

Use of experienced retrieval ease in self and social judgments

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Abstract

People base judgments from memory on both the content of the information they retrieve and the ease they experience in retrieving it (Schwarz, N., Bless, H., Strack, F., Klumpp, G., Rittenauer-Schatka, H., & Simons, A. (1991). Ease of retrieval as information: another look at the availability heuristic. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 195–202). Four studies demonstrate that people rely relatively more on the experienced ease of recall when making judgments about the self compared to judgments about others. This pattern was found for judgments of an “average” (Study 1a) or specific (Study 1b) other. Subjective retrieval ease was less informative when people were relatively less familiar with the specific other person. Providing an alternative explanation for the experienced difficulty of recall affected self, but not social, assessments (Study 2). In addition, the effect generalized to risk judgments about a state of the world; namely, the safety of one’s town (Study 3). A deeper appreciation of when and why people rely on different sources of accessible information when making judgments may help in understanding and reducing social conflict.

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When estimating the frequency of an event, people do not usually have ready access to all instances of that event they have ever encountered. Rather, they often estimate likelihoods by the ease with which they can bring to mind specific examples of an event (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Such inferences from memory render two distinct sources of information available: the actual contents of memory, and the subjective ease or difficulty that one experiences in retrieving those memories (Schwarz, 1998; Schwarz et al., 1991). The current research suggests that subjective feelings carry relatively more weight in judgments of the self compared to judgments of others. Because people presume to be more familiar with their own behavior than with the behavior of others, the experienced ease or difficulty of recalling such behavior is more diagnostic when making inferences about the self than when making inferences about others.

For judgments about the self, retrieval ease serves as a cue to the strength of one’s underlying disposition. In the

classic demonstration of this effect, participants who recalled 12 examples of assertive behavior (a task they found hard) reported being *less* assertive than participants who recalled 6 such examples (a task they found easy; Schwarz et al., 1991). Apparently, participants who struggled to think of 12 times they behaved assertively inferred from their subjective difficulty that they must not, in fact, be all that assertive—despite having recalled twice as many examples of that very behavior than the comparison group.

In addition, the ease with which people could call to mind assertive behavior was positively correlated with self-assessments of assertiveness. The harder it was to think of times they had boldly asked their boss for a raise, for example, the lower the participants reported their overall level of assertiveness (Schwarz et al., 1991). Such inferences seem to rest on an underlying assumption that people generally know, or can readily establish by scanning their personal history, how often they have actually behaved assertively. Having such access to the relevant instances of behavior, people believe that the relative ease or difficul-

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ty in pulling such examples from memory is diagnostic of the trait in question.

Notice that such an assumption might be more or less warranted in different situations. Research on social judgment has demonstrated a tendency for people to rely on privileged information about their own knowledge and affective reactions when making certain kinds of evaluative judgments (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Miller & McFarland, 1987). I suggest that experienced ease of retrieval from memory is one such piece of privileged information that people may consider uniquely relevant to the self.

Support for this hypothesized difference between the self and others comes from studies showing that perceived expertise can moderate the informational value that people draw from the experience of recall. When people realize that they lack expertise in the domain of judgment, the standard ease of retrieval effect can be reversed (Biller, Bless, & Schwarz, 1992; as described in Schwarz & Vaughn, 2002). This finding suggests that the extent to which people consider themselves knowledgeable affects how informative they find their subjective recall experiences. In most cases, it is illogical for people to assume that they have as much information about the experiences of others as they do about their own experiences. If people tend not to expect that their memory for others' behavior will be as comprehensive as their memory for their own behavior (see, e.g., Raghbir & Menon, 2005), they may look to their relative lack of expertise as an explanation for their experienced difficulty when making inferences about another, thereby rendering such experience less informative than it would be for the self.

