

Stanovich Chapter 4:  
Testimonials and Case Study Evidence:  
Placebo Effects and The Amazing Randi

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## Case Studies & Testimonials

Case Studies look very intensely at the detail of a single, or very few individuals.

- Is this good or bad?
- What benefits do case studies provide, if any?

Testimonials are like Case Studies in that they look at isolated events.

## Benefits of Case Studies

Case Studies are not *entirely* bad. They are actually quite useful in the early stages of an investigation into some problem or another.

They act to guide our attention for more serious examination and experimentation.

## The Placebo Effect

“Case Studies and testimonials are virtually worthless as evidence for the evaluation of psychological theories and treatments.”

The Placebo Effect shows the tendency for people to report that any treatment has helped them, regardless of whether it has real therapeutic value.

- Example: arthritic surgery V.S. sham surgery
- Expectations: the more expensive the placebo, the more “effective” it’s use becomes.

## The “Vividness” Problem

The Vividness Effect explains how vivid and dramatic events affect a person's perception.

- People have a tendency to disregard real statistics and data and instead rely on the vividness of personal testimony when making decisions.
- Example: The fact that it is more likely that you would die in a car accident than a plane crash.
  - After 9/11, researchers calculated that 300 more people died in car accidents because they chose to drive instead of fly (Flanagan, 2003).

What other examples of this do we see in everyday life?

## The Amazing Randi: Fighting Fire with Fire

James Randi went around discrediting frauds who claimed to have psychic abilities.

He also demonstrated how easy it was to simply make something up and how that spurred “testimonials” of things that had never really occurred!

## Dangers of Pseudoscience

- “Claims of miracle cures raise false hopes that can cause psychological damage when they are dashed” (Stanovich, p. 69).
- Create false, and dangerous beliefs about science and medicine.
  - The theory that Autism is connected to the early vaccination of children is false, but because children were being diagnosed around the time of their first vaccination, this became the theory.
  - Because of this, immunization rates decreased and more children became ill. Some died.

## Take Home Point

- Case Studies are important in the early stages of research
- Only evidence from controlled observations is sufficient to actually test a claim.
- It is important to recognize when things are not falsifiable.