



The Construction of Social Judgments



Edited by
Leonard L. Martin
Abraham Tesser

The Construction of Social Judgments

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Preface

About 30 years ago, psychology underwent a revolution. The methods, concepts, and research strategies changed from largely behavioristic to largely cognitive. Whereas models employing hypothetical mental processes were once out of fashion, they are now the mode. Social psychology, however, did not experience the cognitive revolution in quite the same way as did the rest of psychology. In a sense, social psychology has always been cognitive. Since the time of Bartlett (1932),¹ social psychologists have studied covert mental phenomena such as schemas and attitudes. What the cognitive revolution has done within social psychology is to move us toward a more detailed account of process. Our models of impression formation, attitude change, and the like have become more sophisticated and more process oriented. In addition, the introduction of new procedures has allowed us to test our models with more precision than was previously possible.

There has been a downside to this concentration on process, however. In trying to gain a more complete understanding of underlying processes, researchers have sometimes stayed within the narrow confines of the experimental paradigms within which the target phenomenon was initially demonstrated. In fact, several research programs seem to have grown up around very specific stimulus materials and procedures. Recently, there have been moves to expand some research programs by using different methods in different contexts. Interestingly, when we have done this, we have found that the initial models sometimes came up short. It was a concern with the paradigm boundedness of some social judgment research that prompted this volume. Our current models

¹Bartlett, F. C. (1932). *Remembering*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

do a good job of predicting behavior within their traditional paradigms but frequently do less well in new situations. If we approach these “failures” with a productive attitude, then we may be able to learn things that will help to increase the generality and power of our models.

We entitled the book *The Construction of Social Judgments* for two reasons. First, we hope that the research presented in the book is constructive in showing us not only where the traditional models fall short but also in pointing the direction toward more complete models. Second, the research reported in the book suggests that perceivers are more sophisticated than they have been depicted by previous models of social judgment. People appear to have a number of different types of information available to them (e.g., feelings, concepts, procedures, episodic memories), and they combine and integrate these different types of knowledge in different ways to create or construct their judgments.

This book grew out of a conference at the University of Georgia in the Spring of 1990 and was sponsored by the university’s Institute of Behavioral Research. In attendance were Leonard Martin, Abraham Tesser, Tory Higgins, Tim Wilson, and Bob Wyer. A provocative set of papers was presented (edited versions of these are presented herein), and fruitful discussion ensued. We then solicited contributions from other researchers whose work we felt also presented challenges to the “traditional” ways of thinking about social judgment.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

The chapters in the first part of the book lay out some of the emerging problems in social judgment research. The chapter by Wyer, Lambert, Budesheim, and Gruenfeld reviews research on one of the most productive theoretical orientations in the area of person perception, the person memory model. This model has received a great deal of support, but as Wyer et al. point out, the model has sometimes fallen short as the research paradigm has expanded. This does not lead the authors to a nihilistic or destructive conclusion, however; rather, they convincingly argue that such failures often point the way to the development of even more sophisticated models.

The chapter by Wilson and Hodge addresses two basic issues in social psychology: the stability of attitudes and the nature of self-reports. In a series of experiments, Wilson and his colleagues have asked people to explain why they hold the attitudes they do. The surprising result is that attitudes measured subsequent to this self-analysis are less useful predictors of subsequent behavior, and choices made following this self-analysis tend to be poorer choices. Such findings suggest that attitudes (at least some) are not stable, ready-made evaluations, but rather are evaluations constructed by people on the basis of whatever considerations happen to be salient to them at the time they are reporting their attitudes.

Higgins and Bargh take on the general question of consciousness. The traditional assumption is that unconsciousness is "bad," whereas consciousness is "good." In fact, this assumption has been the cornerstone of a number of therapies. Presumably, the unconscious gives rise to undesirable "habits" that people overcome only by becoming aware of these habits. Higgins and Bargh present research that suggests that things are not quite that simple. Rather, it appears that automatic processes are sometimes useful and sometimes not, and that controlled processes are sometimes useful and sometimes not. Some conditions when each of these possibilities occur are discussed.

The second set of chapters also challenges some existing theories and assumptions in social judgment. They do so, however, not by analyzing these theories and assumptions directly but by presenting research supporting new assumptions. Smith, for example, challenges the generality of schemata in information processing. He persuasively argues that people often make judgments using particular instances (i.e., exemplars) rather than prototypic or schematic categories. He then shows how a number of basic social psychological phenomena (e.g., stereotyping) can be understood in terms of the effects of exemplars.

The chapter by Clore raises questions about the kind of information people use when making judgments. He argues that in many cases people use bodily sensations, such as moods and feelings of familiarity, in place of or in addition to semantic knowledge. He argues further that people's use of their sensations can be determined by their meta-knowledge. His assumptions allow us to place a range of seemingly disparate phenomena into a common framework.

Sinclair and Mark examine the way in which the mood people are in can change the way people process information. They argue that being in a negative mood causes people to categorize information into a number of narrow categories, whereas being in a positive mood causes people to categorize information into fewer, broader categories. The authors present evidence that is consistent with this hypothesis and also demonstrate that these differences in categorization can produce differences in judgments.

The Martin and Achee chapter questions the generality of the accessibility assumption. A great deal of recent research has been guided by the assumption that people use the information they most easily retrieve. Martin and Achee present evidence that people's judgments are guided by their processing objectives, and that these objectives sometimes tell people to use information other than that which is most accessible. More specifically, Martin and Achee interpret the effects of concept priming (i.e., assimilation and contrast) in terms of people's attempts to satisfy their processing objectives.

Schwarz and Bless also discuss assimilation and contrast effects in judgment. However, they emphasize categorization processes rather than processing objectives. They present evidence that assimilation is most likely to occur when people judge the context and the target stimulus to be members of the same

category, whereas contrast occurs when people judge these stimuli to be members of different categories.

The chapters in the third section of the book not only discuss the role of different types of knowledge in judgments but also spell out the structure of this information and/or how different types of information interact. Strack, for example, argues (as did Clore) that people use bodily sensations, episodic memories, and stimulus information in making judgments. He goes a little further, however, in suggesting specific ways in which different kinds of knowledge interact. One of the main explanatory constructs in his model is representativeness. According to Strack, people use information in their judgments if this information is either related to or seems to have arisen from the target stimulus.

In their chapter, Millar and Tesser discuss the role that self-examination of feelings or beliefs has on the attitude-behavior link. They propose a match/mismatch model that predicts greater attitude-behavior consistency when the content that is most accessible when people report their attitudes (beliefs vs. feelings) is the same as that which is driving their behavior. Millar and Tesser present evidence that is consistent with their model, and then describe ways in which the model relates feelings, beliefs, and behavior in a variety of social psychology domains (e.g., helping).

Perhaps the most comprehensive model is that proposed by Carlston. Not only does Carlston delineate the kinds of information people use in making social judgments and engaging in social behavior, but he also shows the structure of that information, and the manner in which people move around that structure when making different types of judgments. He reviews an extremely wide range of phenomena and indicates how these phenomena can be accommodated within his model.

We began this project with the belief that it was time to reexamine some of the assumptions that have been guiding the general area of social judgment. It was becoming increasingly clear that many of the initial models of social judgment were incomplete. Each of the chapters in this volume has highlighted some of the shortcomings of our established models and has made some suggestions about the direction in which we need to head in order to make our models more complete. The process of editing these chapters has convinced us that we are indeed at a turning point in social judgment research. We have been able to identify deficiencies in our models and have developed ways to deal with those deficiencies. Social judgment research appears to be making some interesting and important moves forward, and it is an exciting time to be involved in this enterprise.

