

Psychological research examples: correlational and qualitative



PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH METHODS

Research Topic 1: *What is the role of visual attention in dyslexia?*

Basic Research Approach: *Correlational*

Background research

Literature Search: *I conducted a literature search on the “ web of knowledge” database, which was chosen as it is a full text database allowing for easy access to any articles of interest. The initial search used only one keyword, “ dyslexia” which returned over 18, 000 results. Additional keywords were then used to narrow the search results, these keywords were; “ visual, attention”. Initially the searches were based on topic and then altered to title to reduce the results further. From here citation searching was used which developed a lead into specifically children and visual attention deficits as early predictions of reading disabilities. The keywords were once again expanded to include “(children or kindergarten)”*

Annotated Bibliography:

Franceschini, S., Gori, S., Rufino, M., Pedrolli, K., and Facoetti, A. (2012). A causal link between visual spatial attention and reading acquisition . The researches argue that problems in visual attention are able to predict future reading abilities and may be far more important in explaining dyslexia than previously thought. The results illustrated that children’s performance on visual spatial attention predicted their reading abilities later in their school life. The researchers further conclude that the findings “ virtually close not only a long-lasting debate on the causal role of visual spatial attention

deficits in dyslexia". This research suggests that visual attention is a confident way to predict the future development of dyslexia.

Catts, H. W., Fey, M. E., Zhang, X., & Tomblin, J. B. (2001). Estimating the risk of future reading difficulties in kindergarten children. The researchers found that a number of variables predicted future reading difficulties, specifically five variables; letter identification, sentence imitation, phonological awareness, rapid naming and mother's education. While these findings do not specifically state dyslexia as the singular difficulty it is interesting to note that a combined measures approach would appear to have the best accuracy in regard to predicting future reading difficulties, which would include dyslexia. While Franceschini argues that visual attention is sufficient, Catts ' demonstrates the potential of false positives in singular measures which would not serve to identify children in need of intervention.

Hypothesis or research question: *Can early detection of visual attention deficits accurately predict reading disabilities such as dyslexia.*

Research Proposal

Method: A longitudinal study where the progress of children from the age of 5 would be followed through to the age of 7. The children would be selected prior to formal reading education and informed written consent would be obtained prior to testing. All testing would be conducted on a computer because it offers a precise, objective and highly flexible system that requires minimal training to operate. In a modern society children would also be familiar with a computer and be able to recognise and interact with its peripherals. This familiarity should reduce any anxiety a child may feel

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resulting in a less stressful testing environment. Another benefit of using a computer based testing suite is that tests could be administered remotely, whereby the use of a webcam and remote desktop would allow an experimenter to monitor the test from a distant location. This would potentially reduce any issues with drop-out as children who move could still participate.

The sample size for this study would have to be reasonable large, in excess of 100 children, meaning a number of schools from different regions of the country would have to be approached. Once the children had been selected they would be initially tested for print awareness, phonological processing and language capabilities. This would allow for a baseline for each subject to be established on which their reading development could be compared. Subsequently a visual attention test would be administered and the children would be reassessed on a yearly basis for end-of-year reading achievement. The children will also undergo Dyslexia Early Screening Test (DEST) administered by their teachers to further identify children who may suffer dyslexia later in life.

Materials: All testing will be conducted on a computer because it offers a precise, objective and highly flexible system that requires minimal training to operate. Superlab would be used to reproduce two tasks using whole and partial letter-strings created by Averbach et al 1961. The whole report task would present five letters (e. g. W H J N S) to the children briefly and ask for a report on as many of the letters as they could remember. The partial task would present a similar list; however, a cued letter would be marked briefly and the children asked to report only that letter.

