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**Suspicion: Assimilation and Contrast Effects of a Primed Social Evaluative Mind-Set**

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*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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Suspicion: Assimilation and contrast effects of a primed social evaluative mind-set

A Thesis Presented To
The Faculty of the Department of Psychology
The College of William & Mary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

By
J. Patrick Boyle
2001
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

J. Patrick Boyle

Approved, April 2001

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ABSTRACT

The present study is an investigation into the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects when priming a suspicious mind-set. The characteristics of the suspicious individual were also examined. Participants were 90 female undergraduate students. Participants were exposed to either a subtle prime, blatant prime, or control condition. A transcript of a social situation was then provided that depicted a particular character in an ambiguous manner. A questionnaire that assessed the participants’ impression of the target individual, a measure of Generalized Communicative Suspicion (GCS), the Big Five Inventory, and the Risk in Intimacy Inventory were administered. Results indicated assimilation and contrast effects in high GCS individuals and correlations between the GCS scale and the RII. This study discusses correction processing models, suspicion and attributional thought, and suspicion in high-risk social situations.
Suspicion: Assimilation and contrast effects of a primed social evaluative mind-set
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The concept of suspicion has been defined in many ways. Suspicion can be generally categorized as a mental state of suspended judgment elicited when information is received. Researchers have expanded this definition in order to effectively operationalize the complex construct. Fein (1996) described suspicion as “a dynamic state in which the individual actively entertains multiple, plausibly rival hypotheses about the motives underlying a behavior” (p. 1165). By his definition, suspicion suggests that the individual perceives that the sender could be communicating misleading information in order to shield the true meaning of the sender’s actions. Specifically, these actions, or ulterior motives, are questioned as a result of suspicion. The presence of suspicion in communication has a variety of effects and outcomes as will be discussed later in this review.

Components of suspicion

Other researchers have further explored the construct such that specific aspects of suspicion can be examined. McCormack and Levine (1990) conceptualized suspicion in terms of three distinct constructs. Generalized Communicative Suspicion (GCS) is explained as a general predisposition toward perceiving communicative information in a suspicious manner. GCS is considered to be an organized structure of beliefs about all communicators’ honesty. As such, GCS can be classified as a cognitive construct and is
differentiated from the two other types of suspicion related constructs, state suspicion and lie-bias, because it is a stable, enduring trait. State suspicion, or situationally aroused suspicion (SAS), is the perception that information provided by specific individuals in a specific environment may be misleading or deceptive. The transitive nature of this construct allows it to be manipulated without any effect on GCS. SAS is typically elicited by the presence of particular contextual cues. “Lie-bias” should be viewed as a cognitive processing bias. The difference between the third construct, “lie-bias”, and the previous two constructs is that lie-bias reflects a judgmental bias toward perceiving all of the information that has been received as having deceptive content, whereas GCS and SAS deal with the possibility of receiving deceptive messages before any such message has been provided. This construct is the conceptual reverse of the “truth-bias” proposed by McCornack and Parks (1986). Truth-bias is the increasing confidence in the ability to detect others’ lies, a bias toward decoding all messages as truthful. In contrast, lie-bias decreases the likelihood that truthful messages will be perceived as such. Essentially, lie-bias is a result of suspicion. That is, once a person becomes suspicious (due to trait suspicion and/or situational cues), he/she will be prone to over-detecting deception. McCornack and Levine (1990) stress that these three constructs are “distinct but not orthogonal” (p. 221). They contend that a particular situation can elicit suspicion (SAS) regarding incoming
messages, and yet the messages may not be cognitively processed with the lie-bias.

Levine and McCormack (1991) examined the relationship between these constructs by developing a measure of GCS and manipulating SAS to study their effects on lie-bias. Their investigation is partially based upon the theory that SAS is a continuous variable that can be experienced at various levels. Previous research has tested SAS as an “all or nothing” phenomena by priming suspicion discretely (either priming or not priming suspicion) (Toris & DePaulo, 1985). In Levine and McCormack’s (1991) study SAS was manipulated by creating three levels (low SAS, moderate SAS, and high SAS). The participants were 107 couples. One member of the couple was selected to play the role of “confederate” (the producer of deceptive messages) and the other played the role of “subject” (the judge of deceptive messages). The confederate filled out a questionnaire consisting of selected items from the Machiavellianism scale. The confederate was then instructed to report his/her true answer on half of the items while being videotaped. The videotape was then presented to the subject. The subjects were assigned to one of the three situationally aroused suspicion (SAS) conditions. In the low SAS condition, subjects were instructed to fill out a questionnaire that included 12 truth/lie judgments (one for each of the confederate’s responses). In the moderate SAS condition, the subjects were instructed to fill out the questionnaire with the understanding that the confederate “may or may not be
telling the truth.” In the high SAS condition, the subjects were instructed to fill out the questionnaire with the understanding that the confederate was “definitely lying on several of the items.” Afterwards, all of the subjects completed the GCS measure. Levine and McComack found that GCS scores adequately predicted the number of lie-judgments such that individuals with higher levels of GCS reported more lie-judgments. This study also demonstrated that varying levels of SAS also had an effect on lie-bias and that the relationship between these two constructs is moderated by GCS. Specifically, individuals in low and moderate SAS conditions made more lie-judgments as GCS increased. However, in high SAS conditions, lie-bias was increased by GCS only to a certain threshold, and was decreased in high levels of GCS. Essentially, SAS and GCS affect lie-bias in a non-linear fashion. These results can be interpreted as evidence that GCS, SAS, and lie-bias are three related but discrete aspects of suspicion.

Suspicion and deception

Research on suspicion has traditionally been explored because of its role in deceptive communication and deception detection. Suspicion is essentially a product of deceptive messages. In the absence of deception, suspiciousness is an unnecessary process. However, there is an abundance of research that indicates that lying is a pervasive aspect of social interactions. Thus, suspicion is an adaptive and integral part of impression formation and decision-making processes when receiving potentially deceptive messages. Whatever deception is labeled, it
must be recognized as a significant component of everyday social interaction. In fact, research has shown that about 25 percent of social interactions involve lies (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996). It was also found that people told anywhere from 0 to 46 lies in any given week. This statistic may be surprising at first glance, but upon further examination deception may not be as uncommon as one may think. The most basic definition of deception is an intentional attempt to mislead someone or give a false impression (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996). A lie can be a slight exaggeration (e.g., inflating the amount of your actual salary to impress a woman) or a blatant falsehood (e.g., telling a woman that you are not married, when you actually are). Deception may occur in order to obtain money, grades, respect, envy, sex or love.

