

The Confidence Associated with Stereotype-Driven Beliefs

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Past research suggests that beliefs that are based on integrated impressions are held with greater confidence than beliefs that are based on less integrated impressions. Because stereotypes often serve as “information integrators” during the impression formation process, it was hypothesized that (1)stereotype-based beliefs would be associated with greater levels of confidence than beliefs based on more individuated impressions, and (2)the greater integration associated with stereotype-based impressions would be reflected by the greater likelihood of stereotype-based beliefs being translated into action. Though results indicated that stereotype-based beliefs were held with greater confidence than more target-based beliefs, no evidence was found to support the notion that (1)differences in levels of integration between conditions resulted in differences in confidence, or (2)differences in levels of integration between conditions led to corresponding differences in inclinations to act out beliefs. Possible methodological limitations of the study are discussed.

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For several decades now, the influence of stereotypes on impression formation has been a topic of much interest to social psychologists. Research has revealed that stereotypes can serve to bias the way in which incoming target information is processed by perceivers, and that the resulting stereotype-driven impressions can influence the manner in which perceivers behave toward targets (for a review, see Hamilton and Sherman, 1994). To be more concise, stereotype-driven beliefs often result in stereotype-driven actions. Nevertheless, the nature of a perceiver's beliefs about a target member of a stereotyped group (i.e. the extent to which the beliefs are stereotype-driven) is not the sole determinant of subsequent behavior toward the target. Another contributing factor is the extent to which the perceiver is confident in his or her beliefs about the target. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the relationship between stereotype-driven beliefs and confidence. Before addressing this specific relationship, however, it is useful to first review past work relating to confidence in belief.

The origins of belief confidence. Past research on belief confidence has often been studied within the context of interpersonal relationships. One common finding is that the greater the amount of time a perceiver spends with a target, the greater confidence the perceiver holds in the associated beliefs about the target. For example, Oskamp (1965) found that clinicians became progressively more confident in their impressions of patients as they spent more time with them. In addition, Swann and Gill (in press) found that the longer a

couple had been dating, the more confident each member was of his or her beliefs regarding the other partner.

There appear to be several reasons why greater time spent together leads to greater confidence. For one, the longer two persons are acquainted with each other, the greater the opportunity for novel information to be added to each partner's representations of the other partner. Amount of information, it has been found, is positively correlated with confidence in associated beliefs, even if the information is non-diagnostic (Gill and Swann, 1997). Second, partners who have spent a significant amount of time together may feel more entitled to be confident in their judgments of their partners. People are generally aware of the implicit rule that one should not judge an individual when he or she is lacking in information about the individual (Quattrone & Jones, 1980). Therefore, length of relationship may serve as a meta-informational cue for the extent to which confidence is warranted (Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994). A third reason, and the one that is of greatest theoretical relevance to the current study, is that relationship involvement motivates those involved in the relationship to integrate information about each other (Berscheid, Graziano, Monson, & Dermer, 1978; Gill & Swann, 1997; Miller, Norman, & Wright, 1978). Because integrated impressions are associated with greater confidence, the more involved two partners are with each other, the more confident they should be in their impressions of each other.

Why would greater integration lead to greater confidence? In order to provide an adequate response to this question, it is necessary to elaborate two

relationships: (1)the relationship between information integration and accessibility, and (2)the relationship between accessibility and confidence.

Integration Leads to Accessibility. Much of what is currently known regarding the relationship between information integration and accessibility has been gleaned from past research on the “fan effect.” The fan effect refers to the general finding that the greater the number of pieces of information an individual has about a given target concept (e.g. an object; person; etc.) the longer it takes for the individual to retrieve any one piece of information relating to the target. Anderson and Bower (1973) explained this effect using a spreading activation framework. They posited that, because unique pathways “fan out” from a target concept to each related bit of information, and because each of these pathways is searched sequentially during a retrieval task, the more pieces of information one has regarding a target, the longer it takes to retrieve any one piece of information.

