

Perceiving Persons and Groups

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This article analyzes the similarities and differences in forming impressions of individuals and in developing conceptions of groups. In both cases, the perceiver develops a mental conception of the target (individual or group) on the basis of available information and uses that information to make judgments about that person or group. However, a review of existing evidence reveals differences in the outcomes of impressions formed of individual and group targets, even when those impressions are based on the very same behavioral information. A model is proposed to account for these differences. The model emphasizes the role of differing expectancies of unity and coherence in individual and group targets, which in turn engage different mechanisms for processing information and making judgments. Implications of the model are discussed.

From its beginnings, social psychology has had, as one of its hallmarks, an emphasis on how the individual perceives, interprets, and understands the complexities of the social world. A natural consequence of this emphasis is social psychology's long-standing interest in social perception: how the individual perceives others and their behaviors.

Within the domain of social perception, social psychology has made an artificial demarcation between two topics: the perception of individuals and the perception of groups. On one hand, there is a long and rich literature concerned with how perceivers form first impressions of other persons based on the information they acquire. On the other hand, there is an equally long and rich tradition of research on perceivers' conceptions of various social groups. These two domains of inquiry, however, have remained somewhat distinct in the literature. For example, the topics of impression formation and stereotype formation are usually discussed in separate chapters in social psychology textbooks. Also, generally speaking, different researchers and theorists have defined and influenced the empirical directions in these two fields. In the study of impression formation, the names of Asch and Anderson are of central importance historically, whereas Fiske, Hastie, Ostrom, Srull, and Wyer, among others, are of more contemporary prominence. In contrast, research on intergroup perception traces back to the seminal works of Katz and Braly, of Allport, and of Tajfel, whereas current leaders in this area include people like Brewer, Devine, Mackie, Park, Rothbart, and Turner, among others. Both of these domains have been very active areas of research, yet historically they have had relatively little contact with each other.

Although this separation will not be surprising to anyone fa-

miliar with the social psychological literature, it does seem ironic in view of certain fundamental similarities in the questions and issues that are important in each of these areas. In both cases, research is concerned with how a perceiver comes to develop a conception of a social target—either a person or a group—on the basis of certain information that is available for this purpose and with how the perceiver uses that information to make judgments and behavioral decisions about that person or group. Given these similarities, one might expect that the same mechanisms and processes govern social perception in these two domains. If so, then one might assume some equivalence in how impressions and stereotypes are formed and in how judgments of individuals and of groups are made. As plausible as this might be, there has been little effort directed at making such a comparison.

In this article, we suggest that this issue is more complex than it may seem at first glance. We argue that forming an impression of an individual and developing a conception of a group are, in fact, governed by the same fundamental information-processing system. However, we also develop the argument that the specific processes engaged and the outcome of those processes can, and often will, differ in some basic and systematic ways for individual and group targets. Finally, we present a conceptual framework to account for why these differences occur.

Our analysis is organized into several sections. First, we briefly summarize some important principles that we extracted from the 50-year history of research on impression formation. These general principles characterize the perceiver's assumptions and processes in forming first impressions of individual target persons. Second, we propose that in many (but not all) contexts in which impressions of groups are being formed, the perceiver does not hold these same assumptions and, therefore, does not abide by the same processes. In developing these points, we review a number of relevant research findings that reveal differences in information processing and judgment as a function of whether the target of perception is an individual or a group of people. We then present a conceptual analysis intended to provide a more general understanding of the factors that govern the processes that are engaged when one develops impressions of individuals and of groups. We also report the

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results of some of our recent experiments testing these theoretical ideas. Finally, we consider a number of implications and issues raised by our analysis.

Principles of Impression Formation

We begin, then, by proposing some very general statements about the processes involved in forming impressions of individuals. We present these generalizations in terms of a *fundamental postulate* and then a series of *principles* about information processing in impression formation that derive from that postulate. In many respects, our analysis both resembles and is indebted to the views expressed 50 years ago by Solomon Asch (1946) in his classic article on forming first impressions. We cite illustrative research evidence supporting each of these principles, although it is not our purpose here to provide an exhaustive review of this extensive literature.

The fundamental postulate and the principles derived from it reflect certain assumptions that the perceiver makes about persons, assumptions that then evoke certain processes that are spontaneously activated and are inherently involved in forming an impression of another person. In fact, intuitively, it is difficult to think of forming an impression without engaging these processes, at least to some extent.

Fundamental Postulate: The perceiver assumes unity in the personalities of others, and persons are seen as coherent entities; therefore, one's impression of another person should reflect that unity and coherence.

The fundamental postulate states that the perceiver expects unity and coherence in the personalities of others. A person is expected to be an organized entity; he or she is the same person, with the same personality, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This unity is assumed to reflect the target person's inherent nature or essence, the main themes of his or her personality. If this is so, then it follows that one's impressions of others should reflect that unity. Discovering these themes therefore becomes the focus and the goal of the impression formation process.

This is not a new idea. It was at the heart of what Asch (1946) had to say about impression formation more than four decades ago. In his words, "Each person confronts us with a large number of diverse characteristics. . . . Yet our impression is from the start unified; it is the impression of the person" (Asch, 1946, p. 258). Thus, the perceiver assumes unity and coherence in the personality of the target person, and, if the target person has unity and coherence, then the perceiver's impression should have it also. Consequently, the perceiver strives to capture this unity during the process of forming an impression.

This, then, is the basic assumption that the perceiver makes in forming impressions of others: the assumption of unity, consistency, and essence in the personalities of individuals. The principles discussed subsequently all derive from this assumption in one way or another.

Principle 1: The perceiver seeks to draw inferences about the dispositional properties constituting the core of the person's personality.

Because the goal is to form an impression of the target person's personality, the perceiver seeks to identify the dispositional

core or roots of that personality. Much of the specific information that the perceiver learns about the target person is viewed as a surface manifestation of more fundamental dispositions. The perceiver implicitly assumes that the target person's behaviors imply more general underlying properties of the person, that they reflect more fundamental qualities. Therefore, the information immediately available is used as a basis for making correspondent trait inferences and evaluative judgments about the person's more general dispositional characteristics.

Again, this idea is hardly new. Asch's (1946) work focused on the inference process, implicitly assuming a tendency to expand on the information available and to move to a more general level of understanding, to a more complete and unified conception of the target person. Similarly, Anderson's work on information integration (cf. Anderson, 1974, 1981) emphasized the perceiver's spontaneous tendency to make evaluative judgments that summarize his or her overall reaction to the target person. And correspondent inference theory (Jones, 1990; Jones & Davis, 1965) was specifically concerned with how the perceiver goes "from acts to dispositions," inferring traits, attitudes, motives, and other dispositional characteristics that underlie the specific information on which the impression is based.

These inferences are often made spontaneously as the perceiver observes and learns about the target person. That is, because the perceiver seeks to understand a core of underlying dispositions, the information acquired about the person is used to infer those traits on-line, as this behavioral information is being processed (Hastie & Park, 1986; Lichtenstein & Srull, 1987). A considerable body of research by Uleman (e.g., Uleman, 1987; Winter & Uleman, 1984), Gilbert (e.g., Gilbert, 1989; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988), and others (e.g., Bassili & Smith, 1986; Carlston & Skowronski, 1994; Carlston, Skowronski, & Sparks, 1995; Whitney, Davis, & Waring, 1994; Whitney, Waring, & Zingmark, 1992) has shown that, at least under an impression formation goal, perceivers routinely make correspondent dispositional inferences in the course of processing information about a target person. These spontaneous inferences may be tentative hypotheses (Trope, in press) and may subsequently be adjusted in light of other information (e.g., about the situational context; Gilbert et al., 1988), but the perceiver seems predisposed to interpret manifest behaviors in terms of underlying personal properties.

The fact that evaluative judgments and correspondent trait inferences are made on-line in forming first impressions of individuals has some important consequences. First, the fact that the impression formation process typically involves on-line inferences means that judgments about the target person, even when made at a later time, often do not require retrieval of specific factual information when the judgment is being made. Instead, the perceiver can simply refer back to these inferences and judgments that were made when the information was being processed (Hastie & Park, 1986; Lingle & Ostrom, 1979; Ostrom, Lingle, Pryor, & Geva, 1980). Second, it is this on-line aspect of processing that generates the well-known primacy effect in impression formation. As information about the target person is acquired, the perceiver immediately begins to extract the evaluative implications of that information and develops, from the outset, an overall impression and evaluative judgment of the person. This initial evaluation can then be modified in

light of subsequent items of information, but the earliest information acquired will typically have the greatest impact on the ultimate impression judgment. Evidence for this primacy effect was first provided by Asch (1946) and is pervasive in the impression formation literature (for reviews, see Anderson, 1974; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979).

Principle 2: The perceiver expects consistency in the target person's traits and behaviors.

Turning now to the second principle of impression formation, it also follows from the fundamental postulate that the perceiver expects the target person to manifest consistency in his or her traits and behaviors. Given one behavior, the person would be expected to perform other behaviors consistent with it. Given one trait characteristic, the person would be expected to possess other traits consistent with it (Asch, 1946; Kelley, 1967; Lutsky, Bacon, & Dawson, 1994; Schneider, 1973).

A number of studies provide empirical support for this principle, documenting beliefs in the stability of individuals (e.g., Hirt, 1990; Lutsky et al., 1994). These studies have used two different methodological strategies for assessing beliefs in consistency. In one, participants rate others as they currently perceive them on a number of attributes and then rate them again, on the same scales, according to what they were like at some previous time or what they are likely to be like at some point in the future. The similarity in ratings between the two time points reflects the participants' beliefs in consistency. In the second strategy, participants directly rate the extent to which various target persons will remain the same on certain attributes over some specified (extended) period of time. The results of both types of studies provide evidence for what Ross (1989) referred to as a widely shared "implicit theory of stability."

