

13

Interpersonal Processes in Context: Understanding the Influence of Settings and Situations on Social Interaction

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When people meet and interact with new acquaintances, they often use expectations about what those other people will be like to guide their interactions. The use of such expectations, often derived from stereotypes and other category-based generalizations, has been demonstrated to influence other people's behavior such that they may actually confirm erroneous expectations during the interaction (see Snyder & Stukas, 1999, for a review). This phenomenon, in which beliefs appear to function as "self-fulfilling prophecies" producing their own reality, can be broken down into two effects: *perceptual confirmation*, in which the person who holds an expectation ("the perceiver") about their partner ("the target") subjectively believes that their partner has acted consistently with the expectation during the interaction; and *behavioral confirmation*, in which the target is judged through some unbiased method (usually by the use of independent raters) to have objectively confirmed the perceiver's expectation with their interaction behavior. Research suggests that these effects are a reliable, though not inevitable, consequence of the use of expectations in social interaction. Our goals here are to consider recent theoretical and empirical advances which suggest that a greater understanding of the contexts in which social interactions occur can shed light on ways in which expectation-relevant interpersonal processes unfold. To do so, we will review past research directly focused on the confirmation of interpersonal expectations in social interaction; in addition, we will extrapolate from research in other domains that can shed some light on such interpersonal processes. Our ultimate aim is to set a course for future research based on past and present indications of the most productive directions.

On the surface, the social interaction between a perceiver and a target may seem a simple phenomenon – just two people conversing with each other – and

that is how such social interactions typically have been studied in the laboratory. In these experiments, perceivers are randomly assigned to hear that targets fit into one of two different types of groups (for example, targets have been portrayed as physically attractive vs. unattractive, extraverted vs. introverted, etc.). Targets are typically unaware of the expectations that perceivers hold of them. After a short conversation, usually by telephone, perceivers and targets evaluate each other to allow for the assessment of perceptual confirmation and potential changes in target self-concepts; objective raters later listen to the targets' portions of each conversation to determine whether behavioral confirmation, behavioral disconfirmation, or no effect has occurred.

Studies of the self-fulfilling nature of interpersonal expectations in social interaction have demonstrated the phenomena in different types of interactions, such as getting acquainted conversations (e.g., Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977) and job interviews (e.g., Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). The process of behavioral confirmation has also been broken down into steps which can be examined separately in research. A common ordering of these steps (e.g., Snyder & Stukas, 1999) suggests that perceivers first adopt beliefs about targets and then act as though these beliefs are true and treat targets accordingly. Targets are thought to assimilate their behavior to perceivers' overtures, resulting in perceivers' interpreting targets' behavior in line with their expectations (and objective raters' consensus in that interpretation). Research on these steps has focused attention on the mechanisms and mediators of confirmation effects, with studies usually examining actions performed by perceivers, such as non-verbal behaviors (e.g., Harris, Moniz, Sowards, & Krane, 1994; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985), confirmatory hypothesis-testing strategies (e.g., Semin & DePoot, 1997; Snyder & Swann, 1978), and avoidant, dominant, and reciprocating interaction strategies of the perceiver (e.g., Klein & Snyder, 2003).

Researchers have also sought to examine the limits of self-fulfilling prophecies by testing potential moderating variables, such as motives or goals (e.g., Dumont, Yzerbyt, Snyder, Mathieu, Comblain, & Scaillet, 2003; Hilton & Darley, 1991; Leyens, Dardenne, Yzerbyt, Scaillet, & Snyder, 1999; Neuberg, 1996; Smith, Neuberg, Judice, & Biesanz, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Haugen, 1994, 1995), perceivers' cognitive capacity (e.g., Biesanz, Neuberg, Smith, Asher, & Judice, 2001; Harris & Perkins, 1995), targets' awareness of perceivers' expectations (e.g. Hilton & Darley, 1985; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995; Stukas & Snyder, 2002), and power differentials (e.g., Copeland, 1994; Georgesen & Harris, 2000; Harris, Lightner, & Manolis, 1998; Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). Studies have also been conducted to understand the types of expectations that lead to confirmatory outcomes in first encounters and from where these expectations originate, such as in perceivers' personalities (e.g., Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1996; Reich, 2004), past relationships (e.g., Berk & Andersen, 2000), or automatically activated stereotypes (e.g., Chen & Bargh, 1997). Although many studies of interpersonal processes in social interaction have been carried out in the laboratory using experimentally manipulated (and often erroneous) expectations, research on naturally-occurring expectations has offered converging evidence about these interpersonal processes (e.g., Madon, Guyll, Spoth, Cross,

& Hilbert, 2003; Rosenthal, 2002; Smith, Jussim, & Eccles, 1999; Snyder & Klein, 2005).

The time is now ripe, we believe, to draw together all of these findings into a more comprehensive understanding of the processes that lead to the confirmation and disconfirmation of interpersonal expectations in social interaction. In an attempt to do so, we will pull the research “camera” back from its close-up on the interaction between a perceiver and a target to take a wider shot that allows us to view the *context* in which the parties are interacting. We believe that an examination of the settings and situations that provide the context for perceivers and targets to come together and interact with each other – the contexts that make expectations accessible or relevant, that arouse moderating motives and goals, and that structure interactions with roles and rules – may help to organize the large and growing research literature on the effects of expectations on social interaction. In short, we believe that it is time to place these interpersonal processes into context.

An example of an interaction between two people as it might unfold in two very different contexts may help to illustrate the important role that context can play in understanding interactions involving expectations and their possible confirmation. Let us begin with the familiar situation of a doctor and patient meeting for the first time in the doctor’s office. This interaction involves a number of features that have been related to behavioral confirmation of expectations. For example, in the doctor’s office, the doctor is granted greater *power* than the target, by virtue of role, expertise and training, as well as control over the setting itself, and for this reason the doctor is more likely to act in the role of perceiver, placing the patient in the target role (see Snyder & Stukas, 1999). Such power makes it more likely that the doctor can guide the social interaction, perhaps in ways that lead to the confirmation of initial expectations about the patient. The *expectations* that the doctor is likely to hold relate to the context: only certain expectations are relevant here – for example, those that relate to the patient’s diagnostic categories, compliance with doctor’s orders, physical attributes, health-related behaviors, as well as, perhaps, stereotypes that link targets’ personal characteristics and group memberships to beliefs about their health. A typical interaction between doctor and patient unfolds according to a familiar script (e.g., Schank & Abelson, 1977) with the doctor asking the patient to report on recent health events and following up with directive questions to obtain information that can guide diagnosis and treatment. The doctor has certain *goals or motives* for the interaction, principally the goal of acquiring knowledge about the target’s condition (and perhaps a secondary goal of trying to speed the interaction). The patient typically has the complementary goal of facilitating the doctor’s information search and providing the information needed to adequately treat any potential problem. However, patients have less latitude to guide the interaction and, with very busy doctors, may report being unable to talk about issues that they feel are relevant. Patients are bound by Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle to supply only truthful and relevant information without providing too much or too little. In other words, the constraints in this situation, based on its formal *norms, roles, and rules*, are loaded toward doctors swiftly gathering information, making a diagnosis, and offering a

treatment – factors that may increase the likelihood of confirmation of the doctor’s expectations for the patient’s behavior in their professional interaction.