Despite society’s negative view of deception, lying is a common event and a fact of daily life. Lies may be self-serving and/or altruistic (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996). Most lies are self-serving lies (Camden, Motley & Wilson, 1984), but these lies are not necessarily meant to be hurtful to the target. In a study by DePaulo et al. (1996), 25 percent of lies actually benefited another. Deception is quite often used for psychological reasons such as shielding oneself from embarrassment, conflict, or criticism. Frequently lies are about topics such as one’s opinions, feelings, and preferences. In general, deception does not appear to be psychologically traumatic to the deceiver. Lies usually require little planning and do not cause any great degree of emotional distress. In fact, over 70
percent of deceivers said they would lie again in the same situation (DePaulo et al., 1996). Thus it would appear that deception aids social interaction by acting as a tool facilitating social support, emotional regulation, and impression management. Whatever the motivation for lying is, the deceptive message may potentially be recognized when suspicion is present. If suspicion is present, then perceivers are likely to initiate lie-detecting strategies.

Toris and DePaulo (1985) examined various effects of suspiciousness on interpersonal perceptions. Their study examined the effects of suspicion on both individuals in the interaction. One participant played the role of “interviewer” and the other played the role of “applicant” for a hypothetical job. Suspicion was primed in half of the interviewers, and the other half was not primed (naïve). The primed interviewers were not significantly more accurate in detecting deception or in discerning the applicants’ true disposition (introverted or extraverted), which had been presented by the applicant either honestly or dishonestly. However, the primed interviewers viewed the applicants as more deceptive and were less confident in their judgments about the applicants. From the other side of the interaction, the applicants who were interviewed by the suspicious interviewers felt less successful in conveying their intended impressions than those who had been interviewed by naïve interviewers, even though the suspicious interviewers were not more accurate in detecting dishonesty. In addition, the applicants felt that the naïve interviewers liked them more and perceived the naïve interviewers
as less manipulative. Despite the fact that lying is not psychologically traumatic to the deceiver, the perception of deception does appear to have a negative effect on social interactions.

Studies of the interaction of deception and suspicion have frequently examined the perception of the suspicious individual; however actual individual differences between the suspicious and non-suspicious person have yet to be explored. Due to the lack of direct measures of suspicion as a distinct enduring trait, researchers have had difficulty linking suspicion to specific personality traits. The Generalized Communicative Suspicion Scale (Levine & McCormack, 1991) may provide some insight into some of the personality correlates of suspicion. Tentative links have been made between authoritarianism and suspicion (Christie & Geis, 1970). In addition, studies of disordered populations have indicated that suspicion may be related to narcissism and schizophrenia (Bornstein, Scanlon, & Beardslee, 1989), but further research is necessary to examine personality correlates in non-disordered populations. Because of the abundance in deception in social interactions, the effects of suspicion on truth-biases in relationships, interpersonal trust, and perceptions of risk in intimacy are worth investigating.

Pilkington and Richardson (1988) found relationships between perceived risk in intimacy and romantic involvement, self-esteem, assertiveness, sensation-seeking, extraversion, and interpersonal trust. The results of this study indicated
negative correlations between perceptions of risk in intimacy and romantic involvement and interpersonal trust. McComack and Parks (1986) demonstrated a truth-bias that increases as romantic involvement and trust increase. This bias blinds the perceiver to the possibility of potential deception by their partner. As previously mentioned, this truth-bias is the conceptual opposite of Levine and McComack’s (1991) lie-bias (one of the three distinct components of suspicion). Essentially, the lie-bias is magnified by increased levels of perception of risk in intimacy. One of the primary goals of the present study to further investigate the potential relationship between suspicion and perceptions of risk in intimacy. However, in contrast to previous research, this study directly examines the relationship between the factors that affect lie-bias (GCS and SAS) and perceptions of risk in intimacy.

Suspicious mind-set

A mind-set is a set of cognitive orientations with distinct features that facilitate the ability to perform specific tasks (Vallacher & Kaufman, 1996). When an individual becomes involved in a task, relevant cognitive procedures become active and are readily accessible. Fein (1996) suggests that suspicion elicits a mind-set that allows perceivers to process incoming messages differently than the typical, unsuspicious perceiver. This suspicious mind-set could be viewed as in terms of attributional conservatism or attributional sophistication. Attributional conservatism is when individuals increase their threshold for
accepting information as presented to them. This higher threshold causes perceivers to interpret behavior as inconclusive or lacking sufficient evidence for making a judgment. The perception of ambiguous behavior may result in an increase in an individual’s attention to potential ulterior motives. Attributional sophistication triggered by suspicion can be characterized by an increase in a perceiver’s focus on questioning “why” a person acted in a certain way. When these questions are attended to, various hypotheses are generated for explaining the person’s behavior. In essence, the suspicious mind-set facilitates the ability to activate complex attributional thinking.

Research on attributional thinking and suspicion suggests that suspicion affects the way individuals make dispositional inferences about others’ behaviors. Massive amounts of psychological literature (e.g., Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Jones, 1979; Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977) however, demonstrate that perceivers almost always base their impression of others on their actions rather than taking situational factors into account. The tendency for perceivers to make dispositional attributions even when the situation provides an adequate explanation for the behavior is called the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) or the correspondence bias (Gilbert and Jones, 1986). Fein (1996) suggests that suspicion may trigger sophisticated attributional thinking that may lead the perceiver to avoid the correspondence bias. One of the most influential effects of suspicion is that it prevents the perceiver from taking others’ actions and
messages at face value. Because the suspicious perceiver is actively considering many hypotheses about the motives of another individual, judgment is suspended until more information is gathered. Suspicion makes one hesitant to draw inferences that correspond to a person’s behavior. Suspicious individuals may acknowledge that a person’s actions are important; however, they recognize these actions as ambiguous. Therefore, the suspicious perceiver is fundamentally different than the naïve perceiver who consistently makes the fundamental attribution error.

Fein, Hilton, and Miller (1990) conducted a study in which they presented participants with a written argument that was either promoting or opposing a proposition that would make all student athletes who do not meet specific academic requirements ineligible for their freshman year. Half of the participants were told that the authors had no choice in selecting their position (no-choice condition), whereas the other half was told that the author may have selected his/her position in order to ingratiate him/herself with a superior (ulterior motives condition). The results indicated that when the participants suspected the possibility of ulterior motives behind a behavior, they made significantly less correspondent inferences. In addition, a measure of attributional complexity demonstrated that those participants in the ulterior-motives condition generated significantly more plausible hypotheses for explaining the author’s behavior. This evidence suggests that the perception of ulterior motives initiates active,
sophisticated attributional processes. This research suggests that entertaining the idea of many different hypotheses may be the remedy to the correspondence bias.

**Impression formation**

When forming an impression of a person in the real world, it is unlikely that this impression is based upon trait information (Srull & Wyer, 1980). In most cases, the impression is formed by observing the behavior of the individual. Once these behaviors have been interpreted, they can be assigned to a personality trait category. These categories are assigned by comparing the individual’s behaviors with previously observed behaviors that have been associated with that trait. For example, if a new student is observed speeding around the parking lot, then this student may be assigned the trait “reckless,” because of the association between speeding and recklessness. However, in previous studies of impression formation (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977) it has been demonstrated that prior activation, or priming, of trait terms may increase the accessibility of a trait category and influence the impression.

