

DO OUR SELF-VIEWS INFLUENCE HOW WE THINK OTHERS SEE US?
INFLUENCE OF PRIVATE INFORMATION ON INTERPRETING OTHERS'
IMPRESSIONS

By

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Metaperceptions refer to people's thoughts about how they are perceived by others. Metaperceptions may be broad and general or specific and detailed (Shectman & Kenny, 1994). Research suggests that people are not impartial in their metaperceptions. Rather, they forecast impressions that are consistent with their private information (i.e., information that people have about the self that cannot be known by others). These inaccurate forecasts ultimately occur because people fail to take the perspective of others. In this study, I examined whether private information might also influence how people interpret the feedback they receive from others. I had participants work individually on a task and manipulated their private perceptions about how they had performed compared with other participants in their session (comparatively well, comparatively poorly, or no manipulation). Participants learned that their performances would subsequently be judged, where each judge would view and evaluate only one task solution. Each participant then received an evaluation of identical wording from the judge and made judgments about this evaluation. Participants' privately-held information about their performance colored their interpretation of the evaluation they received from

their judge. Specifically, participants who privately believed they had done better than the other participants believed their judge viewed them more positively compared with participants who privately believed they had done worse than the others, with participants that received no private performance information falling in between. The effects occurred for interpretation of traits relevant to the task domain but not for traits that were irrelevant to the task domain. Finally, participants' personal perceptions of their performance mediated the effect of private information on task-relevant metaperceptions.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Suppose your friend Steve goes on a blind date. Although he planned to wear his favorite shirt, that shirt is dirty and Steve is forced to wear a shirt that is, in his opinion, inferior. Having mentally compared these two options, Steve arrives at the restaurant feeling unhappy about the shirt he is wearing. During the evening, his date casually comments, “Nice shirt.” How does Steve interpret this comment? The goal of this research is to assess whether information that people know about themselves—but that is unknown to others—influences their interpretations of their social world.

Why Do People Metaperceive?

Steve’s situation illustrates a common mental exercise: People often wonder how they appear to others and what impressions they have made. In this paper, a *metaperception* refers to how people believe they are regarded by others (Shechtman & Kenny, 1994). Metaperceptions are important for several reasons. First, contemplating how one comes across may serve a regulatory function: Metaperceptions have important consequences for mood, self-esteem, mental health, quality of life, self-regulation and a host of other responses (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2006; Oaten, Williams, Jones, & Zadro, 2008; Stein & Kean, 2000). For instance, Gonsalkorale and Williams (2006) found that ostracism—which suggests having made a poor impression on another person or group—led participants to feel a lower sense of belonging and self-esteem. Thus metaperceptions can provide important social information, such as inclusion status. In fact, some studies suggest that metaperceptions become integrated into one’s self-views. A key concept in Cooley’s (1902) “looking glass self” is that people rely on others’ reactions and perceptions of them to form their self-identity. Furthermore,

sociometer theory posits that state self-esteem reflects how positively or negatively people believe they are seen by others (Leary, 1990; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). From this perspective, self-thoughts may heavily depend on perception of others' judgments.

Second, people may be motivated to make certain impressions to get something that is controlled by other people (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). For example, an entry-level employee seeking a promotion as a manager might try to make a certain impression on his boss. To the extent that monitoring and managing desired impressions help a person get what he or she wants, it is important that one is accurate in assessing these impressions.

Finally, people quite simply are curious to know how they are viewed by others. Ironically, despite the range of implications of metaperceptions, and despite how curious people seem to be about others' thoughts, evidence suggests that people are poor at inferring others' thoughts about and impressions of them (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). In other words, metaperceptions are often inaccurate.

In What Ways Are People Inaccurate?

Studies on detecting impressions reveal significant biases in people's conclusions about what others think and attend to. At the broadest level, people tend to overestimate their salience to others (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000; Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999; Savitsky & Gilovich, 1999); they believe others notice their contributions, physical appearance, and presence—even *absence*—more than others actually do. Further, people overestimate others' ability to detect variability in their appearance over time (Gilovich, Kruger, Medvec, & Savitsky, 1999). Beyond these broad, surface-level misperceptions, people assume that their observers have the ability

to detect their internal states as well, believing observers can discern their emotions, beliefs, and their personality traits more than observers actually can (Gilovich, Savitsky, & Medvec, 1998; Vorauer, 2001; Vorauer & Ross, 1999).

Other studies also support the idea that people are not savvy at pinpointing others' thoughts or knowing what things others attend to (Epley, 2002; Van Boven, 1999). For instance, participants in one study imagined themselves committing a social blunder and then estimated how this blunder would be perceived by an observer. These participants' anticipated receiving a more negative evaluation for *committing* this blunder than was "dealt" by other participants who were asked to imagine *observing* the same blunder (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001). Another study found that actors explored the extent to which observers would attribute personal advocacy of a speech that the actors had been randomly assigned to deliver, despite being told that the judge knew of their choice-constraint (Van Boven, 2001). Actors underestimated observers' empathy and overestimated the negativity of their evaluations. These studies illustrate that, although it is generally in people's best interest to correctly identify how others perceive them, the conclusions they draw appear to be flawed for some reason.