The experienced ease or difficulty in generating thoughts about others may therefore lack much informative value; as such, it is functionally similar to not having experienced the ease or difficulty in the generation itself. Indeed, when a group of participants simply read either a small or large number of arguments that were generated by a separate set of people, the participants were more strongly influenced by the greater numbers of arguments they read (Wänke, Bless, & Biller, 1996). When forming judgments of other people, then, individuals might be less likely to rely on the subjective ease of recall, and rely instead on the number or content of the examples they generate. After all, “the default option is probably to use the content that comes to mind without further qualification,” as participants only rely on ease of recall “when the informational value of subjects' subjective experience of ease or difficulty of recall [is] not discredited” (Schwarz et al., 1991, pp. 200–201).

Consistent with the notion that content of recall serves as the default basis for judgment, many theories of human inference assume that people use whatever declarative information is available at the time of assessing a target (see, e.g., Higgins, 1996). The more reasons an employer can think of to hire a particular job candidate, the more likely she is to recommend him for the position. More generally, people often use the sheer number of units avail-

able as a cue for judging frequency or probability. For instance, the same persuasive appeal can produce a greater change in attitudes when people are told that it contains nine, rather than three, favorable arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).

In fact, research has shown that people are most likely to rely on this “numerosity heuristic” when the judgment task is inherently difficult (Pelham, Sumarta, & Myaskovsky, 1994). Because judgments about others may feel inherently more difficult than judgments about the self, people may in fact be especially likely to rely on the number of instances they generate during such evaluations. Given that someone is able to generate a specified number of instances of another person, the resulting judgments may reflect the amount of information actually called to mind to a greater extent than the subjective ease in doing so.

In addition, people typically turn to content when the subjective experience of retrieval is consistent with their beliefs about memory and their expectations for how easy the recall task should be (Skurnik, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2000). When discrepancies between expectation and experience arise, people show the standard reliance on ease of retrieval for judgments about the self. However, in cases where people feel that they do not have access to enough information in memory—as is often the case when considering other people—there should be much less of a discrepancy between expectation and experienced ease. Therefore, compared to judgments of the self, people should give subjective ease relatively less weight, and content of recall relatively more weight, in subsequent judgments of others. Four studies set out to explore this hypothesis.

Study 1a

Method

Sixty participants were approached in an undergraduate dining hall at Harvard University and asked to fill out a brief survey, modeled after Schwarz et al. (1991). Participants were asked to recall either 2 or 8 examples of assertive behavior.¹ Half the participants thought of times when they had personally “behaved assertively and felt at ease,” whereas the other half thought of times when the average Harvard undergraduate had behaved assertively. Below the instructions were either two or eight lines on which to describe the examples. Participants then turned the page over to evaluate their (or the average student's) level of assertiveness on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*). Finally, participants rated how difficult

¹ The number of examples requested in each condition was different from Schwarz et al. (1991) because pretests revealed that most participants in this population of undergraduates could typically generate about 5 examples of assertive behavior. Therefore, they found it very easy to generate 2 examples and very difficult to generate 8 examples. Similar pretests determined the number of examples requested in the other experiments reported here.

it was to generate the examples of assertive behavior on a similar 10-point scale.

Results and discussion

Participants asked to generate 2 examples of assertive behavior ($M = 6.10$) found it less difficult than those asked to generate 8 such examples ($M = 8.17$), $F(1, 56) = 10.90$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .163$, and there was no interaction between reported difficulty and target, $F < 1$, *ns*.

As expected, the measure of assertiveness differed as a function of target and ease. There was a main effect of target, such that people thought they were less assertive than others, $F(1, 56) = 20.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .271$. More relevant to the current investigation, Table 1 shows that the key interaction between number of examples requested and target of judgment was significant, $F(1, 56) = 4.83$, $p = .032$, $\eta_p^2 = .079$. Those with the easy task of generating two assertive behaviors judged themselves as relatively more assertive than those with the difficult task of generating eight assertive behaviors. However, those who thought of 2 examples rated the average student as relatively *less* assertive than those who thought of 8 examples.² The simple effect was significant for judgments of the self ($F(1, 56) = 6.91$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .110$), but not for judgments of others ($F(1, 56) = 0.23$, $p = .634$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$).

