

MKT 699 - The Psychology of Self-report: Asking and Answering Questions in Behavioral Research

Spring 2018, 3 units

Day & Time: Wednesday: 2:00 - 4:50 pm in ACC 312

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Course Description

Self-reports of behaviors, feelings, attitudes, and preferences are the dominant source of data in all social and behavioral sciences, including consumer behavior, management, and decision research. Unfortunately, these data are only as meaningful as the answers research participants provide. This class addresses the cognitive and communicative processes underlying question answering in research situations. How do participants make sense of the questions asked? What can, and what can they not, report on? How do question wording, question format and question context influence the obtained answers? What does this imply for reports of behaviors? What does it imply for reports of attitudes and preferences? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different data collection methods? For a short preview of the type of issues covered see:

Schwarz, N. (1999). Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, 54, 93-105. [pdf](#)

Note that this is not a class that offers easy one-size-fits-all prescriptions for questionnaire design – it is a class about basic processes of communication, memory, and judgment, and their implications for behavioral science data collection, including questionnaires, experiments, diary, and experience sampling studies.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the tasks involved in answering questions about behaviors, attitudes, and preferences from the respondent's perspective
- Understand the basic communicative and cognitive processes involved in these tasks
- Understand how contextual variables impact these processes and shape the answers collected
- Learn how to handle these complexities in your own research

Required Materials

All required materials will be available on Blackboard and/or the USC library.

Prerequisites and/or Recommended Preparation:

The class is designed to be accessible for students throughout the behavioral sciences. If you are unfamiliar with basic principles of psychology, the readings will take more time.

Course Notes:

Each class consists of an overview lecture, application exercises, and discussion, complemented by readings. Except for the first meeting, a typical class will begin with a discussion of the assigned readings, structured by assignment questions that asked you to apply the readings to specific data collection issues. This is followed by discussions of students' own related data collection problems. After a break, an overview lecture introduces the *next* topic and provides a context for the readings and assignments for the next class. This means, for example, that topic #3 below will be introduced in the second half of class 2 and discussed in the first half of class 3, which ends with an introduction of topic #4. Hence, any given topic below comes up in the second half of one class (lecture) and first half of the next class (discussion & applications).

All materials will be available on Blackboard.

Grading Policies:

Grading is based on class participation (10%), completion of weekly assignment questions and exercises (40%), and a research proposal (50%) that can address any topic covered in class. The weekly assignment questions and exercises will be posted on Blackboard. The most useful option for the research proposal is to apply what you learned in class to your own substantive area of research. There is no exam. There will be multiple opportunities to discuss your research proposal, complete with peer review and class input (see weeks 11-15). The final version is due on the day of the last class (week 16); please upload to Blackboard.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Academic Integrity and Conduct

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own (plagiarism). Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. All students are expected to understand and abide by the principles discussed in the *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>). A discussion of plagiarism appears in the University Student Conduct Code (section 11.00 and Appendix A).

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be

found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/> . Failure to adhere to the academic conduct standards set forth by these guidelines and our programs will not be tolerated by the USC Marshall community and can lead to dismissal.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <https://sarc.usc.edu/reporting-options/> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

Tab for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

COURSE CALENDAR/READINGS/CLASS SESSIONS

All weekly assignment questions and required readings are available on Blackboard and so are many (but not all) of the recommended readings.

Each week you are expected to

- Read the required readings
- Complete the assignment questions and bring your answers to class for discussion. These questions ask you to summarize key concepts from the readings and to apply those concepts to specific tasks, usually by predicting how different questions would affect the answers.
- Each week, the assignment questions will also ask you to consider the implications of the readings for your own ongoing doctoral research.

In class, we will use these questions and your answers to review key implications of the readings. The more you attempt to related the material to your own research, the more you will get out of class session.

#1 Introduction and overview

The first class provides an overview of topics and an opportunity for introductions. Please be prepared to describe your own current research interests and current studies, so we can take them into account in determining what to emphasize more or less during this semester.

