

Misperceiving Negotiation Counterparts: When Situationally Determined Bargaining Behaviors Are Attributed to Personality Traits

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Several experiments provided evidence that negotiators make systematic errors in personality-trait attributions for the bargaining behaviors of their counterparts. Although basic negotiation behavior is highly determined by bargaining positions, negotiators primarily interpret their counterpart's behavior in terms of the counterpart's personality, such as his or her level of cooperativeness or agreeableness. Data support a model of 4 processes that contribute to misperceptions: (a) the primacy of situations in determining bargaining behavior, (b) the primacy of personality traits in attributions, (c) the lack of sufficient information about the other's situation to discount personality attributions, and (d) the potentially self-confirming consequences of personality attributions for subsequent interactions. The authors discuss implications for research areas such as social cognition in negotiation, accuracy in social perception, and the dynamics of belief confirmation.

The psychology of resolving mixed-motive conflicts has long been of interest to social psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists, not only because explicit negotiations are ubiquitous and consequential phenomena in work and political life, but also because many other interpersonal relations can be modeled as negotiations of mixed-motive conflicts (Axelrod, 1984; Kelley & Thibaut, 1954; Strauss, 1964). In the psychology of conflict resolution, an important role is played by negotiators' perceptions of their counterparts. Social psychol-

ogists have argued that interpersonal conflicts are particularly likely to give rise to attributions of personality traits to one's counterpart (Orvis, Kelley, & Butler, 1976). Conflict theorists have suggested that a negotiator's attributions for a counterpart's behavior exert a pivotal influence on the negotiator's strategic decisions (Schelling, 1960). A first purpose of the current research is to investigate regularities in the personal dispositions perceived in negotiation counterparts as a function of structural features of the conflict. A second purpose is to investigate the consequences of these attributions on decisions in subsequent interactions with the counterpart.

If attributions in conflict have far-reaching consequences, it is important to know whether attributions are accurate—whether the perceived causes of negotiation behavior correspond to the actual causes. To address this, we reviewed the literature on the actual and perceived causes of negotiation behavior, and then we developed hypotheses about systematic attributional biases in which effects of specific negotiation situations are misinterpreted in terms of specific personality traits. Our methods are influenced by recent social perception researchers (e.g., McArthur & Baron, 1983; Swann, 1984) who have mounted challenges to traditional evidence that attributions are biased and have defended more stringent criteria for identifying attribution errors. In a first experiment we tested hypotheses about two general patterns of misperception. In a second experiment we tested hypotheses about four component social psychological processes that contribute to misperceptions in negotiations.

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Background

Actual Causes of Negotiation Behavior

A point where the findings of social psychology diverge from the core beliefs of conventional Western social thought is the degree to which an individual's behavior is shaped by stable personal characteristics as opposed to temporary social situations. Milgram's (1963) famous obedience experiment, in which pressure from an authority figure led participants to deliver painful electric shocks, illustrates the extent to which people's behavior is determined by the pressures and incentives of a situation. Sometimes even minor factors in a person's situation shape behavior to a greater extent than the most central factors in the person's character. A classic illustration is Darley and Batson's (1973) study of the determinants of altruistic behavior. They observed whether seminary students heading across campus to deliver a sermonette on the Good Samaritan stopped to assist a stranger in medical need. The probability of stopping was not at all influenced by whether the student had indicated "helping others" was a central religious value. However, stopping was influenced by whether the student had been made to feel that he or she was running late to deliver the sermon. In sum, acting as a Good Samaritan was determined more by the superficial constraints of a person's situation than by the person's deepest values.

Empirical research on the determinants of negotiation behavior has yielded similar conclusions. Many researchers have modeled negotiations by running experiments in which participants play bargaining games. Recent reviews of this work have concluded that important components of bargaining behavior, such as the extent to which a negotiator haggles with his or her counterpart instead of making concessions, are greatly determined by a player's economic bargaining situation and little determined by personality traits (Thompson, 1990). A second research paradigm has been direct observation of naturally occurring negotiations. Although researchers in this tradition have generally not been able to take the measurements required for testing causal hypotheses, their interpretive conclusions about the causes of negotiators' behavior have paralleled those from bargaining game experiments in their emphasis on the importance of situations and unimportance of personality. From one of the more comprehensive studies of industrial negotiators inside and outside the bargaining room, Douglas (1962) concluded that a negotiator "more nearly resembles his opposite number in the conference room than himself outside the conference room" (p. 159).

Perceived Causes of Negotiation Behavior

The fascination of social psychologists with attributions for behavior is owed in part to discoveries of systematic biases, which seem to play a pivotal role in many social interactions. Ichheiser noted that we have "in everyday life the tendency to interpret and evaluate the behavior of other people in terms of *specific personality characteristics* rather than in terms of *specific social situations* in which these people are placed" (Ichheiser, 1943, p. 151; emphasis added). This bias was explained by Heider (1958) in terms of a gestalt perceptual process and more recently by Nisbett and Ross (1980) in terms of judgmental heuristics; it is referred to as the *fundamental attribution error* (Ross, 1977) or the tendency to make correspondent inferences from behaviors to traits (Jones,

1990). It is most clearly documented in contexts where the actual causes of behavior are known. For example, Safer (1980) found that observers of a film of Milgram's (1963) experiment attributed the actions of obedient participants to sadistic personalities rather than to the situational pressure to comply with authority. Likewise, Pietromonaco and Nisbett (1982) found that participants who read about Darley and Batson's (1973) seminarians attributed the behavior of the hurried seminarians to their personalities rather than their situation.

The attribution of negotiation behavior to personality traits rather than situational constraints (although familiar to those who have been privy to the thoughts of disputants in a contentious strike or divorce) has been the subject of relatively few experimental studies. Although researchers have run many experiments using detailed simulations of negotiation procedures to search for actual effects of personality in negotiations, research on perceptions of opponents has primarily involved abstract conflict games and perceptions of strategy or intent. Nonetheless, studies have found that an opponent's situational constraints are often misunderstood. Dorris, Gentry, and Kelley (1966) created a bidding game in which a buyer and a seller were each given a limit on the price on which they could settle and still make a profit. When sellers had a high limit, deals were less likely. Interestingly, although participants knew their counterparts were constrained by an externally imposed limit, they nonetheless attributed their counterparts' behavior to personal intent: sellers in the high-limit condition were perceived by counterparts to have a competitive intent. In similar studies of buyer-seller games, participants have systematically underestimated their counterpart's limit (Kelley et al., 1970; Pruitt & Drews, 1969). When participants had the option of attributing a behavior to both personal and situational factors, they primarily attributed it to personal factors (Kelley et al., 1967). These early studies of perceptions of conflict counterparts did not specify what sort of inferences are drawn. Evidence from other domains suggested that perceivers draw mistaken inferences about enduring personality traits (Nisbett & Ross, 1980).

Although systematic errors in social perception were widely accepted a decade ago, recently critics have challenged the evidence. Some challenges focus on the contexts in which errors have been demonstrated. McArthur and Baron (1983) argued that attributions drawn about a target person on the basis of a vignette description or on abstract information about moves in a game are responses to impoverished social stimuli; hence, errors may occur that would not occur in the ecology of real-world social interactions, where responses are based on a richer flow of information (for a review of related issues, see Funder, 1995). Another point is that social perception accuracy increases in contexts where perceivers are motivated to perceive another person accurately, such as when the perceiver's and the target person's outcomes are interdependent (Neuberg & Fiske, 1987; Ruscher & Fiske, 1990). Other challenges focus on how researchers model lay conceptions of personality. Swann (1984) pointed out that instructions in some studies may tap perceptions of a target's disposition within a bounded social situation, and these perceptions may indeed have circumscribed accuracy. Other researchers have objected to the contrived trait lists on which perceivers' impressions have been measured. Studies with more comprehensive measures have identified distinctive types of bias on particular personality dimensions (Robins, Spranca, & Mendelsohn, 1996).

In part because of concerns about the methods used to establish attribution errors, another tradition of research on social perception in conflicts has eschewed experiments in favor of retrospective surveys of naturally occurring conflicts. Surveys have revealed general biases in attribution, such as the difference between the attributions made for behavior by oneself and for behavior by the other person (i.e., the actor–observer difference; Jones & Nisbett, 1971). For example, members of romantic couples in conflict ascribed negative traits (e.g., *selfishness*) more often for behaviors of their partner than for their own behaviors (Orvis, Kelley, & Butler, 1976). Likewise, college students ascribed *uncooperativeness* more to their roommates (Sillars, 1980) and executives ascribed *competitiveness* more to their rivals (Thomas & Pondy, 1977) than they did to themselves. It is tempting to integrate these actor–observer differences in natural conflicts with the findings of Kelley et al. (1967) that competitive intent is overattributed to opponents in bargaining games. However, actor–observer differences can reflect either error in the perceiver's self-attribution or error in his or her attributions about the counterpart, and it is not clear which of these underlies the findings. A second complication in integrating actor–observer findings from field studies of conflict is that some of the identified personality traits are semantically unrelated to uncooperativeness. For instance, negotiators have been observed to overattribute to opponents characteristics such as *anxiety* (Douglas, 1962) and *insincerity* (Baron, 1984, 1988). This suggests that there may be more than one dimension on which negotiators misperceive their counterparts' personalities.

