

The Halo Effect ^[1]

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Nisbett and Wilson' Experiment

The Halo Effect perfectly fits the situation of Hollywood celebrities where people readily assume that since these people are physically attractive, it also follows that they are intelligent, friendly, and display good judgment as well. This also greatly applies to other well-known people such as politicians.

Research Question

Nisbett and Wilson's experiment aimed to address and find an answer to the question regarding people's awareness of the halo effect.

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The Experiment

In this experiment, college students as participants ^[3] were asked to evaluate a psychology instructor as they view him in a videotaped interview. The instructor will be evaluated on several different dimensions.

The students were divided into two groups, and each were shown one of two different interviews with the same instructor who is a native French-speaking Belgian who spoke

English with a fairly noticeable accent.

In one video, the instructor presented himself as someone likeable, respectful of his students' intelligence and motives, flexible in his approach to teaching and enthusiastic about his subject matter. In the other interview, he presented himself in an entirely different way, in an unlikeable way to be specific. He was cold and distrustful toward the students and was quite rigid in his teaching style.

After watching the videos, the subjects were asked to rate the lecturer on physical appearance, mannerisms and his accent. It should be noted that the mannerisms and accent were kept the same in both versions of videos.

Results

After viewing the interview, subjects were asked how much they think they liked the teacher. The subjects will be rating him on an 8-point scale ranging from "like extremely" to dislike extremely."

Subjects were also told that the researchers were interested in knowing "how much their liking for the teacher influenced the ratings they just made. Other subjects were asked to identify how much the characteristics they just rated influenced their liking of the teacher.

Surprisingly, after responding to the questionnaire, the respondents were puzzled about their reactions to the videotapes and to the questionnaire items.

The students had no clue why they gave one lecturer higher ratings. Most said that how much they liked the lecturer from what he said had not affected their evaluation of his individual characteristics at all.

Conclusion

From the results, the subjects were obviously unaware of the halo effect and the nature of the influence of global evaluation on their ratings.

The results also indicate that global evaluations alter evaluations of attributes about which the individual has information fully sufficient to allow for an independent assessment. The subjects were convinced that they made their judgment about the lecturer's physical appearance, mannerisms and accent without considering how likeable he was.

Application

The halo effect has now become a business model; hence it has become well known in the business world. Marketing specialists make use of associations to well known brands or names to make their product appear better. Attaching a popular designer name to a simple pair of jeans incredibly raises its market value.

What's fascinating about the halo effect is that, people may be aware of and understand the particular phenomenon, but they have no idea when it is already happening. Without realizing

it, we naturally make judgments. And then, even when it's pointed to us, we still deny that it is a product of the halo effect phenomenon.

Sources

The Halo Effect: When Your Own Mind is a Mystery [4]

Wikipedia.com: Halo Effect [5]

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