Why Are People Poor Prophets of Others' Thoughts?

People are likely poor at judging how they are perceived by others for two related reasons. The first arises from an asymmetry of information available to people (Chambers, Epley, Savitsky, & Windschitl, 2008). People have more information about themselves than is available to others. Put simply, as actors, people know things about themselves that an audience cannot possibly know. For example, a student may know that the speech he gave today was superior to the one he delivered yesterday in rehearsal. A woman may be privy to her expectation for a perfect score on her term

paper and that a 95% would be a disappointment. A youth may know that, although he is taller than average, he *feels* short compared with others in his family. A man may harbor enduring views of being superior to others he meets. Such cognitions may be quite salient to the person in the situation, and may create a referent or context for appraising new stimuli. However, this information—and importantly the comparisons it spawns—is often invisible and unknowable to outside observers, and is thus “private information” (Chambers et al., 2008; Vorauer, 2001). In this paper, I examined how the private information people have about themselves may influence not only how they view themselves and how they think others *will* view them (Chambers et al., 2008), but also how they interpret a indicator of how others *do* view them (through evaluation).

The second, more proximal reason why people are poor at forming correct metaperceptions is that people fail to sufficiently take into account others’ viewpoints when making evaluations. The explanation for *overweighting* one’s own belief in gauging another’s belief is due, in part, to anchor and adjustment. Research finds that, in making judgments about others or intuiting others’ perspectives, people initially anchor on self-referential information and only subsequently adjust to consider another’s thoughts (Chambers et al., 2008; Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Fischhoff, 1975; Gilbert & Gill, 2000; Gilovich & Savistky, 1999; Gilovich et al., 1998; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Keysar et al., 2003; Kruger, 1999; Nickerson, 1999). But because such adjustment from this anchor is cognitively effortful, demanding time, cognitive capacity, and motivation (Epley et al., 2004; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), people usually fall short of another’s true perspective. Such a deficiency may account for a ‘false belief in consensus’ (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Ross, Greene, & House,

1977) whereby one person assumes by default that another person shares in his or her preferences or perspective, or simply acts as if others have access to the information only he or she has (Birch & Bloom, 2007; Keysar, Ginzel, & Bazerman, 1995; Keysar, Lin, & Barr, 2003). It seems that failure to adjust completely to another's perspective may lead people to "fill in" what they believe is the other's perspective with their own knowledge (Nickerson, 1999), and the thoughts they attribute to another are actually much closer to their own thoughts than the other person's true thoughts. Likewise—and central to this study—one can easily imagine that once a person possesses certain knowledge, it is difficult to shift from an information-enriched standpoint to an information-impoverished one another may hold (Birch & Bloom, 2007; Fischhoff, 1975).

Some research suggests that these perspective-taking errors color people's metaperceptions. Somewhat contradictory to the assumptions of sociometer theory, some evidence shows that metaperceptions are more highly correlated with self-views than with others' actual views (Chambers et al., 2008; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Vorauer & Ross, 1999). For instance, one study examined anticipated impressions on a judge across a series of performance contexts (darts, a singing competition, a word puzzle, and imagined experiences) (Chambers et al., 2008, experiment 3). Participants who received information regarding other players' performances in the word puzzle task (they had done worse than the others) anticipated being more negatively evaluated by a judge than did participants who did not receive comparative performance information regardless of whether participants were told the judge would see only their or everyone's performance. Importantly, participants with private information anticipated that impressions from a judge would be influenced by

information that the judge did not have access to. This finding suggests that it is the contents of one's own perspective that influence inferences about what another thinks. One's self-views, especially self-views informed by private information, appear to have evaluative consequences on how people believe they are perceived by others.

The Present Research and Hypotheses

Despite converging evidence, previous studies are limited in answering the question opening this paper, i.e., how Steve will interpret his date's comment. This limitation exists because participants in previous studies did not actually have access to observers' impressions of them. Instead, they were merely asked to estimate or anticipate what others would think of them. However, in Steve's case and in real life, others' impressions are sometimes available as feedback. Understandably, people don't always receive direct, explicit feedback from others and, in this case, using their own self-views to predict others' impressions would be defensible. However, when they do receive such feedback, use of self-knowledge would be less justifiable and egocentric biases should disappear. The question remains, however, if such biases do disappear, or if instead interpretation of feedback is vulnerable to egocentric bias in the same manner that anticipated impressions are. Put simply: Do private comparisons influence how people interpret actual feedback they receive?

Preliminary support for the hypothesis that people's private information colors perceptions of another's feedback comes from a study exploring responses to phone messages (Epley et al., 2004). Participants received background information about an ambiguous phone message that they later heard on an answering machine. Participants interpreted the same message differently depending on the background information they received (sarcastic versus sincere). Once again, however, this study examined a

different question than the current hypothesis. In the former, the interpretation was not self-relevant, so it would be premature to assume that the influence of background information on a third party's answering machine would also hold for impressions of oneself. Perhaps people are more accurate in interpreting stimuli that are relevant to them.

Thus, beyond its influence on predicting impressions from others, does private information influence interpretations of manifest impressions as well? That is, could the same, ambiguous comment from another person be construed as a compliment or an insult depending upon the favorability of one's own private self-knowledge as Epley et al. (2004) suggested? The literature suggests that egocentric biases are unlikely to disappear on receipt of feedback.

