**Chapter 3 Perception of the Self and Others in Interpersonal Communication**

**Chapter objectives**

**3.1 Define self-concept, self-awareness, and self-esteem and identify the suggestions for increasing awareness and esteem.**

**3.2 Explain the five stages of perception and how they influence how you receive messages.**

**3.3 Define the major impression formation processes and the ways to increase accuracy.**

**3.4 Explain the impression management strategies that may help you to be liked, to be believed, to excuse failure, to secure help, to hide faults, to be followed, and to confirm your self-image.**

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This chapter discusses two interrelated topics—the self (including self-concept, selfawareness, and self-esteem) and the nature of perception. Then these concepts are applied by looking at the ways in which you form impressions of others and how you manage the impressions of self that you convey to others.

The Self in Interpersonal Communication

3.1 Define self-concept, self-awareness, and self-esteem and identify the suggestions for increasing awareness and esteem. Let’s begin this discussion by focusing on several fundamental aspects of the self: selfconcept (the way you see yourself), self-awareness (your insight into and knowledge about yourself), and self-esteem (the value you place on yourself). In these discussions you’ll see how these dimensions influence and are influenced by the way you communicate.

Self-Concept You no doubt have an image of who you are; this is your self-concept. It consists of your feelings and thoughts about your strengths and weaknesses, your abilities and limitations, and your aspirations and worldview (Black, 1999). Your self-concept develops from at least four sources: (1) the image of you that others have and that they reveal to you, (2) the comparisons you make between yourself and others, (3) the teachings of your culture, and (4) the way you interpret and evaluate your own thoughts and behaviors (see Figure 3.1).

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Others’ Images According to Charles Horton Cooley’s (1922) concept of the looking-glass self, when you want to discover, say, how friendly or how assertive you are, you look at the image of yourself that others reveal to you through the way they treat you and react to you (Hensley, 1996). You look especially to those who are most significant in your life. As a child, for example, you look to your parents and then to your teachers. As an adult, you may look to your friends, romantic partners, and colleagues at work. If these important others think highly of you, you’ll see this positive image of yourself reflected in their behaviors; if they think little of you, you’ll see a more negative image.

**Social Comparisons**

Another way you develop self-concept is by comparing yourself with others, most often with your peers (Festinger, 1954). For example, after an exam, you probably want to know how you performed relative to the other students in your class. This gives you a clearer idea of how effectively you performed. If you play on a baseball team, it’s important to know your batting average in comparison with the batting averages of others on the team. You gain a different perspective when you see yourself in comparison to your peers. And social networks have provided a great opportunity to engage in comparisons. This seems especially true for women, who, research finds, use social media sites to compare themselves to others. Men, on the other hand, use social media more to look at the profiles of others and to search for additional friends (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). For good or ill, social media have provided you with the tools (all very easy to use) to compare yourself to others and thus to estimate your individual worth or make you feel better about yourself. Here are a half dozen ways social media enable you to find out where you stand. • Search engine reports. Type in your name on Google, Bing, or Yahoo!, for example, and you’ll see the number of websites on which your name (and similarly named others) appears. Type in a colleague’s name and you get his or her “score,” which, you’re no doubt hoping, is lower than yours. • Network spread. Your number of friends on Facebook or your contacts on LinkedIn or Plaxo is in some ways a measure of your potential influence, a practice that seems to encourage friend-collecting behavior. Look at a friend’s profile and you have your comparison. And you can easily find websites that will surf the Internet to help you contact more social network friends. Recently, for example, the State Department spent some $630,000 to attract friends and followers to its Facebook and Twitter accounts (McKelway, 2013). • Online influence. Network sites such as Klout and Peer Index provide you with a score (from 0 to 100) of your online influence. Your Klout score, for example, is a combination of your “true reach”—the number of people you influence, “amplification”—the degree to which you influence them, and “network”—the influence of your network. Postrank Analytics, on the other hand, provides you with a measure of engagement—the degree to which people interact with, pay attention to, read, or comment on what you write. • Twitter activities. The number of times you tweet might be one point of comparison but more important is the number of times you are tweeted about or your tweets are repeated (retweets). Twitalyzer can provide you with a three-part score (an impact score, a Klout score, and a Peer Index score) and can also enable you to search the “twitter elite” for the world as well as for any specific area (you can search by zip code). Assuming your Twitter score is what you’d like it to be, a single click enables you to post this score on your own Twitter page. • Blog presence. Your blog presence is readily available from your “stats” tab, where you can see how many people visited your blog since inception or over the past year, month, week, or day. And you’ll also see a map of the world indicating where people who are visiting your blog come from. • References to written works. Google Scholar, for example, enables you to see how many other writers have cited your works (and how many cited the works of the person you’re comparing) and the works in which you were cited. And, of course,

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Amazon and other online book dealers provide rankings of your books along with a star system based on reviewers’ comments. cultural teachIngs Through your parents, teachers, and the media, your culture instills in you a variety of beliefs, values, and attitudes—about success (how you define it and how you should achieve it); about your religion, race, or nationality; and about the ethical principles you should follow in business and in your personal life. These teachings provide benchmarks against which you can measure yourself. For example, achieving what your culture defines as success contributes to a positive self-concept. A perceived failure to achieve what your culture promotes (for example, not being in a permanent relationship by the time you’re 30) may contribute to a negative self-concept. self-evaluatIOns Much in the way others form images of you based on what you do, you also react to your own behavior; you interpret and evaluate it. These interpretations and evaluations help to form your selfconcept. For example, let us say that you believe lying is wrong. If you lie, you will evaluate this behavior in terms of your internalized beliefs about lying. You’ll thus react negatively to your own behavior. You may, for example, experience guilt if your behavior contradicts your beliefs. In contrast, let’s say that you tutor another student and help him or her pass a course. You will probably evaluate this behavior positively; you will feel good about this behavior and, as a result, about yourself.

