

## Quest for Accuracy in Person Perception: A Matter of Pragmatics

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It is proposed that an adequate conceptualization of the person perception process must consider the interpersonal context in which that process occurs as well as the purpose for which it is intended. In the spirit of this proposal, a pragmatic approach to person perception is presented that emphasizes the interpersonal aspects of person perception, particularly those whereby perceivers and targets negotiate the identities that targets are to assume during their interactions. A major implication of this formulation is that contemporary accounts underestimate the accuracy of the person perception process. Implications of this conceptualization are discussed.

The pragmatist clings to facts and concreteness, observes truth at its work in particular cases, and generalizes . . . Your typical ultra-abstractionist fairly shudders at concreteness: other things equal, he positively prefers the pale and spectral. If the two universes were offered, he would always choose the skinny outline rather than the real thicket of reality. It is so much purer, cleaner, nobler. (William James, 1907, p. 68)

Were James alive today, his pragmatist sensibilities would probably be offended by most contemporary research in person perception. Even a cursory glance at the literature reveals that most students of the person perception process have tended to scrutinize the "pale and spectral," leaving the "real thicket of reality" undisturbed. The major contention of this article is that for all its virtues of conceptual clarity and methodological elegance, the strategy of abstracting the person perception process from the interpersonal context in which it is ordinarily embedded has led researchers to paint an incomplete—

and in some respects misleading—picture of the person perception process.

Most important, in the process of removing person perceivers from their everyday social environments, researchers have tended to overlook the goals that perceivers ordinarily pursue and the behavioral mechanisms through which they characteristically pursue them. As a result, in their experiments researchers have asked perceivers to pursue goals that represent only a portion of those they ordinarily pursue and have ignored several key behavioral processes that underlie person perception.

The purpose of this article is to examine this state of affairs, considering how it arose, how it has influenced assessments of accuracy in person perception, and how future researchers might work to create a body of research that more fully captures the interpersonal character of everyday person perception. The article begins by asking: If it is so important to consider the nature of the person perception process as it occurs in everyday life, then why have past researchers refrained from doing so?

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The preparation of this article was supported by Grant MH 37598-01 from the National Institute of Mental Health and a grant from the University of Texas Research Institute to the author.

I thank T. Giuliano for her collaboration on an earlier project from which this article grew. Also, for their helpful comments, I am grateful to D. Batson, R. Bailargeon, B. DePaulo, S. Fiske, D. Hamilton, N. Hazen, P. Secord, R. Vallacher, D. Wegner, R. Wicklund, the reviewers of this manuscript, and especially to D. Schneider.

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### Historical Influences

#### *The Formative Years in Person Perception*

Early theorists in person perception were acutely aware of the importance of developing conceptual and procedural paradigms that captured the full richness of everyday person

perception. In 1954, Bruner and Tagiuri issued a call for researchers to study the manner in which characteristics of the interaction context influence the person perception process. In the spirit of such mandates, Jones and Thibaut (1958) presented a general framework for understanding the links between ongoing perceptual activity and two crucial features of the interaction context: the perceivers' goals in the interaction and the interdependency between the actions of perceivers and the reactions of targets.

But if Jones and Thibaut's analysis set the stage for a more thorough and systematic investigation of the links between characteristics of the interaction context and person perception, it soon became apparent that the curtain was not rising. The reasons for this are complex, but it is noteworthy that over the last 100 years virtually every major school of psychology has modeled its approach to perceptual processes after the approach of researchers in object perception (cf. Ittelson, 1973). Unfortunately, during the formative years of person perception, theorists and researchers in object perception emphasized the tightness and precision of their experiments more than the extent to which their experiments embraced the full richness and complexity of ongoing perceptual activity (cf. Gibson, 1966; Neisser, 1976). Translated into person perception, this emphasis meant focusing exclusively on social information processing and ignoring the subtle interplay between social interaction and social information processing.

One of the key figures during this period was Asch (1946). Although Asch stressed the active, constructive nature of person perception, the procedural paradigm he championed focused on the purely cognitive aspects of this construction process and ignored the behavioral processes that feed into and grow out of such cognitive activity. Furthermore, in an effort to simplify matters, Asch ignored the multiplicity of goals that perceivers bring with them to their interactions and focused on the one that he saw as most important: the task of characterizing targets in terms of various traits and dispositions. Researchers were smitten by the fact that Asch's paradigm made the person perception process extremely tractable.

Several years later, Heider (1958) introduced an equally influential analysis of the person perception process. In the tradition of Asch, Heider sought to identify the cognitive strategies people employ in their efforts to impute traits, dispositions, and related personal attributes to target individuals. Although Heider acknowledged the existence of differences in the mechanisms whereby people perceive physical objects versus other individuals, he emphasized the similarities between these mechanisms more than their dissimilarities. This became clear early in his monograph when he endorsed Brunswick's (1934) contention that "the objects of social and nonsocial perception are similar in regard to their formal characteristics *as well as in regard to the processes by which they are perceived*" [italics added] (p. 21). Such characterizations of the person perception process obviously left little room for consideration of the impact of the interpersonal goals and overt behaviors of perceivers on their social information-processing activities.

To date, the Asch-Heider approach has dominated research in person perception (for recent overviews, see Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979). Some of the more prominent topics in this research have been the impact of beliefs and expectations on encoding and retrieval (for reviews, see Hastie, 1981; Hamilton, 1979; Taylor & Crocker, 1981), the manner in which people weigh and combine information about others (for a review, see N. Anderson, in press), and the processes through which people assign causes to the behaviors they observe (for reviews, see Harvey, Ickes, & Kidd, 1976, 1978, 1981; Harvey & Weary, 1984).<sup>1</sup> This preoccupation with social information processing has carried over to research concerned with more specific

<sup>1</sup> To be sure, a few researchers have examined issues that fall outside the narrow confines of social information processing, such as those who have studied the self-fulfilling consequences of people's beliefs (e.g., Darley & Fazio, 1980; Rosenthal, 1976; Snyder & Gangestad, 1981) and the links between social information processing and communication (e.g., Berger & Bradac, 1982; Higgins, 1981; Penman, 1980; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) and interpersonal deception (e.g., DePaulo & Jordan, 1982; Krauss, 1981; Kraut, 1980; Zuckerman, DePaulo, & Rosenthal, 1981).

issues, such as the accuracy of the person perception process. Because accuracy is a major theme in this article, the relevant literature merits a quick summary.

### *The Dismal Track Record of Person Perceivers on Tests of Accuracy*

In 1949, Ichheiser lamented "We are living in a paranoid age in which people fail even to understand that they do not understand one another" (p. iii). Since then, matters have improved considerably. Unfortunately, the research literature suggests that it is not that we now better understand one another, it is simply that at least some of us are more aware of our ineptitude in this domain.

