2 Perception, the Self, and Communication

Activities

Activity 1: Communication Models and Metaphors

Purpose
To classify specific instances of common perceptual tendencies

Instructions
1. Common perceptual tendencies often distort our perception of others. Being able to recognize when this is occurring can help improve communication. Read the following situational descriptions.
2. For each, identify which of the following perceptual tendencies is illustrated.
   a) Judging ourselves more charitably than others, thus perceiving similar behaviour from others and ourselves differently
   b) Being influenced by what is most obvious, including stimuli that are intense, repetitious, contrasting, or related to our motives
   c) Clinging to first impressions, even if they're wrong
   d) Assuming others are similar to us in attitudes and motives
   e) Favouring negative impressions over positive ones
   f) Blaming innocent victims for their misfortunes

Example:

A 13-year old is hit and killed by car speeding through a red light at 1:30 a.m. A person wonders aloud, "What in the world was she doing out at 1:30 in the morning? She should have been home."

(**F**) We tend to blame victims, in this case the teen, and act like it is her fault, instead of blaming the driver for speeding and running a red light.

1. You are trying to pay attention to a friend who is talking to you, but you're worried that your child might fall from the playground equipment.

2. A child brings home a report card with six A's and a D. The parents first want to know why the child is getting a D.

3. The story is told of a woman sitting next to a man on an airplane. He said, "I just got out of prison for murdering my wife." "'Oh,' she replied, 'then you're single'."

4. You thought a new co-worker was trying to juggle the schedule to get the best days and time off at your expense. You later learn that he didn't know the procedure to sign up for scheduling, but you are still suspicious of the person.

5. A person is attacked and robbed in a particular neighbourhood. Others comment, "He should have known better than to walk through that area."

6. You don't understand why a neighbour turned down a better-paying job just because she'd have to move to another city. You always love the excitement of moves and more money.

Add your own examples:

1.

2.

Name _____

Activity 2: Culture and Perception

Purpose
1. To discover the ways in which culture influences our selection and perception.
2. To illustrate the variety of ways our interpretations are influenced by culture

Instructions: Part I
Perception and culture are closely related; culture teaches us how to perceive and strongly influences our selection of what to pay attention to, our interpretation of non-verbal behaviour, and the value we place on talk and silence.
1. For each proverb, write down your own impressions of what each proverb tells us about communication behaviours that are and are not valued. If you repeatedly heard this proverb, what would you select to pay attention to when communicating with someone? How would you interpret other's verbal and non-verbal behaviour? How would exposure to this proverb and its cultural values influence the way you communicate with others?
2. Then, discuss with others what your impressions were, how similar or different they are, and whether these proverbs or similar ones were familiar to you.

Example:

He who speaks does not know; he who knows does not speak. (Chinese)

Someone who hears this proverb would believe that the person who talks a lot doesn't really know much. The person with wisdom would be the silent one. A person would pay attention to a quiet person and ignore loud, boisterous, outgoing people, judging them to be ignorant.

1. He who raises his voice first, loses. (Chinese)

2. The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

3. Loud thunder brings little rain. (Chinese) Contrast this proverb to the previous one.

4. Beauty is only skin deep.

5. Turn your face to the sun and the shadows fall behind you. (Maori)

6. Blood is thicker than water.

7. Life is a dance, not a race. (Irish)

8. You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

9. Silence is golden; speech is silver.

10. All's well that ends well.

11. Cleanliness is next to godliness.

12. Order is half of life. (German)

13. The mouth maintains silence in order to hear the heart talk. (Belgian)

14. Nothing done with intelligence is done without speech. (Greek, from Isocrates)

15. The eyes are the windows to the soul.

What proverbs are popular in your culture to remind members of appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours? List some proverbs or sayings you frequently heard while growing up and describe how they influence your perception and communication. If there are students in class or if you have friends who speak languages other than English, ask them to think of proverbs in other languages and try to translate and explain them for you.

Proverb:

Explanation and impact on communication:

Proverb:

Explanation and impact on communication:

Discuss the proverbs below and determine if they reinforce collectivism or individualism. What behaviours would be rewarded? What behaviours would be rebuked?

