Critique of the article: absolut memory distortions, alcohol placebos influence t...

Absolut Memory Distortions

Alcohol Placebos Influence the Misinformation Effect conducted by Seema L. Assefi and Maryanne Garry in January of 2003 aims to answer one question; Does suggesting that you have consumed alcohol affect your memory of an event? While formulating the study, the research began to show that suggestion that one is drinking alcohol can influence many dependent measures (Hull & Bond, 1986; Marlatt & Rohsenow, 1980) and skew results. To correct their study, Assefi and Garry decided that to rule out extraneous variables such as behavior associated with alcohol consumption, the research question would solely encompass the interest of effects of alcohol placebos on memory.

As cognitive psychologists, the method of action to perform a balanced placebo design (Marlatt & Rohsenow, 1980) where subjects would be told that they were either drinking plain tonic or drinking vodka tonic without knowledge that none of the subjects were drinking any form of alcohol and rather they were only assigned to a group to believe so, would adequately introduce social and nonsocial behavior in the experiment.

The article begins to focus on findings from previous studies conducted by Marlatt and Rohsenow (1980) and Hull and Bond (1986) whose findings indicated that only social behaviors are affected by alcohol placebos and nonsocial behaviors such as sphere of social influence, reaction time, memory for word lists, etc. were not. The researchers found that socially constrained behavior is often kept in check regardless of consumption of

alcohol and this raised questions for Assefi and Garry (2003) because to their belief, memory performance is not something we normally keep in check.

To study the effects of alcohol on memory, the researchers incorporated both nonsocial and social factors using the eyewitness memory paradigm (Loftus, Miller & Burns, 1978) as the ideal method to study the effects of alcohol placebos on memory. In summary, the procedure of the experiment involves 148 undergraduate participants viewing slides depicting a crime followed by reading a narrative of the event with misleading information and then asked what they remember from the initial event.

Half of the sample is convinced that they are consuming tonic and vodka making them the told alcohol group and the other half is told they are drinking plain tonic making them the told tonic group. The question asked by Assefi and Garry (2003) was whether subjects who are told they are consuming alcohol are more prone to the misinformation effect (Belli, 1989) than subjects who are told that they are consuming a nonalcoholic drink. The question solely begs the extent in which the misinformation effect has a social component in addition to the control component in which subjects base their answers on their memory. The study follows a correlational approach in which the end game is to see if two positives are the outcome of alcohol placebos.

The independent variables of this study include the two groups, told tonic and told alcohol as well as who the PEI is coming from and the dependent variables being the accuracy in which the slides were recalled after hearing

the misinformation as well as the overall confidence the participants of each group showed with their answers. The control being what they saw on the slides versus one of the independent variables, the misleading postevent information (PEI) is consistent among the entire the experiment except when they question their judgment because of who delivered the PEI thus incorporating the social factors in which people are misled. The text notes that the status of the individual delivering the misinformation is ultimately the deciding factor in what the participant does or does not remember. Concluding that for the misinformation affect to occur, the participants must fall to the belief of the information provided by another person.

Critique

The presence of reliability and validity in a study is crucial for replication and generalizability. Reliability is defined in psychology as the consistency of a study or measuring test while the validity in psychology refers to the ability of a study or test to measure what it is supposed to measure. I believe that this article does an exceptional job of encompassing both crucial aspects. Taking the procedure from the article, I believe that the study can be easily replicated and thus supports its reliability. However, since it has yet to be replicated I cannot speak for the results and whether they are the same. The ultimate question asked in this article was whether told alcohol subjects would be more affected by misleading PEI than told tonic subjects. Normally, the validity of the study is tested by whether or not the experiment can adequately answer the question at hand. This study did indeed answer the question asked and proved that told alcohol subjects were indeed more

affected by misleading PEI than told tonic subjects. This makes the study valid.

The study found more than what it was initially researching. The ultimate answer we were looking for addressed whether told alcohol subjects were more likely to believe misleading PEI over told tonic subjects and while we did find that yes, this was true, the authors also found that the confidence in their answers expressed by alcohol told subjects was also much higher than that of tonic told subjects. In addition, the authors were also able to prove that societal factors and social behaviors were not the only behaviors affected by alcohol placebos but that nonsocial factors such as memory were indeed, affected by alcohol placebos as well.

Safeguards are essential in research for ethical purposes. In this the study, the authors debriefed the participants after the study was complete that no one had consumed any alcohol in this experiment and that it was all staged very well to convince some that they would be. Although I do not see any activity in the study to be deemed unethical, I do think the authors incorporated the correct safeguard. Although not given the complete details of the study, the participants were briefed prior to the experiment so consent and awareness that they may consume alcohol was evident.

In the article, the authors state that in their experiment they manipulated alcohol suggestions in a three-stage misinformation procedure but that other researchers felt that perhaps one might wish to manipulate suggestions at different stages. I mentioned that as a safeguard the authors used debriefing

to ensure ethicality in their study however, in agreeance with an example mentioned in the article, I believe that a beneficial back up study to this one, would be debriefing the participants prior to reading the misleading information. We do not specifically have to mention the specificity of the misleading information but merely debrief the participants by explaining that alcohol was not consumed by either group, told alcohol or told tonic, and continue to the next part of the experiment in which they would read the misleading information and recall the initial event. I am not sure if this will bring different results, but I think it would be a great way to test the reliability of the initial study.

Brief Summary

This article critique summarized and analyzed the article Absolut Memory Distortions: Alcohol Placebos Influence the Misinformation Effect conducted by Seema L. Assefi and Maryanne Garry (2003). The article discussed the nature in which social and nonsocial factors could be influenced by alcohol placebos. More specifically analyzing the way in which the nonsocial factor of recalling memory is or is not prominent under the presence of alcohol placebos. The study conducted included 148 undergraduate students who were equally divided into a told alcohol group and a told tonic group. None of the participants contrary to belief had consumed alcohol, it was only a formality to test the validity of the study. The participants consumed their drinks, watched slides of a crime, read misleading information, and reported their memory of the initial crime. The question asked tested whether the told alcohol group would be more susceptible to believing the mislead

information over the told tonic group. The study concluded that the told

alcohol group were in fact, more affected by the misleading information than

the PEI group.

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