It has been found, however, that the fan effect can be eliminated or even reversed by provoking subjects to integrate disparate pieces of information regarding a target. For example, Smith et al (1978) presented subjects with two facts: 1)“Marty broke the bottle,” and 2)“Marty did not delay the trip.” Subjects were then given a third fact that either aided in integrating the two facts together (“Mary was chosen to christen the ship”), or did not aid in integrating the two together (“Marty was asked to address the crowd”). Whereas subjects who were presented the third non-integrative fact displayed slower retrieval times of any one of the facts compared to when they were only presented two facts (a fan

effect), subjects who were presented the third integrative fact did not display slower retrieval. Smith et al. posited that that integration serves to create new links between previously unconnected pieces of information, thereby creating alternative, more efficient pathways for retrieval. These more efficient pathways lead to quicker retrieval/greater accessibility.

Accessibility leads to confidence. A consistent finding within the domain of cognitive psychology research is that the degree to which stored information is accessible to an individual is a reliable predictor of how confident the individual is in the associated beliefs. More specifically, the more accessible the information, the more confident the individual is in the corresponding beliefs. Several theorists have argued that this positive correlation between accessibility (i.e. latency of recall) and confidence can largely be attributed to the fact that latency of recall during the search-and-retrieval process is used metacognitively as an index of knowledge. In a sense, then, accessibility can be thought of as a useful heuristic for gauging knowledge, much like the “availability heuristic” is used to assess frequencies and probabilities (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Because accessibility is used as an index of knowledge, confidence judgments should increase as accessibility increases.

To summarize the main points covered so far, it has been argued that the greater the degree of integration among pieces of information, the greater the accessibility of any one piece of information. This greater accessibility, in turn, leads to greater judgments of confidence. Next, these theoretical points are applied toward the domain of stereotype-driven information processing.

Stereotypes as integrators of personality information. There is much empirical evidence for the notion that the activation of a stereotype often influences the subsequent social appraisal of a member of the stereotyped group. For example, Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein (1987) found that subjects who read information about a defendant in a trial who they believed was Hispanic judged the defendant more likely to be guilty than subjects who believed the defendant was Caucasian. Miller and Turnbull (1986) proposed two primary cognitive mechanisms whereby such assimilative effects are produced. First, stereotypes often lead perceivers to attend to certain information relating to the target, while ignoring other information (an encoding bias). For example, if an individual expects a person she is soon to interact with to be dispositionally shy, she may selectively attend to behavior which confirms the expectancy (e.g. the target's reluctance to make eye contact). On the other hand, other aspects of the target's behavior which are inconsistent with the expectancy (e.g. the target's insistence on going out for a beer) may be ignored. Second, stereotypes often lead perceivers to interpret behavior in a stereotype-consistent manner (an attributional bias). Using the previous example, when the perceiver is asked by the target if she would join him for a beer, she may explain away this inconsistent behavior by thinking something to the effect of, "He needs a beer to ease his social anxiety."

In effect, then, stereotypes can serve to integrate pieces of information gathered during the impression formation process, serving as a "central theme" (Bodenhausen and Lichtenstein, 1987) around which information is organized.

It follows that representations that are stereotype-driven should generally be relatively well-integrated. Furthermore, because integration is associated with confidence, we should expect beliefs associated with stereotype-based representations to be held with a relatively high degree of confidence.

The current study. The present study was designed to test this prediction. Subjects were given a self-description ostensibly written by another participant during a previous experimental session, composed of traits. Half of the subjects were led to believe that the other participant was an Asian-American female, while the other half were led to believe that the other participant was a Caucasian female. In addition, half of the subjects were given a self-description composed of traits predominantly consistent with the female Asian-American stereotype, while the other half were given a self-description composed of mostly inconsistent traits¹. After subjects read the self-description, they were asked to predict certain characteristics regarding the other participant (e.g. how much time she spends studying per day; her GPA; etc.). My first prediction was that subjects who believed the other participant to be an Asian-American female and received a self-description with traits predominantly consistent with the female Asian-American stereotype would make more confident predictions about the other participant relative to subjects who believed the other participant was Caucasian and received traits predominantly consistent with the female Asian-American stereotype. As mentioned earlier, past findings suggest that during

