

SOCIology 201:
Social Research Design



27. Ethics of Social Research

Preview

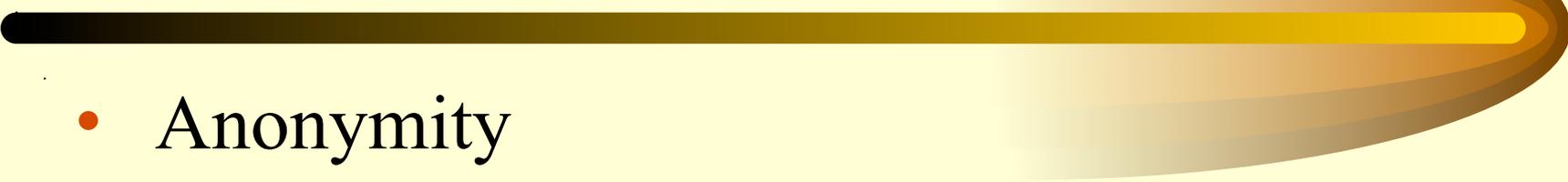


- Voluntary Participation
- Anonymity and Confidentiality
- Deceiving Subjects
- Analysis and Reporting
- Some Controversies
- Discussion examples

Voluntary participation

- *MUST* be voluntary
- But. . .we subtly coerce people to participate
- Prisoners think they'll get paroled
- Students think their grades will be affected
- We try to convince telephone respondents to participate

Anonymity and Confidentiality



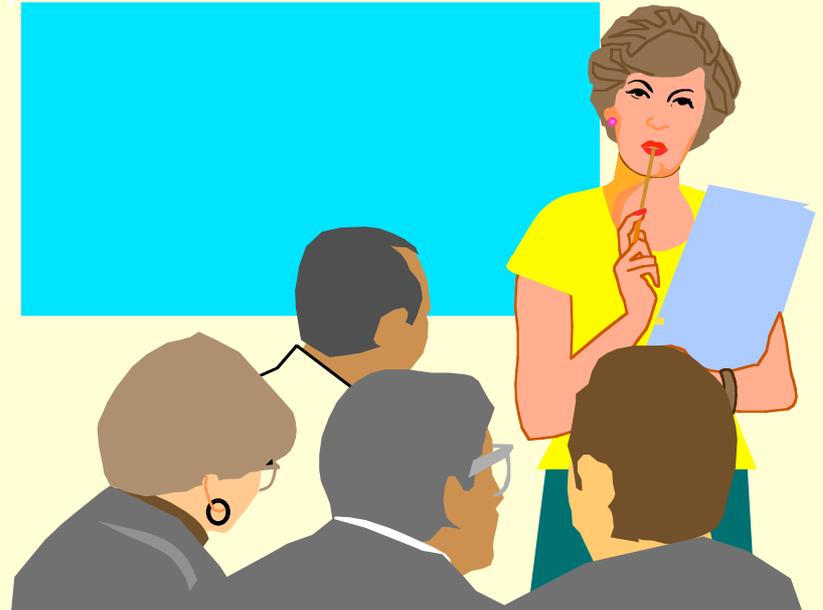
- Anonymity
 - No one knows who provided what information
 - Not even the research knows
- Confidentiality
 - The researcher can know who said what
 - But will keep it secret (Rik Scarce)
- Confidentiality is the minimum unless respondents have agreed to release

Deceiving Subjects

- Telemarketing disguised as research
 - “Can you tell me who’s picture is on a penny?”
 - “Beavis and Butthead.”
 - “Close enough. You’ve won a trial subscription to. . .”
- Surveys of prejudice etc.
- Most experiments

The Asch Experiment

- “You’ve been selected for a study of spatial relations.”
- “You’ll be taking the test with seven other subjects.”



Is X the same as A, B, or C?



X



A



B



C



Total = 28 slides

Is X the same as A, B, or C?