1. The nail that stands out must be pounded down. (Japan)

2. The early bird gets the worm.

3. A single arrow is easily broken, but not a bunch. (Asian)

4. God helps those who help themselves.

Activity 3: Perception Checks

Purpose
1. To become familiar with the parts of the perception check
2. To develop competence in identifying contexts in which to use perception checks
3. To develop skills in creating appropriate perception checks

Instructions: Part I
1. Read each situation below and think about various perceptions of the event.
2. Create a three-part *perception check* to help you discern whether your perceptions are accurate. Write it in first person, as you would actually say it to the other person. Be sure to include
    a) a description of the behavior;
    b) two possible, but different, interpretations of the behaviour; and
    c) a request for clarification of how to interpret the behaviour.
3. Now, role-play with a classmate. Practise delivering your perception check with the appropriate non-verbal delivery skills to reflect a sincere attempt to understand.
4. Finally, consider whether you actually would use a perception check in each situation. Why or why not?

Situations

1. For the last three evenings you've come home and found your neighbour's car (Apt. 2) parked in your space (marked Apt. 3).

    Description of the behaviour

    One interpretation

    Second, different, but possible interpretation

    Request for clarification

    Non-verbal behaviours I would and wouldn't display

2. You wanted two pieces of tuna sushi, so you inquired how many come with an order. Your waitperson tells you that two pieces come with one order. You asked for one order. Two orders (four pieces) are delivered to your table.

Description of the behaviour

One interpretation

Second, different, but possible interpretation

Request for clarification

Non-verbal behaviours I would and wouldn't display

3. You and your spouse agreed not to write checks until after deposits are made. You go to the checkbook (joint account) and find a space left for a deposit but no amount written in. And below that, information about two checks was written out.

Description of the behaviour

One interpretation

Second, different, but possible interpretation

Request for clarification

Non-verbal behaviours I would and wouldn't display

4. You and five of your friends eats at a restaurant. You noticed that the menu indicates that a 20 per cent tip will automatically be added to groups of eight or more. When the bill comes, a 20 per cent charge is added in.

Description of the behaviour

One interpretation

Second, different, but possible interpretation

Request for clarification

Non-verbal behaviours I would and wouldn't display

5. A bookstore gives a 10 per cent discount to students. You show your ID for your purchase of a book on sale for $18.00. The clerk rings up $18.00 plus tax and tells you the total.

    Description of the behaviour

    One interpretation

    Second, different, but possible interpretation

    Request for clarification

    Non-verbal behaviours I would and wouldn't display

6. You just started a new job. You know about a party on Friday night at Joe's house because several other co-workers (not Joe) include you in conversations about the party as if you are invited. You never received an invitation, and you don't know if the invitations are just word of mouth and everyone understands that all co-workers are invited, or if only certain people are invited.

    Description of the behaviour

    One interpretation

    Second, different, but possible interpretation

    Request for clarification

    Non-verbal behaviours I would and wouldn't display

1. Divide the situations (by number) into those would probably require a perception check and those that wouldn't.
2. For each group, discuss the advantages and disadvantages and the probable results of using or not using perception checks.

Numbers of the situations in which I probably would use a perception check:

Advantages and probable results of using perception checks:

Possible disadvantages:

Numbers of the situations in which I probably would not use a perception check:

Disadvantages and probable results of using perception checks:

Possible disadvantages:

Activity 4: Identity Management

Purpose
1. To understand how identity management (impression management) is used to create or maintain a presenting self
2. To practice creative thinking with regard to ways to manage impressions

Instructions
1. For each situation below, describe ways in which you have tried or would try to manage impressions.
2. For each situation tell which reason was behind the impression: following situational social rules or to meet personal goals such as appearing likeable, responsible, or competent.
3. Now go back to your description of what you did or would do and label the items to indicate which were accomplished through manner (words, non-verbal actions); appearance (clothing, make-up, hair); and setting (things that would enhance appearance and/or atmosphere of a place like a briefcase, car, type of furniture, music, colour, laptop).
4. After reflecting on the categories in #3, are there additional ways you could improve managing impressions?

Sample response:

You just started a new job, and you have been invited to a new co-worker's home for a backyard barbecue. What would you or did you do?
Probably wear something in denim, but nicer than just jeans and a t-shirt—perhaps a blazer with jeans, so the blazer could be removed if others were more casual. I'd see if the host is introducing people. If not, I'd greet everyone and introduce myself to those I'd seen at work but didn't really know.

Reason for managing impression:
I'd want to be polite and show respect by dressing appropriately, not so "dressed up" that it looked like I was showing off, but not torn or dirty or such informal clothes that they'd think I didn't care. I'd want to create a friendly impression since I'm new at work.