¹The consistency vs. inconsistency of each trait relative to the female Asian-American stereotype was determined by means of a previous pilot study.

impression formation, the activation and subsequent use of stereotypes to guide information processing should result in relatively integrated impressions, leading to associated beliefs that are held with a relatively high degree of confidence. In contrast, subjects who believed the other participant was Caucasian, and therefore did not have as elaborate a stereotype to guide subsequent information processing, should develop less integrated impressions, resulting in beliefs that are held with a comparatively low degree of confidence.

In addition to this primary hypothesis, I was also interested in assessing the degree to which subjects who received self-descriptions containing traits that were predominantly inconsistent with the female Asian-American stereotype would be confident in their beliefs regarding the other participant. Past research suggests that the assimilative effects of stereotypes during impression formation do not occur if target information is largely contrary to the stereotype. In fact, a contrast effect usually occurs - the discrepancy between the impression of the target and the stereotype is exaggerated (Martin, Crelia, & Seta, 1990). Presumably, the stereotype is still used to guide information processing, but only as an agent for comparison (Manis, Nelson, & Shedler, 1988). Beyond this, however, past research has yet to conclusively identify the cognitive mechanisms underlying contrast effects. As a result, it is unclear whether the impressions associated with contrast effects are relatively well-integrated or not. I therefore predicted that subjects in stereotype/inconsistent information condition would be confident in their beliefs to the extent that their impressions of the other participant were well-integrated. That is, if their impressions were

more integrated that the impressions held by subjects in the no stereotype/inconsistent information condition, they should be comparatively more confident in their beliefs, and vice-versa.

Finally, in addition to the cognitive measure of confidence that was used, I was interested in determining whether the different degrees of confidence held by subjects in the four conditions would lead to behavioral differences. Subjects were led to believe that the other participant would be taking a quiz in an upcoming experimental session, and that they were to select 5 topics (out of the 10 presented) that they felt the other participant would be most knowledgeable in. I predicted that subjects in the stereotype/consistent information condition would assign topics to the other participant that conformed to the Asian-American stereotype (e.g. logic; science; etc.), whereas subjects in the no stereotype/consistent information condition would assign proportionately less stereotype-consistent topics. I also predicted that differences in confidence between the stereotype/inconsistent information condition and the no-stereotype/inconsistent information condition would translate into differences in behavior between the two conditions, with greater confidence leading to a lesser discrepancy between beliefs and behavior.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 106 male and female undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of Texas at Austin. They received partial course credit for their participation. The data from 3 subjects were dropped due to the failure of the stereotyping manipulation², leaving a total sample of 103 subjects.

Questionnaires

Confidence in Belief Questionnaire. This 7 item questionnaire was designed to assess the subjects' beliefs regarding the intelligence and industriousness of the other participant. More importantly, it also assessed how confident subjects' were in those beliefs. An example of one of the questions is, "Compared to the average University of Texas student, how much time do you predict the other participant spends studying per day?" Responses were measured on a 9-point Likert-type scale. After each question, subjects were asked to indicate how confident they were of each of the beliefs, using a scale of "0%" to "100%."

Quiz Questionnaire. This questionnaire contained a list of 10 topics. Five of the topics (logic; religion; science; geography; math) were determined by means of a previous pilot study to be topics that female Asian Americans are stereotypically believed to excel in. Subjects were told that the other participant

² A manipulation check given at the end of the experiment revealed that these subjects failed to notice information indicating the ethnicity of the other participant.

would be a quiz during an upcoming experimental session, and were asked to select the 5 topics that they felt the other participant was most proficient in.

Procedure

Subjects were run in groups of approximately fifteen. After subjects read and signed a consent form, they were told:

The purpose of this experiment is to assess the accuracy of impressions. During a previous experimental session, we have asked several participants to describe themselves using adjectives. Today, you will be reading a personality description written by one of those participants, and, afterwards, will be asked to make several predictions about the other participant's general character, based on what you read in the personality description. At no point in the experiment will you be asked to give any type of identifying information, so your anonymity will be preserved.