Among the first to identify the major shortcomings of person perceivers was Ichheiser (1949) himself. On the basis of his own observations and those of previous investigators, Ichheiser pointed to several sources of systematic error. He noted, for example, that people tend to overestimate the amount of coherence in the personalities of others, a propensity that is now popularly referred to as a *halo bias* (e.g., Chapman & Chapman, 1967, 1969; Hamilton & Gifford, 1976; Hamilton & Rose, 1980). He also argued that people tend to overlook and distort information that disconfirms their initial beliefs (e.g., Langer & Abelson, 1974; Rosenhan, 1973; Zadny & Gerard, 1974) and that once beliefs are established, people cling to them even if they learn that the beliefs have no evidentiary basis (e.g., C. Anderson, 1983; C. Anderson, Lepper, & Ross, 1980; Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975; Walster, Berscheid, Abrahams, & Aronson, 1967). Furthermore, he suggested that observers fail to adjust for the constraining influence of situational factors on the behaviors of others, a tendency that Ross (1977) later dubbed the *fundamental attribution error* (e.g., Jones, 1979; Jones & Harris, 1967; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977; Snyder & Jones, 1974).

During the next decade equally disturbing indictments of the person perceiver appeared in the clinical literature. Meehl (1954), for example, reported that simple statistical models for combining information typically provided more accurate clinical judgments

than did highly trained clinicians. Subsequent research pointed to specific shortcomings of clinical judgments. Researchers found that the judgments of one clinician relying on one data source were unrelated to those of a second clinician relying on another data source, even when the two clinicians were evaluating the same client on the same trait (e.g., Goldberg & Werts, 1966; Howard, 1962, 1963; Little & Schneidman, 1959; Phelan, 1964; 1965; Wallach & Schoof, 1965). More upsetting yet, other investigators discovered that amount of professional training and experience did little to improve judgmental accuracy (e.g., Goldberg, 1959; Levy & Ullman, 1967; Luft, 1950; Oskamp, 1962, 1967; Schaeffer, 1964, Stricker, 1967). Even providing clinicians with more information about clients had disappointing results. Although information increments did make clinicians more confident in their judgments, it did not bolster their actual accuracy (e.g., Oskamp, 1965; Ryback, 1967).

The most recent group to take aim at the judgmental abilities of person perceivers have been workers concerned with human decision making. Among others, Kahneman & Tversky (1972, 1973; Tversky & Kahneman, 1971, 1973, 1974) have argued that people sometimes err when they use simplifying rules or heuristics in making judgments. For example, in estimating the relative frequency of objects or events, people sometimes rely on the cognitive availability of the object or event, that is, the ease with which it can be remembered or imagined. Although this judgmental strategy often proves accurate and useful, it leads to error in those all-too-frequent instances in which cognitive availability is unrelated to the actual frequency of events (e.g., Taylor, 1981). Other researchers have complemented Tversky and Kahneman's work by showing that in addition to relying on heuristics, people fail to incorporate statistical notions such as randomness, variance, and sampling variability into their judgments (for reviews, see Hogarth, 1975; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Nisbett & Ross, 1980).

The uniformly unflattering image of the social perceiver emerging from these three literatures could lead one to wonder how people ever manage to muddle their way through their social relationships. But perhaps

such gloomy ponderings are overly pessimistic. Even some of the person perceiver's harshest critics have acknowledged that the errors that people make in the laboratory probably occur only rarely in everyday contexts (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980, p. 254, but also see p. 252). If so, then why do person perceivers perform so poorly in laboratory experiments?

One possibility is that in plucking perceivers out of the interaction contexts in which they are normally embedded and asking them to make inferences about targets, laboratory researchers have failed to consider carefully the nature of the problem that the person perception process is ordinarily designed to solve (cf. Marr, 1982). Instead, they have simply assumed that person perceivers strive to construct representations of social reality in much the same way and with much the same purpose that object perceivers construct representations of the physical world. In the following section I argue that as appealing as that assumption may be, it is flawed.

#### Person Perception in and out of the Laboratory

Like their counterparts in object perception, most researchers within person perception have tacitly embraced the stimulus-constancy assumption—the notion that the targets of perceptual activity possess identities that are immutable and constant. However apt this assumption may be in the case of object perception, recent analyses (e.g., Magnusson & Endler, 1977) have indicated that the identities of people are not nearly as fixed and traitlike (e.g., Allport, 1937) as the stimulus-constancy assumption would suggest. It is easy to imagine, for example, a child who is the paragon of obedience with his teacher but a holy terror with his mother, or a man who bullies his wife but cows to his boss, or a woman who exudes sensuality with her lover but is chilly with her co-workers. This suggests that the stimulus-constancy assumption rests on shaky ground in person perception.

A corollary assumption underlying most research in person perception is that the activities of perceivers have little or no impact on the characteristics of targets. This assump-

tion is also problematic because in everyday person perception the activities of perceivers exert a powerful channeling influence on the identities that targets assume. Indeed, Goffman (1959) suggested that the behavioral processes whereby perceivers and targets negotiate the identities that targets are to assume during interaction represent a crucially important aspect of everyday person perception.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the identity-negotiation framework suggests that person perceivers may strive to discern the identities that they have negotiated with targets rather than the traits of targets. This notion has profound implications for the manner in which the person perception process is conceptualized, especially with respect to the nature of accuracy.

#### *Identity Negotiation and Accuracy in Person Perception*

If the task of person perceivers is to represent the idiosyncratic social realities that they negotiate with targets, then how should one gauge the accuracy of the person perception process? One might begin by asking what that process is *supposed* to do. At the most general level, the person perception process is designed to allow perceivers to attain their interaction goals, such as courting favor (e.g., Jones, 1964; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980), preserving the relationship (e.g., Kelley, 1979; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), exploiting their partner (e.g., Christie

<sup>2</sup> Some researchers have objected to early identity-negotiation formulations (e.g., Goffman, 1959) because they contradicted the intuitively appealing notion that people display considerable behavioral stability. Nevertheless, Athay and Darley (1981) have proposed a novel identity-negotiation framework that escapes this criticism. These authors assume that to attain their interaction goals, targets must convince perceivers that it is worth their while to continue interacting for a certain period of time. Toward this end, targets make themselves seem predictable and manageable to perceivers by scrupulously honoring the identities they have negotiated with these perceivers. This requires that targets behave in a stable manner, at least in the presence of particular perceivers. Thus, people *do* behave in a stable manner as a means of attaining their interaction goals. The Athay and Darley formulation therefore acknowledges the influence of situations on behavior (e.g., Mischel, 1968, 1973) but assumes that people behave in a stable manner because there is stability in the nature of the situational pressures they encounter.

& Geis, 1970; Goffman, 1959), and so on. This suggests that the mark of an optimal or accurate person perception is its ability to promote the interaction goals of perceivers. Simply put, an accurate belief is an instrumental belief.

