

Research Activity 1

Underground Psychology

You might be surprised to learn that a lot of social psychology research has taken place on public transportation. Ever try to make predictions about who will sit next to whom or wonder why no one likes to make eye contact on the subway? Well, social psychologists have wondered the same things. The article in the link below describes a number of classic social psychological studies that have been conducted on the train, the subway, the metro—you name it!

www.slate.com/articles/life/transport/2009/11/underground_psychology.html

In the spirit of these classic ‘underground psychology’ studies, you are encouraged to come up with a list of questions based on the above article and conduct your own observational field study. Once you’ve come up with your questions, it’s time to conduct your study. But don’t conduct your study just once. See what happens at different times of day and when there are a different number of passengers. What happens when smartphones and tablets are added into the public transportation mix? Share your results with your friends and classmates and wow them with your empirical smarts.

This exercise provides a demonstration of how psychologists come up with research questions and then use observational studies to test them.

Reference

Vanderbilt, T. (2009, November 17). Underground psychology: Researchers have been spying on us on the subway. Here’s what they’ve learned. Slate. Retrieved from www.slate.com/articles/life/transport/2009/11/underground_psychology.html

Research Activity 2

External validity and the Milgram experiment

If you’re having a hard time understanding external validity, consider completing this activity. In this activity you will learn about external validity by applying it to Milgram’s classic study on obedience. As an added bonus, you will receive practise on writing effective discussions.

Click on the link below to get started:

www.psychlotron.org.uk/resources/social/as_aqa_socinf_obexternalvalid.pdf

Reference

Sammons, A. (n.d.). Obedience research: External validity. Retrieved from: www.psychlotron.org.uk/resources/social/as_aqa_socinf_obexternalvalid.pdf

Research Activity 3

The importance of replication

Imagine you have a theory that people in middle-class neighborhoods do not approve of rubbish being thrown out into the street. Ask five of your neighbors to answer a short questionnaire about their attitudes towards throwing rubbish onto the street. Ask three friends from class to do the same 1 week, 1 month, and 2 months later (consecutively) in their own neighborhoods. Compare your results to see if they all support your theory.

This exercise demonstrates the importance of the replication of research findings across various populations, times, and settings (SP pp. 44–45).

Research Activity 4

Ethical values

Imagine you are a community member of an Institutional Review Board. A researcher submits a research plan aimed at studying the effect of violent TV on aggression in young children. In the

research, he plans to re-create a “normal” home environment, and have children aged 5–12 watch violent TV shows for 4 hours a day over a span of two weeks. The researcher plans to measure aggression by examining the attitudes of the children, as well as their physical behavior, after the study. He states that the children will only be slightly deceived: they will be told that they will be watching TV for 4 hours a day over two weeks, but the exact purpose of the study (effects on aggression) will not be made clear to them. He will, however, debrief them thoroughly after the study is completed.

What would you suggest to the researcher about this plan? Would the end justify the means? Would you accept the plan, or ask for some changes before it was accepted?

This exercise demonstrates the importance of considering ethical values in evaluating research that you read about, especially the importance of treating participants as fairly as possible (SP pp. 48–51).