Chapter 2 – Research Methods

In order to find out information into human social behaviour we need to conduct research, social psychologists have developed many methods to study human behaviour.

Most humans often apply common sense after finding out the facts which is known in scientific terms as the hindsight bias. This is the tendency to after learning an outcome exaggerate our own ability to have foreseen how something would turnout and experiments have shown that when participants learn the outcome it suddenly seems unsurprising. People often adjust their beliefs to what is believed to be based on scientific fact even when the research defies common sense. For example the theory that separation intensifies romantic attraction it is likely to be justified with phrases such as ‘absence makes the heart grow fonder’. Whereas, with the theory that separation lowers romantic attraction phrases are used such as ‘out of sight, out of mind’ to justify this theory. The hindsight bias is equivalent to arrogance as an overestimation of our intelligence. We often look back negatively in retrospect which is one of the reasons research is necessary to explain and understand human relationships and behaviour.

There are two main approaches in research methods for social psychology topics and this is quantitative and qualitative research. The qualitative method is based on the interpretation of qualitative information such as how and why rather than statistical analysis of numerical data. Quantitative research is aimed at studying the specific relationship between at least two variables with data expressed numerically and statistical analysis.

In quantitative research any conceivable characteristic may be considered a variable as long as it can vary. Quantitative researchers study the variables and their interplay to establish objective theories. This type of research needs to be measured with scrutiny and numerically so that they can then perform statistical calculations.

Qualitative researchers are more sceptical about reducing people’s behaviour and social psychological life to simple measurable variables. They also believe that people’s true states and experiences are not properly represented through numerical scales. The methods qualitative researchers use are often outside of a laboratory in order to capture the complexities of human behaviour. As of such data is often in the forms of interview transcriptions or observations during specific events. Qualitative research concerns socially contingent phenomena whereas quantitative research concerns fixed, universal facts. Kenneth Gergen believes that the better a theory is able to predict human behaviour the more likely it is that the population will alter its behaviour to invalidate the theory.

Some social psychologists believe quantitative and qualitative research stem from completely different epistemologies (conception of what human psychology is) and they are adamant in using one particular research type. However, most psychologists use a mixture of the two methods depending on the theory at study.

Quantitative researchers exert a high degree of control on research settings to analyse data (collected information) with statistical procedures. Whereas, qualitative researchers use naturalistic settings where they observe spontaneous behaviour unconstrained by rigid protocols and then analyse language and behaviour in their intrinsic meaning.

Most quantitative research will begin with a research question which is there to guide the focus of the current research. These questions can come from existing theories (an interrelated set of principles that guide the study and predict and explain the observed
and our mood that guide our initial judgement. We attribute the cause of events to either situational or dispositional factors and by expecting events to occur we increase the chance that they will (self-fulfilling prophecies).

Priming is the activation of particular associations in individual memory. One thought even if subconscious can influence another thought or action. For example reading an abnormal psychology book primes psychology studies to then worry about themselves having disorders.

Categorical thinking
Priming effects have the possibility to perceive people as belonging to social groups this has implications for stereotyping, discriminatory behaviour and the production of prejudice. Categorical thinking is the process of perceiving a person by using cues indicating their social group, for example whether someone has long hair or the way they are dressed. Individuals’ behaviour changes in accordance with stereotypical information that they have been primed with (Bargh, Chen and Burrows, 1996b). Here participants when primed with the African-American stereotype behaved in a more hostile manner. We do not always engage in stereotypical categorical thinking it is most often when the perceiver has prejudiced beliefs about a certain group and it is relevant to their information processing goals. Also when the perceiver has sufficient attentional resources and the cues are easy or over an extended period they may engage in categorical thinking.

Social information is subject to many different interpretations and our prejudgements sometimes error. All people perceive media and mediators as biased against their beliefs and people’s perception of bias reveals their attitudes. Our premade assumptions can even make contrary evidence and information seem supportive. Researchers have shown how it’s possible to manipulate preconceptions and affect people’s recollections and interpretations.

The Kulechov effect is when film viewers control people’s perceptions of emotion by manipulating a setting or context of a film. Talking about the qualities of someone else also effects someone’s perception of ourselves which is called spontaneous inference.

Believing perseverance is when the basis for someone’s belief is discredited but their still remains an explanation of why the belief might be true aiding the persistence of the person’s conceptions. Research by Ross and Anderson showed that once a person creates a rationale for a falsehood it is surprisingly difficult to destroy the idea. However, Anderson found that explaining why an opposite theory drives people to ponder various responses ultimately reducing or eliminating belief prevalence.

