



Lost in the crowd: Entitative group membership reduces mind attribution



Carey K. Morewedge^{a,*}, Jesse J. Chandler^b, Robert Smith^c, Norbert Schwarz^d, Jonathan Schooler^e

^a *Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University, United States*

^b *Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, United States*

^c *Fisher College of Business, The Ohio State University, United States*

^d *Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, United States*

^e *Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of California at Santa Barbara, United States*

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ABSTRACT

This research examined how and why group membership diminishes the attribution of mind to individuals. We found that mind attribution was inversely related to the size of the group to which an individual belonged (Experiment 1). Mind attribution was affected by group membership rather than the total number of entities perceived at once (Experiment 2). Moreover, mind attribution to an individual varied with the perception that the individual was a group member. Participants attributed more mind to an individual that appeared distinct or distant from other group members than to an individual that was perceived to be similar or proximal to a cohesive group (Experiments 3 and 4). This effect occurred for both human and nonhuman targets, and was driven by the perception of the target as an entitative group member rather than by the knowledge that the target was an entitative group member (Experiment 5).

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1. Introduction

People are perceived differently across a variety of important dimensions when they belong to a group. Group membership changes the trait impressions that are formed of its members (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), the emotions and behavioral responses members elicit (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), and the strategies perceivers use to predict their future behavior (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Morewedge & Todorov, 2012). We examine how group membership influences the perception of individuals on one fundamental dimension of categorization—the extent to which they are attributed mind (Dennett, 1987; Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007; Michotte, 1946/1963; Premack & Woodruff, 1978; Rakison & Poulin-Dubois, 2001). We suggest that when a target is perceived to belong to an entitative group, people attribute less mind to that target relative to when it is perceived as an individual.

1.1. Mind attribution

Mind attribution entails the perception that a target possesses mental states such as beliefs, desires, and complex emotions (Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1985; Gray et al., 2007). It is a distinct psychological process that informs and is related to

* Corresponding author. Address: Carnegie Mellon University, 237 Posner Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15224, United States.

E-mail address: morewedge@cmu.edu (C.K. Morewedge).

a variety of other judgments and decisions such as causal attribution, behavioral prediction, policy making, and moral judgment (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, & Radke, 2012; Dennett, 1987; Gray, Knickman, & Wegner, 2011; Loughnan, Haslam, & Bastian, 2010; Morris, Menon, & Ames, 2001). For instance, mind attribution is related to but distinct from causal attribution. Mind attribution occurs in contexts in which causal attributions are not made (e.g., Gray et al., 2007; Morewedge, Preston, & Wegner, 2007). Conversely, causal attributions can be made without engaging in mind attribution, as when one attributes the flooding of a city to the strength of a hurricane (Morris et al., 2001; Rakison & Poulin-Dubois, 2001).

Not all minds are equal. Targets vary with regard to the capacity and complexity of mind they are attributed. Some categories of targets are generally attributed more mind (e.g., humans) than other categories (e.g., non-human animals and machines). Non-human targets may be perceived to vary on possession of the most basic elements of mind, such as consciousness, beliefs, and desires. Whereas human targets are universally regarded as comparatively high in basic elements of mind, individuals may vary in the apparent richness of their conscious experience (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005), particularly if they belong to the perceiver's ingroup rather than to an outgroup (Leyens et al., 2003). There is also substantial variation in mind attribution that is explained by incidental contextual cues such as the movement speed of the target (Morewedge et al., 2007) and by motivated reasoning on the part of the perceiver (Waytz, Morewedge, et al., 2010). Less mind is attributed to entities when one intends to eat them (Bastian, Loughnan, Haslam, & Radke, 2012; Loughnan et al., 2010), for example, and actions performed by liked targets are attributed to more complex mental states than are similar actions performed by disliked targets (Kozak, Marsh, & Wegner, 2006).

Mind attribution has important consequences. Agents with minds have moral rights and moral responsibility (Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010). The rights afforded to women, minorities, persons with cognitive disabilities, and children have historically waned when those groups are dehumanized and are attributed lesser cognitive capacity (Haslam, 2006). Views regarding the morality of abortion and sustaining the life of patients in persistent vegetative states similarly hinge on whether or not the fetus or patient is perceived to have a mind (Gray et al., 2007, 2011).

Entities attributed mind also elicit different behavioral responses. People are more likely to help outgroup members who are victims of a natural disaster, for example, when they attribute more complex mental states to those victims (Cuddy, Rock, & Norton, 2007). For non-human targets, people use objects without minds and discard them when they are no longer useful, but they will maintain relationships with entities that are attributed a mind even when there is no instrumental benefit of doing so (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Jones & Vaughan, 1990). Given that humans automatically categorize entities according to their group memberships (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), it is essential to understand how group membership influences attribution of mind.

1.2. Entitative groups and minds

We suggest that group membership is likely to influence mind attribution if the group is perceived to be an entitative group. Entitativity refers to the extent that a collection of individuals is perceived as a single, coherent unit, which influences the perception of groups along several dimensions. Entitative groups are judged holistically (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), with minimal attention to and recognition of differences between their component members (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Halberstadt, 2003; Hamilton, Sherman, & Rodgers, 2004; Kurzban, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2001; Mauer, Le Grand, & Monloch, 2002). When making judgments about group members and the group as a whole, greater entitativity leads people to generalize more from past experiences with a single group member (Smith, Chandler, & Schwarz, 2013) and to increased confidence in their final judgment (Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Smith, Faro, & Burson, 2013; Thakkar, 2006). This effect extends beyond physical similarity to include inferences about the homogeneity of individual members' mental states (Hamilton et al., 2004). Illustrating this tendency, recent research has shown that groups united by a common background or goal are perceived as governed by the plans and intentions of the group and each individual member is perceived to be less likely to make its own plans and think for itself (i.e., "have a mind of its own" Waytz & Young, 2012).

These findings suggest that people are likely to infer that there is less variance between the minds of entitative group members (i.e., greater homogeneity). It is not known, however, whether the entitativity of a group leads perceivers to infer that its individual members have *less mind*. Paying less attention to the variance of mental states between highly entitative group members ("these things share a common thought or goal") does not necessarily imply that people are more likely to deny that they possess mental states ("these things do not seem to have mind"). If the Boston Red Sox share a common goal to crush the New York Yankees, for example, it does not imply that each member of the Red Sox has greater or lesser mental capacity than he would if the team possessed disparate goals. In other words, the inference that a group is of "one mind" does not necessarily imply that its members lack mind.

Some research has demonstrated that people rely more on stereotypes when making judgments of members of entitative groups (Brewer & Harasty, 1996), and that the extent to which people rely on such stereotypes is inversely related to the mind attributed to their members (Ames, 2004). This does not necessarily indicate that membership in an entitative group reduces attribution of mind to individual members, however, as people can explain and predict the behavior of others by using knowledge structures such as stereotypes and naïve psychological theories without consideration of others' minds (Ames, 2004; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Saxe, 2005).

In short, membership in an entitative group changes the perception of individual group members in ways that are likely to affect the attribution of mind. Group members are perceived holistically. Their intentions and plans are perceived to be more homogenous and determined by the mental states of other group members, and people often infer their mental states

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