

UC Davis

UC Davis Previously Published Works

Title

SOCIAL PERCEPTION FROM INDIVIDUALS TO GROUPS An Introduction

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8bb693sw>

ISBN

978-1-138-83790-4

Authors

Sherman, Jeffrey W
Stroessner, Steven J

Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed

SOCIAL PERCEPTION FROM INDIVIDUALS TO GROUPS

An Introduction

Jeffrey W. Sherman and Steven J. Stroessner

In the mid-1970s, a revolution was brewing in the field of social psychology. A small group of researchers had independently begun to apply the concepts and methods of cognitive psychology toward advancing the science of person perception. The objective was to move beyond the identification and examination of judgment effects and focus on the cognitive processes and mental representations that underpinned these effects. The principle behind this approach was that focusing on general mechanisms would facilitate the identification of commonalities and differences underlying disparate effects and, thereby, promote theoretical integration across various content areas in person perception that had been studied in isolation.

This approach is now known as *social cognition*, and its influence has moved far beyond the initial emphasis on person perception, pervading research on topics in intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup psychology and behavior. David L. Hamilton was one of the leaders and strongest advocates of the incipient revolution, and no one's scientific contributions better reflect the promise of theoretical integration offered by the social cognitive approach. This book honors those contributions by showcasing a small sampling of the many scientists and research programs that have been profoundly influenced by Dave's work.

Dave Hamilton: A Brief Biography

David L. Hamilton graduated from Gettysburg College in 1963 and received an MA from the University of Richmond in 1965. Dave first entered the PhD program at the University of Illinois to pursue a degree in clinical psychology. Eventually, his interest in clinical waned, and he began to work with Ivan Steiner,

a prominent social psychologist. His dissertation focused on individual differences in coping with inconsistency. After completing his PhD in 1968, he spent the years 1968–1976 at Yale University as an assistant and associate professor. It was during this time that his interest shifted from understanding personality to understanding how people *perceive* personality. In 1976, he moved to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he has remained to this day, helping run the social psychology program into one of the world's leading programs in social psychology, broadly, and social cognition, specifically.

Dave's interest in person perception was spurred by an ongoing debate surrounding the manner in which people integrate information about others into a coherent impression. The dominant model for many years proposed that impressions reflected a simple weighted average of all the distinct items of information known about a person (e.g., Anderson, 1962, 1965). Dave's early work on this question challenged this view of the social perceiver as calculator, emphasizing the role of active construal processes in information integration. This work highlighted the fact that the meanings perceivers attached to a person's behavior were deeply dependent on what was already known about that person, a position that harkened back to Asch (1946) but was not widely embraced by social psychologists at the time.⁴ This emphasis on the role of prior knowledge or expectations on social perception has remained a central theme in Dave's work, an idea that is now taken for granted in the broader field of social psychology.

Another major conceptual contribution to the person perception literature was Dave's demonstration of the importance of perceivers' goals in social perception. In seminal research (Hamilton, Katz, & Leiner, 1980a, 1980b), he showed that perceivers had superior memory for behavioral information about another person when they were trying to form an impression of that person compared with when they were actively trying to remember that information. He also showed that perceivers imposed organization on the information when they formed an impression, as indicated by the greater clustering of behavioral information by trait themes when it was later recalled. These findings were not predicted by the approach to person perception that dominated during that era, and they were important for two reasons. First, they reinforced Asch's view that perceivers play an active and dynamic role in processing information about persons. This contrasted with more mechanistic approaches to impression formation prominent at the time. Second, these results demonstrated how goals influence the nature of mental representations of other people. Given the common early criticism that the social cognitive approach neglected human motivation, it is more than a little ironic that Dave's early contributions highlighted the consequences of active, goal-driven engagement.

During this same period, Dave also became interested in the cognitive processes that might underlie stereotype formation and use. He was particularly intrigued by processing biases that could produce the illusion of correlations

between two classes of events that are not, in fact, related. Building on the work of Chapman (1967; Chapman & Chapman, 1967), Hamilton showed how similar processes could produce illusory correlations between different social groups and the attributes that might describe those groups (Hamilton & Gifford, 1976). This work was extremely important for showing how normal processes of attention and retrieval could produce differentiated impressions of groups in the absence of prejudicial motivations, needs for self-esteem, social-cultural learning processes, or any sort of "kernel of truth." The point, which was often overlooked, wasn't that these other factors weren't important; the point was that, even in their absence, stereotypes might arise through basic, general cognitive processes. Along with Tajfel's classic work (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963) on category accentuation, Dave's work on illusory correlation created the social cognitive approach to understanding intergroup perception and behavior. This approach has been the dominant one in the field for the last 25 years.

