

New Directions in Person Perception Research

MGMT 9710: Advanced Seminar in Org. Behavior and Theory

PSYC G9350: Seminar in Social and Personality Psychology

Spring 2006
Thursdays 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
305 Uris Hall

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Course Overview

While many things are known about impression formation and person perception, a tremendous amount remains unknown about how impressions form and evolve in real-world contexts. For instance, what role do initial conversations (including speaking and listening behavior) play in impressions? How do social ties and secondhand impressions affect our perceptions? How do impressions evolve over time? These questions are fundamental, yet largely unanswered. There is much left to be discovered.

A major goal in this class is for students to articulate and elaborate meaningful unanswered questions about impression formation and to develop sensible initial hypotheses about those questions. We will review foundational work and ideas in person perception in order to develop a well-grounded springboard. To stimulate new thinking, we will draw on a range of literatures and sources for inspiration, such as an “executive coach” guest speaker and the collection of naturally occurring “impression artifacts.”

The course has several parts. We begin with major past and current ideas in person perception, including a review of leading theories, and a consideration of questions such as “how are impressions represented” and “what do impressions do.” In the second part, we turn to impression dynamics that have not yet been fully explored in research, including conversational processes in impression formation and impression change. In the third part, we turn to impression contexts, including social contexts (e.g., social ties) and organizational contexts (e.g., impressions in job interviews).

The course will also be emergent in the sense that several sessions will be devoted to topics that we consensually choose to explore on the basis of interests and ongoing discussion. The course will culminate in discussion of students’ theorizing and plans of study. Students will be expected to actively contribute and show commitment to the course. Do not take this course unless you intend to do the readings, go beyond them in your thinking, and regularly engage the group with your ideas.

Course format

Class meetings will consist primarily of discussion and debate about readings and the ideas they generate. Initial sessions will feature some commentary by the instructor to establish foundational ideas and background; the course will increasingly become a collective conversation typical of advanced seminars as sessions go on.

The class will be divided into teams, with team size depending on enrollment. After the initial sessions, teams will rotate in taking responsibility for identifying supplementary readings on session topics and in leading a portion of the discussion during each session.

Assignments and course requirements

The course includes several graded components, noted below.

» Attendance and participation: 30%

- **Selecting papers, leading discussions:** student teams will identify and select supplementary readings and lead/manage the discussion of certain sessions
- **Class participation:** even when not part of the team leading a discussion, students will be expected to share their views
- **Weekly reaction emails:** before most sessions (by 9 a.m. the day of class), students will be expected to forward via email a brief reaction to the instructor and classmates reflecting part of their own takeaway from one or more of the readings; emails can be informal and a paragraph long; content is flexible, but could feature a criticism or endorsement, a connection to other research, or an example or counter-example

» Short assignments: 15%

- **Phenomena report:** describe one or two examples of impression phenomena in the real world you think are interesting, puzzling, and important; due before session #2; length: one to three paragraphs (more details will be provided to enrolled students)
- **Unanswered question:** identify a provocative question about person perception that is seemingly unanswered by current literature; due before session #4; length: two to four paragraphs (more details provided to enrolled students)
- **Impression artifacts:** identify and provisionally analyze an impression “artifact,” some material manifestation of an impression or an impression process; email gossip and letters of recommendation are such artifacts, but you are strongly encouraged to look more broadly and creatively for the “physical residue” of impressions (e.g., forms used in interviews that embody organizational assumptions about personality); the assignment is to submit the artifact or a description of it along with a brief analysis of what it tells us (or makes us wonder) about person perception; due in session #6 (with examples discussed in subsequent sessions); length: one to three pages

» Collective project: 25%

The class will work together on a collective project that identifies “gaps” in person perception research. In brief, the project is expected to have two components: 1) an analysis of research topics and methods in person perception over the past decade or so, and 2) an analysis of real-world impression contexts and phenomena. We expect to identify some common contexts and phenomena that are relatively understudied (e.g., secondhand impressions). We will work on the project throughout the term and, depending on results, potentially submit a collectively authored manuscript for publication. Students will most likely work in small teams on parts of the project and we’ll integrate our findings as the course goes along. More details will be provided in our initial sessions.