Research has found that we reconstruct our distant past by using our expectations and current feelings to combine fragments of information, meaning we can revise our memories to suit our current knowledge. Loftus (2003) showed that people are subject to the misinformation effect where they incorporate wrong information into a memory after witnessing an event and receiving misleading information about it. Misinformation can even lead to false memories being produced as in the case of patients that believed they had been molested in satanic rituals. This may also happen to suspects and witnesses who are subjected to suggestive interviews as they confuse these suggestions for the real events. Edwards and Middleton (1987) believe that memories are better understood as rhetorical strategies that produce a version of events appropriate to the context for which the memory is produced. People whose attitudes have changed from previously often insist that they have also held the new current view, for example when students were in love they would recall love at first sight whereas the ones no longer in relationships described their partners as initially selfish. This indicates that
for their group.
- Exclusion of targets outside the in-group, such as the Nazi in-group defining itself as exclusive and not including Jewish people.
- The idea of threat, in that the out-group represents a danger to the existence of the in-group. However, although self defense may be viewed as a legitimate act making aggression acceptable, it is still not sufficient to make attacks celebrated the next step is needed.
- Virtue, or representing the in-group as uniquely good, as when we are held to be virtuous the more serious the out-group threat becomes and the more it becomes acceptable to defend our amazing group.
- Finally, celebrating or eulogizing inhumanity as the defense on the latter mentioned virtue is where the in-group represents good and the out-group represents evil.

Infrahumanization is the tacitly held belief that one’s in-group is more humane than the out-group, which arises when people view their in-group and out-group as fundamentally different. Leyens (2000) showed that people attribute uniquely human emotions to the in-group but not the out-group, so they are viewed as less human. By reducing the out-group to less than human (for example calling Hutus ‘roaches) it becomes easier to treat them in a less human manner. Furthermore, Infrahumanization can have practical consequences such as not offering to help someone from an out-group.

Researchers discovered that conformity can grow if the judgements were difficult or we feel incompetent, group attributes such as size, cohesiveness and unanimity. Asch found that three to five people would elicit much more conformity than one or two, but increasing above five diminishes conformity. Moscovici believed this was due to a minority was more likely to show self-confidence, defection and consistency. Several other experiments reveal that someone who punctures a group’s unanimity deflate’s its social power and it is easier to stand up for something if another stands with you. In other words, the extent to which members of a group are bound together, happens when we feel connected to something bigger than ourselves. Latane devised social impact theory =f(SIN) meaning the amount of influence an experiences is a result of the source of influence (S) and the immediacy/proximity of sources (I) and the number of sources (N). These are multiplied together to give their influence. Status is important as the higher status people tend to have more impact and people of lower status were more likely to conform than higher status. In experiments people conform more when they must respond in front of others rather than write their answers down as it’s much easier to stand up for our opinion in private. Lastly making a prior commitment makes people hesitant to back down.

The reasons why we conform are often to create a harmonious atmosphere (very important in collectivist cultures), to avoid rejection in being accepted and because others are an important source of information. Gerard (1955) believed that normative influence, conformity based on a person’s desire to fulfil others expectations and informational influence, conformity occurring when people accept evidence about reality from other people are reasons why westerners conform. In many Eastern and interdependent cultures the reason for changing attitudes to others’ opinions is also a result of holistic, dialectical and complex thinking. Concern for social image produces normative influence whereas the desire to be correct produces informational influence. In day-to-day life these two often occur together. In some collectivist cultures not to fit into the group is seen as a sign of being able to behave as a responsible adult. Cultural influences result from norms and values acquired during socialization and in some cultures fitting in is more important than believing your own self in a low consensus, high dissent society. Conformity and obedience are universal phenomena yet the prevalence varies across cultures and time.
thinking, increase aggressive feelings, increases aggressive behaviour and decreases prosocial
behaviours. Although this is debated, these studies indicate that, contrary to the catharsis
hypothesis, practising violence breeds rather than releases violence. Furthermore, Giffiths
found that while partaking in violent video games increases aggression in children it showed
no effect on adolescents. Fraser found that playing games lowers empathy levels which
results in decreased prosocial behaviour, so what is more apparent are reductions in helping
behaviour.

Academic research notes gender differences in aggression across cultures and situations.
First, there is the argument that men are more aggressive than women due to higher levels of
testosterone. Secondly, evolutionary theory suggests that women are more nurturing and men
protective and possibly aggressive towards threats. White and Kowalski attributed the
difference in female and male rates of violence to several other factors; men are less willing
to report a crime for fear of being stigmatized, women are less likely to commit ‘serious’ acts
of violence and women may be treated more leniently by the criminal justice system. They
also argue that the definition and understanding of what aggression is comes from a male
perspective. As such, suggest that if researchers examine female aggression in situations
congruent with gender roles (non-physical acts included) then the evidence points to women
being more aggressive.