In a formal setting such as the doctor’s office, then, there may be little effect of the more idiosyncratic and personal elements of the context, such as the personalities of the doctor and patient, their personal attitudes and preferences, their feelings for each other, and so on – factors that might otherwise constrain social perception and social behavior in the interaction in ways that would lead to the confirmation of these personal expectations. Moreover, the professional context in which doctor and patient interact also has some built-in safeguards against doctors making mistakes: the doctor has access to relatively *objective information* (such as the patient’s charts and advice from other professionals) that may make expectations and judgments reasonably accurate (see Jussim, 1989). Doctors may also receive training that helps them to avoid falling prey to confirmatory judgments in the doctor’s office.

Imagine now that the same doctor and patient meet for the first time, but in a quite different context – at a party. Both people still enter the interaction with expectations about the other in mind, expectations that may guide their behavior and lead to particular outcomes. However, whereas the doctor’s office provided a script, formal rules, and constraints for how each person should act, the script, rules and constraints of a party are less precise. Indeed, the interactants may need to work together to develop a mutually agreed upon definition of the “situation” (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Perinbanayagam, 1974/1981), perhaps as a flirtation or a brief hello, that will help to determine their behavior. The context of the party does not contain an explicit *power* difference between the interactants, perhaps making our former target (the patient) into a perceiver (especially if he or she now has more social power, perhaps by virtue of being a closer friend of the hosts of the party). The expectations that may now be accessible and relevant are very different from those that might be so in the doctor’s office. In fact, the interactants may now notice their respective levels of physical attractiveness, their charm and wit, their *je ne sais quoi* – these are more relevant to the party context. The personalities of the doctor and patient, their personal attitudes and preferences, and their attraction to each other now are much more likely to have effects on their interaction in the rather informal, social context of the party than in the more formal, professional context of the doctor’s office.

Despite these differences in context, the interaction at the party may appear to unfold similarly to the one in the doctor’s office, with an exchange of questions and answers. However, the underlying goals of the interaction may be different in this new context, perhaps with either the doctor or patient hoping to make a new friend out of the other (or, conversely, trying to prevent the other from exercising any romantic designs). Of course, such inclusionary and exclusionary motives probably depend both on their relevance to the context and on the valence of the accessible expectations about the other person (see Snyder & Stukas, 1999). The patient with greater social power may now have the upper hand, working hard to elicit positive sociable behavior from the doctor who may seem to be an attractive *bon vivant* – and such confirmatory pressures may lead the doctor to feel more charming and perhaps to yield to the patient’s flattering treatment. Fortunately,

though, if the doctor hopes to avoid further encounters of this sort with the patient, the rules and norms of a party are such that he or she can easily escape (i.e., this is an open field; Murstein, 1970; Stukas & Snyder, 2004).

In our example, despite the apparent similarity of two people interacting with expectations in mind, a simple change in context invokes a number of differences in the events that transpire in those contexts, thus suggesting that contexts may best be construed as involving an array of interrelated elements. With the change of context from the office to the party, the roles that perceiver and target occupy change from the starkly different roles of doctor and patient to the relatively equivalent roles of partygoers, removing the more extreme power differential between perceiver and target in the earlier setting. The goals that perceivers and targets seek to pursue in their interaction may also change, with the perceiver more motivated to evaluate and to get to know the target in the doctor's office and the target more willing to defer to the perceiver in that setting. The criteria that perceivers use to evaluate targets may also change; that is, the relevance, salience, or accessibility of perceivers' expectations for targets based on targets' real or imagined characteristics may change with the setting. The rules for how participants can and should interact will also change when the context changes from the doctor's office to the party, with both participants being much more constrained about what they can talk about and how they can present themselves in the doctor's office. We could add that features of the environment that change across these settings (such as the types of seating, the presence of specialized equipment, etc.) may also affect the interpersonal processes that occur there, along with the features of the perceivers and targets that make them more or less comfortable or able in these environments (such as their past histories in these settings, their personalities, attitudes, motivations, dress, and so on).

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT: SETTINGS AND SITUATIONS

Our goal here is to begin to develop an understanding of the different ways that contexts may influence social interaction, with an eye toward identifying factors that make the confirmation or disconfirmation of interpersonal expectations more or less likely. In general terms, the context may best be considered as a *gestalt*, or an array of interrelated elements, in terms of the multiple influences it exerts on behavior, affect, and cognition of individuals within it. The context has both *objective* features (the physical reality of the environmental setting) and *subjective* features (the psychological reality of the situation). Although readers may be used to using terms such as "setting" or "situation" rather flexibly and perhaps even interchangeably, we wish to make a clear distinction between these two terms. For purposes of our analysis of context, we define the setting as the environmental location where the interaction is taking place. For us, this is the *objective* component of the interaction context, the *mise-en-scene* that envelops the actors or the stage on which the interaction is set, and it includes all the physical features and objects available to perceivers and targets in their current environment. So, for

example, the setting in the first part of our earlier example is the doctor's office, which may include a scale, some medical instruments, and a table for patients to lie on. By contrast, we define the situation as the consensually agreed upon event that is occurring, the plot of the interaction's narrative that links our characters together. For us, this is the *subjective* component of the interaction context, including all the norms, rules, roles, and scripts that guide the interaction behavior of participants. So, for example, the situation in our earlier example is the doctor's examination of the patient, which begins with simple questions and moves on to checks of eyes, ears, and temperature, and then further if necessary into diagnosis and treatment.

Of course, settings and situations may, at times, be confounded. In their discussion of the many behavior settings found in a Kansas town, Barker and Wright (1955) focused entirely on "standing patterns of behavior" that were "synomorphic" with the non-psychological context (which they referred to as the milieu). Such synomorphic pairings of setting and situation may include religious rituals and ceremonies that take place in churches, mosques, and synagogues, musical performances that are presented and listened to in concert halls and rock clubs, and trials and hearings that are held in a courthouse. Whereas Barker and Wright's definition merges the subjective and objective features of the setting, we hope to keep these features separate in our own definitions. Nevertheless, certain situations *are* more likely to occur in certain settings – the doctor's examination usually occurs in (and is synomorphic with) the doctor's office. Thus, in those settings that are strongly associated with particular situations, the situation itself may become an expectation, with strong norms, rules, scripts, or roles coming easily to mind for both perceivers and targets when they enter the setting. Such expectations are likely to contribute to the consensually agreed upon context for the interaction; as such, behavior may follow an expected course. In this case, we (and others) are often likely to speak of the setting's ability to constrain and influence behavior without referring to the predominant situations found there. Indeed, people may choose settings with proscribed situations as a way of easily defining and guiding the interaction behavior that will occur (e.g., Ickes, Snyder, & Garcia, 1997; Kelley, 1997). Thus, a perceiver may choose a certain setting (e.g., movie theater) as the location for an interaction with a target expected to have certain characteristics (e.g., shy); in this way, the setting itself may contribute to the behavioral confirmation effect (e.g., people do not talk once the movie begins).

