

Capitolo 3

Case Study 1

You've got the look: Facial appearance of CEOs

Can you tell a good leader from a bad leader in a single glance? Nicholas O. Rule and Nalini Ambady (2008) [DOI:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02054.x] put this very question to the test. In their study, participants saw pictures of CEOs from the 25-highest ranked Fortune 500 companies and the 25-lowest ranked Fortune 500 companies from 2006. The participants' task was to look at each picture (without knowing who each man was) and rate the man on his leadership ability, competence, dominance, likeability, trustworthiness, and facial maturity. The results revealed significant positive correlations between power ratings and company profits and also between perceived leadership ability and company profits. In other words, CEOs of more successful companies were perceived to be more competent, dominant, and to have more mature faces. In addition, those perceived to be better leaders were also more likely to be the CEOs of companies that made greater profits.

Given that this was a correlational study, what could explain these results? Do companies select CEOs that look more powerful and like better leaders? Do individuals start to look more powerful after they take on leadership roles? Answers to these questions await experimental testing, but one result is very clear—naïve perceivers have an uncanny ability to predict a company's success from the look of its leader.

Reference

- Rule, N. O. & Ambady, N. (2008). [DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02054.x]. The face of success: Inferences from chief executive officers' appearance predict company profits. *Psychological Science*, 19, 109–111.

Case Study 2

Thin slices: I don't need to read your poker face

As described in the text, research by Nalini Ambady and colleagues has shown that we, as perceivers, are surprisingly accurate at forming impressions from the thinnest slices of behavior. Recent research in this domain has shown that perceivers have the ability to determine someone's socioeconomic status AND can tell who has the better hand in a game of poker—and these judgments only take a minute or less to make!

Participants in a study by Kraus and Keltner (2009) [DOI:[10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02251.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02251.x)] were asked to watch 60-second clips of an interaction between two strangers. After the interaction, the participants were asked to give their best guess of each stranger's socioeconomic status (SES). Surprisingly, the participants were very accurate at determining whether each individual was from a high or low SES background. In turn, these ratings were positively correlated with the strangers' self-reported general SES, family income, and maternal education level. But, the strangers never discussed their socioeconomic background, so which nonverbal cues led to these impressive inferences by the participants?

Separate coding of the 60-second interactions revealed that high SES individuals tended to demonstrate more disengagement behaviors such as doodling and fidgeting. In contrast, individuals from low-SES backgrounds demonstrated more engagement behaviors such as good eye contact and head nodding. The researchers explained that individuals who have more material goods don't need to rely on others as much, therefore they can demonstrate nonverbal behaviors that suggest they are more disengaged. In contrast, lower SES individuals may have less power and feel the need to ingratiate themselves with others, thereby showing their interaction partners that they are interested and engaged in the conversation. The next time you are in an interaction, think about the message you are sending with your nonverbal behaviors. Could you be communicating to others that you have a losing hand?

An interesting study by Slepian, Young, Rutchick, and Ambady (2013) [DOI:[10.1177/0956797613487384](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613487384)] provides support for the effectiveness of the infamous poker face. Participants in their study were asked to watch 20 brief (each clip was 1–2 seconds, on average), silent clips of professional poker players placing bets. Without seeing the actual cards, the participants were asked to guess how good of a hand each player had—again, after only seeing each player for 1–2 seconds. Now here's where it gets interesting. The participants saw one of three different types of clips: unaltered video showing the poker player from the table up, video showing just the player's face from the chest up, and video showing only the player's arm as he pushed the chips forward to make his bet. Which perspective led to the most accurate guesses about the players' cards?

Amazingly enough, these researchers showed that the most accurate predictions about the quality of each player's hand came from viewing the 1–2 second clips of the players' arms. In other words, brief glimpses of the players' faces for any telltale tells did not help the participants guess the quality of the players' cards. The old poker face really does work, at least in 1–2 second clips. But what about the arm movements led to the accurate predictions? In a third study, the researchers showed that participants were more likely to rate the arms that held winning hands to be smoother

when pushing forth the chips and to be perceived as belonging to more confident players. In contrast, those with worse hands may have been more nervous and those feelings may have translated into jerkier arm movements when placing bets.