Behaviour is seldom random and is often organized around a shared sense of social identity
which provides the groups with norms about appropriate behaviour. Social identity theory
argues that crowds will be violent to the extent that violent actions are consistent with the
group’s identity. Allport’s contact hypothesis believes that increasing contact between groups
can lead to reduced prejudice, but can also intensify racial and ethnic tensions leading to hate
crimes. Zajonc states that ‘genocide is not the plural of homicide’ and massacres are social
phenomena fed by moral imperatives of collective identity, including rhetoric, ideology and
images. Research has shown that groups can amplify aggressive tendencies by diffusing
responsibilities and polarizing conflict, group situations intensify aggressive reactions.

Whilst many of these studies into the influences of aggression some findings are strikingly
consistent. In much research into why aggression is predicted by: male aggressors, type A
personalities, alcohol, viewing violence, anonymity, provoked, presence of weapons and
groups.

Theory and research suggest that aggression can be tackled at the level of the individual, the
group and society. Hausman’s study suggests that primary prevention starts by producing
meaningful roles and economic opportunities for youth in inner cities and providing
culturally competent education. Aristotle argued that we can purge emotions by experiencing
them and as such catharsis can help reduce aggression including the emotional release
through observing, recalling and reliving past events. However, some research has found the
opposite to be true for example in areas with sex shops and also high rates of sexual violence.
Bushman showed this by viewing that participants doing nothing at all more effectively
reduced aggression than did letting off steam by punching a bag. It has also been concluded
that retaliation in the short run reduces tension and provides pleasure but later it fuels more
negative feelings. However, rumination has found to be ineffective at reducing aggressive
behaviour as well so psychologists suggest that communicating in better ways reduces
aggression. The social learning approach suggests controlling aggression by counteracting the
factors that provoke it, such as reducing aversive stimulation (e.g. guns), rewarding and
modelling non aggressiveness and eliciting reactions incompatible with aggression. Punishing
aggression was only found to be effective when strong, prompt and sure, whereas rewarding
In cultures that practice arranged marriages love tends to follow rather than precede marriage and the level of love does not decrease over time as in love marriages. One study showed that those who married for love reported diminishing feelings of love after a five year period. Whereas, those in arranged marriages reported more love after five years. Men also seem to fall in love more readily than women and fall out of love more slowly, but in love it is women that tend to be more emotionally involved. If a close relationship is to endure Hatfield believes companionate love develops, where one is devoted and dedicated to their partner and their happiness in a deep, affectionate attachment.

Commitment can be defined as the intention to maintain a relationship as well as feelings of psychological attachment to the other. Rusbult’s Investment Model of relationships states that the more satisfied you are with a relationship the more you are desirous of maintaining it and increased satisfaction reflects an increase in relationship rewards. The investment in our relationships can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Extrinsic factors represent a physical or financial tie to the other, such as children or a house. Intrinsic investment represents things like time and emotional effort, but it is when extrinsic factors exist that the partners are less likely to leave the relationship.

Our infant dependency strengthens our human bonds. The intense love of infants and caregivers qualifies as a form of passionate love, even in engaging the same brain areas, so Bowlby concluded that attachments during childhood affected the later relationships. Many infants exhibit secure attachment rooted in trust and marked by intimacy which researchers believe forms a working model for later life. Secure adults find it easy to get close to others and don’t worry about becoming too dependent or being abandoned. Secure partners have a positive image both of themselves and others. People with preoccupied attachment style are marked by a sense of one’s own unworthiness and anxiety about rejection, silence and possessiveness, they are likely to get emotional and angry many times leading up repeatedly. People with negative views of others exhibit either dismissing or fearful attachment. Dismissing relationship styles are marked by distrust of others whereas fearful attachment styles are marked by fear of rejection. Both tend to be less invested in relationships. It was found that avoidantly attached individuals are more likely to avoid intimacy with their partner. Another study showed that a year after marriage for those with intrusive spouses, women showed less exploration and autonomy and men had lower self-esteem and self-efficacy. So it’s important to not only consider the attachment style but also the care style. People in friends with benefits relationships were characterised as non-romantic hedonists who have a pragmatic view of relationships.

Society teaches us to exchange rewards by what Hatfield has defined as an equity principle of attraction: what you and your partner get out of a relationship should be proportional to what you put in. If both feel their outcomes correspond to the assets and efforts each contributes, then both perceive equity. Those involved in an equitable long-term relationship are unconcerned with short-term equity.