Hypothesis 1

Private information will influence participants' interpretation of feedback they receive, and the direction of influence will be identical to the valence of private information. Specifically, people with positive private information regarding their task performance will interpret an ambiguous evaluation from a judge more positively than will people with negative private information about their performance.

Rationale. This hypothesis is primarily informed by studies by Chambers et al. (2008) and Epley et al. (2004), which show that private background information can influence people's predicted impressions on others, and people's interpretation of an ambiguous phone message, respectively.

Hypothesis 2

The effect of private information on perceived impressions will be mediated by participants' ratings of self-perceived performance on the task.

Rationale. Research described earlier supports the notion that assumed impressions are highly correlated with self-views (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Distinguished from Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 proposes a mechanism through which people achieve different interpretations of a stimulus. Specifically, Hypothesis 2 posits that participants internalize the private information—thus altering their self-views—and that these self-views are ultimately responsible for interpretation. Establishing this mechanism is critical to conclusions about whether “self-views influence how people think another sees them.”

Hypothesis 3

The influence of private information will be domain-specific; that is, the influence will be limited to impressions relevant to the private information provided and task at hand.

Rationale. Hypothesis 3 (i.e. domain-specificity of the effect) is supported by a study by Savitsky et al. (2001) who found that, after a bad performance on a task, participants anticipated observers’ ratings to drop only on task-relevant traits but not on task-irrelevant traits. Additionally, Vorauer and Ross (1999) showed that increasing actors’ self-awareness during a task increased their perceptions of transparency to others only for task-relevant traits. Hypothesis 3 is also indirectly supported by applicability in activation rules (Higgins & Brendl, 1994). According to the rule, when private information is highly applicable to a stimulus, the knowledge will be applied to interpret the stimulus. By contrast, when private information is not applicable to the stimulus, it will not be applied.

CHAPTER 2 METHOD

The goal of this research was to determine if private self-views influence how people interpret social feedback given by others. I presented participants with a situation that is plausible in real life in which they received performance feedback. I manipulated participants' private information about a task they had performed. Based on random assignment, participants learned either that they had performed better than their fellow participants (*positive* feedback condition) or worse than fellow participants (*negative* feedback condition), or received no information about how they performed relative to fellow participants (no-feedback condition). In addition, participants learned that the judge who was evaluating their performance results would see only their performance results and no one else's. Thus, the judge would ostensibly be unaware of the comparative performance of the person the judge was evaluating. Participants in all conditions received identical, neutrally-worded evaluations written by their judges and then answered questions about the impressions they had made on their judge.

If private comparative information affects interpretation of feedback, then participants who receive negative feedback should interpret the judge's evaluation less positively than should participants who receive positive feedback (Hypothesis 1). If the influence of private information is domain-specific (Hypothesis 3), then the hypothesized effect will only occur for task-relevant impressions and not task-irrelevant impressions. Finally, if self-perception mediates the effect of experimentally-manipulated private information (Hypothesis 2), then condition should no longer predict perceived impressions after I control for participants' self-ratings on performance.

Procedure. Fifty-four undergraduates (20 male, 32 female, 2 sex unknown) participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Participants arrived at the lab in groups of 2 to 5 people to guarantee the presence of at least one co-participant on the task in which they participated. After separating participants into cubicles, the experimenter explained that the study examined person perception and social judgment and that the participants should not communicate with the other participants during the study.

The experimenter mentioned that the study concerned how people evaluate others' performances and that participants in this session were to play a word puzzle game similar to Boggle (Chambers et al., 2008). The experimenter also stated that other participants in the study were assigned the role of judges, and were completing forms in another room. These other participants would judge the performance results of the Boggle players. The experimenter told participants that, to maintain privacy and objectivity, each participant would be evaluated by a separate judge, who would see only their results sheet and no one else's. Once participants acknowledged that they understood this point, the experimenter gave each participant a handout with basic instructions for the game.

Participants played a modified version of the game. All participants received a printout of a Boggle letter matrix and a blank sheet of paper. This variation from the original game minimized distraction and gave participants an identical, standard task. Participants received instructions to generate as many word combinations as they could from the letter matrix in six minutes, and to handwrite their solutions on their sheet. Participants then began the trial. After six minutes, the experimenter called time, asked

participants to write the total number of solutions they generated at the bottom of the sheet, and collected all the solution sheets.

Next, the experimenter informed participants that he/she would make photocopies of the solution sheets to show to their respective judges. After a few minutes the experimenter returned with a packet for each Boggle player that contained a real photocopy of that particular Boggle player's solution sheet, and an identical, bogus evaluation of the participant's performance that was ostensibly written by their personal judge (this evaluation was deemed neutrally-worded in a pilot study, $N = 10$; see Appendix C). The packets given to participants in the no-information control condition contained only these two items.