Correlations between experienced difficulty and assertiveness supported this pattern. There was a significant negative correlation between how hard it was to generate examples of assertive behavior and the level of assertiveness reported when making judgments about the self, $r = -.57$, $p < .001$. When making judgments about another, there was a nonsignificant positive correlation ($r = .05$, $p = .813$). These correlations differed significantly from one another, $z = -2.57$, $p = .010$.

Study 1b

Study 1a relied on an evaluation of the “average university student,” a somewhat ambiguous term that may have led people to conjure an abstract stereotype or prototype (Cantor & Mischel, 1977), or may have caused participants to aggregate instances from many individuals to form a composite of the “average” student. To address this issue, Study 1b investigated the generalizability of this effect by

Table 1

Mean ratings of assertiveness for self and other, by number of assertive behaviors requested (Study 1a and 1b)

	Assertiveness	
	Easy (2 examples)	Hard (8 examples)
Study 1a		
Self	5.80	4.33
Average other student	6.73	7.00
Study 1b		
Self	5.77	5.29
Specific other student	6.85	7.74

having participants think about a specific target. This method also afforded a test of the role that familiarity with the target plays in the relationship between experienced ease and trait judgments.

Method

Study 1b ($N = 114$) used a similar questionnaire and method as Study 1a, but asked participants in the *other* condition to think about one specific “friend or acquaintance.” In addition, participants were asked (at the end of the survey) to rate their familiarity with the target’s past behavior.

Results and discussion

Participants asked to generate 2 examples of assertive behavior ($M = 5.96$) found it less difficult than those asked to generate 8 such examples ($M = 7.68$), $F(1, 108) = 16.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .130$, and there was no interaction between reported difficulty and target, $F < 1.3$, *ns*.³

Once again, people thought they were less assertive than others, $F(1, 110) = 28.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .205$. More importantly, Table 1 shows that the predicted interaction between target and number of examples requested was significant, $F(1, 110) = 4.29$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = .038$, displaying the same pattern of results found in Study 1a. The simple effect was not significant for judgments of the self ($F(1, 110) = 1.04$, $p = .310$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$), and was marginally significant for judgments of others ($F(1, 110) = 3.65$, $p = .059$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$).

Correlations between experienced difficulty and assertiveness again showed that participants only relied on the subjective ease of their experience when making judgments about the self. The harder it was to generate examples of assertive behavior for the self, the less assertive people reported being, $r = -.48$, $p < .001$. No such relationship was found for people who were making judgments about the assertiveness of another, $r = -.03$, $p = .814$ ($z = -2.51$, $p = .012$).

³ Two participants who did not answer the difficulty question were excluded from these analyses.

² It is possible that participants who had to report more examples of behavior ended up generating less extreme instances of assertiveness, due to the relative difficulty of generating so many more examples. To investigate this possibility, a research assistant blind to the current hypotheses coded the last 2 examples listed by each participant on a scale from 1 (*not at all assertive*) to 7 (*very assertive*). Contrary to this alternative account, and consistent with previous research (Schwarz et al., 1991), there were no significant differences in the extremity of the last 2 examples generated by those who were asked to list few or many behaviors (all t s < 1), and no interactions with the target of judgment (all F s < 1), in this or subsequent studies reported here.

To test the role of perceived knowledge of the target, a median split on the familiarity question was performed for participants in the *other* condition. If a presumed familiarity with the target causes subjective recall experience to feel informative, then one would expect those who reported knowing the other person less well to be less likely to rely on subjective ease when making their judgments, compared to those who report knowing the target better. Consistent with this possibility, participants in the high familiarity group showed a negative correlation between reported difficulty of recall and assertiveness ($r = -.26, p = .168$), whereas those in the low familiarity group showed the opposite relationship ($r = .28, p = .169; z = 1.95, p = .051$).

