# EVIDENCE FOR COGNITIVE BIAS TOWARD SEXUAL STIMULI MEASURED BY STROOP AND INCIDENTAL LEARNING PARADIGMS

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## ABSTRACT

Studies of interference in information processing have indicated that sexual material may cause more interference than neutral material. Interference in information processing, due to the processing of sexual stimuli, has been termed the Sexual Content Induced Delay (SCID). Initially lexical decision tasks were used to study the SCID, and the effect was found only in females; males only produced a similar trend. Since literature has indicated that males are more easily aroused by visual stimuli than women, the intent of the present study was to develop a procedure, using explicit sexual pictures and words, to assess if the SCID may occur in males as well. The present study involved two different tasks, both using male participants, 18 years of age or older. The first task addressed the SCID with a Stroop Picture-Word Task. Trials consisted of a picture with a word superimposed on it. Participants were randomly assigned to two different instruction groups. Half were instructed to categorize the word as fast and accurately as possible, and the other half were instructed to categorize the picture. Categorization times of explicit sexual and neutral targets, in the presence of explicit sexual and neutral distracters, were measured and recorded. The second task was an unannounced Incidental Learning Task (IRT) that measured, and recorded, the recognition accuracy of sexual versus neutral target pictures and words, and sexual versus neutral distracter pictures and words presented in the first task.

Reaction times to categorize pictures were not affected by neutral or sexual word distracters. However, reaction times to categorize words were affected by sexual picture distracters. Sexual picture distracters slowed reaction times to categorize neutral word targets, providing support for the SCID effect in male participants.

Longer reaction times to target neutral words, when a distracting sexual picture is present, as well as high recognition accuracy (in the recognition task) for the distracting sexual picture provides support for the hypothesis that sexual material is cognitively processed at a deeper level than neutral material.

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# DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to friends and family, who have continuously been there for me. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my beautiful wife Melissa, who has been extremely patient with me throughout this entire process.

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