

# Research methods 12

## *Social Responsibility in Behavioral Research*

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## Ethical Issues with Human Subjects

- There is always a tension between **protection of subjects rights** and a **desire to gain knowledge**.
- There are no correct answers; only rules with a lot of **gray areas**
  - Ultimately, the responsibility falls on each researcher to decide how to manage this tension.
- Existing **guidelines or regulatory systems**
  - APA ethical guidelines ([www.apa.org/ethics/](http://www.apa.org/ethics/))
  - Institutional Review Boards ([www.tc.edu/irb/](http://www.tc.edu/irb/))

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# Questionable Practices

## 1. Limitations of Free Choice

- Extent to which research participants are **not** free from constraints to choose whether or not to participate in the study
  - a. Involving people without their consent (20, 21, 22, 27, NY Times Article, 2015)
  - b. Participation through coercion (5, 6, 7)
  - c. Invasion of privacy (24, 25, 26)
- If participants had been free to choose, do you believe they would have participated?

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# Questionable Practices

## 2. Deception

- Deliberate deception of participants regarding some aspect of the research
  - a. Withholding information (4, 28)
  - b. Providing incorrect information (23, 9)

### 8.07 Deception in Research

APA Code of Conduct

- (a) 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 non-deceptive alternative procedures are not feasible.
- (b) Psychologists do not deceive prospective participants about research that is reasonably expected to cause physical pain or severe emotional distress.
- (c) 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.)

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## Role of Debriefing in Studies Using Deception

- **Purpose of debriefing**

- Make sure participants understand what happened
- Rectify negative feelings
- Remove harmful after effects
- Return subjects to same psychological state

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## Questionable Practices

### 3. Harming

- Harm comes to the individual as a function of participation in the research
  - a. **Diminished self-respect (1, 19)**
  - b. **Exposing people to stress (10, 11, 17, 18)**
  - c. **Withholding benefits from the control group (12, NY Times article, 2010)**

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## Questionable Practices

### 4. Mistreating Participants

a. False Promises (2, 3, 8)

b. Breaches of Confidentiality (13, 14, 15)

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## Small Group Discussions: Questionable Practices

- Critical issues used to decide whether research practice was acceptable?
- Consensus or variability in your reactions?
- Insights into weighing costs and benefits of doing research?

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# **Weighing** Cost and Benefits

## **Questions the researcher needs to answer:**

- Is my research question of sufficient importance?
- Is there another way of studying the problem?
- What do I expect of participants, what do I give in return?
- What is the cost of not doing the research?