There is considerable historical precedent for defining the accuracy of beliefs in terms of their instrumental value. The first proponents of this view were the early pragmatist philosophers, especially Pierce (1878) and James (1907, 1909). Consider James's views on the nature of truth and accuracy:

What meaning can an idea's truth have save its power of adapting us either mentally or physically to a reality? (1909, p. 238)

*Ideas (which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience.* (1907, p. 58)

James (1907) justified his maverick view of truth by suggesting that truth is one species of good rather than something distinct from good:

*The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief. . . . Surely you must admit this, that if there were no good for life in true ideas, or if the knowledge of them were positively disadvantageous and false ideas the only useful ones, then the current notion that truth is divine and precious and its pursuit a duty, could never have grown up or become a dogma. In a world like that, our duty would be to shun truth rather. But in this world, just as certain foods are not only agreeable to our tastes, but good for our teeth, our stomach, and our tissues; so certain ideas are not only agreeable to think about . . . they are also helpful in life's practical struggles.* (p. 96)

Admittedly, several prominent philosophers have criticized James's pragmatist view of truth (e.g., Dewey, 1908; Moore, 1907-1908; Russell, 1908). It was primarily James's attempt to apply his system to theology that inspired their scorn, however (cf. White, 1955).<sup>3</sup> They argued, for example, that James's formulation allowed that God existed for those who found the concept of God useful but not for those who found the concept useless. Among others, Russell (1908) complained that truth should not be relativized in this way. A belief, he insisted, cannot be true for one person yet false for another.

Yet if James's pragmatist perspective rings hollow when applied to realms wherein ques-

tions of ultimate accuracy are at issue, it seems eminently plausible when applied to person perception. In particular, because targets *do* assume different identities within different situations and at different times, in social relations a belief *can* be true for one perceiver but not for another. Furthermore, perceivers are often more concerned with whether their beliefs are true for them rather than whether they are true in general. For example, if my wife is cool to most people but warm to me, for most of my purposes it would be appropriate for me to regard her as warm even though the belief that she is cool may have greater generality. The accuracy of social beliefs is therefore determined by how well they serve the goals of perceivers rather than by the extent to which they are accurate in an ultimate sense. The present formulation, then, should be construed as a theory of pragmatic accuracy rather than a pragmatic theory of accuracy.

#### *Forms of Pragmatic Accuracy*

An important implication of this formulation is that the emphasis of past researchers on the processes through which people detect traits may be limited because it assumes that perceivers are preoccupied with forming beliefs that are highly generalizable. Although there are certainly instances in which highly generalizable beliefs are desirable, in many instances perceiver's most important concern is that their beliefs offer precise predictions concerning the behavior of targets within highly circumscribed conditions. More specifically, just as perceivers are sometimes most concerned with forming widely generalizable beliefs that are high in *global accuracy*, at other times they are principally concerned with forming fairly specific beliefs that are high in *circumscribed accuracy* (for discussions of related but conceptually distinct forms of accuracy, see Bronfenbrenner, Harding, & Gallwey, 1958; Cronbach, 1955;

<sup>3</sup> For example, in his letter of July 22, 1909, to James, Russell complained that the "pragmatic difference that pragmatism makes to me is that it encourages religious belief, and that I consider religious beliefs pernicious" (reprinted in James, 1975, p. 303).

Harackiewicz & DePaulo, 1982; Snyder & Gangestad, 1981).

This distinction between global and circumscribed accuracy can be further differentiated. The global accuracy of a belief will be high insofar as it enables the perceiver to predict the behavior of the target in the presence of all the perceivers that target encounters (transpersonal accuracy), across all the contexts that target enters (transcontextual accuracy), or across a fairly long period of time (extended accuracy). The circumscribed accuracy of a belief will be high to the extent that it enables the perceiver to predict how the target will behave in the presence of the perceiver only (personal accuracy), within a limited number of contexts (contextual accuracy), and for a relatively brief period (brief accuracy).

The particular form of accuracy that perceivers pursue will be determined by their interaction goals. Contrast, for example, the unique goals of professional person perceivers, such as clinicians, personnel officers, and guidance counselors, with those of everyday person perceivers. Because professional perceivers must often predict the behavior of targets under a wide variety of conditions, they often aspire to the three forms of global accuracy. On the other hand, because everyday perceivers often need only predict the behavior of targets within certain specific conditions, they tend to favor the three forms of circumscribed accuracy. This is especially true if the perceiver-target relationship is a relatively superficial or short lived one (e.g., when the target is a grocer or the potential mugger on the street). As involvement between the perceiver and target increases, however, the picture becomes more complex. Consider people in intimate relationships. Although still primarily concerned with certain forms of circumscribed accuracy (e.g., personal accuracy), they may develop a concern for certain forms of global accuracy (e.g., extended accuracy). Moreover, they may pursue global accuracy as a means of bolstering circumscribed accuracy. So, for example, perceivers may try to learn how their intimate behaves with other admirers (a transpersonal accuracy consideration) as a means of predicting how their intimate will behave with them (a personal accuracy consideration).

To the extent that perceivers aspire to circumscribed accuracy rather than to global accuracy, they may enjoy higher levels of accuracy than past research suggests. Consider that the three forms of circumscribed accuracy usually require only that perceivers predict target behaviors in a limited range of social situations, situations in which perceivers themselves may often be present. This not only reduces the number of potential influences on target behavior that perceivers must consider, it also raises the probability that perceivers will be familiar with these influences and with how they are apt to affect the behavior of targets.

Forms of circumscribed accuracy such as personal accuracy may also be relatively easy to attain because in the course of interacting with targets, perceivers may constrain their behavior so that targets confirm perceiver expectancies. Thus, the mother who believes that her son is well behaved is apt to be accurate if her criterion is personal accuracy (his behavior in her presence), because her presence may of itself insure that her son honors the good-boy identity he has negotiated. Her risk of error is much greater if her criterion is transpersonal accuracy, because her son will ordinarily enter a host of situations in which she is absent. In these situations, the identity she has contracted with him may not be binding. Perceivers who aspire to personal accuracy can therefore attain accuracy not only by accurately "reading" targets, but also by systematically influencing the behaviors they wish to predict. This latter mechanism is usually not as feasible for perceivers aspiring to forms of global accuracy such as transpersonal accuracy, because they will often be absent in many of the contexts in which they hope to predict the behavior of targets.

There are really two points that I am making here. The first is that in many instances, person perceivers can best cope with "life's practical struggles" by maximizing the circumscribed accuracy of their beliefs, a form of accuracy that is easier to attain than the global forms of accuracy emphasized by earlier researchers. The second point is that the identity-negotiation process itself is structured in ways that bolster circumscribed and global accuracy as well. In the next section I

consider several additional accuracy-enhancing features of the identity-negotiation process.

#### Aspects of the Identity-Negotiation Process That May Enhance Pragmatic Accuracy<sup>4</sup>

The identity-negotiation process begins to unfold before people even enter the interaction context, when they choose where and with whom to interact. A second important step occurs once both participants have entered the interaction context, when targets display identity cues that are designed to make perceivers aware of the identities that targets wish to assume. If there are still doubts concerning the identities that targets wish to claim, they are usually resolved in the course of the subsequent behavioral transactions between perceivers and targets. I examine these three successive phases of the identity-negotiation process in turn.

