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Information quality in personality judgment: The value of personal disclosure

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ABSTRACT

We examined the relative quality of different types of information and its effects on accuracy in personality judgment. Three hundred and forty-four unacquainted undergraduates participated in a small group round-robin rating scheme. In one condition, participants were asked to disclose three things that were very important to them in life. In a second condition, participants were asked to disclose three distinctive personal facts: things that differentiated them from others. We found that (a) people believed values information was more personality-relevant than facts information and (b) although there was no clear advantage for one condition over the other in terms of generalized accuracy, there were some differences across conditions for specific traits. Implications for the study of information quality in personality judgment are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Over time, we get to know those close to us. We learn of their preferences, tendencies, virtues, and peccadilloes, and we use this information to predict and explain their behavior. Research in personality perception provides strong evidence for an *acquaintanceship effect*, or the tendency to become more accurate judges of personality as a function of increased acquaintanceship (for a recent review, see Biesanz, West, & Millevoi, 2007). As evidence of this effect, previous studies demonstrate that groups of well acquainted peers, such as married couples (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), friendship dyads (Funder & Colvin, 1988), or members of longstanding groups (Norman & Goldberg, 1966) show greater accuracy in personality judgment than relative strangers. In addition, initially unacquainted groups tend to develop greater accuracy in personality perception over time (Kurtz & Sherker, 2003; Paulhus & Bruce, 1992). However, the specific processes by which people become acquainted with others remain relatively mysterious.

1.1. A model of acquaintanceship

Funder's Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM; Funder, 1995) provides a useful framework for understanding the general process of acquaintanceship. The model posits that in order to achieve accurate judgment in a specific trait domain, trait-relevant cues

must exist and be available to judges who can then detect and utilize these cues effectively. For example, to judge Conscientiousness accurately, there must first exist a trait-relevant cue (e.g., an organized home office) that is available to the perceiver in question (i.e., the perceiver must have access to the home office). Next, the perceiver must detect the organization of the office, and finally, he or she must then connect that organization back to the relevant trait domain (e.g., this organized home office suggests an individual who is high in Conscientiousness). A failure at any stage in the outlined process will likely result in an inaccurate judgment. Funder originally suggested four potential moderators of this process: good judges, good targets, good traits, and good information (Funder, 1995). Characteristics of the good judge have been explored (Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Christiansen, Wolcott-Burnam, Janovics, Burns, & Quirk, 2005; Letzring, 2008; Taft, 1955; Vogt & Colvin, 2003), and researchers have determined which traits are generally perceived with more accuracy by others (i.e., trait visibility effects; Beer & Watson, 2008; Funder & Drobny, 1987; Paunonen, 1989; Ready, Clark, Watson, & Westerhouse, 2000; Watson et al., 2000). Significantly less work has been conducted to determine what constitutes a good target (but see Biesanz & West, 2000; Colvin, 1993), and only recently have researchers begun to take serious interest in what constitutes good information (e.g., Letzring, Wells, & Funder, 2006).

1.2. Dimensions of personality-relevant information

In order to understand information's role in personality judgment, it is best to first consider some principal dimensions

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of interest. First, there are two primary means by which individuals typically gain personality-relevant information about others in daily life: behavioral observation and direct communication. For example, one comes to know that his or her friend is an extraverted individual via a combination of (a) observing the friend's domain-relevant behavior (e.g., she is observed constantly making conversation with strangers at the bus stop) and (b) receiving direct trait information about the friend (e.g., he or someone who knows him has disclosed that he likes to be around others as often as possible). Second, within each of these domains, one can differentiate – at least theoretically – between information quantity and information quality. For example, increasing the quantity of behavioral observation might entail having seen one's friend daily over the course of a year as opposed to weekly, thus affording more opportunities for observation. On the other hand, not all behavioral observation is equally valuable. Interacting with someone in a classroom setting weekly for 3 months is less likely to yield an accurate assessment of that individual than going to dinner with that individual weekly for 3 months. The latter is likely higher quality behavioral observation, as the behaviors exhibited would be more relevant to the actor's general personality. The same distinctions can be made with respect to direct communication. In terms of quantity, receiving five facts about a person is probably more valuable than receiving only one fact about said person. In terms of quality, a blind date spending the better part of an hour discussing his or her hopes and dreams is likely viewed as more relevant to his or her personality than the same individual spending the same amount of time discussing the quality of food at the restaurant.