Hypothesis Development

Our general hypothesis is that certain bargaining behaviors are primarily determined by the negotiator's situational constraints but are attributed by their opponents to personality traits. Through a review of literature on the dimensions of bargaining situations, we will work toward more specific hypotheses about the content of particular misperceptions. A negotiator's bargaining situation can be described in terms his or her alternative option, the option he or she will take if no agreement is reached in the negotiation (Raiffa, 1982; White & Neale, 1991). A negotiator's alternative is like the ground from which he or she negotiates; it is the basic situational factor that determines his or her bargaining style and behavior. Negotiation alternatives vary on two basic dimensions: value and risk.

Value is the amount of a negotiator's alternative. For instance, a job recruit's bargaining position depends greatly on whether his or her offer from an alternative employer is relatively low or high in value. Figure 1 illustrates the bargaining position of a recruit occupying four different bargaining positions varying in value and risk. The top row of the matrix shows that a recruit with an alternative offer that is relatively high in value is like a seller with a high minimum price: In the negotiation with the recruiter, this recruit has a relatively small zone of possible agreements (i.e., where the recruiter pays no more and the recruit earns no less than with their respective alternatives). To achieve an agreement appreciably better than his or her alternative, the recruit will likely have to engage in hard bargaining, or *haggling*, with the recruiter—it will

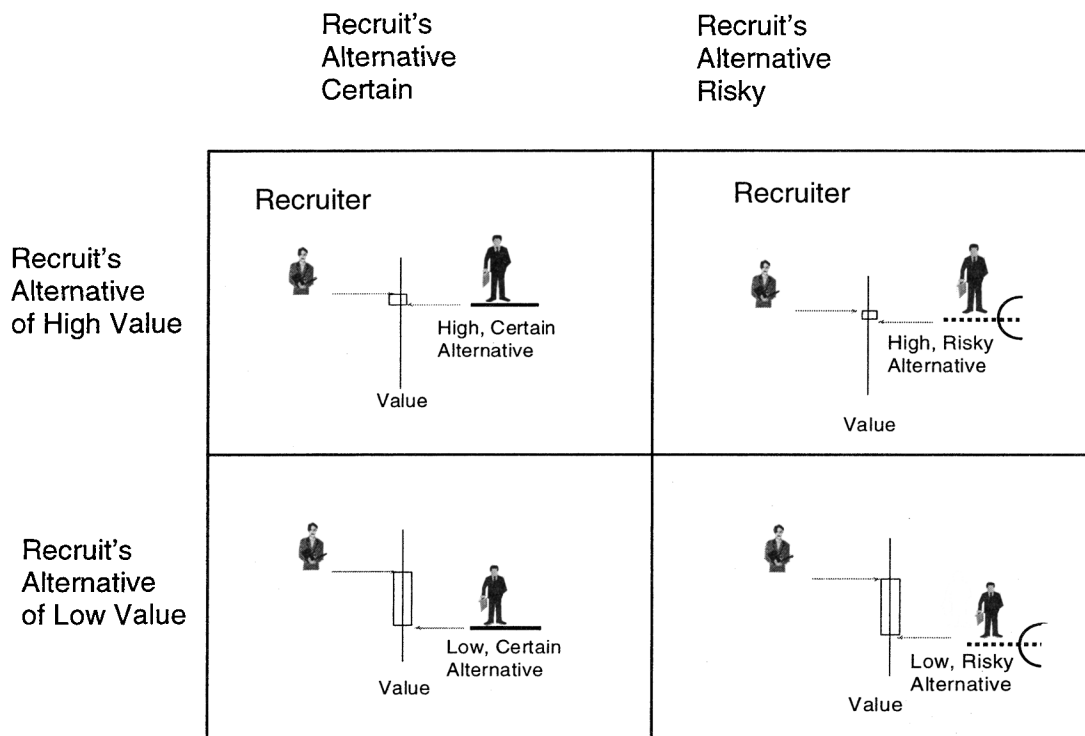


Figure 1. An illustration of four different bargaining situations created by crossing the value (high vs. low) and risk (certain vs. risky) of the recruit's alternative. In the right column, the dashed line indicates that the recruit's alternative is an expected value corresponding to the mean of the market distribution.

not be easy to find a mutually pleasing outcome. By contrast, when the recruit's alternative is relatively low and the zone is relatively large (as shown in the bottom row of Figure 1), then the recruit will not have to haggle much to reach an acceptable agreement (Thompson, 1997). Although negotiators know that their own haggling depends on the situation, we suspect that they nonetheless misattribute their counterpart's level of haggling to his or her personality. Hence, the first error pattern we predict is that negotiators misattribute the trait of uncooperativeness to counterparts who have a relatively high-value alternative in the negotiation where they meet.

A second aspect of a negotiator's alternative option is its level of risk. In some cases, a recruit may have a definite offer of a specific salary from another employer as his or her alternative. In other cases, a recruit's alternative may be uncertain or risky—a risky alternative is an expected value based on knowing that one will draw an offer from a distribution, such as a market (for further definition see Larrick & Boles, 1995). In Figure 1, the recruits in the left column are standing on the secure ground of a definite offer from another company; recruits in the right column are in the more precarious position of not being certain about the value of their alternative, having only an expectation based on the distribution from which the offer will be drawn. Having a risky, as opposed to a certain, alternative affects one's bargaining in several ways. A recruit without a definite, concrete alternative will have more difficulty setting a consistent lower limit (or *reservation price*) in the negotiation, because this limit must take into account not only the expected value of the alternative but also the value that he or she places on certainty. A recruit without a firm alternative offer is also more likely to be vague about his or her alternatives during the negotiation. In sum, a certain alternative option makes it more likely that negotiators will be consistent and steady, whereas a risky alternative makes it more likely that negotiators will *waffle* in the limits they set and in the justifications they offer for these limits. Although we expect that waffling is induced by the situation of uncertainty, we expect that it will be primarily interpreted by perceivers in terms of personality traits such as inconsistency or insincerity. Hence, our second prediction is that negotiators will misattribute dishonesty or insincerity to counterparts who have relatively risky alternatives.

In a pilot experiment, a test of these predictions was conducted by having master of business administration (MBA) students participate in a negotiation exercise that closely simulated a job compensation negotiation typical of the ones they were currently involved in at the time. One hundred twenty students were randomly assigned to roles of recruiter and recruit for a scenario in which they were negotiating the compensation of a possible position for the recruit. The recruit role varied in the value and certainty of the alternative, resulting in the four conditions illustrated by Figure 1. After negotiating, participants rated themselves and their opponent on an ad hoc list of traits relevant to negotiation. Recruits in different experimental conditions did not differ in self-ratings, yet they differed in how they were rated by their opponents. The pattern of differences fit our predictions. Compared with recruits with a low-value alternative, those with a high-value alternative were perceived as more stubborn (4.60 vs. 3.73 on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *disagree* to 7 = *agree*), $F(1, 57) = 3.29, p < .10$, and more competitive (5.30 vs. 4.40), $F(1, 57) = 6.21, p < .05$. Recruits with a risky, as opposed to a certain,

alternative were rated less sincere (4.85 vs. 5.38), $F(1, 57) = 3.0, p < .10$. However, differences on other trait dimensions, such as that recruits were rated lower on the *friendly* dimension when they had a high-value alternative (4.89 vs. 5.54), $F(1, 57) = 3.69, p < .10$, and when they had a risky alternative (4.81 vs. 5.58), $F(1, 57) = 4.82, p < .05$, suggested that misperceptions involve more general personality constructs than specific trait terms.

Experiment 1: Patterns of Personality Misperception in Negotiations

To frame hypotheses at the most general level that conveys the content of misperceptions, we drew on models of the major dimensions of personality differences and personality perceptions (Goldberg, 1990). Four major factors that reemerge in analyses of trait terms in different languages (Yik & Bond, 1993) are usually labeled as follows: (a) Extraversion, (b) Agreeableness, (c) Conscientiousness, and (d) Emotional Instability or Neuroticism. In numerous studies, researchers using reliable indexes of these general dimensions rather than ratings of isolated trait terms have found a considerable degree of consensus in perceivers' impressions of a target person's personality (John & Robins, 1994). Scales measuring these dimensions seem to capture content-general constructs in lay perceptions of personality (McCrae & John, 1992). For instance, a target person rated high in Agreeableness is expected to be more cooperative than the average person in the wide range of domains for which this trait is relevant. If biases in negotiators' personality perceptions affect their core impressions of others, then it should be possible to specify their biases in terms of basic personality dimensions. We propose that the traits to which people should attribute haggling and waffling behavior (if they are making correspondent inferences) map closely onto two of these factors (to the extent that uncooperativeness is an element of low Agreeableness and to the extent that insincerity and inconsistency are related to Emotional Instability). Hence, we can frame our predictions in terms of these more general constructs as follows: (a) Negotiators with high-value alternatives will haggle more and hence evoke perceptions of low Agreeableness, and (b) negotiators with risky alternatives will waffle more and hence evoke perceptions of Emotional Instability.

