

## No-deception policy – information for researchers

COBE Lab has an explicit no-deception policy, which means that deception may not be used in any study for which participants are recruited from COBE Lab's participant pool. This means that researchers are not allowed to lie, mislead or wrongly inform participants about the true nature of a situation.

### Background

The no-deception policy is based on ethical standards governing the safe participation of human subjects in research. Deceptive methodologies compromise participants' ability to give fully informed consent and have possible negative impacts on participants and research. Examples are unwanted and inappropriate invasion of privacy, coercion to act against own will, damage to self-esteem, feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, being manipulated and last, but not least, distrust in researchers and research in general. For these reasons, deception is not accepted in studies using COBE Lab's participant pool.

### Examples of deception

Deception involves intentionally providing misleading or false information to participants.

Examples of deception:

- Participants are told they are interacting with other participants, but in fact they are interacting with a computer or confederates of the experimenter.
- Experimenters tell the participants that they play a competitive game and they are rewarded based on performance, but in fact the game is rigged and the payment is fixed.
- Participants are told that a study is about topic A, but in fact the study is about topic B, and has nothing to do with topic A.
- Participants are given false feedback about their performance.

Any form of behaviour which provides the participants with false information or deprives them of important true information may be defined as deception. This entails that deception can consist simply of withholding information with the intent to deceive, without making any statement at all.

An example of withholding information/misleading behaviour which is considered as deception:

- Participants take part in a task in which their payoff depends on performance. Participants complete the task on paper forms, and the research assistant collects the papers and throws them in a trash can, while the participants are watching. The intention is to make the participants believe that their forms are not revealed and that it is possible to cheat. The task is repeated. After the participants leave the room the research assistant collects all forms from the trash can and they are used for analysis.

It is acceptable to state the general purpose of the research and the researcher does not have to disclose specific research questions (as this might give rise to experimenter demand effects) – as long one can assume that participants would still give their consent to participate if they did know the specific research question. For example, it is not considered deception if a researcher studies how music affects a decision to buy a product and states “this experiment is about decision making” in the study description.

### **If deception is essential to the scientific purpose of the study and there is no way to avoid it**

Researchers may gain access to the lab facilities, but they have to make clear that their study does not conform to COBE Lab's policies. Specifically, researchers are responsible for recruiting their own participants and consent forms for these experiments must include the following introductory paragraph:

"You have not been recruited from COBE Lab's own participant pool and for this reason you are not covered by COBE Lab's human subject policy. For specific questions about the study, please contact the researchers responsible of the study."

HSC requirements when using deception and having access to COBE Lab's facilities:

- The research project still needs to undergo HSC evaluation if they want to use the lab or any resources from COBE Lab.
- Affiliation with COBE Lab must be as limited as possible. Do not use our logo in consent forms, payment forms, promotional material or the like. If equipment is used outside of COBE Lab's address, the COBE Lab signs or logos on laptops or other equipment must be obscured, so they are not visible to participants.
- Participants are debriefed about the deception immediately after their participation. This debriefing includes specifics about the deception, the rationale for the deception and a correction of any false or incomplete information. If debriefing is not possible or appropriate, it requires a strong justification that is accepted by the HSC.
- In the debriefing it must be clear that the participants are not recruited from COBE Lab's participant pool and deception would not be allowed if they were recruited through COBE Lab.
- Any risks described in the study description must not understate the actual known risks of the study.
- Participants must be informed as soon as possible that the description of the study includes inaccurate or incomplete information and that they will be provided with complete and accurate information, when they have completed their participation. If possible, information that debriefing takes place after the study can be provided in the consent form.