

Grossman et al. (2011)

Culture, Attention and Emotion

This study is used to answer questions on:

Attention
Emotion
Stereotyping (Illusory correlation)
Cultural Dimensions (Individualistic/Collectivistic)
Schemas
Acculturation
Cognitive/Behavioural effects of culture

Abstract

Researchers wanted to investigate if there were any effects of culture on attention and emotion.

They began by measuring how long Russian and American students took to examine different pictures. The pictures were divided into sad pictures and happy pictures. They found that the Russian students spent longer looking at the sad pictures

They followed this by having bicultural participants (Russian/Latvian) looking at images associated with one of their cultures. The participants were primed by looking at images of either Latvian or Russian culture. They then asked them to check if words were real or not. Some of the words were positive and some of the words were negative. Researchers found that participants primed with the Russian images correctly identified the negative words quickly but were slower identifying the positive words

Researchers concluded that different cultures can influence people's emotion and attention.



Aim

- To investigate cultural differences in attention
- To test if Russian culture promotes a tendency to focus on negative emotional stimuli (pictures in this study)

Method

Participants

64 European American participants (30 female, 34 male, average 18 years old) were recruited from the University of Michigan in America. 69 Russian participants (48 female, 21 male, average age 19 years old) were recruited from the Moscow State Regional University. Both sets of students participated and received course credit.

Materials

36 pictures were selected. 18 of them were negative pictures and 18 of them were positive pictures.

Procedure

Participants completed the study on their own by following written instructions. They were told that the study was about human reasoning. The participant sat in front of a computer and was told:

You will be shown a set of 36 pictures. These pictures will be used later in the study. Please take as much time as you need to get familiar with the pictures.

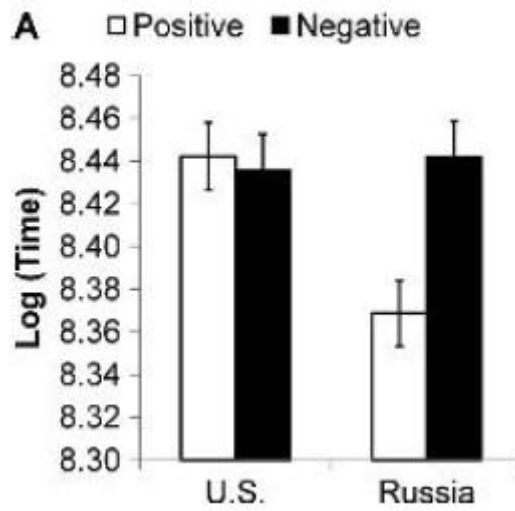
When you are ready, press the space bar to move to the next picture.

Before beginning, the participants completed 9 trials with clouds as pictures to ensure they understood the instruction.

The 36 pictures were randomly selected for each participant. The length of time the participant spent looking at each picture was recorded.



As can be seen in the graph, the American students looked at positive and negative pictures equally. However, Russian students spent much more time looking at negative pictures.



Study Two

Aim

- To test if joining in Russian culture (acculturation) made participants more negative in outlook
- To examine the differences in attention between individualism (Latvians) and collectivism (Russians)

Method

Participants

47 participants (27 female, 20 male, average age 20.5) were recruited from the Latvian capital, Riga. These participants were Russian/Latvian bicultural (this means they were from both cultures). They were recruited through advertisements in universities and newspapers and were paid \$8 for their participation.

Procedure

Participants were shown 15 images on a computer, one at a time. These images were all either from a Latvian culture or a Russian culture. They were a variety of pictures such as architecture, art, literature, religious symbols and national symbols. After seeing a picture, participants saw a word and needed to press either < or > to indicate if this was a real word or a non-word

This means the participants were primed with either Russian or Latvian images.

The words were either positive or negative words. The time it took them to state whether it was a real word or not was recorded.

When they had finished, the participants completed a questionnaire which asked how involved they were in Russian culture. This was to check if the Latvian's and become acculturated to Russian culture.

