

PROSOCIAL ORIENTATION MAY SENSITIZE TO AGGRESSION-RELATED CUES

MICHAEL SCHWENZER
RWTH Aachen University, Aachen, Germany

Keywords: prosocial orientation, aggressiveness, emotional Stroop task, cognition, individual differences.

Prosocial orientation may increase sensitivity to aggression-related cues. In the present experiment, prosocial orientation, but not aggressiveness, correlated to a cognitive bias towards violence words. Ninety-six advanced students and postgraduates, 45 male, mean age = 25.6 ± 3.5 years, completed a prosocial orientation scale and an aggressiveness scale (Fahrenberg, Hampel, & Selg, 2001). In each scale, twelve statements were answered by “correct” or “not correct”, then scores were summed. To test if there was a cognitive bias towards aggression, participants named – as quickly as possible – the color of each word of two modified Stroop tables, each table displaying three columns of 24 words with alternating colors (red, green, blue, yellow). This arrangement resembled an established Stroop test (Bäumler, 1985) but words referring to an emotion rather than a color should slow down responses (e.g., Williams, Mathew, & MacLeod, 1996). One table displayed neutral words (“fruit”, “move”, “frame”, “water”, “journey”, “umbrella”), the other table displayed violence words (“murder”, “slaps”, “threat”, “punishment”, “command”, “contempt”). In an unpublished exploration, the author identified the aggression-related and neutral words lists using a factorial analysis of ratings of whether or not words described an interpersonal conflict. The reaction time (RT) of the neutral table was subtracted

Michael Schwenzer, PhD, sc. hum., Dipl. Psych., Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, RWTH Aachen University, Aachen, Germany.

Appreciation is due to anonymous reviewers.

Please address correspondence and reprint requests to: Michael Schwenzer, PhD, sc. hum., Dipl. Psych., Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, RWTH Aachen University, Pauwelsstraße 30, 52074 Aachen, Germany. Phone: +49 241 80 89490; Fax: +49 241 80 82401; Email: mschwenzer@ukaachen.de

from the RT of the violence table in each subject. After median splits according to the questionnaire scores, groups were compared.

RESULTS

Prosocial-oriented participants showed decelerated responses in the violence table; aggressiveness was uncorrelated to naming violence words (prosocial orientation: $\rho_{\text{scores-RT}} = .23, p = .020$; cut-off = 8, $n = 52$: 44; $M_{\text{high-group}}: 1.99 \pm 3.78$ sec., $M_{\text{low-group}}: 0.08 \pm 4.82$ sec.; $Z = 2.6, p = .009$; aggressiveness: $\rho_{\text{scores-RT}} = -.02, p = .837$; cut-off = 3, $n = 48$: 48; $M_{\text{high-group}} = 1.05 \pm 3.75$ sec., $M_{\text{low-group}}: 0.86 \pm 5.11$ sec., $Z = .01, p = .988$).

REFERENCES

- Bäumler, G. (1985). *FWIT: Farbe-Wort-Interferenztest*. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe.
- Fahrenberg, J., Hampel, R., & Selg, H. (2001). *Das Freiburger Persönlichkeitsinventar* (7th rev. ed.). Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe.
- Williams, J. M. G., Mathew, A., & MacLeod, C. (1996). The emotional Stroop task and psychopathology. *Psychological Bulletin*, **120**, 3-24.