

Intent/Action/Impact

When someone does something, anything, there are a number of motives that compelled them to act. While these motives are private and inaccessible to others, people observing the action tend to believe they know what the motives are – they make assumptions about why the person did what they did. If there is someone strongly and negatively impacted by the action, they are much more likely to make this assumption. Further, they are more likely to assume those motives are negative and malicious.

The personal experience of the impact of the action is also private. Others tend to underestimate the degree of impact and have little clear sense of what the impact is. The person who commits the act often minimizes the impact and, if in conflict with the person who is impacted, will err by assuming the impact is not negative and not worthy of complaint.

These are tendencies, not actual outcomes. We can counter the negative effects of these tendencies by speculating about possible motives and impact, attempting to empathize with the other person and by discussing the impacts and motives until they are better understood.

