

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY – METHODOLOGY

Methods used by social psychology:

- **Observation** (incl. participant observation)
- **Archival analysis** – a form of observational method, whereby the researcher examines the accumulated documents, or archives, of a culture (e.g. diaries, novels, magazines and newspapers) – e.g. aggression against women in pornographic stories – Smith, 1976, **Inter-judge reliability** is the level of agreement between two or more people who independently observe and code a set of data.
- The **correlational method** – the technique whereby two or more variables are systematically measured and the relationship between them (i.e. how much one can be predicted from the other) is assessed – **correlation coefficient** is assessed, (-) correlation does not equal causation; e.g. surveys.
- **Experiment.**

David Sears (1986) has shown that since the 1960's over 80% of social psychology studies have relied on college students tested in the laboratory context. Furthermore, the vast majority of these students have been recruited from undergraduate classes in psychology.

Internal validity in experiments

keeping everything the same but the independent variable OR making sure that nothing else besides the IV can affect the DV; this is accomplished by controlling all extraneous variables; differences among participants are minimized by **random selection and random assignment to condition.**

External validity in experiments

by virtue of gaining enough control over the situation (to ensure internal validity), the situation can become somewhat artificial and distant from real life. External validity is the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized to other situations and to other people.

- To achieve **generalizability across situations**, researchers attempt to make their studies as realistic as possible. The extent to which an experiment is similar to real-life situations is the **mundane realism**. A more important kind of realism is **psychological realism**, which is the extent to which the psychological processes triggered in an experiment are similar to psychological processes that occur in everyday life (for which purpose cover stories are often needed – psychological realism is heightened if people find themselves engrossed in a real event). Making an experiment realistic, both mundanely and psychologically, takes a lot of creative talents of researchers.
- **Generalizability across people** – the only way to be certain that the results of an experiment represent the behaviour of a particular population is to ensure that the participants are randomly selected from that population, which, unfortunately, is impractical and expensive. However, if we accept the premise that there are fundamental psychological processes shared by all people in all places, and that these are these processes that are being studied in social psychology experiments, then it becomes

relatively unimportant to select participants from every corner of the earth. It's not always the case, though.

- The ultimate test of an experiment's external validity is **replication** – conducting the study over again, often with different subject populations or in different settings. When the results are somewhat variable, researchers resort to a statistical technique called **meta-analysis** – it averages the results of two or more studies to see if the effect of an IV is reliable (significance levels across the results of many different studies).
- Our understanding of the external validity of many findings can be enriched by doing **cross-cultural studies**, which have two main goals – to explore similarities and differences between cultures.

The laboratory method is said to have high internal validity. In the laboratory experiment, we can be relatively sure that the measures are measuring what they are supposed to measure. However, we can be less sure that the results have high external validity, that is, that the measures used in the laboratory are measuring phenomena which exist outside the laboratory.

Interview studies:

In order to facilitate communications and to minimize misunderstanding the culture studied, researchers take various precautions, such as using co-ethnic interviewers and back-translation techniques. Back-translation involves one bilingual person translating the research material into the language of the correspondent, and a second bilingual person translating the material back into the language it was in originally. This back-translated material is then compared to the original material and discrepancies in terminology and phrasing are ironed out.

The Emic/Etic Distinction

Emic: the study of the specific or local.

Etic: the study of the universal characteristics of societies.

Field Research: the influence of class

Kohn's field research on conformity. The essence of higher class position is the expectation that one's decisions and actions can be consequential; the essence of lower class position is the belief that one is at the mercy of forces and people beyond one's control, often beyond one's understanding.