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Perceiving individuals

What's it about?

(Social Psychology pp. 55–94)

Impressions of other people are influenced by many cues. These cues are interpreted with the help of associated or accessible knowledge.

When processing information superficially, people infer traits from observable behaviors. Often traits are also inferred when situational causes actually account for behaviors.

When processing systematically, people make **causal attributions** for behavior. A cause is more likely to be considered as an explanation when it is accessible or **salient**. To create an overall impression, knowledge is organized by clustering behaviors, and by creating causal links among characteristics. When people devote time and effort to forming an impression, biases may still occur.

Impressions are a basis for decisions and behaviors. Impressions alter the interpretation of later information, often lead people to seek consistent information, and elicit confirming actions from others, leading to impressions that are resistant to change. When people encounter information that is clearly inconsistent with an impression, they may take it into account. Most of the time, however, people's impressions are difficult to change.

Chapter topics

- Forming first impressions: Cues, interpretations, and inferences (*SP pp. 56–73*)
- Beyond first impressions: Systematic processing (*SP pp. 73–83*)
- The impact of impressions: Using, defending, and changing impressions (*SP pp. 83–91*)

FORMING FIRST IMPRESSIONS: CUES, INTERPRETATIONS, AND INFERENCES

Ask yourself

- Why do we immediately form impressions of other people on first meeting them?
- What factors influence whether we like or dislike someone immediately?
- Can we tell when someone is lying or telling the truth?

What you need to know

THE RAW MATERIALS OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS (<i>SP pp. 57–64</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impressions from physical appearance• Physical appearance in the workplace• Impressions from nonverbal communication• Detection of deception• Lie detection in the legal system• Impressions from familiarity• Impressions from environments• Impressions from behavior• Which cues capture attention?
AUTOMATIC INTERPRETATIONS OF CUES (<i>SP pp. 64–68</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The role of associations in interpretation• The role of accessibility in interpretation• Accessibility from concurrent activation• Accessibility from recent activation• Accessibility from frequent activation• Accessibility of sexism from the media
CHARACTERIZING THE BEHAVING PERSON: CORRESPONDENT INFERENCES (<i>SP pp. 69–72</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When is a correspondent inference justified?• The correspondence bias: People are what they do

- Correspondence bias in the workplace
- Limits on the correspondence bias

THE RAW MATERIALS OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

(SP pp. 57–64)

Impressions from physical appearance

People assume that “what is beautiful is good”: expecting attractive people to be more interesting, warm, outgoing, and socially skilled than less attractive people.

Physical appearance is an important element in people’s attraction to strangers. This is supported by Walster et al.’s (1966) [DOI:10.1037/h0021188] research on dating (SP p. 57).

Physical beauty has been shown to have a pervasive influence on our perceptions and evaluations of other people (SP p. 58).

Facial features also influence perceptions of other people. This was demonstrated by Berry and McArthur (1985) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.48.2.312] in their research on impressions of baby-faced adults, and by Todorov et al. (2005) [DOI:10.1126/science.1110589] in their research on the influence on voting patterns of impressions of competence based on facial appearance (SP p. 58).

Weblink: An interesting site about judging someone’s personality just by looking at their face

www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/articles/emotions/faceperception1.shtml

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: You’re so ~~HOT~~ – AVERAGE!: The effect of face morphing on attractiveness [see ch03-RA-01.doc]

Physical appearance in the workplace

Liking based on physical appearance can have impact on our work lives. For instance, good-looking and tall men have higher starting salaries (SP p. 59). However Johnson,

Podratz, Dipboye and Gibbons (2010) [DOI: 10.1080/00224540903365414] found that attractiveness helped women more when they applied for feminine jobs than when they applied for masculine ones. In contrast, being attractive is helpful for men whether they are applying for jobs thought of as masculine or feminine.

CASE STUDY: You've got the look: Facial appearance of CEOs [see ch03-CS-01.doc]

Impressions from nonverbal communication

People who readily express their feelings nonverbally are liked more than less expressive people. A lot of studies demonstrated that nonverbal behaviors (body orientation, posture, eye gaze, tone of voice) are important for impression formation (see SP p. 59)

In addition, body language offers a special insight into people's mood and emotions. Some researchers even concluded that emotional expression is a kind of universal language, however recent findings show that interpretations of expressions also differ among cultures.

