



# Trusting Impressions: Exploring the Influence of Personal Experiences on Lay Theories of First Impressions

Paige Landreneau, Tai'Mir Mitchell Mentor: Irmak Olcaysoy Okten  
Florida State University Research Opportunity Program

Department of Psychology



## Abstract

Individuals tend to vary in the extent to which they trust their first impressions of other people, yet the underlying factors shaping the general trust on their first impressions remain largely unexplored. Our research outlines an exploratory investigation into the nexus between individuals' general trust in first impressions and their personal experiences, specifically their initial interactions with close confidants. Through an online survey study (N=151), we aimed to discern patterns between the level of trust in first impressions as a metacognitive factor (e.g., "my first impressions are correct") and participants' recollections of their actual past experiences of forming first impressions, particularly within the context of best friendships. Our study posited two predictions: firstly, people who remember their first impression of their best friend as more positive will also think that their first impressions are generally more accurate, and secondly, people whose impressions of their best friend changed less over time will also think that their first impressions are generally more accurate. Results confirmed both predictions. We also ran an exploratory analysis looking at participants' memory of their first encounter with their current best friend in terms of what cues they paid attention to, such as disposition, situation, physical properties, or other. Participants responded overwhelmingly to dispositional cues. This research offers new insights into understanding the mechanisms of trusting first impressions. Potential future research could look at the consequences of over confidence in first impression that could lead to biases. Perhaps our self-awareness, including our thoughts and beliefs, is partially influenced by firsthand experience. By illuminating the intricate dynamics of how individuals navigate their initial perceptions within the fluidity of interpersonal relationships, we can begin to understand the framework of forming an objective impression.

## Background

### Literature

- People form impressions spontaneously (Olcaysoy Okten & Moskowitz, 2020)
- People typically hold lay theories about how changeable people's personalities are (Tong & Chiu, 2002), however, no published research to our knowledge has examined their lay theories about the accuracy of their first impressions
- Various traits can be inferred from people's behaviors and physiognomic characteristic (Suzuki et al., 2019)

### Observations

- We don't know where those lay theories come from
- Factors, such as context or social norms, might play a role in shaping lay theory
- The potential role of actual experience impacting the formation of first impressions

### Research Questions

- How might first impressions of close-others relate to the lay theories of first impression accuracy?
- How might perceived changes in an individual over time relate to the lay theories of first impression accuracy?

### Predictions

1. People who remember their first impression of their best friend as more positive will also think that their first impressions are generally more accurate
2. People whose impressions of their best friend changed less over time will also think that their first impressions are generally more accurate

### Exploratory Analyses

- We coded participants, memory of their first encounter with their current best friend in terms of what cues they paid attention to (disposition, situation, physical properties, other)

## References

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- Uleman, J. S., Adil Saribay, S., & Gonzalez, C. M. (2008). Spontaneous inferences, implicit impressions, and implicit theories. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 59, 329-360
- Tong, Y. Y., & Chiu, C. Y. (2002). Lay theories and evaluation-based organization of impressions: An application of the memory search paradigm. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(11), 1518-1527.