Moreover, the extent of expected stability is both high and pervasive. For example, Lutsky et al. (1994) had participants think of two people they knew well, one 20 years old and one 40 years old; for each target person, participants rated the expected stability of 23 diverse attributes over the next 20 years. Although some differences were obtained between domains (moral character, personality traits, cognitive attributes, and physical traits), most impressive was the high degree of stability expected in all domains (most means were greater than 8.0 on an 11-point scale). Thus, perceivers clearly expect consistency in the personalities of others.

According to Hirt (1990), social perceivers observe the current behaviors of a social target and use an expectancy-guided model to make inferences about past or future behaviors. One of the central aspects that guides these inferences in the case of individuals is a belief in the temporal stability of attitudes and attributes. Studies by Hirt and his colleagues (Hirt, 1990; Hirt, Erickson, & McDonald, 1993) support this model. In the absence of other conflicting expectancies, perceivers generate expectations of stability of attributes and behavior in the case of individual social targets, and they use these expectancies to draw inferences about the past or make predictions about the future.

Other studies also provide relevant evidence in support of this principle. For example, people perceive more consistency in the behaviors of others than in their own behaviors (Baxter & Goldberg, 1987), and they perceive others as more predictable than they see themselves (Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988). Silka's (1989) work on judgments of person change also assumes that

stability is an important part of people's perceptions of the attributes of individual social targets.

Principle 3: The perceiver seeks to develop an organized impression of the target person.

Third, the assumption of unity in the target person's personality also implies some organization among the different elements of the personality, as conceived in the impression. Asch emphasized that, in forming impressions, people immediately begin to integrate the information they are acquiring, and they organize the impression around the prominent themes in the person's personality. Again quoting Asch (1946),

As soon as two or more traits are understood to belong to one person, they cease to exist as isolated traits, and come into immediate dynamic interaction. The subject perceives not this *and* that quality, but the two entering into a particular relation. There takes place a process of organization in the course of which the traits order themselves into a structure. (p. 284)

And elsewhere, he stated it more succinctly: "To know a person is to have a grasp of a particular structure" (Asch, 1946, p. 283).

This means, then, that the perceiver should seek to integrate and organize the information about different types of behaviors or about different traits. The various pieces of information ought to "fit" together in meaningful ways. Behaviors reflecting the same trait ought to be grouped together in memory, in that they reflect the same theme in the person's personality. And if the information is organized in memory, its later retrieval should be facilitated. Research evidence consistent with this view has been obtained in several studies (Hamilton, 1981; Hamilton, Driscoll, & Worth, 1989; Hamilton, Katz, & Leirer, 1980; Hoffman, Mischel, & Mazze, 1981; Park, 1989), although alternative interpretations have also been proposed (Klein & Loftus, 1990).

Principle 4: The perceiver strives to resolve inconsistencies in the information acquired about the target person.

Fourth, as part of this integration process, the perceiver tries to resolve any inconsistencies in the information being acquired about the target person, to make sense of them by discovering how they fit with other information, and to understand why such inconsistencies would occur. When a person whom you know to be friendly and considerate suddenly bursts into unprovoked and rude criticism of another person, it captures your attention; you stop and think, "Hey, what's going on here? Why did she do that? That doesn't fit with my impression of her at all." Again, Asch (1946) commented on this aspect of forming impressions:

We are not content simply to note inconsistencies or to let them sit where they are. The contradiction is puzzling, and prompts us to look more deeply. Disturbing factors arouse a trend to maintain the unity of the impression, to search for the most sensible way in which the characteristics could exist together. (p. 285)

This principle has several interesting corollaries that are well known and are supported by recent literature. First, it implies that perceivers will spend more time thinking about items of information that are inconsistent with the overall impression

than they will in processing consistent information (Bargh & Thein, 1985; Hemsley & Marmurek, 1982; Stern, Marrs, Millar, & Cole, 1984). Second, it suggests that attempts are made to explain why the inconsistency occurred, thereby triggering the attribution process (Clary & Tesser, 1983; Hamilton, 1988; Hastie, 1984). And third, because of this added processing and thought, the inconsistent information should be effectively represented in memory and therefore should be likely to be available for retrieval at a later time. Of course, the finding of better recall for incongruent than congruent information has been obtained in numerous studies on memory for person-descriptive information (Bargh & Thein, 1985; Driscoll, Hamilton, & Sorrentino, 1991; Hastie & Kumar, 1979; Srull, 1981; Srull, Lichtenstein, & Rothbart, 1985; Srull & Wyer, 1989).

In this section, we have presented some general principles about what transpires in the process of forming a first impression of another person. We have not cited all of the evidence documenting these points, although in each case such evidence is available. We have also bypassed the theoretical disputes that surround the interpretation of some of these phenomena. Our purpose here has simply been to summarize some of the main features of what is known about how impressions of individual target persons are formed. These principles of impression formation provide the context for analyzing the issue posed in the next section.

Caveat

According to our fundamental postulate, perceivers assume a high degree of unity and coherence in the personalities of individuals, and expectations of consistency and beliefs in traits as organizing units of personality are assumed to follow. However, virtually all of the research on which our analysis is based was conducted in Western countries, primarily the United States. As with many topics in social psychology (Smith & Bond, 1994), it may be that such assumptions are less "fundamental" than our analysis implies and, in particular, that differences exist between cultures with independent versus interdependent value orientations. Results of cross-cultural comparisons indicate possible differences between individualist and collectivist cultures regarding some of the effects we have discussed, suggesting a need for caution in generalizing across societal variations. For example, studies have shown that people from individualist cultures use dispositional attributes (personality traits and abilities) in characterizing others more readily than do people from collectivist cultures, whose descriptions of others tend to be context bound or to emphasize interactions with others (Korten, 1974; Shweder & Bourne, 1982). Similarly, people from individualist cultures and people from collectivist cultures differ in their causal attributions, the former being more likely to make dispositional attributions (Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994). However, the cross-cultural evidence relevant to the principles we have developed is not extensive, and more research directed at these issues would be extremely useful. At minimum, the principles summarized earlier apply in general form in societies influenced by Euro-American thought and tradition.

Comparing Individual and Group Impressions

We now turn to the question that is the focus of this article, namely the similarities and differences between how person impressions and group impressions are formed. A useful way of addressing this issue is by considering the following question: To what extent do the principles of impression formation of individuals summarized in the preceding section apply to the way perceivers form conceptions of groups? Interestingly enough, Asch (1946) raised this question briefly in his classic 1946 article on forming impressions of personality, and later, in his 1952 textbook, he devoted half of a chapter to the topic (Asch, 1952). Despite his interest in the question, he never pursued it empirically. And although there are now some scattered articles reporting studies that include a comparison of individual and group targets, there has been little systematic effort aimed at understanding what, if any, differences there are in the way individual and group impressions are formed. (See Wyer, Bodenhausen, & Srull, 1984, for one such analysis.)

An information-processing perspective provides a potentially useful approach to analyzing this issue. Specifically, the principles outlined earlier, summarizing processes underlying the formation of *person* impressions, can be used to formulate questions about the perceiver's conceptions of *groups*. That is, do perceivers hold the same assumptions about the unity, organization, and dispositional nature of groups that they do about individual persons? Do they expect consistency among members of a group, as they do within an individual? Do they attempt to form organized conceptions of groups, associating different pieces of information about group members with each other, as they do in processing information about individuals? Do they try to resolve inconsistencies between items of information about group members to the same extent that they try to explain inconsistencies in individual target persons? Do they spontaneously make inferences and judgments about groups on-line, as the information is being processed, as they do in forming impressions of individuals? These are empirically testable questions, and they break down the very general and complex question of group versus individual perception into more specific questions concerning specific processing goals and mechanisms. For each of these mechanisms, forming impressions of individuals and forming impressions of groups may be similar or they may be different. Our purpose, then, is to conceptually analyze these issues and to review the evidence relevant to them.

The fundamental postulate of impression formation asserted that the perceiver assumes unity and coherence in the personalities of individuals with whom he or she interacts. Therefore, the goal of the impression formation process is to identify and understand the nature of the person's underlying personality. Our analysis rests on the proposition that, on the whole, *perceivers do not expect the same degree of unity and coherence among members of a group as they expect in the personality of an individual person*. If this is so, then this difference in assumed unity would generate differences in the kinds of processes and outcomes summarized in the various principles we outlined regarding the impression formation process. That is, differences in perceived unity might induce differences, for example, in the nature and extent of inference processes, in the expectation of

consistency, in the amount of organization imposed on the information acquired, and so forth. Because it is the assumption of unity that generates these outcomes in one's impressions of individuals, a lower level of perceived unity in group targets would therefore lead to differences in how information about group members is processed. These processing differences might then produce different results for perceptions of individual and group targets.

Individual Versus Group Impressions: Empirical Evidence

How can these ideas be tested empirically? The obvious strategy for this kind of work is quite simple. It involves presenting the identical information (e.g., a series of behavior-descriptive sentences) to two groups of participants. One group is told that all of the information describes the same person; the other group is told that each item of information describes a different person but that all of those persons are members of the same group. A comparison of these two conditions then permits an analysis of the effect of the target of perception—individual or group—on the dependent measure of interest in a particular study. Although this experimental strategy might seem obvious, it is surprising how few studies there are in the literature that have used it. There are some relevant studies, however, and we now review their findings in light of the points we have been developing.

