

Psychology coursework

Social psychology- Impression formation

My psychology coursework is criticising Solomon Asch's 1946 study on central traits and how they influence the impression we form of others. I criticise the study because it requires participants to form an impression on somebody who in fact doesn't exist. Therefore I propose to successfully prove that the central traits- "warm" and "cold" do actually effect our impression of others in real life.

My hypothesis is that on the basis of one word participants will make bias judgements on the personality of two complete strangers.

I will give a list of neutral words to describe my two confederates one list will consist of the central trait, cold and the other, warm. After this both the confederates will read out the same irrelevant bulletin notice and interact with the class. I will then present a class of year 7 students with a tick list with additional peripheral traits to describe both the confederates.

I have numerous extraneous variables to control throughout my experiment. Firstly to make sure my participants based the additional traits purely on the list of words I read out. I used to female identical twins, this eliminates the issue of the Halo effect, the class would not judge the confederates personality by simply their looks. I also limited the conversation they could have as the list of words did not in fact apply to the confederates and they could give away their true personality easily.

Furthermore my class, being quite young and new to the school, must be told of the anonymity of the experiment and I must brief them beforehand so they know not to worry that they could get in trouble for, for example, giving a negative opinion about one of my confederates.

For my experiment I also require a research method, I needed a year seven class- around 20 students of 11 year old male and females. This is simply to ensure that confederates have not been previously acquainted with any of the participants otherwise they may have some basis knowledge to judge their additional traits on and this could alter my experiment and cause incorrect results. Therefore my sample is not that able to generalise to everyone as it is only subject to one particular age group, class and ethnicity.

However I do need to make my experiment ecologically valid therefore it will take place in a class situation with the appropriate permission of the class teacher. This will make certain that the circumstance can be related to real/school life. It will simply portray a student passing on a school notice from a particular member of staff.

My Independent variable is the central trait, "cold" or "warm" and my dependant variable is whether the additional traits are positive or negative, so the results of the tick list.

I will need the following to carry out my experiment, a tick list with a range of both positive and negative peripheral traits, it will also require the participant to circle their sex so I can later on refer to this factor in my results. An example of the tick list;

Male / Female (circle which applies)	
<u>Additional Characteristics</u>	
Funny	
Fierce	
Beautiful	
Cruel	
Bright	
Grumpy	
Intelligent	
Jolly	
Inspirational	
Lazy	
Bitter	
Spiteful	
Strong	
Shallow	
Kind	
Gifted	
Boring	
Ugly	
Obnoxious	
Lovely	

The tick list consists of ten positive characteristics and ten negative characteristics the class will have this tick list twice and the choice to tick as many as they want for each confederate.

I will also need a simple notice for both my confederates to read aloud to the participating class, this is the factor that will make my experiment ecologically valid it will improve on Asch's study as it will require the participants to meet the confederates and person being judged in a real life situation. An example of the notice;

“Ski Trip 2009 Reminder- All students going on the ski trip need to hand in final cheques as soon as possible to Mr.McEvoy please. Information letters need to be handed into Miss Lovatt before parents evening on the 4th of February. There is 5 days left for last BOYS place to be claimed- please see Mr.McEvoy if you are interested and hand in the deposit a.s.a.p. Thanks.”

At the end of my experiment I debriefed my participants, I explained they were part of my psychology experiment; the list of words did not really apply to the personalities of my confederates, they understood that the class were participating in my experiment and that the results were anonymous. They were also ensured that the results would be used only for my psychology coursework and they had all been extremely helpful. This debrief also let me identify that none of the participants had

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guessed the hypothesis and therefore been aware of what they were required to do and compromised the data, however none of my participants understood the point of the experiment and therefore all lacked demand characteristics during. So I had to exclude no data from the analysis. I then let them return to their lesson.

My results were as follows:

Central trait, "warm"

	How many words ticked	How many positive words ticked	How many negative words ticked	Majority (positive/negative)
1	2	2	0	positive
2	2	2	0	positive
3	3	3	0	positive
4	3	3	0	negative
5	3	2	0	positive
6	3	2	1	positive
7	4	1	3	negative
8	4	4	0	positive
9	5	5	0	positive
10	5	3	2	positive
11	5	2	3	negative
12	5	5	0	positive
13	5	5	0	positive
14	6	5	1	positive
15	7	7	0	positive
16	7	6	1	positive
17	7	6	1	positive
18	7	6	1	positive
19	7	3	4	negative
20	8	7	1	positive

Central trait, “cold”

	How many words ticked	How many positive words ticked	How many negative words ticked	Majority (positive/negative)
1	2	0	2	negative
2	2	0	2	negative
3	3	0	3	negative
4	3	0	3	negative
5	4	2	2	positive/negative
6	4	1	3	negative
7	5	4	1	positive
8	5	0	5	negative
9	5	0	5	negative
10	5	0	5	negative
11	5	1	4	negative
12	5	3	2	positive
13	6	0	6	negative
14	6	1	5	negative
15	7	1	6	negative
16	7	1	6	negative
17	7	1	6	negative
18	7	2	4	negative
19	8	0	8	negative
20	8	1	7	negative

I have presented my results in the form of a table so it is clear and precise; it shows both the overall result and the statistics. It meant that I could also present my results separately. The first table is the results obtained from the tick list associated with the central trait, “warm”. The second table is showing the results of the central trait, “cold”.