Our goal was to test these predictions with methods that meet the criteria for error in social perception emphasized in recent scholarship. That is, in our research personality perception is measured in an ecologically valid context, in which errors have personal consequences for participants and competition motivates accurate perception. Also, our instructions emphasized to participants that they were to indicate their inferences about enduring characteristics of the other person, not merely describe the other's behavioral patterns. Specifically, we asked them to indicate characteristics that they would expect to see again in a future interaction with the other person. Also, they rated this person on a comprehensive set of trait descriptors.

Method

Participants. Participants were 376 MBA students from four sections of a course on negotiation at Stanford University (1 year after the pilot study) and from three sections of a course on negotiation at the University of Chicago. To make the motivation to succeed in one's outcome more

salient, one randomly selected participant in each role was publicly awarded a cash payment in direct proportion to the value of their settlement (the payment ranged from \$0 to \$24) in class after the negotiation simulation.

Procedure. The data were collected during negotiations in a simulation exercise conducted during the 2nd week of a course on negotiation. The negotiation exercise was conducted between two students acting as, respectively, a recruiter from Alpha Inc., a consulting firm, and an MBA recruit. It concerned only one issue: the salary the firm would offer the recruit (all other terms, such as the signing bonus, had been settled). It was clearly stated that the two individuals would never be working together in the future, so the relationship between the two players was not an issue in the negotiation.

Negotiators in both roles were given private information about their alternatives. On the one side, recruiters were told that if they did not reach a satisfactory agreement with this recruit then they would definitely sign an alternative candidate. The alternative candidate had asked only that Alpha Inc. match the salary offer being sent in the mail by another firm; because this figure was as yet unknown, the recruiter's alternative was risky. Recruiters were told that their expectation of what they would have to pay the alternative candidate came from an office survey that found salaries of recruits from the top five schools in this industry fell on a normal distribution with a mean of \$90,000 and with most offers falling in a range from \$75,000 to \$105,000.

On the other side, recruits were told that in addition to their offer from Alpha Inc., they had an offer from another consulting firm, Lambda. If the negotiation with Alpha Inc. led to a satisfactory salary offer, they would sign immediately and not pursue the offer from Lambda. However, if the negotiation did not lead to a satisfactory offer, they would accept the offer from Lambda, which would be a first and final offer (this firm does not negotiate salary). The recruits' expectation about their salary with Lambda varied across four conditions, which corresponded to the conditions in Figure 1:

1. In the *risky, high-value* condition, recruits were uncertain of the amount Lambda would offer but expected a value around \$85,000, an estimate based on a market survey in *Fortune* of the offers to graduates of the top five business schools that showed essentially a normal distribution with a mean of \$85,000 and with most offers falling in the range from \$75,000 to \$95,000.

2. In the *certain, high-value* condition, the role differed only in that recruits knew for certain that the Lambda salary offer would be \$85,000.

3. In the *risky, low-value* condition, recruits were uncertain of the amount Lambda would offer but expected a value around \$70,000 on the

basis of a market survey that showed essentially a normal distribution with a mean of \$70,000 and with most offers falling in the range from \$60,000 to \$80,000.

4. In the *certain, low-value* condition, the role differed from Condition 3 only in that recruits knew for certain that the Lambda salary offer would be \$70,000.

Negotiation measures. Participants were given 20 min to study their role. They then answered several prenegotiation questions about their strategy and plans for the negotiation. One of these asked participants to state their reservation price—the lowest salary amount that they would accept in the negotiation instead of resorting to their alternative option. After completing the prenegotiation questions, each participant was randomly assigned to a counterpart. The pairs of participants were directed to a private area for a 0.5-hr-long negotiation session. They were then separated to answer postnegotiation questions about whether they reached an agreement and, if so, the amount of the salary contract.

Situation perception measures. Next, we asked recruiters for their perceptions of the recruit's bargaining situation. Participants were familiar from negotiation class with the concepts of the value and risk of an alternative option and had been taught guidelines for estimating these from an opponent's negotiation behavior (see Lewicki & Litterer, 1985). Perceptions of value were measured with the following question: "What do you think is the amount of the recruit's best alternative to a negotiated agreement? The amount the recruit expected to receive from an alternative firm if the negotiation with you ended in an impasse is \$_____." Perceptions of risk were measured with the following question: "How certain was the recruit's alternative offer?" Responses were taken on a 5-point scale with one end (1) labeled *known with certainty*, the midpoint labeled *estimated precisely*, and the other end (5) labeled *estimated loosely*.

Personality perception measures. Finally, we asked recruiters about their perceptions of the recruit's personality traits. We requested that recruiters share their perceptions of stable, global characteristics by asking participants to indicate "personality characteristics that you would expect to see again in future interactions with this person" on a 5-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 5 = *agree strongly*). We emphasized that the question applied to cross-temporal, cross-situational traits so that participants would not merely select characteristics that described the other's behavior in this one bounded situation. We then presented 28 randomly ordered trait descriptors that marked the first four factors of personality perception (O. P. John, personal communication, January 30, 1995). These items and the scale reliability statistics may be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Trait Descriptors for Four Factors of Personality Perception

Factor	Trait descriptors	α	
		Study 1	Study 2
Agreeableness	Cooperative, trustful, helpful, considerate (+)	.83	.85
	Demanding, cold, selfish (–)		
Emotional Instability	Insecure, nervous, touchy, highstrung (+)	.78	.78
	Relaxed, not stressed; emotionally steady and stable; calm, not tense (–)		
Extraversion	Talkative, assertive, energetic, candid (+)	.75	.68
	Reserved, quiet, shy (–)		
Conscientiousness	Efficient, thorough, systematic (+)	.72	.67
	Inconsistent, careless, undependable (–)		

Note. The plus sign denotes trait descriptors that load positively on the factor; the minus sign denotes trait descriptors that load negatively on the factor.

Results and Discussion

Negotiation measures. Recruiters set reservation prices ($M = \$94.95K$) above the level of their alternative option.¹ Recruits in the low-value conditions set reservation prices ($M = \$73.55K$) slightly above their alternative option, which created the intended large settlement zones in this condition. Recruits in the high-value conditions set their reservation prices much higher ($M = \$85.83K$), $F(1, 175) = 169.65$, $p < .001$, which created the intended smaller settlement zones. There was a slight tendency for the recruit's reservation prices to be higher in the risky ($M = \$80.83K$) than in the certain conditions ($M = \$77.95K$), $F(1, 175) = 5.24$, $p < .05$. There was no interaction of risk and value manipulations in determining reservation prices.

Not surprisingly, the outcome of negotiations was highly affected by the manipulation of the value of a recruit's alternative. As may be seen in Table 2, when the value of the recruit's alternative was high rather than low, the settlement rate was lower (86% vs. 97%), $\chi^2(1, N = 188) = 25.36$, $p < .001$, and the average settlement amount was higher (\$89.21K vs. \$84.67K), $F(1, 170) = 20.50$, $p < .001$. Negotiation outcomes were not significantly affected by the recruit's level of risk nor by the interaction of the risk and value manipulations.

Situation perception measures. The results suggest that participants were partially successful in estimating their counterparts' bargaining position. Recruiters ascribed an alternative to the recruit that was higher in the high-value conditions ($M = \$89.10K$) than in the low-value conditions ($M = \$84.04K$), $F(1, 185) = 13.01$, $p < .001$. Not surprisingly, perceptions of the value of the recruit's alternative did not vary as a function of the risk manipulation. There was an unanticipated interaction effect, $F(1, 185) = 6.57$, $p < .05$, which reflected a greater difference between perceptions of recruits' alternatives in the low-value versus high-value conditions when the alternative was risky ($M_s = \$82.33K$ vs. $\$91.43K$) than when it was certain (\$85.46K vs. \$87.19K). However, participants were not successful in perceiving the recruit's level of risk. Perceptions of the recruit's level of risk did not differ at all

between recruits who had a certain versus a risky alternative ($M_s = 3.66$ vs. 3.57).² Not surprisingly, perceptions of the recruit's risk did not differ as a function of the value manipulation or as a function of the interaction.

Personality perception measures. Summary scores for perceived personality factors were created by reverse coding the negative items and then averaging the seven ratings for each factor. Perceptions of Agreeableness and Emotional Instability were predicted to vary as a function of the manipulated factors, whereas perceptions of Extraversion and Conscientiousness were not. As may be seen in Table 2, the predicted differences but no other differences were obtained. Recruiters ascribed a more agreeable character to recruits who had a low-value ($M = 3.65$) rather than a high-value ($M = 3.38$) alternative offer, $F(1, 179) = 7.75$, $p < .01$. Recruiters ascribed a more emotionally unstable character to recruits who had a risky ($M = 2.25$) rather than a certain ($M = 2.04$) alternative offer, $F(1, 178) = 5.31$, $p < .05$. In sum, recruits placed in a situation that induced or required haggling were taken to be disagreeable persons, and recruits placed in a situation that induced waffling were taken to be emotionally unstable persons.