A. *Making sense of questions*

#2 The logic of conversation in research situations

Research participants bring the tacit assumptions that guide conversations in daily life to the research situation. We review these assumptions, which researchers routinely violate, and their implications for questionnaire design and experimental procedures. The selections by Grice and Sperber & Wilson are key statements of the underlying pragmatic principles; the Schwarz piece applies these principles to social science research methods.

Required:

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J.L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics, 3: Speech acts* (pp. 41 -58). New York: Academic Press.

Schwarz, N. (1994). Judgment in a social context: Biases, shortcomings, and the logic of conversation. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 26*, 123-162.

Recommended:

Belson, W.A. (1981). *The design and understanding of survey questions*. Aldershot: Gower.

Clark, H. H., & Schober, M. F. (1992). Asking questions and influencing answers. In J. M. Tanur (Ed.), *Questions about questions* (pp. 15-48). New York: Russel Sage

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Schwarz, N. (1996). *Cognition and communication: Judgmental biases, research methods, and the logic of conversation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1987). *Precis of Relevance*. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 10, 697-710.

Strack, F., & Martin, L. (1987). Thinking, judging, and communicating: A process account of context effects in attitude surveys. In H. J. Hippler, N. Schwarz, & S. Sudman (Eds.), *Social information processing and survey methodology* (pp. 123-148). New York: Springer Verlag.

#3 What were participants thinking? Cognitive interviewing and improved pretests

Given the complexities of language comprehension and communication, it is important to employ development techniques that ensure that most participants understand key questions as intended. This week we review these techniques. The Willis (2005) book is an excellent hands-on summary.

Required:

DeMaio, T. J., & Rothgeb, J. M. (1996). Cognitive interviewing techniques: In the lab and in the field. In N. Schwarz and S. Sudman (Eds.), *Answering questions: Methodology for determining cognitive and communicative processes in survey research* (pp. 177–195). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Fowler Jr., F.J., & Cannell, C.F. (1996). Using behavioral coding to identify cognitive problems with survey questions." In N. Schwarz & S. Sudman (Eds), *Answering questions: Methodology for determining cognitive and communicative processes in survey research* (pp. 15-36). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Recommended:

Madans, J., Miller, K., Maitland, A., & Willis, G. (Eds.) (2011). *Question evaluation methods*. New York: Wiley.

Presser, S., Rothgeb, J. M., Couper, M.P., Lessler, J.T., Martin, E., Martin, J., & Singer, E. (Eds.) (2004). *Methods for testing and evaluating survey questionnaires*. New York: Wiley.

Schwarz, N., & Sudman, S. (Eds.) (1996). *Answering questions: Methodology for determining cognitive and communicative processes in survey research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Willis, G. (2005). *Cognitive interviewing: A tool for improving questionnaire design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

B. Asking and answering questions about behavior

#4 Reporting on one's behavior: Autobiographical memory and options to improve recall

Researchers often ask for information that people simply can't provide (e.g., "On how many days, if any, did you have a headache last year?", a question from a government health survey). We consider what people may or may not be able to report on and what can be done to make their task more reasonable.

Required:

Belli, R. F. (1998). The structure of autobiographical memory and the event history calendar: Potential improvements in the quality of retrospective reports in surveys. *Memory, 6*, 383-406.

Schwarz, N. & Oyserman, D. (2001). Asking questions about behavior: Cognition, communication and questionnaire construction. *American Journal of Evaluation, 22*, 127-160.

Recommended:

Bradburn, N. M., Rips, L. J., & Shevell, S. K. (1987). Answering autobiographical questions: The impact of memory and inference on surveys. *Science, 236*, 157-161.

Conway, M. A. (1990). *Autobiographical memory: An introduction*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.

Menon, G. (1994). Judgments of behavioral frequencies: Memory search and retrieval strategies. In N. Schwarz & S. Sudman, S. (Eds.) (1994). *Autobiographical memory and the validity of retrospective reports* (pp. 161- 172). New York: Springer Verlag.

#5 What I must have done: Reconstruction and estimation in behavioral reports

Given the limits of actual recall, respondents' are bound to draw on any input that may allow them to arrive at a plausible behavioral report. We consider the nature of these reconstruction and estimation strategies.

