

Title: Making Everyone Feel Like a Winner

Author: Celia B. Fisher, *Decoding the Ethics Code: A Practical Guide for Psychologists*, Sage Publications, 2003

Description: To minimize distress and the potential for distrust of staff, investigators researching aggression in boys with conduct disorder do not disclose the purpose of the low-risk research but rather present the study activities as a game. Fisher presents this as an example of best practice.

Headings: Informed Consent: Disclosure and Deception; Deception (debriefing, illusions); Minors (children, adolescents); Mental health disorders, participants with (including addictive disorders and developmental disabilities)

Case Type: Illustrative

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Investigators working with inpatient boys diagnosed with conduct disorder designed an analog task that could distinguish between the children's use of instrumental and hostile aggression. The task was a computer game in which the boys played against an unseen "boy" (in actuality formatted responses programmed by the investigators) in an adjacent room. According to the rules of the game, opponents could block each other's game (instrumental aggression) or send a noxious, but not harmful, noise through the computer headsets (hostile aggression). The investigators believed that these deceptive conditions were safer for the participants than alternative methodologies that manipulated or observed aggression in actual competitive situations. Parents thought the research was important but voiced concern that if the boys were told about the deception, they would lose trust in the staff at the facility. The investigators agreed. To minimize any distress that might emerge during the computer game, the boys could not see their own scores during the game, and when the game was over, all boys were told they had won (adapted from Fisher, Hoagwood, and Jensen, 1996).