

# The Effects of Subliminal and Supraliminal Priming of Religious Content on Intergroup Attitudes

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## Introduction & Purpose

- The controversial "burqa-ban", prohibiting the wearing of religious signs in public places, has raised political, social and religious debates.
- The psychological research field also reflects this confusion, as priming of religious concepts induces pro-social behavior but also prejudice and stereotypes against individuals of other religions (Ahmed & Salas, 2008; Johnson et al., 2010; Ramsay et al., 2014).
- Previous studies have found a majority-minority asymmetry for holding outgroup negative evaluations (Bilali, Celik & Ok, 2014; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005).
- We aim to investigate whether religious priming will differently influence intergroup attitudes for majority and minority groups in Israel (Jews and Muslims, respectively).
- We examine outgroup attitudes following supraliminal and subliminal priming.

## Study 1A - Supraliminal Priming

### Method

- 156 Jewish and Muslim students from the Zefat Academic College: 88 Jews, 68 Muslims.
- Participants completed a search puzzle (Bargh et al., 2001; Pichon et al., 2007) by which they were exposed to religious concepts.
- Participants were randomly assigned to: priming of Jewish concepts, priming of Islamic concepts or neutral priming.

Filler words:

flower-pot, telephone, rice, train

Critical words (1):

yarmulke, mezuzah, Torah

Critical words (2):

veil, Koran, mosque

Critical words (3):

pencil-box, table, computer

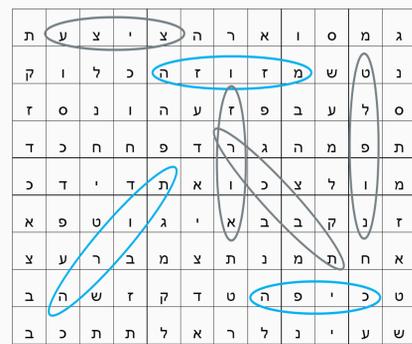


Figure 1: An example of the word search puzzle

- Task: find and mark 7 target words.
- Participants filled questionnaires assessing their stereotypes to the outgroup (Stephan et al., 1994; Tur-Kaspa & Shwarzwoold, 2003) on a 10-point scale, regarding 16 traits.
- Factor scores were extracted: **unpleasantness** (unfriendly, unreliable, undisciplined, disrespectful) and **antagonism** (ignorant, aggressive, clannish, unrestrained).

### Results

- Religious group significantly interacted with priming [*Hotelling's Trace* = .097,  $F(4,258) = 3.113, p < .017$ ].
- Supraliminal priming did not affect outgroup stereotypes of Jews (*Hotelling's Trace* = .034,  $F < 1$ ).
- However, Muslims perceived Jews as more unpleasant when primed by Jewish content, and as more antagonistic when primed by Islamic content [*Hotelling's Trace* = .226,  $F(4,110) = 3.107, p < .019$ ].

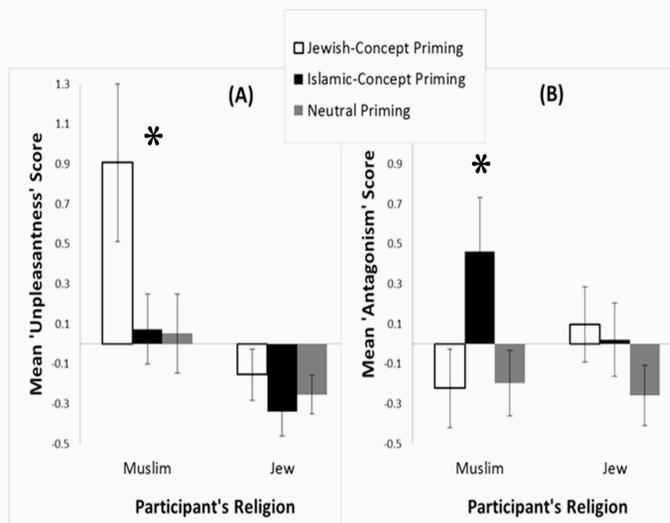


Figure 2: Stereotyping as a function of supraliminal priming

## Study 1B - Supraliminal Priming

### Method

- 67 Jewish participants participated in a computerized priming task (Pichon et al., 2007; Wittenbrink, Judd & Park, 2001).
- Priming conditions: Jewish concepts, Islamic concepts or neutral primes.
- 20 primes in each condition.
- Supraliminal prime duration: 690 msec.
- Task: lexical decision concerning a letter string which followed the prime.

### Results

- Still, priming did not affect stereotypes of Jews toward Muslims ( $F_s < 1$ ).