A question that the reader may ask is, Why did participants in the recruiter role ascribe traits even though their ascriptions of the counterpart's situational constraints did in fact correspond to the counterpart's actual situation? Classical models portray personality and situational attributions as hydraulically related (Heider, 1958), yet our results indicate that situational and personality ascriptions were both elevated. Our interpretation is based on a model of attributional judgment (Morris & Larrick, 1995), which holds that after observing a behavioral effect, a perceiver raises his or her confidence in each of its multiple possible causes to a degree depending on the perceived extremity of effect. If the behavior is perceived as extreme (i.e., a high degree of haggling or waffling in the role-play procedure), then a strong situational attribution does not discount a strong personality attribution (Morris, Smith, & Turner, 1998). In our next study, we measured the perceiver's impression of the extremity of the bargaining behavior to test this interpretation and more incisive hypotheses about the roots of social misperceptions.

Table 2

Negotiation Outcomes and Perceptions of the Recruit's Personality as a Function of the Recruit's Situation (Experiment 1)

Measure	Recruit's alternative offer			
	Low value		High value	
	Risky	Certain	Risky	Certain
Negotiation outcomes				
Proportion reaching agreement (%)	93	100	84	88
Settlement amount (in dollars)	82.93K	85.97K	89.63K	88.74K
Personality perceptions				
Agreeableness	3.69	3.61	3.42	3.35
Emotional Instability	2.24	2.10	2.26	1.99
Extraversion	3.33	3.24	3.31	3.35
Conscientiousness	3.71	3.73	3.77	3.78

Note. Relative to the recruiter's alternative, the recruit's alternative was of either low or high value.

Experiment 2: Processes Contributing to Misperceptions

Heretofore we have tested predictions at the level of overall patterns of misperception. At this point, we refine our analysis to four specific hypotheses about processes that contribute to misperceptions of personality. Misperceptions originate from the combination of the primacy of situations in the actual causes of negotiation behavior (Hypothesis 1) and the primacy of personality in the perceived causes of negotiation behavior (Hypothesis 2).

¹ This is consistent with results of previous studies (Larrick & Boles, 1995) and probably indicates either risk aversion or aversion to the transaction costs of hiring the alternative recruit.

² A troubling aspect of the data for this variable is that almost all responses were above the scale midpoint of *estimated precisely*. Because the region of the scale between *known with certainty* and *estimated precisely* was hardly used by participants, we thought it possible that these labels struck participants as being synonymous. To avoid this possible problem, we dropped the midpoint scale label in the subsequent study.

These two hypotheses are expressed in Figure 2 as the first two links in a sequential process that leads negotiators to misperceive their counterparts. In Experiment 2 we tested each of these links separately by measuring the recruits' actual personalities in addition to manipulating recruits' situation and by measuring recruiters' perceptions of bargaining behavior, situation, and personality.

Misperceptions of personality persist in negotiations because the information a perceiver receives about the counterpart's situation is too uncertain to discount his or her personality attributions (Hypothesis 3). Although one can estimate a counterpart's degree of situational constraint from his or her words and actions in the negotiation, the information is rarely clear and trustworthy enough for one to be certain of the presence of the situational factor. Both in normative analyses and in empirical studies, little discounting of personality attributions follows from information about the mere possibility that a situational factor is present (see Morris & Larrick, 1995).

A final process that perpetuates personality misperceptions is the effect of personality ascriptions on subsequent interactions with the perceived. Personality ascriptions shape decisions that affect the other person and can induce behavior consistent with the ascribed personality. There is considerable evidence that an impression of an opponent as uncooperative leads one to choose uncooperative strategies in future rounds of conflicts. This has been observed in studies of conflict games, such as the multiple-round prisoner's dilemma (Radlow & Weidner, 1966), and in studies of naturally occurring multiple-round conflicts, such as those between roommates (Sillars, 1980) and nations (Jervis, 1976; Bar-Tal & Geva, 1986). Because uncooperative strategies beget uncooperative responses from one's counterpart (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970), they prevent the disconfirmation of one's original impression and even create spurious confirmatory evidence for one's initial impression. In organizational settings, there are several ways in which a perceiver, such as a recruiter, makes decisions that place others in situations that lead them to act consistently with the perceiver's impression of their personality (Hypothesis 4).

A first organizational mechanism for belief confirmation is the choice of how to resolve a future conflict. One can either proceed through direct negotiation or through the arbitration of a third

party, such as an ombudsperson or mutual supervisor (Ury, Brett, & Goldberg, 1989). We predict that employees who perceive their counterpart to be low in Agreeableness will avoid negotiation because they expect that the other person will not exhibit the cooperativeness and flexibility needed for negotiation to proceed effectively. Instead they will choose arbitration, which does not require active cooperation from the parties. Yet, the structure of arbitration limits flexibility and evokes competitive behaviors (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985). In sum, having the impression that the other's personality is low in Agreeableness begets conflict resolution through arbitration, which, in turn, induces uncooperative, inflexible behavior consistent with one's initial impression.

A second organizational mechanism for belief confirmation is the process of recommending others for role assignments. For example, a new employee who comes across as having a low-Agreeableness personality would be recommended for roles that require inflexible behavior (e.g., the role of handling external bargaining over one-time purchases, such as real estate, which requires a demanding, intransigent stance). This new employee would not likely be recommended for roles that require high-Agreeableness behaviors (e.g., the role of managing relationships with important long-term clients, which requires cooperativeness and flexibility). As with conflict resolution decisions, role assignment decisions that are influenced by perceptions of Agreeableness will work to confirm that personality perception.

Method

Participants. Participants were 210 MBA students from two sections of a course on negotiation at Stanford University and from two sections of a course on negotiation at the University of Chicago (1 year after Experiment 1). A week before the negotiation exercise, participants were asked to fill out the Big Five Index (BFI), a reliable and valid self-report inventory for the basic factors of personality (see John & Donahue, 1994). Respondents were presented with 44 short phrases that completed the sentence "I see myself as someone who . . ." and rated each on a 5-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 5 = *agree strongly*). Examples of phrases that load on the five factors are as follows: for Agreeableness, "Is considerate and kind to almost anyone";

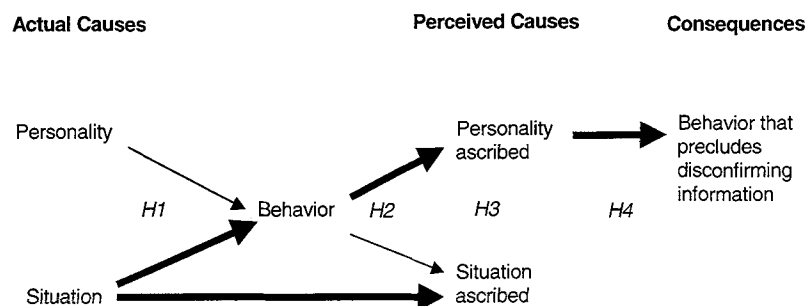


Figure 2. Illustration of four hypothesized processes that contribute to misperceptions of negotiation counterparts: Primacy of situational rather than personality causes of bargaining behavior (Hypothesis 1, or H1); primacy of personality rather than situation in ascriptions for bargaining behavior (Hypothesis 2, or H2); personality ascriptions that persist rather than being discounted by the uncertain situational information a negotiator receives (Hypothesis 3, or H3); and self-confirming consequences of personality ascriptions (Hypothesis 4, or H4). As the bold arrows indicate, we expect that perceivers misjudge their counterpart's personality, even though they pick up some cues to the counterpart's bargaining situation.

for Emotional Instability, "Gets nervous easily"; for Extraversion, "Is outgoing, social"; for Conscientiousness, "Does a thorough job"; and for Openness to Experience, "Is curious about many different things." Students were given this instrument along with several other questionnaires in a packet. This provided our measure of actual personality.

Procedure. The procedure was almost identical to that followed in Experiment 1 except for the addition of several measures of the recruiter's perceptions of the recruit's bargaining behaviors and of his or her organizational decisions affecting the recruit. The only change to the basic manipulation was that the value of the recruit's alternative in the high-value conditions was increased by \$10,000. This was because recruiters in Experiment 1 had been willing to pay more than their alternative was worth, and the average salary on the job market had increased. Immediately after negotiating, participants indicated the extent to which their counterpart had engaged in a number of specific tactical behaviors on a 5-point agreement scale (1 = *disagree*, 5 = *agree*). Some items on the list were designed as measures of haggling, some as measures of waffling, and some as filler. Some items designed to capture perceived haggling were the following: " 'haggled' (argued over the number) a lot before settling," "made extreme requests," "moved quickly to a reasonable position" (reverse scored), and "responded to my requests for concessions" (reverse scored). Some items designed to capture perceived waffling were the following: " 'waffled' (changed his or her mind) about his or her limit," "was unsure or uncertain at moments," "stated a limit and stuck to it consistently" (reverse scored), "remained confident in his or her bargaining stance" (reverse scored).

