

## Introduction to Social Psychology Research

- Personality is the individual differences in behaviour, but social psychology is about the reactions to situational differences.
- Research in social psychology:
  - We over rely on shortcuts in making judgements.
  - Our insights into the reasons for our own behaviour and that of others is often limited (see: Milgram, Festinger's cognitive dissonance experiments).
  - Our intuitions are not adequate in explaining phenomena.
- Where do research questions come from?
  - Testing a theory (general principles, differing levels of complexity, used to derive predictions).
  - Curiosity
  - Testing techniques e.g. cyberball vs ball toss.
  - Demonstrating a phenomenon.

## Steps in the research process

1. Research questions
2. Generate hypotheses (specific, directional predictions)
3. Operationalise (measures)
4. Design experiment/correlational study
5. Collect data
6. Analyse data
7. Draw appropriate conclusions

## **Example 1: Between-subjects experiment**

*"Washing away your sins: Threatened morality and physical cleansing."*

1. Link between physical cleansing and moral purification.
2. Words "clean" and "pure" and "disgust" used in both physical and moral domains.
3. Operationalise (measure: how, what?)
  - What → preference for a free cleansing gift (pencil or wipe) is the DV (about equal preference).
  - Manipulate moral purity: write about deed from past.
  - Who → undergraduates.
4. Design experiment:
  - Randomly assign people to control or treatment -- this makes it a between-subjects design, the IV.
  - Treatment group describes unethical deed from past, control describes ethical deed.
5. Collect data
  - Have S write about event.
  - Offer them a free gift (pencil or wipe) at end of study.
6. Analyse results
  - 75% of treatment group took wipe, and only 38% from control.

7. Draw appropriate conclusion
  - ACCEPT hypothesis → threat to moral purity activates the need for physical cleaning.

### **Example 2: Within-subjects experiment**

#### *The biasing effect of topic importance*

1. Research question → why do published studies of important topics often contain elementary methodological errors?
2. Hypothesis → the importance of the research topic increases the chances of publication.
3. Operationalise:
  - What → reviewers' decisions.
  - How → publishability (DV) on a 9-point scale, where methodological rigour was also rated.
  - Who → research psychologists and medical faculty doctors.
4. Design experiment
  - Every participant serves in all the conditions (making it a within-subjects design).
  - Everyone receives 6 flawed brief descriptions of studies, 3 on important topics, 3 on unimportant topics (IV).
  - Counterbalanced order of presentation.
  - Advantage of within-subjects → don't need many participants.
  - Disadvantage → contamination between the two conditions.
5. Collect data
  - Post reports of flawed studies to each participant.
  - Rate the publishability of each study.
  - Return completed scales.
6. Analyse the data:
  - Higher publishability rating for important studies.
7. Draw appropriate conclusion → ACCEPT hypothesis.

### **Example 3: Factorial design**

#### *Portion size and consumption*

1. Research question → does container size have the same effect on consumption of palatable and less palatable food?
2. Generate hypotheses → large container size will increase intake of both fresh and stale popcorn compared to small container size.

3. Operationalise → what: actual consumption of fresh and stale popcorn, who: moviegoers.
4. Design experiment/correlational study
  - Randomly assign participants to receive free popcorn on entry to cinema
  - 2 IV → 2 container sizes and 2 palatability.
  - Advantage of factorial → can see the effect of IVs alone and together, experiment can also be either between/within-subjects.
5. Collect data
  - Give free popcorn at entry with weight written on bottom of container.
  - Both containers were large enough so that not all the popcorn would be consumed.
  - Collect-up containers and ratings of popcorn quality.
6. Analyse data
  - People ate more stale popcorn in the larger size.
7. Draw appropriate conclusions → ACCEPT hypothesis.

#### **Example 4: Quasi-experimental designs**

##### *Stress and magical thinking*

1. Research question → is there a relationship between magical thinking and stress?
2. Generate hypotheses → those who are exposed to high stress will exhibit higher levels of magical thinking.
3. Operationalise (measures)
  - Magical thinking using a questionnaire.
  - Who → residents of Israeli cities during the Gulf War, with some cities which were frequently bombed and others that were never attacked.
4. Design experiment/correlational study
  - High stress group → those residing in frequently bombed cities.
  - Low stress group → those in cities which were never bombed.
  - Advantage of quasi → investigate natural occurring characteristics that could not be induced within a lab.
  - Disadvantage → no random assignment so it's hard to determine causality.
5. Collect data
  - Interviewers knocked on doors, participants filled out questionnaire.
6. Analyse data
  - Higher stress group had higher rate of magical thinking.
7. Draw appropriate conclusions → accept hypothesis.

## **Example 5: Correlational design**

### *Pathogens, personality and culture*

1. Research question → is regional disease prevalence correlated with personality?
2. Generate hypotheses → where infectious disease is prevalent, personality styles that decrease sexual and social contact are functional.
3. Operationalise (measures)
  - Measure what → regional disease prevalence and regional personality differences.
  - How → archival data of disease and cross cultural studies of the the Big 5.
  - Who → varied.
4. Design experiment/correlational study
  - No groups → no treatment and control conditions.
  - Devise reliable coding scheme.
  - Advantage of correlational designs → allows us to explore questions that would be impossible or difficult to study with experimental designs.
5. Collect data
  - Tabulate all the findings of cross-cultural studies using Big 5 and SOI.
6. Analyse data
  - Disease prevalence negatively correlated with promiscuous sexual style, extraversion and openness to experience.
7. Draw appropriate conclusions
  - a) Is there a relationship/correlation between infectious disease prevalence and personality? → YES.
  - b) Is there relationship between infectious disease and personality spurious (false)? → DON'T KNOW.
  - c) Does the 'cause' precede the 'effect'?