The experimenter then proceeded to hand to each subject a personality description, face down. On one side of the sheet containing the personality description (the side of the sheet that was face up at this point in the procedure), were two items relating to the identity of the participant who ostensibly wrote the personality description: (1)the participant's gender, and 2)the participant's race. Approximately half of the subjects were given a self-description ostensibly

written by a female of Asian ethnicity. The other half of the participants were given a self-description ostensible written by a white female.

After handing out the personality descriptions, the experimenter said, “Ok, now before you turn over the sheet, let me say a couple of things. The other participants were given a list of 100 adjectives, and were asked to pick approximately 25 that they felt described themselves best. So, the personality description you are about to read was composed in that manner. Second, you will only be given a minute to read the adjectives. Because you will be given such a short amount of time, it’s best not to try and memorize each adjective, but rather to just read through the list and form a general impression of the other participant based on the list as a whole.” The experimenter then asked the subjects to turn over the sheet and read the self-description. Approximately half of the subjects received a self-description containing traits that were predominantly consistent with the female Asian-American stereotype (15 consistent vs. 8 inconsistent). The other half received a personality description containing traits that were predominantly inconsistent with the female Asian-American stereotype (15 inconsistent vs. 8 consistent) .

After one minute had passed, the experimenter handed out a packet of materials to each subject which contained the Confidence in Belief Questionnaire and the Quiz Questionnaire. Following the subjects’ completion of both questionnaires, they were given 2 minutes to recall, on a blank sheet of paper, as many of the adjectives contained in the other participants self-description as they could recall. A manipulation check was then conducted (subjects were asked to

indicate the gender and race of the other participant). This concluded the experiment. Subjects were debriefed and thanked.

Results

Three primary dependent measures were assessed: 1) judgments of confidence, (2) stereotypic behavior, and 3) the recall of traits. The results from each of these will be discussed in sequence.

Judgments of confidence. Our primary hypothesis was that stereotype-driven beliefs, because they are based on relatively integrated impressions, should be associated with greater confidence than beliefs that are derived from more individuated impressions. In the present context this translates to the prediction that subjects who were in the Asian-American/consistent information (as/con) condition would be more confident in their beliefs regarding the other participant than subjects in the Caucasian/consistent information (ca/con) condition. Of course, before examining confidence judgments, it was necessary to first determine that subjects in the as/con condition did in fact form stereotype-based impressions. A planned contrast revealed that they did. Subjects in the as/con condition made predictions regarding the character of the other participant that were significantly more stereotype-consistent ($M=7.35$) than subjects in the ca/con condition ($M=6.45$), $t(100)=5.39$, $p<.01$. Next, a planned contrast comparing the confidence ratings made by subjects in the as/con condition vs. subjects in the ca/con condition was performed. Results revealed that subjects in the as/con condition were significantly more confident in their beliefs regarding the other participant ($M=76.92$) than subjects in the ca/con condition ($M=68.19$), $t(100)=1.98$, $p<.05$. However, a correlational analysis between extremity of belief and confidence in belief revealed that the two dependent measures were

significantly correlated, $r(102)=.45$, $p<.001$. Therefore, a planned contrast was again performed comparing the confidence ratings of subjects in the as/con condition vs. those in the ca/con condition; however, extremity of belief was used as a covariate. Results revealed a non-significant difference in confidence ratings between the two groups, $t(100)=1.09$, ns.

