

The role of category accessibility in the interpretation of information about persons: Some determinants and implications.
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ABSTRACT

1. Many personality trait terms can be thought of as summary labels for broad conceptual categories that are used to encode information about an individual's behavior into memory. The likelihood that a behavior is encoded in terms of a particular trait category is postulated to be a function of the relative accessibility of that category in memory. In addition, the trait category used to encode a particular behavior is thought to affect subsequent judgments of the person along dimensions to which it is directly or indirectly related. To test these hypotheses, undergraduates first performed a sentence construction task that activated concepts associated with either hostility (Exp I, 96 Ss) or kindness (Exp II, 96 new Ss). As part of an ostensibly unrelated impression formation experiment, Ss later read a description of behaviors that were ambiguous with respect to hostility (kindness) and then rated the target person along a variety of trait dimensions. Ratings of the target along these dimensions increased with the number of times that the test concept had previously been activated in the sentence construction task and decreased with the time interval between these prior activations and presentation of the stimulus information to be encoded. Results suggest that category accessibility is a major determinant of the way in which social information is encoded into memory and subsequently used to make judgments. (22 ref) (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved)