Automaticity of Chronically Accessible Constructs in Person × Situation Effects on Person Perception: It's Just a Matter of Time

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Models of Person × Situation influences on social behavior and judgment have invoked two distinct mechanisms: a personality disposition and a situational press. In this study we conceptualized both influences in terms of a single underlying mechanism, construct accessibility. We pitted the characteristic ways that individuals perceive others against situational influences on accessibility (i.e., contextual priming) and tracked over time the relative power of these competing influences on the outcome of an impression-formation task. Subjects possessed either a chronically accessible (chronics) or an inaccessible (nonchronics) construct for either outgoing or inconsiderate behavior. As predicted, as the delay since the priming event lengthened (from 15 to 180 s), chronics were progressively more likely to use the chronically accessible construct instead of the primed alternative construct to categorize an ambiguous target behavior, whereas nonchronics' relative use of the primed and alternative constructs did not change as a function of postpriming delay.

There are many documented psychological phenomena that can be accounted for only by reference to the ways in which stable individual characteristics interact with momentary situational forces. General theories as well as specific models of social behavior long have emphasized such Person × Situation effects (e.g., Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Fiedler, 1964; Lewin, 1935; Murray, 1938). More recently, the influence of personality differences on social judgments also has been shown to vary as a function of the situation. For example, Assor, Aronoff, and Messe (1981; see also Battistich & Aronoff, 1985) found that the chronic motivational orientation of subjects with regard to social interaction (dominance vs. dependency oriented) interacted with the relative status of the stimulus target person in producing evaluations of that target. In addition, Higgins and McCann (1984) demonstrated that authoritarianism interacted with the perceived status of the subject's interaction partner to determine social judgments (see also Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986; Uleman, Winborne, Winter, & Shechter, 1986).

In previous work on Person × Situation effects, however, the person and the situation influences have been conceptualized in terms of qualitatively different forces. The situation influence is described in terms of a press, or external pressure, and the person influence as a qualitatively different internal state of some kind. The explanatory appeal to different mechanisms has produced an apples-and-oranges problem that hinders an understanding of the relative influences of person and situation. The model we propose for Person × Situation effects in person perception, on the other hand, interprets both effects in terms of the same mediating variable: level of construct activation. In this article we present and test an interactive model that is able to capture both the situation and the person components in terms of a single underlying quantity. The use of such a model is advantageous in that it facilitates the assessment of the relative influences of the two components over time in a precise manner.

Construct Accessibility and Person Perception

Perceptual processing is a Person × Situation effect by its very nature. It involves an ongoing interaction between the incoming environmental information and the perceiver's mental representations of that environment, which are used to encode the informational input (e.g., Brewer & Treyens, 1981; Bruner, 1951; Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Neisser, 1976; Norman, 1968; Postman, 1951). Given the typical ambiguity of social behavior, in that any social act is usually open to more than one interpretation (e.g., Bruner, 1958), social perception is determined jointly by the relative strengths of the input and the representations relevant to it (Higgins & King, 1981; Postman, 1951; Wyer & Srull, 1986). The strength of the environmental input is a function of how diagnostic it is of a single interpretation; for example, an anonymous donation to a charity that is not taken as a deduction on one's tax return is a stronger act of generosity than is a donation used as a deduction. The preexposure strength of a mental representation relevant to the input has

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been referred to as its *accessibility* (Bruner, 1957; Higgins & King, 1981; Wyer & Srull, 1981) and reflects how frequently one possible interpretation of a given social act will be made relative to other possible interpretations.

Recent research on social construct accessibility has demonstrated both situational and dispositional effects on perceptual interpretation (see reviews by Higgins & Bargh, 1987, and Wyer & Srull, 1986). Features of the current and recent situational context prime, or activate, the social constructs associated with them, and this activation persists for a short time. During this time the construct is temporarily more accessible in that it is more easily applied than other relevant constructs to subsequent informational input. For example, Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977) found that prior presentation of personality trait terms in an unrelated context influenced subjects' subsequent impressions of a target person, as long as the somewhat ambiguous implications of the target's behavior could be understood in terms of those trait concepts (see also Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982, and Srull & Wyer, 1979, 1980).