The likely positive effect of information quantity is dependent upon the quality of the information being aggregated, and thus it is instructive to examine these dimensions both separately and in concert. Ultimately, in either mode of data acquisition (observation or communication), differences in information quality are not currently well understood in a scientific sense, whereas differences in information quantity are more objectively discernible.

1.3. Information quantity and quality and accuracy in personality judgment

Most research on the process of acquaintanceship focuses on information quantity in the domain of behavioral observation, finding that increasing exposure to a target individual's behavior—typically in the absence of self-disclosure—leads to increased judgmental accuracy. Typically, these studies involve increasing exposure via either introducing a sample of relatively innocuous videotaped target behavior (Beer & Watson, 2010; Borkenau & Liebler, 1992) or gradually exposing targets to lengthier video segments (Blackman & Funder, 1998; Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007; Holleran, Mehl, & Levitt, 2009). Recent work, however, has highlighted the importance of evaluating information quality both in isolation and in concert with information quantity. Letzring et al. (2006) conducted a study in which they systematically varied both information quality and quantity and found evidence that increases in both information quantity and quality are associated with increases in judgmental accuracy.

Beer and Watson (2010) also demonstrated parallel effectiveness of manipulations of both information quantity and quality across both behavioral observation and direct communication domains. In this study, the authors found that affording more opportunity for behavioral observation (a videotaped segment and a still photograph versus a still photograph alone) increased self-peer agreement in some domains, which is a demonstration of the effect of information quantity in this realm. More germane to the current discussion, Beer and Watson (2010) also examined the gains in self-peer agreement that resulted from the direct communication

of one personality-relevant statement about the target individual. They found that one piece of information related to the target's level of Agreeableness in addition to a still photograph (versus a still photograph with no accompanying information) increased self-peer agreement in several domains of personality. There was no opportunity for any behavioral observation in this condition, and thus it illustrated the effect of quantity of information on accuracy in terms of direct communication.

Information quantity is relatively simple to evaluate, but information quality is currently a more ambiguous realm that is still largely undefined. Andersen (1984) found that verbally disclosed (via videotaped interview) cognitive and affective information leads to greater self-peer agreement than disclosed information about behavioral tendencies. More recently, Pronin, Fleming, and Steffel (2008) found that the perceived value of different types of self disclosure varies as a function of type (value-related information versus other information) and role (actor or discloser versus observer or recipient). Specifically, disclosers believe that the gap in quality between value-related information and other information is greater than do perceivers. Thus, there exists some evidence that not all types of information are equal, in terms of both actual and perceived value.

2. The current study

The current study is an attempt to examine the process of acquaintanceship, specifically with respect to information quality in direct communication. It seems clear that a small amount of direct communication can go a long way in terms of accuracy in personality judgment (Beer & Watson, 2010), but we do not yet understand the extent of this effect, nor do we have a clear sense of which types of personality-related communications are most valuable. While some research indicates that people hold lay beliefs about information quality in this domain (e.g., Andersen & Ross, 1984; Pronin et al., 2008), we have little in the way of verification of these beliefs. This study represents an initial step towards explicating these issues. First, we endeavor to conceptually replicate Pronin et al.'s (2008) findings concerning lay beliefs of information quality in the domain of self disclosure. Then we examine the validity of these beliefs. Specifically, we manipulate information content via instructing small, previously unacquainted interaction groups to provide self-related information on different topics. In one condition, participants disclosed three core values—things in life they viewed as important. In the other condition, participants disclosed three distinguishing facts about themselves—things that they felt were unique to them, regardless of domain or importance. Although there were minimal opportunities for behavioral observation in this study design, those were equivalent across conditions. In addition, the amount of communication is held constant across conditions. Thus, if any differences in accuracy were observed, it was likely due to the difference in quality of information of the direct communication, operationalized in this case as self disclosure.

