

EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL PRIMES ON JUDGMENTS RELATED TO DRINKING AND DRIVING

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ABSTRACT

Although past research has tested the effects of alcohol related priming on behavior and judgments, previous studies have not investigated the effects of alcohol primes on judgments specific to drinking and driving. Based on the spreading activation model, we hypothesized that participants primed with alcohol words will make drinking and driving judgments consistent with their pre-existing attitudes about engaging in the behavior. Participants ($N = 302$) were randomly assigned to a priming condition (alcohol, safety, danger or neutral words) and they completed a lexical decision task which served as the priming mechanism. Following the primes, participants were asked to make hypothetical drinking and driving judgments. We found a significant interaction (condition X attitudes) on judgments regarding perceived danger of drinking and driving ($\beta = .43, p < .01$). Probing this interaction indicated that the standardized simple slope was $.15$ ($p = .32$) for participants in the alcohol condition and $.70$ ($p < .001$) for participants in the neutral condition. Contrary to our hypothesis, these results suggest that pre-existing attitudes were predictive of drinking and driving judgments following the neutral primes but not following alcohol primes. Results from this study may better fit a dual process model of alcohol cognitions, which suggests that behaviors are influenced by both implicit and explicit cognitions. These effects are stronger for participants who report past drinking and driving behavior suggesting that the alcohol primes may activate implicit cognitions about drinking and driving, which are specifically salient for participants who engage in the behavior.