As a relationship grows self-disclosure occurs where partners reveal intimate aspects of oneself to the other and the social penetration theory states that closeness between people develops as a result of gradual self-disclosure. One explanation for gradual self-disclosure is the disclosure reciprocity (the tendency for one person’s intimacy of self-disclosure to match that of a conversational partner). Child self-disclosure appears to be important in predicting child outcomes, with those disclosing more showing less depression and delinquency.

Often love does not endure and researchers have discerned predictors of marriage dissolution. One predictor is an individualistic culture that values feelings over commitments; other
Chapter 10 – Helping course log

Altruism is one person’s motive to increase another’s welfare without conscious regard for one’s self-interest. According to social-exchange theory the calculations of the costs and benefits precede decisions to help or not. It’s the theory that human interactions are most accurately described as social transactions between people, where people exchange rewards and costs. One research program found that even the earliest helping behaviours of children are intrinsically motivated and socialisation practices involving extrinsic rewards can undermine this tendency. Furthermore, once helpers understand that a stranger willfully employs incentives to encourage assistance, these incentives prove ineffective. The positive effect of helping on feelings of self-worth is one explanation for why so many people feel good after doing it. Dozens of studies have shown that youth engaged in community service or tutoring children develop social skills and positive social values. Some people argue that a helpful act is never truly altruistic and even always has rewards whether inconspicuous or not. Egoism is the idea that self-interest motivates all behaviour and it argues in opposition to altruism that we try to increase our own welfare. A study by Stocks found that higher rates of helping were observed among empathetically aroused participants with the main reason being that empathy evokes an altruistic motive to reduce the victim’s suffering rather than an egoistic aversive-arousal motive. It has also been found that people do whatever is necessary to expunge feelings of guilt, relieve their bad feelings and restore their self-image. An eagerness to do good after doing bad reflects our need to reduce private guilt and restore a shaken self-image. It also reflects our desire to reclaim a positive public image as we are more likely to redeem ourselves with helpful behaviour when other people know about our misdeeds.

However, people who suffer the loss of a spouse or child often undergo a period of intense self-preoccupation which restrains giving to others. But there are exceptions, especially if the person who suffers a loss is attending to the distress of others. The feel-bad do good effect occurs with people whose attention is on others, people for whom altruism is therefore rewarding. Research has found that helping softens a bad mood and sustains a good mood, a positive mood is conducive to positive thoughts and self-esteem, which predisposes us to positive behaviour. Norms of helping prescribe proper behaviour, the oughts of our lives are the no-written rules for our behaviour. Researchers have classified two types of norms that motivate altruism, the first being the reciprocity norm (an expectation that people will help, not hurt, those who have helped them). The reciprocity norm is based on expected exchange and the social benefits of helping behaviour, and when people cannot reciprocate they may feel threatened and demeaned by accepting aid. The second is the social-responsibility norm that’s expects that people will help those needing help, without regard to future exchanges. However, responses are also dependent on attributions; if we attribute the need to help to an uncontrollable predicament we help, if we attribute it to a person’s choice fairness does not require us to help. Rudolph says the key to this is if the attributions and situations evoke sympathy, which in turn motivates helping. Studies also found that women offered help equally to males and females, whereas men offered more help to females. Furthermore women not only receive more offers of help but also seek more help. However, as most of the research is carried out in the west, an independent culture so the gender differences may be a consequence of ascribed sex-roles or gender differences related to norms for adequate male and female behaviour.
before the age of five. From the age of five, children also show the ability to discuss and negotiate race, gender and other identities. However, it is probably not until ten years of age that children fully appreciate the deep meaning and the wider social implications of their social identities. Very soon after the beginnings of self-categorisation and the first manifestations of social identification, children become very sensitive to issues of typicality and deviance. At approximately eight years old children already tend to derogate in-group counter-normative behaviour, as a means to protect in-group identity and distinctiveness.

Do you agree that in some circumstances we behave in terms of the norms of a relevant in-group? Can you think of any example from your own experience?

Shared social identity turns group members into reliable sources of information on the norms that should be consensually agreed. In-group members are the people we rely upon for information about the social world, and therefore have the ability to influence us. For example results from experiments and own personal experience suggests that people find jokes particularly funny and laugh a lot when they hear fellow in-group members laughing.

How important is it, in your opinion, that a wanting-to-be group leader present him/herself as a prototypical representative of the group?