Of course, a major limitation of this evidence is that it is merely suggestive, as familiarity was only measured and not manipulated. A follow-up study that manipulated familiarity directly provides further support for this proposed mechanism (Caruso, 2006a). Participants were asked to think about either a familiar or similar other before generating a few or many examples of that person's assertive behavior. Results revealed a significant interaction, such that people relied relatively more on subjective ease when making judgments about a familiar other compared to a similar other. In addition, reported difficulty mediated the effect of number of examples on assertiveness ratings for familiar, but not similar, others, suggesting that subjective experience only accounted for the judgments of others whom people presumed to know a lot about.

Study 2

In Studies 1a and 1b, people tended to base judgments on the subjective ease of retrieval relatively more when judging the self than when judging another. Because people should presume to know more about themselves than they do about others, I suggest that people view subjective ease of recall as more diagnostic for self-judgments than for most other-judgments. The weight that such information will have in subsequent judgments depends on the perceived diagnosticity of the recall experiences (see Schwarz & Clore, 1996; for a review). When perceived diagnosticity is high, it will receive greater weight—unless, of course, its informational value is called into question.

Indeed, having participants attribute their experienced ease to some other cause—by telling them, for instance, that the music played during the recall task may help or hinder their memory—effectively reverses the standard ease of retrieval effect for judgments about the self (Schwarz et al., 1991; Experiment 3). If, however, subjective ease is less diagnostic when recalling the behavior of others in the first place, rendering ease nondiagnostic should have little effect on the ensuing judgments of other people. In essence, misattributing the difficulty of recall for the behavior of others may be redundant, as the relative lack of familiarity with others (compared to the self) already serves as a cue that recall experience may not be as informative for the judgment at hand. Study 2 tested this hypothesis.

Table 2

Mean ratings of creativity for self and other, by number of creative behaviors requested and diagnosticity of retrieval ease (Study 2)

	Creativity	
	Easy (2 examples)	Hard (6 examples)
Self		
Diagnostic	6.67	5.33
Nondiagnostic	4.75	6.15
Other		
Diagnostic	7.23	7.83
Nondiagnostic	7.33	7.62

Method

Study 2 ($N = 99$) used a similar questionnaire and method as the previous studies. Participants were either asked to generate 2 or 6 examples of times when they or a specific acquaintance had been creative.⁴ All participants wrote their examples on a sheet that was specifically designed with either two or six curved boxes. To render the ease of generating examples less diagnostic, half the participants were told that previous research had shown that this design of the sheet affected one's ability to recall creative behavior (see Ruder & Bless, 2003; Wänke, Schwarz, & Bless, 1995; for successful applications of this procedure). Those in the *easy* condition read that the scattered arrangement of boxes had been shown to increase creativity and hence recall of creative behavior, whereas those in the *hard* condition were told that the boxes had been shown to inhibit recall of creative behavior. I expected this information to affect judgments about the self to a greater extent than judgments about others.

Results and discussion

Participants asked to generate 2 examples of creative behavior ($M = 4.55$) found it less difficult than those asked to generate 6 such examples ($M = 6.48$), $F(1, 95) = 18.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .160$, and there was no interaction between reported difficulty and target, $F(1, 95) = 2.19$, $p = .143$.

As shown in Table 2, the attribution manipulation reversed the standard ease of retrieval effect for judgments about the self, $F(1, 45) = 5.69$, $p = .021$, $\eta_p^2 = .112$. That is, with no alternative attribution, participants judged themselves as relatively more creative after listing two (compared to 6) creative behaviors (simple effect $F(1, 45) = 2.65$, $p = .111$, $\eta_p^2 = .056$), but showed the opposite pattern when they believed the arrangement of the boxes was the cause of their recall difficulty (simple effect $F(1, 45) = 3.05$, $p = .087$, $\eta_p^2 = .064$). The attribution manipulation did not have a significant effect, however,

⁴ To avoid the possibility that participants might pick someone who was particularly creative, participants were first asked to think of the specific acquaintance *before* they learned that their task was to list examples of that person's creativity.

for judgments about others. Participants felt another person was relatively more creative after recalling 6 (compared to 2) examples of creative behavior regardless of whether the alternative attribution was present (simple effect $F(1,46) = 0.18, p = .672, \eta_p^2 = .004$) or absent (simple effect $F(1,46) = 0.83, p = .367, \eta_p^2 = .018$); there was no interaction between number of examples generated and the attribution manipulation, $F(1,46) = .12, p = .734, \eta_p^2 = .003$. The predicted three-way interaction was significant, $F(1,91) = 4.28, p = .041, \eta_p^2 = .045$.

Correlations between experienced difficulty and creativity again showed that participants relied on the subjective ease of their experience when making judgments about the self ($r = -.67, p < .0001$) to a greater extent than when making judgments about others ($r = -.21, p = .136; z = -2.84, p = .005$).

Study 3

In the first three studies, participants showed a self-other difference by making actual judgments about themselves or about another person. In essence, they were answering slightly different questions. It is conceivable that, independent of any of the experimental manipulations, people adopted a different strategy for answering questions about the self and questions about other people. Study 3 addressed this potential problem by asking participants in all conditions to answer the exact same question about a state of the world (the safety of the town where they live), rather than a state of an individual person (one's personal safety).⁵ In doing so, this study also extends the findings to the domain of risk assessments.

Method

Seventy-six female undergraduates⁶ at Harvard University completed a survey that asked for evaluations of life in their college town of Cambridge, MA. Participants were either asked to recall 2 or 6 examples of times when either they or another student had “felt unsafe or feared for their safety” around campus. After recording their examples,

⁵ Documenting a consistent effect in judgments about a state of the world is interesting in light of evidence that people rely on ease when forming judgments in a variety of other domains, such as a consumer's attitude toward a particular brand. In one study, ease of retrieval influenced consumer assessments of brands that were familiar, but not unfamiliar (Tybout, Sternthal, Malaviya, Bakamitsos, & Park, 2005). The basic logic is similar to that of the present studies: people rely on ease mainly when they feel highly knowledgeable about the target of judgment, whether that target is a person (the self) or an object (a familiar brand).

⁶ Only females were chosen for this study because of evidence suggesting that people use subjective ease mainly when relevant information is moderately accessible (Tybout et al., 2005). Because certain types of violent crime are disproportionately directed against women (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), it is not surprising that a pretest using the same design as Study 3 confirmed that men found it equally difficult to generate few or many examples of times they felt unsafe, and hence showed no differences in reported safety between conditions.

Table 3

Mean ratings of home town safety for self and other, by number of examples requested (Study 3)

	Safety of college town	
	Easy (2 examples)	Hard (6 examples)
Study 3		
Self	5.95	6.58
Other	6.33	4.95

participants assessed “In general, how safe is Cambridge?” and how difficult it was to generate their examples on scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very*).

Results and discussion

As expected, participants asked to generate 2 examples of times they felt unsafe ($M = 3.05$) found it less difficult than those asked to generate 6 such examples ($M = 5.74$), $F(1,72) = 24.88, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .257$, and there was no interaction between reported difficulty and target, $F < 1, ns$.

Consistent with results from the previous studies, Table 3 shows that women with the easy task of generating 2 times they were personally afraid judged their town as relatively *less* safe than women with the difficult task of generating 6 examples; however, when generating examples about another student, the opposite pattern was found, $F(1,72) = 7.06, p = .010, \eta_p^2 = .089$. The simple effect was not significant for judgments of the self ($F(1,72) = 1.41, p = .239, \eta_p^2 = .019$), but was significant for judgments of another ($F(1,72) = 6.51, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .083$).

Furthermore, participants showed a significant positive correlation between how hard it was to generate examples of being afraid and their reported safety of their town when thinking about examples for the self ($r = .51, p < .001$), but not another ($r = -.09, p = .614; z = 2.71, p = .007$).

Study 3 replicated the ease of retrieval effects for women evaluating the safety of their college town. Women found it harder to generate more examples of times when either they or another student had feared for their safety, but only inferred from this difficulty that their town was relatively safe when making judgments about the self.

General discussion

Subjective experiences provide people with a wealth of knowledge. People get useful information not only from declarative information, but also from their metacognitive experience of generating that information (Schwarz, 1998). Such metacognitive knowledge is a key aspect of human memory more generally. As Tulving and Madigan (1970) noted in their review of memory research, “one of the truly unique characteristics of human memory [is] its knowledge of its own knowledge” (p. 477). Not only is the memory system adept at retrieving stored information, but “it can also rather accurately estimate the likelihood of its success in doing it” (Tulving & Madigan, 1970, p. 477).

It is perhaps mainly when people are surprised at their inability to recall information—as when they expect to be able to generate eight assertive behaviors about the self but have trouble doing so—that they rely on ease as a heuristic for making judgments (Skurnik et al., 2000). Although people have the sense that they are always present for, and usually attentive to, their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they may recognize that this is much less often the case for the actions of others. As this plausible alternative for the experienced difficulty becomes more salient, it is more likely that a person might discount or ignore that experience and turn to other available cues such as the amount or content of information they generate.

Understanding metacognition

Such results shed further light on when and how people are likely to rely on metacognitive experiences more generally—and the availability heuristic in particular—when making social judgments. Although many interesting applications of this heuristic have been pursued, little evidence has been uncovered about the variables that might influence its underlying mechanisms (see Schwarz, 1998, 2004). A recent exception was the finding that mood moderates the reliance on retrieval ease in a variety of judgments (Ruder & Bless, 2003). As these authors note, “given the prominence of this [availability] heuristic in social cognition and other domains, there is surprisingly little research on the underlying processes and limiting conditions” (Ruder & Bless, 2003, pp. 30–31). The present research furthers our understanding of such conditions by identifying the target under consideration as a crucial determinant of the extent to which people tend to rely on retrieval ease in judgments.

In doing so, the findings also provide further evidence for the context-specific nature of heuristics and the reliance on different types of information in judgments about the self compared to judgments about others. Further research could explore domains in which people are most likely to rely on ease, content, or some other sources of information, and continue to delineate the factors that determine when and how people integrate such information when making social inferences. One interesting possibility is that people are flexible in their reliance on different forms of information when multiple sources are available (Schwarz, 2004). For instance, if someone is particularly motivated to see herself as a generous person, she might overweight the number of generous acts she can generate and underweight the difficulty she had in generating them to preserve her self-concept, showing an elasticity in her justification for a high self-rating of generosity (see Hsee, 1995; Schweitzer & Hsee, 2002). That is, when people are able to justify the use of different inputs to a judgment, they may take selective advantage of inputs that best serve their interests (Dunning, 2001). Although some studies that evoked different processing styles have not found evidence for such a motivated flexibility in judgments (Grayson & Schwarz,

1999; Rothman & Schwarz, 1998), it would be interesting to explore the conditions under which such a self-serving reliance on heuristics might be observed.

Understanding interpersonal conflict

In light of these findings, it may even be possible to capitalize on this apparent asymmetry in the use of different information to help remedy problems that arise from differential access to information about the self. For instance, people working in group tasks are notorious for claiming to have contributed more than their fair share of the work (Ross & Sicoly, 1979), in part because of the increased access people have to their own thoughts and behaviors compared to others'. As such, leading people to think hard about their collaborators as individuals and to consider their individual contributions reduces claims of credit for the self (Caruso, Epley, & Bazerman, 2006; Savitsky, Van Boven, Epley, & Wight, 2005). If people tend not to base judgments about the self on recalled content as much as experienced ease, it may be possible to reduce claims of one's own contributions by increasing how hard it is to generate examples of them.

