

Risen et al. (2007)

One-Shot Illusory Correlations and Stereotype Formation

This study is used to answer questions on:

Stereotypes (Illusory correlation)
Dual processing
Memory

Abstract

An illusory correlation is when people assume something about a minority group based on the behaviour of a small amount of people from that group. For example, assuming that all Asian people are good at Mathematics because they have met a small amount of Asian people who are good at Mathematics.

This series of experiments examines if illusory correlations can be created from just one example e.g. from seeing one person from a group.

It is based on the idea that a rare group and a rare behaviour will lead to an illusory correlation and stereotyping of that group.

The experimenters conducted 3 studies using rare-rare sentences and found that people remembered and paid attention to rare-rare sentences more than other types.

They also showed participants a video of a rare group person (a South Asian student) acting in a rare way (being pushy). They then showed a series of word-fill exercises presented by another South Asian person and found that the words were completed to show pushy words.

Experimenters concluded that illusory correlations can be created by a rare group and rare behaviour association.



Experiments One, Two and Three

Aim

- To test if rare-rare combinations of behaviour and group cause people to take more notice (Experiment one)
- To test if rare-rare combinations of behaviour and group cause people to think more deeply about the situation (Experiment two)
- To test if rare-rare combinations of behaviour and group are likely to cause people to store long-term memories (Experiment three)

Method

Participants

194 participants were used over the three experiments. These were all Cornell University students and received extra credit in their Psychology courses for taking part.

Procedure

Participants were presented with 16 sentences in random order. There were 4 sentences taken from each of the following categories:

	Group	Behaviour
4 Sentences	Common	Common
4 Sentences	Common	Rare
4 Sentences	Rare	Common
4 Sentences	Rare	Rare

Example of a common-common sentence:
Jennifer, who was born in New York, drinks coffee.

Example of a common-rare sentence:
Max, who lives in England, works as a clown.

Example of a rare-common sentence:
Charlotte, who comes from Ethiopia, likes to ride a bike.

Example of a rare-rare sentence:
Steven, who lives in a cave, likes to pick flowers.

What happened in Experiment one, two and three is described next but all use a very similar method of testing based on the 16 sentences.

Results

Experiment One: The participants spent more time looking at the rare-rare sentences, suggesting that they considered them in more detail

Experiment Two: The participants thought about the rare-rare sentences more than the other sentences suggesting attributional thinking

Experiment Three: The participants remembered rare-rare sentences much better than the other sentences, suggesting they had been committed to long-term memory

Conclusion

The rare-rare combination means people will spend more time looking at something, considering it and committing it to memory. This supports illusory correlations where we believe that a group has a certain characteristic.

These experiments also show one-shot illusory correlation where we form an opinion (a stereotype) about a minority (rare) group even if we are only exposed to one strange (rare) behaviour.

Experiment 4

Method

Participants

133 (81 Caucasian, 36 East Asian, 9 African American and 7 Hispanic) volunteers were selected from university students. They received extra credit towards their course grades for taking part.

Procedure

The participants watched a video of several students being interviewed by a student film-maker. One of the interviews in the video was with a South Asian female student or a Caucasian female student (the different conditions). The student was very pushy in the video, continually asking the interviewer to let them borrow their camera. Even when the interviewer said no, the student continued to ask using more and more reasons.

Participants were then asked to watch a second video in which a South Asian male or a Caucasian male held up a word with letters missing. Participants were asked to fill in the letters.

Example

The video would show a South Asian male holding the following card:



Participants were shown 20 words with letters missing. 10 of the words could be completed either as pushy or non-pushy words. In the example above, the pushy word would be DEMAND and the non-pushy word would be DEPEND.

Video	Word Completion
Common (Caucasian)	Common (Caucasian)
Common (Caucasian)	Rare (South Asian)
Rare (South Asian)	Common (Caucasian)
Rare (South Asian)	Rare (South Asian)

Results

Participants who saw the South Asian woman in the video and the word completion chose pushy words

Participants in the other conditions did not chose pushy words

Conclusion

People can create illusory correlations based on just one person if the behaviour and the group are both rare. In this experiment, people associated the South Asian female with being pushy and applied it to the South Asian male.

Evaluation

Generalizability

- Very large sample means that generalizability is high
- The mix of nationalities in experiment four raises generalizability
- All students were from an American university and received credit for their participation which lowers generalisability

Reliability

- The different 16 sentence were mixed up when presented to the participants
- External participants checked to make sure that things considered common or rare really were common or rare
- The font size and sentence length were kept as constant as possible
- Some participants were removed from the study when they knew the actors involved

Application to life

- Results could explain how we form stereotypes about minority groups very quickly

Validity

- The videos are not real life and so the results may not be accurate
- The experiment assumes that South Asian people are rare for all the participants

Ethics

- No serious ethical issues are involved