#### *Choosing Interaction Contexts and Interaction Partners*

As many world travelers attest, there is something unsettling about being in a country in which the behavior of the natives is ambiguous or mysterious ("Is that man staring at me out of hostility or curiosity?", "Is this woman standing so close to me because she finds me attractive or is it just fashionable to stand nose to nose around here?"). Fortunately, perceivers rarely encounter targets who are so perplexing. One reason is that people apparently possess a biologically based drive to seek out interaction partners who are relatively familiar and predictable to them (see Zajonc, 1968, and especially Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). For example, there is evidence indicating that people select both friends (e.g., Richardson, 1939) and dating partners (e.g., Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976) who are similar on a variety of physical, attitudinal, and cognitive dimensions. Similarly, individuals generally select spouses who are their equals on numerous measures of ability and achievement (e.g., Johnson et al., 1976), sociological and demographic indices (e.g., Eckland, 1968; Vandenberg, 1972), and nearly all anthropometric characteristics (e.g., Clark, 1959; Susanne, 1977; Spuhler, 1968). Of course, this preference for predictable others

is tempered by the fact that people do enjoy surprises from their interaction partners now and then (cf. Berlyne, 1971). Such surprises, however, must be limited to relatively small matters. Perceivers must believe that targets are predictable on all dimensions that are central to the relationship; those who fail to meet this criterion are scrupulously avoided.

The tendency of perceivers to gravitate toward familiar settings and surround themselves with similar targets should bolster the accuracy of their beliefs by enabling them to estimate the base rate or prototypical responses of targets correctly. It may also help them anticipate the specific behaviors of targets because they will have an insider's view of the norms, mores, and social rules that guide the behavior of such targets. The result will be that when perceivers encounter targets, they will accurately infer the identities that such targets are able and willing to assume.

And what if perceivers' efforts to interact with predictable targets are thwarted? Under these conditions will perceivers wind up interacting with thoroughly inscrutable targets? Perhaps not, for targets may engage in a parallel set of activities that insure that perceivers readily discern their preferred identities. Like perceivers, targets are presumably motivated to find interaction partners who are predictable to them (e.g., Secord & Backman, 1965; Swann, 1983). Toward this end, they may seek out perceivers who see them as they see themselves. In this way, targets may raise the probability that the identities that perceivers wish them to assume are ones that they also wish to assume.

There is some evidence that targets do indeed strive to arrange their social relationships so that they encounter perceivers who treat them in a manner that is consistent with their self-views. Backman and Secord (1962), for example, discovered that members of a college sorority interacted most frequently with individuals who saw them in a self-congruent manner. Similarly, Broxton (1963) reported that college women were more likely

<sup>4</sup> The aspects of the identity-negotiation process discussed in this section are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. Also, the labels applied to perceivers and targets throughout this section are arbitrary because in reality each individual plays both roles.

to request roommate changes if they believed that the new roommate had a more congruent view of them than did the old roommate. In a later study, Backman and Secord (1968) found evidence that people might choose certain roles in an effort to obtain self-confirmatory feedback. Specifically, when these researchers examined women's preferences for marital roles such as wife and mother, companion, or partner, they found that women chose roles that were compatible with their views of themselves.

To be sure, characteristics of the social structure may sometimes place constraints on both perceivers and targets that prevent them from choosing the social environments that they enter. Accuracy may remain high despite such constraints, however, inasmuch as sociocultural pressures may themselves encourage people to interact with individuals who are predictable to them. For instance, the ethnic, class, and related socioeconomic lines drawn in most societies encourage people to remain in social environments in which the individuals they encounter have similar characteristics or at least characteristics that are understandable to them.

This analysis suggests that perceivers, targets, and the social structures they inhabit may join forces to raise the probability that when people encounter one another, there will be little misunderstanding concerning the identities that each is ready and willing to assume. Targets therefore tend to accept the identities that are offered to them and subsequently offer behavioral support for the accuracy of perceivers' beliefs.

And if such selective interaction processes are unable to remove all ambiguity concerning the identities that targets wish to assume, a second set of processes may do just this. These processes involve the manifestation of identity cues by targets.

#### *Manifestation of Identity Cues*

Targets may make the identities they wish to assume apparent to all by looking the part. By driving a macho automobile or lifting weights, by wearing a barber's smock or a policewoman's uniform, or by accumulating a curriculum vitae that is too fat to fit into a normal-sized brief case, targets may provide

perceivers with clear cues concerning the identities that they are able and willing to assume.

Targets can be quite selective in the identity cues they display, carefully avoiding cues that might lead perceivers to anticipate performances that they are unwilling or unable to deliver. As Athay and Darley (1981) note:

Stable interaction . . . requires that people take care to live up to the public expectations associated with the social positions they announce themselves as occupying; that they signal with some accuracy the contents of their basic traits and dispositions and then conform pretty closely to these presentations . . . Actors can and do violate these normative requirements on occasion, but in doing so they declare themselves dangerous characters who can be dealt with only at high risk. (p. 293)

To be maximally effective, identity cues must be highly visible and capable of evoking predictable reactions from perceivers. Clothing, cosmetics, automobiles, art work displayed on living room walls—all may be used to tell others who they are and how they expect to be treated. Targets may even alter their bodies in an effort to make the identity cues they display compatible with the identities they wish to assume. Witness the popularity of crash diets, exercise programs, and plastic surgery to people who hope to evoke reactions that are in keeping with their positive body images (cf. Swann, 1983).

Sociologists have provided considerable anecdotal evidence that people use identity cues to manufacture identities of their choosing (e.g., Goffman, 1959). Furthermore, there is abundant experimental support for the notion that the appearances that people take on channel the manner in which they are perceived and treated. For example, research has indicated that physically attractive people are viewed in a much more positive light than those who are physically unattractive (e.g., Berscheid, Dion, Walster & Walster, 1971; Dion, 1973, 1974) and that people translate their differential perceptions of attractive and unattractive individuals into behavior (e.g., Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977).

Taken together, this work supports the notion that targets use identity cues to raise the probability that perceivers form impressions of them that accurately forecast their behavior in the interaction. And even if the



identity cues of targets should somehow misfire and perceivers impute identities to targets that targets are unwilling to assume, all is not lost. The research reviewed in the next section suggests that targets who have been mislabeled may induce perceivers to form more accurate beliefs by providing them with corrective feedback.

### *Negotiation Through Social Interaction*

Once perceivers and targets actually initiate social interaction, their first order of business is to establish and coordinate their mutual identities (e.g., Goffman, 1959). Toward this end, perceivers and targets engage in a complementary set of activities that tend to enhance accuracy. Perceivers form expectancies about targets and try them out by adopting appropriate behaviors. At the same time, targets monitor the activities of perceivers to insure that the expectancies of perceivers are compatible with the identities that targets wish to claim.

Although there are surely many strategies with which perceivers might try out an expectancy about targets, the most common one appears to be for perceivers to behave as if the expectancy is correct. Rosenthal and his colleagues (for reviews, see Rosenthal, 1976; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978) were among the first to document this tendency. For example, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) performed a series of studies in which they informed teachers that some of their pupils were gifted. They discovered that teachers adopted highly effective teaching strategies with pupils who were ostensibly gifted and relatively ineffective strategies with pupils not so labeled. Furthermore, the actions of teachers constrained the activities of pupils so that pupils behaviorally confirmed teacher expectancies.