However, other settings do not invoke particular situations as clearly and unequivocally, and truly a variety of particular situations may occur in some settings. For example, casual "getting acquainted" social interactions may occur in a range of settings, and will likely share some similarities (e.g., a very general script and conversational norms or rules; Grice, 1975) regardless of the setting in which they occur. In this case, the setting and the situation may be relatively independent of each other, but it is nonetheless important to note that the features of the setting *and* the features of the situation may influence the way in which interactions unfold. Thus, settings can influence the accessibility and relevance of expectations about targets for perceivers and the ways in which perceivers may act on these

expectations, settings can also place physical constraints on the behavior of targets and perceivers, and settings can provide tools and other stimuli that may assist the goals of perceivers and targets in social interactions. Situations, in turn, can assign perceivers and targets to group memberships or roles that guide perception and behavior, situations can offer norms and rules that constrain behavior psychologically, situations can make certain expectations about targets accessible and relevant, situations can highlight particular goals for perceivers and targets, and situations can offer outcomes and future opportunities for the relationship between targets and perceivers.

We believe, too, that there can be a dynamic and reciprocal relation between the interaction context and the behavior that occurs in the interaction. Thus, expectations about interaction partners (perhaps made salient by the setting) may direct behavior that leads to an understanding of the situation. For example, when men and women come together in some task-based settings (such as the corporate office or workplace), gender may be made salient, perhaps because different forms of dress are dictated for men and women. In these settings, male perceivers may hold expectations about female targets (stereotyped as having less ability, perhaps) and may work to define each situation in line with traditional gender roles, even when the men and women in question occupy similar occupational roles. Thus, when faced with a shared task, a male perceiver may encourage the female target to accept a definition of the situation that involves the man giving orders and the woman following them. This may be made easier for the perceiver when the setting possesses no clear rules or norms about gender discrimination or allocation of duties. Perceivers may dominate targets in this case, feeling that this would help to get the task done more effectively; such a strategy has been suggested as a key mediator of behavioral confirmation processes for negative expectations in task-based settings (e.g., Klein & Snyder, 2003). In effect, the situation itself has been created in the setting, based on the available expectations held by perceivers (usually of higher power or status) about targets (usually of lower power or status). Ultimately, the frequent occurrence of such situations within a setting could result in expectations being developed about the setting itself (e.g., that this is a sexist workplace) that could determine the types of people attracted to that setting (e.g., those with sexist beliefs who could reinforce common situations) and perhaps other consequences (e.g., a lawsuit or an investigation by the authorities).

The effects of expectations about people in a setting on the definition of the situation have garnered little research attention to date – and the reciprocal relations between interaction behavior and both subjective and objective features of the context have garnered hardly any at all. Recently, Wittenbrink, Gist, and Hilton (1997) demonstrated the influence of stereotypic expectations on the perception and construal of a social situation presented as evidence in a courtroom setting involving either African-American or White targets/defendants. In these studies, participants with high versus low levels of anti-Black prejudice interpreted the same trial evidence differently, judging either the defendant or his victim to be responsible for an assault. Extrapolating from their work, it may be the case that when a defendant is from a negatively stereotyped group, expectations about how a trial is to be conducted, the jury's ultimate decision, and the appropriateness of

penalties to be applied will be very different from the expectations elicited when the defendant is from a positively stereotyped group. Such research also demonstrates how situations may be construed and defined differently depending upon the characteristics of both the perceiver (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, accessible schemas, and other individual differences) and the target, even in the identical setting (in this case, a courthouse). If judges and juries fall prey to such contextualized decision-making, then this subjective construal of behavior (the appearance of bias) may come to influence how objective settings are perceived, since judges, courthouses, districts, states, and nations acquire reputations based on how they decide cases and mete out punishments. In this way, settings and situations may come to be perceived as “synomorphic” over time (and may even become so), and this combined effect of settings and situations may organize and constrain the behavior of targets and perceivers toward the use and confirmation of certain interpersonal expectations and not others.

Despite these links between settings and situations, for clarity of presentation we have divided our discussion of the effects of context on the processes that lead to the confirmation or disconfirmation of interpersonal expectations into separate sections about the influence of these two aspects of context. Each section begins with a focused review and definition of our terms.

The Setting

Social interactions take place in environments bounded by space and time. Early work by Barker and Wright (1955) presented the “behavior settings” of an entire Kansas town, suggesting that settings control and regulate the behavior found there. Goffman (1959) spoke of “regions” (“any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception” and often “boundaries with respect to time”; p. 106), suggesting that different regions offer different requirements for “decorum” or appropriate behavior. Sells (1963) listed over 200 dimensions to describe the “stimulus determinants of behavior” found in the environment. These authors (and many others; see Smith-Lovin, 1987, for a brief review) contend that, through the presence of stimuli found there and through its ability to structure interaction, the environment in which people interact may play a major role in determining the interpersonal processes that occur in that environmental setting and their outcomes. Our interest here is in how the settings in which perceivers and the targets of their expectations interact guide the interpersonal processes that lead to the confirmation and disconfirmation of interpersonal expectations.

Settings may Determine the Expectations that are Activated Certain interaction settings may be associated with the occurrence of particular situations, and may regulate relevant interaction behaviors that occur in those settings. For these reasons, settings may themselves arouse expectations about who will be the “perceiver” and who will be the “target” as well as the actual behaviors that each person is likely to perform in carrying out their roles. Thus, as Higgins and Stangor (1988) have claimed, schemas and other cognitive structures may be activated by the features of the setting and may go on to influence selective attention and

perception. Thus, to the extent that environmental features are noticed by perceivers and are related to available schemas, these environmental features may influence the types of expectations that perceivers bring to bear on their interactions with targets. For example, a fitness club may call attention to a target's physical appearance (and associated stereotypes about the personalities associated with appearance) whereas a chess match may make the target's intellectual abilities more prominent. To the extent that contextually primed expectations about targets are also salient in the context, they will be more likely to be used to guide interaction (e.g., Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). For example, as Berkowitz and LePage (1967) demonstrated, features of the environment (e.g., a gun vs. a badminton racket) may also make certain ways of behaving more likely to occur. Priming by stimuli in the environment may therefore make it more likely that targets and perceivers act in line with accessible beliefs about each other – which may increase the likelihood of behavioral confirmation.