Similar effects of chronic or long-term accessibility have also been demonstrated. Chronically accessible constructs are assumed to develop from frequent and consistent experience with a specific domain of social behavior (e.g., kindness, dependence, shyness), so that they become more likely than others to be used in the interpretation of social behavior (Bargh, 1984; Higgins & King, 1981). Moreover, differences in individuals' sets of chronically accessible constructs are assumed to develop because of each person's unique life history of social encounters; the idiosyncrasy of chronic constructs is indicated by the finding that the average random pairing of subjects shared less than 10% of their constructs (Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). Differences in the interpretation of ambiguous target behaviors caused by differences in the chronic accessibility of the subjects' relevant constructs have been demonstrated in several studies (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh & Pratto, 1986; Bargh & Thein, 1985; Higgins et al., 1982). These effects were obtained months after the content of subjects' chronic constructs was assessed (see the Method section) and in the absence of priming manipulations or specific situational contexts.

Those studies also established that the application of chronically accessible constructs in perceptual activity is automatic in that the activation of such constructs by relevant environmental information was shown to be unintentional and uncontrollable (see Logan, 1980). For example, Bargh and Pratto (1986) found that subjects who possessed a chronically accessible construct for a given trait dimension (chronics), relative to those who did not (nonchronics), were more distracted by the presence of trait-relevant adjectives in the Stroop color-naming task, a task that requires subjects to name as quickly as possible the color in which stimulus words are presented and to ignore the meaning of the words. Bargh and Thein (1985) showed that chronically accessible constructs pick up relevant behavioral information even when the perceiver is operating under a severe shortage of attentional resources. The automatic operation of chronically accessible constructs suggests that informational input relevant to them will influence the impressions and evaluations an individual forms of other people independently of the features of the current situational context.

Interaction of Chronic and Temporary Accessibility Influences

The effects of construct accessibility on perceptual interpretation thus have been demonstrated for both person influences and situational influences, whereby person influences derive from chronic individual differences in construct accessibility and situation influences derive from temporarily increased construct accessibility due to contextual priming. How do these two influences interact? In the study by Bargh et al. (1986), subjects with and without a chronically accessible construct for kindness or shyness were either primed or not primed subliminally with trait-related adjectives in a first task. Their subsequent impressions of a target person's ambiguous behaviors along the focal trait dimension (either kindness or shyness) were influenced by the chronicity of the relevant construct and by whether it had been primed in the first task. Apparently, then, the two sources of accessibility combine in an additive fashion when both correspond to the same construct. However, the case in which both a chronically and a contextually accessible construct are relevant for the interpretation of the same environmental event has not yet been investigated, nor have the effects of such competing constructs over time been considered.

A potentially relevant model for such circumstances has been developed by Higgins, Bargh, and Lombardi (1985; see also Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987). This model concerned the specific case in which two competing constructs, both relevant for a subsequent social behavior, were both primed by the current situational context. Adjectives related to one construct (e.g., persistent) were presented on 4 of the 20 trials of the priming task, and an adjective related to the alternative relevant construct (e.g., stubborn) was presented on the 20th and final trial. The target behavior was more likely to be encoded in terms of the more recently primed construct after short delays between the priming event and the presentation of the target behavior (15 s) but the behavior tended to be encoded in terms of the more frequently primed construct after a longer postpriming delay (2 min). Apparently, recency of activation gives a construct relatively greater accessibility or likelihood of utilization for a brief amount of time, but frequency of activation gives a more durable advantage in accessibility that eventually overtakes the advantage of recency.

