The Consensus on Impression Formation

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Abstract

The studies on impression formation usually have focused on the effect of certain appearance features which elevates perceptual evaluation. This study tried to find out whether there is a consensus on impression formation between the perceived person and the perceiver and if the gender is any significant variable to cast any difference on the impression evaluation. Seven photos of voluntary students in ppt file were projected to 143 students attending a university psychology class and were subjected to a impression evaluation questionnaire consisting of 28 adjective scales. The analysis of result revealed: 1) There was a significant difference between the impression evaluation scores of the perceivers and the perceived; the self evaluation of the perceived person was higher than the perceivers' evaluation. 2) There was also a significant evaluation score difference between the genders of the perceivers; the female perceivers rated the stimuli higher than the male perceivers. There was no interaction effect between the genders of the perceivers and the perceived.

Key words : consensus, impression formation, gender, the perceiver, the perceived.

Ⅰ. Introduction

Impression formation is a procedure concerned with signal exchanges of the personal front consisting of body and non-body languages. When verbal language is excluded, the visual image of the body and clothes is almost the sole factor stimulating the perception of an individual. Thus, on many silent personal encounters as we experience in our daily life, the look often becomes the sole source of interpreting an individual's personality and even casts halo effect on the evaluation of his task.

In contemporary post modern culture, obsessed with creating more and more stimulating images on business and personal sectors, the power of images of the physical front is taken dangerously serious. Yet, the consensus on the interpretation of appearance signals between the sender and the perceiver is still quite ambiguous. Whether the receiver of an appearance image shares the same evaluation, mood, or signs as the sender intended, or how much accordance results between the two, or if there exists any pattern in the evaluation procedure according to the gender of the signal sender or receiver has not been clearly investigated.

This study aimed to analyze how much consensus the senders and perceivers share about personal images when they are presented as photo stimuli. It also tried to see if there is any gender effect among the perceivers in the evaluation of a personal images. The finding of this study would reveal part of the psychological mechanism working within the exchange of non

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verbal human interactions and add a piece of information to the understanding of impression formation.

Ⅱ. Theoretical Background

1. Consensus on Impression Evaluation between the Perceivers and the Perceived

Many authors accentuate the importance of body image for a better impression and recommend certain dress items and grooming styles for promoting impression evaluation. A recent study on the domestic research trend on impression formation reports most of the studies have mainly been trying to find out the most proper grooming conditions of dress or hair styles in a specific circumstances utilizing computer aided simulation techniques[1]. As the trend shows, most research focuses on the perspective of the receiver only, but some studies address that of the sender, and few actually deal with both[2] and some studies argue whether there is any reliable degree of consensus on impression evaluation among perceivers. Ryan[3] tried to see if the level of self estimation of appearance coincides with that of the perceiver. She compared (1) the individual's concept of his own appearance with the group's concept of it (2) the individual's concept of his appearance with his estimate of the group's concept and (3) the individual's estimate of the group concept with the actual group concept. She reported nearly one-half of the girls rated themselves and estimated the group rating the same as the group rated them. This means, on the other hand, the remainder who over or underrated themselves than the observers consisted of another half of the group.

Tseelon[4] designed a research to compare the fit between senders' intentions, and receivers' interpretations of an appearance image. In his study, British women, not previously acquainted, attended a gathering, dressed in a way that represented them best. They were asked to judge both themselves and all of the others, using both open ended responses and a series of adjective scales. They were required to evaluate one another on the basis of appearance, without the benefit of discourse necessary to negotiate meaning. It was found that, across the subjects, the average degree of agreement between senders' intentions and receivers' interpretations reached about 36%. This percentage rose up to 56% when approximate matchings were included. No one guessed all of another woman's message correctly.

Dornbush et al.[5] tried to find out the degree of similarity of person perception among perceivers. He asked students attending a summer camp to describe the impression of two different stimulus students and the result showed a similarity rate of 57% when an observer described two stimulus persons. When two observers described a stimulus person, the similarity rate fell down to 45%. Therefore, it might be carefully conjectured that the interpretative integrity within an observer overpowers the idiosyncrasy of the stimulus person's impression.

Johnson et al.[6] reported from their content analysis study of 39 women's responses to open ended interview questions that their samples be-

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1 Kyung-Hwa Lee, and Soo-Im Rha, "A Tendency of study on theory of impression formation by clothing," *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture* 7, no. 1 (1999): 117-127.