Nevertheless, even though many stimuli in the physical setting may exert influences on perceivers' ways of thinking and perceiving, it seems clear that a target person is often the focal point of the setting (and a key part of the contextual gestalt) for perceivers. In this regard, Dijksterhuis and Bargh (2001) have summarized research suggesting that simply seeing targets themselves may lead directly and automatically to related behavioral expressions. Thus, upon first viewing a target, perceivers may find themselves acting in ways that their stored mental representations (e.g., stereotypes) suggest targets will act (e.g., walking slowly after viewing an elderly person; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). In actual interactions, such behavior may have the tendency to elicit reciprocal, confirming behaviors from targets; indeed, Chen and Bargh (1997) demonstrated that perceivers subliminally primed with a picture of an African-American (versus White) target subsequently acted in line with that stereotype (i.e., with greater hostility) toward randomly assigned interaction partners on the telephone, who then responded in kind. The behavioral confirmation effect may therefore occur outside of awareness, both for perceivers, who automatically access expectations when they encounter targets and "automatically" behave in line with these expectations, and for targets, who may reciprocate perceivers' behaviors, perhaps also as a result of automatic mimicry of perceivers' behavior (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999).

However, even when perceivers are susceptible to the activation of automatic links from perception of a target to stereotype-congruent treatment of the target, such links are not inevitable. Thus, as Dijksterhuis and Bargh (2001) have suggested, automatic perception-behavior links (i.e., assimilation of behavior to expectations about targets) can be moderated by awareness of disincentives for acting in line with one's perceptions (for example, when strict penalties enforce rules against discrimination in a workplace) or can be overridden by participants' active goals for the current situation (e.g., Macrae & Johnston, 1998), goals which might lead perceivers to use other expectations about targets or might lead them to suppress negative expectations. Some research also suggests that contrast effects may occur for dimensions that are relevant to the particular context at hand and may be more likely than assimilation effects when targets are members of outgroups (that is, perceivers may be less, rather than more, inclined to act in ways associated

with outgroup targets; Spears, Gordijn, Dijksterhuis, & Stapel, 2004). Such contrasts may impede confirmation and even lead to behavioral disconfirmation effects.

Settings may Determine the Relevance and Importance of Expectations Through their ability to dictate the types of interactions that occur within them, environmental settings may guide attention to expected behaviors and evaluation of targets may occur on dimensions relevant to the interactions that are common in the setting. Although a range of expectations about targets may be available to perceivers, only certain expectations will be useful for the interaction at hand. Thus, in a hospital setting, we may tread lightly, concerned that every stranger we meet could be in a state of grief or anguish; we may even look for signs of tears or stress to confirm our expectations. In a dark inner city alley setting, we may worry that every passing person is a mugger, looking for pockets bulging with guns or the glint of a knife in the moonlight. In both cases, the clues or cues that we seek are those that would confirm or disconfirm expectations that are relevant to situations common to the setting at hand. Relevant expectations may be applied uniformly and equally to all targets, because the setting makes certain behaviors expected for targets. To the extent that behaviors are mandated by a setting (i.e., people are likely to be reserved in hospitals), targets may be more likely to collude, in effect, with perceivers to provide confirmation of setting-induced expectations. Indeed, Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) have demonstrated how the environmental context itself may automatically activate norms that guide behavior. In their research, pictures of a library induced participants to speak more softly, but only when they had an explicit goal to visit the library. These findings have implications for how settings will prime ways of interacting for perceivers and targets when settings are associated with clearly defined norms.

Perceivers may also have expectations for how specific targets will act in a setting. Thus, people dressed in scrubs in a hospital are not expected to be grieving (instead, we may expect them to be inured to such emotions). Well-known stereotypes link race and ethnicity to criminal acts, so we may hold expectations about who is likely to mug us, and be particularly alarmed when we meet them in a dark alley. Selective attention and interpretation, as well as confirmatory processes in perception and behavior, can lead perceivers to see or to elicit confirmation for these setting-induced expectations about targets (e.g., Klein & Snyder, 2003; Snyder & Stukas, 1999). Thus, features of the setting may interact with characteristics of the target to make certain expectations more relevant and important, and therefore more likely to lead to confirmation for some targets than for others.

Settings may Place Limits on Behavior Simply put, only certain behaviors can be enacted in certain environments. A 100-yard dash is impossible on an airplane. No one is about to set off fireworks indoors. The physical features of a setting may prevent some actions and facilitate others (Barker, 1968). Thus, behavior may be constrained in a setting, making some expectations immediately irrelevant for perceivers and unlikely to be confirmed by target behavior. As Fiedler and Walther (2004) have pointed out, structural aspects of environments

may allow for only certain behaviors on the part of targets (a select sample of their behavioral repertoires), notwithstanding the fact that the perceiver may be considered a part of the environment and may influence the target's behavior with him or her. Thus, perceivers' expectation-congruent views of targets may be due to the select behaviors to which they are exposed (especially from relatively large samples of targets with similar characteristics), rather than (or in addition to) any motivation-induced bias to notice only expectation-confirming behavior or to interpret behavior in line with expectations (Fiedler & Walther, 2004). The likelihood that perceivers see only a limited sample of target behavior seems stronger when one considers that perceivers and targets may only interact with each other in certain settings; for example, teachers and pupils rarely meet outside of the school (where their behavior may be quite different). Moreover, perceivers' ability to act on their expectations for targets may be constrained by physical features of a setting; for example, in an especially noisy setting, non-verbal behaviors alone may not be enough to allow perceivers to guide targets to confirm expectations.

At the same time, settings may also provide norms and rules that regulate behavior. Thus, people are quiet in libraries and places of worship. Similarly, it is difficult to be depressed or somber during a pub's happy hours. In many ways, these setting-induced norms and rules are evoked as a direct result of the psychological situations that typically occur in certain physical settings. However, Gibson and Werner (1994) have also detailed how "setting programs" (the rules governing behavior in the particular physical environment) may be communicated to first-time users of a setting, such that individuals may be more likely to conform to a setting's norms (its program) when they are in a distinct (or "legible") setting with clear rules for behavior. Specifically, Gibson and Werner modified an airport's waiting area to make its policy about smoking clearer, doing so by relocating ashtrays to certain areas, posting no smoking signs, and clarifying area boundaries with clear lines of demarcation. As a result, fewer airport-goers smoked in unacceptable places, perhaps chiefly because newcomers to the now legible setting were better able to recognize the rules for behavior, but also because people in legible areas were more likely to speak up to enforce the rules. It follows from these findings that perceivers who choose such legible settings for interactions with targets expected to act in setting-congruent fashion may be more likely to elicit behavioral confirmation (by virtue of the setting's clear rules for behavior alone, perhaps).