This model of situational influences on social perception can be extended to include person (chronic) effects as well. Because chronic individual differences in accessibility theoretically result from high frequency and consistency of construct activation over extended periods of time (Bargh, 1984; Higgins & King, 1981), it may be assumed that *unprimed* chronically accessible constructs will behave similarly to the frequently primed constructs within the Higgins et al. (1985) paradigm. We tested this hypothesis by substituting individual differences in chronically accessible constructs for the frequent priming manipulation in the Higgins et al. (1985) design. If the single mechanism of construct accessibility underlies both the person and the situation effect in person perception, then one can predict that chronics will tend to use the recently primed construct at the short delay but will increasingly use their chronically accessible construct at longer delays, switching over time from predominate use of the recent construct to the chronic con-

struct. Subjects without a relevant chronically accessible construct for the target behavior, on the other hand, will not show any such switchover in the use of constructs. Because only one construct was primed for these nonchronic subjects, and because they did not have a chronically accessible construct for the alternative personality dimension, there would be no competing chronically accessible construct to capture the ambiguous input at the longer delays. Thus, the effects of the recently primed construct should be the same for nonchronic subjects across all three delay conditions.

Method

Subjects

A total of 128 students enrolled in the introductory psychology course at New York University participated in the experiment in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Of these, we excluded data from 11 subjects from the analyses because they did not meet our criteria for English-speaking ability, which was having learned English before 10 years of age. We excluded data from 2 additional subjects because they stated that the priming stimulus word had influenced their response in the subsequent labeling task. Thus, all analyses are based on the responses of 115 subjects.

We selected participants on the basis of their answers to a free-response measure of chronically accessible constructs (see Higgins et al., 1982) that all introductory psychology students had completed at the beginning of the semester (approximately 4–6 weeks prior to the experimental session). On this measure, subjects listed up to 10 characteristics of each of five types of people: those whom they frequently encounter, like, dislike, seek out, and avoid. We operationally defined a subject's chronically accessible constructs as those characteristics given first in response to at least one of the five person types (i.e., the traits that first came to mind when the subject thought about those types of people). We defined a subject's inaccessible constructs as those traits not listed, as well as synonyms of those traits. On the basis of this measure, the final sample of subjects included 28 subjects who possessed a chronically accessible construct for inconsiderateness or selfishness (but not for outgoingness or talkativeness), 28 who possessed such a construct for outgoingness or talkativeness (but not for inconsiderateness or selfishness), and 58 who possessed inaccessible constructs for inconsiderate/selfish and outgoing/talkative characteristics.

Apparatus and Materials

Each subject was seated in front of a table on which a Zenith model ZVM121 cathode-ray tube (CRT) screen was placed. In front of the CRT screen was a response box that was within comfortable reach of the subject. An Apple II Plus microcomputer, located in a separate control room, controlled the CRT display through an interactive BASIC language program. A button on the response box was connected directly to the computer as an input device, such that when the subject pressed the button at appropriate moments, the computer program would proceed to the next part of the experimental session. The experimenter seated herself in the back of the experimental room, out of the subject's field of vision.

Procedure

Before showing the subject into the experimental room, the experimenter entered the code corresponding to the subject's experimental condition into the computer. The experimenter randomly assigned nonchronic subjects to either the inconsiderate or the outgoing prime condition and the chronic subjects to the prime condition corresponding to the trait construct on which they were not chronic. Next, within each of these chronicity/prime conditions, the experimenter randomly assigned the subject to one of the three postpriming delay conditions: 15, 120, or 180 s. Once the subject was seated in front of the CRT screen in the experimental room, the experimenter told him or her that the experiment was concerned with the degree to which language skills are related to the ways in which people mentally manipulate symbols. To reinforce this rationale for the experiment, the experimenter carried a clipboard and wrote down all of the subject's verbal responses during the course of the experimental session.