Figure A

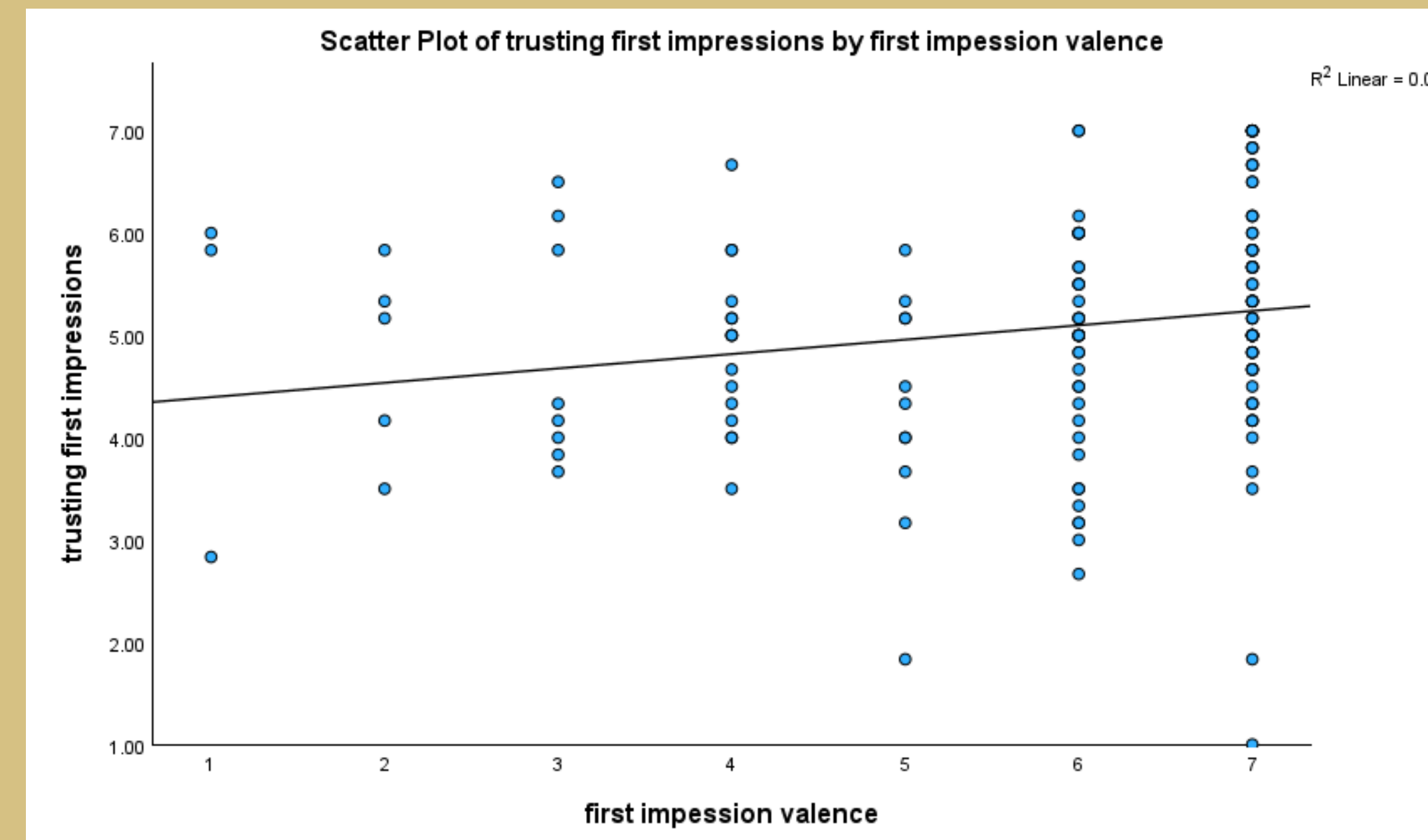


Figure B

Correlations			
		trusting first impressions	first impression valence
first impression valence	Pearson Correlation	.192	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	
	N	150	150