Our second hypothesis was that subjects in the Asian-American/inconsistent information condition (as/incon) would form an impression of the other participant which exaggerated the difference between the other participant and the female Asian-American stereotype (a contrast effect). Furthermore, it was predicted that, because the corresponding impressions should be less integrated than the impressions held by subjects in the Caucasian/inconsistent information condition (ca/incon), subjects in the as/incon condition should be less confident of their beliefs relative to those in the ca/incon condition. First, did the contrast effect occur? No. In fact, subjects in the as/incon condition made predictions that were more stereotype-consistent ($M=6.39$) than subjects in the ca/incon condition ($M=5.38$). A planned contrast revealed this difference to be significant, $t(100)=4.2$, $p<.01$. A planned contrast was then performed comparing confidence ratings between the two groups, with belief extremity used as a covariate. The adjusted means indicated that subjects in the as/incon group were less confident of their predictions ($M=66.15$) compared to subjects in the ca/incon group ($M=68.34$), though this difference was not significant, $t(100)=.52$, ns.

Behavioral measure of stereotyping. Our first prediction relating to this measure was that subjects in the as/con condition, having relatively well-integrated impressions of the other participant, would assign more stereotype-consistent topics to the other participant compared to subjects in the ca/con condition. Because extremity of belief was again significantly correlated with the dependent measure, a planned contrast was performed with extremity of belief used as a covariate. As expected, subjects in the as/con condition assigned significantly more stereotype consistent topics to the other participant ($\underline{M}=2.82$) than subjects in the ca/con condition ($\underline{M}=2.37$), $t(100)= 2.09$, $p<.05$. It was also predicted that subjects in the as/incon condition would assign significantly less stereotype-consistent topics to the other participant compared to subjects in ca/incon condition. However, consistent with the results obtained using the cognitive measure, subjects in the as/incon condition assigned more stereotype-consistent topics to the other participant ($\underline{M}=2.32$) than subjects in the ca/incon condition ($\underline{M}=2.2$), although this difference was not significant, $t(100)=1.39$, ns.

Integration. An index of integration was obtained by measuring the extent to which recall of traits was biased in either a stereotype-consistent or a stereotype-inconsistent manner. For subjects who received a self-description containing 15 stereotype-consistent traits and 8 stereotype inconsistent traits, the following equation was used: $\underline{\text{integration}} = |a/15 - b/8|$, where \underline{a} is the number of stereotype-consistent traits recalled, and \underline{b} is the number of stereotype-inconsistent traits recalled. For subjects who received a self-description

containing 15 stereotype-inconsistent traits and 8 stereotype-consistent traits, the same formula was used, except a represented the number of stereotype-inconsistent traits recalled, and b represented the number of stereotype consistent traits result. In either case, an integration index between 0 and 1 was computed, with 0 indicating no bias in recall (low integration), and 1 representing extreme bias in recall (high integration).

In order to determine whether subjects in the as/con condition formed more integrated impressions than subjects in the ca/con condition, a planned contrast was performed, comparing the two corresponding integration indexes. Surprisingly, it was found that subjects in the ca/con condition formed more integrated impressions ($M=.19$) than subjects in the as/con condition ($M=.17$), though the difference between the two groups was not significant $t(100)=.85$, ns. A second planned contrast was then performed comparing the integration indexes of subjects in the Asian/inconsistent condition with those in the Caucasian/inconsistent condition. It was found that subjects in the as/incon condition formed more integrated impressions ($M=.17$) than subjects in the ca/as condition ($M=.16$), though, again, this difference was not significant $t(100)=.52$, ns.

Two groups of within-cell correlations were then computed. First, correlations between level of confidence and level of integration were computed for the four conditions. None of the four correlations were significant or approached significance. Next, within-cell correlations between stereotyping and

level of integration were computed. Again, none of the four correlations were significant or approached significance.

Discussion

The present study was had two main purposes: (1) To investigate the relationship between integration and cognitive judgments of confidence, and (2) to investigate the relationship between integration and stereotypic behavior. The results pertaining to each component will be discussed separately.