Research has demonstrated that priming trait categories influences impression formation by inducing either assimilation or contrast effects. An assimilation effect occurs when there is a positive relationship between the value placed on the target stimulus (e.g., the impression of the person) and the value placed on the contextual stimulus (e.g., the primed trait) (Martin, 1986). A contrast effect occurs when there is a negative relationship between the value that
is placed on the target stimulus and the value that is placed on the contextual stimulus. For example, if an individual is primed by activating the trait category “anxious” while forming an impression and the resulting impression of the target is anxious, then an assimilation effect has occurred. If the target is viewed as “calm” (not anxious), however, a contrast effect has occurred.

There are many studies that examine the causes of assimilation and contrast effects. For example, Martin (1986) demonstrated that when a priming task was interrupted an assimilation effect was observed in the following impression, whereas the participants who were allowed to complete the priming task formed impressions that contrasted the primed concepts. Martin suggested that the interrupted participants were unable to prevent the primed concept from interfering with the identification of an alternative concept. Simply put, the inability to stop thinking about the prime kept the person from achieving cognitive reset.

Another factor that appears to be involved in the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects is cognitive capacity. Gilbert, Pelham, and Krull (1988) studied the process of making dispositional inferences under cognitive constraints. This study demonstrated that under natural conditions, dispositional inferences are made virtually automatically. Correction for these inferences is a more controlled process. However, the presence of a distracter task causes more cognitive effort to be expended and correction processes to be suspended. Thus, a
correction process (yielding a contrast effect) will not occur when cognitive capacity is filled. Instead, the dispositional inference will be made without correction and an assimilation effect will occur.

Lombardi, Higgins, and Bargh (1987) suggest that consciousness of the priming event will also determine the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects. They propose that conscious processing allows for flexibility in the use of information presented to the individual, whereas unconscious processing occurs automatically and has virtually no flexibility. The results of this study suggest that participants who are aware of the prime have the ability to use this flexible strategy when processing information. It must be noted that although unconscious processes will result in assimilation, both assimilation and contrast effects may occur in the presence of a conscious prime. For example, conscious primes may yield different effects depending on the magnitude of subtlety of the prime (subtle vs. blatant). In a study by Skowronski, Carlston, and Isham (1991), the experimenters manipulated the extremity of the primed concepts in a priming task. Results demonstrated that when participants were exposed to a subtle prime, assimilation effects were found, whereas when participants were exposed to a blatant prime a contrast effect occurred.

Two models have been developed to explain the results of these impression formation priming experiments. According to the set/reset model (Martin, 1986), when individuals are attempting to form an impression their goal
is to create an unbiased, genuine view of the target person. If a bias from an external prime is perceived, then this bias must be partialled out in order create the desired genuine impression. The perceived inappropriate reactions are removed. The removal of this bias is called resetting. Martin suggests that this leads to a contrast effect. The removal of the contextually induced reaction may accidentally remove aspects of a true reaction, leaving only the aspects opposite that of the contextual stimulus (i.e., prime), thus the contrast effect (See Figure 1). For example, if I am attempting to form an impression of a new student then my initial impression will be ambiguous (equal numbers of good and bad features) until another student tells me that she thinks the new student is arrogant (negative contextual stimulus introduced). In order for me to form a genuine impression of the new student it is now necessary for me to partial out all of the bias caused by the negative contextual stimulus (resetting). Unfortunately, I may not be able to do this without removing some of the negative aspects of my true reaction. In this case, my impression of the new student is now likely to be favorable (not arrogant, in contrast to the negative contextual stimulus). However, if the contextual stimulus can be introduced without being recognized then the stimulus will have an additive effect to the true impression and will be assimilated. This effect has been demonstrated by priming constructs subtly (Stapel, Martin, & Schwarz, 1998) and subconsciously (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982).
The flexible processing model (Lombardi et al., 1987) is the second model that has been proposed to explain the results of impression formation priming studies. This model is supported by research in which participants who recalled the priming stimuli demonstrated contrast effects and participants who failed to recall the stimuli assimilated the prime when forming impressions. The developers of this model suggest that "the function of consciousness of the priming events may be to enable subjects to adopt flexible strategies in processing subsequent information relevant to those primed concepts" (Lombardi et al., p. 426). Higgins (1989) elaborated on this statement by explaining that describing people in terms of possessing a certain trait may imply that this individual displays that trait more that the typical person. If this description is subsequently remembered when attempting to form an impression of this individual, then the description serves as an extreme reference point. When judging the person's behavior, this extreme exemplar may produce an impression in contrast to the initial description. Essentially, stimuli primed without conscious awareness are inevitably assimilated. However, conscious recognition allows flexible strategies to be used that could potentially result in either assimilation or contrast effects. The set/reset model and the flexible processing model both offer valid theories accounting for the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects. It is a necessity that more research is done that directly examines the outcomes expected by these two models.
The present study examines assimilation and contrast effects when priming the suspicious mind-set. This research can be distinguished from previous priming experiments by the nature of the prime. Many investigations have investigated the priming of behavior and the priming of trait information to increase category accessibility. The purpose of this study is to prime a socially relevant mind-set: suspiciousness in this case. In many situations it is adaptive to adopt a particular frame of mind. Current social environments make it extremely important to protect oneself from deception, particularly involving sexual relationships, due to the AIDS epidemic and spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Thus, in a social atmosphere, it becomes vital that individuals proceed with a certain degree of caution when engaging in a sexual encounter. Those individuals who demonstrate a moderate level of suspicion may have an advantage in such situations by understanding that the targets of their social perceptions occasionally act in ways that are deceptive. This suspicious mindset causes people to hesitate to take behavior at face value and entertain alternative explanations for this behavior (Fein, 1996; Hilton, Fein, & Miller, 1993). Therefore, studying the inducement of suspiciousness may provide important insight into how to view individuals' actions in a social environment.

Only female participants were used in the current study because of the context of the social situation. Research suggests that males are more likely to alter their self-presentation when initiating a relationship than women (Rowatt,
Cunningham, & Druen, 1998). In addition, the evolutionary perspective suggests that males are motivated to initiate more sexual relationships and will attempt to fertilize as many females as possible, whereas females must invest their reproductive opportunities wisely and need to be careful in partner selection (Buss, 1994). In other words, men will have sex as often as possible and are likely to use deceptive strategies. This indicates that the female population is targeted for deception more frequently and is more likely to be at risk in this situation.