All experimental instructions were presented on the CRT display. The experimenter informed the subject that he or she would perform a series of three different tasks three times. Although no mention of the fact was made to the subject, only the final task series was relevant to the experimental hypotheses. The first 2 task series consisted of practice trials, so that subjects would become familiar with the procedures of the three tasks, and only the third series contained the critical priming manipulation and behavior-labeling task. In addition, there was no relation between the priming and labeling tasks in the first 2 task series, further camouflaging the relation between the two tasks in the last experimental series. The experimenter confirmed that the subject was following the procedures of each task correctly before the third task series was begun.

Priming task. The first task in each series involved constructing meaningful and grammatical three-word sentences out of four-word groupings. All three priming tasks consisted of 20 such trials. Each set of words appeared on the CRT screen for 3 s, followed by a 1-s pause. During this total of 4 s per trial, the subject formed a sentence and stated it aloud. All words presented during the first and second priming tasks were selected because they were neutral in their implications for personality (e.g., "write the mail letter"); thus, no trait adjectives or other personality-relevant words were presented that could have primed person constructs. This was true of the third experimental priming task as well, except for the 20th trial, during which the critical priming stimulus was presented. The four-word group on the 20th trial was "she inconsiderate is was" for the inconsiderate prime condition and "she outgoing is was" for the outgoing prime condition.

Interference task. At the end of the 20th trial of the priming task in each task series, the CRT display immediately presented the instructions for the counting-backward, or interference, task. In the first series, subjects counted backward from 368 by 3s, in the second series from 467 by 6s, and in the third series from 853 by 7s. Because the purpose of the interference task was to completely clear working memory after the conclusion of the priming task (see Peterson & Peterson, 1959; Reitman, 1974), we used a different starting number and subtracting amount in each task series to ensure that task difficulty would remain high for the third task series and that practice effects carried over from the first 2 task series would be minimized. The subjects continued to count backward until the CRT display presented an instruction to stop counting. The counting task lasted 15 s in the short postpriming delay condition, 120 s in the medium-delay condition, and 180 s in the long-delay condition. (See Higgins et al., 1985, for a discussion of the criteria for selection of the delay periods.)

Labeling task. The third part of each series, a labeling task, began immediately at the conclusion of the interference task. The experimenter gave the subject a brief description to read. In the first 2 task series, this description was of a type of animal, and the experimenter instructed the subject to write down the type of animal as quickly as possible (see Higgins et al., 1985). In the third task series, the experimenter presented an ambiguous description of a person's behavior, "He monopolized the telephone where he lived." The experimenter told the subject to write down the one word that best described this type of person. Pretesting had shown this behavioral description to elicit either the

Table 1
Number of Chronic and Nonchronic Subjects Using the Primed, Alternative, or Ambiguous Construct to Categorize the Target Behavior, by Postpriming Delay

Type of categorization by subject group	Postpriming delay (in s)		
	15	120	180
Chronics			
Primed construct	9 (45)	8 (44)	5 (28)
Alternative construct	7 (35)	8 (44)	12 (67)
Ambiguous construct	4 (20)	2 (11)	1 (6)
Nonchronics			
Primed construct	7 (35)	7 (35)	6 (32)
Alternative construct	8 (40)	9 (45)	8 (42)
Ambiguous construct	5 (25)	4 (20)	5 (26)

Note. For the chronic subjects, the alternative construct was chronically accessible; for the nonchronic subjects, the alternative was not chronically accessible. Numbers in parentheses are the percentages of total subjects within each chronicity/delay condition.

labels *inconsiderate* and *selfish* or *talkative* and *outgoing* with approximately equal frequency.