2 S. B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing* (NY: Fairchild Publications, 1997), 315.

3 M. S. Ryan, "Psychological effects of clothing: Part I, II, III, and IV," *Cornell University: Ag. Exper. Sta. Bull. 882, 898, 900 and 905 (1952-54)*, cited in Ryan, M. S., *Clothing: A Study in Human Behavior* (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), 83.

4 Erfat Tseelon, "Communicating via clothes" (Ph. D. diss., Oxford University, 1989), 125-154.

5 S. Dornbush *et al.*, "The perceiver and perceived: The relative influence in bargaining behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1 (1965): 434-440.

6 K. K. P. Johnson, N. A. Schofield, and J. Yurchisin, "Appearance and dress as a source of information: A qualitative approach to data collection," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 20, no. 3 (2002): 125-137.

lieved both they and others were accurate at decoding information from appearance cues, although some participants believed that accuracy was dependent upon the situation or related to specific appearance or dress cues. This result may be interpreted as that people have a tendency to believe they are accurate at appearance communication and they may attribute impression inaccuracy to situations or idiosyncrasy of the cues.

Thus, the consensus on impression evaluation between perceivers and the perceived, and among the perceivers has not yet been fully researched and understood while modern people are striving harder and harder to make the best impression of themselves.

2. Consensus on Impression Evaluation between Genders

Gender is often considered as one of the causes generating impression evaluation difference among perceivers. In a laboratory study, Barnes & Rosenthal[7] found that male subjects rated attractive females more positively than unattractive females, whereas female subjects rated attractive male experimenters more positively than unattractive male experiments. Not only did females evaluate male appearance higher than male perceivers, they also showed a positive attitude toward a male's early fashion adoption as the wearing of earrings and gelled hair[8].

However, gender difference in impression formation does not seem to work in a simple way. Maret and Harling[9] said females gave more generous attractiveness scores than males to all stimulus in a photo. Besides evaluation scores, different gender seems to lay a different basis for aesthetic perception, too. Chu and Geary[10] reported that men rated short females more highly than tall females on expressive characteristics while female raters did not. Mast and Hall[11] reported, in an experiment utilizing photographs to see whether people can judge the stimulus person's status exactly, male targets used somewhat different cues to assess the status of a stimulus person. According to Sweat & Zentner[12], males felt a classic clothing style more conservative and dominant while females considered a romantic style more dependent and passive than the opposite sex. Male observers tended to prefer female's social dresses from work place clothes compared to female observers[13].

Gender difference also seems to mean a difference in emphasis on impression evaluation dimensions. Males are reported to emphasize the sexuality factor of a female appearance while females focus more on styling and social status indicators[14].

In short, there seems to exist 'leniency for the

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[7] L. Barnes, and R. Rosenthal, "Interpersonal effects of experimenter attractiveness, attire, and gender," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48 (1985): 435-446.

[8] M. Hongo, and S. Kaiser, "Male endorsers in advertisements: Cultural stereotypes and appearance messages," Paper presented at the Colloquium on the Body and Clothing as Communication, International Institute on Marketing Meaning, July, Indianapolis.

[9] S. M. Maret, and C. A. Harling, "Cross cultural perceptions of physical attractiveness: Ratings of photographs of whites by Cruzans and Americans," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 60 (1985): 163-160.

[10] S. Chu, and K. Geary, "Physical stature influences character perception in women," *Personality and Individual Differences* 38, no. 8 (2005): 1927-1934.

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[12] S. Sweat, and M. A. Zentner, Attributions toward female appearance styles, In The *Psychology of Fashion*, ed. M. A. Soloman (MA: Lexington Books, 1985), 321-335.

[13] M. R. Delong, C. Salusso Deponier, and K. Larntz, "Use of perceptions of female dress as an indicator of role definition," *Home Economics Research Journal* 11, no. 4 (1983):327-336.

[14] K. Kaigler Evans, and M. L. Damhorst, "Impression formation: Use of descriptors of personal traits," *Perceptual and Motor Skill* 46 (1978): 903-906.

opposite gender' effect in impression evaluation, but this effect appears to be influenced by various factors: different attitude toward dress styles and appearance traits as heights and physical attractiveness plus an unwillingness to reveal gender based bias publicly.

Ⅲ. Research Method

1. Sample

Subjects consisted of 142 college students, 43 males and 99 females, attending 3 classes of a Social Psychology course in a university located in Seoul. All the subjects including the stimuli persons watched and evaluated each of the 7 stimuli photos. The stimuli persons were composed of 4 males and 3 females. The stimuli persons' evaluation scores of self were compared with those of the perceivers' evaluation scores of each stimulus person. When the stimulus person was a male, 141 perceivers consisted of 42 males and 99 females; when the stimulus person was a female, the same number of the total perceivers consisted of 43 males and 98 females.