Weblink: Cultural differences in interpretation of facial expressions—and emoticons!
www.livescience.com/1498-americans-japanese-read-faces-differently.html

Impressions that are formed extremely quickly can also be quite accurate. Participants who see only thin slices of behavior are able to predict end-of-semester teacher evaluations and they can determine status differences between two people. Also, after hearing brief clips of two people talking participants are quite successful at identifying people's voices, even if they've never met them before!

Weblink: The science of snap judgments
www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2014/may-june-14/snap-judgment-science.html

CASE STUDY: Thin slices [see ch03-CS-02.doc]

Detection of deception

People tend to use the wrong cues in assessing whether someone is lying or telling the truth. The best cues to detect a liar are nonverbal cues like the tone of voice or movements of the hands and feet (SP p. 62).

Research by Rule, Krendl, Ivcevic and Ambady (2013) [DOI: 10.1037/a0031050] (SP p. 60) has shown that perceivers (and their amygdalas!) are bad at judging how trustworthy someone is from simply looking at a picture of the person.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Detection of deception [see ch03-RA-02.doc]

CASE STUDY: Detecting deception [see ch03-CS-03.doc]

Lie detection in the legal system

Current research suggests that the “lie detector” is not precise enough to correctly detect guilty suspects. Its effectiveness may derive from confessions by suspects who anticipate that their lies will be detected.

Impressions from familiarity

We tend to develop positive feelings about people we encounter frequently. This is the mere exposure effect, as demonstrated by Zajonc (1968), Festinger et al. (1950) [DOI:10.1037/h0056932], and Moreland and Beach (1992) [DOI:10.1016/0022-1031(92)90055-O] (SP p. 61).

CASE STUDY: Mere exposure [see ch03-CS-01.doc]

CASE STUDY: The two faces of attractiveness [see ch03-CS-04.doc]

Impressions from environments

Because people select and create environments that reflect and reinforce who they are, observers can quite accurately form impressions of others from environmental cues like dorm rooms, single-person offices, and social-networking profiles (SP p. 62).

Impressions from behavior

Many behaviors are strongly linked to particular personality traits. People's behavior is the most genuinely useful resource for developing an impression of others.

Which cues capture attention?

Salient characteristics, characteristics that are rare or unique, capture attention.

AUTOMATIC INTERPRETATION OF CUES

(SP pp. 64–68)

The role of associations in interpretation

An association between two **cognitive representations** arises from similarity in meanings between the cognitive representations concerned, or if two cognitive representations are repeatedly thought of together.

Once the **association** is formed, two cognitive representations are linked. If either of the linked representations comes to mind, the other will also be activated (SP p. 64).

This is the first crucial kind of stored knowledge that helps us interpret the cues.

The role of accessibility in interpretation

The second crucial kind of stored knowledge that helps us interpret the cues is **accessibility**. Accessible knowledge (i.e., knowledge that comes easily to mind) guides our interpretation of cues.

Accessibility from concurrent activation

Accessible knowledge is knowledge that is concurrently activated by other sources. Research demonstrated, for instance, that mood and expectations influence our interpretation of cues (SP p. 65).

Accessibility from recent activation

Knowledge also is accessible when a cognitive representation has recently been brought to mind. Higgins et al. (1977) [[DOI:10.1016/S0022-1031\(77\)80007-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031(77)80007-3)] showed that only cognitive representations that are both accessible and applicable influence our interpretations (SP p. 66).

Knowledge can also become accessible using **priming** techniques, which activate cognitive representations (SP p. 67).

Accessibility from frequent activation

The final factor that influences accessibility of knowledge is frequent activation of a cognitive representation. When frequently using a cognitive representation, this representation becomes chronically accessible, and will be used when interpreting others' behavior.

Accessibility of sexism from the media

The concept of viewing women as sex objects can be primed by television and print advertisements, affecting men's judgments and behavior toward women. Rudman and Borgida (1995) [[DOI:10.1006/jesp.1995.1022](https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.1995.1022)] showed its influence in job interviews (SP p. 68).

CHARACTERIZING THE BEHAVING PERSON: CORRESPONDENT INFERENCES

(SP pp. 69–72)

People often assume that others have inner qualities that correspond to their observable behaviors.

When is a correspondent inference justified?

A **correspondent inference** is justified when the individual freely chooses to perform the behavior, when the behavior has few effects that distinguish it from other courses of action, and when the behavior is unexpected.

The correspondence bias: People are what they do

The tendency to draw unjustified correspondent inferences is known as the **correspondence bias**, or fundamental attribution error.