After the third series of tasks was completed, subjects were carefully probed for any suspiciousness concerning the relation between the first and third tasks. The experimenter informed subjects that she would find it useful to know if they thought that their performance on any of the tasks had been affected by working on any of the other tasks. Two subjects responded that the words presented in the scrambled-sentence task were related to the descriptions presented in the labeling task, but they could not be more specific regarding how the first task might have influenced their responses on the third task. Nonetheless, we excluded data for these 2 subjects from all analyses. All other subjects reported not noticing any connection between the sentence-formation and the labeling task and felt that the words presented in the first task of each series did not influence the label they gave in the third task. To assess memory for the priming word, the experimenter asked all subjects to write down all of the sentences they could remember having formed in the three scrambled-sentence tasks. After each subject had done so, he or she was thanked and debriefed.

Results

Label Classification

Each label given by subjects to describe the target person was classified by two judges as to whether it was synonymous with inconsiderate or selfish, synonymous with outgoing or talkative, or not synonymous with any of these trait adjectives. The two judges, who were blind to the experimental hypotheses and who performed the classifications independently of each other, agreed on the placement of 108 of the 115 labels. The seven disagreements were resolved through discussion by the judges.

This sorting procedure resulted in 88 labels classified as synonyms of one of the four trait adjectives, with 27 labels classified as not synonymous with any of them. Two additional judges, again blind to the experimental hypotheses, next attempted to decide to which of the two major interpretations of the ambiguous behavior—inconsiderate/selfish versus outgoing/talkative—each of the 27 nonsynonyms was more closely related. However, only 6 of the 27 nonsynonyms, all adjectives (dominant, strict, annoying, obnoxious, intelligent, and busy), could be sorted into the inconsiderate or outgoing categories in this way (with complete agreement on their placement by the two judges). This left 21 labels, all nouns (e.g., sister, businessman), that could not be classified.

Relative Use of the Alternative Construct Over Time

The pattern of usage of the primed construct versus the alternative construct was basically the same for the inconsiderate and the outgoing prime conditions. The effects reported herein thus held regardless of which of the two traits filled the role of the primed construct and which constituted the alternative construct, attesting to the generality of the results across specific trait domains. Table 1 shows the frequencies of the three classes of labels, collapsed across the two priming conditions. Whereas the relative use of the primed and alternative constructs remained about the same for nonchronics across the three postpriming delay conditions, chronics increasingly applied the alternative construct as more time passed since the priming event. Because we were making specific directional predictions concerning the ordering of the cell frequencies across the three postpriming delay cells for chronics and nonchronics, instead of an omnibus prediction of any difference in cell frequencies, the test for a linear trend in proportions was the most appropriate (Snedecor & Cochran, 1980, pp. 206–208). We tested the prediction that the proportion of labels reflecting the alternate, nonrecently primed construct would increase for chronic subjects as postpriming delay increased against the null hypothesis that the proportions were not a linearly increasing function of postpriming delay. In support of the hypothesis, the analysis revealed a reliable linear trend ($Z = 1.94$, $p = .05$, two-tailed). Moreover, as Figure 1 shows, the construct used predominately by chronics switched over time from the primed to the alternative (chronic) construct. We had also predicted that nonchronic subjects would show no increasing tendency to use the alternative to the primed construct as time passed since the priming event, and the linear trend for nonchronics was indeed unreliable ($Z = 0.14$, $p > .50$).

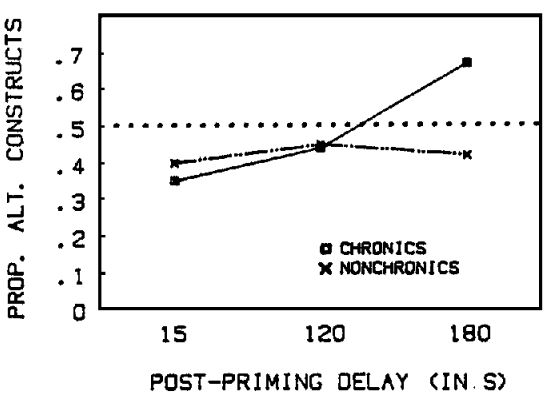

Figure 1. Mean proportion of subjects using the alternative to the primed construct to label the target person by subject chronicity and postpriming delay. (Dotted line represents equal use of the two constructs.)