So, the next time you're playing a game of poker, keep this research in mind. If you spot someone who demonstrates a lot of disengagement behaviors, you can assume that they are from a high SES background. If that same person is slightly uncoordinated and rough when placing their bet, then lady luck is surely on your side.

References

- Kraus, M. W. & Keltner, D. (2009). [DOI:[10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02251.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02251.x)]. Signs of socioeconomic status: A thin-slicing approach. *Psychological Science*, 20, 99–106.
- Slepian, M. L., Young, S. G., Rutchick, A. M. & Ambady, N. (2013) [DOI: [10.1177/0956797613487384](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613487384)]. Quality of professional players' poker hands is perceived accurately from arm motions. *Psychological Science*, 24, 2335–2338.

Case Study 3

Detecting deception

Research has shown that perceivers are remarkably accurate at picking up on a wealth of information from just the tiniest slices of nonverbal behavior. But are we, as perceivers, equally as good at figuring out who is lying to us?

One situation in which it is important to detect deception is in job interviews. Interviewers would like to believe that they can tell when people are being honest versus dishonest about their past experiences and qualifications, but can they? Researchers in Germany set out to test these questions (Reinhard, Scharmach, & Müller, 2013 [DOI: [10.1111/j.1559-1816.2013.01011.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2013.01011.x)]). The participants in this study were divided up into three groups. The first group of participants consisted of individuals who had a lot of experience conducting interviews in a professional setting. The second group of participants had conducted at least one interview, and the third group of participants had never conducted an interview. Each group was asked to watch 14 videos of a person applying for a job and describing a job that they had held previously. The participants were told that some of the job applicants were telling the truth about their previous job and that some of them were lying and had never actually held that previous job. The participants' task was to indicate which of the applicants were telling the truth and which were lying.

The results showed that all of the participants, regardless of their experience conducting interviews, were equally bad at determining who was telling the truth and who was lying. So, in this case,

greater experience in the context of the job interview did not confer any great lie detecting advantage.

Reference

- Reinhard, M., Scharmach, M., and Müller, P. (2013). [DOI: [10.1111/j.1559-1816.2013.01011.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2013.01011.x)]. It's not what you are, it's what you know: Experience, beliefs, and the detection of deception in employment interviews. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(3), 467–479.

Case Study 4

The 2 Faces of Attractiveness: Pitting the familiar against the average

If you've had a chance to read over the "You're so HOT – AVERAGE!: The effect of face morphing on attractiveness" Research Activity then you know that people perceive average(d) faces to be more attractive than the original faces that make up those composites. But research on the mere exposure effect also shows that the more we see someone, the more we like them. So we should naturally have a preference for more familiar faces. Given this research, shouldn't the faces we see every day be more attractive to us than composites of a bunch of faces put together?

Researchers from New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the U.S. decided to pit average faces against familiar faces and see which contender won out. Before conducting their study, the researchers hypothesized that perceivers would find morphed faces to be more attractive when they were composed of faces of people the perceivers did not know. In contrast, morphed faces of people the perceivers *did* know would be viewed as less attractive. Here's why: people do not like ambiguity. When two familiar faces are morphed into one, their original, distinct identities become confused and the face becomes more difficult to classify. This experience can make the perceiver feel confused and slightly negative. In contrast, there is no ambiguity when viewing a morphed face comprised of people you've never met, therefore these morphed faces should be viewed as more attractive.

In their study, Halberstadt and colleagues (2013) [DOI:10.1177/0956797613491969] used pictures of celebrities from New Zealand and from the Netherlands as stimuli and had participants from both countries make ratings of morphed versions of these pictures. Celebrities were selected if they were well known in their respective country, but not at all well known in the other country. Once 28 celebrity pictures had been selected from each country, pairs of similar faces were morphed together, leading to a final collection of 14 celebrity pictures from both countries. The participants then viewed all 28 morphed faces as well as the original 56 faces from the two countries and rated how attractive each face was and how familiar it appeared.

The results showed that participants found the morphed faces from their own country to be less attractive than the original faces, whereas the morphed faces from the other country were perceived to be more attractive than the original faces. In addition, unaltered pictures of celebrities from one's own country were perceived to be more familiar than the morphed versions. Pictures of celebrities from the other country, (whether unaltered or morphed) were seen to be equally unfamiliar. So who wins this epic battle? It all depends on ease of processing. If a face is familiar to you, then seeing it in its unaltered form is easy to make sense of, therefore this face is seen as attractive. In contrast, morphing faces of familiar individuals makes less sense perceptually and that perceptual confusion leads perceivers to view those faces as less attractive. On the other hand, if you have no familiarity with a particular face, then whether it is a picture of the original face or a morphed version, it makes no difference in terms of ease of processing. In this instance, the average face wins and is seen as more attractive.