Settings may also influence behavior in less overt ways. To characterize the ways in which settings are perceived (i.e., their "affective meaning"), Smith-Lovin (1987) asked participants to use Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum's (1957) semantic differential method to rate 345 different settings on the dimensions of evaluation, potency, and activity. Her results demonstrated that participants had no trouble discriminating between settings on these dimensions. Thus, settings may be seen as positive or negative (the evaluative dimension), with large or small power differentials between people (the potency dimension), and as lively or sedate (the activity dimension). More importantly, these characteristics of settings had effects on perceptions of the actors in the setting and the behaviors that occurred there. Behaviors that were in line with the characteristic affective tone or activity level

(“tempo”) for a setting were seen more positively and those that were out of line were seen more negatively. It follows that targets who typically occupy positive or negative settings may become associated with positive or negative impressions and expectations. Funeral directors, people who live near cemeteries or abattoirs, and even those who hail from cities with dangerous reputations may be evaluated more negatively by others, whereas cruise directors, people who live near beaches or scenic vistas, and those who hail from cities that are tourist destinations may be evaluated more positively, even when not in their home settings. Expectations and treatment may follow from such setting-related classical conditioning of attitudes. Smith-Lovin also suggested that behaviors that occur in a particular setting (murders, for example) can lend particular connotations to the setting (e.g., negative tone) for some time to come. The bottom line is that knowledge about specific settings and their characteristics may influence the behaviors that are enacted there and behavior may influence subsequent judgments of the context.

Settings also may be more or less constraining for some targets and perceivers than for others. For example, some people may be granted greater power in a setting by virtue of their personal characteristics (i.e., elderly people get the front seats on the bus, and the chair of the board of directors sits at the head of the conference table and wields the gavel). As Goffman (1959) has pointed out, those with control over the setting (the *maitre d'* in a restaurant or the bouncer at a club, for example) can and will dictate what goes on there. Thus, perceivers who control the setting may have the power to see their expectations for targets confirmed (e.g., Copeland, 1994). Indeed, settings that place expectations about targets in high relief, especially those in which interactions revolve around evaluation of targets (such as police interrogation rooms, doctors' and therapists' offices, classrooms, and courthouses), are settings in which perceivers are likely to have control and, as such, are likely to become “confirmation-prone” settings.

Settings Offer Tools that Aid and Abet Interpersonal Processes As Lewin (1936) theorized, the life space may contain both facilitating and restraining forces that make goals more or less achievable. The same may be true of the settings in which perceivers and targets interact, with certain goals being easier to reach, by virtue of the features of the specific environment, than others. For example, a perceiver intent on romance may pick a nearby flower to present as a gift to a target she or he wishes to impress. A target may find that nearby magazines or brochures allow for a change of topic or an easy distraction that “sends a message” to an overeager perceiver. The presence of such “tools” in the environmental setting may make certain goals more accessible and reachable. Thus, tools may either assist perceivers to elicit confirmation of their expectations or assist targets in their efforts to disconfirm expectations, depending upon the tool, its usage, and the context.

The Situation

Although physical settings may dictate the types of interactions that occur within them, it is also true that some settings (e.g., a park) allow for a range of different

interactions (e.g., a game of catch, an avid discussion, people-watching). In these less specified environments, we may profit from taking the psychological *situation*, as it is perceived and experienced by those interacting, as the contextual unit of analysis. Arguments, getting-acquainted conversations, robberies, flirtations, birthday parties, fistfights, negotiations, and many other interpersonal situations may occur in a variety of settings. In some cases, the participants may only come to appreciate the definition of the situation after a certain amount of interaction has occurred; that is, the situation represents a shared subjective reality that gains shape as it progresses. Thus, a con game is only slowly and excruciatingly revealed, at least to its target, and arguments usually materialize only once people have declared their conflicting positions. The amount of time and effort it takes to agree upon a consensual definition of the situation may depend (in part) on how far apart people are in their original expectations about the interaction. For example, people from different cultures may find it more difficult to agree on the terms and meaning of their interaction than people from the same culture. Many comedies (or tragedies, for that matter) have been precipitated by the initially mistaken or mismatched interpretations of one or both participants in a shared situation. After the situation is clearly and consensually defined, its norms and rules may have great influence on the behavior of participants. As Goffman (1959) observed, such a working consensus is functional, in that it allows people to avoid conflict and to enact behaviors that create desired impressions to reach their current goals.

Ultimately, the setting can help to define the situation, give people roles and identities, evoke goals and motives, and thereby make certain expectations relevant and thus certain outcomes likely to occur. At other times, it is the situation (regardless of setting) that dictates the identities of individuals (e.g., when a fight breaks out, people may take sides and those sides may be equally confrontational whatever the setting in which the fight occurs). When people come together in social interaction, they typically have a preconceived purpose for interacting, whether it is to pass the time in a friendly chat or to determine the best candidate for a job. This guiding purpose for interacting can place people into particular roles and relationships (e.g., doctor and patient, interviewer and interviewee, buyer and seller). Each pre-ordained (or subsequently negotiated) situation also comes with its own rules of decorum. Similarly, each situation makes certain aspects of individuals relevant or important. For example, to the extent that individuals may be contrasted by their group memberships, such identifications may become more important or relevant for the interaction at hand (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

The concept of situational context that we are elaborating is a *social* one, focusing on contexts in which perceivers and targets come together to interact. We are specifically concerned with the ways that actual behavior and perceptions of self and other are shaped by the interactions that occur within the contexts of different social episodes.

Situations may Place People into Roles Structural symbolic interactionist theorists (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000) have suggested that society's organizations and institutions (its social structure) dictate the social networks into which people

fit. Social roles are conceived of as expectations attached to positions in relationships or networks; the many roles that a person occupies are internalized as identities that are ordered in terms of their salience (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000). Although salience is typically discussed as a chronic condition (determining a person's stable self), it is no small leap to imagine that a particular role's salience may be influenced by the situational context as well. Most likely, the immediate situation interacts with a person's longstanding role expectations to make some roles and identities more easily adopted than others. Indeed, people may help to guide the definition of a situation to allow them to occupy a salient or preferred role; in fact, social interaction may be conceived as an "identity negotiation" (e.g., Swann, 1987), albeit one that does not always resolve smoothly or swiftly. Commitment to a role may also reflect a person's interest in maintaining a relationship with people who interact with her or him in the role (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000); thus, targets may continue to confirm role expectations to the extent that they desire to maintain relationships with perceivers who treat them in line with the role.