Lay theories (Andersen & Ross, 1984; Pronin et al., 2008) might suggest that the Values condition would lead to greater overall accuracy across trait dimensions, given that more putatively useful information is being provided in this condition. Previous research in information quality (Andersen, 1984) would suggest a similar basic pattern. Thus, we expected to find that the Values condition would lead to greater overall accuracy in personality judgment than would the Facts condition. However, we also expected that accuracy in different trait domains might be differentially affected by the manipulation. Specifically, we expected that Conscientiousness would be rated with greater accuracy in the Facts condition due to the likelihood that the information disclosed in this

condition would be more habit- and interest-related than information in the Values condition, and general habits and interests would be more indicative of an individual's standing on Conscientiousness than on other domains.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants were 344 (90 males) undergraduates recruited from psychology courses at a mid-sized Southeastern university. Individuals participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

3.2. Measures

To assess personality, we used the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999). The 44-item version of the BFI contains 8-item scales assessing Neuroticism and Extraversion, a 10-item Openness scale, and 9-item measures of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The participants rated themselves using a five-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly) in response to a series of adjectives and phrases following a stem statement ("I see myself as someone who..."). This instrument was used for both self-ratings and peer-ratings, and the peer-rating form featured a modified stem ("I see this person as someone who..."). Coefficient alphas for the scales ranged from .74 to .84 and from .77 to .88 for self- and peer-ratings, respectively.

In addition to personality measures, we also assessed lay theories of information quality from the perspective of both the judge (observer) and target (actor). Participants were asked to evaluate disclosures using two items. The first question read: "How much do you think this information reveals about who you really are and what you're really like?" to which participants responded using a 7-point scale (1 = Nothing, 7 = A lot). The second question read "How accurate of a picture do you think this information provides of your true self?" to which participants responded using another 7-point scale (1 = Not at all accurate, 7 = Extremely accurate). Again, there was both a self and peer version of this form, and the pronouns were modified from first to third person accordingly.

3.3. Procedure

Participants arrived in the laboratory in groups of 2–5. Since this study required minimal to zero acquaintanceship, participants were asked specifically in the study's advertisement not to sign up with friends. They were also asked at the beginning of each experimental session if they knew any of the other participants personally. Those who did were allowed to participate, but the relevant ratings were dropped from subsequent analyses. Ultimately, this dropped the sample size from 344 to 336 (89 males) for the principal analyses. Participants were then provided with a unique study identification number to ensure anonymity.

Once identification numbers were assigned, participants completed self-ratings on the BFI. At this point, the instructional manipulation was implemented. Groups were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: those who would disclose distinguishing facts or those who would disclose core values. Thus, participants within a given session both generated and received disclosures of the same type and had no knowledge of other potential content types. In the Values condition, participants were asked to write, on a provided numbered list, three things that were "very important" to them in their life. Participants were provided with a list of examples (e.g., religious/spiritual activity, sense of humor, relations with family and friends, creativity, educational

accomplishment, financial security) and were encouraged to either provide their own example based on the list contents or to use those exact suggestions if appropriate. In the Facts condition, participants were asked to write three things that were "unusual" about them, that "differentiate you from most people you know." They were told it could "be something large or small, exciting or mundane, just something different." Participants were then provided a list of examples (e.g., own an exotic pet, can juggle, only wear socks with individual toes in them, have a pilot's license, worked as a grave digger) and encouraged to provide their own example based on the list contents.

After recording the three facts or values, participants then used the items described above to assess the value of their disclosures. Once this was completed, participants took turns reading their lists aloud to the group. At the conclusion of each reading, the other group members (heretofore labeled as "peers") indicated the identification number of the discloser on their rating form and then proceeded to complete the peer versions of the BFI and the peer assessments of information quality. This was repeated until each group member had read his or her list and had been rated by each of the other group members. Thus, each participant served as both judge (actor) and target (observer). There were a total of 101 groups. In the Values condition, there were 13 groups of 2, 12 groups of 3, 16 groups of 4, and 10 groups of 5, with an average group size of 3.45. In the Facts condition, there were 15 groups of 2, 11 groups of 3, 15 groups of 4, and 9 groups of 5, with an average group size of 3.36.

