

First impressions formed during 'small talk' may influence future strategic interactions

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Two people having a conversation. Credit: Priscilla Du Preez, Unsplash, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

In a new study, participants who engaged in small talk with others formed impressions about their conversation partners' personalities that

subsequently appeared to influence their behavior when playing strategic games with them. Neha Bose and Daniel Sgroi of the University of Warwick, U.K., present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on August 31, 2022.

Numerous prior studies have examined the role of people's personalities on strategic [behavior](#) in the field of economics. However, less is known about how people's impressions of others' personalities might influence strategic interactions. Previous research has explored how personality impressions may arise through face-to-face interactions, observing others' [physical appearance](#), or observing their behavior.

To expand understanding of personality impressions and strategic behavior, Bose and Sgroi conducted a study focused on impressions formed through "small talk." Specifically, they asked 168 participants to engage in 4 minutes of instant-messaging-based conversation with another participant. Next, participants noted their impressions of their conversation partners' personality, with a focus on extraversion and neuroticism. Finally, participants were asked to engage their conversation partner in two strategic games. For comparison, 170 additional participants did not engage in small talk before playing the games.

The researchers found that participants who engaged in small talk formed impressions about their partners' personalities—particularly regarding their level of extraversion, and these impressions appeared to influence their strategic behavior during the games.

The influence of small-talk-derived personality impressions varied depending on the specific game. In one game with both competitive and cooperative elements, participants behaved more cooperatively if they believed their partner to be extraverted. In a competitive game involving prediction of the opponent's behavior, participants faced greater

difficulty in out-guessing opponents if they felt they shared similar personality traits with each other.

The authors note that this study is exploratory, and that it could serve as a first step towards future research into the links between personality [impressions](#) and [strategic decision](#) making across a range of real-world contexts.

The authors add: "Our work highlights the importance of regular "[small talk](#)" communication, even when it doesn't seem relevant or important. Through short seemingly trivial interactions with others we become better able to predict the [personalities](#) of those we talk with which in turn boosts our performance when we interact with them in the future."

More information: The role of personality beliefs and "small talk" in strategic behaviour, *PLoS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0269523](#)

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