**Self-Awareness**

Your self-awareness represents the extent to which you know yourself, your strengths and your weaknesses, your thoughts and feelings, and your personality tendencies. Understanding how your self-concept develops is one way to increase your self awareness: The more you understand about why you view yourself as you do, the more you will understand who you are. Additional insight is gained by looking at self-awareness through the Johari model of the self, or your four selves (Luft, 1984). YOur four selves Self-awareness is neatly explained by the model of the four selves—the Johari window. This model, presented in Figure 3.2, has four basic areas, or quadrants, each of which represents a somewhat different self. The Johari model emphasizes that the several aspects of the self are not separate pieces but are interactive parts of a whole. Each part is dependent on each other part. Like that of interpersonal communication, this model of the self is transactional. Each person’s Johari window is different, and each individual’s window varies from one time to another and from one interpersonal situation to another. Figure 3.3, for example, illustrates two possible configurations. • The open self represents all the information about you—behaviors, attitudes, feelings, desires, motivations, and ideas—that you and others know. The type of information included here might range from your name, skin color, and sex to your age, political and religious affiliations, and financial situation. Your open self varies in size depending on the situation you’re in and the person with whom you’re interacting. Some people, for example, make you feel comfortable and supported; to them, you open yourself wide, but to others you may prefer to leave most of yourself closed. • The blind self represents all the things about you that others know but of which you’re ignorant. These may include relatively insignificant habits like saying “You know,” gestures like rubbing your nose when you get angry, or traits such as a distinct body odor; they may also include details as significant as defense mechanisms, fight strategies, or repressed experiences.

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• The hidden self contains all that you know of yourself that you keep secret. In any interaction, this area includes everything you don’t want to reveal, whether it’s relevant or irrelevant to the conversation. At the extremes of the hidden-self spectrum, we have the overdisclosers and the underdisclosers. The overdisclosers tell all. They tell you their marital difficulties, their children’s problems, their financial status, and just about everything else. The underdisclosers tell nothing. They talk about you but not about themselves. • The unknown self represents truths about yourself that neither you nor others know. Sometimes this unknown self is revealed through temporary changes brought about by special experimental conditions such as hypnosis or sensory deprivation. Sometimes this area is revealed by certain projective tests or dreams.

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Mostly, however, it’s revealed by the fact that you’re constantly learning things about yourself that you didn’t know before (things that were previously in the unknown self)—for example, that you become defensive when someone asks you a question or voices disagreement, or that you compliment others in the hope of being complimented back. grOwIng In self-awareness Here are five ways you can increase your self-awareness: • Ask yourself about yourself. One way to ask yourself about yourself is to take an informal “Who Am I?” test (Bugental & Zelen, 1950; Grace & Cramer, 2003). Title a piece of paper “Who Am I?” and write 10, 15, or 20 times “I am...” Then complete each of the sentences. Try not to give only positive or socially acceptable responses; just respond with what comes to mind first. Take another piece of paper and divide it into two columns; label one column “Strengths” and the other column “Weaknesses.” Fill in each column as quickly as possible. Using these first two tests as a base, take a third piece of paper, title it “Self-Improvement Goals,” and complete the statement “I want to improve my...” as many times as you can in five minutes. Because you’re constantly changing, these self-perceptions and goals also change, so update them frequently. • Listen to others. You can learn a lot about yourself by seeing yourself as others do. In most interpersonal interactions—whether they be face-to-face or online, people comment on you in some way—on what you do, what you say, how you look. Sometimes these comments are explicit; most often they’re found in the way others look at you, in what they talk about, in what they tweet, in the pictures they post, in their interest in what you say or post. Pay close attention to this verbal and nonverbal information. • Actively seek information about yourself. Actively seek out information to reduce your blind self. You need not be so obvious as to say, “Tell me about myself” or “What do you think of me?” But you can use everyday situations to gain self-information: “Do you think I was assertive enough when asking for the raise?” Or “Would I be thought too forward if I invited myself for dinner?” Do not, of course, seek this information constantly; your friends would quickly find others with whom to interact. • See your different selves. Each person with whom you have an interpersonal relationship views you differently; to each, you’re a somewhat different person. Yet you are really all of these selves, and your self-concept is influenced by each of these views as they are reflected back to you in everyday interpersonal interactions. For starters, visualize how you’re seen by your mother, your father, your teachers, your best friend, the stranger you sat next to on the bus, your employer, your neighbor’s child. The experience will give you new and valuable perspectives on yourself. • Increase your open self. When you reveal yourself to others and increase your open self, you also reveal yourself to yourself. At the very least, you bring into clearer focus what you may have buried within. As you discuss yourself, you may see connections that you had previously missed, and with the aid of feedback from others you may gain still more insight. Also, by increasing the open self, you increase the likelihood that a meaningful and intimate dialogue will develop, which will enable you to get to know yourself better.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a measure of how valuable you think you are. If you have high selfesteem, you think highly of yourself; if you have low self-esteem, you tend to view yourself negatively. Self-esteem includes cognitive or thinking, affective or emotional, and behavioral components (Reasoner, 2010). • Cognitive self-esteem refers to your thinking about your strengths and weaknesses, about who you are versus who you’d like to be. What is your ideal self? How close are you to achieving this ideal self?