Finally, we attempted to collect informant ratings for each target by soliciting two email addresses of "people who know you well." We later contacted each potential informant and directed them to a website wherein they could confidentially complete an electronic version of the peer BFI about the individual who had nominated them. Using this method, we were able to gather at least one informant report for 225 participants and two informant reports for 78 participants.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Before evaluating our principal hypotheses, it is useful to consider some of the more basic characteristics of the data. Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations for the BFI self ratings, peer ratings, and informant ratings (each reported separately by condition). The final two columns provide the test statistics and effect sizes for the differences in mean trait ratings across the two experimental conditions. There were no significant mean level discrepancies across conditions for self or informant ratings, and peer ratings were relatively uninfluenced by the type of disclosure with one notable exception: when judges learned of value-related information, they tended to perceive the disclosers as being more Agreeable, on average. Thus, revealing the most important things in one's life (as opposed to revealing information pertaining to more mundane topics) seems to enhance perceptions of an individual's interpersonal warmth.

4.2. Lay theories of information quality

Before formally evaluating the impact of type of information disclosure on accuracy, it is instructive to determine whether previous findings regarding lay theories of information quality (Pronin et al., 2008) conceptually replicate in our sample. To do so, we first aggregated the two indicators of perceived information quality within self and peer ratings, respectively—a sensible strategy considering the very strong correlations between the two indicators in

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

	Facts (N = 166)		Values (N = 174)		t	d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
<i>Self</i>						
Neuroticism	21.93	5.75	22.21	6.01	-.43	-.02
Extraversion	27.77	6.48	28.20	5.72	-.65	-.04
Openness	35.11	5.77	35.35	6.01	-.38	-.04
Agreeableness	35.90	4.96	35.96	5.52	-.11	-.01
Conscientiousness	32.86	4.92	32.97	5.34	-.19	-.02
<i>Peer</i>						
Neuroticism	21.18	3.40	20.63	3.56	1.45	.16
Extraversion	26.35	6.11	26.56	5.60	-.33	-.04
Openness	33.16	4.36	33.67	4.88	1.26	-.11
Agreeableness	33.63	4.40	35.12	4.19	-3.20**	-.35
Conscientiousness	33.31	4.10	33.40	4.35	-.19	-.02
<i>Informant</i>						
	Facts (N = 100)		Values (N = 123)		t	d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Neuroticism	18.82	6.12	20.36	6.11	-1.87	-.25
Extraversion	30.34	6.13	30.08	6.02	.31	.04
Openness	37.53	5.54	36.73	5.92	1.03	.14
Agreeableness	38.43	5.40	36.98	6.42	1.79	.24
Conscientiousness	34.95	5.84	34.92	6.40	.03	.00

Note. The *t*- and *d*-statistics above portray differences in mean ratings across the two experimental conditions.

** *p* < .01.

both self ($r = .73, p < .001$) and peer ($r = .80, p < .001$) ratings. These aggregated self and peer estimates then served as the dependent variable in a 2 (information type: fact versus value) \times 2 (role: actor versus observer) mixed model ANOVA (Fig. 1 depicts group means relevant to this analysis). The test revealed main effects for both information type, $F(1, 337) = 38.39, p < .0001$, and role, $F(1, 337) = 5.13, p = .0241$, and a significant information type \times role interaction, $F(1, 337) = 13.09, p = .0003$, indicating that the actor–observer

discrepancy varied as a function of type of disclosure. More specifically, observers considered fact revelations more informative ($M = 4.70$) than did actors ($M = 4.34$), $t(166) = 3.74, p = .0002$, whereas there was no such significant difference observed in the domain of value revelations ($M = 5.15$ versus $5.23, t = -1.08, p = .28$). An overarching preference for values information (versus facts) held for both actors, $t(339) = 6.54, p < .0001$, and observers, $t(337) = 4.06, p < .0001$.

