Matching Responses on Successive Surveys Without Revealing Respondents' Identities

Anonymous surveys are commonly used when the questions asked are sensitive and disclosure of responses could put respondents at risk for harm to their reputations or their jobs.

However, it is difficult to maintain anonymity if the research design requires matching subjects' responses to surveys administered at different times. MTurk offers this service – for a cost - to researchers by fulfilling the role of an honest broker; it knows respondents' identities, matches their responses, and then makes the data, but not identities, available to the investigator.

This *Guidance* describes an alternate method for matching responses to surveys taken at different times without revealing respondents' identities. The method is based on the participant *generating* a personal code using information that only s/he knows. The participant does not have to remember the code.

The personal code is generated by responding to 3 questions, such as:
1. first 2 letters of mother's maiden name
2. first 2 letters of the name or number of the street on which you grew up
3. first 2 numbers of the earliest phone number you can remember

The method can be adapted for use in courses in which students receive academic credit for participating. In such cases, it is advisable to have someone other than the investigator award the credit based on statements from students that they completed each survey.

Using this method can make a research protocol eligible for exemption (category 2). Otherwise repeated surveys that maintain identifiers are usually reviewed using expedited procedures.

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