**Sona Researcher Study Description Guidelines**

Aside from a descriptive title, your study on Sona will need a Description that lets the Sona user (“Participant”) make an informed choice as to whether to sign up for your study. The Description does not replace the informed consent document and it won’t contain all of the information that will be in the consent form. It merely helps the Participant decide whether they want to invest the time into signing up for your study. For an online-only study, this investment is minimal—they’ll be reading the consent form immediately after they sign up. But for in-person studies, we want to avoid participants showing up and then leaving right after reading the consent form because they didn’t know what they were getting into.

In addition, your study Description represents a point of contact between our Department and the Sona Participants. We want to make a good impression on our students by using simple, concise writing.

A few general tips:

* Keep your language simple. Remember, these are mostly PSYC 101 students; they won’t know about demographics, paternal attachment or cognitive dissonance.
* If you will be asking about sensitive topics (drug use, sexual behavior, infidelity, etc.), then let them know this up front. That way, they can decide whether or not to continue with informed consent.
* Don’t tell them how you expect the study to turn out (don’t include results from past studies or a statement of your hypothesis). This will help avoid things like demand characteristics and other subject effects.

The bulleted lists following each of the sample study descriptions below give some additional pointers on what to include and exclude from your study description. The objective is to describe in general terms, without jargon, what the participant will be doing. When you submit your study for approval to the Sona Administrator (usually the Research Exposure Coordinator), if your study Description does not meet these standards, your study will be rejected and you will be referred to this document.

**Study 1: Questionnaire study**

Original Description

The purpose of this research study is to explore in a sample of approximately 1200 people the relationship between an individual’s personality characteristics, choice of leisure activities, and perceptions of subjective well-being. You will complete two measures of personality type (92 total items), four measures of different aspects of well-being (45 total items), and several demographic items. Altogether your participation should take no longer than half an hour. Your participation in this study involves no reasonably foreseeable risks and no explicit benefits.

* The participants don’t need to know how many people you will be recruiting.
* Good use of “you” and “your” to address the potential participant directly.
* Don’t need to list the specific number of items used to measure each construct, especially if, from their perspective, the study is just one bit set of questions.
* Do give them an idea of the kinds of questions they will be asked, the overall number of questions, and the approximate length of time it should take to complete the study (including reading the consent form and debriefing document).
* Don’t say “You will complete two measures…”. At every point in the study, it’s the participant’s decision as to whether they want to answer questions. Instead, say “You will be asked to complete to measures…”. That is, you can ask them to answer questions, you just can’t force them to do it.
* Try to be as concise as possible (what’s the difference between “personality characteristics” and “personality”?, “perceptions” and “subjective” are redundant, and what’s the difference between your “subjective well-being” and your “well-being”?).
* Will PSYC 101 students really know what well-being is? Will they know what “demographic items” are? Try to find simple phrases to replace those.
* The first sentence mentions leisure activities, but that’s not listed in the measures. This could be confusing; be sure to list all of the sorts of questions they’ll be asked.
* Don’t need to include the risk/benefit statement here. That will be in your consent form.

Edited Description

The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between personality, choice of leisure activities, and well-being. You will be asked to answer questions about your personality, what sorts of things you do in your free time, and how happy you are with your life (137 total items), as well as a few questions about yourself. Altogether your participation should take no longer than half an hour.

**Study 2: In-person (non-questionnaire) study**

Original Description

The purpose of this study is to investigate perception of temperatures. You will complete one calibration/training session, and one experimental session. Each session will include 20 trials of varied thermal stimulation between 0°C and 40°C (ice cubes and warm water). Exposure to each stimulus will last 3 seconds. Because these temperatures are very moderate and exposure is brief and limited to the fingertips, your participation involves no reasonably foreseeable risks. Altogether, your participation should take no longer than 1 hour. For participating in this study, you will receive 1 credit hour towards your class requirement, though there are no explicit benefits for participating in the study.

* The writing here is overly formal; write so you will be clearly understood by the typical PSYC 101 student.
* Be careful how you use the word “session”; this can be taken to mean one entire timeslot/appointment. That is, you do one session on one day and then come back again for another session. Here, the researcher really means “condition” or “trial block”. At this point the participant doesn’t need to know about the different conditions.
* That said, participants likely won’t know what a “trial block” is either. Try to avoid jargon.
* Will Shepherd students really know what temperatures in Celsius feel like? It’s better to use familiar units (or avoid the units entirely, see revision below).
* Don’t need to list the credit value of the study; that will be indicated elsewhere on the same web page as the Description.
* Don’t need to list any risks or benefits; this will be addressed in the consent form.

