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Psychology of Stereotyping and Prejudice

**Bicultural Individuals in a Stereotypical World:
The Effects of Negative Stereotypes**

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Previous research proves that individuals have a natural inclination to want to affiliate with a group. Culture, peers, and nationalities influence both the need to affiliate and the groups themselves. While all humans socially categorize themselves, the efficiency of stereotypes can shed negative effects by driving these distinctions into evaluations and prejudice of other groups. Literature has illustrated many ways in which negative stereotypes have affected members of groups, however, there is minimal research on how stereotypes specifically affect bicultural individuals juggling two strong group memberships. By turning on and off their associations with cultures based on their immediate surroundings and activations, bicultural individuals have plasticity in their ingroup associations. This experiment reveals the implicit and explicit associations of bicultural individuals after the prime of negative stereotypes against one culture. Expected results indicate that bicultural individuals identify with the primed stereotyped group. Implications for the results are discussed, as well as potential motivators for the behavior.

Keywords: negative stereotypes, biculturalism, priming, self

THE SELF

Bicultural individuals have been an interesting topic in psychology. Social and cultural psychologists have applied the “traditional” uni-cultural self to bicultural individuals in attempt to define their meanings of the self.

The traditional self is interpreted in many different ways. Tajfel (1978) first defined the self in terms of group membership by coining the term *social identity theory*. This theory stipulates that humans self categorize in order to fit into a social group. This, as expected, leads to social identification and social comparison. When social comparison becomes evaluative, negative stereotypes and prejudice are formed creating the stereotypical society of today's time.

There is also an innate desire for individuality and independence from any given group. *Optimal distinctiveness theory* states that humans want to strike the balance between membership of an ingroup and distinct, individual existence (Brewer 1991). This is the optimal position. Coupling this theory with social identity theory, Stryker (1980) exerts *identity theory* as the combination between distinctiveness and group membership. Humans fulfill specific roles, which are the independent classifications of the self. These independent roles coincide with a structured, categorized world, giving way for a social identity. Even with a strong distinct identity, independence seems to be influenced by cultural norms and expectations.

Research applies these theories to bicultural individuals, struggling to uphold the cultural expectations of two groups. This takes the definition of self through an additional step. Based on social identity theory, the salient environment drives behavior in different group settings. (Burke, Deaux 2010) For the traditional self, group membership can fluctuate in different settings, but there is one guiding cultural value system, irrelevant of the salient environment. Bicultural individuals have two principled cultures, creating the need (and luxury) for the extra ability to

turn on or off cultural roles depending on the surrounding setting. Cultural psychologists call this flexibility *frame switching*. (LaFromboise, Coleman, Gerton 1993). For example, research shows that East Asians typically externally attribute while Westerners internally attribute. For individuals with East Asian parents living in the United States (a Western society), internally and externally attributing based on the immediate environment is a form of frame switching. At home they may be more inclined to externally attribute, whereas internal attributions are more common with Western peers. (LaFromboise, et al. 1993).

Frame switching implies that the two cultures are not blended together, but are actually separate entities in the mind of bicultural individuals. (LaFromboise, et al. 1993) So while bicultural individuals have two guiding cultures, they choose between one or the other in any given situation. With the plethora of research supporting this hypothesis, there is little research pertaining specifically to situations with stereotypes for bicultural individuals.

ACTIVATED NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

Previous research has shown the effects of negative stereotypes on different groups across many situations. Academically and socially, stereotypes have the ability to undermine both performance and self-esteem. Because humans build self-image based on what others believe, it is challenging to maintain a positive self-image with impeding external negativity. Cooley (1902) first referred to this as *the looking-glass self*. This is the human tendency to look at oneself with the influence of

outside evaluations. The looking-glass self is an umbrella theory for the notion that negative stereotypes can affect individuals.

Schmader, Johns, and Forbes (2008) prove through *stereotype threat* that when stigmatized groups are aware of the negative stereotype against them, they attempt to counteract the stereotype. This, in turn, puts an additional load on cognition, steering away the original focus of the task and leading to worse performance. The significant example of priming stereotypes with demographic information on the SAT tests drove this point home. These effects can also take place in other academic and work settings.

It has also been proven that self-esteem can be affected by the threat of negative stereotypes against a stigmatized group. This is based on the notion that self-esteem is determined by the immediate situation and can fluctuate accordingly. (Crocker, Quinn 2000) In a situation with a lingering stereotype, the stereotyped group is vulnerable to decreased self-esteem. The looking-glass self also plays a role as outside perception influences self-perception.