Reference

- Halberstadt, J., Pecher, D., Zeelenberg, R., Ip Wai, L., & Winkielman, P. (2013). [DOI:10.1177/0956797613491969]. Two faces of attractiveness: Making beauty-in-averageness appear and reverse. *Psychological Science*, 24, 2343–2346.

Case Study 5

Mere exposure

Zajonc (1968) demonstrated the mere exposure effect in three experiments. He showed participants stimuli with different exposure frequencies and asked them to rate their favorability towards the stimuli. The first experiment used nonsense words as stimuli, the second used Chinese-like characters, and the third used photos from a yearbook. The more the participants were exposed to a stimulus, the more they liked it. A wide variety of stimuli, in both lab and non-lab settings, have been shown to elicit the mere exposure effect.

However, Perlman and Oskamp (1971) [DOI:10.1016/0022-1031(71)90012-6] reported a study in which they showed a decrease in stimulus attractiveness over increasing exposures for negative stimuli. College students were exposed to pictures of stimulus persons with different cultural backgrounds a varying number of times, and were then asked to evaluate the stimulus persons. Results showed that positive exposure enhanced evaluations, and negative exposure decreased evaluations.

So it seems that the initial impression of a person is strengthened by exposure. This was also supported by Brickman, Redfield, Harrison, and Crandall's (1972) [DOI:10.1016/0022-

1031(72)90059-5] research demonstrating that participants, who did not like abstract paintings on initial viewing, showed a decrease in attractiveness when frequently exposed.

In response to these studies, Zajonc, Markus, and Wilson (1974) [DOI:10.1016/0022-1031(74)90071-7] argued that those reversed effects of negative stimuli were obtained via association, dissatisfying the conditions of the mere exposure. In their study, participants were presented with some stimuli that were initially positive and some stimuli that were initially negative, with different exposure frequencies. Afterwards subjects rated these stimuli on a number of affective dimensions. In all cases, except when negative affect was associatively paired with every stimulus exposure, affective responses became increasingly more positive with increasing exposures. So in all other cases than the association case, the exposure effect overcame an initially negative stimulus affect.

To conclude, exposure to stimuli, either positive or negative, leads to more positive evaluations when the conditions of the mere exposure hypothesis are satisfied.

References

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Case Study 6

Attribution to salient causes and discounting

Chapter 3 suggests two factors that determine the activation of stored knowledge; namely, the accessibility and the salience of relevant information. In addition, a third factor, the specificity of information, is also very important. Those three factors also influence the activation of *situational* information; first, situational information becomes salient as a function of its properties such as loudness, movement, and contrast. Second, primed or chronically accessible situational information

may become momentarily accessible. Finally, situational information may become more specific to the extent to which it applies to the particular actor.

Gilbert et al. (1988 [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.54.5.733]; SP p. 69) demonstrated that extra effort is required to discount an initial impression. However this cognitive load did not impair perceivers' awareness of the situational information. Therefore, they argued that cognitive load constrains awareness of situational information. As Trope and Gaunt (2000) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.79.3.344] have put this: "awareness of situational information and the ability to correct dispositional inferences on the basis of this information are separate and necessary conditions for discounting." According to them, perceivers may be fully aware of salient situational demands, but fail to correct their initial dispositional inferences on the basis of this information when the ability to compute such corrections is impaired by cognitive load.

Trope and Gaunt (2000) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.79.3.344] conducted three experiments to investigate how cognitive load and the salience, accessibility, and specificity of situational demands affect the utilization of these demands in drawing dispositional inferences from behavior. Each experiment varied a different knowledge activation factor (salience, accessibility, or specificity), cognitive load, and situational demands. In all three experiments, participants had to infer the actor's attitudes or traits from his or her behavior. The results demonstrated that cognitive load eliminated discounting when situational information was low in salience, accessibility, or specificity. However, when situational information was more salient, accessible, or specific, it produced strong discounting effects, even when perceivers were under cognitive load.

References

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