Ironic Effects of Censorship in Memory

Matthew Kelley, Brittany Goldman, & Jerrica Cerda

Lake Forest College

Abstract

Two experiments explored the generation effect—mnemonic advantage for self-generated information—in the applied setting of lyrical censorship. Participants listened to an original song in which a subset of nouns were either partially or completely censored and then completed a recognition memory test consisting of heard, censored, and distracter items.

Overall recognition accuracy did not differ for censored and heard items, despite the fact that the censored items were never presented. More importantly, when the data were made conditional upon successful generation of the censored item during encoding, the standard generation effect was observed—recognition accuracy was significantly higher for the generated censored items compared to the heard items.

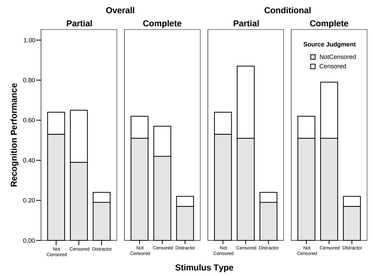
These results suggest that by *omitting certain words from songs, censors might actually make those words more memorable!*

Exp 1: Methods

Participants, Materials & Procedure

- 68 Lake Forest College students heard an original with 15 censored and 15 not censored HF nouns; counterbalanced
- During song presentation, participants indicated which censored items they believed that they generated properly
  - Allowed for internal generation of items, as typically happens when listening to a song
  - Allowed us to examine the *direct* influence generation on retention, data inclusion was made *conditional* upon participant reports of successful item generation during encoding
- All participants informed of memory test
- Partial and Complete censorship manipulations
- 3-alternative forced choice recognition test for item and source memory

Exp 1 Results



Exp 1 Results & Discussion

Overall Recognition & Source Accuracy

- No Generation Effect: (NC = C) > FA

Conditional Recognition & Source Accuracy

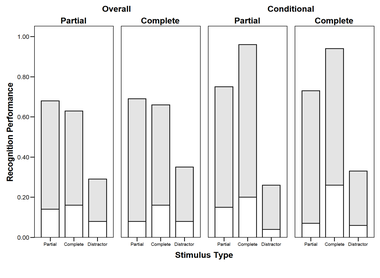
- Generation Effect: generated censored words recognized better than heard words [C > NC > FA]
- Generated more censored items with partially censored words (60%) than completely censored (37%)
- ACSIM measures show source memory did not differ from chance. Bias towards responding 'not censored' to all 'remembered' items

Exp 2: Methods

Participants, Materials & Procedure

- 32 Lake Forest College students heard Exp 1 song
- During song presentation, participants *shadowed* the heard words and attempted to *generate/shadow* the censored items
  - Covert generation allowed us to ensure that participants were generating accurately
- Same test conditions as Exp 1

Exp 2 Results



Exp 2 Results & Discussion

Overall Recognition & Source Accuracy

- No Generation Effect: (NC = C) > FA

Conditional Recognition & Source Accuracy

- Generation Effect: [C > NC > FA]
- Generated more censored items with partially censored words (47%) than completely censored (31%)
- ACSIM measures show source memory did not differ from chance. Bias towards responding 'not censored' to all 'remembered' items

Summary

Demonstrated a standard generation effect within the applied context of lyrical censorship

- In other words, remembered 'non-heard' words 20% better than 'heard' words
- Generation effect emerged in conditional data, both with internal and external generation

Generating censored lyrics is a difficult task

- Partial censorship: 60% and 47% gen rates
- Complete censorship: 37% and 31% gen rates

Shameless Plug for Book

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"The perfect holiday gift for young and old."

- Matthew Kelley (11/15/08)

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