As one example of this process, let us return to our example about men and women interacting in the workplace. In most workplace situations, occupational roles (complete with their associated expectations for behavior) should be the most salient roles for both men and women. However, as Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) have pointed out, when gender is made salient (perhaps because it differentiates the actors), "unconscious performance expectations shape behavior in a self-fulfilling way" (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999, p. 200). In other words, men and women are affected by and act toward each other in terms of both appropriate occupational role expectations and inappropriate gender role expectations. Women may be led to act in ways that are gender stereotypical (e.g., caring, nurturing, dependent) but that are incommensurate with their occupational roles and duties. Beliefs about gender may have their strongest effects in less formally stratified situations, when other hierarchical role relationships are absent, and even in interactions between men and women who occupy structurally equivalent roles. Moreover, cultural beliefs about gender can influence the structural contexts in which men and women interact; that is, occupational roles deemed appropriate for (and subsequently held by) men and women may reflect and perpetuate beliefs about gender. These structural contexts tend to impart roles to women, such as mother, wife, employee, consumer, or significant other, that possess less status or power than the roles occupied by men in the same contexts (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Indeed, it is easy to see how stereotypes about men and women can be the result of situations that assign different roles to men and women (e.g., Eagly & Steffen, 1984). As well, these stereotypes can and do influence the dynamics and outcomes of gender relevant interactions that occur in such situations (e.g., Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982).

Situations may Make Group Memberships Salient Although much work on confirmation and disconfirmation has used expectations based on personality traits (e.g., introversion or extraversion) and other person-specific attributes (e.g., physical attractiveness), implications are often drawn about the effects of

culturally shared stereotypes based on group memberships, such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Recently, Klein and Snyder (2003) have attempted to generalize from *interpersonal* interactions to *intergroup* relations, especially those involving a target who belongs to a stigmatized group and a perceiver who belongs to a non-stigmatized group. In line with current theorizing about stigma (e.g., Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998), they see the devaluing of an individual as situationally determined; that is, the context defines which individuals (or characteristics of individuals) are devalued and which are not (see also Turner et al., 1987). Thus, in their dealings with each other, one person may be stigmatized and the other not.

Intergroup relations, and interactions between individual members of these groups, are often underscored by power differences between the groups involved, related both to social stereotypes and to access to real resources. Klein and Snyder (2003) suggested that a high-power perceiver is most likely to define the target in terms of trait dimensions that differentiate the target from the perceiver and that are relevant to the goal of the situation at hand. If a target's group membership invokes interaction-relevant traits, or if the interaction involves tasks that are typical of the target's social category, then expectations based on this categorization are likely to initiate confirmation processes. Like other social interactions, intergroup interactions may occur in different situational contexts. For example, Klein and Snyder (2003) divided first encounters between members of different groups into getting acquainted interactions and task-focused interactions, suggesting that the former will activate expectations based on sociability and the latter will activate expectations related to skills and abilities, with the confirmation of each type of expectation characteristic of each type of interaction.

Situations may Determine the Characteristics that People Express On some occasions, then, the definition of the situation surrounding an interaction may evolve through the differentiation of perceivers and targets into separate social categories. However, on other occasions, the definition of the situation may develop based on perceivers' pre-existing expectations about the personality of the target. Such expectations have played a major role in research on interpersonal processes (e.g., Snyder & Stukas, 1999). Although it has been useful for many researchers to conceive of people in terms of their traits and dispositions, there has been an emerging trend toward a focus on the interaction of person and situation (e.g., Snyder & Ickes, 1985) and the ways that particular contexts influence the perception and behavior of particular individuals (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Indeed, research suggests that perceivers view targets differently when they are placed in different contexts (e.g., Malloy, Albright, Kenny, Agatstein, & Winquist, 1997). Even automatically activated stereotypes may be influenced by the context in which targets are perceived; for example, Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park (2001) have demonstrated that exposure to stereotyped targets (i.e., African Americans) in either positive (i.e., church, family barbecue) or negative (dilapidated street corner, gang-related incident) contexts can result in the activation and accessibility of more positive or more negative implicit attitudes, respectively, in the minds of perceivers.

Moreover, actual behavior by targets and perceivers may also change as a

function of context. For example, Mischel and Shoda (1995) have proposed that “cognitive-affective units” mediate the link between “psychological features of situations” and behavior. Thus, different people will exhibit different “behavioral signatures” in different contexts, based on their own idiographic sets of “if . . . then . . .” profiles, derived from the array of cognitive-affective units activated for them in particular situations (Mischel, Shoda, & Mendoza-Denton, 2002). The implications of this view for the study of interpersonal processes are considerable. One such implication is that behavioral confirmation effects will be restricted to “in context” interactions in the particular situation in which perceivers and targets typically interact, whereas confirmation will be absent in “out-of-context” interactions, which may even lead to behavioral disconfirmation of the perceiver’s original expectations. More generally, it is possible to think of targets and perceivers as having a large number of potentially relevant cognitive-affective units, but only a certain circumscribed set that are relevant at any given time in any given situation. To the extent that perceivers’ expectations for targets match up with targets’ propensities for behaving, then behavioral confirmation is likely to occur.

Relationships with significant others may help to shape situations for perceivers and targets that can contribute to their expectations and their behavior. Andersen and Chen (2002) have suggested that people possess different relational selves that are activated when they are interacting in particular relationship contexts. These relational selves bring with them rules and roles that help to define the situation and guide behavior. These relational selves sometimes may be activated outside of their usual context, such as when a new acquaintance resembles a familiar relationship partner. Treatment of that new person in line with expectations and beliefs about the familiar other can even have self-fulfilling effects, as Berk and Andersen (2000) have shown with regard to the transference of positive and negative feelings by perceivers to a target who resembles a familiar other. Treatment that results from the activation of relational selves with more appropriate partners also seems likely to guide and shape responses from these partners, responses that may then reinforce the nature of the relationship and its corresponding behavioral expectations.

Situations may Make Goals Relevant or Accessible There are many reasons why people engage in social interaction. In most of the studies of the confirmation and disconfirmation of interpersonal expectations, perceivers and targets have interacted in order to get acquainted or to complete some other task, such as to choose a job candidate or to offer counseling to a peer. As Klein and Snyder (2003) have noted, interactions may be either sociability or task based; such differences in task type may lead to different behaviors by perceivers in pursuit of different ends, and may dictate which expectations are likely to be confirmed in which situations. Hilton and Darley (1991) have theorized that situations may place perceivers in either an *assessment* set (e.g., when interviewing or getting acquainted), making confirmation of expectations less likely because perceivers may individuate targets, or in an *action* set (e.g., when engaging in some other task), making confirmation more likely because perceivers do not individuate targets but instead rely on expectations derived from category judgments.