Jones and Harris (1967) [[DOI:10.1016/0022-1031\(67\)90034-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(67)90034-0)], Jones (1990b), and Gilbert (1998) provided evidence for the existence of this bias; people tend to assume

that behaviors they observe must reflect the actors' inner characteristics, even though other aspects of the situation could explain those behaviors (SP pp. 70–71).

Correspondence bias in the workplace

If people assume we have personal characteristics that fit with our behaviors, this has implications in the workplace, because they are shaped by behaviors we are instructed to perform. This is demonstrated by Humphrey's (1985) [\[DOI: 10.2307/2095412\]](https://doi.org/10.2307/2095412) research on rating characteristics of people who were assigned roles.

Limits on the correspondence bias

The correspondence bias is reduced or reversed when people are specifically motivated to find out about the situation.

In Western cultures the correspondence bias is more prevalent than it is in Asian cultures. In Western cultures, people are seen as responsible for their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, whereas in Asian cultures group or social contexts are also considered.

So what does this mean?

Perceptions of other people are influenced by cues from physical appearance, nonverbal communication, environments, behaviors, and the frequency of encounters. Cues that are **salient** are particularly influential.

A **cognitive representation** that is associated with the cue itself or is accessible is most likely to be used in interpreting cues. Knowledge becomes accessible when it is concurrently, recently, or frequently activated.

When processing superficially, people often assume that others have inner qualities that correspond to their behaviors, i.e. they make **correspondent inferences**. The tendency to draw unjustified correspondent inferences when situational causes actually account for behaviors is known as the **correspondence bias**.

BEYOND FIRST IMPRESSIONS: SYSTEMATIC PROCESSING

Ask yourself

- Can we go beyond our first impression of a person?
- How do we put together multiple characteristics to form a coherent overall impression?
- Does devoting extra thought to an impression increase its accuracy?

What you need to know

CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS (<i>SP pp. 73–76</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sources of attribution• Cultural differences in attributions
USING ATTRIBUTIONS TO CORRECT FIRST IMPRESSIONS (<i>SP pp. 76–78</i>)
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: FORMING COMPLEX IMPRESSIONS (<i>SP pp. 78–79</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrating multiple traits• Integrating the good and the bad
THE ACCURACY OF CONSIDERED IMPRESSIONS (<i>SP pp. 79–83</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motivation for accuracy• Motives for connectedness and valuing me and mine• Attempting to undo biases

CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS

(*SP pp. 73–76*)

To go beyond a first impression (an example of **superficial processing**), people must engage in **systematic processing**, which involves thinking more deeply and taking more information into account. This includes making **causal attributions**: judgments about the cause of a behavior or event.

Weblink: More details of the attribution theory and its applications

www.as.wvu.edu/~sbb/comm221/chapters/attrib.htm

Sources of attribution

The more salient a potential cause, the more likely it is that this cause will be considered as an explanation of behavior. This was demonstrated by Taylor and Fiske (1975) [DOI:10.1037/h0077095], and others. Lassiter et al. (2001) showed important implications of these results for courtroom proceedings (SP p. 74).

CASE STUDY: Attribution to salient causes and discounting [see ch03-CS-02.doc]

Weblink: Even judges are biased by camera perspective

<http://scienceblogs.com/cognitivedaily/2007/03/15/false-confessions-even-judges/>

The more accessible a potential cause, the more likely it is that this cause will be considered as an explanation of behavior. This is demonstrated by Rholes and Pryor's (1982) [DOI:10.1177/0146167282084019] research on priming influences on causal attributions (SP p. 74).

In cases where observing a behavior does not immediately bring any causal attribution to mind, people can try to attribute a cause by collecting covariation information; that is, information about potential causal factors that are present when the event occurs and absent when it does not.

Kelley (1967) considered three major categories of covariation information: distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency, resulting in three possible causes of a social event: the actor, the stimulus or target, or the particular situation.

Weblink: Kelley's Covariation Theory

http://changingminds.org/explanations/theories/covariation_model.htm

Weblink: More on Kelley's Covariation Theory

www.dsmgt310.faculty.ku.edu/SuppMaterial/KelleyAttributionTheory.htm

Cultural differences in attributions

People from different cultures learn to consider different types of causes for behaviors. Miller (1984) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.46.5.961] and Morris and Peng (1994) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.949] demonstrated that people in Western

cultures use more trait-based explanations, whereas people in Asian cultures locate causes in social relationship roles and the larger context (SP p. 76).

As noted earlier, these cultural differences in attribution reflect different assumptions about the basic nature of human beings (independent vs. interdependent).