Initially, Rosenthal's teacher expectancy studies evoked a great deal of incredulity (e.g., Barber & Silver, 1968; Elashoff & Snow, 1971). Nevertheless, subsequent investigators have replicated his basic findings in both laboratory investigations (Meichenbaum, Bowers, & Ross, 1969; Swann & Snyder, 1980; Zanna, Sheras, Cooper, & Shaw, 1975) and field studies (e.g., Crano & Mellon, 1978; Seaver, 1973). Moreover, recent research has

shown that this tendency for perceivers to act as if their expectancies are accurate is not limited to highly structured interactions in which perceivers have higher status and greater power than targets, as was true in the teacher expectancy studies. Snyder and Swann (1978a), for example, observed interactions between pairs of college students. They found that students who believed that their interaction partners were hostile displayed more aggressiveness toward them than those who believed that their partners were nonhostile (see also Jones & Panitch, 1971; Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Kuhlman & Wimberley, 1976; Miller & Holmes, 1975; Snyder & Swann, 1978b; Snyder et al., 1977; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974; Zanna & Pack, 1975).

Recent research has also identified a second general attribute of perceivers' expectancy-based interaction strategies. Trope and Bassok (1983) reported that if perceivers are instructed to test the viability of an expectancy about a target by asking questions of that target, they ask highly diagnostic questions, that is, questions that probe for evidence of features that are distinctively associated with the trait or its opposite. This tendency to solicit diagnostic information is conceptually distinct from the tendency to act as if expectancies are valid. The two tendencies may be closely allied in practice, however, because people regard information that confirms their expectancies to be more diagnostic than information that disconfirms their expectancies (e.g., Swann & Read, 1981b, Investigation 3). Hence, although people's preference for diagnostic information may sometimes compete with their tendency to act as if their expectancies are valid, it probably often feeds into this tendency.

Whatever the nature of perceivers' initial overtures toward targets, these overtures usually represent only the first in a series of behavioral transactions between perceivers and targets. Once perceivers have made the initial move, targets have the option of accepting or rejecting the identities that perceivers have offered them. There is reason to believe that targets are more inclined to accept identities that confirm rather than disconfirm their self-views. For example, because people's self-concepts theoretically serve

as an important means of predicting the reactions of others (e.g., Mead, 1934), they want others to see them as they see themselves; otherwise they will be forced either to revise their self-views or to stop using these views to predict the reactions of others. Targets may also be reluctant to accept self-discrepant identities because they suspect that they will be unable or unwilling to honor such identities. They may reason that if they are misidentified, perceivers may leave the interaction before targets can achieve their interaction goals (cf. Athay & Darley, 1981).

In support of this reasoning, there is evidence that targets work to verify their self-conceptions by trying to bring the expectancies of perceivers into harmony with their self-conceptions (for reviews, see Swann, 1983, in press). For example, Swann and Hill (1982) found that when targets interacted with perceivers who had been induced to form beliefs about targets that were inconsistent with targets' self-conceived dominance, targets quickly provided perceivers with corrective feedback. Whereas targets who regarded themselves as dominant became all the more assertive, those who perceived themselves as submissive became all the more docile.

This tendency for targets to strive to behave in ways that confirm their self-concepts (dubbed a *self-verification* effect by Swann & Read, 1981a) might compete with the tendency for them to behave in ways that confirm the expectancies of perceivers (dubbed a *behavioral confirmation* effect by Snyder et al., 1977). In particular, if target self-conceptions and perceiver expectancies differ, then a battle is likely to occur, with perceivers struggling to elicit behavioral confirmation for their expectancies and targets striving to verify their self-conceptions.

Of particular significance here is that the outcome of such battles influences the accuracy of perceiver beliefs. Accuracy generally is highest if self-verification occurs. That is, if perceivers are induced to bring their actions and beliefs into harmony with target self-conceptions, they will be well equipped to predict how targets will behave in the future because targets will theoretically continue to behave in accordance with their self-conceptions (e.g., Swann, 1983).

The overall accuracy of perceiver beliefs is

lower if behavioral confirmation occurs. On the positive side, such effects will generally not threaten circumscribed forms of accuracy such as personal accuracy, because perceivers should continue to constrain the manner in which targets behave in their own presence. Behavioral confirmation processes may undermine global accuracy, however, because targets may behave quite differently once they escape the constraining influence of the perceiver. For example, Laing and Esterson (1964) reported a case study in which the perceiver, Mrs. Field, was convinced that her teenage daughter June, was weak and incompetent due to a debilitating childhood illness. June continued to provide behavioral confirmation for her mother's expectancy until, at the age of 14, she went to a girl's camp. In this radically different social environment, she realized that she was not as helpless as her mother had made her out to be. She consequently revised her self-view and began asserting her new feelings of autonomy. At this point, the global accuracy of Mrs. Field's beliefs decreased sharply.

Although this case study had a relatively happy ending, it is troubling to imagine what would have become of June had she never escaped her overly protective mother. Quite possibly, she would have continued to accept her mother's perceptions of her and remained dependent indefinitely. Similarly, if all the members of a given society develop an erroneous belief about certain target individuals (e.g., handicapped people are helpless) and treat them accordingly, targets may eventually internalize the labels with which they have been tagged (e.g., Fazio, Effrein, & Falender, 1981; Snyder & Swann, 1978b). In such instances, behavioral confirmation ultimately results in beliefs that are high in both global and circumscribed accuracy.

The negative social consequences sometimes associated with such behavioral confirmation processes might lead one to question whether the accuracy that they foster is really all that pragmatic and instrumental. After all, are there not instances in which such processes foreclose the possibility of an alternative social reality that might better service the interaction goals of both perceivers and targets? Might it not be best for perceivers to simply imagine what targets could be like

under optimal circumstances and act accordingly? For example, in the case study above, might not both Mrs. Field and June have been better off had Mrs. Field acted on the assumption that June was self-sufficient?

One problem with supposing that perceivers should attempt to construct such optimal social realities is that perceivers are generally unaware of the impact of their actions on the actions of others (for a discussion and related evidence, see Swann & Siem, 1984). Given that most people do not realize that their behaviors are shaping the realities they encounter, there is little chance that they would consciously decide which of several alternative realities they would most like to construct. In addition, if perceivers were aware of their role in behavioral confirmation processes, they might also be aware of costs associated with striving to construct optimal social realities. For example, although presuming that June was competent would have relieved Mrs. Field of the burden of devoting so much time to her daughter, it may have interfered with some of her other interaction goals. Conceivably, caring for June allowed Mrs. Field to verify her belief that she was a loving and caring mother. Thus, on the balance, Mrs. Field may have been acting in her own best interests. And, at least from Mrs. Field's perspective, she may have been acting in June's best interests as well. That is, she may have feared that if June was *not* capable of becoming more self-sufficient, encouraging her to do so may have stressed her unnecessarily.

My major objective here, however, is not to debate the ultimate utility of behavioral confirmation processes but simply to suggest that they tend to foster circumscribed accuracy but not global accuracy. Self-verification processes, in contrast, tend to foster both global and circumscribed accuracy. Given that behavioral confirmation and self-verification affect accuracy so differently, it is important to consider the variables that determine which process occurs. In the following section, I identify four such variables; the certainty of perceiver expectancies and target self-conceptions, the structure of the interpersonal relationship, the interaction goals of perceivers and targets, and the content of the expectancy.

