



## **Participant Misrepresentation in Research**

**study:**

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**Researchers may find themselves engaged with participants who have misrepresented their eligibility for a research study, often motivated by remuneration for research participation. Researchers may also have cause to suspect that some responses to their surveys have been generated by a non-participant such as a bot.**

**When a research participant's identity or authenticity is called into question, ethical as well as operational issues arise. The integrity of the data is called into question, and the researcher loses data and time and may incur costs associated with remunerating falsified participants. Social media recruitment and online participation options seem to increase the likelihood of fraudulent participation.**

**The purpose of this document is to raise researcher awareness of this increasingly common challenge and to provide potential solutions that would be acceptable from a research ethics perspective. Researchers and research ethics boards must continue to apply the core research ethics principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice when navigating this research challenge.**

### **Signs of participant misrepresentation**

**Your study may be the target of participant misrepresentation if you notice one or more of the following signs:**

**There is a mismatch between the participant's eligibility or demographic responses and information provided in an interview, or illogical or inconsistent responses to questions.**

**Multiple participants are communicating using the same messaging or who provide unusually brief or vague responses to interview questions or who complete surveys more quickly than plausible.**

**Reluctance or refusal to turn the camera on without reason.**

**Unusually high participation rates from populations that are usually hard to reach  
More than usual interest in monetary incentives.**

**Receiving a high number of responses in a short period of time**

**Multiple email addresses that are formatted similarly or are from unknown email domains.**

## **Mitigation strategies**

**The Dalhousie University research ethics boards are open to considering mitigation strategies proposed by researchers related to their specific projects and to providing an ethical review. The strategies proposed below are meant as helpful examples rather than requirements.**

**Although there are multiple reasons for potential participants to misrepresent their identities, including malicious intent to corrupt data, since the offer of remuneration seems to be the most common reason, the strategies provided below focus on changing how identities are validated, and how remuneration is offered. The approaches will not guarantee that participants do not continue to misrepresent their identities, but they will hopefully dissuade some and allow for earlier detection of others. These should be described in the consent forms so prospective participants have the necessary details to make an informed decision about consent.**

**Recruitment:** Where applicable, avoid sharing survey links on publicly accessible platforms (such as social media) unless your aim is to generate a very large number of responses.

**Where possible, avoid using gift cards that have worldwide usage, e.g., use gift cards from a Canadian retailer when you are seeking Canadian participants, and specify the source of remuneration in the consent form.**

**Screen carefully:** Include screening questions and/or embedded questions about the participant's demographic information to confirm **lies fl \$ toq** **fph**



**for political or ideological reasons. If you have reasonable grounds to suspect that your research project may be, or has been, subject to foreign influence or interference please**