

Forming impressions of personality

In this paper, I would like to compare the study Asch (1946) has conducted and a replication study by Nauts et al. (2014). The original paper written by Asch (1946) is very extensive and aims to describe the process by which people form impressions of others. This paper is often used as an evidence material for the primacy-of-warmth effect, despite the fact no explicit evidence for this statement was found in the original data. The second paper by Nauts et al. (2014) therefore aims to examine and replicate some studies Asch conducted and that are most relevant for the primacy-of-warmth effect.

The original paper (Asch, 1946)

In the original paper, there were 10 studies reported on the (N = 834) participants. Asch hypothesized that the formation of impression would be based on Gestalt psychology model. In each study (or experiment) respondents were provided with a list of traits and then instructed to write down a trait that describes the other person. Then, the participants were to choose from 18 trait-pairs (opposite traits) and had to pick one trait from each presented pair. Finally, participants were asked to rank those traits from the most important to the least important for their own impression. This method was very similar for all of the experiments, so Asch was able to change the traits presented or manipulate the order of traits.

In summary, Asch found out, that some traits have different meanings and different context for the participant, than others. Therefore, he described some traits as central and some traits as peripheral. Central traits were basically those, that influence and define the meaning and function of other traits, while peripheral traits were those influenced by central traits. Which trait becomes central depends on the context, because the context modifies the entire Gestalt of the impression (Nauts et al., 2014). It is obvious that this concept fits the Gestalt view Asch was building his hypothesis on.

It is important to point out some of Asch's experiments, which involved traits "warm" and "cold". In those experiments Asch found out "warmth" to be a central trait, however in another study "warmth" appeared to be more of a peripheral trait. This led to confusion that these findings are a supporting material for the primacy-of-warmth effect. Asch himself acknowledged, that warmth plays an important role in forming impression about another person, but any trait can be central as well as peripheral, because traits are context dependent.

This context-dependency is a key point of Gestalt-model, that Asch (1946) actually tried to present with his research. Sadly, instead of focusing on the Gestalt-model, many researchers used Asch's research (1946) as a proving evidence for primacy-of-warmth effect.

Replication paper (Nauts et al., 2014)

Because of this misinterpretation of Asch's findings, researchers Nauts et al. (2014) replicated some of Asch's experiments relevant for the primacy-of-warmth effect. Such experiments mostly contained traits such as "warm" or "cold". There were also other traits presented as a moderator of a different experimental condition. The method they used was highly similar to Asch's method. Nauts et al. (2014) had a slightly larger number of participants (N = 1023) in their research.

The aim was to examine whether "warm" and "cold" traits are more central than others. As the results shown, these traits did not prove to be the most central ones. Participants indicated the trait "intelligence" as at least as influential in forming their impression (Nauts et. al, 2014). That is, some of the participants described the other person based on their competence at least as much as based on their perceived warmth. Moreover, some of the participants descriptions did not refer to "warm" trait at all.

Summary

These findings don't indicate that Asch was wrong, because aiming on the primacy-of-warmth effect was never Asch's goal in the first place. It only means that using Asch's findings as an evidence base for primacy-of-warmth effect is inaccurate as it turned out to be quite the contrary. Nauts et al. (2014) however produced findings that can support Asch's model of traits, as some traits appear to be more central than others.

Many differences between these two research papers are tied to the time when they were conducted. It is important to note, that Nauts et al. (2014) used a different approach in analysing the data, than Asch did. Of course, the psychological research has progressed widely over the years, for example quantitative data analysis was not fully developed and used in Asch's time. Nauts et al. had also many other technical advantages such as online form of experiments and screen-presented trait-lists.

References

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., Huijsmans, I., Vonk, R., & Wigboldus, D. H. J. (2014). Forming Impressions of Personality. *Social Psychology*, 45(3), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000179>

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Ještě než s pouštím do čtení, líbí se mi struktura textu, kdy je přehledně oddělena jedna a druhá studie, úvod, závěr. Trochu se obávám, že zde bude chybět kapitola přímo k porovnávání ale nechám se překvapit.

Po přečtení: skvělý psaný projev, shrnutí jsou perfektní, explicitní porovnání v rámci různých aspektů mi v práci trochu chybělo a přišlo až v posledním odstavci, který podle mého názoru měl přijít někdy dříve. Co bych rád extra ocenil jsou závěry textu v předposledním odstavci.

Ať se daří,

Adam Klocek