Ways in which impression management was done (label items manner, appearance, setting)
Additional ways you would manage impressions:
manner   Smiles, mingling with other people if I see others doing that as well
appearance Nothing really revealing. Depending on the current fashion trend and weather, I'd think about what would be appropriate to wear.
setting   I'd ask if I should bring some food or drinks, as that's the custom in some places.

1. Job interview (Identify the type of job):

   What would you or did you do?

   Reason for managing impression:

   Ways in which impression management was done (label items manner, appearance, setting)
   Additional ways you would manage impressions:
   manner
   appearance
   setting

2. First day of class at a new school and you want to create an impression of _____.

   What would you or did you do?

   Reason for managing impression:

   Ways in which impression management was done (label items manner, appearance, setting)
   Additional ways you would manage impressions:
   manner
   appearance
   setting

3. Dinner with your boyfriend/girlfriend's family and you want them to think highly of you.

   What would you or did you do?

   Reason for managing impression:

   Ways in which impression management was done (label items manner, appearance, setting)
   Additional ways you would manage impressions:
   manner
   appearance
   setting

4. Appearing in court to seek dismissal of a traffic violation.

   What would you or did you do?

   Reason for managing impression:

   Ways in which impression management was done (label items manner, appearance, setting)
   Additional ways you would manage impressions:
   manner
   appearance
   setting

5. Challenge: You want to impress someone on the Internet whom you've never met. (I'd like to make this kind of impression: _____)
   What would you or did you do?

   Reason for managing impression:

   Ways in which impression management was done (label items manner, appearance, setting)
   Additional ways you would manage impressions:
   manner
   appearance
   setting

Do any of the ways fit these categories? (manner, appearance, setting)

Besides those three, are there additional channels (not available in face-to-face) available to you on web pages? In chat rooms? In forum posts?

In using the Internet channels, what advantages do you gain in terms of impression management? What would you or did you do?

What disadvantages do you need to contend with?

Besides Internet channels, what other mediums or channels have you used that have presented you with distinct advantages or disadvantages in terms of managing impressions?

Activity 5: Self-Concept and Communication

Purpose
To explore one's self-concept and the role of communication in forming self-concept and influencing perception

Instructions
Perceiving the self involves understanding self-concept and its impact on communication. Self-concept is defined as the relatively stable set of perceptions we hold about our physical, social, and psychological traits.

1. List several characteristics that are significant in your self-concept in the left column below. Try to choose some characteristics that are physical, emotional, psychological, and social.
2. Describe in the centre column the role of communication in forming this part of your self-concept.
3. Then in the right column, describe some ways in which each characteristic affects how you communicate with others.

Describe or draw a trait that is part of your self-concept here:	What was communicated to you? How? How did communication play a role in your belief that this is the way you are? Did you learn these things about yourself directly/indirectly from others? From direct communication to you or others' feedback or reactions to you?	What do you communicate to others? How does this trait affect with whom you communicate? For what reasons you communicate? How you communicate with others? How much you communicate?
Example: I'm shy around new people and I'm not comfortable meeting new people.	When I was young, my older sister was always invited to talk to guests, and introduce them to others. I watched, but believed I wasn't good at this. Others probably paid more attention to my sister because she spoke with them.	Sometimes, I really have to talk myself into approaching new people, and I may not walk up to strangers and start a conversation. I'll wait for someone to start talking to me first.

Activity 6: Exploring the Web

Instructions

Chapter 2 discusses various aspects of impression management. Read the following articles:
Miller, Hugh. "http://www.douri.sh/classes/ics234cw04/miller2.pdf." Retrieved from
http://ess.ntu.ac.uk/miller/cyberpsych/goffman.htm

Chandler, Daniel. "Personal Home Pages and the Construction of Identities on the Web." Retrieved
from www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/webident.html.

If you have your own web page, answer the following questions with regard to your own home page.
If not, use either your instructor's page or the page of a friend or famous person you admire.

I will use _____ my own site
          _____ a friend's site
          _____ my instructor's site
          _____ a celebrity's site

URL:

1. What evidence does Chandler cite to support his claim that home pages represent a blurring of
   private and public arenas?

2. Chandler refers to five elements present in the construction of web pages: _____ of cer-
   tain elements_____ to particular elements_____ of certain elements, _____
   or borrowing of elements (by addition, deletion, substitution, or transposition), and _____
   of the elements on a web page.

3. Describe how each of the five underlined elements in question 2 above relates to the web page
   that you are analyzing.

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

   5.