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• Affective self-esteem refers to your feelings about yourself in light of your analysis of your strengths and weaknesses. For example, do you feel pleased with yourself? Does your analysis lead you to feel dissatisfied and perhaps depressed? • Behavioral self-esteem refers to verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as your disclosures, your assertiveness, your conflict strategies, your gestures. Do you assert yourself in group situations? Do you allow others to take advantage of you? Are you confident to disclose who you really are? Before reading further about this topic, think about your self-esteem by considering the following six statements. Respond with T for true if the statement describes you at least some significant part of the time, or with F for false if the statement describes you rarely or never. \_\_\_\_ 1. Generally, I feel I have to be successful in all things. \_\_\_\_ 2. Several of my acquaintances are often critical or negative of what I do and how I think. \_\_\_\_ 3. Despite outward signs of success, I still feel unsuccessful. \_\_\_\_ 4. I often tackle projects that I know are impossible to complete to my satisfaction. \_\_\_\_ 5. When I focus on the past, I focus more often on my failures than on my successes and on my negative rather than on my positive qualities. \_\_\_\_ 6. I make little effort to improve my personal and social skills. T (or true) responses to the questions generally suggest ways of thinking that can get in the way of building positive self-esteem. F (or false) responses indicate that you are thinking much like a self-esteem coach would want you to think. The following discussion elaborates on these five issues and illustrates why each of them creates problems for the development of healthy self-esteem. The basic idea behind self-esteem is that when you feel good about yourself— about who you are and what you’re capable of doing—you will perform better. When you think you’re a success, you’re more likely to act like you’re a success. Conversely, when you think you’re a failure, you’re more likely to act like you’re a failure. When you reach for the phone to ask the most popular student in the school for a date and you visualize yourself being successful and effective, you’re more likely to give a good impression. If, on the other hand, you think you’re going to forget what you want to say or stutter or say something totally stupid, you’re less likely to be successful. Low self-esteem is learned (Lancer, 2013). Somewhere, somehow you learned that your feelings are not justified or that you aren’t capable of doing this or that. And because it’s learned behavior, it’s possible to change this, although it’s not an easy process (Gross, 2013). Here are six suggestions for increasing self-esteem that parallel the questions in the self-test. attack self-DestructIve BelIefs Challenge self-destructive beliefs—ideas you have about yourself that are unproductive or that make it more difficult for you to achieve your goals (Einhorn, 2006; Butler, 1981; Gross, 2006). Often, these selfdestructive beliefs tell you that you should be able to achieve unrealistic goals. Here, for example, are some beliefs that are likely to prove self-destructive: • I should be liked by everyone. • I should be successful in everything I do. • I should always win. • I should be totally in control of my life. • I should always be productive. These beliefs set unrealistically high standards, and therefore almost always end in failure. As a result, you may develop a negative self-image, seeing yourself as someone

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ones, such as these: • It would be nice to be loved by everyone, but it isn’t necessary to my happiness. • It’s nice to be successful but impossible to be successful at everything. • It would be nice if I always won but no one can always win. And I don’t have to win all the time to be happy. I can deal with losing. • I can’t possibly control everything that has an impact on my life. Only some things are under my control. • There is a limit on what one person can do; it’s okay if I do what I can do and don’t do the rest. seek Out nOurIshIng peOple Psychologist Carl Rogers (1970) drew a distinction between noxious and nourishing people. Noxious people criticize and find fault with just about everything. Nourishing people, on the other hand, are positive and optimistic. Most important, they reward us, they stroke us, they make us feel good about ourselves. To enhance your self-esteem, seek out these people. At the same time, avoid noxious people—those who make you feel negatively about yourself. Seek to become more nourishing yourself so that you can build up others’ self-esteem. Identification with people similar to yourself also seems to increase self-esteem. For example, deaf people who identified with the larger deaf community had greater self-esteem than those who didn’t so identify (Jambor & Elliott, 2005). Similarly, identification with your cultural group also seems helpful in fostering positive self-esteem (McDonald, McCabe, Yeh, Lau, Garland, & Hough, 2005). Beware the ImpOstOr phenOmenOn The impostor phenomenon refers to the tendency to disregard outward signs of success and to consider yourself an “impostor,” a fake, a fraud, one who doesn’t really deserve to be considered successful (Clance, 1985; Harvey & Katz, 1985). Even though others may believe you are a success, you “know” that they are wrong. As you might expect, this tendency is more likely in new situations—a new job, say. One of the dangers of this belief is that it may prevent you from seeking advancement in your profession, believing you won’t be up to the task. Becoming aware that such beliefs are not uncommon and that they are not necessarily permanent should help relieve some of these misperceptions. Another useful aid is to develop a relationship with an honest and knowledgeable mentor who will not only teach you the ropes but will let you know that you are successful. At the same time, be careful of the Lake Wobegon effect—a concept taken from Garrison Keillor’s novel, Lake Wobegon, in which everyone in the town was above average; it which refers to the tendency to see ourselves as better, more competent, and more intelligent than our peers without any real evidence or reason. wOrk On prOjects that wIll result In success Some people want to fail (or so it seems). Often, they select projects that result in failure simply because these projects are impossible to complete. Avoid this trap and select projects that result in success. Each success helps to build your selfesteem. Each success, too, will make the next success a little easier. If a project does fail, recognize that this does not mean that you’re a failure. Everyone fails somewhere along the line. Failure is something that happens to you; it’s not something you’ve created, and it’s not something inside you. Failing once does not mean that you will fail the next time. So learn to put failure in perspective. remInD YOurself Of YOur successes Some people have a tendency to focus on and to exaggerate their failures, their missed opportunities, their social mistakes. However, others witnessing these failures give them much less importance (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001). If your objective is to correct what you did wrong or to identify the skills that you need to correct these failures, then focusing on failures can have some positive value.

