Jigsaw Groping of Person Perception: Its Conceptual Framework, Attention Bias, and Developmental Trend

Jenn-Wu Wang,[1] Hung-Yu Lin,[1] Feng-Ming Tsao,[2] and Wen-Ying Lin[3]

[1]Department of Psychology, Fo Guang University

[2]Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University

[3]Department of Psychology/Research Center for Psychological Science, Chung Yuan Christian University

Humans are by nature social creatures. In evolutionary terms, humans perceive others in ways that potentially facilitate social success. By combining various theories and findings, this article provides a rationale for a new conceptual framework of person perception, which predicts two basic dimensions--competence and morality--along a dimension plasticity concept. Based on this framework, human perception links discriminatory attention to others' competence, warmth, and the plasticity of these two features. On one hand, competence gradually accentuates with age. On the other hand, the accumulation of experience dictates how person perception varies across different social situations as well as differentiates into various person perceptions. Two studies were designed to test this jigsaw model of person perception. Participants in Study I were provided with behavior and trait information about a target person. A memory test was utilized as an attention index to determine whether differences of attention along the manipulated trait dimensions would be subsequently observed among second-graders ($N = 76$), fifth-graders ($N = 84$), high-school students ($N = 90$), and college students ($N = 89$), when participants recalled the information provided. Results supported the prediction that people mainly focus on competence and warmth dimensions, with the former surpassing the latter with age. The results also suggested that children might presuppose that competence and warmth remain unchanged during the early developmental stage. Study II utilized a Twenty Statement Test to explore whether people were attentive to different dimensions when they see their best friend, compared to when they encounter non-specific others. We asked the participants from second-grade ($N = 77$), fifth-grade ($N = 69$), high school ($N = 86$), and college ($N = 85$), to verbally describe their best friend (second-graders), or use twenty sentences to write down their impression of their best friend (elder groups). Results indicated that people focus their attention on their best friend in a different way than they do for general others. Finally, the weight of morality and personality perceived in friends tends to increase with age.

Keywords: *attention bias, conceptual framework, developmental trend, interpersonal perception, person perception*