Exciting New Sources of Funding for Experiments!

Kristy Towry

Benefits and Challenges of Experimental Research

- **Benefits**
  - “Experimentalist’s comparative advantage”
  - It’s really fun!

- **Challenges**
  - Out of the mainstream
  - Difficulty finding subjects (and who are the right subjects?)
  - Funding
Good News!

☐ SARB (Society for Applied Research in Business) has established a significant fund for supporting experimental work.

☐ Emory University has been named the fund administrator.

☐ Yours truly is the director.

  ■ Considerable leeway.

☐ First grant announced today!

Everything I’ve just said is a lie, but you don’t mind, do you?
Deception in Experiments

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Based largely on research by Hertwig and Ortmann (e.g., Ethics & Behavior 2008, Experimental Economics 2002, Behavioral & Brain Sciences 2001, American Psychologist 1997).

It depends on where you come from:

- Experimental Psychology – deception commonly used.
  (In recent years, about 50% of studies in top tier social psychology journals use some form of deception.)

- Experimental Economics – deception effectively banned.

*Are economists just more ethical than psychologists?*
What is deception?

- Intentionally providing misinformation?
- Withholding information?
  - Research Hypotheses
  - Range of Manipulations
  - Etc.
- Taking advantage of default assumptions?

Why deceive?

- It allows researcher to create situations of interest that are not likely to arise naturally.
- It prevents experimental participants from “filtering” their behavior.
- It can reduce the number of subjects required.
Why not deceive?

☐ Ethical Reasons
☐ Practical Reasons

Practical argument against deception:

☐ Deception breeds suspicion & therefore taints the subject pool.
☐ Not a new argument:

“As we continue to carry out research of this kind. . . our potential subjects become increasingly distrustful of us, and our future relations with them are likely to be undermined. Thus, we are confronted with the anomalous circumstance that the more research we do, the more difficult and questionable it becomes.”

- Kelman 1967

☐ An economist’s perspective:
  ■ Trust is a public good.
In defense of deception:

1. Participants don’t really mind being deceived.
2. Effects of suspicion on behavior are negligible.
3. Deception is an indispensable tool.

Examining the evidence:
Do participants resent deception?

- Evidence gathered primarily from asking participants their feelings after telling them that they were deceived.

- Evidence is mixed.
  - “Research participants do not perceive that they are harmed and do not seem to mind being misled.” Christensen (1988)
  - Participants who were deceived “rated the experiment as worthless, were annoyed with the experiment, and would not recommend the experiment to a friend.” Kimmel (1998)
Examining the evidence:
Are the effects of suspicion negligible?

- Anecdotal evidence: Mock Jury
- More systematic: Evidence is mixed.
  - Concrete tip-offs or explicit knowledge of deception tends to alter behavior, whereas general suspicion does not.
  - Firsthand experience with deception alters behavior, whereas disclosure of the possibility of deception does not.
  - Not all suspicion affects behavior.
    - Depends on the DV.
    - Depends on similarity to experiment in which participant was previously deceived.

Examining the evidence:
Is deception an indispensable tool?

- Hard to support or refute based on empirics.
APA Rules of Conduct

- Deception is an indispensable strategy of last resort.
  - “Psychologists do not conduct a study involving deception unless they have determined that the use of deceptive techniques is justified by the study’s prospective scientific, educational, or applied value and that effective nondeceptive alternative procedures are not feasible.”
- IRB disclosure rule likely exacerbates suspicion effects.

What do I think?

- As an accounting academic community, we need to arrive at shared norms.
  - Talking is the first step.
- When you’re making design choices, realize that your reviewer might have strong opinions.
- When you’re a reviewer, realize that we don’t have shared norms yet.