Principle 1a: Spontaneous Inferences

We begin our analysis with the question of how and when judgments and inferences are made. We noted earlier that, in forming impressions of individuals, perceivers often make spontaneous trait inferences and on-line judgments as the information is being processed. If, however, participants do not assume the same degree of unity and coherence in a group that they do in an individual, then they may be less disposed toward identifying the inherent nature of the group, that is, they may be less likely to try to infer its dispositional properties. If so, then judgments about the group's attributes would be less likely to be made on-line, as the information is encoded. Instead, judgments about the group's characteristics would be more likely to be calculated at the time judgments are called for, based on items of information that can be retrieved from memory at that time. That is, judgments of groups would be more likely to be memory based. Although there has not been much research on this point, the evidence that is available is consistent with this reasoning.

One kind of supporting evidence comes from research using an illusory correlation paradigm (cf. Hamilton & Sherman, 1989). Research on illusory correlations has shown that the impressions formed of groups can be influenced by the co-occurrence of distinctive stimulus items. Specifically, in this paradigm participants read a series of statements describing behaviors performed by members of two or more groups. One of the groups and one category of behaviors (e.g., undesirable behaviors) are made distinctive within the stimulus set, for example, by their relative infrequency of occurrence. However, there is no actual relationship between group membership and behavior desirability in the

information presented. Hence, the two groups are described by evaluatively equivalent information.

Despite this equivalence, studies using this paradigm have consistently shown that participants' judgments of the groups are biased by the differential impact of the distinctive information (for reviews, see Hamilton & Sherman, 1989; Mullen & Johnson, 1990). Specifically, participants overestimate the frequency with which members of the distinctive group perform the infrequently occurring (e.g., undesirable) behaviors, and they make less favorable trait ratings about the distinctive group. Moreover, some evidence (e.g., Hamilton, Dugan, & Trolie, 1985) suggests that these judgments are memory-based judgments; that is, they are not formed on-line but are formed at the time judgments are made. As such, they are heavily influenced by the most easily accessible information, which in this case is information about members of the distinctive group performing undesirable behaviors (Johnson & Mullen, 1994; McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1994a). The result is a bias in judgment, producing unwarranted differential evaluations of the groups.

Extending this line of work, a study by Sanbonmatsu, Sherman, and Hamilton (1987) compared perceptions of individual and group targets in an illusory correlation paradigm. Participants in this experiment read a series of statements describing five targets who were identified by the letters A, B, C, D, and E. Half of the participants were told that these targets were five groups, and each sentence described a different member of one of those groups; the other half were told that they were five individuals. Each target was described by seven desirable and three undesirable behaviors, making the latter category distinctive by its infrequency. As a means of making one of the targets distinctive, participants were simply instructed to pay particular attention to Target C.

Sanbonmatsu et al. (1987) found a dramatically different pattern of results for the group and the individual target conditions. When participants were learning about groups, they overestimated the number of undesirable behaviors performed by the distinctive group, and they rated that group less favorably than the other groups. These results, which are entirely consistent with the findings of numerous other illusory correlation studies, suggest an especially effective encoding of the distinctive information, enhanced memory for this information at the time judgments are made, and judgments that are memory based.

In contrast, and of particular interest for our present purposes, when participants were learning about individual target persons, they showed the opposite pattern. That is, they overestimated the number of *desirable* behaviors performed by the distinctive target person, relative to the other persons, and they rated the salient person more, rather than less, favorably than the other target persons. Thus, the findings for the individual target condition not only failed to replicate the results typically observed in illusory correlation studies using group targets but, in fact, revealed significant effects in the opposite direction.

Although such a reversal may seem puzzling, it actually follows directly from the analysis we developed in the previous section. That is, in forming impressions of individuals, the perceiver seeks to understand the predominant features of the person's personality. This would focus the perceiver's attention on the most frequently occurring kinds of information, and that information would be used as the basis for making on-line inferences about

the person's characteristics. Any inconsistencies either would be assimilated to the emerging impression or would be explained away as not being diagnostic for understanding the person's personality. Given that 7 of the 10 items describing each target person were desirable behaviors, participants should form generally favorable impressions, and in this case the heightened attention to the one salient target person should result in even more favorable ratings of him or her. This is exactly what happened in the Sanbonmatsu et al. (1987) study.

Sanbonmatsu et al. (1987) explained their results in terms of the distinction between on-line and memory-based judgments (Hastie & Park, 1986). Impressions of individual targets were formed on-line as the information was processed, whereas impressions of groups were not. Consequently, judgments of individual targets were based on impressions already formed, whereas judgments of group targets were based on participants' retrieval of accessible information.

More recently, research by McConnell, Sherman, and Hamilton (1994b) has confirmed and extended this analysis. Again using an illusory correlation paradigm, their study replicated Sanbonmatsu et al.'s (1987) finding of greater evidence of illusory correlation for group than for individual targets. That is, participants in the group (but not the individual) target condition had greater liking for the majority than the minority target. Also, on a target assignment task in which participants were asked to indicate which target had performed each of the stimulus behaviors, participants in the group target condition attributed a greater proportion of negative (infrequent) behaviors to the minority target than did participants in the individual target condition. Both of these findings represent traditional illusory correlation effects for group targets but not for individual targets.

In addition, McConnell et al. (1994b) included several measures useful in assessing the processing differences that distinguish on-line and memory-based judgments. Specifically, participants in the individual target condition recalled more of the behaviors on a free-recall task than did participants in the group target condition, and, on the target assignment task, they made their assignments more accurately and with shorter latencies. These differences are consistent with the view that information is processed more extensively in forming impressions of individuals than of groups. In all likelihood, this extended processing includes making on-line evaluative inferences, which would undermine the retrieval-based mechanisms underlying the typical illusory correlation outcomes. The consequence is that these illusory correlation effects are not obtained for individual targets.

The results reported by Sanbonmatsu et al. (1987) and by McConnell et al. (1994b) provide support for our individual versus group comparison ideas using a paradigm originating from the group perception literature. Other recent research we have conducted (Susskind & Hamilton, 1994) provides parallel evidence with a paradigm commonly used in studies of individual impression formation. In the first of these studies, participants read a series of 24 behavior descriptions, with six behaviors reflecting each of four trait categories. Participants were told that all behaviors described the same person (individual condition); that each behavior described a different person, all of whom belonged to the same group (group condition); or that each behavior described a different person and these persons did not know each other (aggregate condition). These conditions

were intended to represent three levels of (decreasing) perceived unity. Stimulus sentences were presented on a computer screen at a fixed pace. After stimulus presentation, a series of questions about the target, with rating scales, appeared on the screen. Participants' responses to these questions, as well as their latencies in making these judgments, were recorded by the computer.

Among these dependent measures were several trait ratings on attributes corresponding to the four trait domains represented in the stimulus behaviors. Analyses of these ratings indicated that participants made stronger trait inferences (i.e., more extreme trait ratings) for the individual target than for the group and aggregate targets. Moreover, participants in the individual target condition were significantly faster in making these judgments than were participants in the other two conditions. These results are consistent with the view that participants forming impressions of an individual target spontaneously infer attributes implied by the available information and hence can access those inferences quickly and easily when judgments are subsequently requested.

In a second study, Susskind and Hamilton (1994) modified this procedure slightly. Whereas in the first study all behaviors exemplifying all four trait categories were positive instantiations of those traits, the second study sought to investigate the impact of expectancy-inconsistent items in making judgments about individual, group, and aggregate targets. Specifically, participants were first given initial impression expectancies about the target for all four traits. They then read the series of behavior descriptions. For two of the four traits, all of the behaviors were consistent with expectancy. However, for the other two traits, half of the behaviors were consistent and half were inconsistent with expectancy. After stimulus presentation, the same dependent measures were assessed.

Replicating the results of the first study, analysis of participants' ratings on traits about which only expectancy-consistent behaviors had been presented indicated substantially stronger inferences about the attributes of the individual target than about either the group or the aggregate. For those traits for which both consistent and inconsistent behaviors were presented, participants' ratings were, not surprisingly, more attenuated. Even with this mixed information base, however, participants made significantly more extreme ratings of the individual target than of either the group or the aggregate. Moreover, participants' response latencies in making these trait ratings (regardless of information pattern) were substantially faster for the individual than for the other targets.

In sum, the studies summarized in this section compared judgment processes for individual and group targets using paradigms from both the group perception and the individual perception literatures. The results of these studies consistently supported the view that on-line judgments are more likely to be made in forming impressions of individuals than of groups.

Principle 1b: Primacy Effects

If perceivers integrate information about a target on-line, as information is processed, primacy effects in evaluative judgments should occur. If perceivers are more likely to spontaneously integrate for individual than group targets, then such pri-

macy effects should be more likely to occur in the former than the latter case.

A study by Manis and Paskewitz (1987) provides support for this hypothesis. Participants read a series of items that reflected varying degrees of pathology about a person to whom the information pertained. In one condition, all of these statements pertained to the same person, whereas, in the other condition, each statement pertained to a different person, all of whom belonged to the same group. After reading these items, participants made judgments of the overall level of pathology of the person or group that had been described. Manis and Paskewitz found that in the individual target condition, participants' judgments reflected a primacy effect, in that later information was assimilated to the initial impression they formed on the basis of the early items in the stimulus set. This result for the individual target condition is what would be expected if judgments were formed on-line as information was acquired, forming an initial impression from the early items and then modestly adjusting these judgments as new information was obtained. In contrast, participants in the group target condition revealed a recency effect, with their overall judgments reflecting the greater impact of the most recent information received. And, of course, it is this most recent information that would be most accessible for a memory-based judgment made immediately after reading the stimulus items. More recently, a study by Hilton and von Hippel (1990) obtained results very similar to those of Manis and Paskewitz (1987), again indicating greater assimilation to initial information for individual than for group targets.