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*Emerging Problems in
Social Judgment Research*

Theory and Research on Person Impression Formation: A Look to the Future

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A general understanding of social phenomena requires a theoretical framework within which both old and new empirical findings can be conceptualized. To be useful, the theory must have both specificity and generality. That is, the assumptions of the theory must be clearly stated, empirically verifiable and, in various combinations, able to generate testable hypotheses. At the same time, the theory must be sufficiently general that newly discovered and unexpected phenomena can be interpreted in terms of its assumptions.

These remarks almost go without saying. However, there is another side of the coin. That is, a theory can sometimes *interfere* with understanding, by retarding the acquisition of knowledge that is necessary to gain insight into the phenomena to which the theory is supposed to apply. The reason for this may again be obvious. A precise theoretical formulation of social judgment and behavior can only be developed and validated through rigidly controlled experiments that employ well-specified types of stimulus materials, and that restrict subjects' responses to a relatively small range of alternatives. In short, the validation of a theory often requires a well-developed research paradigm within which the relevant variables can be easily manipulated and their effects can be clearly interpreted.

Problems can arise, however, when a theory is applied and evaluated only within a given paradigm.¹ First, the use of a single research paradigm can limit

¹By *paradigm*, we refer to the set of procedures that are used to collect and analyze data along with the implicit or explicit assumptions that surround the operationalization of independent and dependent variables.

greatly the theoretical and empirical questions that can be asked about the phenomena being investigated. Second, it is unclear whether the theory, whatever its success in accounting for phenomena that are identified using the paradigm, has implications that extend beyond the procedures that have been used to evaluate it. In the extreme case, a theory can concern processes that are *created* by the paradigm itself and seldom if ever occur under conditions that differ even slightly from those in which the theory is tested.

Theories that have been developed to account for person perception and impression formation exemplify these problems. The predominant theory of impression formation to emerge in the early 1970s was developed by Norman Anderson (1971, 1981). His information-integration formulation provided precise theoretical statements of the manner in which the evaluative implications of different pieces of information about a person were combined subjectively to form an overall impression of how much the person was liked. The formulation could only be rigorously tested, however, under conditions that bear little resemblance to those one might encounter in everyday life. Specifically, subjects were required to judge their liking for a large number of persons, each described by a different set of randomly selected stimulus adjectives. These adjectives were usually presented in all possible combinations. As a result, many adjective sets provided very unlikely and often quite implausible descriptions of the sorts of people one would be likely to meet or even imagine to exist. The information-integration model accounted very successfully for the pattern of judgments that subjects reported under these conditions (for a summary, see Anderson, 1981). It is nevertheless questionable whether the integration processes that were inferred from these data typically occur when people form an impression of a single individual on the basis of more plausible configurations of stimulus information that are presented in a more meaningful social context. (For a more detailed analysis of the information-integration paradigm and its possible effects on the processing of information, see Wyer & Carlston, 1979.)

Indeed, it was partly in reaction to the obvious artificiality of the information-integration paradigm that many impression-formation researchers turned their attention to the mental representations that people formed from the information they acquired about a person, and how they later used these representations both to recall this information and to judge the person it describes. The theoretical formulations that were initially brought to bear on these matters (for a sample of several such formulations, see Hastie et al., 1980), and the research that was generated by them, promised to answer fundamental questions about the way information about an individual is encoded and organized in memory and the processes that underlie its later retrieval and use.

Perhaps the most influential of these early formulations was a model of person memory proposed by Hastie (1980). The model was initially developed to account for a particular phenomenon (i.e., the relatively better recall of behaviors that are inconsistent with a trait-based expectation for what the actor is like).

However, it has been continually modified, refined, and extended over the decade since its inception (cf. Srull, 1981; Srull, Lichtenstein, & Rothbart, 1985; Wyer, Bodenhausen, & Srull, 1984; Wyer & Gordon, 1982, 1984; Wyer & Martin, 1986; Wyer & Unverzagt, 1985). The most recent version (Srull & Wyer, 1989; Wyer & Srull, 1989), to be referred to hereafter as the *Person Memory* model, can be used to conceptualize a wide variety of phenomena including (a) differences in the processes of forming impressions of a single person and those involved in forming impressions of a group (Wyer, Bodenhausen, & Srull, 1984), (b) the impressions that are formed of persons whose personality trait descriptions conflict with the implications of a stereotyped social group to which they belong (Wyer & Martin, 1986), (c) the effects of on-line and post-information processing time on the type of information recalled (Srull, 1981; Wyer, Budesheim, Lambert, & Martin, 1989; Wyer & Martin, 1986), and (d) the effects of instructions to disregard information on trait judgments and its effects on evaluative judgments (Wyer & Budesheim, 1987; Wyer, Srull, & Gordon, 1984). More generally, the model can account for differences in both judgments and recall even under conditions in which the correlation between judgments and the implications of recalled information is negligible (Lichtenstein & Srull, 1987; Srull & Wyer, 1989; Wyer & Unverzagt, 1985).

Because of the diversity of its implications, it is tempting to view the theory as a comprehensive formulation of person impression formation. However, although the model is clearly superior to information-integration theory in terms of the range of phenomena for which it has potential implications, it has nevertheless inherited problems similar to those of its predecessor. The Person Memory model has been rigorously tested under very circumscribed instructional and information-presentation conditions. In particular, subjects are usually told to form an impression of how well they would like someone on the basis of a series of randomly ordered behavior descriptions that vary in their trait and evaluative implications. In many instances, the behaviors are preceded by a set of trait adjectives with which some of the presented behaviors are consistent and others are inconsistent. After receiving this information, subjects are asked to report their judgments of the person and then to recall the behaviors that were presented. The model postulates the cognitive activities that are involved in informing an impression of the person on the basis of such information, the cognitive representations that are constructed as a result of these activities, and the way that these representations are used both to recall the information and to judge the person to whom they refer.

The Person Memory model has had considerable success in accounting for the phenomena identified under the conditions described earlier (see Srull & Wyer, 1989). On the other hand, one can easily question the extent to which the impression-formation processes that occur under these conditions resemble those that occur in other situations in which people receive information about persons. For one thing, much of the information we receive about a person is

conveyed in a social context. We personally observe the person's behaviors, or learn about them in a book, a movie, or an informational conversation. Moreover, the behaviors we learn about a person are seldom unrelated to one another. Rather, they compose a temporally or causally related sequence of acts that are often directed toward a particular goal.

In addition, we do not always receive information about people and their behavior for the purpose of evaluating them. In many instances, for example, we may simply be interested in understanding the nature of the events that are being described, or in imagining how we might personally act in similar situations. When we do have a judgmental objective in mind, it is often more specific than simply that of forming a general impression. We may wish to decide whether to hire the person for a job, to go out on a date with the person, or to loan the person money. It is not at all clear that the cognitive representations of individuals that are formed in any of these conditions are similar to those that the Person Memory model postulates. Indeed, many of the processes the model assumes could easily be specific to the paradigm that is used to investigate them. In other words, this model, like the Anderson model, could be a theory of the research paradigm and not of person impression formation in general.

Finally, the interpretation of information that is conveyed in a social context may often require a consideration of its pragmatic implications as well as its semantic implications. That is, one must take into account the reasons why the information was conveyed. People who describe an acquaintance as stupid, or who tell anecdotes about another's social ineptness, often convey information about themselves as well as the person they are describing. That is, their statements constitute speech acts that might be interpreted as obnoxious or insensitive and, therefore, create dislike for the speakers themselves as well as the individual being described. These considerations do not come into play under conditions in which the Person Memory model has typically been applied.