### Determinants of Behavioral Confirmation Versus Self-Verification

#### *Certainty of Perceiver Expectancies and Target Self-Conceptions*

Recent research suggested that perceivers and targets alike are especially inclined to act as if a belief is true if they are relatively certain of that belief. This presumably reflects the fact that people are more invested in maintaining beliefs that are high in certainty because such beliefs are particularly useful in generating predictions concerning the nature of the social environment. Swann and Giuliano (1983), for example, examined the impact of belief certainty on the interaction strategies of perceivers. They discovered that perceivers high in certainty were not only particularly inclined to solicit expectancy-consistent evidence from targets, they also tended to adopt interview strategies that severely constrained the response options of targets.<sup>5</sup>

Swann and Ely (1984) examined the impact of belief certainty on the interplay between perceiver expectancies and target self-conceptions. Targets who were either relatively certain or uncertain of their self-conceptions were recruited for a study of the interview process. Perceivers were induced to form relatively certain or uncertain expectancies about targets that clashed with target self-conceptions. They then interacted with targets

<sup>5</sup> On the surface, these findings appear to conflict with research by Snyder and Swann (1978b) indicating that expectancy certainty had no reliable impact on strategies of information seeking. This probably reflects the fact that Snyder and Swann made only constraining questions available to participants, whereas these investigators also made nonconstraining questions available.

Of course, there are surely circumstances under which increments in the certainty of perceivers' expectancies do *not* increase the likelihood that they will act as if the expectancy is true (e.g., Quattrone, 1982). Individuals who have just met someone at a party, for example, are typically concerned with acquiring a wide range of knowledge about the target (e.g., Is this person friendly? interesting?). Consequently, as they become reasonably certain that the target possesses each trait, they are apt to shift gears and focus on some other trait. Increments in expectancy certainty *should* intensify perceivers' search for expectancy-consistent information, however, when perceivers are concerned with maximizing the amount of information they possess pertaining to a specific attribute of the target.

in a series of three successive interview sessions.

The results indicated that in the first session, perceivers were more inclined to behave as if their expectancies were true (by soliciting expectancy-consistent evidence) if they were certain as compared to uncertain of their expectancies. The certainty variable also had an impact on the behavior of targets. Whereas targets who were certain of their self-conceptions steadfastly refused to provide perceivers with support for their erroneous expectancies, targets who were uncertain of their self-conceptions were somewhat more inclined to offer such evidence, especially if perceivers were certain of their expectancies. Thus, one major conclusion emerging from this study was that increments in belief certainty increased the tendency for both perceivers and targets to act as if those beliefs were true.

The Swann and Ely (1984) design also allowed for comparisons of the relative impact of perceiver expectancies and target self-conceptions on the outcome of the interviews. There was an overall tendency for perceivers to abandon their initial expectancies and interview strategies in favor of beliefs and interview strategies that were compatible with target self-conceptions when the data were collapsed over perceiver and target certainty. In contrast, targets generally behaved in ways that were compatible with their self-conceptions and displayed little change in their self-ratings.<sup>6</sup>

This tendency for target self-conceptions to triumph over perceiver expectancies makes sense in light of the fact that targets in the Swann and Ely (1984) study had a lifetime of evidence on which to base their self-conceptions, whereas perceiver expectancies were based on relatively meager evidence. This effect, then, was probably due to a tendency for targets to be more certain of their self-concepts than were perceivers of their expectancies. Whenever this is the case, self-verification is likely to occur, and this should bolster both the global and circumscribed accuracy of perceiver beliefs.

Of course, there are surely some contexts in which perceivers are more certain of their expectancies than are targets of their self-conceptions. These contexts foster behavioral confirmation. For example, the elementary

school teacher who learns that a pupil has excelled on an aptitude test may become quite certain that the student has considerable native ability. At the same time, pupils in the teacher's class may be relatively uncertain of their academic ability given that they have a rather abbreviated track record within the academic sphere.

Perceivers will also be relatively certain of their expectancies if they receive a great deal of consensual validation for them. They may sometimes receive such validation from a small but important subset of interaction partners. Clinicians, for example, may become highly certain of the links between particular behaviors and associated diagnostic categories because they receive substantial support for their viewpoints from their colleagues. They may therefore diligently probe for evidence that supports their expectancies during therapy (e.g., Frank, 1973). Furthermore, because people who enter therapy often do so out of feelings of uncertainty about themselves, therapists may often find clients willing to offer expectancy-consistent evidence—even if these expectancies were initially false.

Perceivers may also become highly certain of their expectancies and likely to elicit support for them if they receive consensual validation for these expectancies from a large segment of society, as is often the case with social stereotypes. Witness the fact that some of the most compelling demonstrations of behavioral confirmation have involved expectancies concerning stereotypes, such as those associated with physical attractiveness (e.g., Snyder et al., 1977) and sex roles (e.g., Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982; Zanna & Pack, 1975). In such instances, the pervasiveness of an expectancy encourages perceivers to become

<sup>6</sup> This tendency for targets to resist overtures that are incompatible with their chronic self-views may also explain research indicating that people strive to invalidate *negative* social labels (e.g., Dutton & Lake, 1973; Farina, Allen, & Saul, 1968; Sherman & Gorkin, 1980; Steele, 1975). That is, consider that most people in our society possess positive self-concepts (e.g., Swann, Griffin, & Ely, 1982) owing to the fact that they have formed their self-concepts by observing others' reactions to them and that these reactions have generally been positive due to normative pressures (e.g., Blumberg, 1972; Tesser & Rosen, 1975). This means that for most individuals, negative feedback is regarded as self-discrepant feedback, and they will therefore work to undermine it.

so certain of its validity that they enact behaviors that severely constrain the response options of targets.

### *Structure of the Interpersonal Relationship*

Differences in the extent to which targets can successfully correct erroneous expectancies also influence whether behavioral confirmation or self-verification occurs. For instance, targets in the Swann and Ely (1984) study induced perceivers to revise their expectancies through a series of explicit verbal disclaimers. The ability of targets to provide perceivers with such corrective feedback increases the likelihood that self-verification occurs, thereby promoting both circumscribed and global accuracy.

Of course, the structure of many interpersonal relationships prevents targets from providing perceivers with corrective feedback. For example, if perceivers form expectancies of targets that are negative, they may avoid all but the most superficial of interactions with such targets in the future, thereby making it difficult or impossible for targets to provide perceivers with corrective feedback (cf. Wegner & Vallacher, 1977). Also, if the perceiver is highly credible or has high status, targets may be unwilling or unable to challenge his or her viewpoint. This may contribute to expectancy effects in teaching (e.g., Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) and therapy situations (e.g., Frank, 1973). Moreover, targets are sometimes unable to refute a perceiver's expectancy due to logical paradox (e.g., Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). For instance, the man whose wife asserts that he is not sufficiently spontaneous can do little to undermine her expectancy because she may attribute all signs of spontaneity to simple compliance rather than to "true" spontaneity. Finally, if the relationship is structured so that most communication takes place non-verbally, explicit verbal feedback is relatively ineffective in inducing perceivers to revise their expectancies. All of these factors increase the probability of behavioral confirmation and thereby diminish global accuracy.