Taken together, the findings of these studies on spontaneous inferences and on primacy effects support the contention that, in forming impressions of individual target persons, perceivers immediately begin making on-line inferences and judgments, whereas, in processing information about members of groups, they are less likely to make these inferences about group characteristics or at least make such inferences less extensively. Rather, those assessments of group attributes are more likely to be based on information retrieved when judgments are called for.

Principle 2: Expectations for Consistency

We now turn to the second principle presented earlier, namely that, given the assumption of unity, perceivers expect consistency in the behaviors and traits of individuals. Our hypothesis is that perceivers do not hold this expectation to the same degree regarding social groups, particularly groups for which the perceiver does not have well-developed conceptions or stereotypes. Surprisingly, there is little empirical evidence in the literature directly relevant to this comparison.

Recent research by Weisz and Jones (1993), based on this same assumption, explored differences between target-based and category-based expectancies (Jones & McGillis, 1976) in their effects on judgments of a target person. These authors hypothesized that target-based expectancies (derived from knowledge about the particular individual) influence and maintain perceivers' impressions to a greater extent than do category-based expectancies (derived from knowledge of the individual's group membership). In their research, Weisz and Jones created these two kinds of expectancies by giving participants descriptions of episodes relevant to a particular attribute. Either all

10 episodes described the same person (target based) or each episode described a different person from the same group (category based). Participants then learned about a target individual whose behavior violated the expectancy.

Two aspects of Weisz and Jones's (1993) results are of interest to the present discussion. First, for their research, it was important that they equate the strength of the expectancies induced by the episode descriptions in their two conditions. Interestingly, Weisz and Jones found that they had to write somewhat stronger descriptions in the group target case to create category-based expectancies that were comparable to the target-based expectancies established about the individual target. Apparently, then, expectancies about individual targets are formed more easily and more extremely than expectancies about groups. Second, Weisz and Jones found that target-based expectancies had more impact on participants' judgments than did category-based expectancies. Specifically, the expectancy-violating episode produced less change in participants' impressions of the individual target than of the group target. Both of these findings suggest that perceivers expect greater consistency in individuals than groups.

Also relevant to this issue are some recent findings reported by Park, DeKay, and Kraus (1994). Participants read 25 paragraph-length descriptions of behavior episodes, descriptions that were actually written by five target persons about their recent experiences in five specified everyday situations (e.g., home, work, and leisure activity). After reading each paragraph, participants rated the person described in the paragraph on a number of trait scales. Some participants were told in advance that there were five target persons, and the five paragraphs pertaining to a given target were presented in sequence. Other participants were simply asked to read and rate each paragraph, without being informed that the same people were described in multiple paragraphs. Park et al. (1994) then analyzed the consistency of participants' ratings of the behavior descriptions as a function of whether participants did or did not know that the same persons were described in the paragraphs. In accord with our conceptual analysis, participants perceived greater consistency in a given target person across situations when they knew that the behavior episodes described the same person than when they did not have such knowledge. In summary, the findings of Weisz and Jones (1993) and of Park et al. (1994) indicate that perceivers both expect and perceive greater consistency in the behaviors of individual target persons.

Principle 3: Organization of Impressions

The perceived unity of an individual's personality implies organization among the elements of information being acquired. As mentioned earlier, Asch's (1946) early studies, as well as subsequent work on the structure of impressions (Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968; Schneider, 1973; Zanna & Hamilton, 1972), lent support to this proposal. More recently, evidence from person memory research indicates that the task of forming an impression of another person spontaneously leads the perceiver to organize behavior-descriptive information according to meaningful trait themes or perceived goals (Hamilton et al., 1980, 1989; Hoffman et al., 1981). The question then becomes, Is there any

evidence concerning the organization of group impressions or the organization of information about group members?

Previous research from the group perception tradition has investigated a number of important issues regarding representations of groups. For example, an extensive research program conducted by Wilder (summarized in Wilder, 1981, 1986) examined the conditions under which people perceive an aggregate of individuals as a social group, as well as the consequences of such categorization. Similarly, Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor, 1981; Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978) studied perceivers' organization of information about group members, using a paradigm that subsequently has been adopted by other researchers investigating the bases for social categorization (e.g., Biernat & Vescio, 1993; Brewer, Weber, & Carini, 1995; Hewstone, Hantzi, & Johnston, 1991; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992). And Rothbart, Fulero, Jensen, Howard, and Birrell (1978) showed that the perceiver's processing load can influence the way information describing group members is organized and stored in memory. Although these lines of research have been of central importance for understanding social categorization and group representations (see Brewer & Harasty, in press), there is little evidence that speaks directly to the issue of concern in our analysis, namely the comparison of individual and group impressions based on the same information.

Some recent findings from our research, however, are at least indirectly relevant to these questions. For example, in the Susskind and Hamilton (1994) studies described earlier, participants rated the extent to which they saw the behaviors describing the target (individual, group, or aggregate) as fitting a meaningful pattern and how much they saw the target as an organized, coherent unit. In the first experiment, the individual target was rated significantly higher than the group target on both of these questions. In the second experiment, the inclusion of inconsistent behaviors for some of the attribute categories reduced participants' judgments of the "meaningful pattern" of the individual target's behaviors, eliminating the previous difference from perceptions of the group target. Nevertheless, participants still rated the individual target as a more cohesive unit than the group target, perhaps reflecting the implicit belief that, despite some inconsistencies in behavior, the individual person is still an organized entity.

There is a second sense in which information about individuals may be more organized in perceivers' thinking than information about groups. If perceivers believe that individual persons are coherent units, then individuals may usefully serve as the foci of organization in more complex social contexts in which information is being acquired about multiple target persons. That is, information about each target person would be stored in memory in one location, separately from comparable organizational nodes for the other persons. Research investigating this idea has produced a complex set of findings (Sedikides & Ostrom, 1988). The extent to which such information is organized in memory according to target person depends on a number of factors, including the perceiver's familiarity with the target persons (Pryor & Ostrom, 1981) and his or her processing goals (Devine, Sedikides, & Fuhrman, 1989; Sedikides, Devine, & Fuhrman, 1991). It does appear, however, that information is organized around individual target persons in a variety of circumstances (Sedikides & Ostrom, 1988).

What happens when the information pertains to members of

several groups? Will the information be organized and stored in terms of those groups, as units, paralleling the evidence for individual targets? Or, if groups do not constitute the natural units of perception, as we have suggested, would information about groups be organized in memory to a lesser extent than comparable information about individual targets?

In one study that we have conducted (Stroessner, Hamilton, Acorn, Czyzewska, & Sherman, 1989), participants read a series of 32 behavior-descriptive sentences, with eight statements describing each of four targets. In one condition, the targets were four individuals; in the other condition, each statement described a different person, but each person was a member of one of four groups. After they had read the stimulus sentences, participants completed a free-recall task. As a means of examining the way the information was organized in memory, clustering analyses were performed based on participants' recall protocols. The results showed that participants organized the information according to the targets to a greater extent in the individual target condition than in the group target condition. That is, statements describing the same target were recalled together, indicating that they were stored together in memory, more when they described individual persons than when they described members of groups. In addition, participants in the individual target condition recalled significantly more statements than did participants in the group target condition, a result also obtained by McConnell et al. (1994b). This finding is consistent with evidence that increased organization facilitates subsequent recall of information. Although preliminary, these findings suggest that perceivers seek to organize information in meaningful ways to a greater extent when they are processing information about persons than about group members.

Principle 4: Processing Inconsistent Information

What happens when there are inconsistencies in the information being acquired, such that it is difficult to integrate the information into a meaningful whole? As we discussed earlier, there is a considerable amount of evidence that, when participants are forming an impression of an individual, three consequences follow from this situation. First, participants spend more time processing the incongruent than the congruent information. Second, they are more likely to generate causal explanations for an incongruent behavior than for a congruent behavior. Finally, they have better memory for incongruent than for congruent information. Fortunately for our purposes here, there is now evidence on individual versus group target comparisons relating to each of these three points.

First, regarding the processing of incongruent information, a study by Stern et al. (1984) presented participants with behavior-descriptive statements that included behaviors congruent and incongruent with an initial impression. Participants progressed through the list at their own pace, with the computer recording how long they spent processing each description. As we reported earlier, Stern et al. (1984) found that, when the target was an individual person, participants spent more time processing the incongruent than the congruent behaviors. In contrast, when each behavior described a different member of an unidentified group, this difference disappeared. Apparently participants were not as bothered by the fact that different

group members would perform behaviors that, in an individual, were seen as incompatible.

Evidence that perceivers try to generate causal explanations for incongruent behaviors of individual targets was reported in a well-known study by Hastie (1984) in which, in the same paradigm used by Stern et al. (1984), participants wrote continuations for each of the stimulus sentences. Hastie found that participants wrote explanatory comments after incongruent, but not after congruent, behaviors. Thus, incongruent but not congruent behaviors spontaneously triggered attributional thinking. Maurer, Hamilton, and Sherman (1994) have extended Hastie's paradigm to the case in which each behavior describes a different person, but all of the persons belong to the same group. The results obtained in this study support our expectation. Namely, when the behaviors described an individual person, the results replicated Hastie's (1984) findings: Participants wrote causal explanations after incongruent behaviors but not after congruent behaviors. However, this difference was much less evident in the group target condition, in which incongruent behaviors were less likely to generate causal thinking and explanatory comments. Both the processing time results and these attribution-related findings suggest the same conclusion. Namely, given the diminished perception of unity and lower expectation of consistency for a group target, perceivers are less troubled by incongruent behaviors by group members and hence make less effort to resolve those inconsistencies.

