**Guidance on Debriefing & Deception**

When deception is involved, the debrief form should include:

* An explanation of what was being studied (i.e., purpose, hypothesis, aim) using lay terms and avoiding jargon.
* An explanation of how participants were deceived.
* An explanation of why deception was necessary in order to carry out the research.
* An explanation of how the results of the deception will be evaluated.

If debriefing is used as an educational tool, participants should be given a simple, clear and informative explanation of the rationale for the design of the study and the methods used.

# **Deception and incomplete disclosure**

# **Ethical considerations surrounding deception and incomplete disclosure**

# This information is partly taken from the following source: <http://cphs.berkeley.edu/deception.pdf>

# Under some circumstances, **deception** and **incomplete disclosure** may be valuable research methodologies. Importantly, however, their use presents special challenges to conducting ethical research.

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### The problem

Deception or incomplete disclosure may in some cases be necessary to avoid study bias or test a hypothesis that requires the participant’s misdirection. However, the concept of informed consent from research participants requires full disclosure of all elements relevant to the subject’s participation in the research. Deception and incomplete disclosure may therefore interfere with the ability of the participant to make a fully informed decision about whether or not to participate in the research.

Thus, proposed research involving deception or incomplete disclosure necessitates special considerations by researchers, and by the Psychology Ethics Committee. To determine whether research can proceed, it is important to consider the extent to which the deception in a given study interferes with the participant’s ability to give informed consent. This includes distinguishing whether “deception” or only “incomplete disclosure” (without deception) is involved, whether there is sufficient justification for use of such measures, and whether there is an appropriate consent and debriefing process in place.

### Definitions and examples

1. **Deception** occurs when an investigator gives false information to subjects or intentionally misleads them about some key aspect of the research. (This is sometimes referred to as “active deception.”)
2. **Incomplete disclosure** occurs when an investigator withholds information about the specific purpose, nature, or other aspect of the research. Withholding information may or may not be considered deception.

Examples of **deception**:

* The subject is given a “cover story” which falsely describes the purpose of the study, but provides a feasible account of the researcher’s objective.
* The study includes a researcher’s “confederate,” an individual who poses as a participant, but whose behaviour in the study is actually part of the researcher’s experimental design.
* Covert observation, in which participants are not aware they are being studied.

Example of **incomplete disclosure**:

* The subject is informed about the purpose of the study or a certain procedure in general terms that are true, but not detailed enough to reveal the researcher’s main or specific objective.
* The subject is informed about the purpose of study in general terms that are true, but details of the study which do not affect data collection are omitted (for example, because they are too complex to explain in terms the subject would readily understand).

Example of **incomplete disclosure that is also deception**:

* The study involves audiotaping or videotaping of subjects without their knowledge or prior consent.

### Guidance for researchers and Psychology regulations

Proposed research involving deception or incomplete disclosure necessitates special considerations by researchers, and by the Psychology Ethics Committee.

**Incomplete disclosure (without deception)** is typically fine and will not result in any special review by the Psychology Ethics Committee.