In the positive- and negative feedback conditions the experimenter announced that because past participants were curious about their fellow Boggle-players' performances, he/she had also made copies of the others players' solution sheets, but reminded participants that the evaluation in their packets was from each player's judge and that the judge had not seen the others' performance results. Thus, in these two conditions, each Boggle player's real photocopy of his or her own solution sheet was preceded by *bogus* photocopies of the solution sheets from other players in that session. In the negative feedback condition, the bogus solution sheets contained many *more* solutions than an average player's number of solutions generated for this word matrix, as determined by a pilot test (pilot test average was 19 solutions, $N = 12$). In the positive feedback condition, the bogus solution sheets contained many *fewer* solutions than this average (see Appendix B for example bogus solution sheets). Consequently, participants in the positive private information condition would generally have done

better compared with the other solutions they saw, whereas participants in the negative private information condition would generally have done worse compared with the other solutions they saw. These bogus solutions were positioned before each participant's own real photocopy to ensure that Boggle players saw how they had done relative to the other players before viewing the judge's evaluation.

After examining the materials, all participants received a second packet and completed a questionnaire with items asking about participants' thoughts on how their judge rated and viewed them (see Appendix D). Primary dependent measures included responses to, "How did the evaluator rate your performance on the Boggle task?" ranging from 1 (*very negatively*) to 9 (*very positively*), and perceived impression ratings for various trait dimensions: Task-relevant (e.g., competence, Boggle-playing ability, and mental agility) and task-irrelevant (e.g., humor and friendliness). I measured trait ratings using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*below average*) to 9 (*above average*). In addition, participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) (Appendix E & F, respectively). After completing these instruments, participants were fully debriefed using a funnel debriefing (Appendix G), thanked, and dismissed. In sum, participants a) believed their judge would see only their personal performance, b) received identical, neutrally-worded feedback from this judge, and c) believed they had either done worse than other participants (negative feedback), better than other participants (positive feedback), or did not receive feedback for making such comparisons (no-feedback control condition).

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

Data from one participant who did not complete any of the target dependent variables were excluded from analysis, leaving a sample of 53.

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses revealed that participants' actual performance on the Boggle game had no effect on participants' anticipated impressions. Thus, participants' actual Boggle score was excluded from subsequent analyses.

A principle components factor analysis of perceived impressions by the judge revealed two independent factors that I labeled *Intelligence* and *Likeability*. The Intelligence factor had an eigenvalue of 5.77, accounted for 48% of the variance, and had an alpha of .91. The Likeability factor had an eigenvalue of 1.97, accounted for an additional 16% of the variance, and had an alpha of .81 (see Table A-1). For each participant, I averaged the items that loaded highly on the Intelligence factor to create a composite measure of intelligence ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 1.08$) and averaged the items loading on the Likeability factor to create a composite measure of likeability ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.59$). The intelligence composite was used to represent the task-relevant trait, and the likeability composite used to represent to task-irrelevant trait. To see the factor loadings of items on each factor, refer to Table A-1.

Does Private Information Influence Interpreted Impressions? If so, is the Influence Domain-Specific?

I tested the hypothesis that private information influences interpreted impressions of task-relevant traits but not task-irrelevant traits (Hypothesis 3) using a 3 (Feedback condition: positive feedback vs. negative feedback vs. no-feedback) x 2 (Trait: relevant vs. irrelevant) mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA), where feedback condition

was a between-subjects variable and trait was a within-subjects variable. Analysis revealed a main effect of trait, $F(1, 50) = 10.51, p < .003, \eta^2 = .17$, indicating that the mean perceived impression differed by trait (relevant/intelligence vs. irrelevant/likeability). This main effect was qualified by a significant Feedback condition x Trait interaction, $F(2, 50) = 8.16, p = .001, \eta^2 = .25$, suggesting that the influence of feedback condition on interpreted impression depends on the trait being measured. The means for the interaction appear in Table A-2.

I decomposed the interaction by conducting separate one-way ANOVAs on the intelligence ratings and the likeability ratings. Analysis revealed a significant one-way ANOVA for the intelligence ratings, $F(2, 50) = 5.47, p = .007, \eta^2 = .18$. Because I made a priori predictions about the pattern of means, I used the pooled mean square error ($MS_E = .991$), from the ANOVA in a series of t tests. As predicted, participants who received positive feedback about their performance believed the judge viewed them more intelligent ($M = 6.51, SD = .81$) than did participants who received negative feedback ($M = 5.34, SD = 1.16$), $t = 3.29, p = .001$ (one-tailed test), $d = 1.13$. This comparison is conceptually and statistically equivalent to testing for a significant linear effect. In addition, the means for the positive- and negative feedback conditions differed from the that of the no-feedback condition ($M = 5.85, SD = .86$), such that participants with positive feedback believed they were significantly more intelligent than participants in the no-feedback condition, $t = 1.77, p = .04$ (one-tailed test), $d = .81$, and participants who had negative feedback believed the judge thought they were less intelligent than participants who received no feedback, $t = 1.62, p = .06$ (one-tailed test), $d = .50$.

The one-way ANOVA for likeability was not significant, $F(2, 50) = 1.89, p = .16, \eta^2 = .07$. In sum, consistent with Hypothesis 3, the influence of private information on interpreted impressions was domain-specific, only affecting trait perceptions relevant to the task. Specifically, private feedback on the Boggle task influenced interpreted impressions of intelligence but not of likeability.