The third point regarding incongruent information concerns participants' recall of the stimulus information. The finding that incongruent behaviors are more likely to be recalled than congruent behaviors is well known and has been replicated numerous times in studies of person memory (see Srull & Wyer, 1989, for a review of this evidence). However, there are now several published studies reporting that (at least under theoretically specified conditions) this advantaged recall of incongruent information does not occur when the behavior-descriptive sentences describe members of a group (Srull, 1981; Srull et al., 1985; Stern et al., 1984; Wyer et al., 1984), and this conclusion is supported by a recent meta-analysis of the literature reported by Stangor and McMillan (1992). This outcome would follow, of course, from the comparatively diminished processing devoted to incongruent information about group members.

Summary

Let us now summarize what we have said to this point. First, we argued that a good bit is known about the processes and properties of individual impression formation. We then extracted from the impression formation literature a number of principles that summarize important aspects of how first impressions of individuals are formed. Second, we have tried to apply those principles to the question of how group concepts are formed from information about group members, and we have described several studies in which different outcomes were obtained when the same information items were presented as describing different group members as opposed to a single individual.

These findings might lead one to conclude that people's concepts of groups are formed according to a different set of rules or procedures than those that govern people's impressions of

individuals, that a different system of processes necessarily underlies individual impression formation and group perception. If this is so, then it is quite understandable that the topics of impression formation and stereotype formation are treated in separate chapters in social psychology textbooks. If person impressions and group concepts really are different beasts, then it is perhaps not surprising that the research in these two areas has remained somewhat distinct.

However, we believe that it would be premature to accept this conclusion. The reason is that the situation is more complex than our analysis thus far might suggest. Our analysis rests on the proposition that perceivers do not assume the same degree of unity and coherence in a group as they assume in an individual. However, this does not mean that they assume no unity or coherence at all in groups; clearly they do. In fact, the very notion of groupness, even in a minimal group, conveys some sense of bondedness. If it did not, all one would have is a collection of individual persons, and one would not think of them as a group.

Individual and Group Impressions: Toward a Resolution

A number of years ago, Donald Campbell (1958) wrote an article in which he analyzed how a perceiver comes to see a social aggregate as a group or entity. What cues does a perceiver use to decide that a collection of individuals is indeed a group? Campbell introduced the unfortunately awkward term "entitativity" to refer to the degree to which a social aggregate is perceived as having "the nature of an entity, of having real existence" (1958, p. 17). His concept of entitativity is similar to what we have been calling perceived unity. His analysis focused on factors that lead discrete elements to be perceived as parts of an organized whole, and in doing so he drew on Gestalt principles of perceptual organization such as similarity, proximity, and common fate. Most important for our purposes, he argued that groups vary in the extent to which they are seen as having entitativity. At one point, for example, he developed an analysis that "a band of Gypsies is empirically harder, more solid, more sharply bound than the ladies aid society, and the high school basketball team . . . falls somewhere in between" (Campbell, 1958, p. 18).

It seems self-evident, then, that groups vary in the extent to which they are assumed to have unity or entitativity. If, as we have argued, the processing principles that we identified as characterizing impression formation derive from the perception of unity, and if groups vary in perceived unity, then the extent to which these processes are engaged as one develops conceptions of groups would vary correspondingly. In particular, if a group is perceived as having a high degree of unity or entitativity, then the way information about members of that group is processed might resemble quite well the way information about individual target persons is processed.

Is there any empirical evidence consistent with this view? As a matter of fact, there is. In several of the studies cited earlier (Hilton & von Hippel, 1990; Srull, 1981; Srull et al., 1985; Susskind & Hamilton, 1994), the experimenters included not only a comparison of individual and group targets but also a comparison of two different kinds of group targets. These two group target conditions differed in what we would call perceived unity or entitativity. For example, the experimenter might identify a

group as a political caucus group or as a family, cases in which a fair degree of entitativity would be assumed, and this condition might be compared with a case in which the stimulus persons are simply described as belonging to "a group." In these studies, the results for the high entitativity group tended to be very similar to those for the individual target condition, or they were at least intermediate between the individual target and the low entitativity group conditions. The number of studies including these comparisons is small, and they differ among themselves in the way the groups were defined. Therefore, it is difficult to draw many firm conclusions from them. Nevertheless, the findings provide a basis for developing a conceptual analysis of the role of perceived entitativity—and especially of differences in such perceived unity—in the processes involved in forming group impressions.

We propose a continuum that represents variations among groups in the extent to which perceivers assume that there is unity and coherence among the groups' members. People see some groups as very tightly knit and interdependent, and they expect the members of these groups to be similar in many respects. As a prime example of a group for which people generally expect a high degree of similarity among members in a wide range of aspects, consider a fraternity. This is a group in which members are selected in the first place primarily on the basis of their similarity to those already in the group. There is extensive interaction and strong group identity among the members. In addition, there are social pressures within the group toward uniformity in all kinds of respects, including everything from dress to attitudes to styles of linguistic expression. The anchor point at the other end of this continuum would be an aggregate of individuals who have no relationship to each other; they are a collection of separate persons and hence have no unity. In thinking about them, entitativity is an unknown concept. And, of course, one would not expect any interrelations among these individuals or any necessary consistencies among them in their attitudes, behaviors, and so forth.

Between these two extremes is a broad range of groups, all of which are referred to in common parlance with group concepts but vary considerably in expectations about the consistency among their elements. Think, for example, about the Democratic Party: How much consistency would you expect among members of that group? Not much, we suspect, aside from their voting for their own kind. And once one moves outside the political arena, even less consistency among these group members would be expected. Alternatively, now think about the residents of a retirement home in your community. How common are your expectations about members of this group? Or what about students majoring in psychology at your school? Or inmates in a prison? Or members of an orchestra? Or members of the American Psychological Association? And what about Germans? Californians? Coal miners? The homeless? The New York Mets? All of these are meaningful groups in some sense, yet they vary considerably in the degree of entitativity, the degree of unity among members, that they are perceived as possessing. They differ in people's expectations regarding whether different members of the group share the same personalities, attitudes, goals, interests, values, and so forth. So, for example, when one learns that a member of the group is strongly anti-abortion, or loves jazz, or gives generously to United Way, to what extent

does one assume that the same would be true of other group members? To what extent do the facts one learns about the members of these groups somehow have to "fit together" into some coherent unity, as is true in the impressions one develops of individuals?

We argue, then, that groups vary in the extent to which the perceiver assumes this kind of unity among their elements. Groups that are high in perceived entitativity are assumed to have unity and coherence, and their members are expected to show consistency among them. For such groups, like a fraternity, information about group members would be dealt with by processes similar to those engaged in forming impressions of individuals. The perceiver would assume consistency, would seek organization among the elements, would make on-line inferences about the group, inconsistencies would be surprising and likely to trigger attributional thinking, and so forth, just as in forming impressions of individuals. For other groups, the perceiver would presume less unity or entitativity and, hence, would be less likely to engage in these processes. In this case, one would see less evidence of an organized representation of the information about group members, judgments would more likely be memory based, and inconsistencies would be less likely to trigger any special processing.

In more general terms, we can summarize our argument as follows. Groups vary in one's perceptions of their entitativity, and therefore so do one's expectations of consistency among their members. For groups that fall at different points on this continuum, the mechanisms involved in processing information about group members, and hence the processes underlying perceptions of the groups themselves, may differ significantly. Therefore, depending on the location along this continuum, the processes used—and the perceptions resulting from those processes—may be quite similar to or quite different from the comparable processes and outcomes observed in forming impressions of individual persons. And this is why, earlier in this article, we resisted any simple conclusion about individual and group impressions being based on the same or different processes. It all depends on this crucial parameter of perceived unity.

In discussing variations in assumed unity or entitativity, we have focused exclusively on groups. But it is also interesting to think about people's beliefs about individuals in light of this continuum. As we indicated at the outset, Asch (1946) clearly assumed that people form impressions of the entire person, that they assume a unity and coherence in that person, and that they therefore seek the consistent themes in the person's personality. To a large extent, we have adopted that position in the analysis we have presented. But can we think about variations among individuals in the degree of unity that we would expect in a person? Suppose you learn that a person is a manic-depressive, a label that explicitly conveys a lack of consistency in the individual's behavior. Or within the more normal range, suppose you learn that a person is moody, temperamental, or indecisive. These too are characteristics that imply that the person's behavior will manifest inconsistencies across time and situational contexts. In cases like these, we would not expect that the principles of impression formation that we summarized earlier would apply so strongly or routinely. That is, if those principles all derive from the assumption of unity in the personalities of individuals, and if one cannot assume that degree of unity and

consistency for someone like a manic-depressive or a temperamental person, then the processes summarized in those principles should be no more evident in these cases than they are in learning about a group for which there is low perceived entitativity.

It follows, then, that both group and individual targets can vary in terms of their perceived entitativity and, hence, in the perceiver's expectations of unity and consistency for those targets. The implication of this analysis is that, if expectancies about unity and consistency were somehow equated for individual and group targets, or if these expectancies were enhanced or reduced regardless of the nature of the target, the effects on the processes and outcomes of impression formation should be similar for individual and group targets.