I believe from personal experience that the ideal leader is expected to be a quintessential representation of the group identity. And that the leader’s ideas and behaviours are evaluated in terms of how closely they match the group prototype. Individuals who aspire to become the leader have to convince the group that they are the true group prototypes. A highly prototypical leader will be able to exert a strong influence on the other group members.

Why do mainstream group members see group deviants as a threat?

Deviants are seen as a problem by mainstream group members. This is because those who challenge the group norms break the unity and cohesion of a group, and question the nature of the group identity. However, Jetten et al. found that group deviants are perceived and treated differently depending on the group cultural ethos. Individualistic groups will see deviants in a less negative light than collectivist groups, due to the fact that individualist cultures place greater emphasis on values such as independence and uniqueness. However, Worchel suggested that group ethos can change, and collectivist norms are more commonly observed early in the life of a group when it needs well defined norms and goals.

Why is the accentuation effect so important?

The accentuation effect is the tendency to exaggerate similarities within categories and differences between categories. Accentuation effect is important as categories become unambiguous and the context becomes clear and intelligible.

Are any of the social identity motives discussed in this chapter more important than the others?

There are several motives that lead people to identify with social groups.

1- Being a member of a group may enhance both collective self-esteem (positive regard for the group) and personal self-esteem. Because highly regarded groups may satisfy both forms of self-esteem, generally want to belong to groups that have high status and prestige.

2- Humans have also been seen to have a pervasive need for uniqueness and distinctiveness and social identity helps us establish an aspect of self-definition, which is important especially in individualist cultures.

3- Another need that social psychologists believe to be universal and fundamental is the need
as people at the top seek to maintain an unequal status quo. Carter further found that people who held authoritarian attitudes and were high in social dominance were much more likely to rely on stereotypical information about other social and cultural groups.

Terror management theory asserts that human beings are painfully aware of their own mortality and this remains an anxiety throughout life. Psychologists have proposed that cultures provide a sense of protection to individuals and claims that people will respond positively to those who bolster their cultural anxiety buffers and negatively to those that threaten their cultural anxiety buffers. With death on their minds people exhibit terror management, becoming motivated to subdue the terror stemming from human awareness of mortality (people would be restricted by the fear of their own death if they could not deal with it, suggesting that people adhere more strongly to their cultural worldviews and beliefs and subscribe self-esteem from these to suppress death related thoughts. They shield themselves from the threat of their death by derogating those who further arouse their anxiety by challenging their worldviews.

Zanna suggests that prejudice arises as a consequence holding negative stereotypes about a group, but also when we feel a group has blocked our own group’s access to a goal or contradicts our norms and values. However, Devine argues that stereotyping is an inevitable consequence of cognition and directly related to prejudice. Stereotypes do not just affect how we see out-groups but also how we perceive ourselves. Devine further states that only deliberate conscious acts to break the habit of prejudice will stop discrimination against a group.

Basking in reflected glory (BIRG) is when we associate with a successful group, despite having no direct involvement in their success. The opposite, cutting off reflected failure (CORF) is when individuals distance oneself from a successful individual or group they would normally associate with when the group fails. BIRG and CORFing seem to be forms of self-impression management and a way to maintain our positive identity. Disadvantaged groups and groups that stress modesty (e.g. Chinese) exhibit less group serving bias (attributing another group’s positive outcome to situational factors and negative outcomes to dispositional factors). When the group serving bias is expressed in discourse (e.g. ‘Eric was aggressive’ for an out-group and ‘Lisa pushed her’ for the in-group is known as the linguistic intergroup bias LIB. The LIB effect has also been associated with implicit prejudice.

Discursive psychologists have focused on prejudiced language. SIT and SCT assume that cognitive processes of categorization is crucial in explaining prejudice. However, discursive psychologists challenge this, arguing instead that social groups, their meaning, membership and differences between them are produced in language. Tajfel believes we often treat people as individuals rather than members of social groups, perhaps even arguing against their inclusion into a social group. This creativity, or flexibility in categorization and particularization is a feature of language. However, Billig suggests we need to understand the ideological assumptions produced in language of prejudice and hatred and the point at which prejudice becomes bigotry and murder. Reicher and Hopkins call this the politics of category construction and how social groups are understood discursively can justify discriminatory practices that disadvantage particular groups. Barker proposes that explicit forms of racism (old racism) have been replaced with implicit, subtle, disguised forms (new racism). Openly expressing racist or ethnocentric sentiments is taboo, but subtle prejudice or racism can work to present the speaker as reasonable while at the same engaging in prejudice.

But, while the blatant expressions of prejudice may be in sharp decline, more subtle forms of prejudice are still rife. Similarly, prejudice against women has been lessened in recent