These considerations combine to suggest that the processes postulated by the Person Memory model (like Anderson's information-integration formulation) could be specific to the research paradigm that has been used to investigate them. That is, the model does not provide a valid characterization of impression formation processes in general. This is not an argument, however, that the theory should be discarded. As McGuire (1972) pointed out, a theory does not need to be correct in order to be useful. Indeed, an invalid theory can often be extremely valuable in understanding phenomena that occur in domains in which it is, in fact, inapplicable. If the implications of a theory are sufficiently well specified, a failure for the theory's predictions to be supported can be attributed to certain specific assumptions on which these predictions are based. Likewise, the failure of an empirical phenomenon to generalize beyond the paradigm in which it was originally observed can be traceable to specific assumptions of the theory that are valid in one situation but not in the other. Indeed, the assertion that the results obtained in one situation do not generalize to other situations

is vacuous unless one can state precisely what differences exist between the situations and what specific effects these differences are likely to have. But such precise statements can usually be made only if a well-elaborated theoretical formulation has been developed and validated within at least one of the situations being compared.

In the remainder of this chapter, we provide examples in support of these arguments. As a framework for our discussion, we first review briefly several assumptions of the Person Memory model that have received empirical support within the paradigm in which the theory is traditionally tested. Then, we discuss research performed in both similar and different paradigms, the results of which differ in important respects from those that are usually obtained. In each case, the research we describe places constraints on the generalizability of the model's assumptions. At the same time, a consideration of the results of this research from the perspective of our Person Memory formulation demonstrates the theory's value in conceptualizing phenomena even in situations to which it is inapplicable and, therefore, in extending our general understanding of person impression formation.

STATEMENT OF THEORY

The Person Memory model is described in detail elsewhere (Srull & Wyer, 1989; Wyer & Srull, 1989). Here, we only summarize those features that are of primary relevance to the discussion to follow.

The theory has three components, each of which pertains to a different phase of information processing. The first, *representational* component concerns the processes that occur in the course of forming a general impression of someone on the basis of information about the person's traits and behaviors, the associations that are formed among the various pieces of information as a result of this cognitive activity, and the types of representations of the person that are constructed as a result of these associations. The second, *recall* component specifies the manner in which information is extracted from these representations when a subject is later asked to recall it. The third, *judgment* component pertains to the way these same representations are used to compute a judgment of the person to whom they refer. The three components of the theory are conceptually independent. Thus, an incorrect assumption pertaining to one component does not necessarily affect the validity of the other components. At the same time, because the representational component of the theory is typically verified on the basis of judgment and recall data, there is an inherent indeterminacy of the model that may be unavoidable (see J. Anderson, 1976).

In most applications of the model, subjects with instructions to form an impression of how well they would like a target person receive information consisting of a series of behaviors, some of which are favorable and others of which

are unfavorable. In some instances, these behaviors are preceded by a more general description of the target's traits, which are also either favorable or unfavorable. In such cases, the behaviors that follow are (a) either evaluatively consistent or evaluatively inconsistent with the trait descriptors, and (b) imply values along either the same trait dimensions to which the initial adjectives refer or different, descriptively unrelated dimensions. The cognitive activity that theoretically surrounds subjects' responses to this information, and that underlies the later recall of the information and judgments based on it, are summarized in Table 1.1 in a series of seven postulates (for a more detailed explication of the overall model, see Srull & Wyer, 1989; Wyer & Srull, 1989). Elaborations of these postulates and their implications follow.

Representational Processes

Postulate 1 (Trait Encoding and Organization). Subjects interpret the behaviors the target has performed in terms of trait concepts that they exemplify.

- a. If initial trait descriptions of the target have not been provided, subjects encode each behavior in terms of the first applicable trait concept that comes to mind.
- b. If initial trait descriptions of the target have been provided, only these traits are used to encode the behaviors presented. That is, behaviors that do not exemplify any of the initial traits are not encoded in trait terms.
- c. The encoding of a behavior in terms of a trait concept leads an association to be formed between the behavior and the concept. If more than one behavior becomes associated with the same concept, a trait-behavior cluster is formed (of a sort to be indicated presently).

To give an example, suppose subjects receive a series of behaviors that could be interpreted as hostile, kind, and intelligent. If no initial trait description of the target is provided, subjects presumably encode all of these behaviors in terms of the traits they exemplify. This would lead to the formation of three trait-behavior clusters. However, suppose the initial trait information about the person describes him² as hostile but does not mention other attributes. Then, according to Postulate 1b, only the behaviors that exemplify hostility would be encoded in terms of a trait, and only one trait-behavior cluster would be formed.

Postulate 2 (Evaluative Concept Formation). Subjects attempt to extract a general concept of the target as likeable or dislikeable. If the first several pieces of information presented about the target are evaluatively consistent

²For reasons that are not entirely clear, the stimulus persons used in this research have almost invariably been male.

TABLE 1.1
Summary of Postulates of the Person Memory Model

Postulates

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. (Trait encoding and organization) | Subjects interpret the behaviors the target has performed in terms of trait concepts they exemplify. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. If initial trait descriptions of the target have not been provided, subjects encode each behavior in terms of the first applicable trait concept that comes to mind. b. If initial trait descriptions of the target have been provided, only these traits are used to encode the behaviors. That is, behaviors that do not exemplify any of the initial traits are not encoded in trait terms. c. The encoding of behavior in terms of a trait concept leads an association to be formed between the behavior and the concept. If more than one behavior becomes associated with the same concept, a trait-behavior cluster is formed. |
| 2. (Evaluative concept formation) | Subjects attempt to extract a general concept of the target as likeable or dislikeable. If the first several pieces of information about the target are evaluatively consistent, this initial information will be used as a basis for the concept. Once an evaluative person concept is formed, subsequent descriptions of the target's behavior are encoded evaluatively (as favorable or unfavorable) and are thought about in relation to the concept. This leads the behaviors to become associated with the person concept. |
| 3. (Inconsistency resolution) | Subjects who encounter a behavior that is evaluatively inconsistent with their concept of a person attempt to understand why the behavior might have occurred (why a likeable person might do a bad thing, or why a dislikeable person might behave favorably). In doing so, they think about the inconsistent behavior in relation to other behaviors the person has performed, leading associations to be formed between these behaviors. |
| 4. (Bolstering) | Subjects who encounter a behavior that is evaluatively inconsistent with their concept of a person attempt to reconfirm the validity of this concept. Therefore, they mentally review behaviors of the target that are evaluatively consistent with the concept. This activity strengthens the association between these behaviors and the concept. |
| 5. (Storage) | The trait-behavior clusters and evaluative person representation that are formed from the above activities are stored independently of one another at a memory location that pertains to the person being described. |
| 6. (Judgment) | Subjects who are asked to make a judgment of the target search memory for a representation whose central concept has direct implications for the judgment. If such a representation is found, subjects use its central concept as a basis for their judgment without consulting the contents of the representation itself. |
| 7. (Judgment) | If a representation whose central concept has direct implications for the judgment cannot be identified, subjects base their judgment on both (a) the evaluative implications of the concept defining the person representation, and (b) the descriptive implications of behaviors they identify in a partial review of those that are contained in this representation. |
-

(either all favorable or all unfavorable), this initial information will be used as a basis for the concept. Once an evaluative person concept is formed, subsequent descriptions of the target's behavior are encoded evaluatively (as favorable or unfavorable) and are thought about in relation to the concept. This leads the behaviors to become associated with the person concept.

Note that as a result of this activity, a representation is formed that is separate from the trait-behavior clusters implied by Postulate 1. This implies that behaviors are often contained in two different representations: a trait-behavior cluster and the representation that is defined by the evaluative person concept.