After completing the situation perception and personality perception questions, recruiters were asked to make two decisions involving the recruit. First, recruiters were asked to imagine that in the future they found themselves working in the same business organization with the person who was their counterpart in this negotiation. Recruiters were asked to decide how to respond if a conflict arose between themselves and the recruit. They were then to describe their intentions and expectations by rating on a 5-point scale (1 = *disagree*, 5 = *agree*) the following four statements: "I would be willing to negotiate the issue with the recruit," "I would be willing to let a third party settle the issue," "Negotiating the issue would prevent tension or animosity," and "Letting a third party settle the issue would prevent tension or animosity."

In the final measure, recruiters were asked to make recommendations about which role in the organization the recruit should be assigned to. The following four roles were described: "*relationship manager* role, which involves contact with important, long-term clients and requires positive interpersonal skills"; "*external bargaining* role, which involves handling one-time transactions such as real estate purchases and which requires assertiveness and competitiveness"; "*scheduling and crisis management* role, which requires precision in planning and firmness in decisions"; and "*innovation and research* role, which requires the ability to perform unstructured tasks." The descriptions of these roles made it clear that an employee would be required to display particular sorts of behavior in the performance of each role. The first two were designed to be roles that require and thereby induce high-agreeableness and low-agreeableness behaviors, respectively. The second two were an attempt to create roles that induce high-stability and low-stability behaviors.

Results and Discussion

Negotiation measures. Recruiters set reservation prices ($M = \$96.24K$) above the value of their alternative, as in Experiment 1. Recruits with a low-value alternative set relatively low reservation prices ($M = \$73.65K$), which allowed a

Table 3

Negotiation Outcomes and Perceptions of the Recruit's Personality as a Function of the Recruit's Situation (Experiment 2)

Measure	Recruit's alternative offer			
	Low value		High value	
	Risky	Certain	Risky	Certain
Negotiation outcomes				
Proportion reaching agreement (%)	96	100	62	41
Settlement amount (in dollars)	85.56K	84.32K	93.28K	96.71K
Perceived personality factors				
Agreeableness	3.70	3.91	3.17	3.15
Emotional Instability	1.97	2.04	1.98	2.01
Extraversion	3.27	3.14	3.61	3.25
Conscientiousness	3.81	3.84	3.92	3.79

Note. Relative to the recruiter's alternative, the recruit's alternative was of either low or high value.

broad settlement zone, whereas those recruits with a high-value alternative set substantially higher reservation prices ($M = \$98.02K$), $F(1, 97) = 261.02$, $p < .001$. Reservation prices in the risky conditions ($M = \$85.80K$) were not significantly different than those in the certain conditions ($M = \$85.11K$), $F(1, 97) = 0.49$, *ns*.

As in the previous study, the value of a recruit's alternative greatly affected the outcomes that were obtained. As may be seen in Table 3, moving from the low to the high condition, the settlement rate decreases (98% vs. 54%), $\chi^2(1, N = 94) = 35.43$, $p < .001$, but the average settlement amount increases (\$84.93K vs. \$94.24K), $F(1, 70) = 19.26$, $p < .001$. The rate and amount of the settlement were not affected by the certainty of the recruit's alternative or by the interaction of the manipulated factors.

Measures of recruits' tactical bargaining behaviors were important for testing hypotheses about the determinants of personality perceptions. To derive measures of haggling and waffling behaviors by recruits, we performed a principal components factor analysis across ratings of behaviors on a list of 16 specific tactics. Two factors emerged that accounted for 26% and 16% of the total variance, respectively. The pattern of items loading on these corresponded to the *a priori* haggling and waffling categories.³ Scales for haggling ($\alpha = .85$) and for waffling ($\alpha = .71$) were constructed, using the items that loaded onto each of the two factors, by reverse coding the negatively loading items and then averaging. Haggling behavior was much more marked among recruits who had a high-value alternative ($M = 3.36$) than among those who had a low-value alternative ($M = 2.35$), $F(1, 94) = 53.10$, $p < .001$. By regressing a recruit's haggling score on the relevant personality factor (the recruit's actual score on the Agree-

³ There was an exception: Some of the intended waffling items failed to load on the waffling factor.

ableness dimension of the BFI) and the relevant situational factor (the value of the recruit's alternative), we can test the hypothesis that situations are primary in the actual causes of bargaining behavior (Hypothesis 1). As may be seen in Table 4, results support the hypothesis that bargaining behavior is primarily driven by situational rather than personality factors.⁴

Whereas results suggest that the haggling scale captured the dimension of behavior perception that mediates the pattern of misperceived disagreeableness that we have observed (in Experiment 1 and the pilot experiment), the results do not suggest that the waffling scale captures the bargaining behavior dimension underlying the pattern of misperceived emotional instability that we have observed. Contrary to predictions, recruits' waffling behavior was not significantly higher among recruits who had a risky ($M = 2.73$) as opposed to a certain alternative ($M = 2.62$), $F < 1$. Although, as expected, perceived waffling was not correlated with the relevant personality factor (Emotional Instability), the lack of an effect of the situational factor means a failure to support the first hypothesis. This failure may reflect that the waffling scale missed the target—the bargaining behavior affected by risk.

Situation perception measures. As in Study 1, participants were somewhat successful at perceiving their counterpart's bargaining situation. Recruiters' perceptions of the value of the recruits' alternative varied as a function of its actual value (\$83.51K vs. \$95.89K), $F(1, 92) = 33.72$, $p < .001$. Yet, as in Experiment 1, recruiters' perceptions of risk were not responsive to the actual level of risk. Oddly, perceptions of risk were responsive to the value of the recruits' alternative: Recruits who actually had a higher value alternative were perceived to have a more certain offer. Perhaps participants in the recruiter role assumed their opponents were averse to risk, so an opponent with a higher apparent reservation price was inferred to have a more certain alternative. However, given the inconsistent results with the certainty-perception variable, conclusions cannot be drawn until further studies using more fine-grained measures are conducted.

Perceptions of the counterpart's personality. Measures of the four trait factors reached acceptable levels of reliability (see Table 1). Personality perceptions across conditions of the experiment may be seen in Table 3. As in Study 1, the value of the alternative offer had a strong effect on the recruit's perceived agreeableness. Perceptions of agreeableness were greater for recruits with low-

value versus high-value alternative offers (3.81 vs. 3.16), $F(1, 94) = 26.63$, $p < .001$. To test that this effect of the situational factor was mediated by the recruiter's perception of the recruit's haggling behavior, we regressed perceptions of disagreeableness on all of the variables that are prior to it in the proposed path model (Figure 2). We obtained evidence for a mediation relationship, according to the criteria of Baron and Kenny (1986): The two independent variables (actual situation and actual personality) individually predicted perceived disagreeableness, as did the proposed mediator, haggling (Equations 1, 2, and 3 in Table 5). When haggling was included with the independent variables, haggling still significantly predicted the dependent variable, whereas the recruit's actual situation did not (Equation 6), which indicates that the effect of the recruit's situation on the attribution of a disagreeable disposition to the recruit is indeed mediated by the recruit's level of haggling.⁵ As can be seen in Figure 3, there was an effect of the recruit's actual personality on perceived agreeableness that was not mediated by the recruit's level of haggling. An interpretation (for which we thank a reviewer) is that agreeableness affects other behaviors besides haggling, and the recruiters had some ability to read these behaviors.

An isomorphic regression model of antecedents of recruiters' ascription of situational factors was also run. Haggling, although primarily caused by the recruit's situation, was not primarily attributed to

⁴ How would a more context-specific dispositional measure fare? In line with the general notion of a fidelity–bandwidth tradeoff, we expected that a scale specifically tuned to competitiveness in workplace conflicts (Rahim, 1983) would have higher fidelity in predicting haggling in our exercise. This scale (composed of items such as “In conflicts at work, I am usually firm in pursuing my goals”) provided a better prediction of bargaining behavior (work conflict competitiveness, $\beta = .24$, $p < .05$, vs. Agreeableness, $\beta = -.09$, *ns*). Yet, the personality effect was still quite small in comparison with the effect of the situation manipulation ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$). Hence, substituting a context-specific measure does not alter the qualitative pattern of findings. We also investigated our expectation that a fine-tuned, context-specific measure would have a more limited bandwidth in predicting conflict behavior. Participants played an ultimatum game that was not framed in a workplace context (Larrick, 1998) in which the measure of conflict behavior was the amount of resources that a player claimed from a fixed pool. Consistent with the expectation of reduced bandwidth, the measure of competitive style in workplace conflicts was worse in predicting this nonworkplace conflict ($r = .15$, *ns*) than was the context-general measure of agreeableness ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$).