Figure 3: Stereotyping as a function of supraliminal priming for Jews in the computerized task

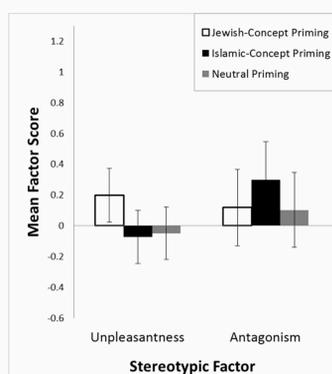


Figure 4: Sequence of events in a trial in the computerized priming task

## Study 2 - Subliminal Priming

### Method

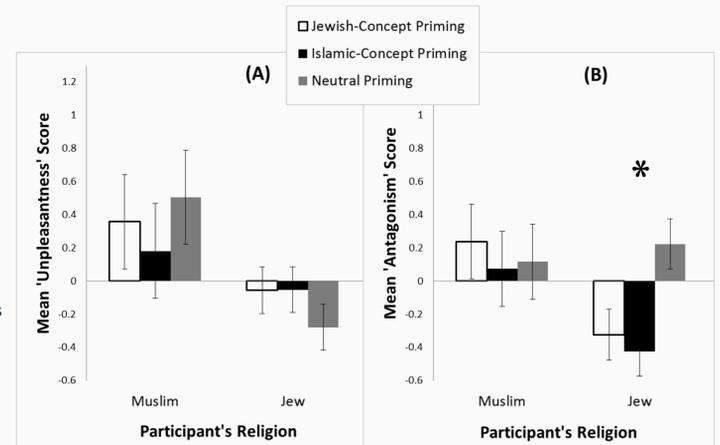
- 64 Jews and 62 Muslims took part in the computerized priming task.
- Subliminal prime duration: 15 msec.
- Participants filled questionnaires concerning their outgroup: stereotypes, threat perceptions, prejudicial attitudes, social distance and sympathy (Stephan et al., 1994, 1998; Tur-Kaspa & Shwarzwoold, 2003).

### Results

- Subliminal priming did not affect perceptions and attitudes of Muslims toward Jews ( $F_s < 1$ ).
- However, Jews perceived Muslims as less antagonist when primed by religious content relative to neutral primes [ $F(2,59) = 5.373, p < .009$ ].

Figure 5:

Stereotyping as a function of subliminal priming



- Jews' perceptions and attitudes toward Muslims were differently affected by the type of prime [for threat perceptions: *Hotelling's Trace* = .27,  $F(6,11) = 2.517, p < .026$ ; for prejudice and social distance measures: *Hotelling's Trace* = .247,  $F(6,114) = 2.351, p < .036$ ].

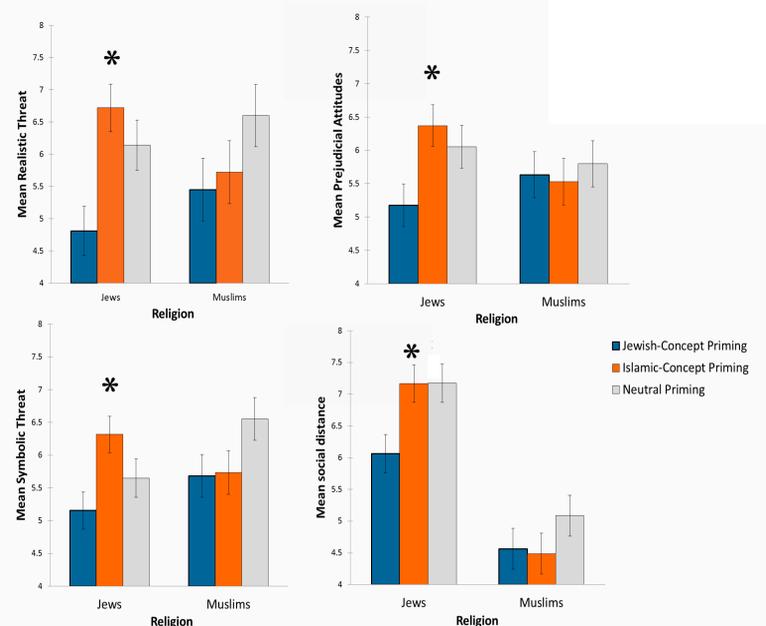


Figure 6: Outgroup perceptions and attitudes as a function of supraliminal priming

## Discussion

- This research highlights the differential influence of evoked religious content on outgroup attitudes as a function of awareness to primes in minority and majority groups.
- For the minority, incidental supraliminal exposure to religious concepts evoked negative outgroup stereotypes.
- For the majority, subliminal exposure to religious schemas moderated negative attitudes towards the outgroup. Ingroup Jewish concepts reduced perceived threats and negative attitudes.
- Unveiling the asymmetry between religious content which was activated subliminally or supra-primally, strengthens the idea of holding double attitudes towards the outgroup (Wilson, Lindzey & Schooler, 2000). Under different priming conditions, people report the attitude that is most accessible and thus different evaluations of the same object may emerge.
- Under certain cases, wearing religious signs in public places may actually reduce negative emotions and attitudes.