We have implemented two experimental strategies to evaluate this proposal, both of which involve manipulating the instructions given to participants. In the first strategy, we manipulated the processes engaged as participants read and processed information about individual or group targets (McConnell et al., 1994b). In the second strategy, we manipulated participants' expectancies about the coherence and consistency of the individual or group target described in the stimulus information (McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1996).

In an experiment described earlier, McConnell et al. (1994b) showed that, when participants read about individual targets or group targets with nondirective instruction sets, on-line impressions were more likely to be formed for the individual targets. We argued that this was due to differences in expectations about the unity, coherence, and consistency of individual versus group social targets. In addition to the condition with nondirective instructions, two other sets of instructions were used that were designed either to promote or to inhibit on-line impression formation. One of these sets instructed participants to form a clear and coherent impression of the targets presented (whether these targets were individuals or groups). In this case, impressions should be formed on-line for both types of social targets. Consistent with this reasoning, the results showed high overall recall, primacy in recall, fast and accurate target assignment, low recall-judgment correlations, and an absence of illusory correlation. Given the explicit impression formation instructions, these results were obtained for both group and individual targets. The other instructional set asked participants to decide, as they read the stimulus items, whether these various behavioral descriptions could be comprehended by a fourth-grade child. These instructions inhibited on-line impression formation for both types of targets. The result was low overall recall, slow and inaccurate target assignment, relatively high recall-judgment correlations, and strong illusory correlations. These findings are all indicative of memory-based judgments, and, under this instructional set, they occurred with both individual and group social targets.

To implement the second strategy, we (McConnell et al., 1996) directly manipulated expectancies of unity and cohesiveness for both individual and group targets. That is, under high unity expectancies, participants were told that the target (whether an individual or a group) was predictable and consistent. Under low unity expectations, participants were told that the target (whether an individual or group) was unpredictable and inconsistent. When participants expected unity, impres-

sions were formed on-line, as indicated by high overall recall, primacy in recall, and an absence of illusory correlations. This was true regardless of whether the targets were individuals or members of groups. On the other hand, when participants expected instability, impressions were memory based, as indicated by low overall recall, recency in recall, and significant illusory correlations in impressions. Again, this pattern occurred in both target conditions.

These findings provide valuable support for the main point of our analysis: The nature of the social target, whether an individual or a group, is not the crucial element in determining the impression formation process; the nature of the target is important only insofar as expectations of unity, consistency, and coherence differ as a function of whether the target is an individual or a group. When these expectancies are controlled or equated, the processes and the outcomes of impression formation are very similar for individual and group targets. This supports our proposal that forming an impression of an individual and developing a conception of a group are governed by the same fundamental information-processing system. The specific processes engaged and the outcomes of these processes can and do differ, however, because perceivers often hold different expectancies about the entitativity of individual and group targets.

General Discussion

As in any new conceptual venture, a number of interesting and important issues arise that need to be explored. In the following sections, we consider some of these questions. First, we discuss the relationship of our theoretical ideas, presented earlier, to certain other lines of theory and research in social psychology to which our analysis may intuitively seem similar. Second, we comment briefly on a number of issues and implications that arise in interesting ways from our theoretical analysis and that need to be explored in subsequent investigations.

Relations to Other Conceptualizations

Perceiving persons as individuals or as group members. Individual persons whom one encounters and about whom one forms impressions and makes judgments are also members of groups, and people often have stereotypic conceptions or generalized expectancies about those groups. An important question addressed in social psychological research in recent years has been, When is a person perceived as an individual, and when is he or she perceived as a member of some group? A related question of considerable importance immediately follows: When will one's impressions and judgments of this person be based on one's prior conceptions of the group to which he or she belongs, and when will they be based on individuating information specifically pertinent to that person?

Recently, both Fiske and Neuberg (1990) and Brewer (1988) have proposed theoretical models aimed at addressing these questions. Like the present formulation, these models are concerned with how impressions are formed and with the processes involved in making judgments of others. And these models specifically draw attention to the distinction between individual-based and group-based influences on those impressions. Do

these models speak to the questions discussed in the present article?

Although the present formulation and these other models share overlapping concerns, there are also important differences in the primary issues of concern. The Fiske and Neuberg (1990) and Brewer (1988) models specifically focus only on the process of forming impressions of individual targets, and they discuss the relative impact of individuating information and group-membership-based expectancies on that process. These theories do not address the question of how impressions of groups are formed from information about group members, and hence they do not speak to the issue of whether similar or different processes and outcomes might be involved in forming impressions of individual and group targets.

In addition, these models assume that the perceiver already possesses stereotypic (category-based) expectancies about the group(s) to which the target individual belongs (the models address conditions under which these expectancies, rather than individuating information, can drive the impression formation process and constitute the basis for judgments of the target person). In contrast, the present conceptualization focuses on the processes involved in forming initial impressions of individuals and groups. Thus, we are concerned with impression formation processes in the absence of prior conceptions, either of an existing impression of an individual target or of stereotype-based expectancies about a group target.

Despite these differences in emphasis, the present formulation can add an important new dimension to the models of Brewer (1988) and Fiske and Neuberg (1990). As we have suggested, individuals (as well as groups) vary along the continuum of entitativity. Some individuals (e.g., moody people and schizophrenics) will be expected to have less unity and coherence. Moreover, even the same individual may vary in perceived entitativity at different times and in different situations.

We would suggest that, when people focus on individuating information (piecemeal processing in Fiske & Neuberg's, 1990, terms), expectations of entitativity should be high. On the other hand, when people's impressions of the individual focus more on group memberships (categorical processing), expectations of entitativity should be diminished. All of the implications of our discussion of entitativity would then follow. Piecemeal processing in impression judgments of an individual should be associated with inferences about dispositional properties, expectations of temporal consistency, primacy in impression formation, an organized and coherent impression, and efforts to resolve observed inconsistencies in behavior. In contrast, category-based processing of that very same individual should be less prone to dispositional inferences, organization, primacy, and so forth. In that case, then, impression formation of individuals should be more similar to the process that generally applies to impressions of groups.

In addition, when impressions of individuals reflect category-based processing, what is transferred from the group stereotype to the individual member should depend on how entitative the perception of that group is. In the case of more highly entitative groups, the category-based impressions of individual members should be more organized, with assumptions of greater consistency and coherence, than when the group is perceived as lower in entitativity.

In fact, recent research supports this notion that, in the forming of impressions of individuals, the use of individual-based versus category-based processing may in part be a function of the perceived entitativity of the persons' group memberships. Brewer et al. (1995) proposed that minority groups would be treated in a more entitative way than large majority groups (see also Brewer & Harasty, in press; Mullen, 1991). To test this hypothesis, Brewer et al. (1995) had participants watch a videotape in which members of a majority group and a minority group made various statements during a discussion. Subsequently, participants were given a surprise recognition test in which they had to identify the specific individual who made each statement. The frequencies of intragroup and intergroup recognition errors were determined, using the method of Taylor et al. (1978). The findings were clear: There were significantly more intragroup recognition errors for minority groups. This suggests that statements made by minority group members were treated interchangeably and not according to the individuals who made them. Thus, information about minority group members is stored at the category level, with less individuated processing of the information.

The idea that minority groups are seen as more entitative than majority groups carries with it all of the implications that we have already delineated with regard to the consequences of expecting high versus low entitativity. In addition, the use of intragroup recognition confusions as a way to measure the entitativity of a group is a potentially important step in providing an objective way to establish perceived entitativity.

Brewer et al. (1995) also found that intergroup competition led to more intragroup recognition errors. This finding indicates that greater perceived entitativity and greater category-based processing are involved in the perception of groups with which one has a competitive relationship. It is thus clear that the type of processing for individual members of a group (categorical vs. piecemeal) is associated with different degrees of perceived entitativity and that the degree of perceived entitativity of the group has a major impact on how information about individual members of that group is processed and represented in memory.

Interindividual-intergroup differences. In an extensive series of studies, Insko, Schopler, and their colleagues have reported evidence of what they call an "individual-group discontinuity" effect (for reviews, see Insko & Schopler, 1987; Schopler & Insko, 1992). In this research, either two individuals or two groups participate in a prisoners' dilemma game, and the frequency of their competitive and cooperative choices over a series of trials is assessed. The consistent finding in these experiments has been that groups respond more competitively than individuals, and this outcome generalizes across a number of factors that have been manipulated in the Insko-Schopler research program. This difference between intergroup and interindividual relations is explained, in part, in terms of people's general expectancy that interactions between groups are likely to be competitive, an expectancy they do not hold about interactions between individuals (cf. Hoyle, Pinkley, & Insko, 1989).

A similar, and in fact more general, distinction is at the heart of social identity theory. Tajfel (1978) proposed that all social behavior can be conceptualized as falling along an interpersonal-intergroup continuum. The position of any given behav-

ior or interaction on this continuum depends on the extent to which it reflects and is determined by, on one hand, the individual characteristics of the participants and aspects of their personal relationship and, on the other hand, the group memberships of the participants (see Brown & Turner, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; for a related conceptualization, see Rabbie & Lodewijkx, 1994). The focus in the social identity theory approach is on the influence of perceived group categorizations on social perception and behavior, particularly with regard to in-group–out-group distinctions. One consequence of social categorization is the perception of homogeneity or uniformity among category members, especially the out-group (although not always; see Simon, 1992). These categorizations have implications for the self-concept and feelings of self-worth.

Both the individual–group discontinuity and the social identity conceptualizations thus posit important differences between interindividual and intergroup behavior, and both have generated considerable empirical support. As in the preceding subsection, the present theoretical analysis differs from these conceptualizations primarily in its focus on the processes by which initial conceptions of individuals and groups are formed rather than on the role of a priori assumptions about groups in guiding intergroup behavior. Yet the relevance of the different perceived entitativity of individual versus group targets is apparent. Other players are more likely to be perceived as a coherent, entitative unit when the interaction is with a group rather than with individual players (Insko & Schopler, 1987).

