

OCR Psychology A-level

**Evaluation of Core
Studies 2**

Notes



N.B. This document details the studies which have not been covered by the accompanying OCR notes or fact sheets. The studies follow the same order as given by the OCR Core Studies 2 Booklet.

Part 1 - Social Psychology - Levine et al - Responses to People in Need

+ **The study used 23 cities across the world**, such as in India and Spain. The countries studied offers a range of cultures, both collectivist and individualist. This means that the findings are unlikely to be culture bound, thus increasing the ecological validity because the results are more likely to be applied to any population, regardless of culture.

— **However, the study may lack temporal validity** because the period over which participants were studied was between 1992 and 1997. This is especially the case when considering the helping measures and walking speeds: significant increases in population numbers and the rate of development of cities may have caused changes in walking speeds, as opposed to helping behaviours, and so also suggests that such findings may not be applicable to such a busy and global time as the modern age.

— **The findings are also likely to be affected by researcher bias** due to the use of opportunity sampling: the researchers had developed hypotheses and so may have approached certain people in particular who looked like they would fulfil or confirm these hypotheses. This means that the sample is not truly representative and the findings may be biased.

— **The researchers acknowledged the role of a potentially confounding variable** of each country's economic status. This means that the findings have an unclear explanation - is the role of cultural norms surrounding simpatia or the economic status more important predictors of helping behaviours?

Part 2 - Cognitive Psychology - Moray et al - Attention

+ **The researchers used a laboratory experiment** and maintained high degrees of control over potential confounding and extraneous variables e.g. surrounding noise and individual ages of participants. This increases the validity of the conclusions drawn and also increases the confidence of establishing a clear 'cause and effect' relationship between two or more outcomes.

+ **A repeated measures design removed the confounding variable** of individual participant differences because each participant participated in each condition. This has the benefit of increased validity of conclusions but has the disadvantage of introducing the extraneous order effect - if the same participant is involved in the same conditions, then they may guess the aim of the study and change their behaviour in order to please the experimenter (a type of demand characteristic). This can be overcome using counterbalancing.

— **The methodology lacks mundane realism**. This is because in real life, people usually only have to remember meaningful information rather than random short lists of meaningless words. Therefore, the researchers may not have validly measured attention, but rather an individual's recall and their ability to remember meaningless information.

+ **The participants' responses were tape-recorded**. This allows for a content analysis to be conducted through the use of coding, operationalisation of variables and event sampling. Therefore, this objective method increases the validity of the conclusions drawn and also allows inter-rater reliability to be established: independent observers may listen to the tapes and independently conduct an analysis. After discussions with each other, if their judgements are in rough accordance with each other, then the findings can be said to have high inter-rater reliability.

Part 3 - Cognitive Psychology - Simons and Chabris - Attention

+ **The sample size was large, through the use of 228 participants**. This increases the reliability of the conclusions because it decreases the likelihood that the observed results are due to chance as opposed to psychological mechanisms. On the other hand, the sample may be biased towards undergraduate university students, and most likely Psychology undergraduates, who



may be able to guess the aim of the study and act accordingly to please the experimenter, through demand characteristics.

- **The researchers removed the findings from 36 participants.** The removal of anomalous results increases the validity of the findings because such anomalies cannot skew the averages calculated and so is a more valid representation of the true value of internal blindness. However, it is often difficult to judge exactly what counts as an anomalous results, especially since the findings from such a large number of participants was removed.
- + **The use of a control condition is useful** because it allows for a comparison to be made with the experimental group and such data can also undergo statistical (quantitative) analysis to determine whether the differences between the groups are statistically significant and the possible mechanisms for this.
- + **There is a real-life application associated with an increased understanding** of the idea that inattentive blindness is linked with the difficulty of a task. For example, educational systems may benefit from such understanding as well as police task forces when evaluating the accuracy and reliability of eyewitness testimonies.