The behaviors that are considered with reference to the evaluative person concept are sometimes evaluatively inconsistent with this concept. In such cases, subjects theoretically respond in two possible ways:

Postulate 3 (Inconsistency Resolution). Subjects who encounter a behavior that is evaluatively inconsistent with their concept of a person attempt to understand why the behavior might have occurred (i.e., why a likeable person might do a bad thing, or why a dislikeable person might behave favorably). In doing so, they think about the inconsistent behavior in relation to other behaviors the person has performed, leading associations to be formed between the inconsistent behavior and the others.

Postulate 4 (Bolstering). Subjects who encounter a behavior that is evaluatively inconsistent with their concept of a person attempt to reconfirm the validity of this concept. Therefore, they mentally review behaviors of the target that are evaluatively consistent with this concept. This activity strengthens the association between these behaviors and the concept.³

Postulate 5 (Storage). The trait-behavior clusters and evaluative person representations that are formed from the above activities are stored independently of one another at a memory location that pertains to the person being described.

To see the implications of these postulates, suppose subjects receive information about a person P that consists of two favorable trait descriptors, T_A and T_B , followed by a series of behaviors that exemplify these traits and are either favorable or unfavorable ($b_{A,+}$, $b_{A,-}$, $b_{B,+}$, and $b_{B,-}$). Subjects should theoretically encode the behaviors that exemplify T_A and T_B in terms of these traits, forming two trait-behavior clusters. These clusters would resemble those shown on the left side of Fig. 1.1, associations between the behaviors and concepts they connect.

In addition, subjects should form a favorable concept of the target on the

³In the complete model, inconsistency resolution and bolstering are both more likely to occur if the inconsistent behavior is descriptively related to the initial trait description than if it is unrelated. For purposes of our present discussion, however, this distinction is ignored.

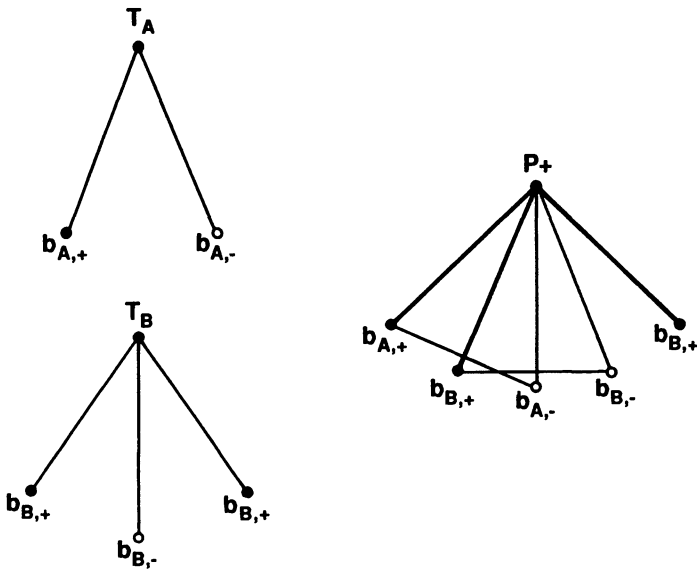


FIG. 1.1. Trait-behavior clusters and evaluative person representations formed from information consisting of two favorable trait descriptions, T_A and T_B , one favorable and one unfavorable behavior that exemplifies T_A ($b_{A,+}$ and $b_{A,-}$), and two favorable and one unfavorable behavior that exemplify T_B ($b_{B,+}$ and $b_{B,-}$). $P+$ denotes the favorable evaluative person concept that is formed on the basis of the trait information. Evaluatively inconsistent behaviors in the evaluative person representation are assumed to form associations with the two behaviors that immediately precede them in representation.

basis of the trait descriptors, and should think about the behaviors with reference to this person concept as well, forming associations of the behavior with this concept. If a behavior is unfavorable, and therefore is evaluatively inconsistent with the person concept, subjects think about it in relation to other behaviors. This leads associations to be formed between the inconsistent behavior and the others (Postulate 3). In addition, the inconsistent behavior can stimulate bolstering, which strengthens the associations of favorable (consistent) behaviors with $P+$ (Postulate 4). The representation that is formed as a result of these activities would resemble that shown on the right side of Fig. 1.1. This representation and the two trait-behavior clusters are then stored independently of one another in a memory location pertaining to the target (e.g., a "referent bin"; see Wyer & Srull, 1989).

Retrieval Processes

Suppose that some time after the information about the target has been presented, subjects are asked to recall the information they have received. They first identify the memory location at which the information is stored and retrieve one

of the representations that is contained there (i.e., whichever one happens to be most accessible). They then report the contents of this representation. To do so, subjects theoretically begin their search from the central concept node, progress along a pathway to a behavior node, and report this behavior. They then traverse a pathway (if any) that connects this node to a second behavior node, report this behavior, and so on, returning to the central concept node and reinitiating the search whenever they reach a dead end (a node that is not linked to any other behavior). If more than one pathway from a node exists, pathways that denote stronger associations are relatively more likely to be selected. When no new behaviors within a given representation can be identified, a second representation is drawn from the location and the process is repeated.⁴

There are two implications of these assumptions. First, if subjects happen to retrieve a trait-behavior cluster to use as a basis for recall, they will report the behaviors contained in this cluster before behaviors in a different cluster. This means that the recalled behaviors will often be clustered in terms of the trait concepts they exemplify.

Second, suppose subjects retrieve the evaluative person representation to use as a basis for recall. The likelihood of identifying a particular behavior in this representation depends on two factors. Evaluatively consistent behaviors become more strongly associated with the central concept as a result of bolstering. Therefore, these behaviors should be relatively more easily identified on the basis of a search that initiates at this concept. However, evaluatively inconsistent behaviors become associated with a greater number of other behaviors than do consistent behaviors as a result of inconsistency resolution. Consequently, these behaviors are more likely to be accessed on the basis of a search from a behavior node. The relative likelihood with which inconsistent behaviors and consistent behaviors are recalled theoretically depends on which process (inconsistency resolution or bolstering) predominates under the conditions being investigated. In most of the research that has been performed to evaluate the model, inconsistent behaviors have a recall advantage, indicating that inconsistency resolution processes initially take priority over bolstering. When subjects have ample opportunity to think about the information they receive, however (either at the time it is presented or subsequently), consistent behaviors gain a recall advantage. This suggests that bolstering ultimately predominates if subjects have sufficient time to engage in it (Wyer, Budesheim, Lambert, & Martin, 1989; Wyer & Martin, 1986).

Judgment Processes

Postulate 6. Subjects who are asked to make a judgment of the target search memory for a representation whose central concept has direct implications for the judgment. If such a representation is found, subjects use its

⁴All of the behaviors contained in a representation are usually not recalled; for an explication of the "stopping" rule, see Srull and Wyer (1989).

central concept as a basis for their judgment without consulting the contents of the representation itself.

Postulate 7. If a representation whose central concept has direct implications for the judgment cannot be identified, subjects base their judgment on both (a) the evaluative implications of the concept defining the person representation, and (b) the descriptive implications of behaviors they identify in a partial review of those that are contained in this representation.

Although these two judgment postulates are somewhat oversimplified (cf. Wyer & Budesheim, 1987), they have interesting implications. For example, they imply that the traits specified by the initial trait adjective descriptions of the target are judged on the basis of these descriptions alone. (More specifically, the judgments are based on the concepts that define the trait-behavior clusters formed as a result of these descriptions.) Similarly, evaluative judgments of the target are based solely on the concept that defines the evaluative person representation without consulting the behaviors contained in it. In other words, specific behaviors only enter into judgments of traits for which no trait-behavior cluster has been formed. Consequently, there is often very little relation between the judgments that are made of a person and the implications of the person's behaviors that subjects are able to recall (Dreben, Fiske, & Hastie, 1979; Hastie & Park, 1986; Lichtenstein & Srull, 1987).

