

Jesse Gray

Week 3

Harvey: Self-Report Methods in Studying Personal Relationships

I didn't realize how much work goes into designing and verifying questionnaires before using them to collect data, which makes me feel better about their use. It seems like it would be quite easy to allow your assumptions about an experiment creep into the questionnaire design, biasing the results (perhaps simply by assuming an incorrect set of dimensions for the responses), but many of these questionnaires seem to be the study of extensive research themselves before they are put to use.

This paper doesn't go into exactly how these various self report techniques are verified. I would like to hear a bit more about that - since self report techniques are usually only used because they are the only practical measure for that information, what can you verify your results against? Likely this process is different for each technique, based on what other relevant information can be collected, and I wonder if the need for this independent verification may even influence the technique that is being developed.

There was a passing mention of a number of relationship words, such "interdependence" and "love", and some scales that accurately measure them. This must mean that there is an agreed upon definition for these terms, I would be curious to see those.

They mention that these techniques are clearly best for studies where the desired information is subjective in nature, since there are many biases that come up in self reporting. They did not distinguish what I would call simple biases (it is easier to remember an event that happened to me) to more complicated biases (I purposely report/remember the event differently because I am lying/have lied to myself). If the purpose of the study is to measure something like the difference in reality between two people the fact that you are measuring what happened through these personal filters will be useful, but it seems like it will be quite difficult to use these reports to determine what actually happened.

The authors mention a problem with scoring certain types of self report information is that the coders must make certain judgment calls about the similarity of certain events to categorize them in order to produce statistical data. While questionnaires are often thought to eliminate the problems of relying on coders to decide which kinds of events are similar enough to group, I think it sometimes may just hide the issue. When taking the questionnaire, the subject is faced with the same dilemma of determining where their experience fits into preset categories. Someone is still having to make arbitrary grouping decisions, but in one case it is the researcher, with full knowledge of what is going on and the ability to re-group later based on new evidence - in the other it is the subject, and any extra information about their decision that might be useful later is lost.

Kenny: The Analysis of Data from Two-Person Relationships

This paper seems to give a good survey of the difficulties in analyzing statistical data from couples. Some of the primary concerns seem to be how to determine which variables to compare. For some purposes, simply comparing the behavior of men versus women may be sufficient. However, many more subtle results may be obtained if it is the behavior of couples relative to each other that are compared - the data contains the link between each couple and their partner, so throwing that information away to lump men and women together reduces the possible results that can be obtained.

Further complications occur when there is no clear difference between the members of the dyad - then the researchers might be tempted to assign them randomly to one group or another to do correlations, but that can yield different results depending on the assignment - a better solution is to use the intraclass correlation method.

The author also discusses the difference between measuring within-dyad variables (like male/female) versus between dyad variables (comparing a feature of the relationship between different couples). If the variable is not fixed (such as gaze frequency, which could be effected by the dyadic process) it becomes even more complicated, and though solutions exist they have not been used in published work. There do, however, seem to be established methods for working with within-dyad variables and even in cases where the behavior being monitored is mutually influenced.

This paper highlights the fact that any but the simplest of experiments involving relationships such as those described here deserves careful thought and research to determine the best way to collect and analyze data in the most accurate and effective way.

#### Wheless: The Measurement of Trust and its Relationship to Self-Disclosure

The authors of this paper begin by describing the commonly held belief about the relationship between trust and disclosure - that higher trust is correlated with higher disclosures. They explain that the evidence for trust being based on disclosures is disputed, and the evidence showing disclosures being caused by trust are slightly more successful but still not hard evidence.

The authors propose their thesis - that disclosures require, but are not necessitated by, a certain level of trust, and that over that level more trust will lead to more disclosures. They point out flaws in the measurement of both disclosures and trust as measured by previous studies, and set out to prove their thesis using updated measures for trust and disclosures.

They got the results they were looking for, although with weaker than expected correlations between the variables. Subjects that trusted their target were more likely to have disclosed personal information to them than subjects that did not trust their target. Moreover, the level of disclosures rose with the level of personal trust in the target. The authors attributed the weakness of the correlation to the fact that they believe that trust is only a necessary condition for disclosure, and that in fact many trusted targets will not be disclosed to.

I thought they might have been able to get better results if they asked each participant about multiple target people, and compared their results that way. I think that would control better for the difference in subjects about reporting trust levels and disclosure levels, since you could compare relative trust levels and disclosure levels for each target of the subject, instead of having to compare levels across subjects with no knowledge of their internal baselines for trusting and disclosing.

#### Horvath: Development and Validation of the Working Alliance Inventory

The author introduces the concept of a "Working Alliance", which describes many types of relationships including that between a therapist and patient. This concept differs from previous work on therapist/patient success by focusing on the relationship between the two rather than attributes of one or the other. Alliances are divided up into three parts. Tasks are the behaviors that form the substance of the counseling, goals are the targets of the counseling process, and bonds are the personal connections between patient and doctor.

In order to measure the working alliance, a 29 item quiz was developed through a process of question generation and multiple question elimination steps (experts in Working Alliance first rated the questions, then psychologists, then a pilot test was deployed - each time the worst questions were removed). Initial results of this test were promising, and consistent with most similar measures.

In a second application of the test, the Working Alliance measure was compared against actual success (issue resolution) in the counseling sessions. A statistically reliable correlation was found between the Working Alliance score and the success in the therapy session. A third study had some troubling patients whose deterioration of self-esteem was not explained by the Working Alliance score, but it is thought that the Working Alliance test was administered too early, before the deterioration occurred. Without those patients the Working Alliance test significantly correlated with other measures of success. The authors conclude that the measure has adequate accuracy to be useful.

The accuracy of this measure may seem a bit low, but it does appear significant and the authors continue to develop the method. The importance of the 3 sub-scores (task, goal, and bonds) is still being examined and examining the importance of different sub-scores at different stages of therapy may be interesting. Even though this measure overlaps with a few existing measures, it seems like it will have a place in therapy-relationship research. The other measures do not seem to attempt to measure the relationship between patient and therapist, and as the authors here suggest that seems like it should be key to the success of the partnership. This measure, then will likely prove to be useful for quantifying therapy techniques.