

Peoples formation of
impressions
psychology essay



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This experiment studied how group membership In-group vs Out-group and Order effects Order A vs Order B - Asch affected peoples formation of impressions. 151 Kingston University Second Year Psychology Undergraduate Students were randomly allocated to one of the four experimental conditions where they completed a response sheet answering two endorsement questions. Participants either viewed a presentation on describing characteristics associated with a mechanic or psychology student in either Order A or Order B. Once viewed they completed a response sheet +6 which involved them answering the following two questions on a scale of 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) - " This is a person I would like to meet" and " This person could become my friend". The results showed that group membership can affect the formation of impressions however order effects and group membership and Order effect together did not. It was concluded, people do favourably rate others in their in group but are not significantly affected by this or order effects, however more research is required.

Introduction

Impression formation is a common element of human behaviour. In recent years there has been considerable interest in impression formation and group perception individually and combined. Ever since Asch (1946) established many of the foundational principles of impression formation one being that impression formation is an organized process - Asch goes on to identify 3 others. Impression formation is defined as a procedure whereby specific pieces of information about someone else are combined too form a impression/perception of an individual (Gordon Marshall 1998 cited in

Encyclopedia. com 2012). Group perception is the idea that the group you assimilate with will have an affect on the way you perceive - this is often you not primarily making judgements of your own freewill (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002).

Asch's research on forming impressions was linked to group perception in his study of Understanding Conformity in Groups (1951). The experiment was designed to build upon and further Sherif (1935) work on conformity due to his experiment having no correct answer. Peoples formation of impressions can strongly be linked to what others think thus people may follow others opinions because of the group status.

Practically all studies on impression formation are based around Asch (1947). In his studies Asch focussed on this theory of central traits and the way in which central traits are able to manipulate the significance of other traits. He conducted 10 experiments - the majority focused on two groups of participants being shown lists of words that were similar apart from one or two words being changed and/or being presented in specific orders. These 10 experiments provided a baseline in which other researchers could use to further the study of impression formation. From these results it could be argued that more favourable results could be attributed to character traits perceived as positively (first). Also if the positive character traits were linked to the in group as from Hewstone, Rubin & Willis (2002) people respond better to people in their in-group.

Hewstone, Rubin & Willis (2002) provided an extensive chapter on Group membership (in-group and out-group biases). They pointed out that people

have the tendency to assess their own group (in-group) or its members more favourably than a non-membership group (out-group) or its members - this is based on " behaviour (discrimination), attitude (prejudice), and cognition (stereotyping)" (Mackie & Smith 1998, Wilder & Simon 2001 cited in Hewstone, Rubin & Willis (2002)). Also the idea that Social Identity Theory [S. I. T] (Tajfel & Turner 1979 & 1986) can be used too explain in-group decisions as S. I. T states that " in-groups will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image". Thus this also supports the idea that the in-group will rate an individual positive because they belong to the same group and discriminate against an out-group individual.

The present study therefore sets out to examine the effect group membership (In-group vs Out-group) and Order effect (Order A vs Order B) has on peoples ability to form impressions of someone and what impressions would be formed - either positive or negative. On the basis of previous research it was hypothesised that the presentation order would have a substantial effect on impressions formed. Order A would produce higher scores of strong endorsement than order B. Also that the group membership associated with an individual would affect the impression created as people should show more favourable attitudes to members of the own group. Thus the higher the scores for the questions presented would show a strong endorsement and a more favourable impression.

Method

Design

A between groups/independent measures design was used. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups based on the class they attended. These four conditions formed levels for the two independent variables - Order (the order in which the characteristics were presented) and Group membership (the group in which the example is identified with - in group and out group). The levels consisted of Order: Either Order A where by the individual was initially presented as intelligent or Order B where by the individual was initially presented as Envious. Group membership: where the characteristics were associated with either a Psychology Student (in-group) or a Car Mechanic (out-group). The dependent variable was the nature of impression and was measured through two endorsement statements (" This is a person I would like to meet" and " This person could become my friend") using a scale which ranged between 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

Participants

A total of 151 Kingston University second year psychology undergraduate students took part in this experiment. This consisted of 124 females and 24 males with a mean age of 21. 4 years old and a standard deviation of (SD= 4. 17). The range of participant's ages was 29 years old. There were 79 participants allocated to the in-group: psychology student which was split into level one Order A: 34 and Level 2 Order B: 45. 72 participants were allocated to the out-group condition: Car Mechanic, which was split into level one Order A: 28 and level 2 Order B: 44.

Materials

A list of 6 descriptive characteristic's (e. g. Intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious) was created in order for participants to form an impression. Participants were assigned to one of four conditions and were shown this list of 6 characteristics in one of 2 ways either Order A whereby the list was presented - intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious. Or Order B whereby the list was presented in the opposite order - envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent.