The specific goals of this study are to investigate assimilation and contrast effects when priming this mind-set, examine the role of generalized communicative suspicion in making social judgments, and identify some of the personality correlates of GCS which have been lacking in previous research. This research tests three basic hypotheses. First, subtle priming of suspicion is expected to yield an assimilation effect, whereas blatant priming is expected to result in a contrast effect. Individuals exposed to the subtle prime will display greater suspiciousness, whereas individuals exposed to the blatant prime will show less suspicion. The results are predicted due to the different correction processes employed in the removal of perceived bias. Second, levels of GCS will moderate the effect of the prime such that assimilation and contrast effects are expected to be increased in individuals with low levels of GCS; low level GCS participants are expected to demonstrate assimilation and contrast effects of a
greater magnitude than high level GCS participants. These results are predicted because of an interaction between GCS and SAS. Finally, trait suspicion (GCS) is expected to positively correlate with the constructs of neuroticism and perception of risk in intimacy and negatively correlate with openness and agreeableness.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 90 female undergraduates enrolled in introductory level psychology courses at the College of William & Mary. All of the participants received course credit for their participation.

Materials

The materials used in this study included three laminated sheets of paper that were used as stimuli for the control and subtle prime condition. These stimuli were designed to resemble the Stroop test (Stroop, 1935). The three sheets of paper are provided in Appendix A. In addition to the sheets, a word generation task was created in which participants were given five sheets of paper with one trait word at the top of each sheet. This word generation task is provided in Appendix B.

A transcript of a hypothetical social situation was created. This transcript was based loosely on information gathered from a focus group that consisted of
five undergraduates. The hypothetical situation took place in a bar setting; one character (Seth) is introduced to another character (Sara) by mutual friends. Seth begins to show interest in Sara in a way that was designed to be somewhat ambiguous, leading to the possibility of arousing Sara’s suspicion. This transcript is provided in Appendix C.

Various scales were employed in order to measure individual suspicion and other specific constructs. Among these measures was the Individual Suspicion Scale; which was designed for this study. Several items were intended to examine the participants’ level of suspiciousness (e.g., “Sara should be suspicious of Seth” and “Seth is lying about himself in order to have sex with Sara.”) Other items were intended to assess participants’ perceptions of Seth’s character in the transcript (e.g., “Seth is a considerate person” and “Seth is a trustworthy person.”), and other items were intended to examine perceptions of Seth’s past (e.g., “Seth has probably had many romantic/sexual partners” and “Seth has probably been unfaithful to previous partners.”) In addition to the Individual Suspicion Questionnaire, the Generalized Communicative Suspicion Scale (Levine & McCormack, 1991), the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), and the Risk in Intimacy Inventory (Pilkington & Richardson, 1988) were administered. These questionnaires are included in Appendix D.
Procedure

A verbatim script was recited discussing the format of the study. The participant was informed that she would be participating in two unrelated studies. The first study would be a cognitive processing study. The experimenter asked the participant to complete an informed consent form. Participants were randomly assigned into one of three conditions (no prime (control), subtle prime, blatant prime). Participants in the control group completed a variation of a Stroop task in which they recited the list of color words presented in different color inks. The Stroop variation (used in both the control and subtle prime conditions) had various color words (e.g. “blue”, “red”) printed in different color inks. The participants then performed a task in which they were presented with a stimulus consisting of neutral words and asked to recite these words in order. The second stimulus (used in the control condition only) had various neutral words printed in different color inks. Participants in the subtle prime condition completed the variation of the Stroop task. Then the participants performed a task that presented them with a stimulus consisting of five trait-priming words. This third stimulus (used in the subtle prime condition only) had five priming words ("independent", "creative", "immature", "logical" and "suspicious") printed in different color inks. The participants were asked to recite the priming words in the order that they were presented.
Participants in the blatant prime condition were given the word-generation task that included the same five trait words as the blatant prime task. The word generation task that was created included five sheets of paper with one trait word at the top of each sheet (the same priming words from third stimulus: “independent”, “logical”, etc.). They were asked to generate as many words as possible that are similar to, or synonymous with, the given trait word in a given amount of time (two minutes per priming word). The final trait word that they were asked to generate words for was “suspicious”. Upon completion of the first task the participants were given a bogus debriefing.

At this time, the experimenter began the second task. A second verbatim script was read. The second study was ostensibly a social evaluation study. The participants in all three conditions were provided with the transcript based loosely upon a focus group session. The situation included three males and three females in a social situation. One of the males demonstrated interest in pursuing a relationship with one of the females in an ambiguous manner that suggested deception. After reading the transcript, the participants were given a packet of questionnaires including the Individual Suspicion Scale and the General Communicative Suspicion Scale (Levine & McCormack, 1991). Participants’ Big Five Inventory and Risk in Intimacy Inventory scores were obtained from a mass testing database. When the participants had completed the questionnaires they were debriefed and thanked for partaking in the study.
Results

Three subscales were extracted from the Individual Suspicion Questionnaire based on item content. One subset of items assessed the participants' perception of ulterior motives for Seth's behavior (e.g., lying to have sex with Sara). A principal components factor analysis of these items yielded one factor accounting for 56 percent of the variance (see Table 1 for factor loadings.) Responses to these items were summed to produce an overall score (item 14 was reversed). Higher scores on this "Deceit Perception" subscale indicate a high level of deception perceived by the participant. A second subset of items assessed the respondents' perception of Seth's personal qualities (e.g., likable, charming, considerate). A principal components factor analysis of these items yielded one factor accounting for 68 percent of the variance (see Table 1 for factor loadings.) Responses to these items were summed to produce an overall score. Higher scores on this "Character Impression" subscale indicate a positive, favorable impression of Seth. A third subset of items assessed the participants' beliefs that Seth has had many sexual partners and has been unfaithful to previous partners. A principal components factor analysis of these items yielded one factor accounting for 83 percent of the variance (see Table 1 for factor loadings.) Responses to these items were summed to produce an overall score. Higher scores on this "Commitment Level" subscale indicate a perception that Seth displays low levels of commitment.
A median split of the GCS scores at 35 was performed to divide the participants into categories of high and low levels of GCS. Descriptive statistics for GCS scores, Deceit Perception scores, Character Impression scores, and Commitment level scores for each of the prime conditions are displayed in Table 2, as are the mean scores for the Risk in Intimacy Inventory and the Big Five Inventory on Table 3.

Deceit Perception was analyzed using a 3 (Type of Prime) x 2 (Level of Generalized Communicative Suspicion) analysis of variance. This analysis yielded a marginally significant interaction, $F(2, 47) = 2.70, p < .08$. Upon examination of these results another analysis of variance of Deceit Perception was computed with only individuals with high levels of Generalized Communicative Suspicion (GCS). These results indicated a marginally significant effect of Type of Prime on Deceit Perception, $F(2, 21) = 2.62, p < .10$. As shown in Table 4, levels of Deceit Perception were opposite of the hypothesized direction. Participants with high levels of GCS who were exposed to the blatant prime perceived higher levels of deception than those who were exposed to the subtle prime. Participants with low levels of GCS did not significantly differ in levels of Deceit Perception for subtle and blatant prime conditions.