### *Goals of Perceivers and Targets*

The goals of participants in the identity-negotiation process are yet another determi-

nant of whether behavioral confirmation or self-verification occurs. Perceivers are ordinarily motivated to negotiate identities with targets that targets are inclined to accept. This usually means that perceivers form expectancies that are consistent with target self-conceptions. If so, then both circumscribed and global accuracy remain high.

The goals of targets usually exert a similar impact on accuracy. That is, targets are typically motivated to bring perceivers to view them in a self-confirmatory manner because they prefer self-confirmatory feedback and because they fear that they will be unable to honor identities that are incompatible with their self-conceptions. For these reasons, targets strive to verify their self-conceptions and thereby contribute to both the global and circumscribed accuracy of perceiver expectancies.

Even so, perceivers' goals may sometimes interfere with accuracy. At times, perceivers may have special reasons for maintaining a particular expectancy about targets, regardless of its accuracy (e.g., the new bride who has a positive impression of her spouse). At other times, perceivers may have special reasons to revise an expectancy, even if it is accurate (e.g., the parents who suspect that their child is seriously ill). And as noted above, in some instances perceivers may care only that their expectancies predict target behavior under certain limited conditions.

Targets' goals may also prompt them to behave in ways that undermine the accuracy of perceiver expectancies. Sometimes the underlying goal may be quite benign, as when targets misrepresent their personalities in an effort to comply with rules of conversation. Grice (1975), for example, argued that people who are engaged in conversation characteristically attempt to follow the cooperative principle, which stipulates that participants accept the premises inherent in the questions and statements of their interaction partners. In instances in which perceivers act on erroneous expectancies about targets, such conversational rules may encourage targets to provide misleading responses to perceivers (see Swann, Giuliano, & Wegner, 1982, for a discussion and evidence). At other times, targets may allow perceivers to entertain erroneous expectancies because their relation-

ship with perceivers is of so little consequence that they are simply unmotivated to take corrective action. At still other times, targets may actually promote an erroneous expectancy; the confidence man, the pool shark, and the dishonest politician offer all too familiar examples of such individuals (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). What is striking about such accuracy-diminishing misrepresentations of self, however, is that they work only if they are used infrequently. Indeed, if all targets sought to mislead perceivers, they would probably gain little because perceivers would distrust them (for a further discussion, see Athay & Darley, 1981).

### *Content of the Expectancy*

Whether targets confirm perceiver expectancies or their self-conceptions may also be a function of the nature of the expectancy. Targets may behaviorally undermine some expectancies simply because they are unable to do otherwise (cf. Rosenthal, 1976). For example, just as physical limitations prevent uncoordinated children from confirming the expectancy that they will become world-class athletes, painfully shy individuals may disconfirm the expectancy that they are extraverted or sociable because they lack the social knowledge or temperament needed to confirm such expectancies. In contrast, some expectancies are relatively difficult to disconfirm. For instance, targets who are erroneously thought to be dangerous have difficulty shaking the label for at least two reasons. First, because perceivers expect to encounter evidence that confirms such a label only under rare or extreme circumstances, they can maintain it for some time in lieu of behavioral evidence. Second, opportunities for targets to display behaviors that clearly disconfirm such a label are very limited (for a further discussion, see Miller, 1984).

The foregoing analysis clearly suggests that the identity-negotiation process only sometimes protects perceivers against the decrements in global accuracy associated with behavioral confirmation effects. Even so, it bears repeating that behavioral confirmation

effects generally do not threaten circumscribed accuracy. Furthermore, I argue that the identity-negotiation process may bolster accuracy by counteracting a host of other sources of error in person perception.

### Errors That Identity Negotiation May Eradicate

Several features of the identity-negotiation process will stamp out errors that might ordinarily threaten global as well as circumscribed accuracy. For example, everyday person perceivers may avoid several errors of person perception because the identity-negotiation process gives them access to a wealth of highly diagnostic information about targets. As Nisbett and Ross (1980) noted, the availability of highly diagnostic information militates against several classic errors. Thus, for example, if the football player reports that his favorite pastime is knitting, the everyday perceiver may ask for proof. If the athlete responds by whipping out his needles and knitting up a storm, the perceiver can disregard the fact that knitting is a highly improbable (i.e., low base rate) activity for football players. In this case, failure to rely on base rate information (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, & Hepburn, 1980) does not threaten accuracy because the information available to the perceiver is highly diagnostic.

The availability of highly diagnostic information also minimizes the dangers inherent in the tendency for people to assign targets to a category simply on the basis of superficial similarity between the target and other members of the category—the representativeness heuristic (e.g., Tversky, 1977). Take the perceiver who suspects that a target is from the southern portion of the United States and knows that *only* people from the south use the word “tarred” to indicate fatigue. If the perceiver asks the target how he or she feels and the target indicates that he or she is “tarred,” the perceiver is safe in assuming that the target is a southerner because in this case the superficial characteristic of the target (i.e., the target’s accent) is highly diagnostic.

In addition, the judgments of perceivers who possess highly diagnostic information

will not be invalidated due to statistical regression effects (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1973). To wit, a man whose neighbor attacks him might reasonably assume that his neighbor is truly unfriendly and that his level of unfriendliness will not regress to the neighborhood mean in the near future.

Other errors may be reduced by the ability of targets to provide perceivers with corrective feedback. That is, in their ongoing transactions with perceivers, targets may typically work to insure that perceivers view them in a manner that is compatible with the identities that targets wish to assume. Such corrective feedback countermands the tendency of perceivers to validate erroneous beliefs about targets. Similarly, corrective feedback reduces the tendency of perceivers to become overconfident in inaccurate beliefs about targets and less likely to persevere in such beliefs. Finally, the feedback that targets provide to perceivers may also diminish the significance of selectivity biases in attention, interpretation, and recall because such biases are less troublesome if the beliefs that guide them are fine-tuned through corrective feedback.

Some errors in person perception are simply irrelevant in everyday settings because circumscribed accuracy is more important than global accuracy. Consider the fundamental attribution error (e.g., Ross, 1977), the tendency of perceivers to overestimate the role of dispositional factors as causes of the behavior of targets. Because perceivers typically interact with targets in a limited number of settings, the situational forces that constrain the target's behavior when they first encounter one another are likely to be present at later times. This is particularly apparent if one considers that perceivers themselves are often one of the major situational factors influencing the behavior of targets. The upshot is that perceivers who assume that a stable disposition caused a target behavior, when in reality the behavior was influenced by some aspect of the situation, do not err as long as they aspire to circumscribed accuracy only.

This discussion of accuracy tempts one to ask whether the beliefs of person perceivers are well calibrated. Calibration refers to the extent to which people's confidence in a belief concurs with the actual accuracy of that belief (for a discussion, see Lichtenstein,

Fischhoff, & Phillips, 1982). A possible problem is that some of the factors that bolster accuracy in everyday person perception may induce perceivers to become overly confident of their beliefs. This is an important shortcoming inasmuch as overconfidence may encourage perceivers to suspend information seeking and information processing prematurely, leaving them quite confident of erroneous beliefs. If perceivers then act on such beliefs, they risk making highly consequential errors.

