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## Chapter 14: Impression formation

Mary R. Power

*Bond University, Mary\_Power@bond.edu.au*

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## CHAPTER 14: IMPRESSION FORMATION

### Quotable quotes

“Good breeding consists in concealing how much we think of ourselves and how little we think of the other person”. (Mark Twain).

“Most of our behaviour involves sending messages about ourselves to others—in other words, impression management”. (Adler & Rodman, 1997, p. 54).

### A brief introduction to the field

“Saving face” is something we all do at some time or other. The girl whose boyfriend swiped the side of a bus would say, “We had an accident” to save him from embarrassment, to save his face, and hers, too, since part of being coupled is to share one another’s embarrassment. This desire to avoid embarrassment, to look good, to seem sometimes, better than we are, results in our **managing the impressions** others make of us. Sometimes we do this by our clothing, our accents, our cars and our houses. At other times we play roles—the role of the adoring partner, the angry customer, the laid-back Australian or the keen young lawyer. Sometimes, in the words of Erving Goffman, we forget the role and act as if we were back-stage and reveal another self. When this happens we might wonder which is our “real self” and if it might not be more honest to present the same face to everyone. Fortunately few people do this. It is much easier to communicate with people who are working at saving your face and saving you from embarrassment than with people who delight in telling it like it is. However, if you sense that others are more concerned with the impression they are creating than in paying attention to you the interaction is likely to become less satisfying.

### Key issues in the area

**High self-monitors** watch themselves and others. They control their own behaviour and change roles to suit changing situations.

**Low self-monitors** are more predictable. They play fewer roles and at the same time are less adaptable and less flexible.

### Discussion exercise

Which things are important for you in having someone make a favourable impression on you? Prepare by ranking this list with (1) as most important and (16) as least important. In class compare your ranking with those of two other people.

- Mobile phone
- Type of car
- Tidy office
- Family pictures in office
- Clothing
- Spelling ability in written English
- Legibility of handwriting
- Weight
- Clothing
- Age
- Qualifications
- Jewelry
- House
- Friendliness
- Politeness
- Money they spend

## Writing tasks

### Paragraphs

Use the model on p. 69 to write a paragraph on:

1. Explain why most people monitor their behaviour more when meeting someone for the first time.
2. Is it manipulative to be concerned about the impression you are making on someone?
3. Isn't it better to be totally honest than to worry about how you seem to other people?

### Speech opportunities

"Saving face" is universal behaviour and not confined to people from Asia.

In groups of three plan the content of a speech that begins with this statement. Speaking from your notes deliver a three minute speech on the topic.

### Sources of information

Goffman, E. (1957). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor.