

Towards a more Precise and Coherent Understanding of the Research Ethics of Deception

Perspectives and Experiences of Researchers

Kamiel Verbeke,¹ Tomasz Krawczyk,² Dieter Baeyens,³ Jan Piasecki,² Pascal Borry¹

¹ Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law, KU Leuven

² Department of Philosophy and Bioethics, Jagiellonian University Medical College

³ Research Unit Parenting and Special Education, KU Leuven



Kamiel.Verbeke@kuleuven.be

First article →



Herding Cats? Or Ivory-tower Codes?

- **Deceiving** research participants is common and has methodological benefits
- Myriad **ethics guidance** documents exist for deception
- However, **suboptimal** uses and ethics review persist
- This disconnect may be due to an insufficiently precise and coherent **theoretical framework** underlying guidance
- Precision and coherence make guidance more **robust** and **closer to practice**

Methods

- Qualitative **interviews** with 24 researchers experienced with deception (diverse disciplines, methods, regions)
- Thematic analysis

What study characteristics are relevant to the ethical justifiability of deceptive studies? When and why are they relevant? How do they affect practice?

"But then it's made clear again that if in a week time they think, 'oh no I don't want to be involved anymore,' they can always email and withdraw the data."

"I think that there could be more stringent rules for [the deception of] children as compared to adults. [...] It's often a relationship between an adult and a child in which children tend to accept as true what an adult says"

- * ↑/↓ consent validity
- * Data withdrawal
- * Answerability to participants
- * Identifying & addressing harms
- * Enabling additional methods

- * Roles of researcher towards participant
- * Deception norms in participants' communities

- * Facilitate understanding
- * Simultaneously limit understanding

Truthful disclosure

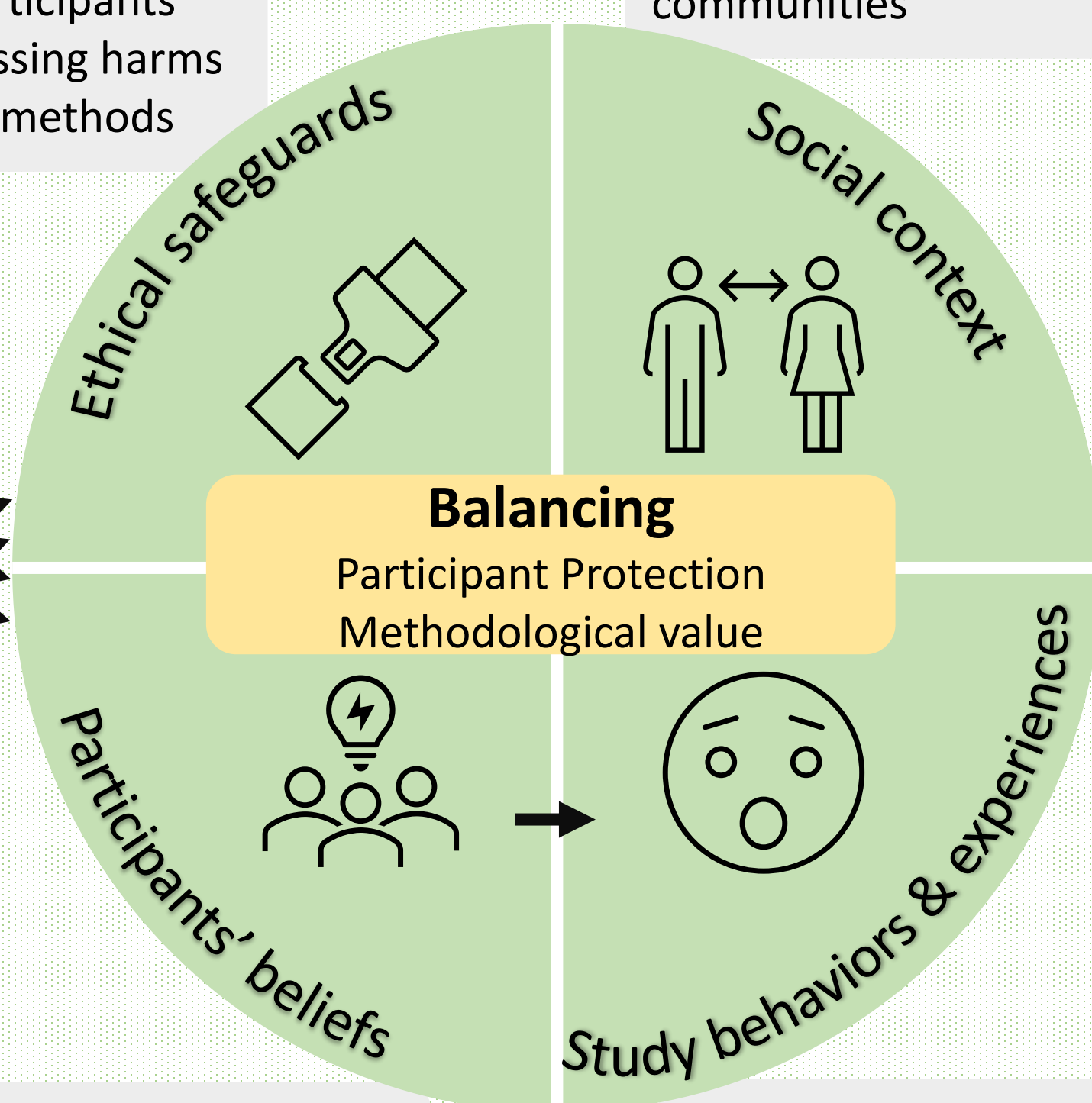
Deceptive act

- * Content
- * Form

"That research identity moved from being [first set of character traits] to [second set of character traits], who was just a reflection of the actual environment around him. [...] So, my identity was established in the beginning; I had no chance to do it. It gave me the opportunity to think about what identity might work best to access this pure form of data"

- * Credibility
- * Suspicions

- * Stronger negative appraisal of (enduring) behaviors & experiences



Discussion

- Researchers' decision-making reflects **nuance and coherence**, and can enrich the **theoretical framework** underlying guidance development
- Nevertheless, **gaps** remain

What now?



1. **Integrating** more precision and coherence into existing **guidance**
2. **Explore** method- and discipline-specific complexities of deception