

PREVIEW

ATTENTION ALLOCATION AND THE VARIABILITY OF THE
STEREOTYPE PRIMING EFFECT

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Dedication

To my mother, who has always been a constant source of support and encouragement.

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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Psychology
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
December 2009

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Dr. Stephen L. Crites for taking me on as a graduate student despite my dearth of research experience and for providing me with the guidance needed to complete this project. I would also like to thank Jennifer Taylor, David Herring, Guadalupe Corral, and all the undergraduates in our laboratory- their support and contributions were invaluable.

PREVIEW

Abstract

The stereotype priming effect is assumed to be a rather uniform and robust effect. However, a closer look at the existing literature suggests that the ‘standard’ stereotype priming effect may be more susceptible to variability than originally believed. In the present study, we sought to demonstrate that the stereotype priming effect displays significant variability in strength depending upon the level of attention allocated to the stereotype feature of interest. Participants were assigned to 1 of 3 conditions: a lexical decision task (LDT) condition, a pre-primed LDT condition, and a gender categorization condition. It was predicted that the stereotype priming effect to be strongest in the gender categorization condition, absent in the LDT condition, and intermediate in the pre-primed LDT condition. Results revealed no evidence of priming in the LDT and pre-primed LDT conditions, and strong priming in the gender categorization condition. Implications for the current conceptualization of stereotype priming are discussed.

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PREVIEW

Chapter 1: Introduction

Stereotypes refer to semantic memory structures that reflect associations between social groups and certain attributes, behaviors, appearances, occupations and objects (Blair & Banaji, 1996; Judd & Park, 1993). The activation of these associations can lead to various forms of discrimination, particularly decisions related to instrumental behaviors (e.g., hiring decisions) (Amodio & Devine, 2006), and thus stereotype activation has garnered considerable research attention over the past several decades (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Blair & Banaji, 1996; Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983; Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, Thorn, & Castelli, 1997). The results of this research have led to the conclusion that stereotype activation is a robust phenomenon, observable under numerous conditions (e.g., Bargh, Chaiken, & Trope, 1999; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Many researchers have therefore moved beyond studying ‘standard’ stereotype activation to investigate the conditions in which stereotype activation is malleable (for review, see Blair, 2002). For example, it has been demonstrated that stereotype activation is attenuated following a period of exposure to counter-stereotypic individuals (Blair, Ma, & Lenton, 2001). Examining the malleability of stereotype activation is important to deepen our understanding of stereotyping and how it can influence our behavior. However, a closer look at seminal studies on stereotype activation reveals that even ‘standard’ stereotype activation displays considerable variability. More specifically, what the literature has grouped together as ‘standard’ stereotype activation may belong to different categories of stereotype activation. In the present study therefore, we sought to examine the conditions under which ‘standard’ stereotype activation displays variability.