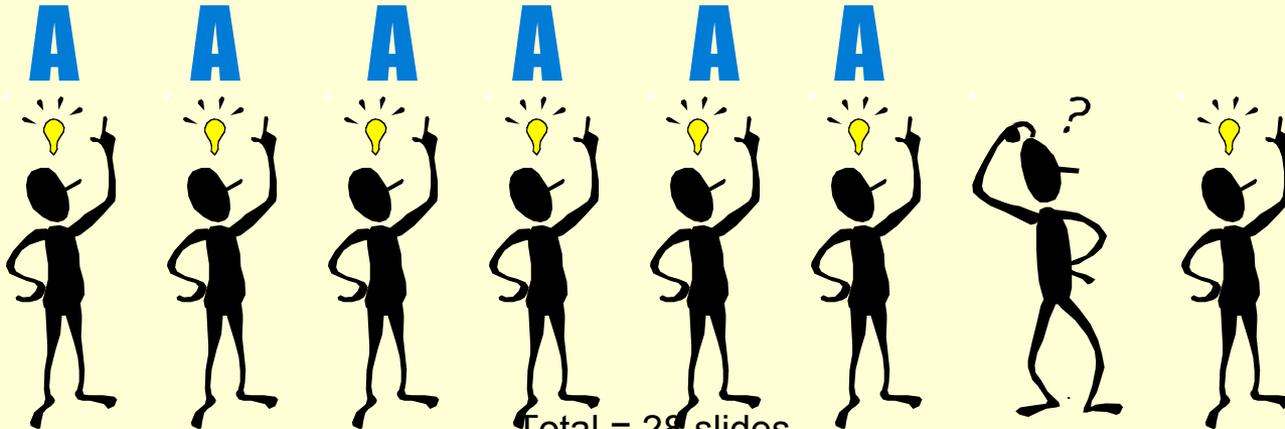
A

X

A

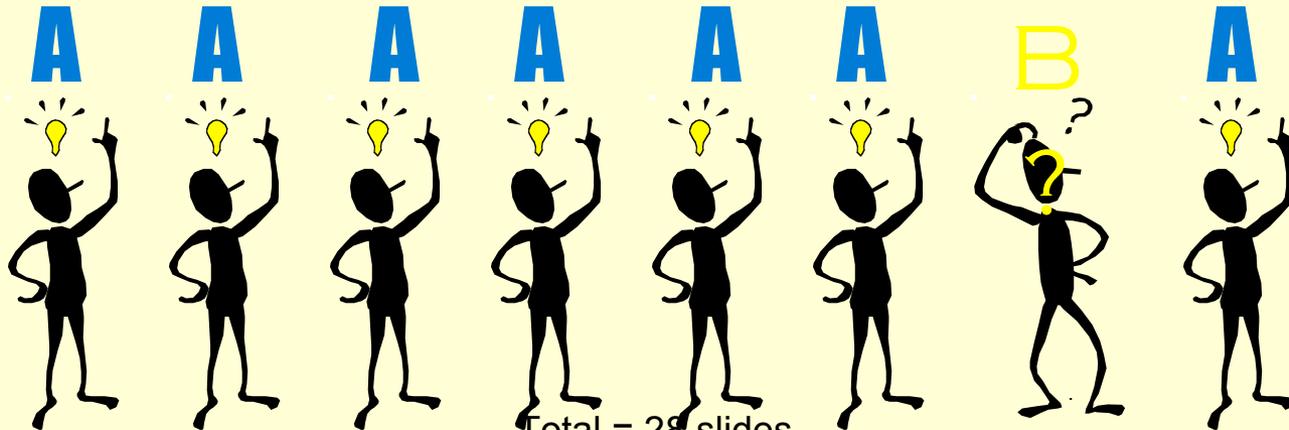
B

C



Total = 28 slides

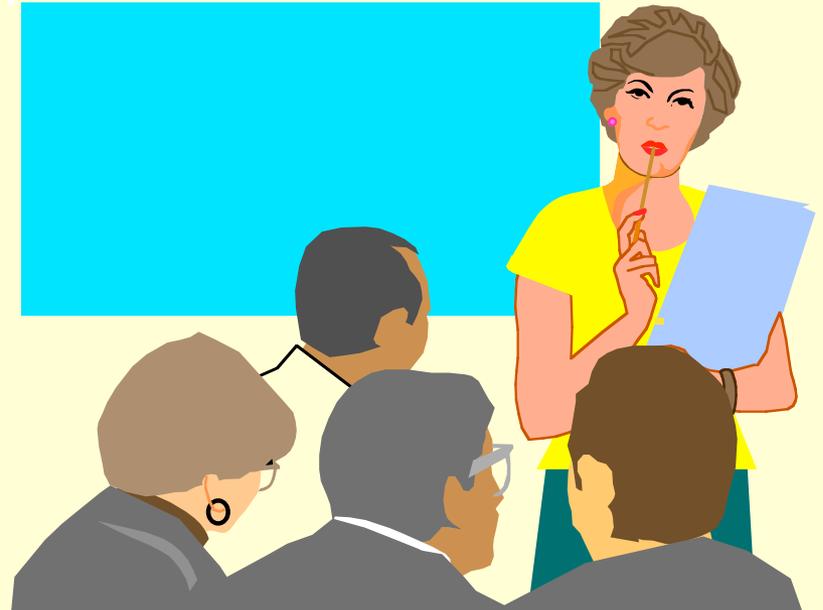
Is X the same as A, B, or C?



Total = 28 slides

Experimenter's response:

- “Well, the group did *pretty* well for a first try.”
