

Integrating stereotypes and individuating information based on informativeness under cognitive load

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Abstract

When making inferences about another person (the target), perceivers often have to integrate multiple sources of information. This can include stereotypes about the target's groups (e.g., age, race, occupation) as well as other information about the target (individuating information). In simple situations, perceivers approximate ideal Bayesian information integration, relying more heavily on information that is more informative for the judgement. However under cognitive load with cognitive resources taken up by other demands people may instead rely on simplifying heuristics. We investigate several possible heuristics that people may use under load, including relying primarily on stereotypes rather than individuating information, as suggested by previous research, and we test if and how these heuristics depend on how informative each source of information is. By clarifying how stereotypes are used in less-than-ideal cognitive conditions, this work has implications for when stereotypes will tend to be overused in real-world situations.