Of interest as well was the more specific comparison between the relative use of the primed versus the alternative construct over time (i.e., excluding the ambiguous-label classification from the analysis). Because this analysis included only those labels that were classified as synonymous with or related to either the primed or the alternative construct, it provided a direct test of whether the increased use of the alternative construct with increasing delay was at the expense of decreased usage of the primed construct. For chronic subjects, 44% of the labels were related to the alternative (chronic) construct and 56% to the primed construct at the 15-s postpriming delay, 50% to each at the 120-s delay, and 71% to the alternative and 29% to the primed construct at the 180-s delay. The linear trend coefficient was unchanged by the exclusion of the ambiguous labels (Z = 1.94, p = .05). For nonchronic subjects, the identical analysis showed the linear trend to be absent once again (Z = 0.21, p > .50). Thus, chronics but not nonchronics used the alternative construct reliably more and the primed construct reliably less over time.

Use of the Primed Construct or the Priming Adjective?

That our results reflect the relative accessibilities of social constructs, and not single lexical memory locations corresponding to the prime words themselves (see Jacoby & Kelley, 1987, for this alternative model), was demonstrated by the categorical nature of the labels provided by subjects. When subjects' labels reflected the primed construct, it was not the case that the subjects were merely giving back the priming adjective (i.e., inconsiderate or outgoing). Of the 42 labels classified as synonymous or related to the primed construct, only 7 were the priming adjectives themselves, and these were distributed evenly across the three delay conditions. Thus, the labels used by the subjects reflected the activation and use of the abstract construct and not solely the specific lexical representation of the priming word itself (for a similar finding, see Higgins et al., 1977).

Subjects had been asked at the end of the experimental session to write down all of the sentences they had formed in the three scrambled-sentence tasks. A total of 50 subjects (43%) recalled the prime-word sentence trial. The ability to recall the prime was unrelated to its use as a label, however; of the 7 subjects who used the prime word as a label, 4 recalled the priming sentence and 3 did not. Thus, only 4 of the 115 subjects (3%) both recalled the priming adjective and used it as their label for the target behavior (for additional evidence of the independence of recall of the priming sentences and the use of accessible constructs, see Higgins et al., 1985, and Lombardi et al., 1987). Moreover, only 1 of these 4 subjects was in the chronic group. As would be expected, the numbers of subjects recalling the prime decreased across the three postpriming delay conditions: Ns = 20 for the 15-s, 17 for the 120-s, and 13 for the 180-s delays. Nearly equal numbers of chronics (24) and nonchronics (26) recalled the prime.[1]

Discussion

Our findings show that when there is a delay of sufficient magnitude between final priming and presentation of the social behavior, one's chronically accessible but unprimed social constructs are more likely to be used to interpret social behavior than an equally applicable construct that has been recently primed by the situational context. In demonstrating that chronically accessible constructs not recently activated produce an influence on person perception similar to constructs that have been frequently activated by features of the current situation, our results provide support for a model in which both person and situation influences on person perception are mediated by a single mechanism: the level of construct activation.

The similar effects that chronicity and frequent priming produce in this paradigm are also consistent with the assumption that chronic accessibility results from a high frequency of prior construct activation (Bargh, 1984; Higgins & King, 1981). In this regard, there was an intriguing difference between our results and those of Higgins et al. (1985). In the Higgins et al. (1985) study the reversal in the use of the recently and frequently primed constructs occurred at the 2-min delay, whereas in this study the analogous reversal in the use of the recently primed and chronically accessible constructs did not occur until after a 3-min delay. This suggests that the baseline level of activation for a chronically accessible construct may be lower than that which results from (four) frequent priming events at a 2-min postpriming delay. However, whereas the effect of frequent contextual priming would be expected to decay completely after several minutes in the absence of contextual reactivation (see Forbach, Stanners, & Hochhaus, 1974), the chronicity effect has been shown to last for months (e.g., Bargh et al., 1986; Higgins et al., 1982) and could very well last even longer.