» Final paper: 30%

The paper can be either a research proposal or a theoretical review and critique. Research proposals should include some discussion of existing related work and thinking and should articulate a novel prediction and explain why testing the prediction matters. Research proposals should also include proposed methods for gathering data and an analytical strategy for testing the hypotheses. Theoretical reviews should feature a thorough review and synthesis of some area of thinking, with the idea of drawing some novel conclusions, posing some novel questions, and proposing some novel predictions. Papers that simply summarize existing ideas will be seen as less compelling than those that go beyond current thinking.

All papers should follow APA style and should include an abstract and a reference section. The main text should be 10 to 20 pages in length. A draft will be due April 20 in order to stimulate preparation for presentations in our final session, April 27. Drafts should be readable, though have no minimum length; the idea is to convey the paper’s central thoughts in order to get feedback from the instructor and classmates. Final papers are due May 1 at noon.

Introduction

Session #1, January 18

Synopsis In the introductory session, we'll discuss major past and contemporary research on person perception. We'll also discuss our goals for the course and begin thinking about unanswered questions.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Gilbert, D. T. (1998). Ordinary personology. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 89-150). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Kunda, Z. (1999). *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Chapter 9: Knowledge about Others' Attitudes, Behavior, and Personality (pp. 395-450).

McGuire, W. J. (1973). The yin and yang of progress in social psychology: Seven koan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 446-456.

*Assignments,
etc.* Phenomena report due by 5 p.m. February 1 to da358@columbia.edu

NOTE: No class week of January 23

Representations: What is it (if anything) to have an impression?

Session #2, February 2

Synopsis In this session, we'll consider what impressions are. In part, this means thinking about impressions representationally—that is, how we re-present the external stimulus of someone else to ourselves. Various scholars have suggested that impression representations revolve around actor goals, types or archetypes, memories, schemas, and other organizing components. Each account may capture a bit of the truth; some accounts may be more compelling than others.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Moskowitz, G. (2005). *Social Cognition: Understanding Self and Others*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. Readings:

- Chapter 3: Categories and Category Structure: How Person Memory Illuminates Impression Formation Processes
- Chapter 4: On Schemas and Cognitive Misers: Mental Representations as the Building Blocks of Impressions

Kihlstrom, J. F., & Hastie, R. (1997). Mental representations of persons and personality, *Handbook of personality psychology*. (pp. 711-735). San Diego, CA, USA: Academic Press, Inc.

Read, S. J., & Miller, L. C. (2005). Explanatory coherence and goal-based knowledge structures in making dispositional inferences. In B. Malle & S. Hodges. *Other Minds*. New York: Guilford Press.

Anderson, C. & Sedikides, C. (1991). Thinking about people: Contributions of a typological alternative to associationistic and dimensional models of person perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 203-217.

Assignments, etc. Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu
Phenomena report due by 5 p.m. February 1 to da358@columbia.edu

NOTE: No class meeting on February 9

Function and accuracy

Session #3, February 16

Synopsis What do impressions do, or allow us to do? How do impressions fit with our goals? Is it meaningful to talk about impression accuracy—if so, how? And do we really have impressions of people or of relationships?

Readings (read before session) Fiske, Susan T. (1992). Thinking is for doing: Portraits of social cognition from Daguerreotype to laserphoto. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 63(6), 877-889.

Gill, Michael J. and Swann, William B. Jr. (2004). On What It Means to Know Someone: A Matter of Pragmatics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 86(3), 405-418.

Funder, David C. (1999). *Personality judgment: A realistic approach to person perception*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press. Chapter 3: Error and accuracy in the study of personality judgment.