Character Impression was analyzed using a 3 (Type of Prime) x 2 (Level of Generalized Communicative Suspicion) analysis of variance. This analysis yielded a marginally significant interaction, $F(2, 47) = 3.03, p < .06$. An analysis
of variance was computed with only individuals with high levels of GCS. With high-level GCS participants, the effect of Type of Prime on Character Impression was marginally significant, $F(2, 21) = 2.57, p < .10$. Table 4 reports the mean scores for Character Impression in all three Type of Prime conditions. Participants with high levels of GCS that were exposed to the blatant prime formed a less positive impression of Seth than those who were exposed to the subtle prime. Participants with low levels of GCS did not report significantly different levels of Character Impression for subtle and blatant prime conditions.

There was no significant effect of Level of GCS or Type of Prime on Commitment Level. However, Commitment Level was correlated with other measures of trait (GCS) and state (Deceit Perception and Character Impression) suspiciousness. Correlations for the total sample for trait and state suspicion are reported in Table 5. See Tables 6 (subtle prime), 7 (blatant prime), and 8 (control group) for correlations in each individual prime condition.

Item 29 of the IQS assessed the participants' ultimate decision as to whether Seth and Sara should initiate a relationship. High values indicated that they should become involved and low values indicated that they should not. This decision was significantly correlated with Deceit Perception, $r = -.58, p < .01$, Commitment Level, $r = -.56, p < .01$, and Character Impression, $r = .53, p < .01$. However, this relationship initiation decision was not affected by the type of prime or GCS level.
Generalized communicative suspicion was found to positively correlate with perceptions of risk in intimacy, $r (55) = .43, p < .01$. In addition, perceptions of risk in intimacy was significantly correlated with the Big Five personality factors of extraversion, $r (55) = -.30, p < .05$; agreeableness, $r (55) = -.43, p < .01$; conscientiousness, $r (55) = -.30, p < .05$; and openness, $r (55) = -.31, p < .05$. However, GCS was not significantly correlated with any of the Big Five personality measures. Scores on the three subscales extracted from the IQS (Deceit Perception, Character Impression, and Commitment Level) were not significantly correlated with any of the Big Five measures.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that subtle and blatant primes of suspicion affect the perception of deceit and the formation of character impressions in individuals with high levels of Generalized Communicative Suspicion (GCS). However, the data suggest that the effect was contrary to the hypothesis. Participants exposed to the blatant prime perceived more deception and generated a less favorable impression of the target character than the participants exposed to the subtle prime. These results are consistent with an assimilation effect for the blatant prime and a contrast effect for the subtle prime. These effects were only present in the high GCS participants. Assimilation and contrast did not occur in low GCS individuals, demonstrating a simple effect for
prime condition in high GCS individuals. These findings indicate that the level of GCS moderates assimilation and contrast effects.

These results raise the question of which model is applicable to this study: the set/reset model (Martin, 1986) or the flexible processing model (Lombardi et al., 1987). The proposed hypothesis that a subtle prime would yield assimilation effects and a blatant prime would yield contrast effects was based upon the set/reset model. The present study investigated this model because clearly it defines the conditions under which assimilation and contrast should take place. The model suggests that when an observation is made, there will be an initial reaction. If this reaction is deemed appropriate (non-biasing), then the reaction will be assimilated into the impression formation process. In contrast, if the reaction is perceived as biasing, then cognitive effort is exerted and the bias will be partialed out resulting in a contrast effect. If cognitive effort is not exerted, then the reaction will be assimilated. Another reason this model was selected for the study is because the set/reset model focuses on priming stimuli within the threshold of consciousness, which was the goal of the priming task. Upon examination of the findings of the present study, the unexpected results may be resolved by the flexible processing model. Lombardi et al. (1987) explained that "without consciousness of the priming events, subsequent stimuli are inevitably assimilated to the primed construct" (p. 426). However, when the individual is aware of the prime, it is possible for either assimilation or contrast effects to
occur. Lombardi et al. (1987) were very clear that there might be “other as yet unidentified factors determining which will occur” (p. 422).

One factor that has been identified in the determination of assimilation or contrast occurrence is the effect of task interruption. In previous research (Martin, 1986), participants have been given a priming task that was either interrupted or completed. Those individuals who were permitted to complete the task formed impressions that contrasted the primed concept, whereas those who were interrupted formed impressions that assimilated the primed concepts. Martin (1986) suggested that interruption caused the participants to continue to think about the prime, which prevented them from identifying a contrasting concept. Expenditure of cognitive effort continued (which makes complex corrections difficult). Therefore, an assimilation effect occurred. Those participants who completed the task did not ruminate about the primed concept, freed cognitive capacity, and corrected with a contrasting concept.

In the current study, the blatant prime involved giving the participants two minutes to generate as many words that were similar to, or synonymous with, the prime word. When the two minutes had passed the participants were instructed to discontinue the task despite the fact that they were still generating words. The discontinuation of this task may have served as an interruption, which has been demonstrated to yield assimilation effects (Martin, 1986). This is a possible explanation for the increased levels of Deceit Perception and less positive
Character Impressions for participants in the blatant prime condition. In contrast, the subtle prime was clearly an uninterrupted task, potentially explaining the presence of contrast effects.

Some potential limitations of the present study include omissions in the method. After administering the questionnaires, an investigation into the participants' awareness of the primed concept may have provided more insight into the role of prime consciousness on assimilation and contrast effects. It may have been helpful to prolong exposure of the prime in order to obtain more pronounced effects. Finally, because of the lack of correlates to generalized communicative suspicion (trait suspicion), more specific personality measures could have been administered to get a better character profile of the suspicious individual.

Future research should include some of the previously mentioned omissions of the present study. In addition, the current research raises the issue of why these assimilation and contrast effects were demonstrated only in individuals with high levels of GCS. These suspicious people may have a lower threshold for triggering a suspicious mind-set. If this is the case, then these individuals may have an advantage in avoiding deceit in social situations (e.g., sexual/romantic relationships). After all, they appear to be able to engage in complex thought that allows them to entertain multiple theories explaining a person's behavior, such as underlying motives. However, there may be negative aspects of suspiciousness as
well (e.g., lower relationship satisfaction, general distrust), and these should be examined.

Individuals with low GCS did not respond to the primes. One explanation for this is that low GCS people did were not affected by the suspicion primes due to their natural predisposition towards non-suspiciousness. They may have perceived suspiciousness as an irrelevant and inapplicable in this situation. If this was the case, Higgins et al. (1977) suggest that the primes will have no effect. Alternatively, suspicion primes will not over-ride chronic (non-suspicious) mind-sets that may be present in low GCS individuals (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988).

The exposure to subtle and blatant primes did not affect the perceived level of Seth’s commitment to relationships. This may have occurred because Seth’s perceived level of commitment was based upon past occurrences of infidelity and sexual encounters. Responses may have been based on the current transcript, in which Seth claims to value “loyalty” very much. Participants may have responded to the items of the Level of Commitment factor in an objective way, drawing on information directly from the transcript rather than forming their own opinion. If the items were answered objectively, rather than subjectively, the prime should not have any effect on this factor, as was the case.