The postulates outlined have received substantial support within the paradigm in which the Person Memory model is usually tested. This support is well documented (Srull & Wyer, 1989; Wyer & Srull, 1989) and is not elaborated here. Rather, we devote the remaining discussion to research that both we and others have performed that raise questions about the generalizability of the theory's assumptions. The first two sections focus on the encoding of behaviors in terms of trait and evaluative concepts and the conditions in which this encoding occurs. The last two sections focus more generally on the cognitive representations that are formed from different types of information when the information is presented in ways that differ from that employed in the usual person memory paradigm. These latter data indicate that impression formation processes are often quite different from those the model assumes. At the same time, the research calls attention to the value of the model, albeit incorrect, in conceptualizing the phenomena investigated.

THE ROLE OF TRAIT CONCEPTS IN THE PROCESSING OF BEHAVIORAL INFORMATION

Effects of Trait Concepts On the Interpretation of Individual Behaviors

The trait-encoding postulate (see Table 1.1) implies that when a target is initially described by a set of trait concepts, these concepts are used to encode the target's behaviors. If, on the other hand, an initial trait description of the target is not provided, the target's behaviors are encoded in terms of whatever

applicable trait concepts come to mind most easily. As a result, the target is typically judged to have the traits implied by these concepts.

The effects of concept accessibility on the interpretation of behaviors were initially identified by Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977) and by Srull and Wyer (1979, 1980). (For a summary of this work, see Higgins & King, 1981; Wyer & Srull, 1981, 1989.) This research suggested, for example, that activating a concept of hostility increases the likelihood that an ambiguous target behavior (e.g., refusal to pay the rent until the landlord paints his apartment) will be interpreted as hostile and, therefore, will lead the target himself to be judged as more hostile than he would if the concept had not been activated. More recent research, however, has placed qualifications on the conditions in which these effects occur. In some instances, for example, subjects believe that the trait concept that first occurs to them when they consider a behavior has come to mind for reasons that are unrelated to either the behavior or the person being described. Then, they are likely to avoid use of this concept, and interpret the behavior in terms of a different concept than the one they first considered (Martin, 1986; for a related conceptualization, see Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987).

Moreover, other studies (Herr, 1986; Manis, Nelson, & Shedler, 1988), suggested that although activating a trait concept has a positive, assimilation effect on the interpretation of behaviors whose features are generally similar to those of the concept, it has a negative, contrast effect on the interpretation of behaviors whose features are generally opposite to those of the concept. (Thus, for example, activating the concept *hostile* leads moderately hostile behaviors to be encoded as more hostile, but moderately kind behaviors to be interpreted as more kind, than they otherwise would.)

Although several explanations of these contrast effects are possible, none of them is implied by the Person Memory model in its present form. In particular, the trait-encoding postulate makes no provision whatsoever for the encoding of behaviors in terms of traits that are diametrically opposite to those that have been activated. Some more subtle challenges to the Person Memory model are also provided by these effects. According to the second part of the trait-encoding postulate (see Table 1.1), the trait-behavior clusters that are formed should pertain only to attributes that are explicitly mentioned in the initial trait information presented. Thus, as in our example, an initial description of a target as *hostile* should lead behaviors that exemplify hostility to be encoded and organized in terms of this trait. However, behaviors that are interpretable as kind should not be encoded in trait terms at all.⁵ The contrast effects obtained

⁵This assumption of the model is supported by evidence that when the evaluative implications of the target's behaviors are controlled, behaviors are recalled better if they exemplify the traits contained in an initial description of the target than if they exemplify the bipolar opposites of these traits (Wyer & Gordon, 1982). Moreover, the presented trait adjectives appear to cue the recall only of behaviors that exemplify them and not behaviors that exemplify the bipolar opposite traits.

in category accessibility research, on the other hand (cf. Manis et al., 1988), suggest that these encodings do indeed occur. The research paradigms in which assimilation and contrast effects have been observed are, of course, quite different from those used in person memory research. Nevertheless, a consideration of these effects in the context of the Person Memory model indicates a need to circumscribe more clearly the conditions in which its trait encoding assumptions are applicable.

Effects of Trait Concepts On the Organization of Behaviors

A second body of research, which has been performed in a paradigm very similar to that in which the model is usually applied, bears more directly on the model's assumption concerning the organization of behaviors into trait-behavior clusters. The third part (c) of the trait-encoding postulate, in combination with the retrieval processes assumed by the theory, implies that if subjects encode and organize behaviors in terms of trait concepts at the time the behaviors are learned, the order of the behaviors they later recall should reflect this organization. That is, behaviors should be clustered in terms of the trait concepts they exemplify. Support for this hypothesis was first reported by Hamilton, Katz, and Leirer (1980). Specifically, subjects had better recall of behaviors overall, and the recalled behaviors were more likely to be clustered in terms of the trait concepts they exemplified, when subjects had read the information for the purpose of forming an impression of the person it described than when they were explicitly told to remember this information.⁶

Gordon and Wyer (1987) confirmed these conclusions using different criteria. In their study, subjects were asked to form an impression of someone on the basis of 18 behaviors, of which 3 exemplified one trait, 6 exemplified a second trait, and 9 exemplified a third. Some subjects were told at the outset that the target person possessed the three traits, whereas other subjects were not given this information. In both conditions, however, the likelihood that subjects recalled a given behavior decreased as the number of behaviors exemplifying the same trait increased. In other words, a category set size effect occurred of a sort that is typically assumed to reflect the organization of information into categories (Rundus, 1971; for a conceptualization of set size effects in terms of the Person Memory model, see Srull & Wyer, 1989). These differences should

⁶Hamilton, Katz, and Leirer (1980) attributed subjects' generally better recall of behaviors under impression formation conditions than under memory conditions to subjects' organization of the behaviors into trait categories in the former condition. According to the Person Memory model, however, the better recall of behaviors under impression formation conditions could also result from the organization of the behaviors around the evaluative person concept. Thus, according to this theory, the two results reported by Hamilton et al. do not necessarily reflect the same underlying process.

not occur if the behaviors were encoded separately in memory, or alternatively, were organized around a single concept. In such cases, each behavior would have an equal likelihood of being recalled, regardless of the trait it exemplified.

More recent research by Klein and Loftus (1990) created problems for this conclusion. In one study, subjects were given a series of behaviors that exemplified different traits with instructions either to form an impression of the person they described (impression formation conditions), to remember the behaviors (memory conditions), or to encode each behavior in terms of a trait concept (explicit trait-encoding conditions). Later, they were asked to recall the behaviors. The degree of clustering of recalled behaviors by trait category was much lower in impression formation conditions than in explicit trait-encoding conditions even though the ease of recalling the behaviors was the same. Moreover, clustering was not appreciably greater in impression formation conditions than in memory conditions.⁷

In a second study, subjects were again given a series of behaviors, but in this case, each behavior exemplified a different trait concept. Consequently, the behaviors were impossible to organize by trait category. Or, in terms of the Person Memory formulation, each "trait-behavior cluster" contained only a single behavior. Nonetheless, subjects recalled a greater proportion of behaviors under both impression set conditions ($M = .62$) and explicit trait-encoding conditions ($M = .58$) than they did under memory conditions ($M = .40$). These data indicate that although the encoding of behaviors in terms of trait concepts facilitates their later recall, this is not because the behaviors are subjectively organized into trait categories (see Footnote 6).

