

Request for Review:  
"The Poker House"  
Principal Investigator: XXX  
HRC protocol YYY

1. Purpose and Significance of the Project:

This research project aims to investigate the social organization of an illicit poker game. Poker has become extremely popular among college students over the last couple of years and there has been a lot of media attention to the growing interest. Poker tournaments are regularly televised, and there are also off-shore operations featuring gambling operations where people can play poker online for money. Poker games for money featuring face-to-face participants are exceedingly common as well, with some even operated illegally, yet tolerated by law enforcement, by charitable and youth sports organizations as fund-raisers.

I have some acquaintances who operate a poker game in their house on a regular basis. I would like to interview them about how the game runs, the division of labor among the participants, how the game got up and running, the types of people who come to play, and how they rationalize this activity as normal despite its technical status as illegal. None of these people has ever been arrested or had any contact with law enforcement related either to this game or to other activities.

2. Methodology of the project:

a) General description: I envision this as a very short research project that can be started and finished within the space of two to three weeks, once the research is cleared. It is a straight interview study. I would like to interview participants who volunteer to participate in this study one time only. I do not anticipate the need to interview more than ten people, perhaps fewer.

b) Subject population: All of the subjects for this population are over the age of 21 and participate in this regular poker game. I have spoken to these people already to see if they would be willing to talk to me about their game and they have indicated that they would be amenable. I will not need to do any further recruitment of subjects. Therefore, as a recruitment tool, there are five to six people who participate regularly, and I have asked them if they would be willing to do interviews on this topic. They have all agreed verbally to being interviewed, and I am merely awaiting HRCA approval to provide them with the written consent form for them to sign.

c) Human subjects procedures: I would like to interview subjects individually at a time and place of their choosing. I would like, with their consent, to tape record the interviews. I would anticipate that the interview might last for an hour or shorter. No deception will be used.

d) Interview topics:

My faculty advisor, ZZZ, has spoken to [IRB administrator] about the epistemological reasons why she is theoretically and methodologically opposed to providing a random sampling of questions for the [IRB]. In this kind of qualitative interview the approach is inductive, and the interview is more likely to resemble a casual conversation than a structured interview made up of questions and responses. The nature of the questions, their order, and the whole tenor of the conversation will vary with each individual and each situation. However, there are certain topics that I will make sure I address during this conversation:

- History of playing cards
- Learning about poker house
- Regularity of participation
- Motivations for participation

Rationalizations for participation  
Roles of participants in the game  
Types of poker played and other activities (food, socializing)  
Views on poker and its role in society

3. Description of the risks and benefits to participants:

- a) They will be telling me about their participation in an activity that is technically illegal, although not highly enforced and conducted in a private home setting.
- b) There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

4. Means for ensuring privacy:

Although I cannot offer my face-to-face subjects total anonymity (I will know who I am interviewing), I will offer them confidentiality (I will not reveal who they are or anything identifiable about them). I will use all possible measures to ensure the greatest possible anonymity of subjects. I will not call them by name, but will assign them a pseudonym prior to the interview and will call them by that name. I will not ask them questions about any other participants by name, and will only ask them directly about their own activities. I will specifically instruct them prior to the interview not to discuss any other illegal activities. If they forget and mention any, I will stop the tape and remind them not to discuss anything illegal. I will transcribe the interviews and destroy the tapes afterwards. There will be no identifiers either on the tapes or the transcriptions. I will write about the poker house and the participants in a way that does not identify them and would not enable readers to identify either them or the location of the research.

5. Qualifications:

I am a senior at the [name of university]. I have taken [faculty mentor's] course, [name of course], so I am very familiar with the course concepts and material. I will use these course concepts in doing my interviews.

In my research I will be supervised by [faculty mentor], a senior scholar at the University with an expertise in the area of deviance and criminality. [Extensive discussion of faculty member's qualifications in this field.]

6. Consent form is attached.