It is important to note that the obtained reversal over time in construct use by chronic but not by nonchronic subjects suggests that both recent and chronic accessibility influences were operating in our study. If, for example, chronics had predominantly used labels congruent with their chronically accessible construct at all three delay intervals, it would not be possible to infer that the priming manipulation had had any effect for either group of subjects. Also, if there had been a main effect of delay condition in the use of the primed construct such that it decreased over time for both groups, one could not infer the operation of any chronically accessible construct. However, because only chronics showed a crossover in the relative use of the two constructs with increasing delay (see Figure 1), paralleling the crossover between recent and frequent contextual priming (Higgins et al., 1985; Lombardi et al., 1987), the most reasonable conclusion is that priming did occur and was eventually

[1] Higgins, Bargh, and Lombardi (1985) and Lombardi, Higgins, and Bargh (1987; Experiment 1) found that subjects who recalled the priming event showed a reversal over postpriming delay in the pattern of relative use of the frequently versus recently primed construct. Consequently, we attempted to examine the labeling patterns across the three delay conditions separately for the 50 recall subjects, but the cell frequencies were reduced sufficiently by this further breakdown (median and mode frequency = 2) to make the pattern very unstable and statistical tests unfeasible. It is not clear that such a reversal would be expected in this experiment in any case because, unlike the earlier studies, there was no frequent priming manipulation and thus no reason to expect that the recallability of the prime would influence the use of the unprimed chronic construct.

overridden in its effect by the influence of the chronically accessible construct only in those subjects predetermined to possess such a construct.[2]

The Person × Situation interaction documented in this study underscores the conclusion reached by several reviewers that main effects of personality variables on social perception are weak in and of themselves (e.g., Schneider, 1973; Taguiri, 1969) and that only by taking the person–situation interaction into account in one's theoretical conceptualization can individual differences in social perception be demonstrated (Battistich, Assor, Messe, & Aronoff, 1985). In this experiment, for example, if we had instructed subjects to give their labels for the target behavior immediately or even 2 min after the priming task, we would have found no effect for chronicity at all; in other words, we would have obtained a main effect for the situational variable and no effect whatsoever for the personality variable. Our results document the importance of assessing personality influences on perception after some time has elapsed since the full impact of the situational variable.

As noted earlier, the application of accessible constructs to informational input is a passive and automatic phenomenon (Bargh, 1984; Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Higgins & King, 1981). In the ecology of social interactions and situations, a variety of dispositional and situational influences on construct accessibility are likely to be operating concurrently. Our findings suggest that those automatic perceptual biases that reflect the long-term nature of one's social experiences—that is, one's chronically accessible constructs—are the default interpretative mechanisms, as Kelly (1955) suggested. Their power to capture relevant informational input may be overridden temporarily by contextually activated alternative constructs, but it is just a matter of time before one's dispositional perceptual set will be restored to ascendancy.

[2] With respect to nonchronic subjects, the design of the experiment did not permit an assessment of the priming effect. Such an assessment would have required knowledge of the baseline level of nonchronics' use of the primed construct in the absence of any priming (i.e., a no-priming comparison condition). As the purpose of the study was to test for the change over time in the relative use of the two competing constructs, predicted to occur for chronics but not for nonchronics, a separate check on the usual priming effect for nonchronics was not necessary to the design of the experiment. Given that subjects in the two previous studies that used the identical paradigm (Higgins, Bargh, & Lombardi, 1985; Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987) did consistently show priming effects and that those subject samples were not preselected to be chronics on the focal trait dimensions and thus may be assumed to be mainly nonchronics (see norms in Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982), we presume the existence of a priming effect for nonchronics in this study.

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