apt to interrupt. These findings establish that priming effects can influence our own behavior (see also Chartrand & Bargh, 1999).

4. Contrast Effects Following Schema Activation

To this point, we have seen that schema activation produces an assimilation effect. If hostility has recently been primed, we interpret ambiguous behaviors to be more hostile than if hostility has not recently been primed. Contrast effects also occur. With a contrast effect, we are less apt to interpret an ambiguous behavior to be consistent with an activated schema. To illustrate, suppose you have recently read a biography of Mother Teresa. If you then read a story about Saddam Hussein, you will probably regard him as more evil than if you had first read a book about Hitler. In cases like these, rather than being assimilated to the activated schema, your judgment is contrasted against the schema.

Research suggests that traits produce assimilation effects but that extreme examples produce contrast effects (DeCoster & Claypool, 2004; Moskowitz & Skurnik, 1999; Stapel, Koomen, & van der Plight, 1997). To illustrate, suppose you see a person solve a puzzle. If the trait term clever has recently been primed, you will probably think the person is smart (an assimilation effect). If, however, you have recently been thinking about Albert Einstein, you will probably be less inclined to think the person is smart (a contrast effect). The same thing happens with your own behavior (Dijksterhuis et al., 1998). Thinking about smart people in general tends to improve our performance at a task, but thinking about a particularly smart person, such as Einstein, tends to impair our performance.

C. Overcoming Priming Effects

The research you’ve been reading about makes it seem as if you are at the mercy of chance events. If a driver happens to cut you off on the way into work, you will interpret a colleague’s request to use the copy machine in negative terms and brusquely