Indeed, I found exactly this pattern of results in one study that asked people to list either zero or six specific contributions that they or another person were responsible for in a collaborative project (Caruso, 2006b). Relative to those who did not list any contributions, those who listed 6 examples for the self *or* for another person both reported that they had contributed less to the project. These results suggest, ironically, that reductions in egocentric assessments of credit to a group project can be obtained by having individuals think harder about either contributions that their fellow group members made or the contributions that they themselves made. Given the considerable consequences that can result from group members who disagree over claims of responsibility (e.g., Forsyth & Mitchell, 1979), the ability to predict when retrieval ease is likely to mitigate or exacerbate such strife is an important step in addressing issues of group conflict.

Understanding personal and group judgments

The present findings may also illuminate some observed self-other differences on a broader scale. Individuals have a general tendency to report that the amount of discrimination they personally face is less than the amount faced by their group as a whole (e.g., Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). One explanation for this *personal-group discrimination discrepancy* is an availability-based account, whereby instances of group discrimination are assumed to be more numerous in the aggregate—and hence more accessible—than instances of personal discrimination (Moghaddam, Stolkin, & Hutcheson, 1997). On this account, individuals can more easily call to mind examples when others in their group have been the target of discrimination, so the ease in pulling episodes from this larger pool

of instances helps to produce the observed discrepancy in ratings of self and group.

The present research, however, suggests that such a difference in the ease or sheer number of instances one can call to mind need not be necessary to account for the difference. If people tend to rely on subjective ease when recalling examples of one's own behavior but not when recalling examples of others' behavior, one might still infer that discrimination directed at the self was lower than discrimination directed at another group member, even in the absence of any difference in ability to recall those instances. Any individual member of a social group might have a hard time generating several instances of personal discrimination, and therefore infer based on that difficulty that he or she must not be the direct target of discrimination very often. However, that same individual may have an equally difficult time recalling the same number of instances of discrimination directed at *any other specific individual* of the group—like the request to think of assertive behaviors for a single individual in Study 1b—but ignore that difficulty in favor of the actual number of examples generated. As such, the existing cognitive explanations for this and related phenomena might be further informed by an enhanced understanding of the specific ways in which people use retrieval experiences versus accessible content when judging themselves and others.

Conclusion

The prevalence of heuristics in everyday judgments and their popularity as a topic of research demands a detailed understanding of their attributes and application in different domains. Knowing that people tend to rely on distinct sources of accessible information when forming impressions and making judgments of themselves compared to other people helps to explain many consequential phenomena in the real world, from self-other discrepancies in social judgment, to interpersonal misunderstanding, to social conflict on a broader scale.

The current research, however, leaves some open questions. For example, the simple effect of ease was not consistently reliable across the different studies, sometimes indicating that the interactions were driven by the heightened reliance on ease for judgments of the self and sometimes suggesting that the effects were driven by the greater reliance on content for judgments of others. Future research can help pinpoint the specific form of this relationship, and work to identify additional mechanisms that produce the self-other difference reported here. Factors such as processing motivation (Rothman & Schwarz, 1998; Tormala, Petty, & Briñol, 2002), affective reactions (Rothman & Hardin, 1997), and heuristic processing strategies more generally (Schwarz, 1998) have all been shown to influence the extent to which people rely on feelings of ease in judgment. One possibility is that people are more motivated to processes information about the self than information about others. The results of Study 2, for instance, are con-

sistent with possibility that retrieval ease mainly matters when people have both the motivation and ability to attend to metacognitive information.⁷ A deeper awareness of when and why people rely on different facets of available information when making self and social judgments should increase our understanding of the form and function of judgmental shortcuts, and may shed further light on how the process of understanding oneself differs from the process of understanding another.

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