

Deception

Lecture 11

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EPS Lectures

Deception in Experiments

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Definition (Deceptive Identities)

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Definition (Deceptive Materials)

When the materials used in the experiment are deceptive.

Arguments for Deception

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- Better educational experience – learn from debriefing.
- Allows for research that otherwise could not be conducted & thus greater knowledge about the world.
- Deception is part of everyday life.

Objections to Deception

Ethical Concerns

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- Bok (1978 p. 194) remarked in relation to experimental subjects “Among the risks taken seriously must be psychological ones: the damage which some may experience from having revealed themselves unknowingly, from having their privacy invaded, or from discovering something about themselves that will be painful to live with.”

Objections to Deception

Methodological Concerns

- Major methodological concern – will negatively ability to run experiments in future. Consider quote from Ledyard:

“It is believed by many undergraduates that psychologists are intentionally deceptive in most experiments. If undergraduates believe the same about economists, we have lost control. It is for this reason that modern experimental economists have been carefully nurturing a reputation for absolute honesty in all their experiments... (I)f the data are to be valid. Honesty in procedures is absolutely crucial. Any deception can be discovered and contaminate a subject pool not only for the experimenter but for others. Honesty is a methodological public good and deception is not contributing.”

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- Know from monetary experiments difference, but do we know with hypothetical ones?

Effects of Deception

Are Harms from Deception Minimal?

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- Can subliminal priming have a longer effect on subjects?
- **Is trust diminished?**

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- The first question is whether subjects who have been deceived in past experiments will be resentful and take this sentiment into the experiment, thus changing their “natural” behavior.

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- Hertwig and Ortmann (200x) examine various studies on this issue and found mixed results.
- On the one hand some studies found that deceived subjects did not become more resentful (Kimmel, 1998; Christensen, 1988), while other studies have found that resentment in subjects affected their behavior (Allen, 1983, Straits, Wuebben and Majka, 1972, Cook, Bean, Calder, Frey, Krovetz, and Reisman, 1970).

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- Hertwig and Ortmann (200x) found that the suspicion did impact behavior in the experiment.
- However, there is some evidence that the effects of deception depend on the type of experiment.

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- In the experiment some subjects are deceived that they are playing against a human partner in a trust game when they are actually playing against a computer.
- **In the baseline manipulation subjects played against other subjects.**

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- Two to three weeks later, both the deceived and undeceived subjects were recruited for a second experiment involving other well known games and choice situations.
- They found some minor effects of deception on the likelihood that subjects chose to return for the second session and on their behavior in the second session.

Does Deception Change the Behavior of Subjects in Future Experiments?

- Jamison et al's study does not clear up the controversy over whether deception matters or not since the effects they found, although real, were weak. They note (page 486):

We have discussed these results with both psychologists and economists and are struck by their reactions: both see the data as supporting their priors! .. We fully understand that although we do find clear differences in behavior, they are subject to interpretation as to their economic (or psychological) importance, as well as to further refinement regarding their magnitude and generalizability. The irony is that further study of how deception influences behavior, both in the laboratory and in the real world, requires relaxing the no-deception rule.

Removing Harmful Effects of Deception

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- That is, debriefing is seen as a chance to rectify the unethical or immoral act of deception by the researcher.

The Conditional Information Lottery Procedure & Avoiding Deception

- Most political scientists who use deception do so because they see it as the only way to address the research question of interest. Scharlemann et al contend (page 628-9):

In our experiment, control requires that subjects be presented with paired sets of faces. A single face is presented in two versions: one smiling, and one unsmiling. Without this control we cannot be certain whether our result is due to a smile, or due to some other difference between any two different faces. This led us to control the facial expressions by setting them ahead of time.

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- However, only one of the faces shown was actually a subject in the experiment, the other faces were from photos that the experimentalists had taken previously from a different experiment.
- Subjects knew that only one photo was real, but did not know which one.
- Hence, Eckel & Wilson were able to show the same photos to subjects both smiling and unsmiling, as in Scharlemann et al, but not engage in deception.

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- Subjects are not told which tasks are “real” or not.
- Subjects are then paid only for the real tasks.
- The lottery is involved in determining in which period or round subjects experience the real task and subjects are told the likelihood of a task being real (the percentage of real tasks they face).
- Then at the end of the experiment the real tasks are revealed to the subjects.