Mediation Analyses

Self-Perceived Performance

To examine whether self-perception mediated the relationship between feedback condition and interpretation of impression (Hypothesis 2), I followed the four steps for testing mediation specified by Baron and Kenny (1986). Feedback condition predicted both the DV—interpreted intelligence, $\beta = .42, p = .002$, and the proposed mediator—self-perceptions of performance, $\beta = .65, p < .001$. When I simultaneously entered feedback condition and self-perceived performance in a multiple regression predicting interpreted intelligence, feedback condition was no longer significant, $\beta = .09, ns$, whereas self-perceived performance remained significant, $\beta = .52, p = .001$. The Sobel test revealed that the indirect effect of the mediator was significant, $z = 2.97, p = .003$. Together, the regressions and Sobel test support Hypothesis 2, that one's self-view influences interpretation of impressions, and that private feedback helps inform these self-views.

Self-Perceived Ability

An alternative explanation needs consideration, however, which is that the feedback conditions may have affected participants' self-perceived Boggle ability, and that these perceptions of ability were responsible for influencing interpreted impressions. For instance, receiving positive feedback could have made participants

believe that they were better Boggle players than those receiving negative feedback, which in turn made them favorable interpret impressions of intelligence from the judge more favorably and, as such, self-perceived ability would have the direct influence on interpretation of feedback. To explore this possibility, I examined condition means of a dependent measure that measured participants' self-perceived ability on the task: Expectations for their best possible performance on the Boggle roll (i.e. number of solutions they could generate). If private information influenced self-perceived ability, one might expect the same pattern across conditions for predictions for best possible performance as found for interpreted intelligence. A one-way ANOVA with condition predicting best possible performance was significant, $F(2,49) = 12.71, p = .000$. Although participants in the positive feedback condition predicted higher best possible performance scores ($M = 27.92, SD = 9.10$) than did participants in the no-feedback control condition ($M = 20.00, SD = 7.47$), $t = 2.57, p < .016$, it was those participants in the *negative* feedback condition that reported the highest predictions ($M = 33.00, SD = 7.94$). The mean for this group was significantly higher than that of the no-feedback control group, $t = 5.25, p < .001$, and higher than that of the positive feedback condition, $t = 1.71, ns$. Because both the positive- and negative feedback conditions predicted better 'best performances' than the no-feedback control condition, it is possible that knowing how others performed either was informative in some way and/or promoted belief in doing better.

CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to examine the extent to which private information influences interpretation of social evaluation. The main hypothesis was that private information would influence how participants interpreted the evaluation from their judge. Participants performed a task and then privately learned that they had performed better than other participants (positive feedback), worse than other participants (negative feedback), or learned nothing about their performance relative to other participants (no feedback). Participants then received identical, neutrally-worded performance feedback from a judge who ostensibly saw only one individual's performance results.

Analyses revealed that participants used private feedback to interpret their judge's evaluation of them. That is, participants interpreted the judges' evaluation as if the judge had the same information that they did. Importantly, the influence of private information on interpreted impressions was domain-specific, affecting only interpreted impressions related to task-relevant traits (intelligence), but not task irrelevant traits (likeability). Specifically, participants who received positive feedback interpreted the judges' evaluation of their intelligence more positively than did participants who received no feedback and participants who received negative feedback, and participants who received negative feedback interpreted the judges' evaluation of their intelligence more negatively than did participants who received no feedback and participants who received positive feedback. Finally, self-perceptions of task performance mediated the relationship between feedback condition and interpreted intelligence such that the private feedback influenced participants' perceptions of their performance, and these

self-perceptions influenced how positively participants interpreted the judges' evaluation.

These findings are consistent with past research on egocentrism and anticipated impressions (Chambers et al., 2008; Savitsky et al., 2001). Just as in studies measuring anticipated impressions, participants made use of private information they possessed. However, this study extends the literature on private information by showing that the influence of private information goes beyond anticipated impressions to influence how people interpret social evaluations from others. Similarly, this study is congruent with work on transparency regarding domain-specificity (Vorauer & Ross, 1999) and with applicability rules (Higgins & Brendl, 1994): Only the domain that was made salient to the participants through feedback (i.e. that relevant to the task) was interpreted differentially by participants with different views of their performance.

My findings may be understood as an egocentric failure to adjust from self-views when trying to take the perspective of another. That is, when trying to interpret how their judge perceived them, participants may have started by using the private feedback they had about their performance, and were subsequently unable to discount this information when they formed their conclusions. Support for this sequence comes from several findings. First, participants' self-perceptions of their performance mediated the relationship between feedback condition and interpretations of intelligence. Second, participants' self-perceived performance on the Boggle task correlated significantly with their ratings of the positivity of the judge's evaluation, $r = .27, p < .05$. Given that the judges' evaluation was identical across conditions, these two findings suggest that participants' self-views may have counted more than did their judges' evaluation in

interpreting impressions of intelligence. Indeed, an anchor and adjustment explanation suggests that initial information is weighed more heavily than is subsequent information.

