

**Western Carolina University
Office of Research Administration
Institutional Review Board Standard Operating Procedures**

SOP# 210.1	TITLE: Deception in Research	Date Effective: 07/01/2021 Last Revision Date: 06/30/2021
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I. Purpose

The Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board recognizes that the use of deception as a methodology in human subjects research can be necessary to avoid study bias, when a subject would be likely to alter their behavior if informed that the behavior is being studied. The use of deception interferes with the ability of the potential participant to give informed consent and is therefore only permitted when the requirements for a waiver of consent are satisfied. Deception is not appropriate to utilize in circumstances where subject would not otherwise agree to participate.

II. Scope

This procedure applies to any investigator utilizing deception in human subjects research at Western Carolina University, regardless of funding source. Federal regulation prohibits the use of deceptive techniques that places participants at greater than minimal risk. This procedure does not apply to research protocols where the subject prospectively agrees to the deception, as defined at 45 C.F.R. 46.104 (d)(3).

III. Definitions

Debriefing – the process of giving study participants in a completed research project a fuller explanation of the study in which they participated than was possible before or during the research.

Deception - a research methodology that occurs when an investigator knowingly gives false information to research subjects or intentionally misleads them about some key aspect of the research. The false or misleading information might relate to the purpose of the research, the role of the researcher or other participants, the true nature of the procedures to be followed, or other aspects of the study.

Incomplete Disclosure – a research methodology that occurs when an investigator withholds information about some aspect of the research from the subjects. In some instances, researchers may tell subjects the general purpose of the study but do not give them enough details to reveal the entire purpose.

IV. Procedure

1. Projects that include deception or incomplete disclosure methodology must qualify for a waiver of informed consent. To qualify for a waiver of consent, the research must satisfy the following elements:
 - a. The research involves no more than the minimal risk to the subjects;
 - b. The waiver of alteration would not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects;
 - c. The research could not practically be carried out without the waiver; and
 - d. The subject will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

2. Investigators utilizing deception or incomplete disclosure methodology must submit an informed consent form with the protocol, regardless of the waiver of consent. The informed consent may withhold portions of the consent relevant to the research design, but must include other required elements:
 - a. Name of Principal Investigator (PI) and position at WCU
 - b. IRB and PI contact information
 - c. Description of subject privacy or confidentiality
 - d. Compensation
 - e. Potential Benefits/Risks
3. Projects that include deception or incomplete disclosure methodology must include the debriefing process in the application and provide any debriefing forms utilized, to the IRB. The PI may use the template, Debriefing and Permission to Use Data, if necessary. A debriefing process must include:
 - a. Disclosure information about the nature of the research
 - b. Allows participant to withdraw from study (if longitudinal) or remove their data
4. Projects that include deception or incomplete disclosure methodology must include a debriefing at the end of subject's participation in order to disclose the true nature of the project, and explain why deception was necessary. This can be accomplished utilizing the Debriefing and Permission to Use Data form.
 - a. If the protocol involves minors or cognitively impaired individuals, the debriefing should be suitable to the age and cognitive ability of the participants. The PI should consider whether to include a parent, guardian, or legally authorized representative in the debriefing session.
 - b. For protocols that involve the collection of anonymous data, participants must be given a debriefing at the end of the survey with the ability to opt out or withdraw their data before exiting the survey.
5. Deception research involving any of the following characteristics will be reviewed by the full board:
 - a. Target vulnerable populations (such as minors, prisoners);
 - b. Includes questions on sensitive topics, such as victimization or illegal behavior;
 - c. Includes any activity that requires a participant to view, respond, or reflect on any item involving trauma, abuse, violence (even if the item is not asking them to disclose or reflect on their personal experiences);
 - d. Any study in which debriefing cannot be undertaken because to do so would cause more harm than good or when participants cannot be contacted;
 - e. Any study involving subliminal priming;
 - f. Any study in which the researcher assumes a false identity;
 - g. Manipulations designed to elicit behaviors about which participants' may feel shame or other strong negative emotions;
 - h. Covert observation and/or videotaping.

V. Responsibilities

Investigators

VI. References

American Psychological Association, Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct § 8.07 – 8.08 (2002).

45 C.F.R. §§ 46.116(f)(3)(v), 46.117(c)(1)(i)-(iii) (2018).