4. Define *bricolage*. Explain Chandler's use of the term *bricolage* as it relates to the web page you're analyzing.

5. Analyze the content and form of the web page you are examining. What do you find appealing or unappealing about its content? About its form?

6. Does the page have any of the following: guest book, e-mail capacity, chat link? What does the presence or absence of these contribute to the web-identity of the person?

Review the following sites for more information about analyzing web pages and their design:
- www.wilsonweb.com/articles/12design.htm
- www.werbach.com/web/page_design.html

Read about "How Search Engines Rank Web Pages":
- www.searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/rank.html

Activity 7: Cultural Impression Management

Purpose
To utilize a cross cultural reference to think more critically about our own

Instructions
In Japan, the maxim "the nail that sticks out must be hammered down" suggests a culture with beliefs that are very different from those of North Americans. Give examples from your own life, a popular song, or a film or TV plot to show how this maxim could be productive in our culture and also how it could fail. Give two examples from each perspective

Activity 8: National Identity

Purpose

To think critically about what it means to be Canadian with reference to the United States

Instructions

In Canada, French and English are both our official languages. Consider what national identity can mean for a culture, and how certain characteristics can be community-building or divisive. Think about Canada and the US, or any large country that has a less-powerful satellite country that it influences. How does national identity define how these countries think about themselves in relation to the more influential country?

Activity 9: Trying on the Researcher's Role

Purpose
To compare and contrast local, informal findings with academic research

Instructions
Review Table 2.2 on page 69 and observe the differences in men's and women's perceived and presenting selves. While there are similarities, there are also some striking differences.

Try some informal research for yourself. Ask at least seven men and seven women who attend your college or university but who are not in your course to describe themselves. First, ask each person for three words to describe the person's public (presenting) self. Then ask for three words to describe the person's private (perceived) self. Compile your findings and record them on the chart below.

Perceived Self		Presenting Self	
Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.	7.

How do your findings compare with those reported in the text? Compare your findings to a classmate's. If you notice any unexpected or unusual findings, discuss what might be informing these descriptors. What descriptors would you select for yourself?

Activity 10: Competing Narratives

Purpose
To evaluate the role of narratives in co-constructing the social world

Instructions
As you learned in this chapter, narratives refer to the stories that people create and exchange to make sense of their personal worlds.
1. Think about various settings in your life where competing narratives have existed, e.g., on a sports team, as a member of a club or a nonprofit society, within your extended family, or at work.
2. In about 200 to 250 words, write down a situation you recall in which differing narratives led to communication problems. As you write, reflect on the interactive features of these narratives— that is, the way they build on or reject one another.
3. Share your writing with a classmate or a member of your study group. What similarities do you notice in comparing recollections? What differences do you notice?

Activity 11: How to Say This

Purpose

1. To practise perception-checking
2. To recognize the importance of empathy in communication

Instructions

1. Perception-checking is a valuable skill, but phrasing perception checks can be a challenge until you've done it a few times. Here's a chance to try perception checking in a low-stakes setting.

   Task: Write three short, dialogue-based scenes in which a problem exists between two people. (Each scene can involve a different dyad, or you can write three linked scenes using the same characters.) Use a little narrative description to set the scene, and give the characters names. As the action starts to rise, have one of the characters check his/her perception of what's going on, following the steps on pages 55 to 57 in the textbook. Let the other character respond, and then bring the scene to a resolution and close.

2. After writing, reflect on what was difficult about this task. Did you edit the perception-checking dialogue to make it sound natural? What did you notice about the effect of perception-checking on the direction of the scene? How could you manipulate the responding character's dialogue if you wanted to escalate the emotional tension rather than resolve the conflict?

3. Now reflect on what this task has taught you about phrasing perception checks and your own comfort with checking in with another person. What have you learned from scene writing that might help you in your day-to-day life?

Activity 12: Recognizing Self-Serving Bias

Purpose
1. To understand a common element of perception
2. To understand communicative influences that may affect behaviour

Instructions
1. As the textbook points out on pages 44 to 45, people tend to judge ourselves more favourably than we judge others and also tend to misattribute outcomes. This concept is not merely academic, however. Spend some time online or in the library examining political news stories. Examine how various politicians explain their victories and failures, and how they characterize the actions of their opponents. Do you see the self-serving bias at work? What does your observation tell you about the character of the politicians in question—or about human nature more generally?

2. If you want to extend your observations, you might be able to write a post about politics and the self-serving bias for your class blog, or a short opinion article for your campus newspaper.