

## Last week's exercise

1. Identify ways in which this course could be useful to you (on a personal or professional level)
2. Identify personal topics or situations of interest that could be used as examples during the course

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## Perceiving others:

The first impression

Week 2

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## The first impression as an example of social perception

What is an impression?

What is a cognitive representation?

Types of cognitive representations

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## The first impression

### Examples of contexts in which impressions are involved

- When we want to make a good impression
- When a decision is based on the impression we have of somebody
- A job interview
- A professional interview (psychological, medical, business,...)
- When dealing with clients (waiter/waitress, salesperson, hairdresser,...)
- A blind date
- A court testimony
- An election
- When you have to deal with a public image (actors, politicians,...)

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## What do we base our impressions on?

1. Physical appearance
2. Non-verbal communication
3. Familiarity
4. Behaviour

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## What do we base our impressions on?

### The impact of physical appearance and beauty

- ... considered more interesting, warm and socially skilled (Feingold, 1992)
- ... improves the perceived intelligence and academic potential of childrens, as perceived by teachers (Clifford, 1975)
- ... increases the chances of receiving help from a stranger (Benson et al., 1976)
- ... receive lighter prison sentences (Stewart, 1985)
- ... are more likely to be hired (Cash & Kilcullen, 1979)

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## What do we base our impressions on?

### The impact of physical appearance and beauty

- A paradox of the effect of beauty
- During a simulation (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985), people had to evaluate vice-presidents from a picture. The attractive male was considered higher in ability than the unattractive male. The reverse was true for female pictures. How can it be explained?

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## What do we base our impressions on?

### The effect of non-verbal communication

#### Cues interpreted positively

- The non-verbal expression of emotions (Friedman et al., 1988)
- In Western cultures: facing us directly, leaning towards us, nodding while we speak (Mehrabian, 1972)
- Dilated pupils (Niedenthal & Cantor, 1986) e.g. use of belladonna
- Frequent eye contact (Kleinke et al., 1974) perceived as honest, straightforward, friendly and likable.
  - Unfrequent : unfriendly, shifty or shy (Zimbardo, 1977)
  - Staring : angry or hostile (Ellsworth & Carlsmith, 1973)

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## What do we base our impressions on?

### The effect of familiarity

- Women seen more often were thought to be more interesting, attractive, warm and intelligent than women seen less often. (Moreland & Beach, 1992)
- Generalisation of the effect
- How to take advantage of this effect?

The effect of behaviour : generally attributed to an internal disposition (the correspondent inference)

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## What do we base our impressions on?

The role of salience and attention to prioritize sources of inference

- Unusual characteristics (in our universe) or strong contrast between characteristic and context
- Ex : Familiarity in an unknown context

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## The interpretation of cues

The role of accessibility in interpretation  
(when the cues are ambiguous... but when aren't they?)

- Accessibility by concurrent activation of knowledge
- The effect of mood
- The effect of expectations
  - previous information, rumours
  - association to a social group (age, gender, ethnic/religious group,...)
  - in-group/out-group bias (e.g. political debates)
  - Rosenhan's (1973) pseudopatients

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## The interpretation of cues

The role of accessibility in interpretation

- Accessibility by recent activation (the priming effect)
- Priming experiment
- Ex : Sexism in a job interview
  - Priming : TV commercials showing women as sex objects
  - Situation : A man interviewing a woman for a job
  - Impact : sat closer to the interviewee, asked more personal and inappropriate questions, recalled more about her physical appearance but less about the info revealed in the interview, rated her as more friendly but less competent. The "primed" male participants were rated by the interviewee as looking more at her body and as being more sexually motivated.

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## The interpretation of cues

### The role of accessibility in interpretation

- Accessibility by frequent activation
- Ex 1 : the first interpersonal relations and the development of important dimensions (friendliness, humour, beauty, intelligence,...)
- Ex 2 : the media

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## Interpreting behaviour: the attribution theory

- Behaviour is either attributed to internal causes (dispositions, traits,...) or to external causes (situation, context,...).
- Correspondent inference is most likely when:
  - 1) The ind. freely chooses to perform behaviour
  - 2) The behaviour has few effects/consequences that distinguish it from other options
  - 3) The behaviour is unexpected rather than expected or typical(Jones & Davis, 1965) - See also Kelley's (1973) theory

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## Interpreting behaviour: the attribution theory

- The correspondence bias or fundamental attribution error: a tendency to overestimate dispositional influences and underestimate situational influences.
- Ex.1) The pro-Castro speech (Jones et Harris, 1967)
- Ex.2) The quiz game (Ross et al., 1977). Contestants and observers believed questioners to be more knowledgeable than contestants.

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## Interpreting behaviour: the attribution theory

- Notion of social role and implications (from role to nature)

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## Interpreting behaviour: the attribution theory

### Limits of the correspondence bias

- Objective: To know the person or the situation?
- The actor/observer difference: A question of salience (e.g. voluntary vs coerced confessions)
- The effect of time (from dispositional to situational)
- Self-awareness (as a context or a trait)
- The rich vs the poor
- Western vs non-Western cultures:  
Notions of independent and interdependent cultures (individual vs social causes)

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## The first impression: a summary

1. The selection of cues
2. Their interpretation
3. The attribution of causes

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## Beyond first impression and correspondent inference: Systematic processing

Using systematic processing instead of superficial processing to form a more adequate impression.

A question of:

- 1) Ability (e.g. distraction)
- 2) Motivation (e.g. a good reason)

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## Forming complex impressions

How do we develop coherent overall impressions?

- Simplification through our implicit personality theories (culturally shared and/or idiosyncratic associations)
- Association between traits of similar value (+ vs -)
- Negative information is given more weight than positive information bc less expected
- Subsequent information is assimilated/explained by previous information if possible (e.g. the rude artist)

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## The impact of impressions

Impressions and judgments

- Using as few attributes as possible (a simple impression guides judgment more efficiently)
- Past judgments and inferences are easier to access than their causes (e.g. context)
- The usefulness of an impression increases its chances of survival

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## The impact of impressions

### Impressions and interpretations

- The primacy effect: the first impression affects subsequent interpretations.
- The perseverance bias: The effect stays even when the impression is proven to be false (e.g. rumours, WMD, inadmissible evidence in the courtroom..).
- Confirmation bias: We selectively seek, elicit and recall confirming evidences unless ACTIVELY trying to counteract that tendency (wt systematic processing).

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## The impact of impressions

### Impressions and behaviour: the self-fulfilling prophecy

- Teachers' expectations and students' academic performance (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968).
- Behavioural confirmations of expectations.

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## The impact of impressions

### Dealing with information that is inconsistent/ contradictory with first impression

- Through superficial processing, minor incoherences can be neglected.

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## The impact of impressions

### Dealing with information that is inconsistent/ contradictory with first impression

- Through systematic processing, incoherences can be integrated to the impression by complexifying it.
- However: systematic processing tends to explain away the incoherence (through a situational attribution) to save the initial impression.
- Ex:

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## The impact of impressions

### Dealing with information that is inconsistent/ contradictory with first impression

- Through systematic processing, incoherences can be integrated to the impression by complexifying it.
- However: systematic processing tends to explain away the incoherence (through a situational attribution) to save the initial impression.
- Ex: Conjugal violence

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Voilà!!

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