⁵ It might be argued that perceptions of disagreeableness were picking up the recruiter's dissatisfaction with the recruit rather than an assessment of the recruit's personality. However, Agreeableness is only one of four dimensions by which the recruiters could portray the recruit unfavorably, and effects of the manipulation were limited to Agreeableness. We also measured recruiters' satisfaction with the outcome on a rating scale, and although it was affected by the size of alternative offer, it did not mediate any of the relationships between the manipulation, haggling behavior, and attributions of disagreeableness. Moreover, in recent studies featuring a *negative* bargaining zone where it quickly becomes apparent that no deal is possible (Larrick, Morris, & Su, 1999), we have found that disagreeableness perception does not increase steadily as the bargaining zone becomes more negative and the settlement rate declines. Rather, perception of disagreeableness is highest in a narrow but positive bargaining zone. In sum, disagreeableness seems to be a correspondent inference drawn directly from perceived bargaining behavior not from postnegotiation feelings about impasse versus settlement.

Table 4
Recruit's Haggling Behavior Regressed on the Actual Value of the Recruit's Alternative and the Recruit's Actual Agreeableness Score

Predictor	Regression equation		
	1	2	3
Actual value of alternative	.60***		.53***
Actual Agreeableness score		-.08	-.09
Adjusted R^2	.36	-.01	.27
df	96	70	69

Note. Coefficients are standardized weights. Actual value of alternative is a dummy variable with the high-value condition coded as 1 and the low-value condition coded as 0. Actual Agreeableness score is the recruit's self-rated Agreeableness score on the Big Five Index (John & Donahue, 1994).

*** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Recruiter's Perception of the Recruit's Disagreeableness Regressed on Predictor Variables

Predictor	Regression equation						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Actual value of alternative	.47***				.40***	.10	.09
Actual Agreeableness score		-.29***			-.29**	-.25**	-.23*
Haggling behavior			.72***			.55***	.55***
Ascribed value of alternative				.41***			.02
Adjusted R^2	.22	.07	.51	.16	.22	.44	.43
df	96	70	98	95	69	67	64

Note. Coefficients are standardized weights. Value of alternative is a dummy variable with the high-value condition coded 1 and the low-value condition coded 0. Actual Agreeableness score is the recruit's self-rated Agreeableness score on the Big Five Index (John & Donahue, 1994).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

the situation. As Equation 7 reveals, haggling predicted ascription of a high-value alternative to the recruit only marginally ($\beta = .23$, $p < .10$, Table 6), not nearly as well as it predicted ascription of a disagreeable personality ($\beta = .55$, $p < .001$, Table 5). As illustrated in Figure 3, the one significant predictor of perceptions of the value of the recruit's situation was its actual value. This influence, which was not mediated by haggling, reflects that some other cues to the value of the recruit's alternative were available.

Counter to our prediction and to the pattern observed in Experiment 1, perceptions of emotional instability were not affected by the manipulation of the risk in the recruit's alternative, as may be seen in Table 3. One possible explanation for the failure to replicate the pattern of misperception is that the introduction of the waffling perception questions inhibited the trait attribution on this dimension. That is, the pejorative connotations of waffling may have led participants to be reticent in their trait ratings. Consistent with this interpretation, ratings of emotional instability in Experiment 2 were generally lower than those in in Experiment 1, and this depression of ratings was specific to emotional instability rather than being a general pattern. Furthermore, in subsequent studies that have omitted the behavior perception measures, the effect of the recruit's level of risk on the recruit's perceived personality was observed once again. Although in Experiment 2 we have no evidence for a misperception of personality and hence obviously cannot test mediating variables, there was support for the notion that a negotiator's attribution on this personality dimen-

sion was predicted more by his or her counterpart's waffling behavior than by the counterpart's actual level of emotional instability, as the regression model in Table 7 reveals. Finally, perceptions of the Extraversion and Conscientiousness dimensions were not affected by the manipulations.

Persistence of personality trait ascriptions. Regression analyses also allowed us to test our third hypothesis that ascription of personality traits persists in the face of information about possible situational causes for behavior. We predicted that people's confidence in ascribing a personality factor would not be appreciably discounted by cues to a situational factor that fall short of definite information about a sufficient alternative (Morris & Larrick, 1995). The observed haggling behavior should lend credence to both unobserved possible causes: a disagreeable personality and an attractive alternative. Because more extreme levels of perceived haggling should lend relatively more credence to both attributions, we have interpreted the positive association between personality and situational attributions observed in Experiment 1 as arising from variation in the extremity of perceived haggling behavior across dyads. Accordingly, we expected to once again observe a positive bivariate relationship between personality and situational ascriptions, but we predicted that this association would disappear once variation in perceived haggling was controlled (in Figure 2 we predict no direct association between the ascription of situational and personality factors). In Tables 5 and 6 we can see that the bivariate relationship is strongly positive (Equa-

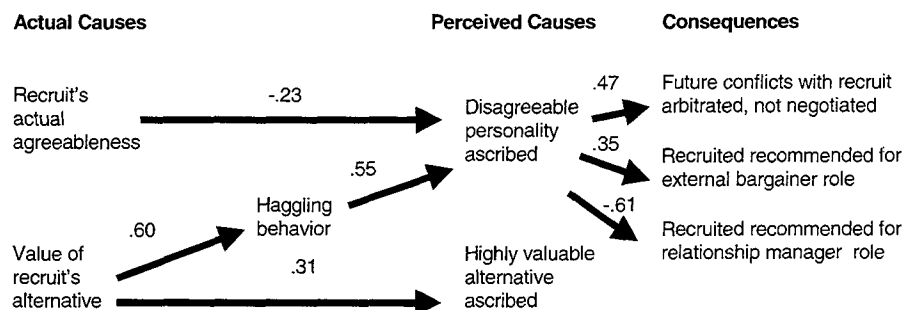


Figure 3. Observed relationships in Experiment 2 between actual causes of haggling behavior, perceived causes, and decisions about future interactions. Only the significant paths from the full regression models in Table 4 (Equation 3), Table 5 (Equation 7), Table 6 (Equation 7), and Table 9 (Equation 7) are shown.

Table 6
*Recruiter's Perception of the Value of the Recruit's Alternative
 Regressed on Predictor Variables*

Predictor	Regression equation						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Actual value of alternative	.51***				.46***	.31*	.31*
Actual Agreeableness score		-.16			-.16	-.13	-.12
Haggling behavior			.52***			.25†	.23†
Ascribed disagreeableness				.41***			.03
Adjusted R^2	.25	.01	.26	.16	.22	.23	.22
df	94	70	95	95	69	66	64

Note. Coefficients are standardized weights. Value of alternative is a dummy variable with the high-value condition coded 1 and the low-value condition coded 0. Actual Agreeableness score is the recruit's self-rated Agreeableness score on the Big Five Index (John & Donahue, 1994).

† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

tion 4), but this relationship disappears when haggling is controlled (Equation 7).

Future behavior toward the perceived. The fourth hypothesis is that erroneous perceptions of disagreeableness lead to decisions regarding one's counterpart that induce behavior confirming one's misperceptions. A first test of this hypothesis drew on questions about how the recruiter would choose to resolve a dispute with the recruit if they ended up working in the same organization in the future: Would he or she resolve the conflictual issues through direct discussion and negotiation or let a third party arbitrate the matter? As may be seen in the means presented in Table 8, the experimental manipulation of the value of the recruit's alternative produced differences in recruiters' expectancies and preference for arbitration versus negotiation. To test that the difference across conditions of the experiment was mediated by personality perceptions (as illustrated in Figure 2), we performed a set of linear regressions using a summary variable that summarized preference for arbitration. The composite variable was created from the four future conflict variables through a principal component factor analysis, which indicated that the four variables loaded onto a single dimension that explained 52% of the variance in the variables. Factor scores for the four variables were approximately equal, and a composite variable was created by summing

the two variables that tapped preference for arbitration and subtracting the sum of the two variables that tapped preference for negotiation. The regression results presented in Table 9 reveal that willingness to use arbitration is strongly predicted by ascription to the recruit of a disagreeable personality. Importantly, as hypothesized, effects of more remote variables, such as the recruit's alternative (see Equation 1) and the recruit's level of haggling (see Equation 3), are mediated by the ascription variable (see Equation 7). Moreover, a parallel analysis revealed that the effect of a high ascribed alternative was also mediated by ascribed disagreeableness.