Participants created their own response sheets where they asked to record they age, gender and answer two questions on a scale from 0 to 7 by rating whether they agreed with the following: " This is a person I would like to meet", and " This person could become my friend" (See Appendix 1 for what a sample of this would look like).

Procedure

The experiment consisted of participants being randomly allocated to one of four experimental groups whereby they viewed 6 descriptive characteristic words via a presentation and had to an impression of someone based on the characteristics presented to them. The experimental conditions participants were assigned to was decided through the Psychology Research Methods seminar class students were assigned to at the beginning of the year being the group and the course leader choose which class experienced which condition. Each seminar group's participant's viewed a presentation which differed based on the Group membership: In-group and Out-group condition they were assigned (See appendix 2 for instructions presented). The words were presented for 4 seconds - with one second inter-stimulus intervals via

one of two levels for the Order independent variable - Order A whereby the list was presented - intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious. Or Order B whereby the list was presented in the opposite order - envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent. Once completed participants were asked to record the impression they formed through answering the two questions on a scale from 0 to 7 - This is a person I would like to meet and this person could become my friend.

Results

The data was obtained in the form of responses to the stimuli's (Order - A and B, Group Membership - Psychology student and Car Mechanic) presented to the participants. Descriptive statistics for all conditions are presented in Table 1 below. For the psychology student using Order A showed a mean of 7.0 (SD = 2.86) while the mean rating using Order B was 6.22 (SD = 3.16). In turn the mean ratings for the Car mechanic using Order A was 5.04 (SD = 3.09), on the other hand using Order B the mean was 5.36 (SD = 2.97).

Table 1 - Descriptive statistics for Order A (Intelligent First), Order B (Envious First) and Group Membership

Group Membership

Order

N

Mean

Standard Deviation

Psychology

Order A

Order B

Total

34

45

79

7. 00

6. 22

6. 56

2. 86

3. 16

3. 04

Car Mechanic

Order A

Order B

Total

28

44

72

5. 04

5. 36

5. 24

3. 09

2. 97

3. 00

Total

Order A

Order B

Total

62

89

151

6. 11

5. 80

5. 93

3. 10

3. 08

3. 08

A two-way between subjects ANOVA test was conducted that compared the effect of Order (the order the characteristics were presented either Order A intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious. Or Order B envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent) and Group membership (the group in which the example is identified with - in group and out group) on forming an impression of someone. The test revealed that the main effect of Group membership (In-group: Psychology student vs Out-group: Car Mechanic) was significant. $F(1, 147) = 7.901$; $p = .006$. The main effect of Order (A: Intelligent presented first vs B: Envious presented first) was not significant as $F(1, 147) = .201$; $p = .665$ and thus $F < 1$. The interaction between group membership and order was not significant either $F(1, 147) = 1.212$; $p = .273$. The results did not support that hypothesis that presentation Order (A vs B) would have a substantial effect on impressions formed. The results did partially support the hypothesis that group membership would effect the impressions created. The results also failed to support the idea that group membership and Order effect would effect participant's formation of impressions (For full statistical results see Appendix 3).

Discussion

The experiment aimed to examine the effect group membership and Order has on peoples formation of impressions. The hypothesis suggested that presentation order would effect impressions formed. Order A would produce higher scores of strong endorsement than order B and group membership would affect the impression created as people should show favourable attitudes to members of their group. The results did not support the hypothesis that presentation Order would effect impressions formed, specifically that Order A will produce higher scores than Order B. The results also failed to support that group membership and Order would effect participant's formation of impressions. The results did partially support that group membership would effect the impressions created specifically that there would be higher scores for the in-group (psychology students) showing a strong endorsement and more favourable impression. (This is as group membership produced a significant result overall), however further investigation is needed as the results only partially supported the claim. Although all the results are not significant they do support the claims that Hewstone, Rubin & Willis (2002) and (Tajfel & Turner 1979 & 1986) make about group membership.

Although the diversity of participants was limited as there was more female participants than male participants and this could lead too gender biases. It has been argued that the differences between men and women when it comes to impression formation is not significant (HumÄf, 2010). However many would still argue this is not the case as there are clear differences in male and female cognitive processes (Weiss, Kemmler, Deisenhammer,

Fleischhacker & Delazer, 2003). Thus if we eliminated all the males then we would be provided data on women's impression formation.

Limitations with this theory include the argument that people interpret identical information differently and that this is dependent on the thoughts and actions that person is having at that specific time (Stapel & Koomen, 1997). From this it could be argued that if we tested participants at a different time their responses could be different. Also bringing into question - could mood affect results. Thus extensions to this theory could branch into seeing if mood affects impression formation as well as more research to provide more conclusive results.

Understanding how impression formation works can be very useful as it is featured throughout everyday of people's lives. This is because people can not go a day without forming impressions of one another. Thus any research could help understand why that impression was formed or just to provide information on a topic.