Vescio, Snyder, and Butz (2003) have suggested that situations may also lead perceivers to be *strength-focused* or *weakness-focused* in their social influence strategies for dealing with targets. Strength-focused perceivers activate the positive characteristics of targets and anticipate the ways in which targets may help perceivers to meet their goals, whereas weakness-focused perceivers activate the negative characteristics of targets and anticipate the ways in which targets may block perceivers from meeting their goals. Environments that offer bonuses for successful performance may encourage strength-focused strategies and environments that punish unsuccessful performance with harsh penalties may encourage weakness-focused strategies. Vescio et al. (2003) have demonstrated how these strategies lead perceivers either to utilize or not to utilize stereotypes of targets. That is, perceivers who interact with targets stereotyped with “matching” features (i.e., weakness-focused perceivers pay attention to stereotypic weaknesses) are more likely to utilize stereotypes than perceivers who interact with targets stereotyped with “non-matching” features (i.e., strength-focused perceivers do not pay attention to stereotypic weaknesses). All of these differences in situations may lead to differences in the likelihood of behavioral confirmation and disconfirmation, because they make different characteristics of targets relevant to perceivers and they influence the strategies that perceivers use in their interactions with targets.

In addition, many interpersonal situations arouse goals related to impression management. Often, people think about how they wish to appear in a situation (e.g., Goffman, 1959); for example, a cocktail party with professional colleagues may activate the goal of demonstrating knowledge or competence, which may be satisfied by talking more than others and even by talking over others deemed less important. However, situations may also arouse goals that deal with the practicalities of tasks at hand, as people seek to produce tangible outcomes. For example, job interviews may activate an employer’s goal of finding the best candidate, which may be satisfied by asking challenging questions (especially, perhaps, of candidates thought to be particularly unsuitable). Situations that arouse goals in perceivers that call on them to use information about targets and to make decisions about targets based on that information (e.g., interviews, first dates, interrogations, examinations) may lead perceivers to perform activities that make confirmation more likely (e.g., Snyder & Haugen, 1994). Situations that arouse goals in targets that can be met by deferring to perceivers (e.g., classes, therapeutic sessions, interviews, examinations, or even first dates with extremely desirable others) may lead targets to confirm even erroneous expectations (e.g., Snyder & Haugen, 1995).

More generally, just as there may be confirmation-prone settings, there may be confirmation-prone situations that involve “well-worn” patterns of behavior that guide perceivers to utilize expectations about targets in ways that lead targets to confirm these expectations. For example, teachers think of students with regard to their intellectual abilities, coaches think of athletes in terms of their physical abilities, and so on. Such expectations may be facilitated in the majority of situations that involve interactions between these parties (but perhaps especially when those situations are synomorphic with the settings of classroom and sports field, respectively): that is, perceivers may be more confident of their expectations and more readily act on their expectations in these relevant situations. Similarly, in

many of these confirmation-prone situations, targets may find relevant aspects of their own behavior salient and may seek to fit into the expectations held by perceivers, perhaps even going so far as to collude with perceivers to confirm erroneous expectations (particularly positive expectations, such as “smart” or “strong”) by presenting a more exaggerated version of their self than they usually do. Such collusion may be more likely when targets respect and yield to the expert power granted to perceivers in many confirmation-prone situations (e.g., Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001).

However, some situations may arouse goals in targets that lead them to disconfirm erroneous expectations and some situations may arouse goals in perceivers that do not require them to utilize expectations about targets, erroneous or otherwise. Rules and penalties have been built into some situations, such as those involving employer and employee or teacher and student, that are intended to ward off discriminatory use of stereotypes and erroneous expectations. In such situations, targets may be empowered to act in ways that disconfirm perceivers’ expectations even as perceivers may seek to avoid using socially sanctioned expectations. Indeed, any situation that is defined as empowering a previously negatively stereotyped target may be a situation that leads either to the disconfirmation of perceivers’ expectations for targets or to no effect of these expectations on behavior.

Finally, perceiver and target goals should be considered together as well as separately. For example, Graham, Argyle, and Furnham (1980) have suggested that in an interpersonal situation each person’s goals might be independent, compatible, or in conflict. Thus, when perceivers and targets share compatible goals, confirmation may result as a part of the orderly unfolding of the situation: that is, interviews and interrogations, therapeutic sessions, and doctor’s examinations flow more smoothly when perceivers take control and targets yield to perceivers’ control. Incompatible goals may lead to goals being thwarted, and even result in disconfirmation of expectations. In such cases, consensus about even the very definition of the situation may be slow to develop. First dates do not always result in perceivers leading targets to confirm their expectations: If a perceiver who finds a target attractive seeks to have further contact with a target who does not share the attraction, the outcome is probably not going to be confirmation of the perceiver’s initial expectations of good things to come from this first date. Moving from situations defined as “first dates” to those defined as “burgeoning romances” may be difficult when goals are incompatible, but may appear (to observers) to happen surprisingly swiftly when goals line up.

Situations may Place Constraints on Behavior Snyder and Ickes (1985) have discussed differences between situations that can be classified as “strong” and those that can be classified as “weak”. Strong situations (such as golf tournaments, the movies, and many social psychological experiments) are those that contain clear rules and norms for behavior (and thus generally inhibit individual differences), whereas weak situations (such as dances, picnics, and studies using Ickes’ Dyadic Interaction Paradigm) contain fewer rules or norms (and thus allow for individual differences to be expressed). In strong situations with many constraints

on behavior, perceivers and targets may agree on the types of behaviors that may be enacted, and perceivers are likely to see their expectations confirmed. However, when perceivers hold erroneous expectations about targets, constraints that make confirmation-inducing behaviors on the part of perceivers more likely and that simultaneously prevent targets from engaging in disconfirming behaviors will make confirmatory outcomes all the more likely. Thus, strong situations that place great cognitive load on perceivers, such as situations that involve multi-tasking, lead perceivers to rely heavily on generalized expectations in their dealings with targets (e.g., Biesanz et al., 2001; Harris & Perkins, 1995). Police interrogations, job interviews, and other strong situations that limit targets' response options may also limit targets' chances for disconfirmation (e.g., Kassin, Goldstein, & Savitsky, 2003; see also Chapter 5 in this volume). In weak situations with few constraints, by contrast, the likelihood of behavioral confirmation may depend on other factors such as the ability of the perceiver to guide and influence the target's actions (by virtue of their greater interpersonal power, perhaps) or the target's actual characteristics. That is, in weak situations, targets may have more opportunities to actively disconfirm perceivers' erroneous expectations (especially, perhaps, if they are aware of them; Hilton & Darley, 1985; Stukas & Snyder, 2002). This is not to say that confirmation of erroneous expectations will always occur in strong situations and will never occur in weak situations, but only that the rules and constraints of a situation may themselves promote or prevent confirmation or disconfirmation of certain interpersonal expectations.

