First Impressions and Cultural Influences on Perception

## Descriptions of Individuals

In analyzing first impressions, the individuals selected for this study offer distinct perspectives. The first individual, encountered at a networking event, exhibited a reserved demeanor, engaging minimally in conversation. This behavior, combined with formal attire, suggested professionalism yet hinted at discomfort in social interactions. In contrast, a longtime acquaintance, met initially through a shared hobby, demonstrated enthusiasm and openness, frequently initiating discussions and displaying animated gestures. The context of each meeting significantly influenced these impressions, as the networking event's formal atmosphere may have contributed to the initial individual's reticence, while the common interest in the second scenario fostered a more relaxed and engaging environment. These observations underscore how situational factors and personal behaviors intertwine to shape first impressions, leading to varying interpretations of personality traits. According to the research on first impressions, such contextual details play a crucial role in forming personality attributions (Junior et al., 2019).

## Attributions and Implications

The first individual's reserved demeanor at the networking event can be attributed to both internal and external factors. Internally, it may reflect a personal tendency towards introversion or discomfort in social settings, which are common attributions when observing limited engagement (Junior et al., 2019). Externally, the formal nature of the event itself likely influenced the individual's behavior, indicating that situational context plays a significant role in shaping outward expressions. In contrast, the acquaintance's animated behavior is attributed more to internal factors, such as an inherent enthusiasm and openness, characteristics that are often perceived positively and thus lead to favorable impressions. These attributions significantly impact the perception of their actions, as internal attributions for positive behaviors enhance perceived trustworthiness and likability, whereas external attributions for reserved behaviors may mitigate negative judgments, highlighting the nuanced interplay between personal characteristics and situational contexts in forming impressions (Junior et al., 2019).

## Thinking Processes

In forming first impressions of the two individuals, the thinking process varied significantly between automatic and controlled. The initial encounter with the networking event participant involved a more automatic thinking process. The reserved demeanor and formal attire quickly led to attributions of professionalism and discomfort without extensive deliberation, aligning with findings that automatic processing often relies on readily observable traits (Gautam et al., 2020). Conversely, impressions of the longtime acquaintance were formed through a controlled thinking process. This involved more thoughtful consideration of the individual's enthusiastic behavior, integrating past interactions and contextual factors to construct a nuanced perception, illustrating how controlled processing allows for deeper analysis when more personal and relational history is available (Junior et al., 2019). The choice between automatic and controlled thinking reflects the complexity of the social environment and the perceiver's familiarity with the individual, demonstrating how cognitive processes adapt to different situational demands.

In forming first impressions of the individuals, distinct schemas and heuristics were applied selectively, influenced by the context and prior experiences. For the individual encountered at the networking event, a professionalism schema was activated, driven by their formal attire and reserved demeanor, which are commonly associated with professional contexts and thus informed the initial impression (Junior et al., 2019). This heuristic allowed for quick processing of observable traits, streamlining the perception of the individual's professional identity. Conversely, when interacting with the longtime acquaintance, there was a conscious avoidance of relying on simplistic heuristics. Instead, impressions were shaped through a more controlled integration of past interactions and context-specific cues, reflecting an effort to construct a well-rounded understanding beyond superficial traits (Boutyline & Soter, 2021). This approach illustrates how the use or avoidance of schemas and heuristics in first impressions is contingent upon the perceiver's familiarity with the individual and the situational context.

## Cultural Background

The cultural background to which I belong plays a crucial role in shaping my first impressions of others, influencing both the schemas I employ and the attributions I make. Growing up in a collectivist culture emphasizes the importance of group harmony and interconnectedness, which often leads to holistic thinking. This cultural orientation encourages the consideration of situational and relational contexts when forming impressions, rather than focusing solely on individual traits (Shiraev & Levy, 2020). Consequently, when meeting the reserved individual at the networking event, my initial impression was tempered by an understanding of the event's formal nature and the potential stress it might impose. Similarly, the enthusiasm of the longtime acquaintance was viewed not just as a personal trait but as a reflection of our shared experiences and social dynamics, illustrating how cultural schemas guide interpretation and attribution processes in social perception (Boutyline & Soter, 2021).

## Cultural Influences on Impressions

Cultural factors, including specific display rules and thinking styles, profoundly influence the formation of first impressions by shaping the content of schemas used in social perception. In collectivist cultures, such as my own, there is a tendency towards holistic thinking, where individuals consider broader contextual factors rather than focusing exclusively on individual traits. This approach aligns with cultural schemas that emphasize interconnectedness and group harmony, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of social interactions (Shiraev & Levy, 2020). For instance, when observing the reserved individual at the networking event, the formal context was incorporated into the impression, aligning with cultural expectations that prioritize situational awareness. Similarly, the enthusiastic demeanor of the longtime acquaintance was viewed through a cultural lens that values relational dynamics, highlighting how cultural norms and practices guide the interpretation of behaviors and the resulting impressions formed (Boutyline & Soter, 2021).

## Conclusion

The examination of first impressions and their cultural influences reveals a complex interplay of cognitive processes and cultural norms. Initial observations of the individuals highlighted how automatic thinking processes swiftly generate interpretations, often relying on observable traits such as attire and demeanor (Gautam et al., 2020). In contrast, controlled thinking was more prevalent when deeper relational histories were involved, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the individuals' behaviors. Cultural background significantly influenced these impressions, with collectivist cultural schemas promoting holistic thinking that incorporates contextual factors into perception (Shiraev & Levy, 2020). Furthermore, culturally specific display rules shaped the interpretation of behaviors, emphasizing the role of cultural context in guiding social perception and the formulation of first impressions (Boutyline & Soter, 2021).