

# Please Hear What I'm Not Saying

Don't be fooled by me.  
Don't be fooled by the face I wear  
for I wear a mask, a thousand masks,  
masks that I'm afraid to take off,  
and none of them is me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,  
but don't be fooled,  
for God's sake don't be fooled.  
I give you the impression that I'm secure,  
that all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well  
as without,

that confidence is my name and coolness my game,  
that the water's calm and I'm in command  
and that I need no one,  
but don't believe me.

My surface may seem smooth but my surface is my mask,  
ever-varying and ever-concealing.

Beneath lies no complacency.

Beneath lies confusion, and fear, and aloneness.

But I hide this. I don't want anybody to know it.

I panic at the thought of my weakness exposed.

That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,

a nonchalant sophisticated facade,

to help me pretend,

to shield me from the glance that knows.

But such a glance is precisely my salvation, my only hope,  
and I know it.

That is, if it's followed by acceptance,

if it's followed by love.

It's the only thing that can liberate me from myself,

from my own self-built prison walls,

from the barriers I so painstakingly erect.

It's the only thing that will assure me

of what I can't assure myself,

that I'm really worth something.

But I don't tell you this. I don't dare to, I'm afraid to.

I'm afraid your glance will not be followed by acceptance,

will not be followed by love.

I'm afraid you'll think less of me,

that you'll laugh, and your laugh would kill me.

I'm afraid that deep-down I'm nothing

and that you will see this and reject me.

So I play my game, my desperate pretending game,  
with a facade of assurance without

and a trembling child within.

So begins the glittering but empty parade of masks,

and my life becomes a front.

I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk.

I tell you everything that's really nothing,

and nothing of what's everything,

of what's crying within me.

So when I'm going through my routine

do not be fooled by what I'm saying.

Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying,  
what I'd like to be able to say,  
what for survival I need to say,  
but what I can't say.

I don't like hiding.  
I don't like playing superficial phony games.  
I want to stop playing them.  
I want to be genuine and spontaneous and me  
but you've got to help me.  
You've got to hold out your hand  
even when that's the last thing I seem to want.  
Only you can wipe away from my eyes  
the blank stare of the breathing dead.  
Only you can call me into aliveness.  
Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging,  
each time you try to understand because you really care,  
my heart begins to grow wings--  
very small wings,  
very feeble wings,  
but wings!

With your power to touch me into feeling  
you can breathe life into me.  
I want you to know that.  
I want you to know how important you are to me,  
how you can be a creator--an honest-to-God creator--  
of the person that is me  
if you choose to.  
You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble,  
you alone can remove my mask,  
you alone can release me from my shadow-world of panic,  
from my lonely prison,  
if you choose to.  
Please choose to.

Do not pass me by.  
It will not be easy for you.  
A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls.  
The nearer you approach to me  
the blinder I may strike back.  
It's irrational, but despite what the books say about man  
often I am irrational.  
I fight against the very thing I cry out for.  
But I am told that love is stronger than strong walls  
and in this lies my hope.  
Please try to beat down those walls  
with firm hands but with gentle hands  
for a child is very sensitive.

Who am I, you may wonder?  
I am someone you know very well.  
For I am every man you meet  
and I am every woman you meet.

Charles C. Finn  
September 1966

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## Consider this . . .

### Application of the Perceptual Awareness Process

Your roommate, Stephanie, has been quiet for the last two days and has not been talking to you (behavior). You are sure that she is mad at you (first interpretation). She may have had a fight with her boyfriend (second interpretation). Why would I be acting that way? (Put yourself in that situation.) Ask Stephanie, “Why have you been so quiet recently?” (request for clarification).

Jim stomped out of the room and slammed the door (behavior). Jim must have not liked what I said and got mad (first interpretation). Jim sure must be in a hurry and accidentally slammed the door (second interpretation.) “Why would I have acted that way?” (Put yourself in that situation). “Jim, how did you feel when you left the room yesterday?” (request for clarification).

Think of some situations you have been in and go through this process.

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS.** First impressions can have a tremendous influence on our perception of others. The initial impression we have of another person may have a strong impact on our future interactions with them. If you go to a party and see someone that looks just like the boss that fired you last week, what is your impression of that person? What is the likelihood of you approaching that person? You will most likely avoid that person even though they seem to be very friendly and not at all like your boss. The *primacy effect* occurs when the first impression carries more weight than any subsequent information. That first impression of the person that looks like your previous boss will be difficult to change even if you see them in a new and different situation (Myers 2007).

