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EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES OF HUMAN CROWDING:

A TEST OF TWO MODELS.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology
at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

Following a review of the history of human crowding the attributional arousal model of crowding was examined. This model views the experience of crowding as spatially induced arousal, attributed to the closeness of others. The model introduces the possibility of misattribution of arousal source leading to a reduction in perceived crowding. A salience hypothesis was developed in order to account for the ease with which misattribution was predicted to occur.

Study One attempted to test the salience hypothesis. The study varied two levels of distance and four levels of information concerning arousal source in attempting to partially replicate one of the key studies on which the attributional arousal model is based. The 320 subjects were run in groups of five.

The distance manipulation was effective in inducing crowding in subjects seated at close distances. However, the predicted levels of increased arousal failed to emerge. This unexpected result precluded any test of the salience hypothesis, since increased levels of arousal are necessary in order for causal search and misattribution to occur. This result showed that the experience of crowding may occur independently of arousal.

The information expectancy model was developed to explain the results from Study One. This model assumes invasion of personal space is necessary for the
experience of crowding, and also that confirming of expectations will reduce the impact of crowding. Study Two aimed to clarify the role of information and expectations in the context of experimental crowding. A further aim was to gather psychometric data on the efficacy of measurement scales for the concepts of arousal and crowding.

Study Two varied three levels of spatial information and two levels of nonspatial information. The 240 subjects were run in groups of five and all were seated at close interpersonal distance.

Results showed the measurement scales possessed high levels of internal consistency. However, accurate spatial information failed to reduce the impact of crowding and this result calls into question the utility of pre-exposure information. Disconfirmed nonspatial expectations increased levels of reported crowding suggesting that accurate information concerning the activities which occur while in crowded conditions is important. Sex differences emerged and these contributed to the view that women may be more adaptable than men under conditions of reduced interpersonal distance.

The results of these studies were considered in terms of their implications for the models of crowding. Suggestions for further research were discussed. These included examining the relationship between spatial invasion and crowding, and further considering the impact of information on the experience of crowding.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ................................................................. i

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** .................................................. iii

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION** ........................................................ 1
**OVERVIEW** .............................................................. 1
**HISTORY OF CROWDING** .............................................. 2
**DISTINCTIONS AND DEFINITIONS** .................................. 10
**MODELS OF CROWDING** ............................................... 18

**CHAPTER TWO**

**ATTRIBUTIONAL MODELS** ............................................ 27

**CHAPTER THREE**

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE TWO FACTOR MODEL OF CROWDING** 36

**SPATIAL INVASION** ..................................................... 40
**AROUSAL** .................................................................. 42
**COGNITION** ............................................................... 46
  - Attribution .......................................................... 46
  - Attention ............................................................ 52
  - Information .......................................................... 54
  - Salience .............................................................. 56
# CHAPTER SEVEN

AN INFORMATION EXPECTANCY MODEL OF CROWDING ........................ 102

PREDICTIONS OF THE INFORMATION EXPECTANCY MODEL .......... 108

HYPOTHESES .............................................................................. 112
  Appraisal ............................................................................. 112
  Crowding ............................................................................. 112
  Arousal ................................................................................. 113
  Annoyance ............................................................................ 114
  Interpersonal Relationships ...................................................... 115
  Affect .................................................................................... 116
  Performance ........................................................................... 116
  Sex ....................................................................................... 118

MEASUREMENT OF AROUSAL AND CROWDING ......................... 119
  Arousal ................................................................................. 119
  Crowding ............................................................................... 124

# CHAPTER EIGHT

STUDY TWO: METHOD ................................................................. 129

OVERVIEW AND DESIGN ............................................................. 129

SUBJECTS .................................................................................. 130

EXPERIMENTAL MATERIALS ...................................................... 132

PROCEDURE ............................................................................. 137

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DEBRIEFING ...................... 141
CHAPTER NINE