A third major contribution was developed in collaboration with Steven J. (Jim) Sherman. They noted that, historically, the perception of individual persons and the perception of groups had been treated as distinct topics in social psychology, with different research traditions and different theories focusing on these two different types of social targets. With Jim, Dave began to piece together an integration of individual and group perception. This work culminated in the publication of "Perceiving Persons and Groups" in *Psychological Review* (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Building on Campbell's (1958) classic work on the perception of groups, Hamilton and Sherman explored the similarities and differences in person and group perception via the organizing principle of perceived *entitativity*. The resulting synthesis of the two topics is one of the greatest realizations of the promise of the social cognitive approach to produce theoretical integration across disparate topics of study via a set of common assumptions about cognitive processes and mental representations. This work has spawned a prolific body of research and has fundamentally altered the landscape of research on social perception.

We have described the three most significant contributions of Dave's work to understanding social cognition and behavior, but that is hardly an exhaustive list. For example, Dave's contributions to understanding causal attribution and the effects of stereotypic expectancies on social perception also have had a major impact on the field of social psychology. With various collaborators, he has published a number of influential review articles and chapters, edited volumes, and a forthcoming textbook (Hamilton & Stroessner, in press). Dave's achievements have been recognized in many ways. He is the recipient of the Thomas M. Ostrom Award for career contributions to social cognition, the Jean-Paul Codel Award for contributions to the advancement of social psychology in Europe, and has received Honorary Doctorates from the University of Lisbon, Portugal, and from Eotvos Lorand University, Hungary. The current volume provides an opportunity for some of those who have been influenced by Dave's work to honor that work and showcase its expansive and lasting impact.

The book begins with an entertaining narrative by Steven J. Sherman describing the development and evolution of his remarkable collaboration with Dave. From there, the book is organized around the three central themes identified above: person perception, stereotype formation, and work on the intersection of person and group perception via the concept of entitativity. The first section highlights Dave's influence on the topics of impression formation and person memory, with chapters by Robert S. Wyer Jr.; James S. Uleman; and Leonel Garcia-Marques and Margarida Vaz Garrido. The second section highlights Dave's work on illusory correlation and stereotype formation, and some of the more recent extensions of the work, with chapters by Donald E. Carlston and Erica D. Schneider; Jeffrey W. Sherman, Lisa M. Huang, and Dario L. M. Sacchi; and Russell Spears and Wolfgang Stroebe. The third and final section covers the wide-ranging impact of Hamilton and Sherman's work on integrating person and group perception via the concept of entitativity, with chapters by Marilyn B. Brewer; Steven J. Stroessner and Carol S. Dweck; Brian Lickel and Mayuko Onuki; and Anne Maass, Andrea Carrnaghi, and Tamara Rekić.

Organizing this book has been a labor of love for us. Beyond Dave's enormous scientific contributions, he also has been a great friend, advisor, and collaborator for many people, including each of us. Perhaps his greatest contribution is the many people he welcomed into the field in his role as longtime organizer of the Person Memory Interest Group (PMIG) conference and in his efforts to internationalize the social cognitive approach. Suffice it to say that Dave enjoys the love and admiration of many people. On behalf of all of those people, we are proud to present this book to recognize and honor Dave's legacy.

References

Anderson, N.H. (1962). Application of an additive model to impression formation. *Science*, *138*, 817-818.

Anderson, N.H. (1965). Averaging versus adding as a stimulus-combination rule in impression formation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *70*, 394-400.

Asch, S.E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *41*, 258-290.

Campbell, D. T. (1958). Common fate, similarity, and other indices of the status of aggregates as social entities. *Behavioral Science*, *3*, 14-25.

Chapman, L. J. (1967). Illusory correlation in observational report. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, *6*, 151-155.

Chapman, L. J., & Chapman, J.P. (1967). Genesis of popular but erroneous psychological observations. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *72*, 193-204.

Hamilton, D.L., & Gifford, R.K. (1976). Illusory correlation in interpersonal perception: A cognitive basis of stereotypic judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *12*, 392-407.

Hamilton, D.L., Katz, L.B., & Leier, V.O. (1980a). Cognitive representation of personality impressions: Organizational processes in first impression formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*, 1050-1063.

Hamilton, D.L., Katz, L.B., & Leier, V.O. (1980b). Organizational processes in impression formation. In R. Hastie, T.M. Ostrom, E.B. Ebbesen, R.S. Wyer Jr., D.L. Hamilton, & D.E. Carlston (Eds.), *Person memory: The cognitive basis of social perception* (pp. 121-154). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hamilton, D.L., & Sherman, S. J. (1996). Perceiving persons and groups. *Psychological Review*, *103*, 336-355.

Hamilton, D.L., & Stroessner, S. J. (2014). *Social cognition*. Unpublished manuscript.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.E. (1985). Classification and quantitative judgment. *British Journal of Psychology*, *54*, 101-114.