The notion that a group may be perceived as a more entitative unit than an individual (with the behaviors held constant) may seem contrary to the thesis of our model, namely that individuals are generally expected to show greater coherence and entitativity than are groups. But perhaps these expectations are reversed when one particular kind of relationship potentially exists between the social perceiver and some social target: the relationship of competitiveness, as in a prisoners' dilemma game. For competitive situations involving groups such as team sports, wars, and clashes between political parties, expectations of entitativity and a single-minded purpose of the opposition may be very strong, stronger perhaps than the degree of consistency expected from a single individual opponent. As already mentioned, Brewer et al. (1995) reported findings that indicate high expected entitativity in the case of groups with which one has a competitive relationship. Such a reversal of the usual expectations of greater entitativity for individuals than for groups would be quite compatible with our formulation, which suggests that the entitativity of both individuals and groups varies along a continuum so that situations in which there is higher perceived entitativity for a group than for an individual, although atypical, are entirely feasible.

Some Remaining Issues

The meaning and bases of entitativity. Despite its use by a number of authors, the concept of entitativity is poorly defined. Campbell (1958, p. 17) simply defined entitativity as “the degree of being entitative. The degree of having the nature of an entity, of having real existence.” But what is it that gives groups “real existence”? And, more important for our concerns, how

is it that perceivers come to bestow more of this property on some groups than on others?

This is the question that was the focus of Campbell's (1958) article, in which he proposed several possible bases of, or at least contributors to, the perception of entitativity. Campbell's strategy was to examine the way people's visual perception system identifies entitativity in the physical world and then to consider how these same principles might apply to the perception of social aggregates. He therefore drew on Gestalt principles of perception, including common fate, similarity, proximity, and organization, and discussed how these same properties would enhance the perception of “groupness” in an aggregate of persons.

Campbell's analysis is insightful and provides a useful starting place for understanding this issue. Still, many questions remain. Certainly, when we think about, say, the Washburn family, on one hand, and members of “Group B” on the other hand, we can agree that the one is a more meaningful social unit (has higher entitativity) than the other. However, when we think about the range of social groups that we encounter and perceive in everyday life, what is it that gives some of these groups more essence, makes them more meaningful than others as perceived social units? Is it due to the physical proximity of the members to each other? Or to the interdependence among their members? Or to some common fate that they share? Or is it due to the similarity of the members to each other? If so, then similarity with respect to what? Their heritage? Their appearance? Their personalities? Their interests? It seems plausible that all of these factors probably contribute to the perception of entitativity in a group, at least under some conditions. Are any of them necessary preconditions? Do any of them, by themselves, constitute sufficient conditions? Are some of them more important than others?

The empirical work necessary to answer these questions has yet to be done. Therefore, our own view is, of necessity, largely speculative. Nevertheless, we would advance several points in addressing these questions. First, we agree with Campbell's analysis that properties such as those he cited provide important cues that perceivers use in inferring the entitativity of groups. Second, although we suspect that these properties are at least somewhat correlated, those relationships are not perfect. This implies, then, that there are multiple routes to perceiving entitativity in a group. Therefore, two groups may be perceived as equally entitative but for quite different reasons; the perception of entitativity may be based on different features in the two cases. Third, we suspect that the perception of group entitativity resulting from the group being known to possess one relevant cue to entitativity (e.g., it is a tightly organized group) can enhance the perception of that group's possession of other cues to entitativity (e.g., similarity) as well. That is, entitativity not only may be based on these features but, once perceived in a group, may in turn influence the perception of that group on other relevant properties. And fourth, although any of Campbell's suggested cues might increase the perception of entitativity, we believe that some are likely to be more important than others. Thus, whereas proximity and similarity among members may increase perceived entitativity, we believe that common fate, interdependence, and organization are more important clues. If, as Campbell suggests, entitativity means “having real existence” or some inherent essence, then such a group's

members would probably share more than mere physical proximity or surface-level similarities. Rather, a highly entitative group ought to have some structure or organization, to have interdependence among its members, who therefore share some common fate.

Perceived entitativity and stereotyping. As with any topic bearing on group perceptions, the issue of stereotyping seems not far removed. Specifically, our analysis raises interesting questions regarding what the relationship might be, if any, between the perceived entitativity of a group and the extent to which the group is, or can be, stereotyped. These questions concern both the formation of new stereotypes and the ramifications of preexisting stereotypes.

For example, could it be that it is easier to develop a stereotype about a group that is perceived as being high in entitativity? Are people less likely to develop stereotypes about groups that are perceived as possessing lower degrees of unity and coherence? The current interest in research on perceptions of group variability (e.g., Brewer, 1993; Linville & Fischer, 1993; Mackie, Sherman, & Worth, 1993; Park & Hastie, 1987) arises, at least in part, from the reasonable assumption that the perception of homogeneity among group members can facilitate forming beliefs about characteristics of the group as a whole (i.e., a stereotype). This suggests that perceived entitativity (at least when based on perceived similarity among members) can be a contributing antecedent condition for the formation of stereotypes. Is this so? The previously cited study by Brewer et al. (1995) would suggest that this indeed may be the case. They found that participants made more intragroup recognition errors for minority group members than for majority group members, suggesting that minority groups are perceived as more entitative, and of course stereotyping is generally more prevalent for minority groups. It remains to be seen whether perceived entitativity based on factors other than similarity has this same consequence.

Other questions pertain to consequences that follow from the use of existing stereotypes about groups. For example, if stereotypic conceptions lead to overgeneralizations about group members (Allport, 1954; Lippmann, 1922), then one might expect that stereotypes can lead to the perception of entitativity in group targets (see Rothbart & Taylor, 1992, for related ideas). One might even expect that the stronger a person's stereotype, or the more confidence with which it is held, the greater the perceived entitativity in the target group. The answers to these questions are, at this point, not well understood, and we can only speculate about their implications. Nevertheless, these considerations suggest that perceived group entitativity may be both an antecedent and a consequence of group stereotypes.

Perceived entitativity and the out-group homogeneity effect. One of the consequences of perceived entitativity in a group suggested by our analysis is the perception of similarity and consistency in the behaviors manifested by the members of that group. The perception of similarity among members of a group immediately brings to mind the extensive literature on the out-group homogeneity effect (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992; Park & Rothbart, 1982; Quattrone & Jones, 1980; Simon, 1992), in which members of out-groups are perceived as being more similar to each other than are members of in-groups. Are perceived

entitativity and perceived homogeneity the same thing? Are we invoking two different terms to refer to the same concept?

It is certainly the case that perceptions of homogeneity and of entitativity are related. Recall, for example, that in Campbell's (1958) conceptual analysis, similarity among group members was one of the perceptual factors that would lead to the perception of entitativity in a group target. Thus, in those cases in which a high degree of homogeneity among group members is observed, one might expect high perceived entitativity as well. As the term *out-group homogeneity effect* conveys, this is often the case in perceptions of out-groups (although greater perceived in-group homogeneity can also occur under certain conditions; see Brewer, 1993; Simon & Hamilton, 1994).

On the basis of this reasoning, Brewer and Harasty (in press) have recently suggested that the out-group homogeneity effect is intimately related to differences in the perceived entitativity of in-groups versus out-groups. In fact, they defined entitativity in terms of category homogeneity. Category homogeneity is, in turn, based on the tightness of fit of category members to the category prototype. According to Brewer and Harasty (in press), out-groups are represented more by a prototype than are in-groups (see also Park, Judd, & Ryan, 1991), out-groups are more entitative in their representation, and out-groups are judged as more homogeneous than in-groups. In their view, then, the three aspects of out-groups—prototype representation, perceived entitativity, and homogeneity—go hand in hand.

It seems to us that this reasoning can be questioned. The apparent equivalence between these concepts breaks down when one considers perceptions of one's in-groups. If out-groups are often seen as homogeneous, it is in their comparison with perceptions of in-groups, which are viewed as being more heterogeneous. Does this imply that people typically believe that the groups to which they belong have less entitativity than do the groups to which they do not belong? This suggestion seems implausible, at best. The groups to which people belong, and certainly those with which they most strongly identify, are (for them) indeed meaningful groups that have a reality, an identity, an essence that defines their existence. As a consequence, we would argue, people typically perceive those groups as possessing a high degree of entitativity. Thus, although "we" may be quite a diverse bunch of folks (especially in comparison with "them," who all seem so similar), our heterogeneity does not mean that "we" are a less entitative group than "they" are.

Moreover, results recently reported by Laskey, Sherman, and Klein (1995) indicate that prototypic representation and perceived homogeneity are not necessarily related. Using a task that can assess the degree of prototype versus exemplar representation of a category, these experimenters found that in-groups are, in fact, represented relatively more by prototypes and out-groups relatively more by exemplars. Despite this greater degree of prototypic representation for the in-group, Laskey et al. (1995) also obtained the typical out-group homogeneity effect in their experiments. Prototype representation might well capture the degree to which a group is a cohesive unit, but this may be quite different from perceptions of the degree of similarity or homogeneity among group members. If this is so, then in-groups might be perceived as possessing more entitativity but as less homogeneous than out-groups. Of course, as Brewer and Harasty (in press) have argued, the extent to

which the in-group is construed as a single entity can vary as social identity concerns and similar goals and motivations are activated.