STUDY TWO: RESULTS .................................................. 144
PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF THE SCALES MEASURING
AROUSAL AND CROWDING ......................................... 144
MANIPULATION CHECKS ............................................. 146
DISTANCE MANIPULATION ......................................... 146
INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND SUBJECTS' APPRAISAL ... 148
DIFFICULTY OF ANAGRAMS ........................................ 149
SEX ..................................................................... 152
CROWDING ............................................................. 153
ANNOYANCE ............................................................ 155
AROUSAL ................................................................. 158
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ............................... 160
PUNITIVENESS .......................................................... 161
AGRESSIVENESS ........................................................ 162
LIKING FOR OTHERS ............................................... 163
AFFECT .................................................................. 164
PERFORMANCE ......................................................... 165

CHAPTER TEN

STUDY TWO: DISCUSSION ............................................ 167
MEASUREMENT OF AROUSAL AND CROWDING ............... 167
MANIPULATION CHECKS ............................................. 168
  Interpersonal Distance ............................................. 168
  Information .......................................................... 173
  Anagrams ............................................................ 173
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CROWDING AND ANNOYANCE</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AROUSAL</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFECT</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INFORMATION EXPECTANCY MODEL</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ELEVEN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: EXPERIMENTAL PRE-INSTRUCTIONS (STUDY ONE)</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: POST-EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE (STUDY ONE)</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: NOTES TO SUBJECTS (STUDY ONE)</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: ANOVA TABLES FOR KEY DEPENDENT MEASURES FOR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY ONE (GROUP ANALYSIS)</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: ANCOVA TABLE FOR CROWDING CONTROLLING FOR AROUSAL ................................................................. 238

APPENDIX F: ANOVA TABLES FOR SELECTED DEPENDENT VARIABLES SHOWING INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS FOR STUDY ONE .................. 239

APPENDIX G: EXPERIMENTAL PRE-INSTRUCTIONS (STUDY TWO) . . . 242

APPENDIX H: PRACTICE AND TEST ANAGRAMS ........................................ 245

APPENDIX I: POST-EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE (STUDY TWO) . . . 248

APPENDIX J: CROWDING RESEARCH NOTES TO SUBJECTS (STUDY TWO) .......................................................... 255

APPENDIX K: ANOVA TABLES FOR KEY DEPENDENT MEASURES FOR STUDY TWO (GROUP ANALYSIS) .......................... 260
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.
Means and standard deviations for ratings of arousal ................. 78

Table 2.
Means and standard deviations for ratings of crowding ............. 79

Table 3.
Means and standard deviations for ratings of confinement .......... 80

Table 4.
Means and standard deviations for the number of words derived from the master word ........................................ 82

Table 5.
Frequencies for extent of personal space invasion ................. 148

Table 6.
Means and standard deviations for number of practice anagrams correct per condition ........................................ 150
Table 7.
Means and standard deviations for number of test anagrams correct per condition ................................................. 152

Table 8.
Means and standard deviations for ratings of crowding as a function of sex and information ................................................. 154

Table 9.
Means and standard deviations for ratings of crowding as a function of sex and task difficulty ................................................. 155

Table 10.
Means and standard deviations for ratings of annoyance as a function of sex and information ................................................. 156

Table 11.
Means and standard deviations for annoyance ratings as a function of sex and task difficulty ................................................. 157

Table 12.
Means and standard deviations for arousal as a function of information and task difficulty ................................................. 159
Table 13.
Means and standard deviations for somatic as a function of information and task difficulty ........................................... 160

Table 14.
Means and standard deviations for the Love-Punishment scale as a function of information and task difficulty .................... 161

Table 15.
Means and standard deviations for aggressiveness as a function of information and task difficulty ........................................... 163

Table 16.
Means and standard deviations for group performance as a function of information and task difficulty ........................................... 165

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Diagram of the attributional arousal model showing spatial invasion leading to increased arousal and interpretation .......................... 39