In summary, Klein and Loftus' findings call into question the assumption that the encoding of behaviors in terms of trait concepts leads these behaviors to be organized into trait-behavior clusters, and that this organization facilitates the recall of the behaviors later. But how can these findings be reconciled with Gordon and Wyer's? One possibility is that the effects obtained by Gordon and Wyer also do not reflect the organization of the behaviors into trait categories. Rather, they reflect a retrieval strategy that subjects used to access the behaviors at the time of recall. Suppose subjects who have encoded behaviors in terms of traits store them independently of one another in memory as trait-behavior pairings. Suppose further that when subjects are later asked to recall the information they received, they have better memory for the traits than for the behaviors that are paired with them (Carlston, 1980). Then, subjects might intentionally recall and review the trait concepts they had applied in the hope that some of them will cue a behavior that was associated with it. Such a strategy

⁷This finding, which appears to contradict Hamilton, Katz, and Leirer's (1980) results, may reflect the fact that the index of clustering used by Klein and Loftus, unlike that used by Hamilton, Katz, and Leirer, corrects for differences in the total amount of information recalled. To this extent, Klein and Loftus' conclusion seems more likely to be valid.

would often be effective. However, subjects who are successful in identifying a trait that cues the recall of a behavior might not continue thinking about this trait but rather might go on to a different one. Consequently, other behaviors that are associated with this same trait would often be missed. If this is so, the proportion of recalled behaviors that exemplify a given trait would decrease as the total number of trait-behavior pairs that exist in memory increases. This could account for Gordon and Wyer's (1987) findings without the need to postulate the existence of trait-behavior clusters.

In summary, Klein and Loftus' data call into question the postulate that the encoding of the behaviors in terms of trait concepts leads to the construction of trait-behavior clusters. Moreover, our reinterpretation of Gordon and Wyer's (1987) data suggests a need to modify the model's retrieval assumptions as well.

EFFECTS OF CONCEPT ACTIVATION ON THE EVALUATIVE ENCODING OF BEHAVIOR

A further challenge to the assumptions of the Person Memory model is provided by the results of a study by Hong and Wyer (1990) in a different content domain. This study concerned the effects of a product's country of origin on the processing of other, more specific product attribute information. This study showed that concepts activated by the country of origin affected the *evaluative* encoding of specific attribute information. When the attribute information was evaluatively ambiguous, it was interpreted more favorably when the product's country of origin had a reputation for manufacturing high quality merchandise than when it had a reputation for low quality merchandise. When the attribute information was either moderately favorable or moderately unfavorable, concepts activated by the country of origin had both assimilation and contrast effects on subjects' interpretations of this information.⁸

Perhaps more important was the finding that these evaluative encoding effects occurred only when the product's country of origin was conveyed 24 hours before the attribute information was presented. When the product's country of origin was activated immediately before the other product information, it functioned simply as another characteristic of the object that influenced judgments in much the same way as other attribute descriptions. Hong and Wyer concluded that in order for the product's country of origin to affect the interpretation

⁸More specifically, a favorable country of origin led the attributes described by moderately favorable information to be perceived as more favorable (assimilated) and the attributes described by moderately unfavorable information to be perceived as more unfavorable (contrasted). An unfavorable country of origin led the attributes described by moderately favorable information to be interpreted as more favorable (contrasted) and those described by moderately unfavorable information to be interpreted as less favorable (assimilated). Therefore, these attributes, and consequently the product itself, were judged more extremely when concepts associated with the product's country of origin had been activated than when they had not.

of other information presented, it had to be conveyed a sufficient length of time before this information to lead subjects to form a separate concept of the product on the basis of country of origin alone.

To the extent that the processes that underlie the formation of impressions about commercial products are comparable to those that underlie the formation of person impressions, the phenomena identified in 1990 by Hong and Wyer suggest two deficiencies of the Person Memory model in its present form. Specifically, the model's evaluative-concept-formation postulate (see Table 1.1) asserts that an evaluative concept of the target is typically formed on the basis of the initial information about it, and that the later information about the target is evaluatively encoded in terms of this concept. For at least two reasons, however, this postulate is insufficient to capture the findings reported by Hong and Wyer.

First, the evaluative encoding of behaviors with reference to a general person concept is likely to be more elaborate than the above postulate implies. That is, the evaluative person concept with which the target's behavior becomes associated can also affect the interpretation of this behavior, leading the behavior to be seen as either more evaluatively consistent with the concept than it might otherwise be regarded (i.e., assimilated) or as more inconsistent with the concept than it would otherwise be seen (contrasted). These evaluative encoding effects may precede the responses to inconsistency implied by the inconsistency-resolution and bolstering postulates.

Second, the initial information presented about a target does not always lead a general evaluative concept of the target to be formed. In person impression formation, for example, the initial trait descriptions of a target can sometimes function simply as favorable or unfavorable pieces of information that are not distinguished from the person's behaviors in terms of their effect on subjects' overall impression. To the extent this occurs, it would also challenge the evaluative-concept-formation postulate.

On the other hand, results obtained in the usual person memory paradigm indicate that the initial descriptions of a target *are* often used to form an evaluative concept of him or her (for a review of this research, see Srull & Wyer, 1989). What accounts for the difference between these results and Hong and Wyer's? The answer to this question could lie in the way the initial information is presented. In Hong and Wyer's (1990) study, the country of origin was conveyed in the context of other product information. Although the context information was evaluatively neutral and therefore unimportant for evaluating the product, this was not stated explicitly. Moreover, subjects were not given any indication that they should pay particular attention to the product's country of origin or should give it special status relative to the information that accompanied it. In the person memory paradigm, however, the initial trait adjectives are explicitly called to subjects' attention by the experimenter, and are often presented in a way that distinguishes them from the list of behaviors that follow

(for an exception, see Wyer & Gordon, 1982). If the trait descriptions of a target person are not presented in a way that appears to give them special importance, a delay between the presentation of these descriptions and the behavior information might be necessary to obtain the effects that are typically observed in the person impression paradigm.

IMPRESSIONS FORMED ON THE BASIS OF INFORMATION CONVEYED IN CONVERSATIONS

Much of the information we acquire about people is conveyed in the context of a conversation. That is, we hear others exchange opinions about what a person is like or give anecdotal accounts of the person's behavior. There is an important difference between this impression formation situation and those that are typically investigated using the person memory paradigm described earlier. Specifically, people who listen to a conversation may not only form impressions of the person being discussed. In addition, they may form impressions of the speakers themselves, based on the comments they make about the target.

Conversations About a Third Party

Wyer, Budesheim, and Lambert (1990) asked subjects to listen to a taped conversation between a male and a female college student about a mutual (male) acquaintance. Before engaging in the conversation, each speaker ostensibly wrote down three adjectives that described the person they had chosen to discuss. These written descriptions, which were either favorable or unfavorable, were given to the subjects. The speakers then exchanged anecdotes about the target's behavior. In fact, the behaviors they mentioned were very similar to those used in previous studies of person memory (e.g., Wyer & Martin, 1986). That is, they varied in favorableness and, therefore, in their evaluative consistency with both the trait description of the target by the speaker who mentioned them and the trait description provided by the other speaker. Subjects listened to the conversation with the objective of either forming an impression of the target or of forming an impression of the speakers. Later, they reported their liking for both the target and the speakers, inferred the speakers' liking for the target, and recalled the behaviors that were mentioned.

Judgments. First, consider the speaker-impression condition. In this condition, the favorableness of each speaker's trait description of the target had a positive effect on subjects' beliefs that the speaker liked the target, and on subjects' own liking for the speaker. However, it had a slight contrast effect on subjects' liking for the target himself. That is, subjects evaluated the target more favorably when the speakers' trait descriptions of him were unfavorable

than when they were favorable. These data suggest that subjects used the speakers' characterizations of the target to infer whether the speakers were either friendly or unfriendly, and, therefore, to form concepts of them as likeable or dislikeable. Having done this, they apparently used these concepts as standards of comparison in evaluating the target at the time of judgment.

