

Running head: PRIMING AND SELF-DESCRIPTION

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The Effect of Positive and Negative Priming on Self-Description

Allison Krutul

Hamilton College

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**{INSTITUTION  
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Sample APA format paper

(To the student:

- This is an abbreviated, sample APA format paper. Note that the paper text is in Times New Roman, explanatory comments in **COOPER BLACK** and [brackets])
- Also see Professor Borton's "How to Write an APA Style Research Paper"

We investigated the impact of a positive and negative priming situation on individuals' self-description using the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). Participants read either a friend acceptance (positive) situation or friend rejection (negative) situation, rated and explained how they would react to the situation, then responded to the question "Who Am I?" in up to twenty words. We hypothesized that individuals in the positive prime condition would use more positive words to describe themselves, whereas individuals in the negative condition would describe themselves using more negative words. Our results supported the former hypothesis, but we did not find any differences in the number of negative words used between the two conditions. Future studies should use a stronger priming situation and have a larger participant pool.

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Reading about or recalling a particularly emotional event **{ INDENT }**  
has the potential to arouse a salient emotional response in an individual. This response could be unconscious and short-lived, or it could produce an internalized emotional state that results in a complete change of mood (Vallacher, Nowak, Froehlich, Rockloff, 2002). In the current study, we investigate whether a positive and negative situational prime would influence a person's self-description using the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954).

*Effects of Priming on Individuals*

Numerous mood induction studies have shown that people's perceptions of themselves and situations differ based on their current mood (Vallacher et al., 2002). For example, Fedorikhin and Cole (2004) investigated the effect of mood induction on consumer preferences.

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## Method

### *Participants*

Thirty-five students, (18 men and 17 women), ranging in age from 17 to 23 ( $M = 19.14$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) from Hamilton College participated in the study. We recruited students by going to three on-campus dormitories and distributing questionnaires. Students enrolled in certain psychology courses received extra credit for their participation.

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### *Materials*

*Priming questionnaire.* The questionnaire had two parts, a situation description with follow-up questions and a free response section. Participants either read a positive or negative scenario. In the positive situation, participants imagined that it was their birthday, and when they arranged to meet their friends for dinner, their friends surprised them with a cake and presents.

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### *Procedure*

Each of the three female researchers went to a different dormitory on the Hamilton College campus to recruit participants. We knocked on students' doors between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. on a week night and asked if they would mind completing two questionnaires for a social psychology course.

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*Overall Differences Following Positive and Negative Priming*

As expected, we found that participants used more positive statements following the positive prime situation than following the negative prime situation,  $t(33) = -1.98, p < .05, (M = 34.91, SD = 19.66,$

$M = 21.84, SD = 18.95)$ . Thus, in terms of positive statements, the results supported our hypothesis.

**{ADDITIONAL RESULTS}**

Discussion

We sought to investigate the influence of a positive and negative priming scenario on participants' self-description, in terms of how they described their physical appearance, roles, traits/abilities, emotional state, preferences and future jobs. We hypothesized that the positive priming condition would cause individuals to use more positive descriptors, while the negative condition would lead to more negative self-descriptors.

**{ADDITIONAL PARAGRAPHS**

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References

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Baldwin, M. W. (1994). Primed relational schemas as a source of self-evaluative reactions. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 13*, 380-403.

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Fedorikhin, A., & Cole, C. A. (2004). Mood effects on attitudes, perceived risk and choice: Moderators and mediators. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14*, 2-12.

Table 1

*Percentage of Positive and Negative Statements Based on Priming  
Condition*

Priming Condition	Type of Statements	
	Positive	Negative
Positive	34.91	40.29
Negative	21.84	50.28

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*Figure 1.* Percentage of positive and negative statements as a function of priming condition.

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