Chen-Idson L. and Mischel W. (2001). The personality of familiar and significant people: the lay perceiver as a social cognitive theorist. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 585–96

Baldwin, Mark W. (1992). Relational schemas and the processing of social information. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(3), 461-484.

Assignments, etc. Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

Impressions in the wild

Session #4, February 23

Synopsis A tremendous amount of impression research revolves around lab paradigms. While these traditions can tell us a great deal, we can improve as scientists by taking a broader view as well. In this session, we'll look at impressions in the "wild" of everyday life for new ideas on what drives ordinary impressions, how they go awry, and how they can be managed/changed. We'll review and discuss writing and work outside the discipline in an effort to stimulate our scientific thinking.

We're fortunate to be joined in the first half of the session by executive coach and author of "First Impressions," Ann Demarais.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Demarais, A. and White, V. (2004). *First Impressions: What You Don't Know About How Others See You*. New York: Bantam Books.

MacFarquhar, L. (2002). The better boss. *The New Yorker*.

*Assignments,
etc.* Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

"Unanswered question" assignment due 5 p.m., February 22

Conversational processes

Session #5, March 2

Synopsis Many first impressions are based on relatively brief interactions which consist almost entirely of conversation. No acts of heroism or betrayal, no histrionics, no bitter conflict—just talking and listening. Conventional models of disposition inference don't tell us much about how we form impressions in such contexts, yet we do. In this session, we'll consider what happens.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Wyer, R., Swan, S., & Gruenfeld, D. (1995). Impression formation in informal conversations. *Social Cognition*. Vol 13(3), 243-272.

Selections from Irving Goffman [(1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books; (1971). *Relations in public: Microstudies of the public order*. New York: Basic Books.]

Sprecher, S. & Duck, S. W. (1994). Sweet talk: The importance of perceived communication for romantic and friendship attraction experienced during a get-acquainted date. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20, 391-400.

Additional readings as identified by session leadership team

*Assignments,
etc.* Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

NOTE: No class meeting on March 9 (Spring break)

Impression change and perseverance

Session #6, March 16

Synopsis Of course, first impressions often become lasting ones. But not always. Sometimes impressions are dramatically revised after weeks, months, or even years. In this session, we'll consider how and why.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Paulhus, Delroy L. (1998). Interpersonal and intrapsychic adaptiveness of trait self-enhancement: A mixed blessing? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 74(5), 1197-1208.

Swann, W. B., Milton, L. P., & Polzer, J. T. (2000). Should we create a niche or fall in line? Identity negotiation and small group effectiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 79(2), 238-250.

Jerker, D. (2005). Why Most People Disapprove of Me: Experience Sampling in Impression Formation. *Psychological Review*. 112(4), 951-978.

Park, B. (1986). A method for studying the development of impressions of real people. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 51, 907-917; also: Longitudinal changes in consensus as a function of acquaintance and agreement in liking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 72, 604-616

Additional readings as identified by session leadership team

*Assignments,
etc.* Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

“Impression artifact” report due

Social context

Session #7, March 23

Synopsis In this session, we'll embed both perceivers and targets in their social context, examining social ties and networks, as well as secondhand impressions.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Ames, D. and Kammrath, L. (2005). When the dirt sticks: Negativity in secondhand impressions.

Krackhardt, D. & Kilduff, M. (1999). Whether close or far: Social distance effects on perceived balance in friendship networks. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 76(5), 770-782.

Additional readings as identified by session leadership team

*Assignments,
etc.* Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

Organizational context

Session #8, March 30

Synopsis Organizations and organizational life feature important impression dynamics, such as job interviews, work team formation/functioning, and job evaluation. In this session, we'll explore how impressions unfold in these contexts.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Barrick, M. R., Patton, G. K., & Haugland, S. N. (2000). Accuracy of interviewer judgements of job applicant personality traits. *Personnel Psychology*, 53, 925

Posthuma, R. A., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2002). Beyond employment interview validity: A comprehensive narrative review of recent research and trends over time. *Personnel Psychology*, 55, 1

Selection from: Khurana, Rakesh (2002). *Searching for a Corporate Savior*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Additional readings as identified by session leadership team

*Assignments,
etc.* Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

Improving person perception

Session #9, April 6

Synopsis While social psychology often paints a reasonably grim picture of our ability to form good/accurate impressions of others, there is very little offered by way of guidance in terms of how to improve impressions other than “don’t stereotype” and “avoid the fundamental attribution error.” In this session, we’ll consider prescriptions and advice for reaching more effective/accurate impressions.