2. Instrument

1) Stimulus

Photos of 7 volunteer students were collected and subjected to the impression evaluation questionnaire. The course instructor asked attendants of 3 classes respectively if there were any students who wanted to get evaluated about their clothed appearance and earn an extra mark for the lecture. Seven students (3 females and 4 males) volunteered to be the stimulus person; they were told to take pictures of themselves dressed in clothes which they think express themselves best. The picture was ordered to represent a whole image of the stimulus person against simple background(Fig. 1).

2) Impression Evaluation Questionnaire

Questions to evaluate the impression of stimulus persons in the photos were adapted from precedent studies about person perception with a consideration of an even distribution on the evaluative, competent and sociable dimensions as revealed to be main dimensions of person perception. 28 vocabularies were selected for 7 point semantic scales ranging from 1 (definitely disagree) to 7(definitely agree) including a neutral point 3. 7 stimulus photos were presented in the beginning session of a semester of the class and after exposure to each photo, the viewers were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Consensus on impression evaluation was calculated from the difference between the scores of questionnaire of the stimulus sender and the stimulus receiver(or the perceivers and the perceived) or between male and female perceivers. The lower the score, the higher the consensus between perceivers and the perceived.

〈Fig. 1〉 A sample of the 7 self presentation photos of the students.

3. Data Analysis

SPSS Window 12.0 was used for statistical analysis of Descriptive statistics, Factor Analysis, *t*-test, ANOVA, and GLM.

Ⅳ. Results & Discussion

1. Factors Consisting Impression Evaluation

1) Factor Analysis

Factor analysis against 28 semantic scales re-

vealed 4 factors constructing impression evaluation with 59% of total variance explaining power. Cronbach reliability coefficient ranged from 0.81 to 0.89 through all factors. The factor with most common variance was named "evaluative" and contained vocabularies such as "intellectual" and various personality characteristics as "sincere" and "responsible", which related to the general evaluative quality of a person. Other factors contained vocabularies more uniform in their connotations and were named "dynamic", "comfortable" and "attractive" factor respectively 〈Table 1〉.

2) Means and Range of the Evaluation Scores and Their Correlationship

The overall descriptive statistics are as 〈Table 2〉. The score ranged from 1 to 7 points and

〈Table 1〉 Factor Analysis of Impression Evaluation Vocabulary

Vocabulary	Evaluative	Dynamic	Comfortable	Attractive
Intellectual	[illegible]	−0.09	0.05	0.18
Sincere	[illegible]	−0.17	0.25	−0.08
Neat	[illegible]	−0.24	0.12	0.15
Responsible	[illegible]	0.08	0.23	−0.10
Clean	[illegible]	−0.03	0.20	0.34
Meticulous	[illegible]	−0.27	0.05	0.13
Professional	0.65	0.28	−0.04	0.16
Successful	[illegible]	0.24	0.11	0.34
Honest	[illegible]	−0.09	0.35	−0.17
Sociable	[illegible]	0.12	0.30	0.19
Leader-like	0.05	[illegible]	0.12	0.04
Self-confident	0.03	[illegible]	−0.04	0.19
Motivated	0.12	[illegible]	0.09	0.16
Vigorous	0.19	[illegible]	0.10	0.19
Dominating	0.08	[illegible]	−0.34	−0.03
Active	0.33	[illegible]	0.21	0.14
Open minded	−0.06	[illegible]	0.35	0.40
Comfortable	0.25	0.05	[illegible]	0.14
Optimistic	0.01	0.34	[illegible]	0.12
Harmonious	0.19	0.19	[illegible]	0.13
Good	0.29	0.26	[illegible]	0.12
Intimate	0.16	0.11	[illegible]	0.36
Generous	0.27	−0.12	[illegible]	0.19
Warm	−0.06	−0.29	[illegible]	0.30
Sexy	0.01	0.10	−0.13	[illegible]
Refined	0.22	0.36	0.03	[illegible]
Cool	0.25	0.34	0.07	[illegible]
Attractive	0.35	0.07	0.33	[illegible]
Eigen Value	5.42	4.30	3.85	3.11
Common Variance	19.36	15.37	13.76	11.09
Total Variance	19.36	34.73	48.49	59.58
Reliability Coefficient	0.89	0.85	0.81	0.83

〈Table 2〉 Descriptive Statistics of Impression Evaluation Scores

Factors	Evaluative	Dynamic	Comfortable	Attractive	Total Score
Mean(SD)	4.00(1.18)	4.67(1.18)	4.26(1.03)	3.38(1.45)	4.08(0.79)
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	6.49