Required:

Ross, M. (1989). The relation of implicit theories to the construction of personal histories. *Psychological Review, 96*, 341-357.

Chapter 5 of Tourangeau, Rips & Rasinski (2000). *The psychology of survey response*. New York: Cambridge University Press. "Factual judgments and numerical estimates."

Recommended:

Pepper, S. C. (1981). Problems in the quantification of frequency expressions. In D.W. Fiske (Ed.), *Problems with language imprecision* (New Directions for Methodology of Social and Behavioral Science, Vol. 9, pp. 25-56). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Schwarz, N. (1999). Frequency reports of physical symptoms and health behaviors: How the questionnaire determines the results. In Park, D.C., Morrell, R.W., & Shifren, K. (Eds.), *Processing medical information in aging patients: Cognitive and human factors perspectives* (pp. 93-108). Mahaw, NJ: Erlbaum.

#6 Reporting on feelings: Convergence and divergence in concurrent, retrospective, and prospective reports

Feelings are fleeting and can only be introspected on while one has them. After a short while, they need to be reconstructed on the basis of one's lay theories. These same theories are also the basis of affective predictions, which usually results in good convergence between expected and remembered feelings – yet, neither may be a good representation of one's actual experience. Because predicted feelings play a key role in decision making, these convergences and divergences have important implications for many basic social science issues.

Required:

Schwarz, N., Kahneman, D., & Xu, J. (2009). Global and episodic reports of hedonic experience. In R. Belli, D. Alwin, & F. Stafford (eds.), *Using calendar and diary methods in life events research* (pp. 157-174). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Recommended:

Robinson, M. D., & Clore, G. L. (2002). Belief and feeling: Evidence for an accessibility model of emotional self-report. *Psychological Bulletin*, *128*, 934-960.

Schwarz, N., & Xu, J. (2011). Why don't we learn from poor choices? The consistency of expectation, choice, and memory clouds the lessons of experience. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *21*, 142-145. – DOI 10.1016/j.jcps.2011.02.006

#7 Alternatives to retrospective reports: Diaries and real-time data capture

Memory issues can be attenuated (and sometimes avoided) through real-time or close-in-time data collection. We consider some options, focusing on experience sampling and diaries. The findings often differ from retrospective reports, which raises important conceptual questions about the conditions under which prospective (e.g., how I will feel), concurrent (how I feel now) and retrospective (how I did feel) reports converge or diverge. In most cases, prospective and retrospective reports show good consistency because they are based on the same lay theories, which also drive choice (decision what to do), resulting in good convergence that suggests considerable validity. However, concurrent measures indicate that the actual in-situ experience may be poorly related to prediction as well as memory and that the observed convergence is to a large extent a product of mental construction.

Required:

Kahneman, D., Krueger, A. B., Schkade, D., Schwarz, N., & Stone, A. A. (2004). A survey method for characterizing daily life experience: The Day Reconstruction Method (DRM). *Science*, 306, 1776-1780.

Stone, A.A., Shiffman, S.S., & DeVries, M.W. (1999). Ecological momentary assessment. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 61-84). New York: Russell-Sage.

Recommended:

Belli, R. , Alwin, D., & Stafford, F. (Eds.) (2009). *Using calendar and diary methods in life events research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mehl, M. R., & Conner, T.S. (Eds.) (2012). *Handbook of research methods for studying daily life*. New York: Guilford.

C. Asking and answering questions about attitudes and preferences

#8 Attitudes, opinions, and preferences: Conceptual issues and measurement procedures

We begin with a review of classic attitude concepts, their change over time and reflection in measurement procedures. I recommend you read the required pieces in the order listed.

Required:

Schwarz, N. (2008). Attitude measurement. In W. Crano & R. Prislin (eds.), *Attitudes and persuasion* (pp. 41-60). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

Bassili, J. (2001). Cognitive indices of social information processing. In A. Tesser & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intraindividual processes* (pp. 68-87). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Vargas, P.T., Sakaquaptewa, D., & von Hippel, W. (2007). Armed only with paper and pencil: low tech measures of implicit attitudes (pp. 103-124). In B. Wittenbrink & N. Schwarz (Eds.) (2007). *Implicit measures of attitudes: Procedures and controversies*. New York: Guilford.

