



Reliance on individuating information and stereotypes in implicit and explicit person perception[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated whether stereotypes or individuating information take primacy in implicit and explicit person perception. Study 1 investigated whether variation in the diagnosticity of individuating information moderated stereotype bias in implicit and explicit person perception. Increases in diagnosticity produced a linear reduction in explicit and implicit stereotype bias; with more diagnostic individuating information, there was less bias. Studies 2 and 3 examined the effects on person perception of racial stereotypes and of diagnostic individuating information that varied in valence. Study 2 found no substantial implicit or explicit anti-Black stereotype bias in the presence of diagnostic individuating information and large individuating information effects on explicit person perception. Study 3 found no explicit anti-Black stereotype bias in the presence of diagnostic individuating information and that individuating information influenced both implicit and explicit person perception. Together, these studies showed that individuating information can reduce or eliminate stereotype bias in implicit and explicit person perception and that its effect depends on the diagnosticity of the information. In addition, patterns of reliance on stereotypes and individuating information in implicit and explicit person perception generally converged. Results are discussed in the context of current controversies about the processes underlying implicit and explicit social cognition.

1. Introduction

What sources of information do people prioritize when consciously and subconsciously forming impressions of others? Do they primarily rely on stereotypes (general beliefs about the characteristics of social groups and their individual members; Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981) or on individuating information (any information about an individual group member other than category information; Kunda & Thagard, 1996; Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, & Hepburn, 1980; cf. Brewer, 1988)? Does this reliance change when the impressions are implicit rather than explicit? The present research investigated the roles of individuating information and stereotypes in implicit and explicit person perception and addressed the convergence versus divergence of these two modes of impression formation.

2. Do stereotypes or individuating information take primacy in explicit person perception?

2.1. Theoretical perspectives

Early theoretical models of impression formation disagreed about the primacy of stereotypes versus individuating information in explicit person perception. In these perspectives, primacy generally refers to information that dominates person perception with effects that are typically large or difficult to eliminate. Some argued that stereotypes take primacy over individuating information in person perception (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Others asserted that neither individuating information nor stereotypes take primacy in person perception by default—rather, that reliance on stereotypes versus individuating information in person perception depends in part on the characteristics of the individuating information and the judgment task (Kunda & Thagard, 1996).

In addition, some have argued that stereotypes lead people to ignore individual differences (e.g., APA, 1991; Aronson, 2011; Aronson, Wilson, Akert, & Sommers, 2015; Whitley & Kite, 2009). For example,

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Aronson et al. (2015) defined a stereotype as “a generalization about a group of people in which *identical* characteristics are assigned to *virtually all* members of the group, regardless of actual variation among the members” (p. 416, emphasis added). Such perspectives are interpretable as predicting that individuating information will be ignored, whereas stereotypes will produce powerful biases.

2.2. Empirical evidence

Kunda and Thagard (1996) reported a meta-analysis showing that the effect of individuating information on person perception was considerably larger ($r = 0.71$) than that of stereotypes ($r = 0.25$; see Jussim, 2012, for a review of meta-analyses reaching similar findings). Subsequent research has also found that individuating information generally has larger effects on person perception than do stereotypes (e.g., Monroe et al., 2017), but that their effects are not mutually exclusive (Crawford, Jussim, Madon, Cain, & Stevens, 2011; Gawronski, Ehrenberg, Banse, Zukova, & Klauer, 2003). Thus, despite earlier theoretical claims to the contrary, the very large effects in the empirical data can be plausibly interpreted as indicating that, in most of the contexts in which it has been studied, relevant individuating information takes primacy over stereotypes in explicit person perception (for a review, see Jussim, 2012).

3. Implicit versus explicit social cognition

In contrast to explicit social cognition, implicit social cognition has typically been defined as thoughts and feelings about social objects that are at least partially outside of conscious awareness (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). The processes underlying implicit and explicit social cognition have been the subject of extensive debate (see Cone, Mann & Ferguson, 2017; Ferguson, Mann, & Wojnowicz, 2014). The classic dual-process perspective (e.g., Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, 2011; Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Sloman, 1996, 2014; Smith & DeCoster, 2000) distinguishes between two types of cognitive processes: associative processes and propositional processes. In contrast, more recent perspectives reject the argument for two processes, instead espousing multi-process (Amodio, 2014; Amodio & Ratner, 2011) or single-process (DeHouwer, 2014a, 2014b; Hughes, Barnes-Holmes, & DeHouwer, 2011) models of social cognition.