Further support for an egocentric framework is the finding that the pattern of means for interpreted intelligence is consistent with research on egocentric availability (Ross & Sicoly, 1979), which suggests that egocentrism may bias interpretations either favorably or unfavorably and does not merely reflect an effort to self-enhance through motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). In this study, participants interpreted a judge's evaluation of their intelligence more favorably in the positive feedback condition than in the no-feedback condition, and less favorably in the negative feedback condition than in the no-feedback condition. The bi-directional effects of the feedback are inconsistent with motivated reasoning: If motivated reasoning were operating, only positive feedback would have an effect. Instead, despite a valid excuse to discount the feedback by telling participants directly that the judge did not have access to their feedback, even negative feedback influenced interpretations of intelligence.

Together, the influence of private information on interpreted impressions and domain-specific nature of the influence suggest a tentative theory regarding the pervasive influence of private information: It is deep, but not wide. It is 'deep' in the sense that the influence appears to bleed beyond anticipated impressions into interpreted impressions. It is not 'wide' in that the influence extends only to impressions to which the information can be reasonably applied.

Limitations and Alternative Explanations

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants in each condition was imbalanced, and the sample was small, both of which limited the ability to

detect the effects of interest. Nevertheless, I found differences between conditions, suggesting that the effects were strong.

A second limitation is that the findings are open to potential alternative explanations other than the egocentric model I have suggested. One alternative explanation is that private information influenced participants' mood, and their mood influenced the interpretation of impressions. A mood explanation seems unlikely for two reasons. First, private information did not affect participants' self-perceived ability, as reflected in their 'best possible Boggle score' means. Although this measure is not a direct measure of mood, one can imagine that mood might affect participants' predictions for 'best possible performance,' such that participants with negative feedback would feel bad and thus predict lower best scores. But clearly, these participants' predictions did not suffer. In fact, participants with negative private information anticipated higher best potential Boggle scores than did participants with positive private information. Second, if feedback condition affected a general construct such as mood, then it presumably would produce effects regardless of domain. Yet, private information affected intelligence ratings and not likeability ratings.

A final limitation concerns the construct validity of the interpreted impression measures. Several of the items comprising the intelligence impression asked participants how their *judge* would rate them on certain traits. Because participants received a neutrally-worded and somewhat ambiguous evaluation, it is possible that participants did not use the evaluation in interpreting the judges' thoughts and thus did not use it when they responded to the interpreted impressions measure. Instead, participants may have reported their personal beliefs about their performance. That is,

when I asked participants to report how they believed the judge perceived them, they consciously ignored this request and instead answered a different question; they answered with how they perceived themselves.

Although the current study does not include direct means by which to rule out this possibility, several findings from other researchers argue against it. Some research shows that even when actors have live interaction partners whose reactions should provide the actors with raw data of others' thoughts of them, their metaperceptions are correlated more highly with self-perceptions than others' actual impressions (DePaulo, Kenny, Hoover, Webb, & Oliver, 1987; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). That is, metaperceptions may derive more from self-perceptions than from any evaluative feedback perceived from others through interaction. Other research finds a near-zero correlation between athletes' self-thoughts about their athletic ability and their coach's actual ratings of them along the same dimension, which suggests that people do not necessarily incorporate what others truly think of them in their self-thoughts (Felson, 1981). Together, these findings may make moot the question of whether participants in my study found the evaluation useful or not, and whether participants consciously or unconsciously used their self-thoughts in interpreting the judges' impressions: For even when a 'judge' and 'feedback' are available through interaction, people do not seem to use available evaluative cues in forming either self- or metaperceptions.

Future research could more directly address the extent to which participants believe that their judges truly held the impressions they interpreted. An open-ended question asking participants how they arrived at their responses could help assess whether participants interpreted the judges' impressions (e.g. by referencing or

analyzing the content of the judge's evaluation). Alternatively, participants could simply report their own self-views (e.g. by stating that they assumed the judge agreed with their self-perceived performance).

Implications

In some ways, egocentrism could be viewed as a rational and justifiable viewpoint (Kruger et al., 2008). Despite its tendency to yield misguided conclusions, egocentrism may in fact be a necessary default and even useful in some instances. For instance, being "in the know" (Lewis, 1955) and having more information than others can be advantageous and steer people to better-informed decisions (for a counter-argument, see Hall, Ariss, & Todorov, 2007). In addition, viewing the world through a stable, egocentric perspective may minimize cognitive effort and afford people a consistent baseline from which to make estimations about their world. A consistent baseline may be especially important because people often do not have access to other people's thoughts. In an absence of such access, estimations are the best a person can do. In short, the shortcuts afforded by egocentric processes may be functional. In light of the findings in this study, however, where a judge's ostensible 'true thoughts' were available to participants through written evaluation, egocentric adherence to private information led participants to interpret identical feedback information differently. Therefore, egocentrism showed some degree of irrationality and distortion of objective reality. If private information does influence people's metaperceptions, then egocentrism may be socially maladaptive in some cases, and reassessing the function/utility of seeking others' impressions (i.e. metaperceiving) may be necessary.

It is interesting that many theories (e.g., Terror Management Theory (Pyszczynski, 2004), self-verification theory (Swann, 1987), the looking glass self (Cooley, 1902)),

posit that people often rely on validation from others to support their self-perceptions. The current data implies, however, that private information could bias attainment of such validation. In essence, people may anchor on their self-views in interpreting others' reactions to them—a supposition that directly challenges assumptions of the looking glass self (Yeung & Martin, 2003). Because this study did not examine the effects of others' thoughts on one's self-views, it would be premature to say that these theories require revision, but the prospect that my findings could challenge some of their underlying assumptions is an important implication. A final implication is that a person may come to distrust feedback (or the people giving it) if the feedback is inconsistent with his or her self-views, bringing the relevance of this research into the realm of relationships.

