

# Lecture: Impression Formation & Interpersonal Perception



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# Learning Outcomes

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After the session and appropriate reading, students should be able to:

- Understand how social psychologists have utilised cognitive processes to understand the impression formation process.
- Discuss different ideas proposed to explain impression formation in general, for first impressions and in situations where there is little prior knowledge of a person.



# Lecture Outline

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- Definition of interpersonal perception.
- Object versus person perception.
- Cognition in forming impressions
- Forming impressions automatically
- Making first impressions
- Making impressions without prior *knowledge*.



# Definition

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- “.....an active process (or set of processes) through which we seek to know and understand others” (Baron & Byrne, 1997, p38).



# Object vs Person: Similarities

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- Key components:
  - Selection - focusing on aspect of object or behaviour
  - Organisation - formation of coherent impression of person or object.
  - Inference - attributing characteristics to person or object for which there's no real evidence.



# Object vs Person: Differences

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- People behave - behaviour may provide data for making inferences.
- People interact - one person's behaviour may influence another's.
  - Social behaviour is partly the product of another's behaviour towards the self.
- People perceive and experience.
  - One person perception may be influenced by another's experience of them



# Impression Formation: Questions

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- Which cognitive strategies are used to form impressions of others?
- How do we form first impressions of others?
- How important are first impressions?



# Forming Impressions

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- Asch (1946)
  - Dynamic product of all perceptual information available (including *memory*)
  - Some information more important than others
  - Some information accessed more than other information when forming an impression.





# Central Traits (Asch, 1946)

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## Stimulus Lists

### **Group 1**

intelligent

skilful

industrious

*warm*

determined

practical

cautious

### **Group 2**

intelligent

skilful

industrious

*cold*

determined

practical

cautious



# Peripheral Traits (Asch, 1946)

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## Stimulus Lists

### **Group 1**

intelligent

skilful

industrious

*polite*

determined

practical

cautious

### **Group 2**

intelligent

skilful

industrious

*blunt*

determined

practical

cautious



# Asch: Evaluation

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- Certain information more important in forming an impression.
  - Central and peripheral traits (Asch, 1946; Kelley, 1950).
  - The halo effect (Asch, 1946).
- Does the effect “hold up” for impressions being formed about a real person?
  - Is actual experience important for the operation of central and peripheral traits?



# Impressions in the real world

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- Kelley (1950)
- Guest lecturer experiment
- Half participants told that lecturer “cold”, the other half “warm”
- Then exposed to lecturer
- DV = impression formed of lecturer after exposure
- Replicated Asch’s original work



# Implicit Personality Theory

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- Bruner & Taguiri (1954)
  - Expectation about another based on knowledge derived from central traits
  - Attend to preconceptions held about the totality of the person based on central traits.
  - Important role of stereotyping process for the formation of implicit personalities.



# Impression Formation Goal as Automatic

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- Chartrand & Bargh (1996)
  - The goal of impression formation can be activated by the environment preconsciously.
  - Primed impression formation goal using scrambled sentence technique (memory goal as control condition)
    - ... a supraliminal priming method.
    - Prime example = *opinion, evaluate, personality*



# Chartrand & Bargh (1996)

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- Read passages describing various behaviours.
- Then asked to recall as many of the behaviours described as they could – *surprise recall*.
- Never told to form an impression.
- Primed participants reported significantly more behavioural descriptions than *memory goal* condition



# Impression Formation as Automatic

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- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i10VhIRpwJc>





# Impression Formation as Automatic

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- Williams & Bargh (2008)
  - Participants were exposed to warm or cold temperatures by incidentally holding a confederate's coffee cup (iced or hot).
  - Participants read that "Person A" was intelligent, skillful, industrious, determined, practical, and cautious.
  - Rated on 5 scales related to the warm-cold dimension and 5 unrelated
  - People who had held the hot coffee cup perceived the target person as being significantly warmer (than did those who had briefly held the cup of iced coffee)
  - Same result when Ps asked to select gift either for themselves or a friend i.e. reward for a friend