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But if you focus only on failure without forming any plans for correction, then you’re probably just making life more difficult for yourself and limiting your self-esteem. To counteract the tendency to recall failures, remind yourself of your successes. Recall these successes both intellectually and emotionally. Realize why they were successes, and relive the emotional experience when you sank that winning basketball, or aced that test, or helped that friend overcome personal problems. And while you’re at it, recall your positive qualities. secure affIrmatIOn An affirmation is simply a statement asserting that something is true. In discussions of self-concept and self-awareness, the word affirmation is used to refer to positive statements about yourself, statements asserting that something good or positive is true of you. It’s frequently recommended that you remind yourself of your successes with affirmations—that you focus on your good deeds; on your positive qualities, strengths, and virtues; and on your productive and meaningful relationships with friends, loved ones, and relatives (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1998; Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2007). One useful way to look at self-affirmation is in terms of “I am,” “I can,” and “I will” statements (www.coping.org). • “I am” statements focus on your self-image—on how you see yourself—and might include, for example, “I am a worthy person,” “I am responsible,” “I am capable of loving,” and “I am a good team player.” • “I can” statements focus on your abilities and might include, for example, “I can accept my past but also let it go,” “I can learn to be a more responsive partner,” “I can assert myself when appropriate,” and “I can control my anger.” • “I will” statements focus on useful and appropriate goals you want to achieve and might include, for example, “I will get over my guilty feelings,” “I will study more effectively,” “I will act more supportively,” and “I will not take on more responsibility than I can handle.” The idea behind this advice is that the way you talk to yourself influences what you think of yourself. If you affirm yourself—if you tell yourself that you’re a friendly person, that you can be a leader, that you will succeed on the next test— you will soon come to feel more positively about yourself. Some researchers, however, argue that such affirmations—although extremely popular in self-help books—may not be very helpful. These critics contend that if you have low self-esteem, you’re not going to believe your self-affirmations because you don’t have a high opinion of yourself to begin with (Paul, 2001). According to this view, the alternative to self-affirmation is securing affirmation from others. You do this by, for example, becoming more interpersonally competent and interacting with more positive people. In this way, you’d get more positive feedback from others—which, these researchers argue, is more helpful than self-talk in raising self-esteem.

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**Perception in Interpersonal Communication**

3.2 explain the five stages of perception and how they influence how you receive messages.

Perception is the process by which you become aware of objects, events, and especially people through your senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. Perception is an active, not a passive, process. Your perceptions result both from what exists in the outside world and from your own experiences, desires, needs and wants, loves and hatreds. Among the reasons perception is so important in interpersonal communication is that it influences your communication choices. The messages you send and listen to depend on how you see the world, on how you evaluate specific situations, and on what you think of yourself and of the people with whom you interact. Interpersonal perception is a continuous series of processes that blend into one another. For convenience of discussion, we can separate interpersonal perception into five stages: (1) You sense, you pick up some kind of stimulation; (2) you organize the stimuli in some way; (3) you interpret and evaluate what you perceive; (4) you store it in memory; and (5) you retrieve it when needed.

**Stage One: Stimulation**

At this first stage of perception, your sense organs are stimulated—you hear a new CD, see a friend, smell someone’s perfume, taste an orange, receive an instant message, feel another’s sweaty palm. Change and newness seem to be particularly stimulating and often get your attention. This is one of the reasons that changing your profile photo gets you more attention; you “look new” (Roper, 2014). Contrast also seems to prove especially stimulating and attention-getting; if there are six or seven similar items and one different, you’re likely to focus on the different one. It’s especially important to understand that at this first stage you perceive selectively; you engage in what is called selective perception, a general term that includes selective attention and selective exposure: • In selective attention, you attend to those things that you anticipate will fulfill your needs or will prove enjoyable. For example, when daydreaming in class, you don’t hear what the instructor is saying until your name is called. Your selective

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attention mechanism then focuses your senses on your name. As you can appreciate from searching the web and especially social media sites, selective attention is made more difficult by the enormity of information available on every computer screen and the varied ways in which it comes at you, for example, with pop-up images and videos and advertisements you’re forced to listen to. • Through selective exposure, you expose yourself to people or messages that confirm your existing beliefs, contribute to your objectives, or prove satisfying in some way. For example, after you buy a car, you’re more apt to read and listen to advertisements for the car you just bought because these messages tell you that you made the right decision. At the same time, you are likely to avoid advertisements for the cars that you considered but eventually rejected because these messages would tell you that you made the wrong decision.