Future Research

Several lines of future research are apparent. First is a replication of these findings with a larger sample. A larger sample would likely resolve several of the limitations mentioned earlier.

Second, although the current study suggests that the influence of private information penetrates interpretation of social information, the boundaries of such influence remain unknown. Future studies could reveal conditions under which the effects found in this study might disappear or intensify. For example, some anchor and adjustment literature posits that under certain conditions, providing an incentive for accuracy can attenuate anchor effects (Epley & Gilovich, 2005; Epley et al., 2004). Thus, providing incentives for accuracy may also help reduce bias in interpreting impressions. Alternatively, a study could purposely undermine the credibility of the private information that participants receive. Additionally, one could examine whether

the influence of private information on interpretations could be augmented in different conditions by adding cognitive load (a typical manipulation in anchor and adjustment studies; see Epley et al., 2004).

Last, because this study cannot directly rule out mood as an alternative explanation, future research that can do so is advisable. A solution may be as simple as including a measure that assesses participants' current mood or how participants felt about their performance. To the extent that the suggested measure does not mediate the effect, the inclusion of the measure would bolster the findings.

Conclusion

The current study accomplished several important things. First, it supported past findings on the influence of private information on anticipated evaluations. Second, it extended prior research by introducing actual feedback from a judge to address the hypothesis that private information would influence interpretation of real feedback and not just intuiting others' thoughts in the absence of feedback. This study found that participants interpreted impressions in a manner consistent with the valence of their private information for impressions of intelligence but not of likeability). Third, the study showed that self-perceptions of performance mediated the effect of private information on interpreted intelligence. In sum, people's conclusions about how others see them may sometimes be simply a reflection of how they see themselves.

The full potency of private information on impression formation remains unclear, but the findings here are suggestive, and the question regarding potency is an empirical one. One thing seems likely, though: Your friend Steve probably *did* interpret his date's comment less positively than he would have had he worn his favorite shirt. But the good news is, according to the domain-specific findings, that if she also told him that she

enjoyed his company and thought that he was funny, Steve might interpret this feedback without bias, at least without bias from private information about the shirt he was wearing.

Table A-1. Factor loadings for exploratory factor analysis of interpreted impressions

Item	Interpreted	
	Intelligence	Likeability
How did the evaluator rate your Boggle performance?	.66	-.06
How would the evaluator rate you on:		
Boggle-playing ability?	.73	-.41
Humor?	.33	.80
Clear-mindedness?	.68	-.27
Competence?	.73	-.03
Friendliness?	.44	.77
Intelligence?	.89	-.04
Confidence?	.76	.25
Thoughtfulness?	.75	.35
Mental Agility?	.91	-.15
Inventiveness?	.66	-.09
How would the evaluator rate your Boggle-playing ability compared to that of the average UF student?	.54	-.53

A-2. Condition means and standard deviations of important dependent measures

Dependent Measure	Negative	Control	Positive
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Interpreted Intelligence	5.34 (1.16)	5.85 (.86)	6.51 (.81)
Interpreted Likeability	5.76 (1.40)	4.83 (1.60)	5.76 (1.79)
Self-perceptions of Task Performance	4.42 (1.30)	5.61 (.96)	6.83 (1.04)

APPENDIX A
BOGGLE ROLL

Date: _____ Time: _____

Participant #: _____ Age: _____ Gender: (circle) Male Female

Experimenter Initials: _____

Boggle Roll

I	N	L	O
E	I	W	S
A	B	T	R
E	T	O	F

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE OTHERS' SOLUTIONS

Samples of Others' Results (Participants received a hand-written version of this page):

From the upward condition:

t/win/e	neat	low	own		bat	rote
line	tail/s	own	tab		bet	abort
owl/s	abet	bat	rot(s)		eat	torso
low	torso	tot(e)	robe		ate	libate
bit	nit	tail(s)	trot		tea	bit
bat	beat	wrote	bit(s)		neat	tail
rob/e	trot	bin	abet		rob	tails
robin		win	owl(s)		robin	bail
tot/e		slow	neat		robe	bails
rot/e		fort(s)	line		low	wrote
eat		for	nil		lows	slit
tea		lie	robin		lost	tab
bin		rob	slit		lie	fro
wit		wit			strobe	bain
own		line			win	owl
tab		bettor			wine	owls
lie		eat			twin	
ate		ate			tot	
sow/n		lost			trot	
strobe		lit			tote	
Total: <u> 35 </u>		Total: <u> 39 </u>			Total: <u> 41 </u>	

APPENDIX C
EVALUATION FORM

Evaluation Form

“They did pretty alright. They seemed to get a few good answers; overall, pretty OK.”