The constraints of language may also shape behavior in interpersonal situations. In many, if not most, interactions, formal rules about appropriate ways to communicate may be in place. Grice's (1975) well-known cooperative principle and maxims of conversation may capture some of the constraints on targets and perceivers. For example, a target who seeks to follow the maxim of "relation", which suggests that communication should be relevant to the recipient, might provide answers to the perceiver's queries which only show one side of his or her personality, the side which just happens to confirm the perceiver's expectations. Therefore, it may be the case that, on some occasions, behavioral confirmation of erroneous interpersonal expectations occurs not because perceivers and targets act on motives or desires that promote such behaviors, but rather because both participants are following well-known rules of conversation or of the situation (e.g., Fiedler & Walther, 2004).

Furthermore, communicative messages and definitions of situations (or even cultures themselves) may be developed in specific interactions based on "shared reality" or understandings held by both parties. For example, Lau, Chiu, and Lee (2001) have suggested that communicators design their messages based on their assumptions about the knowledge that the recipient holds and that, through communication, interactants develop a mutually acceptable definition of the situation. If perceivers use their expectations about what a target is like as a basis for constructing shared reality with the target *and* targets seek to cooperate with perceivers in constructing this reality (e.g., Grice, 1975) by going along with perceivers' attempts to define the situation, then behavioral confirmation may very well occur.

Different Situations may Offer Different Potential Outcomes and Opportunities

As Murstein (1970) has noted, interpersonal interactions may take place either in “closed” fields, in which interaction partners are predetermined and environments are difficult to exit (such as workplaces), or in “open” fields, in which opportunities exist to approach or avoid interaction partners and to leave the field (such as parties). In open fields, then, perceivers may be especially likely to act on their desires to include or exclude targets in their social networks, which may lead targets to confirm expectations. However, the ability to leave an open field and terminate social interaction unilaterally may make confirmation of positive expectations more likely than confirmation of negative expectations in open fields (e.g., Stukas & Snyder, 2004). Perceivers may need to exert extra influence on the targets of their positive expectations in order to persuade them to remain in social interaction and possibly to consent to future interactions; such extra effort may lead more easily to confirmation of these positive expectations. Conversely, perceivers who hold negative expectations about targets in open fields may choose to end social interactions early and to decline invitations for future interaction, thereby preventing the interactions from getting to the point where their treatment of targets could elicit behaviors confirming their expectations; moreover, by precluding further interactions, perceivers effectively deny the targets of negative expectations the opportunity to work to disconfirm these negative motivations, should they be so motivated, with the net effect being that, in the absence of interaction, negative expectations may remain unchallenged in the minds of perceivers (for a related point, see Denrell, 2005). In closed fields, when future interactions are more-or-less guaranteed, confirmation of positive and negative expectations may depend on other elements of the context.

In addition, and related to differences between open and closed fields, situations differ in the extent to which they allow participants to exercise power and control over outcomes in their dealing with others. Such differences in outcome control and power have been linked to the confirmation of expectations in social interaction (see Snyder & Kiviniemi, 2001). Copeland (1994), for example, manipulated whether perceivers or targets were in a position to choose a partner (either their current interaction partner or another third party) for an upcoming game in which money could be won. He also provided perceivers with randomly assigned expectations about targets. When perceivers had the ability to control targets’ outcomes, behavioral confirmation of expectations was more likely than when targets’ had the ability to control perceivers’ outcomes. Further analyses suggested that low-powered participants were motivated by desires to get along well with the high-powered participants, a motivation that is known to lead targets to confirm perceivers’ expectations of them (e.g., Snyder & Haugen, 1995); conversely, high-powered participants were motivated to get to know their partners’ personalities, a motivation that is known to lead perceivers to elicit behavioral confirmation from the targets of their expectations (e.g., Snyder & Haugen, 1994). Thus, situations that provide outcome control to perceivers but not to targets might make behavioral confirmation particularly likely, whereas increasing the interdependence of perceivers and targets (or giving targets more outcome control) might reduce this likelihood. Although such outcome control may be

collectively determined (as when groups elect a leader), determined at random (as when a coin is flipped), or determined by convention (through such devices as turn-taking, alphabetical order, ordering by age, gender, or experience), it is likely that those who are granted power to make decisions, and more importantly to direct others' behaviors or to assign them roles, may ultimately use interpersonal expectations or stereotypes as the basis for their actions, potentially increasing the likelihood of behavioral confirmation.

CONCLUSIONS

We have oriented our discussion of the effects of context on interpersonal processes in terms of two frameworks for organizing contextual features: the setting and the situation. We have defined the setting as the environmental location where a social interaction is taking place, the objective component of the context, including all the physical features and objects available to perceivers and targets in their current environment. We have defined the situation in more psychological ways, as the consensually agreed upon event that is occurring, the subjective component of the interaction context, including all the norms, rules, roles, and scripts that guide the interaction behavior of participants. We hope to have demonstrated that by placing social interactions into the contexts provided by their settings and situations, a greater potential for understanding when and why expectations will be confirmed and disconfirmed in social interaction can be achieved. As we have tried to convey, settings and situations may have strong influences on the ways that interactions unfold, on the expectations that perceivers and targets hold, on their goals, on their behaviors, and on the outcomes of their interactions. More specifically, we believe that pulling our research camera back to examine social interaction in a wide-angle, long-shot reveals a more complex and nuanced picture, in which the objective and subjective elements of the context may influence interpersonal processes at each step of the way in people's dealings with each other.

Toward these ends, we have articulated a set of principles that capture the effects of settings and situations, and we have discussed the potential ways in which contextual variations may facilitate or inhibit the phenomena of interest. We have detailed how settings and situations may determine the accessibility and relevance of expectations that perceivers hold about targets, and even the self-perceptions of targets themselves. We have proposed ways that these contexts may lead perceivers to act (or not to act) on their expectations in certain ways (both automatic and intentional) that allow situation-specific goals to be met in the course of social interaction. We have considered the ways that targets respond to perceivers' behavioral strategies and the ways that context can and does guide targets' behaviors, sometimes leading to confirmation, sometimes to disconfirmation, and sometimes to no effects at all. Finally, we have discussed the influence of settings and situations on perceivers' final perceptions of targets and on the ultimate outcomes of their interactions.

Our analysis also reveals that we are not alone in stepping back to survey the contextual landscape. Indeed, social scientists of various stripes, including both

psychologists and sociologists, have increasingly come to recognize that the processes and outcomes of people's dealings with each other may change in meaningful and predictable ways from context to context. We hope that, from such considerations of context, there will emerge a broad and comprehensive, holistic, and integrative perspective on social interaction, interpersonal relationships, and intergroup relations.

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