

Subjects vs. Participants

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To the Editor:

Unlike Drs. Resnik and Bond (“[Use of ‘Subjects’ Should Not be Subjective](#),” *Observer*, May 2007) I am not familiar with the regulations of NIEHS or NIH, but I do suggest that there are clear logical and epistemological grounds for distinguishing between the terms “subjects” and “research participants.” Specifically, the latter term should be reserved for those who make an epistemological contribution to the research such as undergraduate students, masters and doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows, other faculty members, and even, at times, technical staff and academically unqualified friends who nevertheless contribute intellectually to the design and interpretation of the research (my spouse, who has not done more than one year of undergraduate psychology, being my prime example). Subjects, on the other hand, whether they are animal or human, make no epistemological contribution, although they may well provide many significant indirect benefits to society. I maintain, moreover, that this distinction holds, no matter what nonsensical rules organizations like the editors of APA journals may implement and force authors to comply with in order to get their papers published in high-impact journals.

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