- “Seven out of eight got it right.”
- “Let’s try it again.”



Is X the same as A, B, or C?



X



A



B



C



Total = 28 slides

Is X the same as A, B, or C?



X



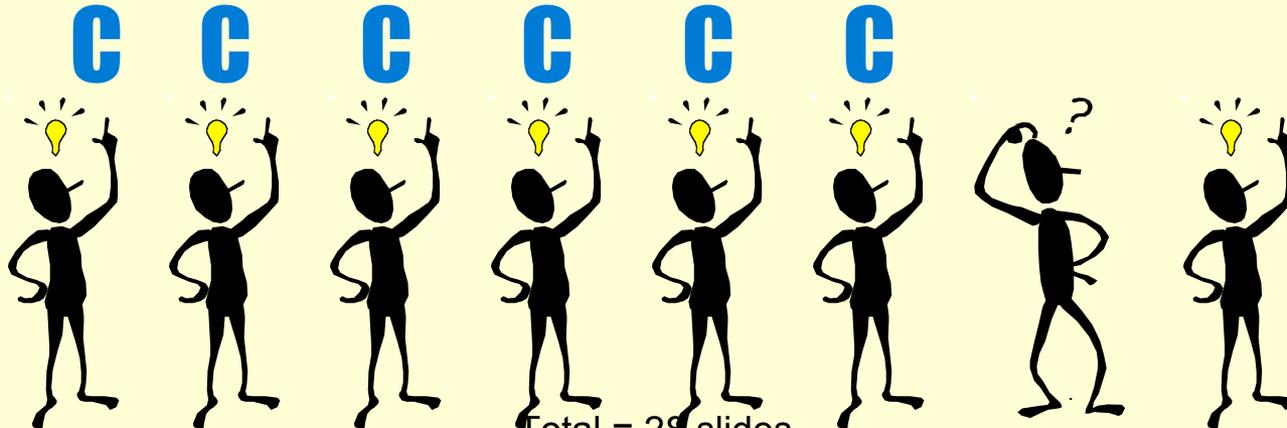
A



B



C



Total = 28 slides

Is X the same as A, B, or C?