*Readings
(read before
session)* Funder, D.C. (1999). *Personality Judgment: A Realistic Approach to Person Perception*. San Diego: Academic Press. Chapter 8: Prospects for Improving Accuracy.

Andersen, S.M., & Ross, L. (1984). Self-knowledge and social inference: I. The impact of cognitive/affective and behavioral data. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 280-293.

Andersen, S.M. (1984). Self-knowledge and social inference: II. The diagnosticity of cognitive/affective and behavioral data. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 294-307.

Additional readings as identified by session leadership team

*Assignments,
etc.* Reaction email due by 9 a.m. to da358@columbia.edu

Emergent session

Session #10, April 13

[see below for potential emergent session topics]

Emergent session

Session #11, April 20

[see below for potential emergent session topics]

[Final paper draft due April 20]

Concluding session

Session #12, April 27

Synopsis In our final session, students will draw on their draft final papers to give brief presentations on their ideas and research proposals.

*Assignments,
etc.* Be prepared to deliver brief presentation of review/research

Final paper due May 1, Noon (707 Uris Hall)

Emergent sessions

Emergent session topics will be chosen by the instructor based on enrolled student interest and the course of discussion over the initial sessions. Potential topics and readings include (but are not limited to):

- **Conflict and competition:** what are the antecedents and consequences of impressions in the context of conflict and competition?

Impression formation and cooperative behavior *European Journal of Social Psychology* Volume 29, Issue 2-3, Date: March - May 1999, Pages: 305-328 Ellen N. M. De Bruin, Paul A. M. Van Lange

- **Nonverbal and other cues:** what are the roles of nonverbal behavior and other target attributes (e.g., babyfacedness, attire) in impressions?

Ambady, N., Bernieri, F., & Richeson, J. (2000) Towards a Histology of Social Behavior: Judgmental Accuracy from Thin Slices of Behavior. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 201-272.

Selection from Zebrowitz, L.A. (1997). *Reading Faces: Window to the Soul?* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- **Impression artifacts:** What are the material manifestations of impressions? How are they recorded and transmitted? What external “tools” do we use in impression formation? How do these things matter to impressions, and what do they tell us about impressions?

Hutchins, E. (1996). *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- **Perceiving leaders:** What are impressions of leaders or leadership, and from where do they come?

Ames & Flynn (2005). What breaks a leader: The curvilinear link between assertiveness and leadership.

Meindl, J. R. (1990). On leadership: An alternative to the conventional wisdom. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 12 (1990), pp. 159-203.

- **Non-human impressions:** How do we form impressions of non-human targets (such as robots, dogs, organizations, and brands) and what does this tell us about person perception?

Breazeal, C. (2004). *Designing Sociable Robots*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gosling, S. D., Kwan, V. S. Y., & John, O. P. (2003). A dog's got personality: A cross-species comparative approach to evaluating personality judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 1161-1169.

Bailenson, J. N. & Yee, N. (2005). Digital Chameleons. *Automatic Assimilation of Nonverbal Gestures in Immersive Virtual Environments*. *Psychological Science* Volume 16, Issue 10, Page 814-819, Oct 2005

Personality Trait Inferences About Organizations: Development of a Measure and Assessment of Construct Validity. By Slaughter, Jerel E.; Zickar, Michael J.; Highhouse, Scott; Mohr, David C. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 89(1), Feb 2004, 85-103.

Aaker, Jennifer (1997), "Dimensions of Brand Personality," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34 (August), 347-357.