

Social Science Participant Pool Debriefing Guidelines & Example

After the data have been collected, it is the responsibility of the researcher to debrief the participant. Debriefing is the process of informing the participant about the purpose of the experiment and about any deception that may have been used. This is done to increase the participant's understanding of the research in which she or he was involved, and to remove or protect the participant from any possible harmful effects that may have inadvertently come about due to her/his participation. A good rule is to make sure that the participant leaves feeling as good as when she or he arrived.

You must prepare a debriefing form for your experiment, but the debriefing itself can be done orally. You should make the written copy available if the participant wants to see it. The debriefing form should be written like a story in very non-technical terms. Do not assume that your participants know anything about research. In the debriefing, you should include: (a) a description of your hypothesis, (b) what deception was used, if any, and why it was needed, (c) what the participants in the other conditions did (if applicable), and (d) what results the researcher(s) expect(s) to find. Finally, you should provide a number the participant can call if she or he has any questions (i.e., the Primary Investigator's name and office number) and a reference for further information about the topic of your study. Below is a sample debriefing form.

Debriefing Form

Project Title: Perceptions of Divorce

People's perceptions of the likelihood and outcome of divorce vary greatly. Studies have shown, for example, that people are more likely to think divorce will occur if the man is the spouse who is dissatisfied with the marriage and who wants a divorce.

In this study, we wanted to see if people's perceptions of the likelihood of divorce differ depending on whether the man or woman wanted the divorce and what his/her reasons were. In order to do this, we gave each participant one of four possible packets. In each packet we included a picture of either a man or a woman, and one of two short profiles describing his/her marital situation. In one version, the man/woman was described as feeling dissatisfied with his/her marriage, and in another the man/woman was having an extramarital affair.

We predict that participants will rate the likelihood of divorce higher if a man is dissatisfied with his marriage than if he is having an extramarital affair but will use the opposite criteria for women. Therefore, participants are expected to rate a woman as more likely to get a divorce if she is having an affair than if she is dissatisfied.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to ask me now. If you have any further questions or comments, please contact (**course professor**) at (**phone number**). Because other students may be participating in this study in the future, we ask that you not discuss the details of this study with your friends or classmates.

If you are interested in reading more about this topic, try the following: Gottman, J. M. (1979). *Marital interaction: Experimental investigations*. New York: Academic Press.

Thank you for your participation!