〈Table 3〉 Bivariate Correlations between Factors

Factors	Evaluative	Dynamic	Comfortable	Attractive	Total score
Evaluative	1	.07*	.41**	.39**	.66**
Dynamic		1	-.05	.43**	.53**
Comfortable			1	.16	.54**
Attractive				1	.82**

*p<.05, **p<.01.

the average score was around 4.00 with the standard deviation of about 1 point, suggesting a wide range of responses and a relatively normal distribution. The dynamic factor gained the highest mean score while the attractive factor gained the lowest score with the largest deviation.

Correlations between these factors are shown in 〈Table 3〉. The evaluative factor was related to all other scores while the dynamic factor and the comfortable factor were related only to the evaluative factor. The attractive factor had moderate positive relationship with evaluative and dynamic scores and had the highest positive correlation with the total score. Comfortable factor also had positive relationship with the evaluative factor while the dynamic factor had weak negative relationship with evaluative factor.

2. Consensus of Impression Evaluation

1) Consensus between Genders

To appraise the consensus on impression evaluation of male and female perceivers, and also to see if there is any evaluation difference according to the gender of the stimulus person, a multivariate test of GLM was processed and the result revealed a significant evaluation difference according to the perceivers' gender and also according to the stimulus' gender, but there was no interaction effect between the genders of the perceivers and the stimulus 〈Table 4〉.

To see the pattern of the gender effect, t-test for the genders of the perceivers and the perceived was done respectively 〈Table 5〉.

Overall, the female perceivers made more generous evaluation for all stimulus persons on all factors except the attractiveness factor. From the fact that the mean of the attractiveness score appears distinguishedly low, it seems that students of both gender have a sparing evaluation attitude with this category. However, the female stimuli persons received higher evaluation than the male stimuli from the perceivers of both gender except for "dynamic factor". The significance level was high (p<0.001).

Thus, it seems clear at least for this sample that females are not only the advantageous stimuli gender as far as impression evaluation is concerned, but also they are more benign evaluators than male evaluators. No interaction effect existed between the genders of the perceivers and the perceived, which means the evaluators in this study were not affected whether the stimulus person was either the same gender as their own or not in their evaluation.

〈**Table 4**〉 GLM Tests of between Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	*F*
Perceiver's Gender(A)	Evaluative	5.56	1	5.56	4.17*
	Dynamic	13.57	1	13.57	10.90***
	Comfortable	8.99	1	8.99	9.32**
	Attractive	0.08	1	0.08	0.04
	Total	5.43	1	5.43	9.03**
Stimulus's Gender(B)	Evaluative	45.13	1	45.13	33.81***
	Dynamic	93.14	1	93.14	74.79***
	Comfortable	77.77	1	77.77	80.61***
	Attractive	80.90	1	80.90	39.77***
	Total	13.84	1	13.84	23.04***
A × B	Evaluative	0.07	1	0.07	0.05
	Dynamic	3.04	1	3.04	2.44
	Comfortable	0.21	1	0.21	0.22
	Attractive	1.21	1	1.21	0.59
	Total	0.80	1	0.80	1.32

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

〈**Table 5**〉 Gender Effects on the Impression Evaluation

Gender \ Factor		Evaluative Mean(SD)	Dynamic Mean(SD)	Comfortable Mean(SD)	Attractive Mean(SD)	Total Mean(SD)
Perceivers(n)	Male(42)	3.85(1.16)	4.44(1.14)	4.04(1.12)	3.30(1.50)	3.92(8.5)
	Female(99)	4.05(1.19)	4.74(1.19)	4.30(0.98)	3.36(1.44)	4.13(7.5)
	t	2.30*	−3.48***	−3.58***	−0.64	−3.64***
Stimulus (n)	Male(4)	3.78(1.33)	4.96(1.02)	3.98(1.03)	3.07(1.35)	3.95(0.86)
	Female(3)	4.26(0.87)	4.24(1.26)	4.58(0.93)	3.70(1.52)	4.19(0.67)
	t	6.23***	9.64***	−9.26***	−6.74***	−4.84***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

2) Consensus between the Perceived and the Perceivers

To see if there exists consensus on the impression evaluation of the perceivers and the self evaluation of the perceived, One Sample *t*-test was processed. 〈Table 6〉 shows a highly significant difference in the evaluation scores of the two. In general, the perceived person rated oneself higher than the perceivers except stimulus 6 who consistently rated oneself lower than the perceivers. Stimulus 1 and stimulus 2 rated themselves lower only for the evaluative factor, and stimulus 3 for dynamic and comfortable factors. This could be interpreted that there is a low consensus on impression evaluation between the perceived person and the perceivers and that generally one evaluates oneself significantly more favorably than the observers.