These conclusions seem quite plausible when a subject's explicit objective in listening to the conversation is to form impressions of the speakers. Indeed, they support the evaluative concept formation postulate, that subjects use the initial information they receive about individuals to form evaluative concepts of them. However, the same pattern of judgments also occurred when subjects were told to form an impression of the *target*. In other words, even under these conditions, subjects did not use the information presented to form an impression of the target person himself. Rather, they spontaneously formed concepts of the speakers as likeable or dislikeable on the basis of their descriptions of the target, just as they did under speaker-impression conditions, and then used these concepts as standards of comparison in evaluating the target when they were later asked to do so.

The results, therefore, clearly contradict the evaluative concept formation postulate (at least insofar as it pertains to the target person and not to the speakers). Moreover, they are contrary to the results typically obtained in person memory research in which initial information about a target *does* have a major positive effect on judgments of this target. What is the reason for this discrepancy?

In retrospect, it seems reasonable to attribute the persisting effect of the initial trait information that is observed in the usual research paradigm to the conditions that surround the presentation of this information. In this paradigm, subjects are often told simply that the person possesses the traits being described without being given any indication that the description might not be accurate (cf. Srull, 1981; Wyer & Gordon, 1982). In other cases (cf. Wyer, Bodenhausen, & Srull, 1984; Wyer & Martin, 1986), they are told that the target is a character in a novel and that the trait adjectives were used by the author to describe this character. In both cases, therefore, subjects are effectively told by the experimenter to assume a priori that the trait descriptions are indeed valid characterizations of the target's personality and that there is no reason to question them.

In contrast, subjects are more likely to consider an acquaintance's description of a person in the course of a conversation to be a matter of opinion that does not necessarily convey what the target person is actually like. Indeed, such descriptions may convey as much about the speaker as about the person being described. The results obtained by Wyer, Budesheim, and Lambert (1990) would be consistent with this conjecture. In any event, the data call into question the generality of the assumption that subjects' impressions of a person are based largely on the initial information that is conveyed about the person. When this information is conveyed in a social context, this is clearly not always the case.

Recall. The judgment data suggest that subjects organized the information in the conversation around concepts of the speakers rather than of the target. The content and structure of these representations should be reflected in the type of information that subjects recalled. Under speaker-impression conditions, subjects had better recall of behaviors a speaker mentioned that were evaluatively inconsistent with the *other* speaker's trait description of the target. (Thus, subjects had better recall of behaviors the male speaker mentioned that were inconsistent with the female's description.)

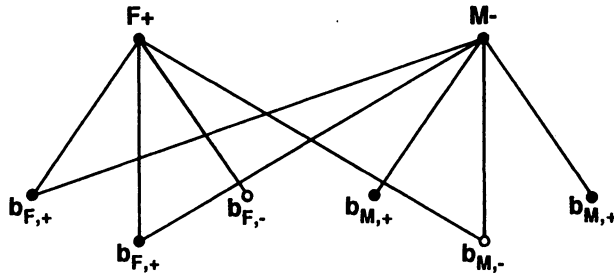
At first glance, this finding is curious. When considered in the context of the judgment data, however, it has a plausible explanation. Specifically, although subjects used the speakers' trait descriptions of the target to form impressions of the speakers, they may not have been completely confident of their assumption that the descriptions did, in fact, reflect characteristics of these speakers rather than of the person being described. Consequently, they paid particular attention to statements made in the conversation that confirmed this assumption. When the behaviors mentioned by one speaker are inconsistent with the second speaker's trait description, they suggest that this trait description is not a valid characterization of the target but rather reflects the likeableness of the speaker instead. Subjects may therefore have thought about such behaviors more extensively in relation to their concept of the second speaker in the course of confirming the validity of this concept, thereby establishing associations between the behaviors and the concept. These associations facilitated the recall of the behaviors later. To the extent that this reasoning is correct, the representation that was formed under conditions in which the two speakers' trait descriptions of the target evaluatively differs would resemble that shown in Fig. 1.2a.

Considered from this perspective, the representation that was constructed when subjects were told to form an impression of the target can also be understood. Judgment data indicated that subjects formed equally strong impressions of the two speakers in this condition. However, their recall of the behaviors mentioned in the conversation was affected only by their consistency with the target description provided by the female. That is, subjects had better recall of behaviors mentioned by the male if they were inconsistent with the female's description of the target (thus replicating the results obtained under speaker-impression conditions). However, they also had better recall of behaviors that the female herself mentioned that were inconsistent with her description of the target.

These data suggest that if subjects were not explicitly told to form an impression of both speakers, they did not listen to the conversation from a disinterested perspective. Rather, they focused their attention on only one of the speakers, specifically, the female.⁹ In doing so, they considered more carefully

⁹The target person was male. It is therefore conceivable that subjects were more intrinsically interested in the comments about the target by a person of the opposite sex than by a person of the same sex. This, of course, is pure speculation.

a. Speaker-impression Conditions



b. Target-impression Conditions

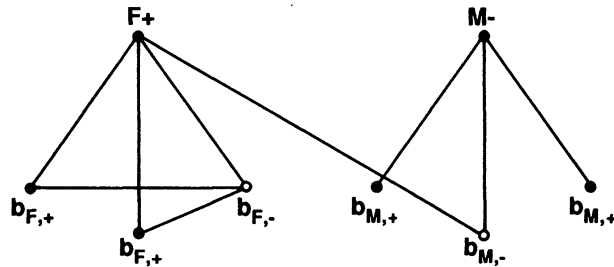


FIG. 1.2. Speaker-based representations formed from information in a conversation when subjects have the objective of (a) forming an impression of the speakers and (b) forming an impression of the target. F+ and M- denote favorable and unfavorable concepts of the female and male speakers respectively, based on their trait descriptions of the target; $b_{F,+}$ and $b_{F,-}$ denote favorable and unfavorable behaviors mentioned by the female speaker; and $b_{M,+}$ and $b_{M,-}$ denote favorable and unfavorable behaviors mentioned by the female.

behaviors the male mentioned that confirmed their concept of her (i.e., behaviors that suggested that her trait description of the target did not reflect attributes of the target). In addition, they engaged in inconsistency-resolution processes similar to those assumed by the Person Memory model (Postulate 3). That is, they thought about behaviors the female mentioned that were evaluatively inconsistent with their concept of her in relation to other behaviors she had mentioned in order to understand why the statements might have been made (i.e., why a likeable person would mention an undesirable thing about the target, or why a dislikeable person would bother to mention something nice). To the extent these cognitive processes led associations to be formed among the behaviors and concepts involved, the resulting representation would resemble that shown in Fig. 1.2b.

Conversations About One of the Speakers

The aforementioned studies point out that people's statements in a conversation are often interpreted as communicative acts. That is, they constitute behaviors of the speakers that have implications for attributes of the speakers themselves. When this is the case, additional considerations can arise. That is, speakers' statements can often vary in their consistency not only with evaluative concepts that subjects have formed of these particular speakers but also with more generalized expectations for the things that people are likely to say in conversations and the meaning that is attributed to them (Grice, 1975; Higgins, 1981; Kraut & Higgins, 1984). A rather obvious norm is politeness. That is, people usually communicate to others in a way that will not unduly offend the person with whom they are speaking or others who might be listening. These normative expectations may be applied to people in general, regardless of their underlying personality dispositions.