X



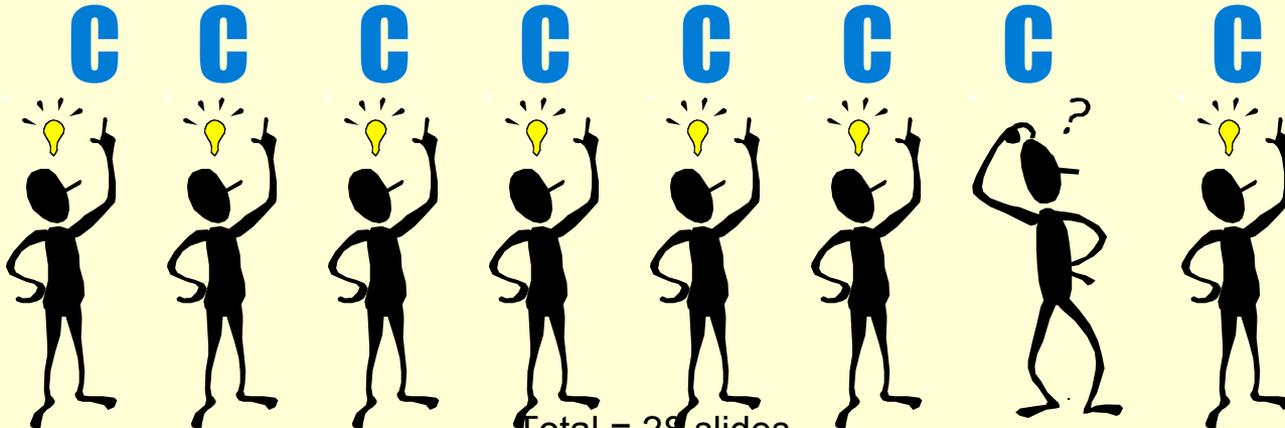
A



B



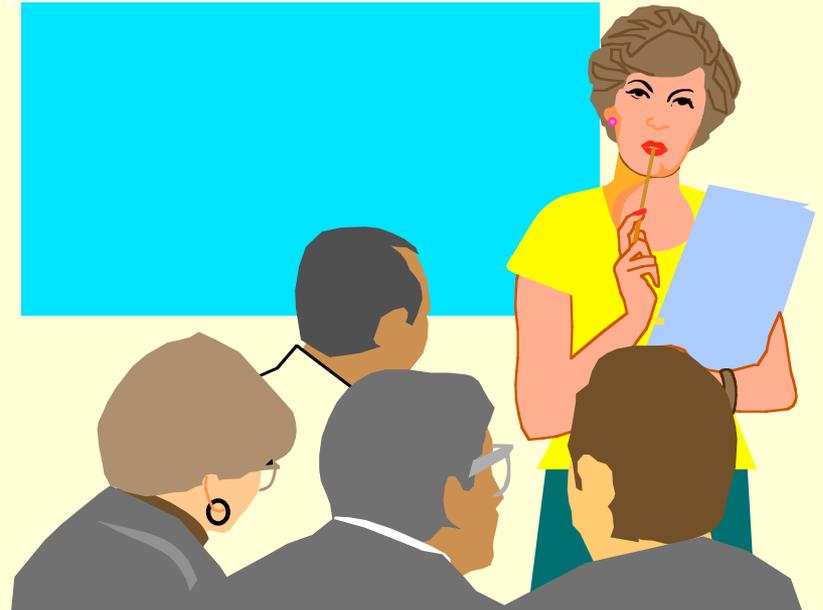
C



Total = 28 slides

Experimenter's response:

- “Yay! Good job that time..”
- “Everybody got it right.”
- “Now that everybody understands it, let's do some more..”



While lying is bad. . .