USING ATTRIBUTIONS TO CORRECT FIRST IMPRESSIONS

(SP pp. 76–78)

Attributional thinking may lead to discounting, which is reducing the belief in one potential cause of behavior because there is another viable cause. This correction for the initial inference takes time and cognitive effort.

This was demonstrated by Gilbert et al.'s (1988) [\[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.54.5.733\]](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.5.733) research, which showed that unless we are willing and able to process information systematically, we stick to our first impression, which often occurred automatically (SP p. 77).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: FORMING COMPLEX IMPRESSIONS

(SP pp. 78–79)

Integrating multiple traits

People rely on their implicit personality theories. These theories are patterns of associations among traits, which we expect to go together. Relying on these theories means we may infer that a particular person has many positive (or negative) qualities on the basis of a single good (or bad) one.

The general patterns of these theories are shared within a culture, but particular patterns may differ individually depending on people's own experiences.

We may organize what we know by clustering behaviors that present the same trait and/or by creating causal links among behaviors and traits. This is to create an overall impression.

Integrating the good and the bad

When integrating all information into an overall evaluation, people tend to give negative information more weight than positive information, which is termed the negativity effect.

This is because negative information seems more extreme and informative than positive information, and can also contaminate positive information.

THE ACCURACY OF CONSIDERED IMPRESSIONS

(SP pp. 79–83)

Motivation for accuracy

Being accurate is a motivation for devoting extra thought to forming an impression. Research confirmed that one might be particularly motivated to form accurate impressions of people when having to work with them, or when being suspicious about someone's ulterior motives (SP p. 80).

Motives for connectedness and valuing “me and mine”

Accuracy is not always the goal of person perception, forming connections with others and seeing the world in a way that will result in a good outcome for ourselves also influences our search for information and its interpretation. This latter point was supported by Klein and Kunda's (1992) [\[DOI:10.1016/0022-1031\(92\)90036-J\]](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(92)90036-J) research on evaluating the trivia knowledge of a competitor or partner (SP p. 81).

Attempting to undo biases

Normally, we get along well enough relying on our biased views. But sometimes when we realize this, it may motivate us to devote extra effort to correcting our impressions when we have the time and the cognitive resources.

However, as Wegener and Petty (2001) demonstrated, our attempted correction depends on our beliefs about the nature and direction of the bias (SP p. 82).

So what does this mean?

When people engage in **systematic processing**, they make **causal attributions** for behavior. A cause is more likely to be considered as an explanation when it is accessible or **salient**. Collecting covariation information can also help in making attributions.

Impressions are influenced by people's implicit personality theories. To create an overall impression, knowledge is organized by clustering behaviors, and by creating causal links among characteristics. When integrating, people tend to give negative information more weight.

When people devote extra thought to forming an impression, biases may occur, and the extra efforts may only confirm our existing beliefs.

THE IMPACT OF IMPRESSIONS: USING, DEFENDING AND CHANGING IMPRESSIONS

Ask yourself

- What aspects of your impression influence your judgments?
- How do impressions survive even when learning that the beliefs, on which the impression was based, were false?
- What happens when facing information that is clearly inconsistent with our impression?

What you need to know

USING IMPRESSIONS (<i>SP pp. 83–91</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Superficial processing: Using a single attribute• Systematic processing: Integrating multiple factors
DEFENDING IMPRESSIONS (<i>SP pp. 84–89</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impressions shape interpretations• Impressions resist rebuttal• Perseverance in the courtroom• Selectively seeking impression-consistent behavior• Creating impression-consistent behavior: The self-fulfilling prophecy• Self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom• Limits on the self-fulfilling prophecy
DEALING WITH INCONSISTENT INFORMATION (<i>SP pp. 89–91</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reconciling inconsistencies• Integrating inconsistencies• Altering impressions: Is fundamental change possible?

USING IMPRESSIONS

(*SP pp. 83–91*)

Superficial processing: Using a single attribute

Decisions based on a single characteristic require minimal effort and thought.

Superficial processing relies on past judgments and evaluations, rather than the underlying evidence. This makes us slow to change our previous judgments.

Systematic processing: Integrating multiple factors

When processing systematically, one way of combining multiple factors is the algebraic approach; weighing each advantage and disadvantage according to its importance for a decision.

Another way of combining multiple factors is the configural approach; fitting information together into a meaningful whole. As Asch (1946) [[DOI:10.1037/h0055756](https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055756)], and Asch and Zukier (1984) [[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.46.6.1230](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.46.6.1230)] showed, in using this approach, one item may subtly change the meaning of others (SP p. 84).