Our first impressions are formed quite rapidly—often within a matter of seconds. Research indicates that negative first impressions are often quickly formed and hard to overcome. This is why they say “getting off on the wrong foot” may be particularly damaging to a person. The opposite tends to be true of positive first impressions, which are often hard to earn but easily lost (Rothbart and Park 1986). If the person you are going out with for the first time is late, what is your first impression? Would you think that he or she is unreliable and must be a flake—a negative first impression? Many of you would feel this way and this impression will be difficult to change. If your new date is on time are you willing to say that this person is reliable and conscientious? Most of us will take more time to make that judgment even though the first impression was positive.

**WHAT DO YOU NOTICE FIRST?** While you are walking down the street one day, you notice a person that you have never seen before. In your mind you immediately form an impression of what you think this person is like. What had the greatest impact on the formation of your opinion? Was it the way the person was dressed, their hairstyle, their size or shape, their facial expression, or their physical attractiveness? A recent survey indicated that women are most impressed by the way a man dresses, while men seem to be influenced most by the physical attractiveness of women. Overall, we seem to be influenced more by *physical appearance* than anything else. This may be due to the fact

**Y**ou never get a second chance to make a first impression.

GARY WILLIAMS

Locus of Control  
T/ extravert

that mass media puts too much emphasis on these factors and, thus, has a great influence on our perception of the world.

Other factors that seem to have an impact on our first impressions of others include what the individual is doing (their behavior) at the time you perceive them and what the *interactional possibilities* are with that person (whether or not they would be a good date, tennis partner, or study partner). If you see someone acting weird the first time you see them, what kind of person do you think he or she is? What will you think of that person the next time you see them? Most of us would continue to perceive them as weird because of what we observed them doing the first time we saw them. If you see someone who you think would be fun to date, will you approach them? If you think the person sitting in the corner would help you study psychology, will you ask them to help you? If you perceive someone as “stuck-up,” or with an “attitude,” will you approach them? Based on your first impression of these individuals, you have already determined how you will respond or not respond to them. You are making your decision based on how you perceive the *interactional possibilities* (Aronson et al. 2006).

What about the impression you leave on the worldwide web, such as MySpace and Facebook? Do you realize that any information you post on those sites is quite public and long-lasting? Do you realize that the public can see all the pictures taken in various stages of sobriety, etc. on Facebook? Do you realize that what you post may be the **first impression** someone has of you further down the road? Do you realize that employers might check the worldwide web to see what you have posted on various websites? The lesson is just think carefully—the worldwide web is available to millions of people—just think before you post.

**PREJUDICES.** Our perception of other people may be influenced and distorted by our prejudices. Prejudices predispose us to behave in certain ways toward other people and groups. *Prejudice* is when we prejudge a person or group of people prior to having all known information and facts. Being prejudiced does not always have a negative meaning, it can also be positive. You see someone dressed as a nurse. You automatically perceive that person as kind and generous, even though you do not know anything else about the individual. It is too bad that most of us allow our prejudices to affect our interaction with others negatively.

**STEREOTYPING.** Many people think people with red hair have hot tempers, that all police officers are mean, that all Irish people drink a lot, that all Japanese are intelligent, and that all Jewish people are rich. These are all *stereotypes*—preconceived, inaccurate, rigid beliefs about individuals or groups of people. The habit of stereotyping people is so common that almost any personal characteristic leads to the formation of stereotypes. For example, what are your feelings about overweight people, people who wear glasses, short people, black people, women, or homosexuals?

Did you know that tall people are more apt to get hired first and get paid more than short people? Did you know that attractive students tend to get better grades than less attractive students? Are you aware that women are paid about seventy percent of what men are paid for doing the same job? Is this because tall people are better qualified than short people, attractive students are more intelligent than the less attractive students, women are not as good employees? No, it is because we have allowed our prejudices and stereotyping to influence our behavior. We must learn to overcome these influences and

accept people as they are and not how we learned to perceive them. We must work together to reduce prejudices and break down the assumptions that one group is better than or inferior to others. We must work toward developing positive interactions among all individuals—no matter what size, shape, or color the person is.

DO OUR SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS INFLUENCE OUR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS TOWARD PREJUDICE AND STEREOTYPING? *Social perception* involves the creation of images of ourselves and of others. Our cultural background and past experiences have a tremendous impact upon how we interpret our daily experiences. A *prejudice* is a negative attitude toward members of a group, while *discrimination* involves your behavior toward members of a group. Prejudice is a negative cognitive set; discrimination is negative behavior (unfair treatment). For example, a store owner has a strong prejudice toward everyone from Mexico, yet treats them like everyone else because she needs their business. This is an example of prejudice without discrimination. Can discrimination happen without prejudice? It is less common, but it can happen. A restaurant manager who has a handicapped child has empathy for all handicapped people but still will not hire them at his restaurant.