**Stage Two: Organization**

At the second stage, you organize the information your senses pick up. Three interesting ways in which people organize their perceptions are by rules, by schemata, and by scripts. Let’s look at each briefly. Organization by rules In the organization of perceptions by rules, one frequently used rule is that of proximity or physical closeness: Things that are physically close to each other are perceived as a unit. Thus, using this rule, you tend to perceive people who are often together, or messages spoken one immediately after the other, as units, as belonging together. Another rule is similarity: Things that are physically similar (they look alike) are perceived as belonging together and forming a unit. This principle of similarity may lead you to see people who dress alike as belonging together. Similarly, you may assume that people who work at the same jobs, who are of the same religion, who live in the same building, or who talk with the same accent belong together. The rule of contrast is the opposite of similarity: When items (people or messages, for example) are very different from each other, you conclude that they don’t belong together; they’re too different from each other to be part of the same unit. If you’re the only one who shows up at an informal gathering in a tuxedo, you’ll be seen as not belonging to the group because you contrast too much with the other people present. OrganIzatIOn BY schemata Another way you organize material is by creating schemata, mental templates that help you organize the millions of items of information you come into contact with every day (as well as those you already have in memory). Schemata, the plural of schema (though schemas seems to be used in many texts), may thus be viewed as general ideas about people (e.g., about Pat and Chris, Japanese people, Baptists, Texans), about yourself (your qualities, abilities, liabilities), or about social roles (the characteristics of a police officer, professor, multibillionaire CEO). You develop schemata from your own experience—actual as well as via television, reading, the Internet, and hearsay. You might have a schema for college athletes, for example, and this might include an image of college athletes as strong, ambitious, academically weak, and egocentric. OrganIzatIOn BY scrIpts A script is really a type of schema, but because it’s a different type, it’s given a different name. A script is an organized body of information about some action, event, or procedure. It’s a general idea of how some event should play out or unfold; it’s the rules governing events and their sequence. For example, you probably have a script for eating in a restaurant, with the actions organized into a pattern something like this: Enter, take a seat, review the menu, order from the menu, eat your food, ask for the bill, leave a tip, pay the bill, and exit the restaurant. Similarly, you probably have scripts for how you do laundry, how an interview is to be conducted, the stages you go through in introducing someone to someone else, and the way you ask for a date.

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As you can appreciate, rules, schemata, and scripts are useful shortcuts to simplify your understanding, remembering, and recalling information about people and events. They also enable you to generalize, make connections, and otherwise profit from previously acquired knowledge. If you didn’t have these shortcuts, you’d have to treat every person or action differently from each other person or action. This would make every experience a new one, totally unrelated to anything you already know. As you’ll see in the next stage, however, these shortcuts may mislead you; they may contribute to your remembering things that are consistent with your schemata (even if they didn’t occur) and to your distorting or forgetting information that is inconsistent.

**Stage Three: Interpretation–Evaluation**

The interpretation–evaluation step in perception (a combined term because the two processes cannot be separated) is greatly influenced by your experiences; needs; wants; values; beliefs about the way things are or should be; expectations; physical and emotional state; and so on. Your interpretation–evaluation are influenced by your rules, schemata, and scripts as well as by your gender; for example, women have been found to view others more positively than men (Winquist, Mohr, & Kenny, 1998). For example, on meeting a new person who is introduced to you as Ben Williams, a college football player, you’re likely to apply your schema for athletes to this person and view him as strong, ambitious, academically weak, and egocentric. You will, in other words, see this person through the filter of your schema and evaluate him according to your schema for college athletes. Similarly, when viewing someone performing some series of actions (say, eating in a restaurant), you apply your script to this event and view the event through the script. You will interpret the actions of the diner as appropriate or inappropriate depending on your script for this behavior and the ways in which the diner performed the sequence of actions. Judgments about members of other cultures are often ethnocentric. Because your schemata and scripts are created on the basis of your own cultural beliefs and experiences, you can easily (but inappropriately) apply these to members of other cultures. And so it’s easy to infer that when members of other cultures do things that conform to your own scripts, they’re right; and when they do things that contradict your scripts, they’re wrong—a classic example of ethnocentric thinking. This tendency can easily contribute to intercultural misunderstandings.

**Stage Four: Memory**

Your perceptions and their interpretations–evaluations are put into memory; they’re stored so that you may retrieve them at some later time. So, for example, you have in memory your schema for college athletes and the fact that Ben Williams is a football player. Ben Williams is then stored in memory with “cognitive tags” that tell you that he’s strong, ambitious, academically weak, and egocentric. Despite the fact that you’ve not witnessed Ben’s strength or ambitions and have no idea of his academic record or his psychological profile, you still may store your memory of Ben along with the qualities that make up your schema for “college athletes.” Now let’s say that at different times you hear that Ben failed Spanish I, normally an A or B course at your school; that Ben got an A in chemistry, normally a tough course; and that Ben is transferring to Harvard as a theoretical physics major. Schemata act as filters or gatekeepers; they allow certain information to get stored in relatively objective form, much as you heard or read it, and may distort other information or prevent it from getting stored. As a result, these three pieces of information about Ben may get stored very differently in your memory. For example, you may readily store the information that Ben failed Spanish because it’s consistent with your schema; it fits neatly into the template you have of college athletes. Information that’s consistent with your schema—as in this example— strengthens your schema and makes it more resistant to change (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2007). Depending on the strength of your schema, you may also store in memory (even though you didn’t hear it) that Ben did poorly in other courses as well.

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The information that Ben got an A in chemistry, because it contradicts your schema (it just doesn’t seem right), may easily be distorted or lost. The information that Ben is transferring to Harvard, however, is a bit different. This information is also inconsistent with your schema, but it is so drastically inconsistent that you begin to look at this mindfully and may even begin to question your schema or perhaps view Ben as an exception to the general rule. In either case, you’re going to etch Ben’s transferring to Harvard very clearly in your mind.