One obvious advantage that everyday perceivers may have is that often their beliefs need only be well calibrated with respect to the target's behavior in a limited number of situations (*circumscribed calibration*) rather than with respect to the target's behavior in a wide range of situations (*global calibration*). Circumscribed calibration is a more modest goal than is global calibration for the same reasons that circumscribed accuracy is a more modest goal than is global accuracy. In addition, the fact that the identity-negotiation process makes highly diagnostic information available to perceivers and enables targets to provide perceivers with corrective feedback raises the probability that perceivers' beliefs will be accurate. In the case of accurate beliefs, the common problem of overconfidence is less troublesome.

Nevertheless, there are two processes that might undermine global calibration. Perceivers who elicit expectancy-consistent evidence from targets by employing constraining search strategies may become overconfident of beliefs that are low in global accuracy. Also, insofar as perceivers surround themselves with similar targets, they may continuously receive expectancy-consistent evidence and therefore grow very confident of their expectancies. If these expectancies happen to be invalid for individuals other than those with whom perceivers typically interact, perceivers may make consequential errors when they venture outside their characteristic social environments.

### Summary and Future Directions

The primary contention of this article is that past treatments of the person perception process are limited and misleading because theorists and researchers have refrained from

considering the uniquely social aspects of that process (cf. Stryker & Gottlieb, 1981).<sup>7</sup> Using object perception as a model, past workers tended to assume that person perceivers detect the identities of target individuals just as they might detect the identities of physical objects. They have therefore overlooked the fact that object perception offers a poor analogy to everyday person perception in that target individuals are neither invariant stimuli nor are their identities independent of the activities of perceivers. Far from being invariant and independent of the activities of perceivers (i.e., traitlike), the identities of targets are negotiated through a series of behavioral transactions with perceivers.

Of course, such negotiated identities may be binding only within the relatively narrow range of settings in which particular perceivers interact with particular targets. Yet it is precisely within these settings that perceivers often are concerned with predicting the behavior of targets; to perceivers, how targets conduct themselves within other settings or in the presence of other perceivers is frequently of little or no consequence. Thus, for example, perceivers are often more concerned with questions such as "How will this target behave with *me*?" (a form of circumscribed accuracy) than questions such as "How will this person behave with all the individuals he or she encounters?" (a form of global accuracy).

Whether perceivers are more concerned with global accuracy than with circumscribed accuracy is determined by their interaction goals. So, for example, the interaction goals of professional perceivers will often encourage them to pursue global accuracy, and the interaction goals of everyday perceivers will frequently dictate that they pursue circumscribed accuracy.

The most general implication of this analysis is that future researchers should devote more attention to the manner in which the person perception process is woven into the fabric of people's ongoing social relationships. For example, what everyday problems does the person perception process allow people to solve? What questions do perceivers ask about targets, and how do the answers to these questions help them achieve their goals? Which questions require that the beliefs of

perceivers are high in circumscribed accuracy, and which require high levels of global accuracy?

An especially interesting issue concerns how perceivers react when they discover that their beliefs are high in one form of accuracy but low in another. That is, given the diversity of role constraints and situational pressures under which people operate, it seems likely that targets sometimes negotiate very different identities with different perceivers. For example, although there is no necessary contradiction between the fact that a college professor is cool toward his students but warm toward his family, each audience might be surprised at his behavior with the other.

All should go smoothly as long as targets manage to segregate audiences with whom they have negotiated distinct identities (e.g., Goffman, 1959). Such segregation is sometimes impossible to maintain, however. For example, as intimate relationships grow more serious, partners typically begin to see one another in the presence of an increasingly wide assortment of audiences, including rel-

<sup>7</sup> The position being advocated here may strike some as similar to that expressed in a recent article by McArthur and Baron (1983). These authors stress, as I do, the essential accuracy of the person perception process and the importance of studying this process in naturally occurring contexts. Nevertheless, the Jamesian-Goffmanian origins of the present article and the Gibsonian roots of McArthur and Baron's article have led us to paint fundamentally different and in some respects incompatible pictures of the person perception process. In particular, the major purpose of the present article is to consider how the concept of identity negotiation influences one's conceptualization of the nature and origins of accuracy in person perception. I attempt to show how this framework lends itself to a pragmatic conceptualization of the nature of accuracy in person perception and a more expansive view of the processes through which perceivers pursue accuracy. Accuracy is not the major focus of McArthur and Baron's article, and these authors implicitly accept the very conceptualizations of accuracy that I propose are in need of modification.

Rather than being concerned with accuracy, McArthur and Baron were primarily concerned with questioning the conventional view that social knowledge is gained largely through a process of inference. They endorse Gibson's (1966) *direct perception* view, arguing that social information is largely specified in the stimulus. On this issue, I endorse the view that virtually all important person perception activity involves inference. Furthermore, I side with Gibson's critics (e.g., Ullman, 1980) who proposed that the direct perception view merely begs the question of *how* information is specified in the stimulus.



atives, friends, colleagues, or even past lovers. Sometimes they do not like what they see. In some instances, they may be disappointed to find that the identities that they negotiated with their partners during courtship are high in circumscribed accuracy but low in global accuracy. This may be one reason why married couples grow less fond of one another during the first year of marriage (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, in press).

The present analysis also highlights the potential importance of the fact that person perceivers can behave as well as think. An important but untested hypothesis presented earlier in this article was that people enhance the accuracy of their beliefs through various overt behaviors, such as selective interaction and the display of identity cues. In addition to testing this hypothesis, researchers might examine other behavioral processes that influence the person perception process. For example, under what conditions do perceivers learn about targets through a process of active experimentation rather than passive observation? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these general strategies? One possibility is that relatively passive strategies tend to maximize global accuracy because they do not involve constraining the behavior of targets, and interactive strategies maximize circumscribed accuracy because they may be used to elicit information that offers precise predictions concerning how targets behave under certain circumscribed conditions.

It is also important to consider the possibility that the benefits associated with interactive strategies of person perception may sometimes be offset by disadvantages. The task of perceivers who are actively engaged in interaction is complicated by the necessity of asking "What am I going to do next?" in addition to "What is my interaction partner like?" This additional demand may overload perceivers and diminish accuracy. Thus, for example, perceivers who have just received an insult may become so obsessed with formulating a retort that they fail to detect indications that the insult was made in jest.

To be sure, perceivers may try to cope with overload problems by using various simplifying strategies. For instance, rather than code the interaction as a continuous stream of actions and reactions on the part of them-

selves and their interaction partners, they may chunk the interaction into a series of discrete, cause-effect units. But such simplifying strategies may of themselves threaten accuracy. For example, those who chunk the interaction into target's-action-my-action units may be relatively unaware of the constraining influence of their own actions on the reactions of targets. Only individuals who chunk the interaction into my-action-target's-action units should be relatively aware of their influence on targets (e.g., Swann & Siem, 1984).

These are but a few of the issues that become important once one returns the person perception process to the interpersonal context in which it is ordinarily embedded. Admittedly, these issues will surely prove more difficult to study than those examined by past researchers. Yet issues such as these are truly crucial if one acknowledges that the person perception process derives its purpose and structure from the interpersonal sphere. It may simply be the case that it is impossible to fully understand the nature of social thought without simultaneously considering the nature of social interaction.

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Received December 7, 1983

Revision received April 6, 1984 ■