Implicit Learning and Parapsychology: Exploring the boundaries of unconscious

Results:

Experiments investigating covariation detection in a parapsychological task found that participants could utilise (without conscious knowledge) card-size when it covaried with a particular "target", but could not utilise speed-of-card-dealing when it existed as a cue. A surprising finding was that participants in the "random" conditions scored above chance. Further analysis suggested that these results were artefactual, with participants actually utilising the unintentional body-language of the actor in the clips that they were shown. This in itself was an interesting finding. When the actor was removed, no significant findings emerged. No evidence was found that people could utilise facial cues to make personality judgements after having been exposed to a series of "covariations" in which (e.g.) long faces were associated with warm personalities. However, some covariations were more successful than others to a significant degree, suggesting that there are other psychological variables involved when people are asked to make personality decisions based on facial features.

Experiments into implicit sequence learning within a parapsychological context found that success was likely due to utilisation of simple heuristics rather than an implicit understanding of the sequence. When more complex sequences were developed, participants could not use these heuristics. This suggests that implicit learning is actually difficult to elicit under these conditions. Results suggestive of psi-missing were not replicated in a subsequent experiment, and there were no individual differences in performance, although individual differences did play a small part in the way participants' approached the task. There was some indication that "correct" guesses in the implicit learning condition were made significantly faster than incorrect guesses, suggesting that, at an unconscious level, participants had in fact detected the pattern and were responding to it in terms of how fast they made their responses.

Published Work:

Wilson, S., and Hamlin, I. (2007) Implicit Learning in a Card Prediction Task. *European Journal of Parapsychology*, **221**, 3-29

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