

3.1: Looking at Group Differences

Learning Objectives

At the end of this chapter you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What is the difference between a Treatment Group and a Control Group?
- What types of naturally occurring groups differ on social behaviours?

Examining and understanding how groups of individuals can differ is one of the key goals of many social sciences, including psychology. This understanding is particularly important when you want to examine whether a certain intervention is helpful. For instance, if you wanted to trial a new depression medication or treatment. Often times these interventions are used when conducting a particular type of research design, more often an experiment where one group is assigned to the treatment or intervention, and the other group is not. Let's now unpack this idea a little further.

One group will be known as the *Treatment Group*. A Treatment Group comprises of the group of participants that receives some type of treatment or intervention that is expected to make a difference in one or more outcomes. For example, if a psychologist is using a new method of therapy within a group of clients, that therapy could be considered a treatment or intervention. A different type of group in experimental settings, in a group of participants that receives *no* amount of treatment or intervention, which is known as the *Control Group*.

Most of you would be familiar with treatments administered by researchers in settings such as clinical practice or medical trials. However, it is possible for groups to experience some effect as a “treatment” under natural conditions.

In respect to naturally occurring groups, there are many different groups of people that make up groups and organisations, like classrooms or work groups. Each group may have a distinct environment, including aspects of social differences. It makes sense that many groups would differ on different psychological constructs and behaviour. An example of this would be risk-taking behaviour. Would you expect a group close to retirement to have the same thoughts, feelings and behaviours around taking risks as a group of new employees early in their careers?

There are some slides that appear via links within Chapter Three. Please look for these as you review the current chapter.

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