A second belief-confirmatory dynamic was tested by asking recruiters to recommend the recruit for organizational roles. They considered roles that demand different kinds of behavior from the people that fill them. Of interest are the two roles that require, respectively, high- and low-agreeableness behavior.⁶ As predicted, the manipulation of the recruit's alternative value led to differences in the extent to which the recruit was later recommended for the relationship manager and external bargaining roles—the relevant means may be seen in Table 8. Recruits in the high-value alternative condition were recommended more for the external bargaining role (3.67 vs. 2.58), $F(1, 89) = 22.54$, $p < .001$, and were deemed less appropriate for the relationship manager role (3.51 vs. 3.82), although this latter difference was nonsignificant, $F(1, 89) = 1.69$, *ns*. Recommendation decisions were submitted to regression analyses, isomorphic to those described for the conflict resolution decision. As summarized in Figure 3, we again observed that ascribed disagreeableness mediated the effect of more remote variables. In sum, results of Experiment 2 supported the hypothesis that the personality misperceptions that arise in negotiations have consequences for decision making in organizations. False attributions of a disagreeable personality led to organizational decisions regarding the new recruit that make him or her unlikely to disconfirm the false impression and likely to reinforce it.

Table 7
*Recruiter's Perception of Recruit's Emotional Instability
 Regressed on the Recruit's Actual Emotional Instability
 Score and the Recruit's Waffling Behavior*

Predictor	Regression equation		
	1	2	3
Actual Emotional Instability score	-.12		-.04
Waffling behavior		.45***	.40***
Adjusted R^2	.00	.20	.14
df	70	96	68

Note. Coefficients are standardized weights. Actual Emotional Instability score is the recruit's self-rated Neuroticism score on the Big Five Index (John & Donahue, 1994). Waffling behavior is an index of six negotiation behaviors.

*** $p < .001$.

⁶ The two job roles that were designed to require high or low degrees of stability are not discussed because the certainty manipulation did not have an effect on either perceived emotional stability or assignment to these roles.

Table 8

Recruiter's Decisions About Future Interaction as a Function of the Recruit's Situation

Measure	Recruit's alternative offer			
	Low		High	
	Risky	Certain	Risky	Certain
Dispute resolution preference				
Willingness to negotiate	4.52	4.64	3.92	4.21
Confidence in negotiation	4.12	4.08	3.79	3.37
Willingness to seek arbitration	2.20	2.20	2.50	3.11
Confidence in arbitration	1.88	1.92	2.29	2.63
Role assignment preference				
Relationship manager	3.80	3.83	3.50	3.52
External bargaining	2.68	2.50	3.75	3.57

Note. Relative to the recruiter's alternative, the recruit's alternative was of either low or high value.

General Discussion

The current research greatly clarifies the dynamics of attribution errors and their consequences in conflicts. In a pilot experiment we found support for two predicted patterns in which bargaining behaviors arising from basic aspects of a counterpart's situation are erroneously attributed to corresponding traits in the counterpart's personality. In Experiment 1 we found that these misperceptions affect major dimensions of personality perception. Counterparts who had a highly attractive alternative offer and hence required a higher salary to accept the job were perceived to be lower on the Agreeableness dimension of personality. Also, counterparts who had a less certain alternative offer and hence were less able to refer openly and consistently to their alternative were perceived to be higher on the Emotional Instability dimension of personality.

In Experiment 2 we tested hypotheses about specific processes that contribute to and sustain misperceptions of the personalities of conflict counterparts. Misperceptions originate from the combination of the primacy of situations in the actual causes of bargaining

behavior (Hypothesis 1) and the primacy of personality in attributions (Hypothesis 2). Misperceptions are sustained by the lack of discounting of personality ascriptions based on uncertain information about situational causes (Hypothesis 3) and by the self-confirming effects of personality impressions on subsequent interactions with the other person (Hypothesis 4). All four hypotheses were clearly supported with regard to the pattern of perceived disagreeableness. Perceptions of disagreeableness arose from the fact that a recruit's level of haggling depended primarily on the situational factor (the value of his or her alternative), not on the corresponding personality factor (level of Agreeableness), yet haggling was attributed by the recruiter almost exclusively to the personality factor rather than to the situational factor. As expected, although recruiters' estimates of the recruits' alternative did respond to the clues they received about its actual level, recruiters did not significantly discount their personality ascriptions on the basis of their (uncertain) estimates of the situational factor. And, finally, impressions of the recruit as being a disagreeable type influenced future decisions to place the recruit in situations that induce further low-agreeableness behavior: (a) the decision to resolve a future conflict with the recruit through the adversarial procedure of arbitration rather than the collaborative procedure of negotiation and (b) the decision to assign the recruit to an organizational role that requires demandingness and intransigence rather than to a role that requires cooperativeness and flexibility. In sum, results of Experiment 2 unequivocally reveal a systematic misperception in which negotiators in a commanding economic position are attributed demanding, uncooperative personalities.

Our data are not inconsistent with recent findings that Agreeableness has a weak impact on competitive bargaining in some situations (Barry & Friedman, 1998), but our emphasis is that the impact of personality is small in comparison with the impact of the economic bargaining situation and in comparison with the role that lay perceivers accord personality.

With regard to perceptions of Emotional Instability, it was not possible to test hypotheses about component processes because the basic effect of the certainty condition on emotional instability perceptions (seen in the pilot experiment and Experiment 1) failed to replicate in Experiment 2. Various features of the current findings and subsequent findings in our research suggest that this

Table 9

Recruiter's Preference for Arbitration (vs. Negotiation) Regressed on Predictor Variables

Predictor	Regression equation						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Actual value of alternative	.38***				.34**	.22†	.18
Actual Agreeableness score		-.02			.02	-.01	.10
Haggling behavior			.44***			.25*	.01
Ascribed disagreeableness				.47***			.47***
Adjusted R^2	.13	.00	.18	.21	.09	.13	.25
df	95	69	97	98	68	66	65

Note. Coefficients are standardized weights. Preference for arbitration is a unit-weighted index created by summing willingness to arbitrate, confidence in arbitration, willingness to negotiate (reverse coded), and confidence in negotiation (reverse coded). Value of alternative is a dummy variable with the high-value condition coded as 1 and the low-value condition coded as 0.

† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

misattribution vanished because the derogatory connotation of the waffling items reduced their endorsement, which carried over to the emotional instability items. In ongoing work, we have found that the misperception of emotional instability reappears when the waffling measure is removed. Also, the effect occurs more strongly when the recruit's alternative is high in value, probably because the alternative is more salient when it is attractive. Hence, although our findings in general point to a pattern of misperception in which negotiators in an uncertain, insecure economic position are attributed unstable, insecure personalities, we are less confident (than with regard to the first pattern) that our measures fully capture this pattern or that the pattern is very robust. The behavioral effects of a risky alternative may not be captured by the construct of waffling, and they may be attributed to a personality disposition that does not fall squarely on the Emotional Instability dimension. For example, the trait of insincerity (which we used successfully in the pilot experiment) may be a correspondent inference evoked by the behavior of inconsistent statements in bargaining, but not a trait that loads on the dimension of Emotional Instability. Although the findings about Emotional Instability did not allow a test of specific hypotheses, results were consistent with the general claim that major dimensions of personality perceived in negotiation counterparts are mirages. Perceptions of a counterpart's personality on the Agreeableness and Emotional Instability dimensions had little to do with the counterpart's actual personality.

The Issue of Context Specificity in Personality Dispositions

We have conceived of personality in terms of the five-factor model of context-general traits, such as Agreeableness. Although this is currently the leading approach to the study of dispositions in psychology generally (McCrae & John, 1992) and in negotiation research specifically (Barry & Friedman, 1998), it is not the only fruitful approach. An increasingly influential alternative is defended by Mischel and Shoda (1995), who have argued that personality can be conceptualized in terms of behavioral dispositions specific to particular situational contexts. In extensive studies of domains involving sustained social interaction, such as a summer camp, they have found that tailor-made, context-specific measures do better than context-general measures in predicting behavior. This can be understood in terms of the general notion that increased specificity in constructs brings gains in fidelity (predictive validity) albeit losses in bandwidth (generality and parsimony). The magnitude of these gains and losses will, of course, vary from domain to domain. Proponents of context-general constructs such as Agreeableness argue that in many domains, the gains in fidelity from narrowing one's constructs are small. To assess this we compared the performance of the Agreeableness scale with a similar instrument that taps the disposition to be competitive specifically in workplace conflicts (Rahim, 1983). We found (see Footnote 4) that the context-specific measure does allow slightly better prediction of haggling behavior, but the effect remains small relative to that of the situational variable and relative to the role accorded personality by perceivers.

A second, and independent, claim about context specificity is that lay perceivers form impressions of others in terms of context-specific traits (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Shoda & Mischel, 1993).