Recommended:

Dawes, R. M., and T. Smith (1985). Attitude and opinion measurement. In G. Lindzey, & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 509-566). New York: Random House.

DeMaio, T. J. (1984). Social desirability and survey measurement: A review. In C. F. Turner & E. Martin (Eds.), *Surveying subjective phenomena* (Vol. 2, pp. 257-281). New York: Russell Sage.

Schuman, H., & Presser, S. (1981). *Questions and answers in attitude surveys*. New York: Academic Press.

#9 Mental construal: Context effects in evaluative judgment

What determines the emergence, direction, size, and generalization of context effects in evaluative judgment, including attitude reports? Bless & Schwarz present a comprehensive model that extends beyond context effects in self-report. Given its length, it is the only required reading.

Required:

Bless, H., & Schwarz, N. (2010). Mental construal and the emergence of assimilation and contrast effects: The inclusion/exclusion model. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 42, 319-374.

Recommended:

Biernat, M. (2005). *Standards and expectancies: Contrast and assimilation in judgments of self and others*. New York: Psychology Press.

Bless, H., Schwarz, N., & Wänke, M. (2003). The size of context effects in social judgment. In J. P. Forgas, K. D. Williams, & W. von Hippel (Eds.), *Social judgments: Implicit and explicit processes* (pp. 180–197). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lord, C. G., & Lepper, M. R. (1999). Attitude representation theory. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 31, pp. 265–343). London: Academic Press.

Stapel, D.A., & Suls, J. (Eds.) (2007). *Assimilation and contrast in social psychology*. New York: Psychological Press.

#10 Attitude reports without intention: Implicit measures

Concerns about the context sensitivity of explicit attitude reports motivated attempts to develop more indirect measures, which have collectively become known as “implicit” measures of attitudes. The contributions to the Wittenbrink & Schwarz volume present how-to guides for all major variants, most of which require reaction time measurement. The class provides a short overview and focuses on more low tech variants, which can be more easily integrated into diverse data collection efforts. Unfortunately, the hope that implicit measures bypass context effects was illusory. We address the implications of this finding in the next class.

Required:

Wittenbrink, B. & Schwarz, N. (2007). Introduction (pp. 1-16). In B. Wittenbrink & N. Schwarz (Eds.) (2007). *Implicit measures of attitudes: Procedures and controversies*. New York: Guilford.

Vargas, P.T., Setaquaptewa, D., & von Hippel, W. (2007). Armed only with paper and pencil: low tech measures of implicit attitudes (pp. 103-124). In B. Wittenbrink & N. Schwarz (Eds.) (2007). *Implicit measures of attitudes: Procedures and controversies*. New York: Guilford.

Recommended:

Wittenbrink, B., & Schwarz, N. (Eds.) (2007). *Implicit measures of attitudes: Procedures and controversies*. New York: Guilford.

Bassili, J. (2001). Cognitive indices of social information processing. In A. Tesser & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intraindividual processes* (pp. 68-87). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Gawronski, B., & Payne, B. K. (2010). *Handbook of implicit social cognition*. New York: Guilford.

D. Project reviews & special issues

#11-15 Project development and review & special topics

The topics of weeks 11-15 will be determined based on students' interests. Some of these weeks will serve the discussion of your own ongoing or planned research projects. You will present your projects, complete with draft materials, which we will peer review, discuss, and improve. In addition, a selection of the topics below will be covered; other topics may be added as a needed.

- **Age-related changes in self-report**

Normal human aging is associated with cognitive changes that affect the processes underlying self-report. Despite a rapidly aging population, this is a largely neglected topic. Similarly neglected is the other end of the age spectrum, where relatively little is known about what kids can report on when and under which conditions.