The answer to this apparent puzzle lies in the multiple possible bases of perceived entitativity. Perceptions of similarity among group members represent one, but only one, factor that can lead to the perception of group entitativity. As noted earlier, a group's history, its shared goals for the future, the interdependence of its members, their proximity to each other, their shared heritage, any or all of these factors may contribute to the perception of entitativity in a group. Note that all of these properties typically are higher for in-groups than for out-groups. And all of these factors may or may not co-occur with perceived similarity among the group's members. Consequently, despite an apparent overlap, the concepts of perceived entitativity and perceived homogeneity are not isomorphic and, in our view, should be retained as distinct concepts.

Role of the self. Our analysis has focused on the processes involved in forming impressions of individuals and of groups, as well as on the mechanisms underlying judgments of individual and group targets. In the preceding section, we considered a more specific question about group perceptions by addressing differences in perceptions of in-groups and out-groups. This discussion naturally leads to another issue that has been prominent in that literature: What, if any, difference does it make whether the perceiver is or is not a member of the group in question? There is, for example, abundant evidence of in-group bias, in which in-group members consistently have been shown to evaluate other in-group members more favorably than out-group members (for reviews, see Brewer, 1979; Messick & Mackie, 1989). In addition, the fact that the in-group (but not the out-group) always includes the self has been cited as a possible factor contributing to the out-group homogeneity effect (Judd & Park, 1988; Park & Judd, 1990; Park et al., 1991). Thus, the question naturally arises: How does the present theoretical analysis relate to these effects?

We propose that on-line impressions are more likely to form in the case of in-groups than in the case of out-groups. There are several reasons for making this proposal, including the following: (a) In-groups are perceived as having greater entitativity than out-groups (see earlier discussion); (b) there is greater self-involvement and self-relevance in the case of in-groups, which necessitates the acquisition of knowledge of the attributes of these groups; and (c) this acquisition of more general and detailed knowledge of the in-group would facilitate the abstraction and storage of a prototype for the in-group. Consistent with this reasoning, recent work we have conducted (McConnell & Sherman, 1993) has shown that traditional illusory correlation effects are stronger when both target groups are out-groups (e.g., men, for female participants) than when both target groups are in-groups (e.g., women, for female participants), suggesting the possibility of greater on-line impression development in the case of in-groups (see also Schaller & Maass, 1989).

Interestingly, similar considerations may apply to the other domain of social perception that we have addressed, namely the perception of individuals. The individual-target parallel to the distinction between in-group and out-group is the distinction between the perception of "inperson" and "outperson," that is,

of self and of other. Given that our theoretical analysis began with principles derived from the literature on forming impressions of individuals, we might also ask how the ideas we have presented apply to issues pertaining to self-perception. Just as the areas of individual impression formation and the formation of stereotypes of groups have occupied different literatures and have been treated separately, so too has the area of self-concept development been treated separately and independently from these other two topics. One useful benefit of the approach advanced here is that it potentially allows an integration of these three important areas of social perception within a common conceptual framework.

As a starting point for our consideration of self-perception versus other perception, it is reasonable to propose that expectations for the self might be higher in entitativity in comparison with any other individual or group social target. The everlasting struggle to find out who and what one is carries with it the clear assumption that there is a "me" with its own unique essence and unique characteristics. Moreover, this expectation for a coherent, entitative self might lead to a more well-developed and more accessible abstract, well-differentiated representation of the self than of other individuals. Finally, the greater experience and knowledge with regard to the self may be associated with judgments of greater heterogeneity for the self than for others, just as in-groups are perceived as more heterogeneous than out-groups.

Greenwald (1982), in addressing the question of whether there is or is not unity to the self, concluded that the person consists of a set of subsystems that are largely independent and nonunified. This idea that there is no single state of truth to a person—no high degree of entitativity, in our terms—is provocative and interesting. However, what is important from the point of view of the current article is not whether there is or is not unity of the self (or of another person, or of a group) but, rather, the degree to which there is the *perception* of unity and entitativity for these social targets. We have argued that there is more perceived unity for individual than for group targets and more perceived unity for the self than for other individual targets. On this point, Greenwald (1982) did not disagree. In fact, he pointed out that laypersons and psychologists alike perceive great unity of the person (perhaps wrongly), and personal unity has historically been a dominant theme in our discipline. In the present analysis, we have argued that differences in the perceived unity of social targets lead to the engagement of different mechanisms for processing information about those targets, and this in turn leads to differences in impressions and judgments of the targets.

Most relevant to the present discussion, the expectation for a highly entitative self would suggest that on-line impression formation would be extremely characteristic of self-concept development, with all the attendant outcomes of on-line impression formation. These would include making spontaneous inferences, the primacy of early information over later information, and a high level of recall for self-descriptive information. In fact, a number of findings support this interpretation. For example, recall of information is highest when that information is processed with reference to the self as opposed to any other social target (Klein & Kihlstrom, 1986; Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977), and people form abstract concepts of self, which

they use in making judgments, more so than they do for others (Klein & Loftus, 1993).

However, deeper consideration of self-concept development would suggest that it is not so simple. In the first place, whereas on-line impression formation is usually possible (based on cognitive capacity) for individual or group targets, such is not always the case with regard to the self. In developing conceptions of other social targets, whether individuals or groups, the perceiver has only one role, that of observer. In contrast, in processing self-relevant information, it is often necessary that the person be both actor and observer at the same time. The role of actor will sometimes require sufficient cognitive capacity that little capacity is left for the simultaneous observation, evaluation, and analysis of one's own actions. Take, for example, the relatively simple situation of listening to a lecture. An audience member can listen to the lecture, judge how the lecture is going, and even form some ongoing impressions of the lecturer, all at the same time, without much difficulty. When the lecturer is the self, however, considerable attention and resources must be devoted to the task of delivering the lecture. Consequently, fewer resources are available for attending to and evaluating, at the same time, one's own performance. Thus, the answer to the question "How was your lecture?" may be more likely to involve a memory-based judgment. Whatever factors about the lecture are most accessible at the time of judgment would be likely to dominate the impression. For other self-involving tasks, however, the capacity requirements may not be so great, and on-line impressions may be more likely. For example, the act of meeting and talking to a potential date might allow for both acting and observing at the same time.

In addition to these impediments to forming self-impressions on-line, there are other ways in which the development of a self-concept is likely to differ from the development of impressions of both individual and group social targets. For example, there is a motivational overlay to self-impressions that is stronger than any motivational processes involving perceptions of other individuals or groups. Self-protective and self-enhancing motivations are well documented in the literature (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989) and are likely to bias impressions of the self in situations in which more veridical impressions of other social targets might be expected. In addition, self-concept development is likely to involve social comparison processes to a greater extent than is true for impressions of individuals or groups (Tesser, 1991; Wood & Taylor, 1991). Comparison with others in terms of abilities, appearance, outcomes, and so forth, seems natural and ubiquitous for self-concept development. An application of our principles and framework could help to illuminate both the similarities and the differences concerning the development of perceptions of the self, individual targets, and groups.

In sum, the self-other and in-group-out-group distinctions raise a host of new and different questions about the role of the self as an element in the unit being perceived (i.e., self or in-group). A number of different processes become relevant, or take on enhanced importance, when the self (as the self or as a member of the in-group) becomes an element in the target of perception. These processes include (a) an enhanced role of evaluative processes, and particularly of biases due to self-enhancing and self-protective motivations; (b) increased familiar-

ity with self or in-group targets in comparison with other or out-group targets; (c) a greatly increased importance of self-comparison processes; (d) more, and more specific, knowledge about self-relevant targets; and (e) the influence of motivations for uniqueness and commonality, which may function differently for self-defined versus other-defined social targets. These and other issues will need to be addressed as the present framework is extended to explicitly recognize the role of self-related processes in the perception of individual and group targets.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented some systematic ideas about the way information about social targets is processed and, in particular, about why it is that the results of social information processing can, and often do, diverge depending on whether the impression being formed is one of an individual person or of a group. Our analysis is based on the fairly substantial knowledge of processes involved in forming impressions of individuals, from which we gleaned a fundamental postulate and a series of principles about how impressions of individuals are formed. We then considered the extent to which those same principles might apply to the way impressions of groups are formed, based on information about group members. The fundamental assumption guiding our analysis is that perceivers expect less entitativity—less unity, consistency, organization, and coherence—in group targets than they do in individual targets. From this basic premise, we developed several hypotheses regarding ways in which information about individual and group targets might be processed differently, with a variety of specifiable consequences. A review of the existing literature, supplemented by the results of recent research from our own laboratories, provided an encouraging initial base of empirical support for these ideas. Finally, we have considered some of the numerous issues and implications generated by these theoretical ideas that remain to be tested in future research.

What is it, then, that differentiates the way impressions of individuals and groups are formed? Earlier in this article, we summarized a sizable number of studies in which the outcomes differed depending on whether the target of perception was an individual or a group. However, we have argued that the basic processing system underlying group and individual impression formation does not differ. What do differ are the assumptions people make about individuals and groups as units of perception. It is the perception of unity or entitativity that is the crucial parameter, and it applies to both individual and group targets. When the degree of perceived unity is held constant, the results for perceptions of individual and group targets do not differ. However, that parameter is often not held constant in people's everyday experience. We have proposed that it is often the case—perhaps even typically so—that the perceived entitativity of the group does not approach the degree of unity that one expects in the individual. The consequence is that the processes we have discussed as underlying the formation of person impressions—expected consistency, organization among elements, and on-line inferences and judgments—are not as readily engaged as one processes information about group members, and hence under these conditions one's conceptions

of groups may follow a different course, and may reveal different patterns, than one's conceptions of individuals.

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