Generalized communicative suspicion was positively correlated with perceptions of risk in intimacy. Individuals with a greater predisposition to
suspicion tended to perceive more risk in close relationships. Perceptions of risk in intimacy negatively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. However, GCS was not correlated with any of these personality factors.

It is likely that there are other correlates with GCS that are important for understanding the behavior of the suspicious person, such as attachment style and aggression. Research in this direction may provide insight into the development of suspiciousness and how the negative aspects may be prevented. Domestic violence as a result of perceived partner infidelity, relationship satisfaction due to general distrust, and criminal behavior may all have direct links to suspiciousness. Previous research (Bornstein, Scanlon, & Beardslee, 1989) has proposed correlations between suspicion, paranoia, hysteria, and certain defense mechanisms. It may be worthwhile to examine the relationship between suspiciousness and various psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia and depression. This research may provide clinicians with potentially useful information for developing new therapeutic methods.

This research can serve as a starting point in a reevaluation of the set/reset model (Martin, 1986) and the flexible processing model (Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987). Perhaps a combination of these models would provide a more comprehensive theory of correction processes and the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects. These two models are not entirely distinct. There are
similarities between the set/reset model and the flexible processing model. The origins of these models lie in research that examines the role of category accessibility and applicability in impression formation (Higgins et al., 1977). Along with these similarities there are significant differences between the models (Martin & Achee, 1992). The set/reset model proposes that primed concepts are judged based upon their appropriateness in order to partial out inappropriate bias. The flexible processing model implies that contrast occurs only when an individual is consciously aware of the priming stimulus and that stimulus causes a comparison to an extreme exemplar. The set/reset model is supported by research that demonstrates that increased similarity between the primed concept and the target yields greater contrast (e.g., Martin, 1986), whereas the flexible processing model holds that more extreme differences between the prime and the target causes greater contrast. The set/reset model explains the effects of task interruption and the exertion of cognitive effort on assimilation and contrast effects. Unfortunately, it fails to account for priming stimuli below the threshold of recognition. The flexible processing model stresses the role of awareness in the occurrence of assimilation and contrast effects. However, it suggests that contrast effects will only occur when the participant is aware of the prime. A comprehensive model extending the set/reset model to include the role of awareness could be useful in the design of future experiments. One direction for research that integrates the two models might test the hypothesis that assimilation
and contrast effects vary on a continuum of levels of awareness. A study that compares participants primed with a blatant stimulus, a subtle stimulus, and a sub-threshold of recognition stimulus may provide insight into when assimilation and contrast effects occur along with effect size and direction.

Lombardi et al. (1987) suggest that there are factors that determine whether assimilation or contrast effects occur when the individual is conscious of the primed concept that have not yet been identified. Further research should examine the role of prime relevance and situational constraints on assimilation and contrast effects. Higgins et al. (1977) demonstrated that exposing a participant to trait terms (priming words) will only affect subsequent impression formation when the prime is applicable to the target individual. However, it is unclear as to whether or not the prime must be relevant or applicable to the specific situation for it to have an effect. Priming suspicion may not be effective when the situation presented has little potential for arousing suspiciousness. For example, when interacting with trusted family members or romantic partners, attempting to elicit suspiciousness may have no effect because it is perceived as inapplicable in this context.

The suspicious mind-set can serve as a protective mechanism in situations that put an individual at risk. Some of these high-risk situations involve financial matters (e.g., buying a used car), romantic relationships (e.g., partner infidelity), and in contemporary society, health risks (e.g., HIV/safe sex practices).
Suspicious individuals may be less likely to fall prey to these dangers. The current research examined suspiciousness in the context of relationships. Only female participants were used due to the context of the social interaction. Because females are more likely to be the target of deception in the initiation of a sexual relationship, the transcript assigned the role of potential deceiver to the male (Seth) and the role of the potential target to the female (Sara). Although future research might benefit from examining gender effects, it is unlikely that cognitive correction processes are different in males and females.

Triggering the sophisticated attributional thinking that is associated with the suspicious mind-set could be one of the most effective methods of preventing unsafe sex. When initiating a sexual encounter, it is not likely that the individuals have fully examined the situation. By triggering the complex thought processes of suspicion, a range of potentially dangerous underlying motives may be identified and precautions that may prevent aversive outcomes may be employed. For example, if Sara and Seth, the characters in the transcript, were about to initiate a sexual encounter later that evening, suspiciousness could protect Sara’s emotional and physical health in this high-risk situation. A suspicious Sara would identify all of the possible motives for Seth’s behavior. Seth may be acting in this way because he has a genuine interest in Sara, he is interested in becoming romantically involved with Sara, or he just wants to have sex with Sara. Recognizing the true motives for Seth’s behavior may protect Sara from
misunderstanding the nature of their relationship, therefore preventing emotional
distress. Her suspicious mind-set would prevent her from taking all of Seth’s
statements at face value (e.g., “I would always use a condom,” “I know I would
never disrespect my girl...by cheating on her.”) This could influence Sara’s
decision to engage in protected sex, therefore reducing the likelihood of
contracting a sexually transmitted disease such as AIDS. Unfortunately, the
suspicious mind-set is not always active in these situations. If this were the case,
then Sara could be putting both her physical and emotional health at risk by not
identifying Seth’s potential underlying motives. Teaching people how to use this
sophisticated attributional thinking in high-risk situations could be one of the
most effective methods of promoting safe sex.

Given the broad range of fields (e.g. suspicion, deception, priming,
impression formation, and correction processes) addressed by this study, it
appears that future researchers should continue to conduct more integrated
investigations in order to understand the influence of suspicion on individuals and
society.
References


Table 1

**Factor Loadings for ISQ Subscales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deceit Perception</td>
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<td>ISQ2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISQ3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISQ6</td>
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Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for GCS Scores and ISQ Subscales for the Prime Conditions

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Blatant Prime</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Character Impression</td>
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<td>9.84</td>
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<td>31.17</td>
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<td>Commitment Level</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>12.53</td>
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Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for BFI and RII Scores for the Prime Conditions

<table>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>BFI Extraversion</td>
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<tr>
<td>BFI Agreeableness</td>
<td>32.00</td>
<td>5.44</td>
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<td>BFI Conscientiousness</td>
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Table 4

Mean Ratings of Deceit Perception and Character Impression by Level of Generalized Communicative Suspicion and Type of Prime

<table>
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<th>Type of Prime</th>
<th>Deceit Perception</th>
<th>Character Impression</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low GCS</td>
<td>High GCS</td>
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<td>Subtle</td>
<td>36.38&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (8.71)</td>
<td>34.00&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (6.32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blatant</td>
<td>37.81&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (9.00)</td>
<td>40.50&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (4.00)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>37.73&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (5.33)</td>
<td>37.24&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt; (9.28)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Different subscripts within columns indicate significantly different means.
Correlations between Generalized Communicative Suspicion and IOS Subscales of the Total Sample

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. GCS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Deceit Perception</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Character Impression</td>
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<td>-.45*</td>
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<td>4. Commitment Level</td>
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Note. An asterisk indicates that $p < .01$

N = 88
Table 6

Correlations between Generalized Communicative Suspicion and IQS Subscales for the Subtle Prime Condition

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<td>3. Character Impression</td>
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Note. An asterisk indicates that $p < .01$

$N = 30$
Table 7

Correlations between Generalized Communicative Suspicion and IQS Subscales for the Blatant Prime Condition

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<td>.65*</td>
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<td>3. Character Impression</td>
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<td>4. Commitment Level</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. An asterisk indicates that p < .01

N = 30
Table 8

Correlations between Generalized Communicative Suspicion and IQS Subscales for the Control Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. GCS</td>
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<td>.05</td>
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<td>.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Deceit Perception</td>
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<td>.67*</td>
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<td>3. Character Impression</td>
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<td>-.20*</td>
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<td>4. Commitment Level</td>
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Note. An asterisk indicates that $p < .01$

$N = 28$
Figure 1.

