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Priming effects of masked stimuli: The role of the masking procedure.

One approach to investigate stimulus processing outside of consciousness employs masking paradigms which make a commonly visible stimulus invisible. Priming effects of masked stimuli have been taken as evidence for the view that given specific circumstances stimuli can be processed although they are not consciously perceived. Dissociation paradigms have been developed which provide evidence for a dissociation of processing routes that do or do not result in conscious perception of the stimuli that can produce various effects irrespective of whether they are consciously perceived or not. Later investigations, however, revealed that priming effects of masked stimuli depend on the type of masking paradigm that is used to abandon conscious perception of the effective stimuli. Different effects of specific masking procedures on conscious perception and on priming effects shed new light on the processing of visual stimuli in general. Most recent findings accord with the view that backward masking interferes with stimulus processing for conscious perception while forward masking affects stimulus processing on the route to priming effects.