Undoubtedly person perception is this nuanced in some social settings, for instance, the impressions formed by perceptive camp counselors. Yet, there are features of the domain we studied—one-round negotiations between strangers—that impede such impressions. First, the perceiver has information about the target person in only one situation (negotiating in the context of one specific bargaining position) and hence cannot observe situation-behavior covariation. Second, the perceiver cannot easily detect the target person's situation; negotiations create strong situational pressure for actors to hide their true situation (strategically, negotiators strive to create the impression that they have a favorable alternative). Hence, our expectation is that perceivers interpret bargaining behavior in terms of context-general dispositions. We investigated this in an exploratory study using a distributive negotiation similar to the narrow-bargaining-zone conditions of Experiments 1 and 2. Two weeks prior to the study, all participants were asked to rate themselves on a series of eight descriptors of negotiation behavior in one of two contexts: Four synonymous questions asked about their behavior in an advantageous bargaining situation (having a favorable alternative), and four asked about their behavior in a disadvantageous bargaining situation (having an unfavorable alternative). For example, they were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "If I am in a *strong* bargaining position, I negotiate aggressively" and were also asked to rate their behavior in the converse situation: "If I am in a *weak* bargaining position, I negotiate aggressively." Following the negotiation exercise, negotiation opponents were asked to rate their counterpart on six similar if . . . then items. For instance, they were asked to rate their opponent on descriptors such as "would negotiate aggressively if in a *strong* bargaining position" and "would negotiate aggressively if in a *weak* bargaining position."

Relations between these actor ratings and observer ratings on the situation-contingent dispositions are shown in Table 10. As may be seen in Table 10, actors believed that their own behavior is only weakly related across strong and weak negotiation situations, $r(1, 2) = .19$, whereas perceivers expected actors to show a great deal of consistency, $r(5, 6) = .50$. This fits the expectation that perceivers, having only one observation of the other person, do not have information about situational variability, unlike actors who can recall their own behavior across different kinds of conflict situations. It may also be seen in Table 10 that actor self-ratings in particular contexts did not correlate highly with the corresponding perceiver ratings, as would be expected if actual personality and

Table 10
Correlations Between Context-Specific Measures of Personality and Personality Perceptions

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self (if strong)	—					
2. Self (if weak)	.19*	—				
3. Perc (agreeable)	-.06	.16	—			
4. Perc (haggle)	.15	.07	-.66***	—		
5. Perc (if strong)	.22*	.01	-.50***	.41***	—	
6. Perc (if weak)	.29**	.07	-.49***	.45***	.50***	—

Note. $N = 107$. Self = self-reported ratings; Perc = perceiver's ratings of target.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

perceived personality existed at this context-specific level (these correlations were no higher than for context-general agreeableness perceptions in Study 2). Indeed, the correlation is highest between actors' self-ratings in strong situations and perceivers' ratings of the actor in weak situations, $r(1, 6) = .29$, suggesting that perceivers encoded behavior not as context-specific but in terms of a context-general impression of the actor's competitiveness. In support of this, a regression of perceived behavior in strong situations (Variable 5) on actor's self-rating in strong situations (Variable 1) and on perceived behavior in weak situations (Variable 6) showed that the relationship to actor's self-rating disappeared ($\beta = -.09$), $p > .30$, whereas the relationship to the perceiver rating remained high ($\beta = .46$), $p < .001$. Finally, Table 10 also shows that self-rated context-specific measures predicted perceived haggling poorly, $r(1, 4) = .15$ and $r(2, 4) = .07$, *ns*, but perceived haggling predicted context-specific perceptions very well, $r(4, 5) = .41$ and $r(4, 6) = .45$, $p < .001$. It seems that perceivers were using negotiation behavior to form impressions of the target in strong and weak situations, and they were doing so equally. Once again, this result suggests that perceivers, in this domain, worked with a context-general impression of cooperativeness. To test this, we conducted a partial correlation between perceived haggling and each of the context-specific if...then measures controlling for perceptions of global Agreeableness (Variable 3). The previous correlations of .41 and .45 decreased to .13 (*ns*) and .19 ($p < .05$), indicating that the global impression largely mediated the relationship between perceived behavior and context-specific perceptions. In sum, the empirical findings converge with our conceptual arguments to support the assumption that first impressions of negotiation counterparts are formed in terms of context-general constructs, such as Agreeableness.

Implications for Theory

Social psychological processes in negotiation. Early social psychological research on negotiation focused on personality dispositions that affect negotiation outcomes (e.g., Rubin & Brown, 1975) and was not, on the whole, successful in identifying strong, reliable effects (Thompson, 1990). The social psychological study of negotiation dwindled in the 1980s, at the same time that the study of cognitive biases in negotiation, led by Neale and Bazerman (1991), flourished and redefined the field. Of late, researchers of social cognition and perception in negotiation (Thompson, 1997) have carved out a new territory for social psychological studies of negotiation. Most of the studies in this stream of research have explored social psychological factors that distort a negotiator's perceptions of an opponent's preferences (Thompson & Hastie, 1990) or of a third party's preferences (Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992). The current research extends this approach to perceptions of an opponent's personality. More generally, we draw on the traditional social psychological themes that situations primarily determine the behaviors one sees, and yet one's subjective attributions for such behaviors, which guide one's response, often miss the role of situational factors (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). We apply this situationist, subjectivist analysis to elucidate how negotiation counterparts are misperceived.

Accuracy in social perception. As we have reviewed, the portrait of the error-prone social perceiver painted during the

1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross, 1977) has been questioned by recent theorists who have put forth more stringent criteria for errors. These criteria are met by the current studies in the negotiation context. The ecological validity (McArthur & Baron, 1983) is high because the interaction was natural and in a context that is familiar and motivating to participants. Although the ecological validity of a role-play method might be questionable in a study of interactions that are spontaneous or involve deep personal feelings, it is less problematic in a study of negotiation, which, as a task, requires conscious stage-management of impressions (Goffman, 1969). Furthermore, in the current studies we have examined biases with summary measures of the major dimensions of personality perception rather than mere ad hoc lists of specific traits. We have hypothesized and found that patterns of error are specific to major content dimensions such as Agreeableness, as in other work that has comprehensively measured trait perception (Robins et al., 1996). Finally, we have established that the misattributions are made to stable dispositions and hence affect decisions about future interactions; they are not just descriptions of the other person's behavior within the bounds of one interaction (Swann, 1984). In sum, evidence that meets the recently proffered criteria suggests that the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) or correspondence bias (Jones, 1990) is alive and well and living at the bargaining table.

Dynamics of self-confirming beliefs. The notion that prophecies are self-fulfilling—that beliefs result in actions that evoke confirmatory responses from others—was first developed by the sociologist Merton (1940) to account for phenomena he observed in organizations. However, the concept has been refined primarily by social psychologists, particularly those interested in stereotypes (e.g., Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978). Psychologists have provided detailed evidence for several distinct ways that beliefs work toward their own confirmation. The simplest process, which almost certainly occurs in interpersonal conflicts, is that beliefs guide a perceiver's attention to details of the environment that are confirmatory (Jones, 1990). In face-to-face conversation, this process could occur through a negotiator selectively seeking, attending to, and remembering those actions of the counterpart that confirm prior impressions (Snyder & Swann, 1978). A more complex process, which has been studied in interpersonal conflicts, is that beliefs support actions that constrain the opponent's behavior and evoke behavior by the other person that is confirmatory of the beliefs. A classic demonstration is Kelley and Stahelski's (1970) experiment with the repeated-trial prisoner's dilemma game in which a competitive player's attribution of competitiveness to a counterpart supported the competitive player's behavior of defecting; the expectation of competitiveness was then confirmed when this defection induced defection from the counterpart. Also, within the context of a more informationally rich negotiation conversation, there is a resonance whereby a recruiter's negative expectancies about a recruit manifest themselves in negative nonverbal behaviors that evoke confirming responses (Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974).

The contribution of the current research, however, lies in identifying longer-term organizational processes through which specific misperceptions born in negotiation work toward their own confirmation. In the spirit of Merton's examples, we examined two kinds of organizational decisions that routinely

occur following a negotiation and that clearly influence what will be observed in the counterpart's subsequent behavior. We found that erroneous personality perceptions affected (a) decisions about the procedure in which one will meet the other person to resolve a future conflict and (b) decisions about work roles to which the other person will be assigned. These decisions place the other person in situations that constrain behavior; hence, they shape the other person's behavior and, as a result, the behavior the decision maker will observe in the future. Notice also that these organizationally mediated self-confirming dynamics not only perpetuate the decision maker's mistaken personality impression but also potentially spread this false personality impression to many other observers because they shape a person's long-term public behavior.

Implications for Practice

The current findings about systematic negotiator misperceptions suggest a few speculative recommendations for people negotiating everyday conflicts. Our findings highlight that negotiations have not only an economic outcome but also a *social outcome*. Acting to maximize one's economic outcome by obtaining a valuable alternative can involve the cost of appearing to be a person low in Agreeableness. However, the trade-off is not inevitable—the misperception can be avoided. Research in progress (Larrick, Morris, & Su, 1999) suggests that if, after the settlement, negotiators are provided with trustworthy, certain information about their counterpart's alternative, then negotiators can discount their ascription of disagreeableness. A recommendation about avoiding misperceived Emotional Instability is easier to make because there does not seem to be a trade-off between the economic and the social outcomes. Both outcomes were better if negotiators had a certain rather than risky alternative option. Even when the certain alternative was of only average value, negotiators with certain alternatives achieved economic outcomes just as high as those with risky alternatives and came across as having more stable personalities. Hence, certain alternatives should be obtained in preparing for negotiations in which social outcomes matter.

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