Graphical representation of a set/reset contrast effect (Martin, Seta, & Crelia, 1990)

Initial impression of target person

Impression after priming with a negative concept

Impression after partialing out perceived bias

+ Positive thoughts
- Negative thoughts
**Appendix A.** Control group and subtle prime stimuli.

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Appendix B.

Blatant prime word generation task

Word Generation Task

Please generate as many similar words and synonyms for the given descriptive word during the next two minutes.

Creative
Please generate as many similar words and synonyms for the given descriptive word during the next two minutes.

**Independent**
Please generate as many similar words and synonyms for the given descriptive word during the next two minutes.

**Immature**
Please generate as many similar words and synonyms for the given descriptive word during the next two minutes.

**Logical**
Please generate as many similar words and synonyms for the given descriptive word during the next two minutes.

Suspicious
Appendix C.

Social situation transcript

Social Situation Transcript

The following vignette is a transcript based upon an actual conversation among a group of college students. The students in this vignette are discussing real issues that pertain to social life on a college campus. This conversation occurred in a local bar the evening after an exam in a course that they are all enrolled in. There are six students involved in this encounter: Tom, Meg, Dave, Eve, Seth, and Sara. Tom, Dave, and Seth live in the same dormitory and are all friends. Meg, Eve, and Sara are all friends too. Tom and Meg have been in a relationship for two years. Dave and Eve are currently dating. The girls are sitting in a booth when the guys arrive. Tom, Sara, and Seth are sitting next to each other on one side, while Meg, Dave, and Eve sit on the other side.

**Tom:** So ladies…how are y’all doing tonight?

**Meg:** Well, we’ve been better. We were just talking about the psych exam before you got here.

**Seth:** I hear ya…I was clueless on that first essay.

**Tom:** Oh…um, Dave, you know Meg and Sara, right? *Dave nods.* Seth have you met everyone? This is my girlfriend Meg and this is Sara and Eve.
Seth: I’ve met Eve and Meg and I’ve seen Sara in class...but we haven’t been introduced formally. Hi Sara, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Seth and Sara shake hands.

Sara (to Seth): I had trouble with that first essay too.

A waitress comes to take their orders.

Eve: The girls need a round of Sex on the Beach’s. (giggles)

Sara: That sounds good to me! (laughs)

Dave: Dude, you guys want to share a pitcher of Bud? Tom nods.

Seth: Nah, I need a little liquor...I’ll have a Sex on the Beach too.

Dave (to Seth): Alright, it’s your call.

Seth (to Dave): Yeah, I think I’ll try a little something different today.

Waitress leaves.

Dave: This place is kinda dead tonight man, there’s no one here and it’s a Friday!

Eve (to Dave): Relax honey, who are you looking to find anyway? (smiles)

Sara: I don’t know, it’s still early. People’ll show up eventually, I hope.

Tom: Still though...before I met Meg I was totally bored. The parties were lame, the fraternities were the only thing on campus and that scene gets old real fast. The social life is pretty weak here.

Sara: It isn’t that bad is it? It’s better than high school, right?
Seth (to Sara): Definitely, when I played football in high school we used to have a couple of parties with the cheerleaders after games, but other than that you couldn’t buy a good party.

Tom (to Seth): You’re such a stud.

Meg: Oh those crazy cheerleading days, what the hell was I thinking? (to Sara) You were a cheerleader weren’t you? (smiles)

Sara: Yeah, I was a cheerleader, but I was young and stupid then. It was the cool thing to do at the time.

Seth: C’mon give the girl a break. Most of the cheerleaders I knew were really nice girls, (to Sara) and you seem like a nice girl. (smiles)

Sara (to Seth): Thank you.

Meg: But there was always that one football captain who had to date the head cheerleader…it was like mandatory or something.

Seth: Well that was the way the dating worked in high school…it’s different in college. Girls and guys hook up at parties or they meet someone from class, like in a study group or something. College girls are always looking for the smooth, sensitive guy.

Eve: Dave and I met in our American History class last semester. We had to do a presentation on the death of the railroads or something stupid like that.

Waitress returns with drinks.

Dave: Should we start a tab?
Seth: (to waitress) Here, take my credit card. *Seth gives card to waitress.* (to group) The drinks are on me tonight, I just got paid. Anyway, I’m sick of meeting random girls at frat parties. I like to actually know a girl before I get into a relationship.

Meg (to Tom): See Tom, you’re lucky to have me. You didn’t want to stay with that ugly ex-girlfriend from high school. Tom was in a long distance relationship with some freak from high school. *(frowns)*

Sara: Well, I mean, long distance dating must be really tough.

Seth (to Sara): Well…um…my ex-girlfriend lives in my hometown. It’s really difficult to keep something like that going when you can’t have like personal contact with them.

Dave (to Seth): Hmm…what exactly do you mean by *personal* contact?

Seth (to Dave): You know what I mean dumbass. Get your mind out of the gutter.

Eve (to Dave): Is that all you think about…sex, sex, and more sex?

Tom: What else is there? *(jokingly)*

Meg (to Tom): Well…how about like compatibility and loyalty? *(frowning)*

Seth: I think loyalty is *really* important. I know I would *never* disrespect my girl, if I had one, by cheating on her. *(to Sara) What do you think?
Sara: I guess it’s kinda hard, with all the distractions and alcohol and everything. But guys make stupid decisions when they’re drunk. My ex-boyfriend cheated on me at a frat party.

Seth (to Sara): He would have to be an idiot to cheat on you. (smiles)

Meg: Anyway, it’s really dangerous to go around sleeping with everyone that you meet nowadays, you know with all the diseases and stuff. You really put your girlfriend at risk if you’re not careful. I don’t know why guys don’t use condoms more.

Dave: Condoms are awful. They kill the mood and they feel awful.

Seth: Dude, they’re important though…you know with all of the STD’s and AIDS. Better safe than sorry. I would always use a condom.

Dave (to Seth): Yeah right, I know you better than that. You’re a player dude.

