

## **Contemporary College Students' Attitudes about Deception in Research**

by Jon Lasser, Gail Ryser, Dora Borrego, Emma Ham, Karla Reyes Flores, Julia Pruin, and Peyton Randolph

### **Appendix**

#### Experiment E\*

We would like your opinions regarding the experiment described below. Please read the summary of the study and then answer the questions provided on the following pages.

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** Psychologists have hypothesized that when an embarrassing situation occurs, people give explanations which they hope will restore their “tarnished” reputation. This experiment was conducted to examine whether males and females differ in their explanations for an embarrassing incident and whether the severity of their mistake and their perceived social status would influence their explanations.

**PARTICIPANTS:** Ninety male and female undergraduates participated for Introductory Psychology course credit.

**PROCEDURE:** At the beginning of the experiment participants were told that they would be participating in a taped interview to be used for subsequent research on how people form impressions of others and were told that they would either interview another student (giving them high status) or that they would be interviewed by another student (giving them low status). They were not told that the true purpose of the study was to observe how they behaved in an embarrassing situation nor were they told that the other “student” was really another experimenter.

Participants were then told to place their belongings on a table which was rigged with a cup of colored water which could be toppled by a hidden string. When participants started to place their belongings on a table, the experimenter posing as a student coughed to distract them so that another experimenter could topple the contents of the cup into a strategically placed tote bag making it look as if the participant had done it. For half the participants only papers were in the tote bag (low severity incident) while for the other half an expensive camera was in the tote bag (high severity incident).

Immediately after the cup spilled, the confederate said, “Oh no, my stuff” followed by “What happened?”

**MEASUREMENT OF PARTICIPANT REACTIONS:** The experimenter secretly video taped the participant’s behavior when the cup was toppled. Nonverbal responses (e.g., hand to face, head shaking), instrumental behaviors (e.g., attempts to empty the bag), and verbal responses (e.g., “I’m sorry” or “I didn’t do it”) were noted.

**DEBRIEFING:** After participants’ behaviors were recorded, they were thanked and told the true purpose of the experiment. The experimenter answered questions and discussed any distress the participants might be experiencing.

**RESULTS:** When the participants’ behavior and responses were analyzed, it was found that females gave longer, more concessionary (“I’m sorry”) and emotional (“I feel terrible”) accounts than males. When the consequence of the incident was severe (a camera was in the tote) high and low “status” individuals (interviewers VCR

interviewees) did not differ in their explanations. However, when consequence severity was low (only papers in the tote) women placed in the “low status” condition expended more effort to explain themselves.

\*“Gaffe” study in Fisher & Fyrberg, 1994.

EXPERIMENT E\*  
Questions

1. In this first set of questions we would like you to consider the PURPOSE of the study.

1a. How important do you think it is for psychologists to study the extent to which individual differences in accounting for an embarrassing incident is influenced by a person's sex, status, and the severity of the incident?

1	2	3	4
unimportant	not very important	somewhat important	very important

1b. How important do you think it is for psychologists to create embarrassing situations so that they can observe actual "accounting" behaviors in the laboratory when information can also be obtained through questionnaires or asking participants to role-play how they would behave?

1	2	3	4
unimportant	not very important	somewhat important	very important

2. In this next question we would like you to consider how well the experimental PROCEDURES satisfied the goals of the study.

That is, to what extent do you think the participants in the study believed they had committed a serious versus a not so serious mistake as a result of having the cup of liquid spill on a camera or some papers?

1	2	3	4
ineffective	not very effective	somewhat effective	very effective

\*“Gaffe” study in Fisher & Fyrberg, 1994.

3. In this question we would like you to consider the RESULTS of the study.

The experimenters found some effects of sex, status, and consequence severity on the amount and type of explanations participants gave. How important do you think the results of this experiment are with respect to enhancing our understanding of how people behave in embarrassing situations?

1	2	3	4
unimportant	not very important	somewhat important	very important

4. In this next set of questions we would like you to consider the PARTICIPANTS’ REACTIONS while participating in this experiment.

- 4a. To what extent do you think those participants who were in the LOW STATUS, HIGH CONSEQUENCE SEVERITY GROUP were embarrassed when the liquid spilled into the tote bag?

1	2	3	4
not embarrassed	not very embarrassed	somewhat embarrassed	very embarrassed

- 4b. To what extent do you think those participants who were in the HIGH STATUS, LOW CONSEQUENCE SEVERITY GROUP were embarrassed when the liquid spilled into the tote bag?