DEFENDING IMPRESSIONS

(SP pp. 84–89)

Impressions shape interpretations

Initial impressions can set up an expectation that shapes the interpretation of later information (primacy effect).

Impressions resist rebuttal

The effects of earlier impressions on the interpretation of later information can persist even if the initial impression is discovered to be false, which is called the perseverance bias.

Ross et al.'s (1975) [[DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.32.5.880](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.32.5.880)] experiment supported the existence of this bias (SP p. 85).

The most effective way to reduce the perseverance bias is to explicitly consider an opposite possibility.

Weblink: I repeat, Barack Obama is not Muslim. Stop perseverating!

<http://phys.org/news187442140.html>

Perseverance in the courtroom

In courtrooms the perseverance bias means that information may have effects that persist even after the information is found to be false.

Selectively seeking impression-consistent behavior

If people expect others to have particular characteristics, their search for more information may become biased by asking leading questions.

When giving a choice, people ask diagnostic questions; that is, questions that will provide information about the truth or falsity of their beliefs.

Creating impression-consistent behavior: The self-fulfilling prophecy

Initial impressions of someone create corresponding behaviors towards this person.

The other person can act in ways to meet with the expectations. This is called the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Weblink: More details of the self-fulfilling prophecy

www.accel-team.com/pygmalion/

Weblink: Smells like teen spirit: The use of cologne jump starts the self-fulfilling prophecy

<http://nortonbooks.typepad.com/everydaysociology/2009/01/cologne-and-self-fulfilling-prophecies.html>

When people are aware of their influence on others, they might try to discount that influence. However, as Gilbert and Jones (1986) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.50.2.269] demonstrated, it is difficult for people to recognize their effects on others (SP pp. 87–88).

Self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom

Rosenthal and colleagues (Rosenthal, 1985; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968)

demonstrated the self-fulfilling prophecy in the classroom; teachers' expectations have an enormous influence on pupils' achievements (SP p. 88).

In the workplace, supervisors' impressions also influence subordinates' performance, as demonstrated by Kierein and Gold (2000) [DOI:10.1002/1099-1379(200012)21:8<913::AID-JOB62>3.0.CO;2-#] and by McNatt (2000) [DOI:10.1037/0021-9010.85.2.314].

Limits on the self-fulfilling prophecy

Self-fulfilling prophecy effects become weaker when people being perceived have strong views about themselves, when the targets are aware of the perceivers' expectations, or when the targets are motivated to convey accurate impressions. Research on self-fulfilling prophecy effects confirmed this (SP p. 88).

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: I imagined you differently: Limiting the self-fulfilling prophecy [see ch03-RA-03.doc]

DEALING WITH INCONSISTENT INFORMATION

(SP pp. 89–91)

Reconciling inconsistencies

When encountering inconsistent information, we often prefer to ignore it because our sense of mastery and understanding is threatened by such information, and our ability to maintain a relationship or social interaction with the person in question may be thrown into doubt.

However, important inconsistencies are likely to trigger **systematic processing**. When people have time and make the effort to reconcile inconsistent information, it has several effects on cognitive processing and memory; people spend more time thinking about the unexpected behavior, they try to explain unexpected behaviors, and recall of inconsistent behaviors is improved by extra processing.

Even when making an effort to reconcile inconsistencies, extensive processing does not always change impressions; unexpected behaviors may directly be explained away or be attributed to situational factors.

Integrating inconsistencies

When getting to know someone well over a period of time, potential inconsistencies should lead to developing a more complex impression of that person. We have the most complex impressions of people we meet in a number of different contexts.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY: Integrating inconsistencies [see ch03-RA-04.doc]

Altering impressions: Is fundamental change possible?

When people are actively looking for change in an individual, fundamental change is possible.

Perceptions of change differ for different perceivers, and in different cultures. This was demonstrated by Ji et al. (2001) [\[DOI:10.1111/1467-9280.003\]](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.003). They showed that Asians are more willing than Westerners to see people as changing in fundamental ways.

So what does this mean?

Once an impression is formed by **superficial processing** or **systematic processing**, it becomes a basis for decisions and behaviors.

An initial impression can alter the interpretation of later information, leading to impressions that are resistant to change. Impressions often lead people to seek consistent information, or even to elicit confirming actions from others, creating a **self-fulfilling prophecy**.

When people encounter information that is clearly inconsistent with an impression, they may take it into account. Most of the time, however, they may attempt to explain it away or attribute it to situational factors. It is only when people are actively looking for change in an individual that fundamental change is possible.