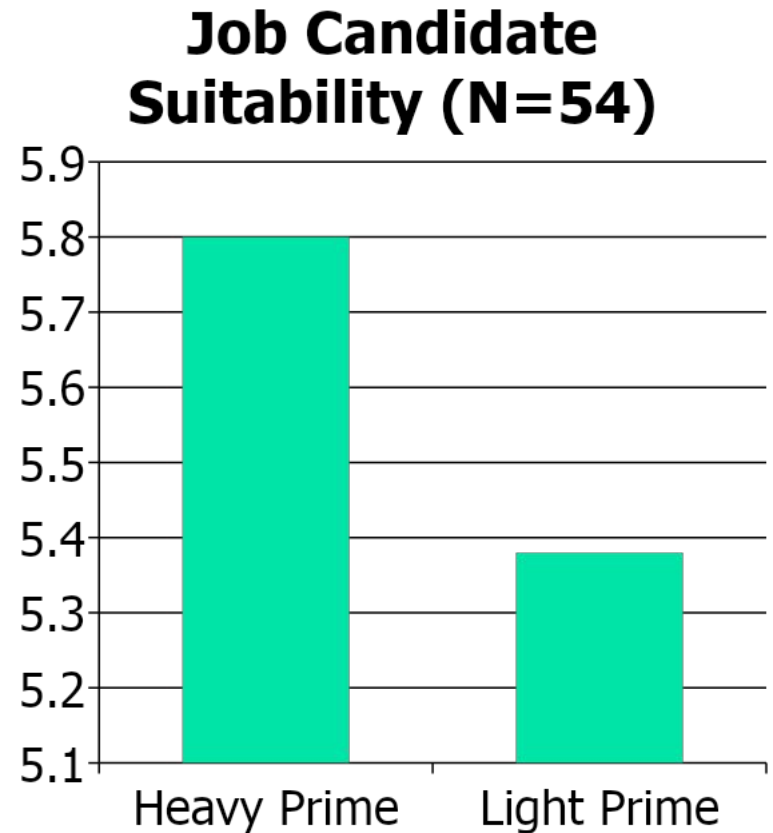
# Impression Formation as Automatic

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- Ackerman, Nocera & Bargh (2010)
  - Studied role of 'touching' objects to trigger *associated* representations for impression formation.
  - Six experiments demonstrating how *weight, texture* and *hardness* show nonconscious activation of impression formation representational cognitive sets.

# Ackerman, Nocera & Bargh (2010): Experiment 1

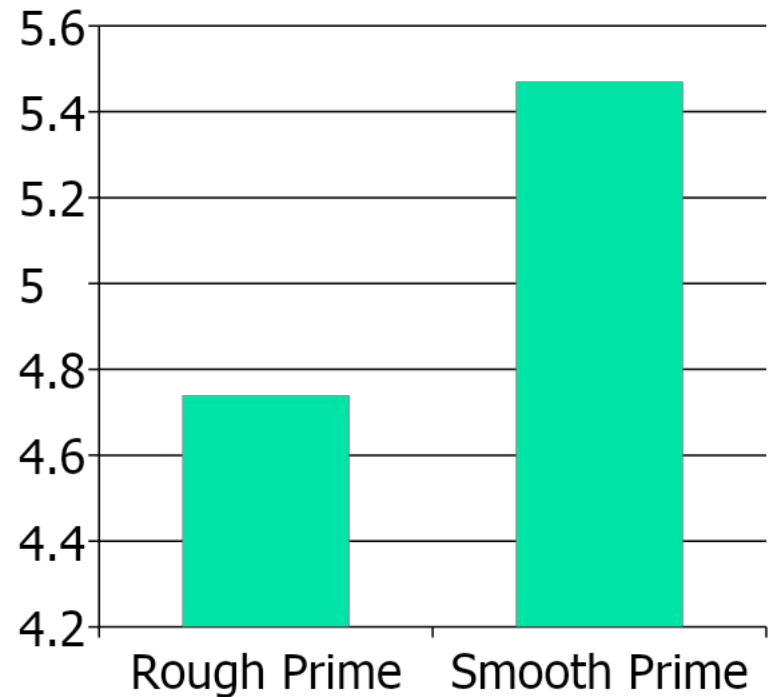
- Ps asked to evaluate job candidate applications – based on CV
- CV given on either a) heavy clipboard or b) light clipboard
- Those holding heavy clipboards rated applicants as more suitable
- Why?
  - Because 'heavy' implicitly associated with perceived seriousness of application
  - Suitability impression activated