Seth: No way! I really respect the girl I’m with. I always have a condom ready if she wants it. I know I’m safe, but I respect the wishes of the girl...no pressure or anything.

Sara (to Seth): That’s nice to hear coming from a guy.

Dave (to Seth): O.K. Whatever…Mr. Sensitive. (sarcastically)

Seth: Do you girls need another drink? (to Sara) How about you Sara?

Sara (to Seth): Sure, I’ll have another.

Seth (to Sara): Great. It’s nice to meet someone who likes to have a good time.

We should do this more often.
Music starts playing.

Meg: Oh... I love this song, (to Tom) let's dance.

Eve: Me too. (to Dave) C'mon get up Dave.

Tom and Dave reluctantly join Meg and Eve on the dance floor.

Seth (to Sara): Well I guess it's just you and me.

Sara (to Seth): This is a good song, I saw these guys in concert a couple years ago at the amphitheater.

Seth: Wow! So did I... what did you think?

Sara: They were awesome.

Seth: If they come back to town would you like me to get you a ticket?

Sara: Sure, I'd like to see them again.

Seth: Um... do you think you want to dance?

Sara: I guess so.

Sara and Seth join the others on the dance floor.
Appendix D.

Questionnaires

GCS Scale

1) I often feel as if people aren’t being completely truthful with me.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2) Most people only tell you what they think you want to hear.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

3) When I am in a conversation with someone, I frequently wonder whether they are really telling me the truth.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

4) People rarely tell you what they’re really thinking.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

5) When I first meet someone, I assume that they are probably lying to me about some things.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

6) Most people are basically honest.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

7) Anyone who completely trusts someone else is asking for trouble.
   
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
8) When I ask a stranger for directions, I frequently wonder whether they are being truthful.

   Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

9) When I am talking to others, I tend to believe what they say.

   Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

10) People seldom lie to me.

    Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

11) Most people follow the saying “honesty is the best policy.”

    Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree
Individual Suspicion Questionnaire

Listed below are various statements that reflect the social evaluation of one or more characters in the vignette that has been previously presented. The purpose of this questionnaire is to ascertain a general evaluation of individual impressions of the characters. Please respond to each statement according to your impression of the character based upon the information that has been given in the vignette. Circle the number that most accurately represents the extent to which you agree with the appropriate statement.

1. Seth is a likable person.
   *Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9* Strongly agree

2. Seth is a charming person.
   *Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9* Strongly agree

3. Seth is an honest person.
   *Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9* Strongly agree

4. Seth is a considerate person.
   *Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9* Strongly agree

5. Seth is a caring person.
   *Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9* Strongly agree
6. Seth is a trustworthy person.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

7. Seth is probably an attractive person.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

8. I believe that Seth has a girlfriend.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

9. Seth wants to become friends with Sara.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

10. Seth is sexually attracted to Sara.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

11. Seth is interested in a long-term relationship with Sara.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

12. Seth is attempting to deceive Sara.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

13. Seth is agreeing with Sara to get her to like him more.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

14. There are no underlying motives for Seth’s behavior.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**

15. Seth’s interest in Sara is purely sexual in nature.

**Strongly disagree** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 **Strongly agree**
16. Seth is lying about himself in order to have sex with Sara.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

17. Sara’s friends should warn her about Seth.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

18. Seth has probably had many romantic/sexual partners.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

19. Seth has probably been unfaithful to previous partners.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

20. Sara wants to become friends with Seth.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

21. Sara is interested in a romantic relationship with Seth.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

22. Sara is an intelligent person.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

23. Sara is probably an attractive person.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree

24. Sara is a likable person.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly agree
25. Sara is a naïve person.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  Strongly agree

26. Sara should be suspicious of Seth.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  Strongly agree

27. Sara appears to be suspicious of Seth.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  Strongly agree

28. Tom and Meg are trying to get Sara and Seth to go out with each other.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  Strongly agree

29. Seth and Sara should get together.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  Strongly agree
Risk in Intimacy Inventory

Listed below are several statements that reflect different attitudes about relationships. Some of the items refer to general attitudes or beliefs about relationships. Other items refer to more specific kinds of interactions, such as those with acquaintances (e.g., someone you've met only once, someone you know only from class), with casual friends, or with people you are very close to.

Using the scale below, indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement by writing the appropriate number in the blank beside each item.

1 = very strong disagreement  
2 = moderate disagreement  
3 = slight disagreement  
4 = slight agreement  
5 = moderate agreement  
6 = very strong agreement

There are no right or wrong answers. This is simply a measure of how you feel. Please try to give an honest appraisal of yourself.

______ 1. It is dangerous to get really close to people.
______ 2. I prefer that people keep their distance from me.
______ 3. I'm afraid to get really close to someone because I might get hurt.
______ 4. At best, I can handle only one or two close friendships at a time.
______ 5. I find it difficult to trust other people.
______ 6. I avoid intimacy.
______ 7. Being close to other people makes me feel afraid.
______ 8. I'm hesitant to share personal information about myself.
______ 9. Being close to people is a risky business.
______ 10. The most important thing to consider in a relationship is whether I might get hurt.
The Big Five Inventory

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who *likes to spend time with others*? Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree a little
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree a little
5. Agree strongly

I see myself as someone who…

1. ____ Is talkative
2. ____ Tends to find fault with others
3. ____ Does a thorough job
4. ____ Is depressed, blue
5. ____ Is original, comes up with new ideas
6. ____ Is reserved
7. ____ Is helpful and unselfish with others
8. ____ Can be somewhat careless
9. ____ Is relaxed, handles stress well
10. ____ Is curious about many different things
11. ____ Is full of energy
12. ____ Starts quarrels with others
13. ____ Is a reliable worker
14. ____ Can be tense
15. ____ Is ingenious, a deep thinker
16. ____ Generates a lot of enthusiasm
17. ____ Has a forgiving nature
18. ____ Tends to be disorganized
19. ____ Worries a lot
20. ____ Has an active imagination
21. ____ Tends to be quiet
22. ____ Is generally trusting
23. ____ Tends to be lazy
24. ____ Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
25. ____ Is inventive
26. ____ Has an assertive personality
27. ____ Can be cold and aloof
28. ____ Perseveres until the task is finished
29. ____ Can be moody
30. ____ Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
31. ____ Is sometimes shy, inhibited
32. ____ Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
33. ____ Does things efficiently
34. ____ Remains calm in tense situations
35. ____ Prefers work that is routine
36. ____ Is outgoing, sociable
37. ____ Is sometimes rude to others
38. ____ Makes plans and follows through with them
39. ____ Gets nervous easily
40. ____ Likes to reflect, play with ideas
41. ____ Has few artistic interests
42. ____ Likes to cooperate with others
43. ____ Is easily distracted
44. ____ Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature
VITA

J. Patrick Boyle

The author was born on July 27, 1977 in Portsmouth, Virginia. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Muhlenberg College in May 1999. He entered the Master of Arts program in Psychology at The College of William & Mary in August 1999. He will begin a career with a consulting firm in New York City in the summer of 2001.