The main gap in this research is exactly how these activated negative stereotypes would affect bicultural individuals who have the flexibility of associating with another culture or group. Unlike individuals with just one culture, bicultural individuals can “dodge” stereotypes by escaping identification with the stigmatized group. The main question this experiment explores is if individuals would identify with the stereotyped group even though self-esteem and performance are in danger.

PRIMING

To assess the association of bicultural individuals, this experiment will look at both their implicit and explicit associations under primes of negative stereotypes of one of their cultures. Priming is a wide used technique in psychologist serving the purpose of activating knowledge that will later influence behavior. Participants in the study will either be primed subliminally or supraliminally, based on Bodenhausen et al. (1994) distinctions of conscious or unconscious priming methods. This will help better understand the mechanisms behind bicultural individuals' identification with groups under stereotype threat.

To keep the priming consistent throughout the study, only bicultural students that are half American and half Israeli will be used in this study. The negative stereotype of Americans being overly polite, superficial and fake will be used as a prime for half of the participants. The other half will be under the prime of the negative stereotype of Israelis. This stereotype is that Israelis are overly aggressive, rude, and blunt. This bicultural dynamic was picked because of the behavioral opposition embedded in the stereotypes. Because the behaviors are exact opposites of each other, the results can be more plausibly linked to the prime as a result of the activated stereotype. Similar to previous research conducted, primes can influence both implicit and explicit behaviors.

Implicitly, go-no-go tests, IAT tests, and response time measures have all conveyed implicit motivations and associations. Explicitly, participants are influenced by the primes manifested in behaviors. Bargh et al. (1996) displayed this

behavioral activation with participants' feelings toward the elderly. Once the participants were primed with the elderly, they either walked slower and quicker depending on if they liked or disliked the elderly. The behavior was an accurate indicator of their evaluations.

The present hypothesis is two fold. Firstly, bicultural individuals will implicitly and explicitly associate more with the activated culture when the negative stereotype is unconsciously presented with the subliminal prime. Secondly, bicultural individuals under conscious prime will still implicitly associate with the activated, stigmatized group, however, they will explicitly associate with the culture not activated in the stereotypes. Because bicultural individuals under conscious prime are aware of the negative stereotype, they will actively distance themselves from the stigmatized group and exploit the plasticity of their biculturalism.

EXPERIMENT

Method

Participants. A total number of 40 bicultural students at Columbia University will participate in the experiment. The students can be undergraduate or graduate, ranging the ages from 18 and up. The bicultural students all have one parent that is Israeli and one parent that is American. Participants will be chosen randomly, but any student who has enrolled in a cultural psychology class will not be able to participate. The participants will not encounter any other participants in the study because the pattern of Israeli-Americans would make the experiment more obvious

to the participants. The participants are also randomly assigned to one of four priming conditions. This is a between-subject design, and a double-blind experiment.

Materials. The priming manipulation is based on the Bodenhausen et al. (1994) impression formation task, which presents stereotype labels on the computer screen at either 30 ms or 20 s depending on the condition. For each condition, three stereotype labels will be flashed on the screen, within the participants' fovea to ensure that they will see the stimuli. For the American negative stereotype, too polite, superficial and fake are the words shown on the screen. For the Israeli negative stereotype, rude, aggressive, and blunt are shown on the screen. Participants will be asked to hit a key on the keyboard when they see the words appear on the screen. Other neutral words will be displayed with these negative words. Words such as lucky, athletic, and natural will be flashed.

Procedure: Participants will take part in the study one at a time, and no participants' time slots will overlap. When the participants arrive at the laboratory, the experimenter will greet them. The experimenter will be the same for every participant to control for any effect the experimenter could potentially have on the study. The participants will be told that the study is about multiculturalism on campus and that the study has nothing to do with individual beliefs about multiculturalism, but rather, is based on posters and demonstrations around campus. The experimenter will give the participants instructions of the study, which will consist of sitting in front of the screen followed by identifying cultural symbols. After the consent form is signed, the participant will be randomly assigned

to one of four conditions in this 2x2 experiment: American subliminal prime, American supraliminal prime, Israeli subliminal prime, or Israeli supraliminal prime. The experimenter will not be aware of which condition the participant is assigned to. In each condition, the participant will enter the assigned room with the computer screen and will be told to press the enter key. The enter key will start the presentation of the priming stimuli. The prime will either be presented for 30 ms, as an unconscious prime of the stereotype, or for 20 s, as a conscious prime of the stereotype. The control words will be displayed for the same corresponding time as the primed words. This is the case for both American and Israeli negative stereotypes. The words will either reflect the American stereotype, too polite, superficial, and fake, or the words will reflect the Israeli stereotype, rude, aggressive, and blunt. The participant will be told to press any key on the keyboard when the stimuli are presented, whether or not they have enough time to process the words.