Required:

Park, D. C. (2000). The basic mechanisms accounting for age-related decline in cognitive function. In D. Park & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Cognitive aging. A primer* (pp. 3-22). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Borgers, N., de Leeuw, E., & Hox, J. (2000). Children as respondents in survey research: Cognitive development and response quality. *Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 66, 60-75.

Schwarz, N., & Knäuper, B. (2000). Cognition, aging, and self-reports. In D. Park & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Cognitive aging. A primer* (pp. 233-252). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Recommended:

Schwarz, N., Park, D., Knäuper, B., & Sudman, S. (Eds.) (1999). *Cognition, aging, and self-reports*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

- **Cross-national and cross-cultural studies**

Cultures differ to some extent in their dominant cognitive and communicative processes. This has implications for self-report, which are often compounded by language issues. The Schwarz et al reading illustrates cultural differences in mental construal, drawing on the tasks discussed earlier in this class. The Harkness et al chapter presents the current state of the art regarding questionnaire translation and adaptation.

Required:

Schwarz, N., Oyserman, D., & Peytcheva, E. (2010). Cognition, communication, and culture: Implications for the survey response process. In J. A. Harkness, M. Braun, B. Edwards, T.P. Johnson, L. Lyberg, P. Ph. Mohler, B.E. Pennell, & T.W. Smith (eds.), *Survey methods in multinational, multiregional and multicultural contexts* (pp. 177-190). New York: Wiley.

Harkness, J.A., Villar, A., & Edwards, B. (2010). Translation, adaptation, and design. In J. A. Harkness, M. Braun, B. Edwards, T.P. Johnson, L. Lyberg, P. Ph. Mohler, B.E. Pennell, & T.W. Smith (eds.), *Survey methods in multinational, multiregional and multicultural contexts* (pp. 117-140). New York: Wiley.

Recommended:

Harkness, J., van de Vijver, F., & Mohler, P. P. (Eds.) (2003). *Cross-cultural survey methods*. New York: Wiley.

Harkness, J., Braun, M., Edwards, T.P. Johnson, L. Lyberg, P. Ph. Mohler, B.E. Pennell, & T.W. Smith (eds.), *Survey methods in multinational, multiregional and multicultural contexts* (pp. 177-190). New York: Wiley.

- **Crowd sourcing**

Many studies are suitable for crowdsourcing, which most often means using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. We review the (quickly changing) options and basic insights in what to pay attention to when using online subject pools.

Required:

Feldman, G. (2016) Running experiments on mechanical Turk
<http://mgto.org/running-experiments-with-amazon-mechanical-turk/>

Paolacci, G., & Chandler, J. (2014). Inside the Turk: Understanding Mechanical Turk as a participant pool. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23, 184–188.

Recommended:

Note the linked references in Feldman's piece above.

Hauser, D.J., & Schwarz, N. (2016). Attentive turkers: MTurk participants perform better on online attention checks than subject pool participants. *Behavior Research Methods*, 48, 400-407. -- DOI 10.3758/s13428-015-0578-z

MTurk basics

https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/under-the-hood-of-mechanical-turk#.WLbz_fkrl2w

Buhrmeister's (2016) MTurk Guide

<https://michaelbuhrmester.wordpress.com/mechanical-turk-guide/>

E. Review and integration

#16 The psychology of self-report: What do we know? What should we know? And what do we do with it?

Having reviewed the context sensitive processes underlying memory, judgment, and self-report of behaviors and attitudes, you may wonder what the malleability of self-report means: How should we collect data to get at the “real” thing? And how “real” is that “real thing” to begin with? Do people have stable beliefs and preferences? The Schwarz (2012) chapter assumes that thinking is for doing and is therefore tuned to goal pursuit in the current context: Stable preferences are the researcher’s fundamental attribution error; actors have much less use for them than assumed. Large sections of this chapter will be familiar because they cover material from the earlier sections and provide a review of what we’ve done in class.

Required:

Schwarz, N. (2012). Why researchers should think “real-time”: a cognitive rationale. In M. R. Mehl & T. S. Conner (eds.), *Handbook of research methods for studying daily life* (pp. 22-42). New York: Guilford.