Figure C

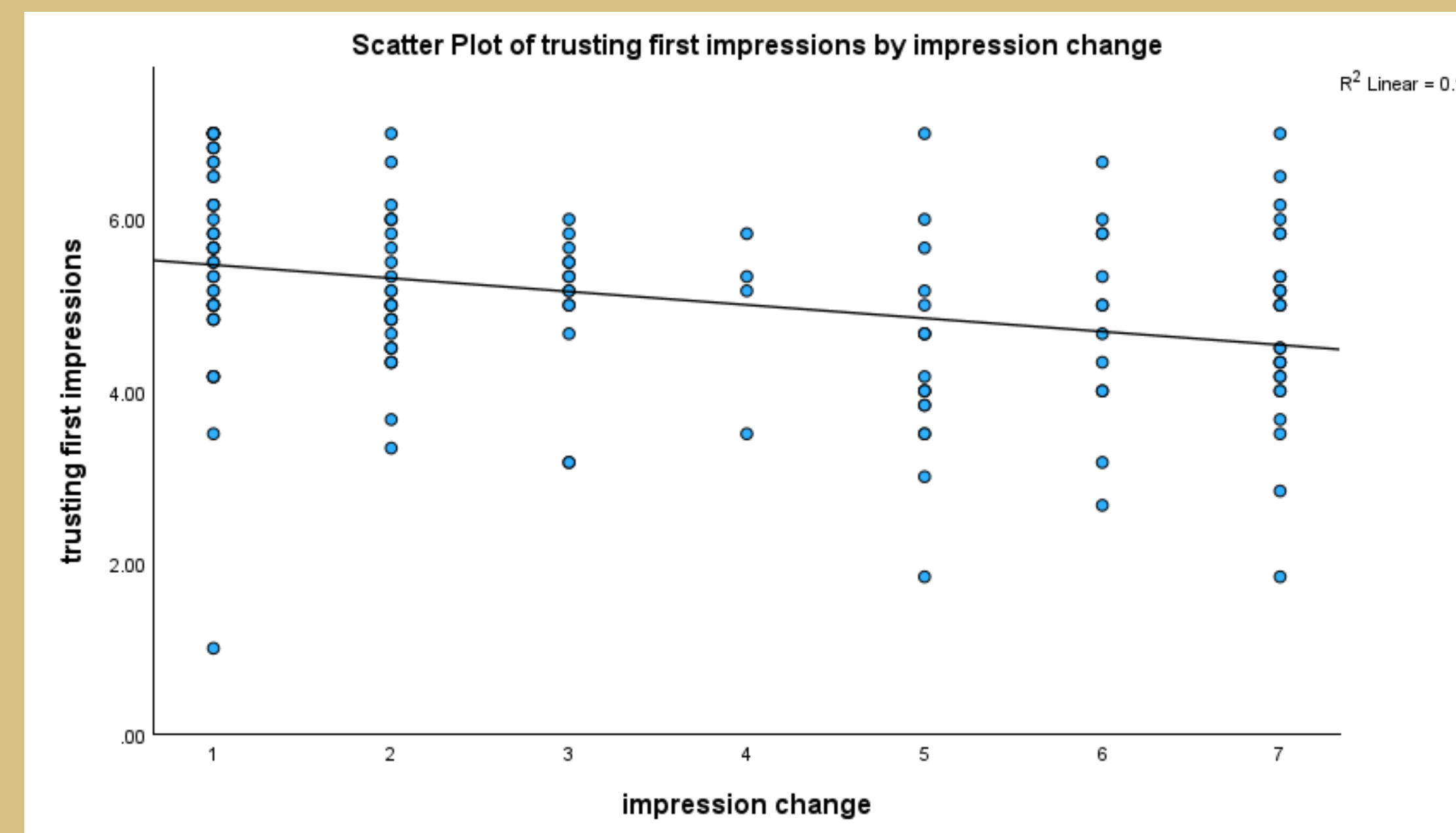


Figure D

Correlations			
		impression change	trusting first impressions
impression change	Pearson Correlation	1	-.316
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	150	150

## Methods

### Participants

- 151 participants
- Age:  $M = 39.8$ ,  $SD = 14.20$
- Gender: 106 female, 42 male, 3 non-binary/other
- Recruited through Prolific Academic

### Procedure

- Revised survey previously used in earlier studies
- Self-report online questionnaires
  - a. **Impressions of Best Friend:** Open ended question to measure initial interaction with participants' best friend
    - Valence of First impression: "How was your first impression of your best friend"
    - Change in first impression: "How much of your impression changed after getting to know your best friend"
    - Ease of recall: "How difficult is it to remember your first impression of your best friend"
  - b. **General trust in First impression:** One block consisting of 6 questions based off how much the participant trusts their impression capabilities such as:
    - "I trust my first impressions"
    - "My first impressions are accurate"
- Compensation: \$8 per hour for participation

### Data Preparation & Analyses

- Ran two correlational analyses:
  1. **Valence of first impression and general trust in first impression**
  2. **Change in first impression and general trust in first impression**
- Exploratory Analyses:
  - Coded open-ended response questions using four categories:
    - Dispositional, situational, physical, and/or other
  - As well as valence of open-ended response questions
    - Participants responded overwhelmingly to dispositional cues

## Discussion

### Prediction 1

- Confirming our predicting, people's general trust in their first impressions correlated with an inclination to remember their first impression of their best friend as more positive (Figure A).

### Prediction 2

- Predicting that people report minimal changes in their perceptions of their best friends also exhibit a heightened trust in their initial impressions resulted in a negative correlation.
- As seen by Figure C, people who report more change in their best friend say they trust their first impression evaluation abilities less.

### Limitations

- Only running a correlational study
- Researcher bias in categorizing open-ended response questions

### Future Research

- In future research we would like to take a new direction by looking at the consequences of over confidence in first impressions (e.g., the hiring process) and what potential biases may form.
- Measuring this could include participants interact with a confederate acting strangely and then ask the participants' if they still trust how they make their first impression based off that abnormal experience