

The primacy of warmth in two studies

A comparison

The main aim of the study by S. E. Asch (1946) was to find the most suitable model for the process of forming an impression. He did so by reciting different strings of trait words to participants (who were mostly college students, $N \cong 1000$, although results are only reported for 834, and mostly women), with the task to form an impression of the given person. Ten experiments were conducted in total. Experiment I. included two identical lists of traits, with the exception of one word, which was either *warm* or *cold*. Answers were assessed in three ways: by open-ended questions, by picking one from opposite pairs of traits and finally, by ranking the importance of the traits in the list. The experiment showed that the *warm/cold* trait was central and influential, but mostly when accompanied by more peripheral traits (such as *intelligent*, *skillful*, *industrious*, *determined*, *practical*, and *cautious*). On the other hand, in Experiment IV, they were rather peripheral when accompanied by *obedient*, *weak*, *shallow* and *unambitious*. Also, when the authors tried replacing *warm/cold* with the words *polite/blunt* in Experiment III, they found a far less important effect. Therefore, whether the trait is central or not depended on the context (the other traits recited) and on the relative strength of the trait itself. Overall, the author concludes that the final impression the person has is Gestalt-like (more than a sum of its parts, which relate to each other in various ways). However, the study is often cited as the progenitor of the primacy-of-warmth theory.

The second study by Nauts et al. (2014) was a replication of the former one. There are many differences between the two. In terms of introduction, Nauts et al.'s sources are much broader and more varied, which makes sense, since it was published 70 years after Asch's study. In this sense, Asch's study was the seminal work that Nauts et al.'s study draws upon.

The recruitment method was different in the latter study, because it took place online, with $N = 1023$, 474 male, and participants aged 18-75, therefore the sample was somewhat different. They were assigned to one of 7 conditions which replicated Experiments I, III and IV.

In fact, the entire study took place online, using Amazon's MTurk software, as opposed to the Asch study, for obvious reasons. The strings of words were shown twice on the computer, while in the Asch study, they were read out loud. The three assessment methods were overall improved. Firstly, quantitative statistical analyses were used for the word pairs and ranking, while the open-ended questions were systematically analyzed. The open-ended questions were coded according to a scheme, whereas Asch, although he relied greatly on their results, only used informal assessment. Additionally, synonyms in the descriptions were also taken into account. The study yielded the results that

competence-related traits (mostly *intelligent*) were similarly or even more decisive in forming an impression than *warm* or *cold*, although the latter did influence the overall valence of the description more than *polite* and *blunt*. In line with Asch's findings, they were relatively more important when accompanied by the more peripheral traits. The authors conclude that the warmth-related were not central, arguing against the primacy of warmth. However, they add that proving the importance of warmth was not the main message of Asch's experiments.

Overall, the studies differed in methodological aspects discussed above. Also, much more information about the Nauts et al. study was provided, in accordance with the principles of Open Science. The study was also preregistered. It is also important to bear in mind that both studies share the limitation of judging the process of forming an impression based on exposure to verbalisations of the trait, which may not be the same as actually forming an impression upon meeting a living person.

Although both studies showed results that can be seen as diverging, in my opinion, Asch's study mostly used the distinction *cold/warm* as a potential example of a central trait, rather than highlighting it as a key decisive power in impression formation and Nauts et al. are rightful in correcting the assumption that he originated the primacy-of-warmth effect and that what should be praised are the findings about impression formation.

Asch, S. E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 41(3), 258–290. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055756>

Nauts, S., Langner, O., Huijismans, I., Vonk, R., & Wigboldus, D. H. J. (2014). Forming impressions of personality: A replication and review of Asch's (1946) evidence for a primacy-of-warmth effect in impression formation. *Social Psychology*, 45(3), 153-163. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000179>

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The two texts to be compared were a series of 10 experiments by S. E. Asch (1946) and a more recent replication from 2014. While Asch is often cited as the progenitor of primacy-of-warmth effect (Nauts et al., 2014), such results do not seem to stem from his findings nor were successfully replicated.

Kritérium hodnocení úkolu	Podíl	Splněno	Body
Účelné shrnutí pro obě studie	14%	1	0,7
Účelné porovnání studií (podobnosti, rozdíly)	14%	1	0,7
Vyvození vlastních opodstatněných závěrů	16%	1	0,8
Kvalita argumentace, její opora v textu, pospolitost, uvědomování si limitů	14%	1	0,7
Stylistika projevu a srozumitelnost	14%	1	0,7
Obsahové strukturování a plynulá návaznost textu	14%	1	0,7

Formální náležitosti a formální strukturování textu	14%	1	0,7
Maximální počet bodů Získaný počet bodů	5		5

Kvalitní práce, jen tak dál.

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