Part 4: Developmental Psychology - Lee et al - Moral Development

- **The socio-economic status of the Chinese children was unknown,** and so this may have acted as a confounding variable which may have affected the findings, as opposed to cultural differences in terms of which behaviour is deemed morally and socially acceptable. Therefore, this confounding variable does not enable a reliable 'cause and effect' relationship to be established between culture and morality, thus decreasing the validity of the conclusions drawn.
- + **The researchers controlled for the confounding nature of order effects** (often associated with a repeated measures design) through using a randomisation table. This increases the reliability of the findings, which otherwise may have been skewed by participants guessing the aim of the study and changing their behaviour accordingly, in order to please the experimenter (demand characteristics).
- + **There are real-life applications associated with the variables** which the researchers had identified as affecting lying and truth telling behaviours. These include culture (where Chinese children often rate telling the truth more negatively in prosocial terms), socio-economic backgrounds and age. This may be used in social care and also when developing tests to assess morality and cognitive development in children.

– **The researchers may not have controlled for the confounding effect of post-event discussions,** which has been proven to change the accounts made by each participant, as suggested by Gabbert et al. This is because participants participated in group discussions after the investigation, and so may have learned different attitudes towards morality from their peers and those from other cultures, thus biasing the findings.

Part 5: Biological Psychology - Blakemore and Cooper - Brain Plasticity

- **The researchers used an independent measures design** and so different kittens participated in each condition. This does not control for the confounding effects of individual participant variables, where differences in genetic predispositions for visual development and the rate of such development may have been the reason for differences in brain development, rather than the changing visual environment. This therefore reduces the validity of the conclusions drawn.
- + **The kittens were each randomly allocated to one of two conditions.** This prevents the biasing effects of researcher bias and investigator effects because the researchers have no controller which kittens are allocated to which conditions and so cannot choose certain kittens which, in their opinion, are likely to fulfil their original hypothesis.
- **There are ethical issues associated with such research.** For example, despite the majority of kittens recovering 10 hours after being placed into a well-lit room, several suffered severe and seemingly permanent deficits in their visual perception, such as an inability to keep their head still and problems perceiving distance. This breaches the BPS ethical guideline of protection from



physical and psychological harm. Despite such ethical concerns, this does not detract from the utility of this research, but a cost-benefit analysis would have to be conducted to assess the ethical costs relative to the benefits (an increased understanding of visual development).

N.B. Gould's study entitled 'A nation of morons' is a review article and not empirical evidence. Therefore, the piece reviews the strengths and weaknesses of individual psychometric and intelligence tests, which can be used as evaluative points and are presented as the key conclusions.

Part 6: Psychology of Individual Differences - Hancock, Woodworth and Porter - Measuring Differences

— **The findings may suffer from gender bias** because only male murderers were used (52). This may be significant in the sense that women tend to use more emotive language compared to men, and so the exclusion of women from the sample may limit the ecological validity of the findings because they can only be applied to women, as opposed to men. Thus, the sample is not a true representation of 'psychopaths'.

+ **Content analysis was used to study the transcripts.** This was an objective measure and allowed for systematic analysis through event sampling i.e. noting each time one of the operationalised variables occurred. This also allows inter-rater reliability to be established. Independent observers would then conduct their own analyses. After a discussion, if they are in agreement with each other, then high inter-rater reliability can be established.

— **The use of psychopaths may be flawed in this study because they were told the aim of the study.** Therefore, demand characteristics were likely to have played a role in the findings because some may over-exaggerate the extent of their crimes (to give themselves a sense of bravado) or under exaggerate their crimes (to potentially achieve a lighter prison sentence). Therefore, it is important to consider these cognitive biases when interpreting the findings.

+ **The conclusions drawn by the researchers has a particularly important real-life application** in terms of advising police forces how to address psychopaths and potential treatments. For example, the idea that a significant number of psychopaths view their crimes as logical and the product of a relatively rational cause, in their opinion, may be particularly focused upon the addressed cognitive biases/faulty information processing during their time in prison/ other institutions.