# Ackerman, Nocera & Bargh (2010): Experiment 3

- Ps completed puzzle with pieces covered with either a) sandpaper (*harsh texture*) or b) nothing (*smooth texture*)
- Then read scenario about interaction between two people – ambiguous interaction.
- Rated according to whether they saw the interaction as being socially co-ordinated or not (e.g. adversarial/friendly, etc)
- Rough prime = less social co-ordination
- Why?
  - Implicit activation by rough prime of *related* social co-ordination representation

**Rating of social co-ordination (N=63)**





# Do First/Last Impressions Count?

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- Seriation and social cognition.
- Primacy vs. recency.
- Primacy effect - first impressions count more than later ones.
- Recency effect - greater impact of more recent information on impression formation.



# Primacy Effect

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- Asch (1946) - reverse order experiment.

## **Group 1**

intelligent

industrious

impulsive

critical

stubborn

envious

## **Group 2**

envious

stubborn

critical

impulsive

industrious

intelligent



# Primacy/Recency Effects

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- Luchins (1957) - Personality experiment.
- Matched subjects on personality.
- Assigned to 4 groups:
  - description of extrovert (Group 1 - control)
  - description of introvert (Group 2 - control)
  - extrovert first, then introvert (Group 3)
  - introvert first, then extrovert (Group 4)
- Judged character on introversion / extroversion.



# Luchins (1957): Continued

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- Primacy effect when description followed in immediate succession
- Recency effect when there's a delay between first and second sets of information about target.
- Primacy more common recency.
  - Information encountered first assimilated.
  - Accommodating new information means changing first impression





# Accounts of Primacy/Recency

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- Earlier information is the 'real' person.
- Later information dismissed - it's not viewed as typical / representative (Luchins, 1957).
- Attention at a maximum when making initial impressions (Anderson, 1975).
- Early information affects 'meaning' of later information (Asch, 1946) - consistency.
- What about people's exiting ideas of others?
  - Social schemas



# Social Schemas

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- Cognitive structures/ organisational structure of information.
  - Stored in memory.
  - Based on past experience.
- Shorthand summaries of social world.
- Allow us to encode and categorise new data

Represent:

“knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including it’s attributes and relations among those attributes” (Fisk & Taylor, 1991, p. 98)



# Social Schemas

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- Schemas influence what to pay attention to
- Information consistent stored, information inconsistent ignored.
- Allows us to process information quickly and arrive at an impression swiftly.
- A “top-down” approach to information processing



# Schema Types

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- Person schemas (Cohen, 1981)
  - Expectations about others
  - Prototypes
- Self schemas (Markus, 1977)
  - Guide self-related information
- Role schemas (Fisk & Taylor, 1991)
  - Behaviours expected in situation
- Event schemas (Schank & Abelson, 1977)
  - Scripts for different situations



# Summary

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- How do we form impressions of others?
  - Central /peripheral traits
  - Automatic impression formation
- How do we form first impressions?
  - Primacy and recency effects.
- How do we form impressions without prior knowledge?
  - Social schemas



# Further Reading

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Ackerman, J.M., Nocera, C.C. & Bargh, J.A. (2010) Incidental haptic sensations influence social judgments and decisions. *Science*, 328, 1712-1715.

Williams, L.E. & Bargh, J.A. (2008) Experiencing physical warmth promotes interpersonal warmth. *Science*, 322, 606-607.

Chartrand, T.L. & Bargh, J.A. (1996) Automatic activation of impression formation and memorization goals: nonconscious goal priming reproduces effects of explicit task instructions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 464-478.