Dependent Measures: After the presentation of the primed negative stereotypes, there will be a measure of implicit and explicit associations of the bicultural individuals. The implicit association will be tested by response time measure (De La Casa and Lubow 2001). Stimuli of culturally significant objects will be presented to the participants, and the quicker they can identify the culture associated with the symbol, the stronger the activated association is for the participant (Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Martinez 2000). The stimuli will be presented on the computer and the participant will vocalize the associated culture. The computer program will record the lag time between the presentation of the stimulus

and the vocalization. 10 American symbols are presented, 10 Israeli symbols are presented, and 25 other random but culturally significant symbols will also be presented to counterbalance the stimuli. (ie: French flag, The White House, Israeli currency: Figure 1, 2, and 3)



Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

The explicit association will be based on an encounter with a confederate after taking the implicit test. The experimenter will not be the conversationalist in this part to avoid any kind of prior judgments or stereotypes that the participant may have formed of the experimenter in the first part of the study. This could influence and bias the results of this section. The explicit measure of the cultural identification stems from the idea of behavioral priming and activation (Bargh, et al. 1996). This refers to behavior mediated by the prime. The participant is rated during this conversation as either rude and aggressive or phony and fake. Before the conversation starts, the confederate will be standing in the way of the participant, giving the participant an opportunity to say excuse me, sorry, or nothing. Then, the confederate will strike up a conversation. The participant's reaction is recorded. During the conversation, if the participant stays overly friendly and overly polite, despite the confederate's initial intrusion, the participant is

displaying negative American stereotypes. If the participant is being rude, aggressive, or interrupts the confederate, the participant is displaying Israeli negative stereotypes. Their response to the initial encounter is also recorded. If the participant says “excuse me” or “sorry”, he or she is conforming to the cultural expectations of Americans whereas if the participant does not, he or she is conforming to Israeli cultural norms. Self-report is specifically not used as an explicit measure because it is seldom 100 percent reliable, as there is always bias in self-report.

Expected Results

Implicit. To evaluate the results of the implicit time response measure a 2 (stereotype: American or Israeli) X 2 (subliminal or supraliminal) ANOVA will be conducted. The expected results are significant. The exact number and p value is subject to determination from the study. For both the subliminal and supraliminal conditions, the implicit measure of the strongest cultural association for the bicultural individual will be linked to the primed culture. There is a main effect for Israeli stereotype X subliminal presentation.

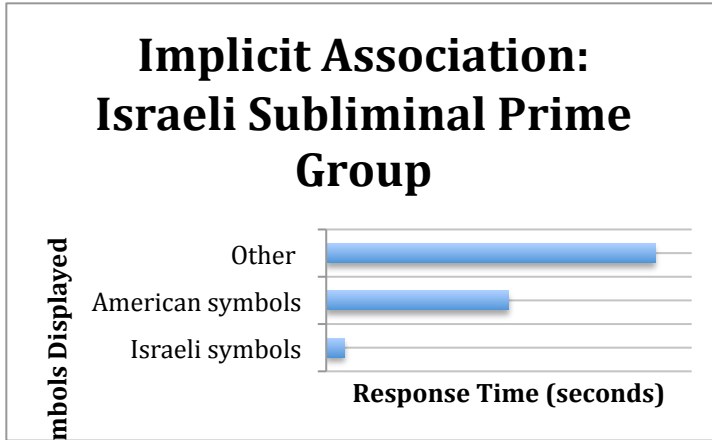


Figure 4

There is also a main effect for American stereotype X subliminal presentation.

