deceived, or guilty at having been induced to commit regretted acts) while the deception is taking place. Explain how risks will be minimized during the research and after the research is complete.
3. For any protocol that involves deception, the IRB requires that all participants be debriefed and a debriefing file should be uploaded with your protocol. Debriefing can be a formal process that includes assessment of the subject’s reaction to the deception or an informal discussion. In the deception section of eProtocol:
   1. Explain the process to debrief participants. Explain when participants will be debriefed and who will debrief them. The IRB generally expects the debriefing to be immediate. Any delay in debriefing must be explained and adequately justified.
   2. Subjects must have the opportunity to ask questions about the new information and be given the opportunity to withdraw from the study and have their data removed. The IRB’s preference would be that the participant is given an opportunity on the debriefing form to document their request to withdraw their data.
   3. In addition to the debriefing letter, provide the script that will be used to orally explain the deception involved in the study.

The Debriefing should include:

* The study title.
* PI & Co‐PI name and contact information if applicable for follow‐up questions.
* Explanation of what was being studied (purpose, hypothesis, aim) using lay terms.
* Explanation of why deception was necessary in order to carry out the research.
* Explanation of how the results of the deception will be evaluated.
* Provide references/websites for further reading on the research topic to make the debriefing an educational tool.
* A documented option for the participant to withdraw his/her data after finding out about the deception.
* Offer to provide the participants a copy of the study results.

Consent process and form requirements when a study involves deception:

When using deception, generally an alteration of consent must be requested as you are not fully informing your participants. The consent document should not include anything that is untrue. This is done in the consent section of eProtocol by selecting “Waiver of Consent,” and answering the following questions:

* The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects;
* The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects;
* The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and
* Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

[American Psychological Association (APA) Code of Ethics](http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx?item=11)

8.07 Deception in Research:

* Psychologists do not conduct a study involving deception unless they have determined that the use of deceptive techniques is justified by the study’s significant prospective scientific, educational, or applied value and that effective nondeceptive alternative procedures are not feasible.
* Psychologists do not deceive prospective participants about research that is reasonably expected to cause physical pain or severe emotional distress.
* Psychologists explain any deception that is an integral feature of the design and conduct of an experiment to participants as early as is feasible, preferably at the conclusion of their participation, but no later than at the conclusion of the data collection, and permit participants to withdraw their data. (See also Standard 8.08, Debriefing.)

8.08 Debriefing:

* Psychologists provide a prompt opportunity for participants to obtain appropriate information about the nature, results, and conclusions of the research, and they take reasonable steps to correct any misconceptions that participants may have of which the psychologists are aware.
* If scientific or humane values justify delaying or withholding this information, psychologists take reasonable measures to reduce the risk of harm.
* When psychologists become aware that research procedures have harmed a participant, they take reasonable steps to minimize the harm.