Edited Description

The purpose of this study is to investigate how people perceive temperature. You will be asked to use your fingertips to feel temperatures ranging from that of ice to warm water for 3 seconds at a time. Altogether, your participation should take no longer than 1 hour.

**Study 3: In-person study with a minimum attendee requirement**

Original Description

Because this is a study of group dynamics, a minimum of 3 people is necessary. If fewer than 3 people are signed up 36 hours before the study is scheduled, that session will have to be cancelled. Another session will be available. This study is open to women only. The same study, "Effect of the Environment on Group Dynamics - Men", is available to men in another time slot. The purpose of this research study is to explore in a sample of approximately 120 people the relationship between the group environment and problem-solving. 5 women will work as a group to solve a geometric puzzle and agree on a solution to a moral dilemma. Each participant will be given a loose t-shirt to wear over their clothing while participating in the study. Altogether your participation should take no longer than an hour.

* If you have unusual limitations (like needing at least 3 people to show up), be sure these are clearly spelled out. But don’t give the participant more information than they need to make their decision.
* Will PSYC 101 students know what “group dynamics” are?
* Don’t need to say how many participants there will be.
* Good description of what the participant will be doing—i.e., wearing a t-shirt. Good job noting that they will be given the t-shirt to wear (rather than, say, having to bring one with them).
* Good job noting that this study is only for women, but that there is another one for men.
* Good job using “women” instead of “females”. (We use “male” and “female” for non-human animals and “men” and “women” for adult humans.)
* A bit of re-organizing would make this more effective. Start by noting there’s a different study for men (so men don’t have to read the whole thing).
* Don’t begin a sentence with a digit (“Five women”, not “5 women”).
* Probably not a good idea to promise “Another session will be available”; what if you have to cancel your last one? You would then be obligated to schedule at least one more session.

Edited Description

This study is open to women only. Men wishing to participate in this study should sign up for "Effect of the Environment on Group Dynamics - Men". The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationship between the group environment and problem-solving. Five women will work as a group to solve a geometric puzzle and to agree on a solution to a moral dilemma. Each participant will be given a loose t-shirt to wear over their clothing while participating in the study. Altogether your participation should take no longer than an hour. Because this is a study of how people work together, a minimum of 3 people must show up for the study to proceed. If fewer than 3 people are signed up 36 hours before a scheduled session, that session will be cancelled.

**Study 4: Questionnaire study**

Original Description

The purpose of this study is to explore the possible impact of male gender roles and coping mechanisms on the existing gender gap in depression. 200 participants will be asked to complete a survey with three sections: one assessing their experience of depression, one assessing their agreement with masculine role norms, and one assessing dominant coping style (in total, with demographic questions, 73 questions). Participation should last about half an hour.

* Don’t begin a sentence with digits (“Two hundred participants…”).
* Will PSYC 101 students know what a “demographic” question, a “gender gap”, or “masculine role norms” are?
* From their perspective, is it important at this point to tell them there are three sections to the survey (especially if, from their perspective, they’ll just be answering a bunch of questions)?
* Address participants directly (e.g., “you” instead of “participants”).
* Note that we usually use “man” and “woman” rather than “male” and “female”, but here the word male is part of a phrase (“male gender roles”) rather than a description of participants, so it’s okay.

Edited Description

The purpose of this study is to explore the possible impact of male gender roles and coping mechanisms on gender differences in depression. You will be asked to complete a survey asking questions about your experience of depression, your opinion of how we expect a typical man to behave, how you usually cope with stress, and a few questions about yourself (73 questions total). Participation should last about half an hour.

**Study 5: Questionnaire study**

Original Description

The purpose of this study is to test if the need for affiliation affects the amount of activities people do as well as their life satisfaction and overall happiness. The study will involve the Life Satisfaction Questionnaire, Happiness survey, Needs Assessment Questionnaire, an activity list where the participant will indicate how often they perform different activities, and demographic questions. There are no potential risks foreseen and no direct benefits to the participant other than receiving partial course credit. Your participation should take no longer than half an hour.

* Will a PSYC 101 student know what “need for affiliation” is?
* Be careful how you use “effect”. Will you be manipulating need for affiliation? If not, then you aren’t looking at its effect on anything; you are looking for relationships.
* It’s usually not necessary to list the specific measures a participant will be completing. The Sona Participants won’t usually know what these are.
* Don’t need to say anything about course credit at this point.

Edited Description

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether a person’s desire to be with others is related to how many activities they participate in as well as their life satisfaction and overall happiness. You will be asked to answer questions about your life satisfaction, how happy you generally are, how much you like interacting with other people, how often you perform a variety of daily activities, and a few questions about yourself (88 questions total). Your participation should take no longer than half an hour.