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Data Analysis: *A 2 x 2 mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) design in which the within-subjects factor whole and partial letter-strings. Children would on average in the whole task manage to recall 4-5 letters, while children with visual attention deficits would be expected to recall fewer. Another interesting assessment would be to analyse which letter positions would be most frequently remembered or ignored. For the partial task children with visual attention deficits would be expected to answer incorrectly more frequently than those who would not go on to develop dyslexia.*

Potential limitations of method chosen: *A longitudinal study poses a number of challenges. Participant drop-out is one such challenge, whereby, children who complete the study may differ from children who have left the study resulting in analysis that is not representative. There is the possibility that children who would not suffer from reading disabilities yet show visual attention deficits could drop-out of the study and vice versa. Such shifts in participant representation could potentially distort the results which would create difficulties in assessing direction of causality.*

Research Topic 2: What are young women's experiences of mixed-sex friendships?

Basic Research Approach: *Qualitative*

Background research

Literature Search: *I initially considered the research topic and developed a list of keywords to begin a search. Those keywords were: friendship, mixed-sex, and women. The initial search was performed on the "web of knowledge" database, which offers access to a vast collection of full text*

articles, making for easy navigation to areas of interest. These brought back no articles of interest or relevance, however, a new keyword was found; "cross-sex" which was used to replace "mixed-sex" resulting in a relevant manageable list of results.

Annotated Bibliography:

Benefit or burden? Attraction in cross-sex friendship (2012) By: Bleske-Rechek, April; Somers, Erin; Micke, Cierra; et al. Suggests that men and women do experience cross-sex friendships differently. The researcher's argue that the experiences men and women have reflects their evolved mating strategies. Attraction between cross-sex friends is common and seen as a burden.

The challenge of sexual attraction within heterosexuals' cross-sex friendship (2009) By: Halatsis, Panayotis; Christakis, Nicolas agrees with the previous research that attraction in cross-sex friendships is both common and a burden. However, the researchers argue that if that attraction is expressed the friendship prevails most of the time.

While this research illustrates the problems encountered in cross-sex friendships when sexual attraction is involved, it cannot be the only difficulty such friendships face. Also, the benefits of these more recent friendship styles would seem to outweigh these negatives, so a closer inspection of these positives might be in order.

Hypothesis or research question: *Young women will primarily experience cross-sex friendships differently to men.*

Research Proposal

Method: *The interview method will be used and will be semi-structured, recorded digitally and focuses on experiences women have with mixed-sex friendships. The interviews will be held in a place convenient for the participant but quiet enough as to not cause distraction. The interviews should last roughly 1 hour in length where participants will firstly be asked to describe any significant friendship they have with men. The main focus of the interview will be on experiences the participant has involving these cross-sex friendships and as such will focus on issues, events, people and sexual attraction. As such interview questions will cover the following themes:*

1. *Friendship challenges*
2. *Sexuality*
3. *Friendship benefits*
4. *Sexual attraction*
5. *Friends as family*

The interviews will then be transcribed and subjected to a discourse analysis.

The participants for this study would have to be individuals who were currently involved in at least one cross-sex friendship. There would be no pre-requisite on the sexuality of the participant or friend(s) and as such locating participants would be based on advertisement. Place an add in a local newspaper or social media site and have participants volunteer to

participate. If this method was not sufficient to accrue enough participants a snowball sampling method could be employed.

Materials: A tape recorder, transcription software such as ExpressScribe, a list of questions that will form the framework of the interview; e. g. Are you currently in a cross-sex friendship? How long have you and ___ been friends?

Data Analysis: The transcripts will be read and coded repeatedly and topics and themes will be generated from the data rather than a predetermined list. Initial themes will be revised and reassessed each time the transcript is read and re-coded. This will be a time-consuming process as each transcript will have to be compared for broader trends in themes. This should allow for the generation of a very rich account of how young women experience cross-sex friendships. I would however expect one of the themes to be based around sexuality; it would appear, especially with the “ fag-hag” phenomenon, that many of the cross-sex friendships involve gay men and heterosexual women.

Potential limitations of method chosen: The process of analysis will be heavily time-consuming. Also, a face-to-face interview may result in interviewer effects, whereby an inexperienced interviewer may lead the interviewee rendering their data useless.