**Stage Five: Recall**

The recall stage of perception involves accessing the information you have stored in memory. Let’s say that at some later date you want to retrieve your information about Ben because he’s the topic of discussion among you and a few friends. But your memory isn’t reproductive; you don’t simply reproduce what you’ve heard or seen. Rather, you reconstruct what you’ve heard or seen into a whole that is meaningful to you—depending in great part on your schemata and scripts. It’s this reconstruction that you store in memory. When you want to retrieve this information, you may recall it with a variety of inaccuracies: • You’re likely to recall information that is consistent with your schema; in fact, you may not even be recalling the specific information (say, about Ben) but may actually just be recalling your schema (which contains information about college athletes and, because of this, also about Ben). • You may fail to recall information that is inconsistent with your schema; you have no place to put that information, so you easily lose it or forget it. • You may recall information that drastically contradicts your schema because it forces you to think about (and perhaps rethink) your schema and its accuracy; it may even force you to revise your schema for college athletes in general.

**Impression Formation**

3.3 Define the major impression formation processes and the ways to increase accuracy.

Impression formation (sometimes referred to as person perception) consists of a variety of processes that you go through in forming an impression of another person. Each of these perception processes has pitfalls and potential dangers. Before reading about these processes that you use in perceiving other people, examine your perception strategies by responding to the following statements with T if the statement is usually or generally true (accurate in describing your behavior), or with F if the statement is usually or generally false (inaccurate in describing your behavior). \_\_\_\_ 1. I make predictions about people’s behaviors that generally prove to be true. \_\_\_\_ 2. When I know some things about another person, I can pretty easily fill in what I don’t know. \_\_\_\_ 3. Generally my expectations are borne out by what I actually see; that is, my later perceptions usually match my initial expectations.

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\_\_\_\_ 4. I base most of my impressions of people on the first few minutes of our meeting. \_\_\_\_ 5. I generally find that people I like possess positive characteristics and people I don’t like possess negative characteristics. \_\_\_\_ 6. I generally take credit for the positive things that happen and deny responsibility for the negative things. \_\_\_\_ 7. I generally attribute people’s attitudes and behaviors to their most obvious physical or psychological characteristic. \_\_\_\_ 8. When making judgments about others I emphasize looking to their personality rather than to the circumstances or context. These questions were designed to raise questions to be considered in this chapter. All the statements refer to perceptual processes that many people use but that often get people into trouble because they lead us to form inaccurate impressions. The questions refer to several processes to be discussed below: the self-fulfilling prophecy (statement 1), personality theory (2), perceptual accentuation (3), primacy–recency (4), and consistency (5). Statements 6, 7, and 8 refer to the barriers we encounter as we attempt to determine motives for other people’s and even our own behaviors: self-serving bias, overattribution, and the fundamental attribution error. As you read this chapter, think about these processes and consider how you might use them more accurately and not allow them to get in the way of accurate and reasonable people perception. At the same time, recognize that situations vary widely and that strategies for clearer perception will prove useful most of the time but not all of the time. In fact, you may want to identify situations in which you shouldn’t follow the suggestions that this text offers.

**Impression Formation Processes**

The way in which you perceive another person, and ultimately come to some kind of evaluation or interpretation of this person, is not a simple logical sequence. Instead, your perceptions seem to be influenced by a variety of processes. Here we consider some of the more significant: the self-fulfilling prophecy, personality theory, perceptual accentuation, primacy–regency, consistency, and attribution of control. self-fulfIllIng prophecy A self-fulfilling prophecy (identified in statement 1 in the above self-test) is a prediction that comes true because you act on it as if it were true. Put differently, a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when you act on your schema as if it were true and in doing so make it true. Self-fulfilling prophecies occur in widely different situations such as parent–child relationships, educational settings, and business (Merton, 1957; Rosenthal, 2002; Madon, Guyll, & Spoth, 2004; Tierney & Farmer, 2004). There are four basic steps in the self-fulfilling prophecy: 1. You make a prediction or formulate a belief about a person or a situation. For example, you predict that Pat is friendly in interpersonal encounters. 2. You act toward that person or situation as if that prediction or belief were true. For example, you act as if Pat were a friendly person. 3. Because you act as if the belief were true, it becomes true. For example, because of the way you act toward Pat, Pat becomes comfortable and friendly. 4. You observe your effect on the person or the resulting situation, and what you see strengthens your beliefs. For example, you observe Pat’s friendliness and this reinforces your belief that Pat is in fact friendly. The self-fulfilling prophecy can also be seen when you make predictions about yourself and fulfill them. For example, suppose you enter a group situation convinced that the other members will dislike you. Almost invariably you’ll be proved right; the other members will appear to you to dislike you. What you may be doing is acting in a way that encourages the group to respond to you negatively. In this way, you fulfill your prophecies about yourself. Self-fulfilling prophecies can short-circuit critical thinking and influence others’ behavior (or your own) so that it conforms to your prophecies. As a result, you may