INACCURACIES IN SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS. This is both a cause and an effect of prejudice. We will examine a few sources of inaccuracy that we discussed earlier that contribute to prejudice in important ways.

- ❑ **Stereotyping.** Stereotyping seems to contribute more than any other factor in determining our prejudices. Many people subscribe to derogatory stereotypes of various groups. Although studies suggest that racial stereotypes have declined over the last fifty years, they are still not a thing of the past (Plous 2002).
- ❑ **First Impressions.** One of the problems with the power of first impressions is that many people's first impressions of minorities come not from actual interactions, but from disparaging remarks made by parents, neighbors, and others. Thus, many impressionable children develop unfavorable opinions toward Hispanics, African Americans, homosexuals, the handicapped, etc., before they have any opportunity for rewarding interactions with members of these groups. Even though these negative first impressions may eventually be overridden by contradictory experiences, the primacy effect probably contributes to prejudice. Judging a book by its cover is a pervasive consequence of our initial reactions to other people—reactions that encourage often inaccurate stereotypes about races and ethnic groups other than our own, women, old people, overweight people, and many other negatively stigmatized social groups (Pincitore et al. 1994).
- ❑ **Categorizing.** People frequently categorize others on the basis of age, sex, race, sexual orientation, weight, height, and so forth. *In-group-out-group bias* explains the tendency to hold less favorable opinions about groups to which we do not belong (*out-groups*), while holding more favorable opinions about groups to which we do belong (*in-groups*) (Hewstone et al. 2001). We perceive people like ourselves to be members of the “in-group” and those who are different to be part of the “out-group.” We tend to have more favorable attitudes toward “in-group” members than “out-group” members. We tend to explain the behavior of people in the “out-group” on the basis of their membership in the group. Jamie is slow, not very athletic, and obese, so Jamie must be just like all fat people. In contrast, my best

You can see a lot by observing. . . .

YOGI BERRA

Focus of Content Extravert

minicase

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What is your impression of this person?

friend, Larry, is slow and also obese, but I do not categorize him as an "out-group" because I perceive Larry to be a unique person. Therefore, he is part of my "in-group." We need to learn to avoid categorizing people.

**Attribution Error.** When we observed Juan for the first time, he was studying by himself in the cafeteria using a laptop computer. What was our first impression of Juan? He must be a loner. He must be an intellectual. He must be a "nerd." Are we right about our perception of Juan?

The next day we are walking by the soccer field and we notice a very fast aggressive player scoring a goal and we discover that it is Juan. Was our first impression of Juan correct? We then further discover that Juan is also a very outgoing individual with lots of friends. We definitely made an error based on our first impression. Remember, a person's behavior at a given time may or may not reflect their personality—but we tend to assume that it does.

Inaccuracy in our perceptions tend to persist because our first impressions can be very difficult to overcome. Evidence tends to demonstrate that we tend to see what we expect to see in our interpersonal interactions. Now that you are more aware of how your perceptions are influenced, we hope that you can begin to accept people as they really are.

As we continue the process of people perception, we discover that it is common for us to make many mistakes and errors in our perceptions of others. We have found that our prejudices and stereotypes often lead to unfair treatment of others. We will now take a look at one characteristic that seems to have the greatest impact on our perception of others without substantial evidence to support its accuracy—another distortion in perception.

Are you more likely to seek out an attractive person as a friend or someone who is perceived as less attractive? If you were an employer, would you be more likely to hire the most attractive applicant? Do you perceive physically attractive people to be more poised, likeable, sexy, competent, happy, interesting, and socially skilled than people of average or unattractive appearance? Many of you would answer no to these questions, but when it comes time for you to act on these questions it could be a different story. Research indicates that physical attractiveness has a profound influence on our impression of others and our interactions with them (Berscheid and Reis 1998; Baron and Byrne 2006).

In general, people tend to believe that what is beautiful is good (Dutton and Atwater 2008). This stereotype seems to start early in life. When preschool children were asked to pick whom they liked best and who they thought was the best behaved in their class, they selected both categories of their classmates with the same group of children adults judged to be the most attractive physically (Berscheid and Reis 1998).

We have all been told, "beauty is only skin deep, it's what's inside the person that counts." A person's character and behavior are more important than looks. Most of us would probably agree that physical attractiveness should not be a major factor in interpersonal attraction. Then, why is physical beauty such a powerful influence in attracting us to others?

One reason is that we all want to be accepted and liked, and we perceive attractive people as being more friendly, liked more by others, and thus we hang around them more we will also be perceived in the same way.