APPENDIX E
RSE

RSE

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you:
Strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1 = Strongly agree	2 = Agree	3 = Disagree	4 = Strongly disagree
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- _____ 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
- _____ 2. At times I think I am no good at all.
- _____ 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
- _____ 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
- _____ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
- _____ 6. I certainly feel useless at times.
- _____ 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
- _____ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
- _____ 9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.
- _____ 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

APPENDIX F
NPI

In each of the following pairs of attitudes, choose the one that you **MOST AGREE** with. Mark your answer by **writing either A or B** in the space provided. Only mark **ONE ANSWER** for each attitude pair, and please **DO NOT** skip any items.

1. _____ A. I have a natural talent for influencing people.
B. I am not good at influencing people.
2. _____ A. Modesty doesn't become me.
B. I am essentially a modest person.
3. _____ A. I would do almost anything on a dare.
B. I tend to be a fairly cautious person.
4. _____ A. When people compliment me, I get embarrassed.
B. I know that I am a good person because everybody keeps telling me so.
5. _____ A. The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me.
B. If I ruled the world it would be a better place.
6. _____ A. I can usually talk my way out of anything.
B. I try to accept the consequences of my behavior.
7. _____ A. I prefer to blend in with the crowd.
B. I like to be the center of attention.
8. _____ A. I will be a success.
B. I am not too concerned about success.
9. _____ A. I am no better or no worse than most people.
B. I think I am a special person.
10. _____ A. I am not sure if I would make a good leader.
B. I see myself as a good leader.
11. _____ A. I am assertive.
B. I wish I were more assertive.
12. _____ A. I like having authority over other people.
B. I don't mind following orders.
13. _____ A. I find it easy to manipulate people.
B. I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people.

14. _____ A. I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.
B. I usually get the respect I deserve.
15. _____ A. I don't particularly like to show off my body.
B. I like to show off my body.
16. _____ A. I can read people like a book.
B. People are sometimes hard to understand.
17. _____ A. If I feel competent I am willing to take responsibility for making decisions.
B. I like to take responsibility for making decisions.
18. _____ A. I just want to be reasonably happy.
B. I want to amount to something in the eyes of the world.
19. _____ A. My body is nothing special.
B. I like to look at my body.
20. _____ A. I try not to be a show off.
B. I will usually show off if I get the chance.
21. _____ A. I always know what I am doing.
B. Sometimes I am not sure what I am doing.
22. _____ A. I sometimes depend on other people to get things done.
B. I rarely depend on anyone else to get things done.
23. _____ A. Sometimes I tell good stories.
B. Everybody likes to hear my stories.
24. _____ A. I expect a great deal from other people.
B. I like to do things for other people.
25. _____ A. I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve.
B. I will take my satisfactions as they come.
26. _____ A. Compliments embarrass me.
B. I like to be complimented.
27. _____ A. I have a strong will to power.
B. Power for its own sake doesn't interest me.
28. _____ A. I don't care about new fads and fashion.
B. I like to start new fads and fashion.

29. _____ A. I like to look at myself in the mirror.
B. I am not particularly interested in looking at myself in the mirror.
30. _____ A. I really like to be the center of attention.
B. It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention.
31. _____ A. I can live my life any way I want to.
B. People can't always live their lives in terms of what they want.
32. _____ A. Being an authority doesn't mean much to me.
B. People always seem to recognize my authority.
33. _____ A. I would prefer to be a leader.
B. It makes little difference to me whether I am a leader or not.
34. _____ A. I am going to be a great person.
B. I hope I am going to be successful.
35. _____ A. People sometimes believe what I tell them.
B. I can make anyone believe anything I want them to.
36. _____ A. I am a born leader.
B. Leadership is a quality that takes a long time to develop.
37. _____ A. I wish someone would someday write my biography.
B. I don't like people to pry into my life for any reason.
38. _____ A. I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in public.
B. I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go out in public.
39. _____ A. I am more capable than other people.
B. There is a lot I can learn from other people.
40. _____ A. I am much like everybody else.
B. I am an extraordinary person.

APPENDIX G
FUNNELED QUESTIONNAIRE

Final Questions: MAKE SURE TO ANSWER

1. Please describe in very general terms what you did in this study.

2. At any time were you suspicious of anything that happened in this study?

Please circle: Yes No

If "Yes," please explain:

3. Please try to guess the hypothesis of this study. Be as specific as possible.

4. Some participants were shown other people's performances (solutions). If you were one of these participants, do you think seeing those solutions affected how you viewed the evaluation from your judge?

Please circle: Yes No

If you answered "Yes," please explain how it affected your perceptions of the judge's evaluation:

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Corinne grew up in Somers, New York. At Somers High School, she was active in both academic and athletic communities. Her proudest accomplishments and contributions were in the National Honor Society, the Spanish club, and the track, basketball, and tennis teams (captaining and receiving the Most Value Player award in tennis). She graduated in the top 10% of her class in 2003. She then attended The University of Georgia as a Foundation Fellow scholar from 2003-2007, and obtained a Bachelor of Science in psychology and a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology. In addition, she received summa cum laude distinction and Highest Honors. Her senior Honors thesis in psychology examined how people react to a subtle ego threat (misspelling participants' names), and whether these reactions are moderated by participants' narcissism levels. She has now completed two years at the University of Florida, with this thesis serving as her master's research, and she plans to continue her pursuit of a doctorate in social psychology.