Integration and judgments of confidence. It was predicted that subjects in the as/con condition would form more integrated impressions of the target than subjects in the ca/con condition, and would therefore make more confident predictions regarding the target. Though results indicate that subjects in the as/con condition did make more confident predictions than those in the ca/con condition, the fact that there was not a significant difference in integration between the as/con condition and the as/incon condition suggests that differences in integration did not cause the obtained difference in confidence. A secondary prediction was that subjects in the as/incon condition would make less stereotype-consistent predictions about the target than subjects in the ca/incon condition (a contrast effect), and that associated confidence levels would again be correlated with integration. However, a contrast effect did not occur. In fact, subjects in the as/con condition made more stereotype-consistent predictions about the other participant than subjects in the ca/incon condition, mimicking the pattern that was found between the as/con and ca/con conditions. Of greater theoretical importance in the context of the current study is that, like the findings associated with the two consistent conditions, a significant difference in

integration was not found between the as/incon condition and the ca/incon condition.

If differences in integration cannot account for the obtained differences in confidence, what factor(s) is/are responsible? As stated earlier, amount of information has been shown to be positively correlated with confidence. In the present study, subjects in the two stereotype conditions may have had more information associated with the other participant than subjects in the two Caucasian conditions. More specifically, the female Asian-American stereotype, deemed as an acceptable categorization of the other participant, may itself have increased levels of confidence by serving as extra “information” about the participant.

A second possibility is that differences in belief extremity between the Asian and Caucasian conditions had a direct impact on corresponding levels of confidence. As already mentioned, differences in confidence between 1)the as/con and w/con and 2)the as/incon and w/incon were eliminated when extremity of belief was used as a covariate. Although in the present experiment extremity of belief and amount of information appear to be confounded, there is evidence to suggest that belief extremity has effects on confidence independent of amount of information (Lee and Ostrom, 1976).

Considering the substantial evidence supporting the notion that information integration is associated with confidence, the lack of significant correlations between integration and confidence is surprising. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the recall task did not yield a representative

measure of integration. As may be recalled, during the experimental procedure, subjects were instructed to “form a general impression of the other participant as a whole [rather than attempting to memorize each trait]” before they were given the self-descriptions. This was included as part of the procedure in order to increase the difficulty of the task and thereby increase the likelihood that stereotyping would occur (Hamilton and Sherman, 1994). However, past research has found that in such instances, where global evaluations of a target are initiated during the information acquisition stage, there is little or no correspondence between impressions of the target and the specific facts that are later recalled about the target ; only when impressions of the target are postponed until after the information acquisition stage, it has been found, does the recall information have evaluative merit (for a review of such findings, see Lichtenstein and Srull, 1997). Therefore, the correlations in the present study between 1)integration and confidence, and 2)integration and behavior are of dubious diagnostic value.

Behavioral measure of stereotyping. It was predicted that subjects in the as/con condition would assign more stereotype-consistent topics to the other participant than subjects in the ca/con condition. Though results indicate that they did (even when extremity of belief was factored out), integration was not correlated with the number of stereotype-consistent topics that were assigned, as was predicted. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the difference between the as/con condition and the ca/con condition persisted even after belief extremity was factored out. This suggests that a factor other than belief extremity (as

reported on the cognitive measure) may have contributed to the obtained difference. Again, because the validity of the integration index is suspect, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that differences in integration between the two groups was a factor here. Another possibility, however, is that subjects in the as/con condition initially inhibited the reporting of stereotypic beliefs on the cognitive measure. Later, however, when the behavioral measure of stereotyping was given, this inhibition might have been lessened by the extra incentive for accuracy prompted by the monetary reward that was offered. In other words, the cognitive measure of belief extremity may have underestimated subjects' true beliefs regarding the other participant.

Summary and conclusions

The current study was designed with the intention of testing the idea that stereotype-based beliefs are associated with greater confidence than target-based beliefs as a result of stereotype-based impressions (from which the beliefs originate) being comparatively more integrated. Though it was found that stereotype-based beliefs were (1) held with greater confidence, and (2) associated with more stereotypic behavior, there was no evidence to suggest that the differences in confidence and behavior were due to differences in levels of integration between the conditions. However, because there is reason to suspect the validity of the integration index used in the study, no firm conclusions can be made regarding the mediating role of integration in the relationship between stereotype-based beliefs and associated levels of confidence.

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