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Introduction

In psychological research it is common to assess stereotypes using explicit measures in which people are asked directly about their stereotypical beliefs. In current research it has become increasingly difficult to rely on explicit tasks because of social desirability.

A series of experiments by Lasonde (2008) assessed the presence of stereotypes through an implicit measure of reading comprehension that did not reflect social desirability. Participants read a series of passages which were intended to activate stereotypes. It was demonstrated that reading time slowed when information inconsistent with stereotypes was presented.

➤The goal of the present study was to examine stereotype activation in memory as a function of whether the stereotype described in the text was either positive or negative. Differences were assessed by measuring participant reading time on target sentences.

Method

Participants. Thirty Minnesota State University, Mankato undergraduates from the Psychology Department received partial course credit for their participation.

Materials. Twenty-four passages similar to those presented in Table 1 were used.

Procedure. Participants read passages line-by-line on a computer by pressing a line-advance key. A reading time measure was used to determine processing time on target sentences. A comprehension question immediately followed each passage. E-Prime2.0, Psychology Software Tools, Inc. was used for procedure and data collection. Differences in reading time for target sentences were determined using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Table 1. Sample Passages

POSITIVE STEREOTYPE	NEGATIVE STEREOTYPE
<p><u>Introduction</u> The local high school had a community T.V. station and students were encouraged to become part of T.V. productions. Each year two senior class members were elected by their peers to broadcast the school's announcements in the station. The televised announcements were broadcast live each morning and alerted the student body of current happenings.</p> <p><u>Elaboration</u> Jim and Carol, the student anchors, reported on stories involving sports and activities. This morning, one of the major announcements concerned the debate team's results on the school's annual achievement test. Jim and Carol reported that the principal had called members of the debate team into her office to address their performance.</p> <p><u>Background</u> Jim and Carol also revealed the results of a fund-raising competition. Students from each grade were collecting change in support of building a recreation center at school. After the announcements, Jim and Carol saw the principal in the hall and said hello.</p> <p><u>Reinstatement Sentence</u> Jim asked about the debate team's performance.</p> <p>Consistent Target Sentence 1 The debate team performed well on the test.</p> <p>Inconsistent Target Sentence 1 The debate team performed badly on the test.</p> <p>Target Sentence 2 Jim also asked about how the senior class did.</p> <p><u>Closing</u> The principal told him that overall he was pleased with the senior class's scores on the achievement test.</p> <p><u>Comprehension Question</u> Was the school holding a fund-raiser?</p>	<p><u>Introduction</u> Amy and her roommates never spent much time together on campus because they had opposite schedules. However, in the evenings they made it a point to eat dinner and watch an entertainment show that reported on the biggest stories and latest gossip. They started eating and eagerly watched as the show announced the featured story.</p> <p><u>Elaboration</u> This evening, the T.V. show's major story involved a person that everyone in the public seemed to have a strong opinion about. The criminal was being questioned about a recent incident at a trendy night club. Amy found it hard to disguise her feelings toward the criminal.</p> <p><u>Background</u> Amy's friend had made a homemade pot pie which was a real treat. Because they were students, they really didn't have time for cooking and their eating habits had suffered. After eating, they continued to talk over dessert.</p> <p><u>Reinstatement Sentence</u> Amy's friend asked for her thoughts about criminal.</p> <p>Consistent Target Sentence 1 Amy said that the criminal was repulsive.</p> <p>Inconsistent Target Sentence 1 Amy said that the criminal was gorgeous.</p> <p>Target Sentence 2 Another friend asked Amy how her day was.</p> <p><u>Closing</u> Amy told her friends that she had a lot of homework.</p> <p><u>Comprehension Question</u> Did the roommates have pot pie for dinner?</p>