- . . .we do it frequently in research.
- In particular, we often lie about our research purposes
- Often, there's no other way to do the research.
- Must weigh the benefits of the research against the deception

Analysis and Reporting



- Negative findings should be reported
- Should be honest re shortcomings
- Scandals about falsified results
- Publish or perish pressures cited

Some Controversies

- Laud Humphreys
- Stanley Milgram
- Alaska survey re Exxon Valdez oil spill



Ethics Discussion

A psychology instructor asks students in an introductory psychology class to complete questionnaires that the instructor will analyze and use in preparing a journal article for publication.



Ethics Discussion

After a field study of deviant behavior during a riot, law enforcement officials demand that the researcher identify those people who were observed looting. Rather than risk arrest as an accomplice after the fact, the researcher complies.



Ethics Discussion

After completing the final draft of a book reporting a research project, the researcher-author discovers that 25 of the 2,000 survey interviews were falsified by interviewers—but chooses to ignore that fact and publish the book anyway.

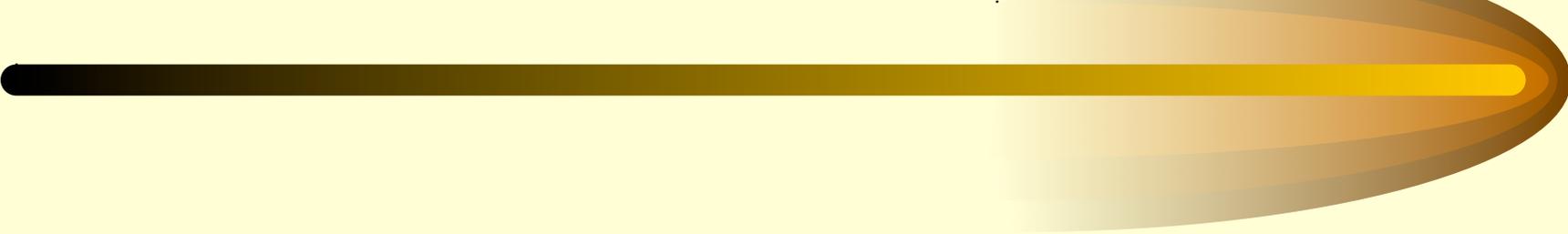


Ethics Discussion

Researchers obtain a list of right-wing radicals they wish to study. They contact the radicals with the explanation that each has been selected “at random” from among the general population to take a sampling of “public opinion.”



Ethics Discussion



A college instructor who wants to test the effect of unfair berating administers an hour exam to both sections of a specific course. The overall performance of the two sections is essentially the same. The grades of one section are artificially lowered, however, and the instructor berates them for performing so badly. The instructor then administers the same final exam to both sections and discovers that the performance of the unfairly berated section is worse. The hypothesis is confirmed, and the research report is published.

Ethics Discussion

In a study of sexual behavior, the investigator wants to overcome subjects' reluctance to report what they might regard as shameful behavior. To get past their reluctance, subjects are asked: "Everyone masturbates now and then; about how much do you masturbate?"



Ethics Discussion

A researcher studying dorm life on campus discovers that 60 percent of the residents regularly violate restrictions on alcohol consumption. Publication of this finding would probably create a furor in the campus community. Because no extensive analysis of alcohol use is planned, the researcher decides to ignore the finding and keep it quiet.



Ethics Discussion

To test the extent to which people may try to save face by expressing attitudes on matters they are wholly uninformed about, the researcher asks for their attitudes regarding a fictitious issue.



Ethics Discussion

A research questionnaire is circulated among students as part of their university registration packet. Although students are not told they must complete the questionnaire, the hope is that they will believe they must—thus ensuring a higher completion rate.



Ethics Discussion

A participant-observer pretends to join a radical, political group in order to study it and is successfully accepted as a member of the inner planning circle. What should the researcher do if the group makes plans for the following?

- a. A peaceful, though illegal, demonstration
- b. The bombing of a public building during a time it is sure to be unoccupied
- c. The assassination of a public official