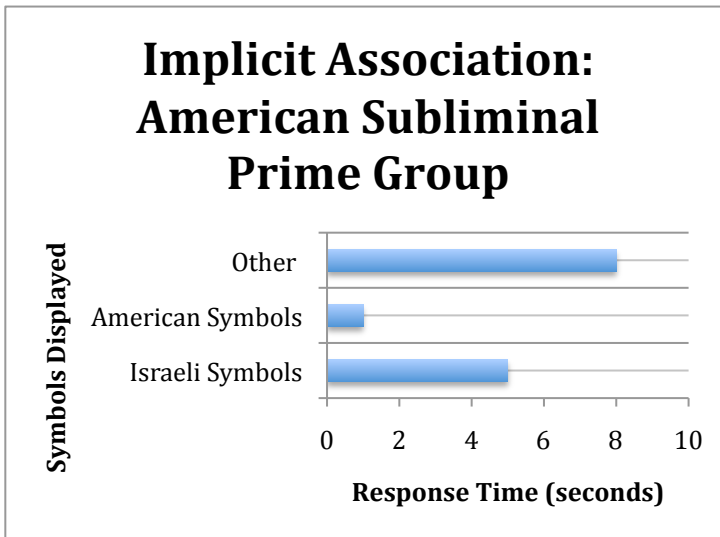


Figure 5

There is also a main effect for Israeli stereotype X supraliminal presentation. In this condition, the significant value is even higher, because the symbols associated with Israel were recalled at even faster rate, while the other culturally significant items

were recalled at a slower rate than when the stimuli were presented subliminally.

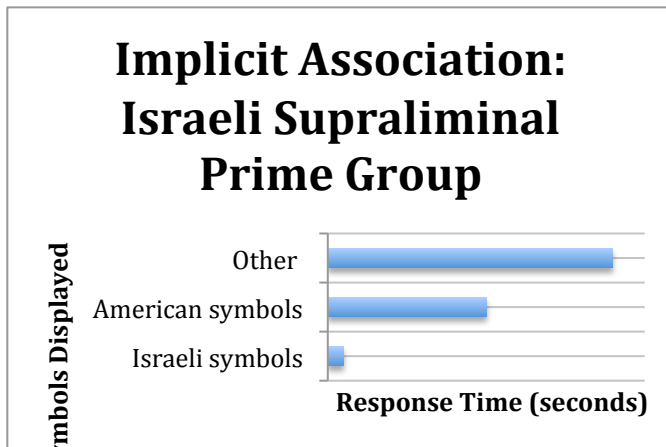


Figure 6

A similar main effect is expected for American Stereotype X supraliminal prime. The symbols associated with America will be remembered at an even quicker rate than in the subliminal condition because of the level of awareness and consciousness. The symbols for the other cultures will be remembered at a slower rate, possibly because of the cognitive space that the consciousness of America is taking up.

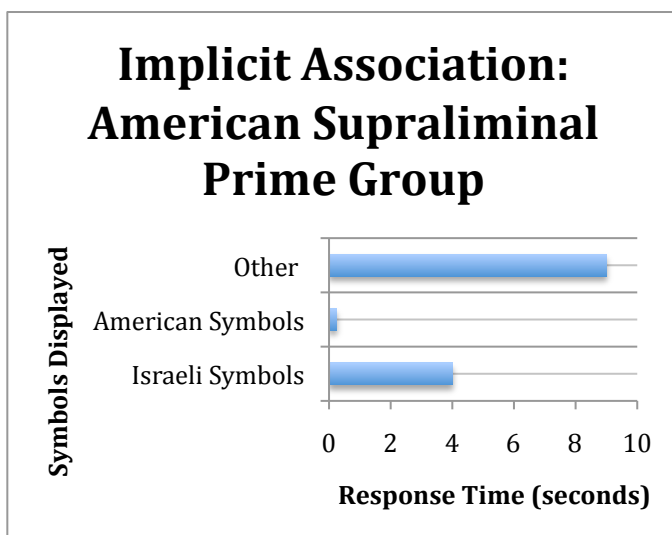


Figure 7

Explicit. To evaluate the results of the explicit measure, two points during the interaction with confederate will be recorded. First, whether or not the participant said any form of “excuse me” to the confederate will be recorded as yes or no. Second, the amount of times the participant shows aggression and over politeness will be recorded. Since the interaction will only be about 8 minutes, any tally above 3 will be considered behaviorally displaying the primed negative stereotype.

A double dissociation is expected for these results. While implicitly, all four conditions will exhibit a stronger association with the primed culture, explicit results will be different for the conscious and unconscious experimental groups. For subliminal prime conditions, explicit measures are expected to show a greater association with the primed culture. However, for supraliminal conditions, explicit measures of the bicultural individuals’ behaviors will show a stronger association with the non-primed culture. This double dissociation displays opposing results for the implicit and explicit measures of the bicultural participants in the conscious priming groups. Motivations for this behavior will be discussed.

