

By description I mean an actual report of what we have observed with the minimum of distortion and without attributing social significance to the behavior. Description includes what we see and hear and is accomplished by counting and/or recording observations. In order to clarify these processes, consider the following example:

Description

Kim did not look me in the eye when we talked

This statement is descriptive in nature. It does not attribute social significance to Kim's behavior; it merely tells what the observer saw.

If we attribute social significance or make inferences about what we saw, we would be engaged in interpretation. *Interpretations* are what we think about what we see and hear. Multiple interpretations can be made for any particular description of behavior. Returning to our example, we have the following:

Description

Kim did not look me in the eye when we talked

Possible Interpretations

Kim is lying.

Kim is shy.

Kim is evasive

Each of these interpretations can have several different evaluations.

Evaluations are positive or negative judgments concerning the social significance we attribute to behavior; whether we like it or not. To illustrate this, we can use the second interpretation given above:

Interpretation

Kim is shy.

Evaluations

I like that; Kim is not aggressive.

I don't like that; Kim should stand up for herself.

Of course, several other evaluations could be made, but these two are sufficient to illustrate potential differences in evaluations that can be made regarding any one interpretation.

We do not distinguish among these three cognitive processes when we communicate on automatic pilot. On automatic pilot, we skip the descriptive process and jump immediately to either interpretation or evaluation when confronted with different patterns of behavior.

From Gudykunst, W.B. *Bridging Differences. Effective Intergroup Communication*. 4th edition, London: Sage Publications, 2004, p. 250-251.