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- CINAHL
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- Core Databases
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  - DynaMed
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*The effect of stimulus salience on over-selectivity.*

Leader, G. Loughnane, A. MacMoreland, C. Reid, P.


**Abstract**

The influence of stimulus salience on over-selective responding was investigated in the context of a computer-driven measure of over-selectivity. In Experiments 1 and 2, participants were presented with two stimuli, each displaying two colors. In comparison to uncontrolled conditions, participants with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) demonstrated more over-selectivity, which increased when the stimulus differed in salience. In Experiment 3, a previously under-attended stimulus emerged to control behavior. The results suggest that stimulus of different salience may trigger over-selectivity in individuals with ASD and provide preliminary support that this may be due to the action of an over-selective computer mechanism functioning at the neural level of processing.

**Keywords**

Over-selectivity, Computer mechanism, Stimulus salience, Inattention

**Introduction**

Over-selectivity occurs when only a limited number of the available stimuli are noticeable to the environment or to control behavior (Lorrain et al., 1971). Lorrain et al. (1971) presented three groups of stimuli (Attentional Spectrum Disorder, developmentally delayed, and typically developing) with a computer stimulus that comprised auditory, visual, and tactile elements. The participants received reinforcement for ignoring the presence of the computer stimulus, but not in its absence. Following this training, the individual elements of the computer stimulus were presented separately, and responding in the presence of each element was recorded. Although over-selectivity has been reported in a number of individuals with ASD (e.g., Lorrain and Scheff, 1966; Rundall and Lorrain, 1971), Williams and Lorrain (1989), this phenomenon is not unique to ASD, and it has also been demonstrated in several populations with impaired intellectual functioning (e.g., DeLeon et al., 1996; Lorrain et al., 1997; McHugh and Reid, 2007).

Several theories regarding the nature of over-selectivity propose that such over-selective responding is the product of an attentional deficit (e.g., Lorrain et al., 1971). Such theories can be regarded as implying that over-selectivity is the result of a failure in the pre-processing abilities of the participants. In the limiting case, if all of the stimuli in the environment are attended to equally, then they cannot be processed, and, thus, cannot come to control behavior. Evidence for an attentional basis for over-selectivity comes from studies of the eye movements of people with ASD. A study conducted by DeLeon et al. (1999) used an eye-tracking procedure to investigate whether there were differences in the initial attentive responses of the participants. Participants with intellectual disability, who showed over-selective responding, only looked at about three times the stimuli as presented compared to a control participant.

However, it should be noted that studies of environment have yielded some inconsistent results (e.g., Lorrain et al., 1997; Van der Geest et al., 2002; Vollman and Myers, 1990).
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