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see what you predicted rather than what is really there (for example, you may perceive yourself as a failure because you have predicted it rather than because of any actual failures). A widely known example of the self-fulfilling prophecy is the pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). In a classic research study, experimenters told teachers that certain pupils were expected to do exceptionally well—that they were late bloomers. And although the experimenters selected the “late bloomers” at random, the students who were labeled “late bloomers” performed at higher levels than their classmates. These students became what their teachers thought they were. The Pygmalion effect has also been studied in varied contexts such as the courtroom, the clinic, the work cubicle, management and leadership practices, athletic coaching, and stepfamilies (Eden, 1992; Solomon et al., 1996; Einstein, 1995; McNatt, 2001; Rosenthal, 2002). persOnalItY theOrY Each person has a personality theory that says which characteristics of an individual go with other characteristics (statement 2 in the self-test). Most often these theories are subconscious or implicit, but they can be brought to consciousness. Consider, for example, the following brief statements. Note the word in parentheses that you think best completes each sentence. • Carlo is energetic, eager, and (intelligent, unintelligent). • Kim is bold, defiant, and (extroverted, introverted). • Joe is bright, lively, and (thin, heavy). • Eve is attractive, intelligent, and (likeable, unlikeable). • Susan is cheerful, positive, and (outgoing, shy). • Angel is handsome, tall, and (friendly, unfriendly). What makes some of these choices seem right and others wrong is your personality theory, the system of rules that tells you which characteristics go together. Your theory may, for example, have told you that a person who is energetic and eager is also intelligent, not unintelligent—although there is no logical reason why an unintelligent person could not be energetic and eager. Another type of personality theory that many hold is that you are what your friends are. It’s a simple theory based on the assumption that friends are generally similar to each other. If your friends are cool, so must you be. If your friends are dull (as demonstrated in their photos and in their posts), you’ll be seen as dull too. Social media users, for example, are seen to be more attractive when they have attractive friends than when their friends are less attractive (Walther et al., 2008). The widely documented halo effect is a function of personality theory (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Riggio, 1987). If you believe a person has some positive qualities, you’re likely to infer that she or he also possesses other positive qualities. There is also a reverse halo effect (or “horns” effect): If you know a person possesses several negative qualities, you’re more likely to infer that the person also has other negative qualities. For example, you’re more likely to perceive attractive people as more generous, sensitive, trustworthy, and interesting than those less attractive. And the reverse halo effect leads you to perceive those who are unattractive as mean, dishonest, antisocial, and sneaky (Katz, 2003). The ambiguity of the message tends to increase your reliance on your personality theory in making judgments. This is especially important in online communication, which is often more ambiguous than face-to-face communication. When you read or view something on some social media site that is ambiguous, you’ll resolve the ambiguity according to your personality theory. For example, you know that Joe is an honest and positive person who always sees the best in people; when you read an ambiguous comment from Joe, you’ll resolve it so that Joe retains your image of him as an honest and positive person.

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perceiving qualities in an individual that your theory tells you should be present but aren’t, or seeing qualities that are not there (Plaks, Grant, & Dweck, 2005). perceptual accentuatIOn When poor and rich children were shown pictures of coins and later asked to estimate their size, the poor children’s size estimates were much greater than the rich children’s. Similarly, hungry people need fewer visual cues to perceive food objects and food terms than do people who are not hungry. This process, called perceptual accentuation, leads you to see what you expect or want to see (statement 3 in the self-test). You see people you like as better looking and smarter than those you don’t like. You magnify or accentuate what will satisfy your needs and desires: The thirsty person sees a mirage of water; the sexually deprived person sees a mirage of sexual satisfaction. Perceptual accentuation can lead you to perceive what you need or want to perceive rather than what is really there and can lead you to fail to perceive what you don’t want to perceive. For example, you may not perceive signs of impending relationship problems because you’re only seeing what you want to see. Another interesting distortion created by perceptual accentuation is that you may perceive certain behaviors as indicative that someone likes you simply because you want to be liked. For example, you view general politeness and friendly behavior used as a persuasive strategy (say, by a salesperson) as an indication that the person genuinely likes you. prImacY–recencY Assume for a moment that you’re enrolled in a course in which half the classes are extremely dull and half are extremely exciting. At the end of the semester, you evaluate the course and the instructor. Will your evaluation be more favorable if the dull classes occurred in the first half of the semester and the exciting classes in the second? Or will it be more favorable if the order is reversed? If what comes first exerts the most influence, you have a primacy effect (statement 4 in the self-test). If what comes last (or most recently) exerts the most influence, you have a recency effect. In the classic study on the effects of primacy–recency in interpersonal perception, college students perceived a person who was described as “intelligent, industrious, impulsive, critical, stubborn, and envious” more positively than a person described as “envious, stubborn, critical, impulsive, industrious, and intelligent” (Asch, 1946). Notice that the descriptions are identical; only the order was changed. Clearly, we have a tendency to use early information to get a general idea about a person and to use later information to make this impression more specific. The initial information helps us form a schema for the person. Once that schema is formed, we’re likely to resist information that contradicts it. One interesting practical implication of primacy–recency is that the first impression you make is likely to be the most important—and is likely to be made very quickly (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004; Willis & Todorov, 2006). A violation of trust, for example, that occurs early in a relationship can do permanent damage to a relationship even after you’ve tried to make amends (Lount, Zhong, Sivanathan, & Murnighan, 2008). The reason is that the schema that others form of you functions as a filter to admit or block additional information about you. If the initial impression or schema is positive, others are likely to (1) remember additional positive information readily because it confirms this original positive image or schema, (2) forget or distort negative information easily because it contradicts this original positive schema, and (3) interpret ambiguous information as positive. You win in all three ways—if the initial impression is positive. cOnsIstencY The tendency to maintain balance among perceptions or attitudes is called consistency (statement 5 in the self-test). People expect certain things to go together and other things not to go together. On a purely intuitive basis, for example, respond to the following sentences by noting your expected response: 1. I expect a person I like to (like, dislike) me. 2. I expect a person I dislike to (like, dislike) me.

