

Example of a Debriefing Script for a Study Involving Deception*

*about the true purpose of the study and the feedback given to participants on their performance during the study. Thanks to Dr Fuschia Sirois for this example.

I would like to hear from you what you think about what we did today in this study, and your general impression about the tasks involved in this study. **[participant feedback invited]**

There is more to this study than what I have told you about so far. Sometimes in psychological research it is necessary to not tell people about the true purpose of the study at the beginning. If we did, it may affect how they respond to the questions asked and the tasks involved, and this would change the results in way that may make them invalid. In some studies we want to get an idea of how people respond in their day to day life to certain situations, and sometimes the best way to do this is to not give all the details about the purpose of the study. Can you see why it may be necessary in some studies to not reveal the true purpose of the study up front? **[participant feedback invited]**

Did you suspect that I was not being completely honest with you? **Y** **N**

Now I would like to tell you exactly what the purpose of this study was. We told you that we were trying to find the best time needed to allow for optimal performance on a test of creative reasoning, and that because personality may influence peoples' perceptions of time we wanted you to complete some personality measures. While it is true that personality can affect peoples' perceptions of time, we were in fact interested in finding out how different personality traits influence the preference for more or less time on a timed task. There is some research that suggests that such preferences may be related to personality, and that some people will find that time limits help their performance, while others will tend to believe that time limits may actually limit their ability to perform at their best. This may be especially true after experiencing failure on a timed task.

In this study not everyone was given a test that was equally difficult – some were given an easy version of the test, others received a very difficult version of the test, and a third group received a test of average difficulty. Although your scores on this test were true, it was not a fair test for everyone as some were very difficult and some were very hard. More importantly, the feedback that you were given about how well you did on this test was completely false – there are no comparison standards with other students. In fact, this test does not predict academic and career success as you were told, and it is not a test of “creative reasoning”. So the results from this test mean nothing regarding your actual performance potential or abilities – therefore, please do not give it another thought. This was all done so that we could simulate real life conditions of success and failure and get your natural responses to being in these circumstances.

Because this is an ongoing study and many other students may get involved, we ask that you not talk about the study and its true purpose that I just revealed to you with any other students. The reason we ask this is because if someone you talk to about this

study then decides to participate, their reactions would not be as spontaneous or natural as if they had not know what the study was about. Even if you think that the person you are telling is not likely or eligible to participate in this study, they may tell someone else who may then participate. For this reason I would like to ask you to not say anything more about the study than what you were told at the beginning of the study and before you knew the true purpose.

Your participation in this research is very important. We realize though that finding out that we were not up front with you regarding the purpose of the study may affect your satisfaction with your participation, especially since you gave consent to a study with what you thought had a different purpose. If you are not satisfied with this study and want us to not use your data, then please let me know now and will remove it, and you will still be credited with your bonus point. Do you want to keep your data in this study or have it removed? **Y** **N**

We hope that you found your experience participating in this study to be interesting. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. **[participant feedback invited]**