〈**Table 6**〉 Evaluation Difference between the Perceived and the Perceivers in Impression Formation: One Sample *t*-test

Factor / Stimulus	Evaluative		Dynamic		Comfortable		Attractive		Total score	
	the Perceived n=1	the Perceivers n=141	the Perceived n=1	the Perceivers n=141	the Perceived n=1	the Perceivers n=141	the Perceived n=1	the Perceivers n=141	the Perceived n=1	the Perceivers n=141
Stimulus1 Male	2.90	3.12(0.79)	5.29	5.26(0.99)	4.14	4.12(0.92)	2.75	2.93(1.15)	3.77	3.86(0.70)
	t=-3.32***		t=-0.38		t=-0.24		t=1.93		t=1.51	
Stimulus2 Female	3.70	3.96(0.67)	5.14	4.34(0.94)	5.71	4.94(0.82)	4.75	3.20(1.10)	4.83	4.11(0.65)
	t=-4.58***		t=10.14***		t=11.21***		t=16.81***		t=3.22***	
Stimulus3 Male	4.40	3.82(1.05)	4.14	4.96(0.89)	4.71	4.96(0.89)	4.00	2.63(1.23)	4.31	3.80(0.76)
	t=-6.60***		t=11.08***		t=0.51***		t=-3.23***		t=-8.06***	
Stimulus4 Female	4.60	3.90(0.73)	6.57	5.24(0.91)	4.29	3.96(0.77)	5.75	5.30(0.98)	5.30	4.60(0.60)
	t=11.53***		t=-7.34***		t=5.08		t=5.52		t=13.93***	
Stimulus5 Male	3.60	2.92(0.93)	5.14	4.86(1.09)	5.71	3.87(1.10)	4.00	2.78(1.26)	4.61	3.61(0.82)
	t=-8.71		t=-3.03**		t=-20.00***		t=11.58***		t=-14.63***	
Stimulus6 Female	4.90	4.96(0.74)	2.86	3.17(0.96)	4.71	4.91(0.86)	2.00	2.66(0.92)	3.62	3.93(0.55)
	t=0.90		t=3.96***		t=2.73***		t=8.53***		t=6.61***	
Stimulus7 Male	6.30	5.37(0.92)	5.71	4.81(1.01)	4.86	4.23(0.94)	4.75	4.14(1.23)	5.41	4.64(0.76)
	t=-12.12***		t=-10.62***		t=-7.95***		t=-5.92***		t=-12.08***	

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Ⅴ. Conclusion & Implication

A few precedent studies on the consensus on the impression evaluation reported male perceivers evaluating female stimulus higher than male stimulus, while female perceivers are rating male stimulus higher than female stimulus. The researchers attributed such a result to the natural mating drive. However, the result of this study showed that the female was a more lenient gender in the impression evaluation disregarding the gender of the stimulus person. This result coincides with the report of Maret and Harling[15]. Females were not only generous evaluators but also were beneficiaries of impression evaluation, a result which remains as an issue still to be proved by further studies.

The no interaction effect between genders of the perceivers and the perceived might have originated from the stimulus photos whose appearance level was not controlled, perhaps resulting in a presentation of better looking female stimulus persons than male stimulus persons. But realizing that male stimulus not only received lower scores than female stimulus but that they also gave lower scores even to the female stimulus than female perceivers might be revealing a new trend of men's heightened grooming standard. Or, it could have reflected males' tendency to negate their interest in the opposite gender's appearance in public.

The difference between the perceived person's self evaluation and the perceivers evaluation was an anticipated, but rarely proven result. People's self centered and holistic view of oneself should have contributed to bring a better interpretation of one's own image while viewers might spend a hard time to construct a meaningful Gestalt

[15] S. M. Maret, and C. A. Harling, *Op. cit.*, 163-160.

out of the visual representation of others. However, there was a person who persistently evaluated oneself lower than the perceivers, suggesting a need for further studies on self evaluation on appearance in relation to personality characteristics.

The finding that the perceivers were parsimonious evaluators for the attractiveness compared to other dimensions of impression also requires more study for generalization.

As a whole, the result of this study allows a conclusion that impression evaluation is not a matter of general consensus; at least, it differs along the line of male versus female and the perceived versus the perceivers.

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