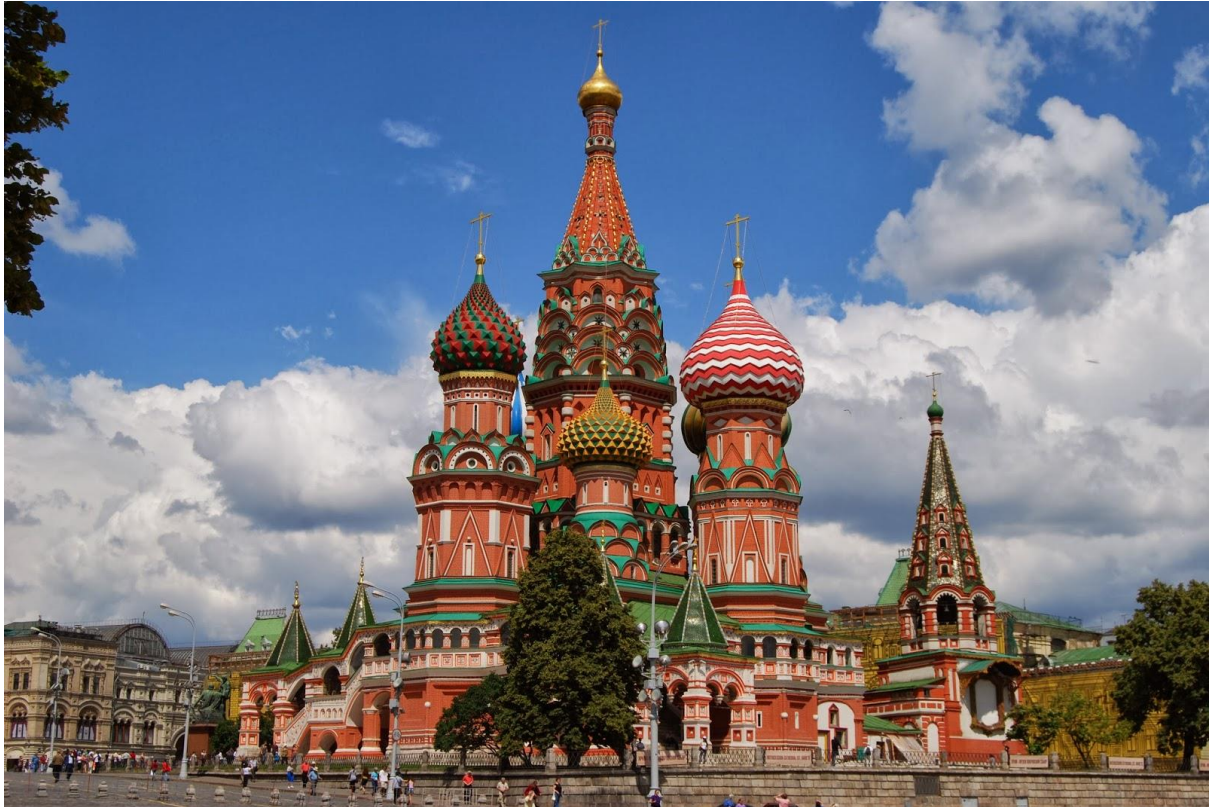
Results

Participants who were primed with the Russian pictures recognised the negative words very quickly. Those primed with the Latvian pictures were slow to recognise the negative words. They were also quicker to recognise positive words.

Those participants who indicated on the questionnaire that they were heavily involved in the Russian culture were the fastest to identify the negative words.

Conclusion

Both the studies provide evidence that cultural influences can affect the way we perceive the world and the attention we give to emotions and emotional situations/stimuli.



Evaluation

Generalisability

- There was quite a high number of participants from different backgrounds. However, only 2 countries were used.
- The participants used were quite young. Older members of those societies may react differently.

Reliability

- The mood of the participants before the study could have affected how much attention they paid to each picture.
- The written instructions were back-translated. This means they were translated into Russian by one person then translated back into English by a different person to ensure no meaning was lost in translation.
- The instructions were written instructions, so there was no possibility of researcher bias
- It is unlikely that demand characteristics played a part as participants would not guess the aim of the study.

Application to life

- The results suggest that different cultures will have different perspectives on events which may help differing cultures to understand each other better.

Validity

- The participants may simply have been following the stereotype of their culture and focusing on sad pictures/words because they felt that this is what good citizens do.
- Positive pictures/words may be easier to identify; thus, less time would be spent looking at them.
- Russians may perceive neutral images/words as negative.

Ethics

- Exposing participants to sad images could have caused some distress.