1	2	3	4
not embarrassed	not very embarrassed	somewhat embarrassed	very embarrassed

5. In this next set of questions we would like you to consider the PARTICIPANTS’ REACTIONS after the experiment when the true purpose of the study was revealed.

- 5a. To what extent do you think participants believed the experimenter when they were told that the true purpose of the experiment was to observe how they would act in an embarrassing situation?

1	2	3	4
did not believe experimenter	were very skeptical	were somewhat skeptical	believed experimenter

5b. To what extent do you think participants were embarrassed or distressed when they were told that the true purpose of the study was to observe how they behaved in a predicament?

1	2	3	4
not embarrassed or distressed	not very embarrassed or distressed	somewhat embarrassed or distressed	very embarrassed or distressed

5c. To what extent do you think participants were annoyed or distressed when they learned that the experimenter had deceived them?

1	2	3	4
very annoyed or distressed	somewhat annoyed or distressed	not very annoyed or distressed	not annoyed or distressed

5d. If, after being told the true purpose of the study, participants did feel embarrassed or distressed that their “accounting” behavior had been observed by the experimenter, how likely do you think it would be that they would tell the experimenter how they were feeling?

1	2	3	4
most would not tell	a few would tell	at least half would tell	most would tell

Please give a brief reason for your answer:

5e. If, after being told the true purpose of the study, participants did feel annoyed or angry that they had been deceived by the experimenter, how likely do you think it would be that they would tell the experimenter how they were feeling?

1  
most would  
not tell

2  
a few  
would tell

3  
at least half  
would tell

4  
most  
would tell

Please give a brief reason for your answer:

5f. Subjects in this experiment received Introductory Psychology course credit for participating. If some participants were embarrassed, distressed or annoyed by the experiment, to what extent do you think the fact that the experiment was associated with their Psychology course would influence their decision to tell the experimenter how they felt?

1  
would be  
much less  
willing to  
tell

2  
would be  
somewhat less  
willing to  
tell

3  
would be  
somewhat more  
willing to  
tell

4  
would be  
much more  
willing to  
tell

Please give a brief reason for your answer:

6. Participants in this study were told that the purpose of their participation was to be in a taped interview which would be used for subsequent research on impression formation. In this set of questions, we would like you to consider whether participants' willingness to participate in this experiment would have been influenced by additional information about the study?

6a. To what extent do you think individuals would be willing to participate if they were told that the study they were in "might include some deception"?

1  
would be  
much less  
willing to  
participate

2  
would be  
somewhat less  
willing to  
participate

3  
would be  
somewhat more  
willing to  
participate

4  
would be  
much more  
willing to  
participate

Please give a brief reason for your answer:

6b. To what extent do you think individuals would be willing to participate if they were told that "they might experience some embarrassment" in the course of the experiment?

1  
would be  
much less  
willing to  
participate

2  
would be  
somewhat less  
willing to  
participate

3  
would be  
somewhat more  
willing to  
participate

4  
would be  
much more  
willing to  
participate

Please give a brief reason for your answer:

7. Psychology experiments conducted in colleges and universities are reviewed by an IRB (Institutional Review Board). One of the tasks of the IRB is to evaluate the experiment with respect to the COSTS (potential negative effects to the participants) versus the BENEFITS (potential gains for society). In the next set of questions we would like you to consider the costs and benefits of this experiment.

7a. How would you evaluate the costs and benefits of this experiment?

1  
the costs to  
participants  
are much  
greater than  
benefits to  
society

2  
the costs to  
participants  
are somewhat  
greater than  
benefits to  
society

3  
the societal  
benefits  
are somewhat  
greater than  
costs to  
participants

4  
the societal  
benefits  
are much  
greater than  
costs to  
participants

Please give a brief reason for your answer, noting what costs (if any) or benefits (if any) you think are potential consequences of this experiment:

7b. On the basis of your answer to question 7a., do you believe the study should have been conducted?

YES NO

Please give a brief reason for your answer:

8. Please briefly discuss any thoughts you have about ethical and/or moral issues a psychologist should consider when designing research which entails deceiving the participants:

9a. Have you discussed research ethics in your Introductory Psychology class?

YES NO

9b. If yes, have you discussed research ethics regarding deception research?

YES NO