Discussion

MOTIVATIONS

There are many explanations that better the understanding of bicultural individuals facing stereotypical situations. Starting with the implicit associations, it is clear that implicit associations are uncontrolled, unconscious, and automatic. (Greenwald 1998) There is little motivation in implicit thoughts. Therefore, cognitive processes can explain expected results. Because the bicultural individuals

are being primed, or triggered, to think about one culture over the other, the association with that primed culture will inevitably be stronger. The response measure task assesses how activated a given piece of information is in one's brain. In this experiment, the bicultural participants are primed to think of one culture, making it more activated and accessible in the brain.

The response time is also expected to be shorter for supraliminal priming conditions than for subliminal priming conditions. This is congruent with the notion that implicit thoughts are a factor of cognitive mechanisms. The longer the prime is displayed, the more activated it is in the brain, and the quicker the response will be for retrieving the information. "Automatic activation of stereotypes should also produce cognitive savings in the impression-formation task, allowing for better performance on the prose-monitoring task." (Bodenhausen, et al. 1994)

There is, however, strong motivation in explicit, controlled, and conscious behaviors. Concepts such as the looking-glass self and social comparison can attest to the fact that humans want to be liked by others and therefore may explicitly display an attitude that is incongruent with implicit attitudes, as IAT tests often prove (Greenwald 1998). The double dissociation that is expected from this experiment verifies this theory. If the bicultural individuals displaying an implicit attitude of higher identification with the stereotyped group consciously attempt to counteract those stereotypes explicitly, there must be a conscious motivation coinciding with the behavior.

The present hypothesis suggests that when bicultural individuals are under stereotype threat, and are consciously aware of it, they will be motivated to

counteract the stereotype and act in the opposite way. In order to boost self-esteem and relate to a group that is not under stereotype threat, bicultural individuals will manifest behavior according to the untargeted culture. “...the self-esteem of the stigmatized is constructed in the situation and depends on both the collective representations, or shared meanings, that people bring with them to the situation and features of the situation that make those collective representations relevant or irrelevant when evaluating the self.” (Crocker 1999) This experiment serves to distinguish bicultural individuals from individuals from just one culture because it highlights the flexibility to make the situation irrelevant to the self if self-esteem is temporarily vulnerable. Participants in this study who are consciously primed with Israeli stereotypes, for example, will display over politeness in order to escape the presented stereotype. The opposite will occur for those primed consciously of American stereotypes. The main motivation here is to be associated with an ingroup that is not stigmatized. As humans with innate desire for group membership, optimal distinctiveness, and positive self-regard, identifying with a stigmatized group can damage self-esteem, even if it is temporary.

This performance correction only applies for when there is minimal cognitive load on the participants. In the present study, the participants are not completing difficult tasks. Therefore, they have the mental capacity to consciously counteract stereotypes and correct for automatic behaviors. (O’Brien, Crandall 2003) It could be argued that if bicultural individuals were under heavy cognitive load and stereotype threat, they may, indeed, fulfill the primed stereotype instead of counteract it. (Schmader, Johns, and Forbes 2008) Further research should be

conducted to test the effects of negative stereotypes on bicultural participants' explicit attitudes and associations with culture.

LIMITATIONS

This design has some limitations that should be considered for future research. One limitation is that only American-Israelis are considered in this design. If more cultures and stereotypes are studied in the future, the mechanisms and motivations behind bicultural individuals will be better understood and increase external validity.

As mentioned above, this experiment uses very simple tasks. There are probably different results for harder tasks, making it more difficult for the bicultural individuals to utilize cultural plasticity under higher cognitive load. In this case, it would be interesting to see the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy on bicultural individuals attempting to counteract a salient stereotype (Brophy 1983).

Furthermore, the study did not take into account self-esteem before or after the experiment. The discussion assumes that self-esteem boost is the main motivation for the double dissociation found in those consciously primed of the negative stereotype. Future studies should give a survey of self-esteem before and after the experiment. If self-esteem changes in any way, motivations can be more accurately examined.

CONCLUSIONS/ IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study is to further understand the definitions of self as it applies to bicultural individuals facing negative stereotypes. As previous research explores, the definition of self is not simple. The definition of the self experiencing different group memberships and norms is even more complex. Previous research also explores stereotypes and prejudice, but has yet to explore the dynamic between bicultural individuals and stereotypes. The implications of this study will help bicultural individuals confront stereotyping more effectively. Based on motivation to lift self-esteem and stay positive, perhaps bicultural individuals can be taught to face these negative experiences appropriately. Although this experiment only touches upon the motivations of bicultural individuals, future research should explore more possibilities and mechanisms helpful to them.

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