My results were quite successful to my aim however there were some anomalies and are not as consistent as I imagined they would be.

For example a lot of the cold trait tick lists, had at least one positive additional characteristic ticked. A large percentage of these words was either, “funny” or “jolly”. I believe this is due to the fact that during reading out the notice, my confederate described as cold, laughed in between. This could have added to the participant’s view of the confederate and it seems to have affected their overall opinion.

In the results of the central trait warm, there were a few occasions of negative words being ticked, these were often, “shallow” or “obnoxious” and although my list of words were quite simple and straightforward I believe that some participants may have not understood the meaning of these two words. Leading them to checking them, perhaps thinking they had positive connotations.

Overall my results in relation to my aim were successful. I found that the participants ticked a majority of positive words when describing my confederate whom they were told was warm and that they ticked a majority of negative words when describing my confederate whom they were told was cold. This supports the ideas that; warm and cold are central traits, that on the basis of one of these words participants will give additional similar traits to this person and that it will effect their opinion of that person's personality.

There were certain patterns in my data for example the majority sex to tick positive characteristics in both tick lists were female and the males were the majority sex to tick a larger amount of characteristics. It also seemed in my data that the more words ticked the more likely both positive and negative words would be ticked, this could be due to the fact that participants were trying to analyse the confederate as best as they could and used more factors than the list of words to make their assumptions. Of course it just be simply math related the more words ticked simply just increases the chance of a negative word being ticked.

The implications of this study are of use in the world today. If central traits have such a large impact on the judger, and their overall opinion of a person, it says something about how much we really can know someone. It proves that bias judgments happen in everyday life. Which is the results I assumed when conducting the experiments, it matches the outcome of Asch's 1946 study however it is actually countable as it had ecological validity. The results met my aims and supported the research I'd done on both Asch's previous study and impression formation research linking to the primacy effect, which supports the idea of making a bias first judgement and it influencing your overall opinion. Study's which many psychologists have proved such as; Jones & Goethals, 1972; Anderson & Hubert, 1963; Stewart, 1965

I also overall achieved my hypothesis and proved it correct, that on the basis of one word participants will make bias judgements on the personality of two complete strangers. And my participants did they made judgments on how nice or funny or intelligent my confederate was by me simply telling them whether they were warm or cold and I have evidence to prove this. My tables show the extreme bias a lot of my participants chose, it even shows at what extent they went and in detail what they actually assumed, for example how many additional traits they gave the confederate, which ones in particular they were and how many of these were positive or negative.

The strengths of my experiment were the consistency in my data. It proved my hypothesis for definite and where there were anomalies there were possible causes for them and general patterns throughout. The weaknesses were perhaps the inability to generalise an experiment, quite an important factor if you want it to relate it to everybody in society.

My data is reliable as it was done following the correct ethics and by avoiding any extraneous variables that I could have presupposed. If my experiment was to be repeated following similar steps it would be likely to have similar results. However it depends on the participants, the experiment worked for my sample however it was restricted to what I could generalise the results, and therefore hypothesis, to. So

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perhaps if my experiment was to be repeated in different circumstances it is not definite the results would match.

I also consider my results accurate as my results prove my hypothesis correct which I decided after careful research. It also is an improvement on the 1946 Asch's study which stated it would get similar results to what I did however his study was ecologically invalid. My results are also very detailed so any inaccuracy could probably be spotted by simply viewing them, excluding my anomalies.

If I were to repeat my experiment I would develop it by increasing the scale of participants. I would repeat it over and over using different circumstances to fit different groups of people which I would like to generalise my results to. I would perhaps use trained actors and actresses so that the confederates would not create flaws in my results. I would also perhaps instead of posing my confederates as just giving a notice. I would put them in a class as a "new student" and instead of a list of words have the teacher describe them before they entered, then video the class and observe the reaction towards the confederates. This of course would be a hypothetical situation as it would involve ignoring ethics such as consent and deception by tricking the class and filming them without them knowing.

However I do believe it would increase the reliability and accuracy of my experiment therefore could be more recognizable for psychology.

In conclusion I did manage to achieve my aim which was to "successfully prove that the central traits- "warm" and "cold" do actually effect our impression of others in real life." And prove my hypothesis, "that on the basis of one word participants will make bias judgements on the personality of two complete strangers" correct.