In the studies described here, the speakers ostensibly talked to one another about a mutual acquaintance who was unknown to both the experimenter and the potential listeners. In this situation, speakers' descriptions of socially undesirable acts the target performed are unlikely to be considered impolite. Indeed, because such acts usually occur less frequently than desirable ones, they may be more interesting to talk about, and consequently, they may be often mentioned. Suppose, however, that the person being discussed is one of the speakers. The social appropriateness of mentioning things one has personally done may not vary systematically with the favorableness of the actions. (The mention of unfavorable behaviors, for example, is often an indication of modesty, whereas the mention of favorable acts can sometimes be self-serving.) In contrast, calling attention to an unfavorable thing that the other has done, particularly in front of the experimenter, is likely to embarrass or offend the actor and, therefore, to be counternormative. Subjects may therefore think more extensively about such statements in an attempt to reconcile their occurrence, and this may occur independently of more speaker-specific expectations that subjects have formed on the basis of the speaker's trait description.

A later study by Wyer, Budesheim, and Lambert (1991) provided some evidence for this. The stimulus materials were similar to those used in the first conversation studies except that in this case, the conversation was between two male speakers, P and O, and the target was one of the speakers, P. Thus, Speaker O first wrote down a favorable or unfavorable trait description of Speaker P, and Speaker P wrote down a favorable or unfavorable description of himself. These descriptions were conveyed to the subjects. Then, Speakers P and O exchanged anecdotes about favorable and unfavorable behaviors that Speaker P had performed in various situations. Subjects listened to the conversation with instructions either to form an impression of Speaker P or to form an impression of Speaker O. Later, they rated both speakers and recalled the behaviors.

Data were generally similar under both instructional conditions. Judgment data indicated that the favorableness of Speaker O's description of Speaker P had a positive effect on subjects' liking for Speaker O, but had no influence on their liking for Speaker P himself. The favorableness of Speaker P's self-description had no effect on ratings of either speaker. Thus, in no case did the initial trait descriptions of the target affect subjects' evaluations of him.

The recall data of primary interest are shown in Table 1.2. Subjects had better recall of behaviors Speaker P mentioned that were inconsistent with Speaker O's trait description of Speaker P. This result provides a conceptual replication of the earlier studies. That is, subjects thought more extensively about behaviors Speaker P had mentioned that confirmed their assumption that Speaker O's trait description of the target was a reflection of Speaker O's general likeableness rather than characteristics of the target himself. In contrast, behaviors Speaker O mentioned were recalled better if they were unfavorable, and therefore deviated from normative expectations for Speaker O to be polite. This was true regardless of the behaviors' consistency with either Speaker O's description of Speaker P or Speaker P's self description.

The interpretation of these data is reasonably straightforward. A consideration of their implications within the framework of the Person Memory model, however, raises an important theoretical issue. The storage postulate (Postulate 5, see Table 1.1) implies that the representations that are formed are stored in memory as independent entities and are not connected either to one another or to more general knowledge that people have acquired. The results of the present study, however, indicate that behaviors were also thought about in relation to more general norms and concepts that compose one's general world knowledge. To this extent, the representation that was formed was not independent, but rather, was associatively linked to subjects' semantic or episodic knowledge.

Summary

The series of aforementioned studies indicate that the information about persons is processed quite differently when it is presented in the context of a conversation than when it is conveyed as a list of trait descriptions and behaviors

TABLE 1.2
Proportion of Behaviors Recalled as a Function of their Favorableness,
Which Speaker Mentioned the Behaviors, and the Favorableness of
Speaker O's Trait Description of Speaker P

<i>O's Trait Description of P</i>	<i>Behaviors Reported by P</i>		<i>Behaviors Reported by O</i>	
	<i>Favorable</i>	<i>Unfavorable</i>	<i>Favorable</i>	<i>Unfavorable</i>
Favorable	.375	.401	.323	.430
Unfavorable	.385	.336	.307	.446

out of any social context. These differences call into question several postulates of the Person Memory model as described in Table 1.1.

First, in contradiction to the evaluative concept formation postulate, subjects' impressions of the person to whom the information pertains were not formed from the initial information presented about these persons. Rather, subjects used the initial information to form concepts of the speakers who provided this information. Subjects' judgments of the target may have been computed at the time they were requested, using previously formed concepts of the speakers as standards of comparison.

Second, when subjects listen to conversations about someone, they do not typically respond to behaviors that are mentioned in the manner implied by the inconsistency-resolution or bolstering postulates. Rather, they try to confirm their impressions of the speakers, based on what they say about the person being discussed. Thus, they think more extensively about the behaviors a speaker mentions that confirm the validity of the general concept they have formed of the *other* speaker (i.e., behaviors that are evaluatively inconsistent with the second speaker's trait description of the target, and therefore, imply that this description reflects attributes of the speaker and not the target himself).

Third, in contradiction to the storage postulate, the behaviors that speakers mention in a conversation can often become associated with concepts that compose subjects' general knowledge as well as concepts that are specific to the persons who are involved in the conversation. Put another way, people engage in elaborative processes as well as organizational processes (Klein & Loftus, 1990).

Thus, many assumptions underlying the representational component of the Srull and Wyer model are inapplicable for conceptualizing the processing of information acquired in a social context. At the same time, it is clear that without the model and the processes it implies to use as a comparative standard, it would have been much more difficult to conceptualize the processes that did in fact occur. In this regard, we have assumed that the failure of the Person Memory model to account for our results reflects errors in the representational component of the model rather than in its judgment and retrieval components. In fact, it was necessary to assume the validity of Postulate 6 (that subjects base their judgments on the central concept of a representation they form rather than the target's behavior) in order to infer from the judgment data that the behaviors were organized around concepts of the speakers rather than of the target. Moreover, the retrieval assumptions were necessary to conceptualize the representations that were formed and the processes that led to their construction. Without these aspects of the theory to draw upon, our conclusions concerning the processing of the information would be much more imprecise.

Whether the model will continue to be useful in conceptualizing the formation of impressions in conversations is of course unclear. In our current work, subjects themselves participate in get-acquainted conversations, and the impres-

sions they form and the type of information they remember are evaluated under much less constrained conditions. The cognitive dynamics that underlie the formation of impressions in conversations of this sort are not at all obvious. Thus, the work described here is only a preliminary step in understanding the dynamics of impression formation in social context, based on information of the sort people are likely to acquire outside the laboratory.

Some of the factors that will ultimately need to be taken into account are suggested by the studies described and noted earlier in this chapter. That is, when information is conveyed in a social context, its pragmatic implications may often be as important a determinant of people's reactions to it as its semantic implications. In conversations, for example, people are likely to consider why a statement was made as well as its literal meaning, and these considerations may have indirect effects on the impressions they form of both the referent and the speaker. The evidence in Wyer, Budesheim, and Lambert's (1990, 1991) studies, that subjects attributed speakers' trait descriptions of the target to characteristics of the speakers rather than the person they describe, is one reflection of this tendency. Statements that violate conversational norms to be informative, accurate or polite (cf. Grice, 1975; Higgins, 1981) can sometimes indicate that the speaker does not expect them to be taken literally. The processes of identifying the intended meaning of such statements underlie the appreciation of witticisms (Wyer & Collins, 1990) but are also important factors in the communication of emotion (for an elaboration of this possibility, see Scott, Fuhrman, & Wyer, 1991; Wyer, *in press*). Whether a reviewed version of the Person Memory model will be able to take into account these factors and the processes that underlie their effects remains to be seen.

However, just as the original model has been a valuable conceptual tool in understanding information processing in the studies by Wyer et al. described previously, it should provide a preliminary framework for understanding the dynamics of more natural conversations and the representations that are formed from them.

THE PROCESSING OF PERSONALLY RELEVANT INFORMATION

In the studies described in the last section, the traits and behaviors we presented were identical to those used in previous studies of person memory and judgment but the manner of conveying them to subjects differed. In a second series of studies (Wyer, Lambert, Gruenfeld, & Budesheim, 1990), we returned to the information presentation procedure used in the traditional research paradigm but varied the type of information presented and the type of person to whom it referred. These factors also had substantial effects on the way the information was processed and the representations that were formed from it.