The present research did not take an a priori position with respect to this debate. Instead, we derived a series of competing hypotheses from this literature to empirically address the unresolved questions of (a) whether stereotypes or individuating information take primacy in implicit person perception, and (b) whether patterns of reliance on individuating information and stereotypes in implicit and explicit person perception converge or diverge.

4. Do stereotypes or individuating information take primacy in implicit person perception?

4.1. Theoretical perspectives consistent with the primacy of individuating information in implicit person perception

A central tenet of propositional models of implicit evaluations (DeHouwer, 2014a, 2014b; see also Hughes et al., 2011) is that the automatic formation or activation of propositions mediates implicit evaluations. Propositional information can be defined as a statement about the world that has an objective truth value (e.g., “The sky is blue”; DeHouwer, 2014a; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, 2011). According to this definition, many types of individuating information are propositional in nature because they provide information about targets that generally has objective truth values (e.g., a target did or did not engage in a behavior, received a certain score on a test, etc.). Because individuating information is oftentimes inherently propositional,

these propositional models can be interpreted as predicting sensitivity of implicit evaluations to individuating information.

In addition, the associative-propositional evaluations (APE) dual process model of implicit and explicit attitude change (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006, 2011) posits that implicit evaluations should be sensitive to information that affirms new propositions. According to this model, revision of existing implicit attitudes and beliefs to incorporate counterinformation falls under this umbrella. This idea can easily be extended to reliance on counterstereotypic individuating information (the processing of which presumably constitutes affirmation of new propositions; see Mann & Ferguson, 2015) in person perception. The resulting prediction is that individuating information should take primacy over stereotypes in implicit person perception.

4.2. Theoretical perspectives consistent with the primacy of stereotypes in implicit person perception

Other perspectives suggest that, once they are formed, implicit evaluations should be less likely than explicit evaluations to take into account new information (Amodio, 2014; Amodio & Ratner, 2011; Gregg, Seibt, & Banaji, 2006; Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Sloman, 1996; Smith & DeCoster, 2000; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). Several of these perspectives draw the distinction between slow-learning, associative processes, more recently named “System 1,” and fast-learning, rule-based, propositional processes known as “System 2” (Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Sloman, 1996; Smith & DeCoster, 2000). This view posits that, because System 1 processes are based on associations that accumulate gradually (cf. Gregg et al., 2006), they less readily incorporate new information than do System 2 processes (Smith & DeCoster, 2000). Some of these theories contend that at least that some types of implicit social cognition are System 1 processes (Amodio, 2014; Amodio & Ratner, 2011; Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Smith & DeCoster, 2000; see also Wilson et al., 2000). In contrast, explicit social cognition is a System 2 process according to this view (Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Smith & DeCoster, 2000). Taken together, these perspectives are consistent with the prediction that *implicit* evaluations should be relatively resistant to the influence of individuating (new) information and instead be based on stereotypes (existing associative information), whereas *explicit* evaluations should readily incorporate individuating information.

4.3. Empirical evidence regarding the responsiveness of implicit person perception to new information is mixed

Some empirical research shows that implicit evaluations of individuals do not easily change in response to new information (Rydell & McConnell, 2006; Rydell, McConnell, Strain, Claypool, & Hugenberg, 2007). Other research has found that implicit evaluations readily incorporate new information (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017; Peters & Gawronski, 2011; Whitfield & Jordan, 2009, Study 3), or that they do so to an extent (Cao & Banaji, 2016). Still other evidence suggests that implicit evaluations of individuals can be revised under particular circumstances (Cone & Ferguson, 2015; Gawronski, Rydell, Vervliet, & De Houwer, 2010; Mann & Ferguson, 2015, 2017; Rydell, McConnell, Mackie, & Strain, 2006; Wyer, 2010, 2016). Thus, no single pattern has emerged regarding the sensitivity of implicit evaluations of individuals to new information (for a review, see Cone, Mann, & Ferguson, 2017).

Two of these previous programs of research are particularly relevant to the present studies. In one, Cone and Ferguson (2015) found that a single instance of highly diagnostic behavior induced revision of implicit evaluations of an individual. The present research builds on this by investigating the effect of diagnostic individuating information on *stereotype bias* in implicit person perception and by examining implicit impressions in a specific domain (intelligence or unintelligence) rather than overall positivity or negativity.

In the other, Cao and Banaji (2016) found that counterstereotypic

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