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3. I expect my friend to (like, dislike) my friend. 4. I expect my friend to (like, dislike) my enemy. 5. I expect my enemy to (like, dislike) my friend. 6. I expect my enemy to (like, dislike) my enemy. According to most consistency theories, your expectations would be as follows: You would expect a person you liked to like you (1) and a person you disliked to dislike you (2). You would expect a friend to like a friend (3) and to dislike an enemy (4). You would expect your enemy to dislike your friend (5) and to like your other enemy (6). All these expectations are intuitively satisfying. You would also expect someone you liked to possess characteristics you liked or admired and would expect your enemies not to possess characteristics you liked or admired. Conversely, you would expect people you liked to lack unpleasant characteristics and those you disliked to possess unpleasant characteristics. Uncritically assuming that an individual is consistent can lead you to ignore or distort perceptions that are inconsistent with your picture of the whole person. For example, you may misinterpret Karla’s unhappiness because your image of Karla is “happy, controlled, and contented.” attrIButIOn Of cOntrOl Still another way in which you form impressions is through the attribution of control. For example, suppose you invite your friend Desmond to dinner for 7:00 p.m. and he arrives at 9:00. Consider how you would respond to each of these reasons: Reason 1: “I just couldn’t tear myself away from the beach. I really wanted to get a great tan.” Reason 2: “I was driving here when I saw some young kids mugging an old couple. I broke it up and took the couple home. They were so frightened that I had to stay with them until their children arrived. Their phone was out of order and my cell battery died, so I had no way of calling to tell you I’d be late.” Reason 3: “I got in a car accident and was taken to the hospital.” Depending on the reason, you would probably attribute very different motives to Desmond’s behavior. With reasons 1 and 2, you’d conclude that Desmond was in control of his behavior (the reasons were internal). With reason 3, you’d conclude that he was not in control of his behavior (the reason was external and not under Desmond’s control). You would probably respond negatively to reason 1 (Desmond was selfish and inconsiderate) and positively to reason 2 (Desmond was a Good Samaritan). Because Desmond was not in control of his behavior in reason 3, you would probably not attribute either positive or negative motivation to his behavior. Instead, you would probably feel sorry that he got into an accident. You probably make similar judgments based on control in numerous situations. Consider, for example, how you would respond to the following situations: • Doris fails her history midterm exam. • Sidney’s car is repossessed because he failed to keep up the payments. • Margie has developed high blood pressure and is complaining that she feels awful. • Thomas’s wife has just filed for divorce and he is feeling depressed. You would most likely be sympathetic to each of these people if you felt that he or she was not in control of what happened; for example, if the examination was unfair, if Sidney lost his job because of employee discrimination, if Margie’s blood pressure was caused by some inherited physiological problem, and if Thomas’s wife wanted to leave him for a wealthy drug dealer. On the other hand, you probably would not be sympathetic if you felt that these people were in control of what happened; for example, if Doris partied instead of studying, if Sidney gambled his payments away, if Margie ate nothing but salty junk food and refused to exercise, and if Thomas had been repeatedly unfaithful and his wife finally gave up trying to reform him.

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frequently ask if they were in control of the behavior. Generally, research shows that if you feel a person was in control of negative behaviors, you’ll come to dislike him or her. If you believe the person was not in control of negative behaviors, you’ll come to feel sorry for and not blame the person. In your attribution of control—or in attributing motives on the basis of any other reasons (for example, hearsay or observations of the person’s behavior) beware of several potential errors: (1) the self-serving bias, (2) overattribution, and (3) the fundamental attribution error. 1. You exhibit the self-serving bias when you take credit for the positive and deny responsibility for the negative (statement 6 in the self-test). For example, you’re more likely to attribute your positive outcomes (say, you get an A on an exam) to internal and controllable factors— to your personality, intelligence, or hard work. And you’re more likely to attribute your negative outcomes (say, you get a D) to external and uncontrollable factors—to the exam’s being exceptionally difficult or to your roommate’s party the night before (Bernstein, Stephan, & Davis, 1979; Duval & Silva, 2002). 2. Overattribution is the tendency to single out one or two obvious characteristics of a person and attribute everything that person does to this one or these two characteristics (statement 7 in the self-test). For example, if a person is blind or was born into great wealth, there’s often a tendency to attribute everything that person does to such factors. And so you might say, “Alex overeats because he’s blind,” or “Lillian is irresponsible because she has never had to work for her money.” To avoid over attribution, recognize that most behaviors and personality characteristics result from lots of factors. You almost always make a mistake when you select one factor and attribute everything to it. 3. The fundamental attribution error occurs when you assess someone’s behavior but overvalue the contribution of internal factors (for example, a person’s personality) and undervalue the influence of external factors (for example, the context or situation the person is in). This fundamental attribution error (statement 8 in the self-test) leads you to conclude that people do what they do because that’s the kind of people they are, not because of the situation they’re in. When Pat is late for an appointment, for example, you’re more likely to conclude that Pat is inconsiderate or irresponsible than to attribute the lateness to a bus breakdown or a traffic accident. A summary of impression formation processes and the cautions to be observed are presented in Table 3.1.

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