Results

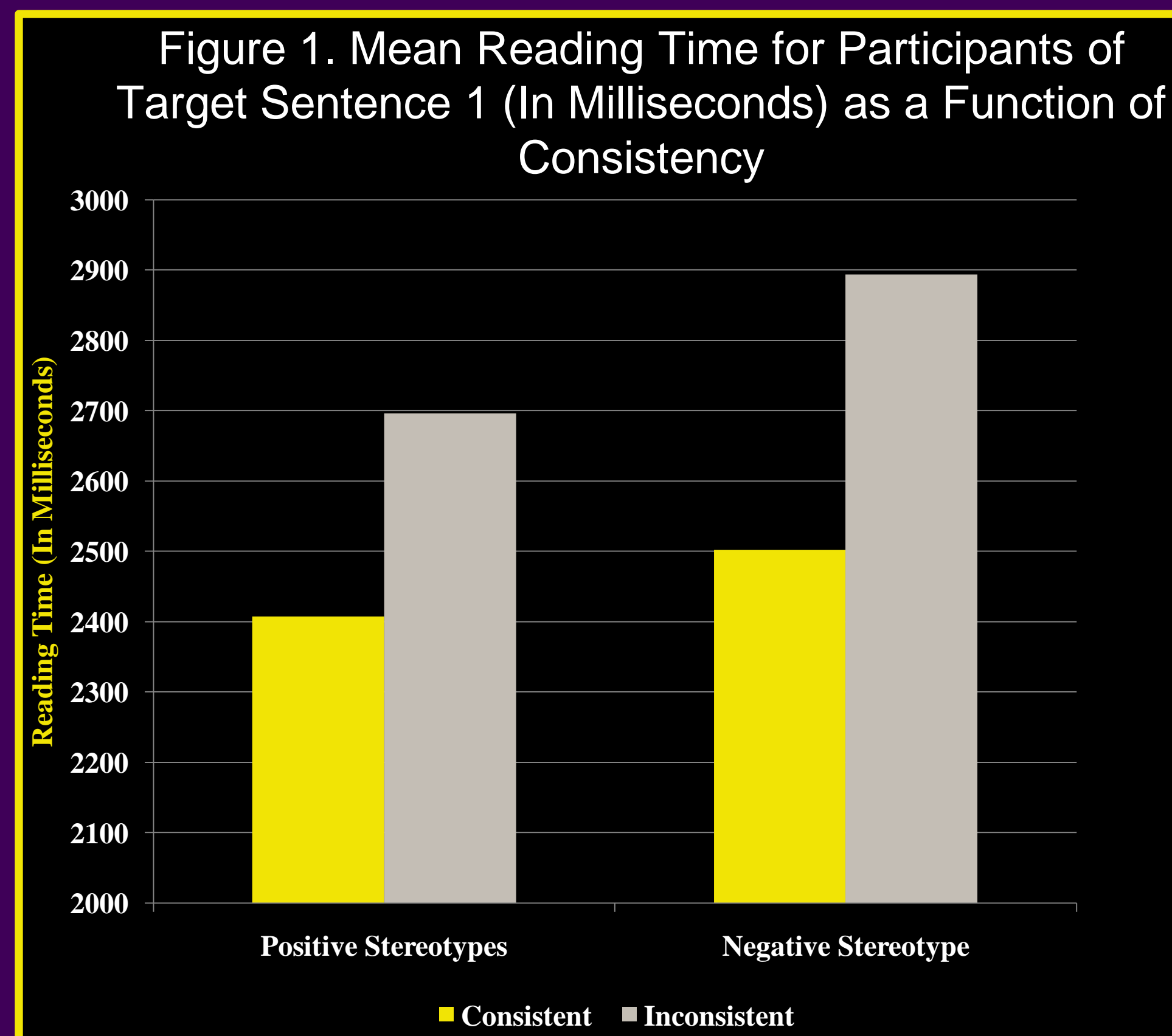
✓Reading times were facilitated for target sentences consistent with the inferred stereotype when compared to target sentences inconsistent with the inferred stereotype, by participants, $F(1, 28) = 51.33$, $Mse = 67,753$.

✓Planned comparisons confirmed this was true for passages containing positive stereotypes, $F(1, 28) = 19.45$, $Mse = 129,130$ and for passages containing negative stereotypes, $F(1, 28) = 23.93$, $Mse = 192,266$.

✓In addition, reading time was slower for target sentences that were both inconsistent and negative when compared to reading time for target sentences that were inconsistent and positive, $F(1, 28) = 6.44$, $Mse = 181,055$.

Table 2. Mean Reading Time of Target Sentence 1 (In Milliseconds) as a Function of Consistency

	Positive Stereotype	Negative Stereotype
Consistent	2407	2502
Inconsistent	2696	2894



Discussion

We found that participants read target sentences more quickly when they were consistent with the inferred stereotype than when target sentences were inconsistent with this stereotype independent of whether the stereotype was positive or negative. These results replicate the findings of Lasonde (2008).

The more interesting result was that inconsistency differed as a function of valence; that is, participant reading time on inconsistent target sentences was slower for negative stereotypes when compared to positive stereotypes. This result demonstrates that valence may be an important dimension to consider in stereotypes and that there are differences in how stereotypical knowledge is stored and retrieved. We are currently working on a follow-up study to examine these differences.

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References
 Lasonde, K. A. (2008). Activation of Stereotypical Knowledge (Doctoral Dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 2008). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 69 (3-B), 1982.