4.3. Accuracy (verification of information quality)

Accuracy was operationalized using three distinct indicators: consensus, self-peer agreement, and realistic accuracy (Letzring et al., 2006). Consensus, in this case, is a measure of agreement between two or more observers of a single target. This metric is useful in that agreement among observers increases, in a probabilistic sense, the chance that a judgment is accurate (for a full explanation, see Funder & Colvin, 1988). However, it is still possible that two or more people can agree about another's personality and be inaccurate in an objective sense. Self-peer agreement is a measure of concordance between the target's self-rating and aggregated ratings from one or more observers. Self-judgments have frequently been used as an accuracy criterion, citing the logic that the individual is the most accurate source of information about her or himself. However, there are myriad reasons to believe that self-judgments are fallible in some cases, due to issues of social desirability or other simple failures in self-knowledge (Vazire, 2010; Vazire & Mehl, 2008). The realistic accuracy criterion aims to mitigate these latter concerns by utilizing an accuracy criterion that is comprised of an aggregate of self-ratings and knowledgeable informant ratings.

Table 2 provides the inter-informant and self-informant convergent correlations for the overall sample. In the 78 cases for which we were able to obtain two informant reports, these informants showed significant agreement about the target's personality for all five traits assessed, the lowest agreement being observed in

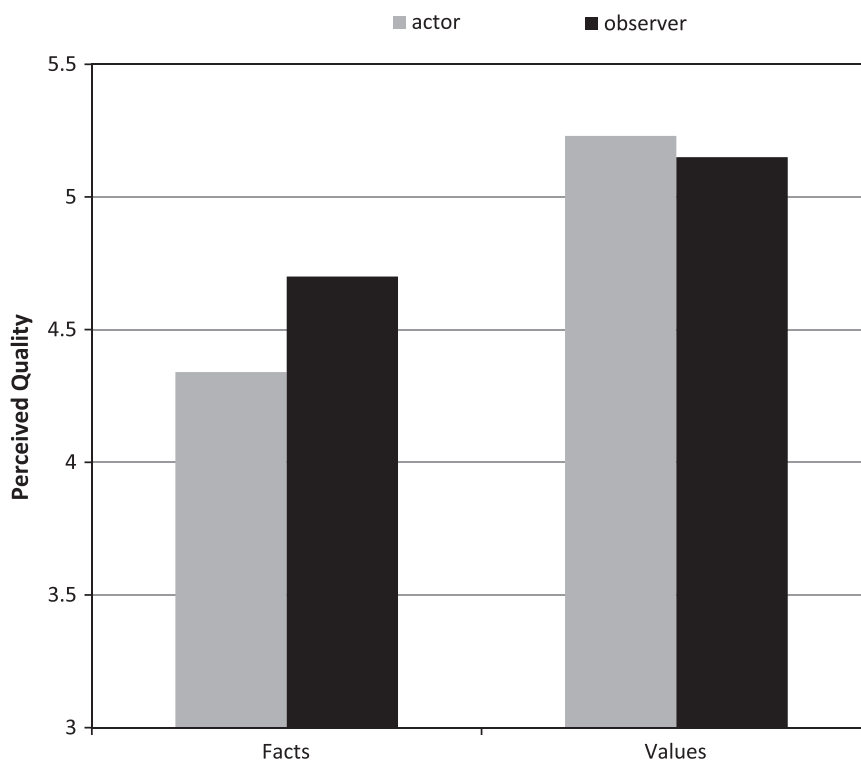


Fig. 1. Lay theories of information quality across conditions.

Table 2
Inter-informant and self-informant agreement.

	Inter-informant	Self-informant
Neuroticism	.38**	.29**
Extraversion	.60**	.57**
Openness	.49**	.41**
Agreeableness	.23 [†]	.15 [†]
Conscientiousness	.30**	.35**
Mean	.41	.36

Note. Inter-informant *N* = 78. Self-informant *N* = 222.

[†] *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

the domain of Agreeableness. Since a sample of 78 individuals represents only 23% of the total sample size, we decided to analyze all cases for which we could obtain at least one informant report. It is important to note that there were no significant differences in mean self ratings for those individuals for whom informant data were collected versus those for whom we were unable to collect informant data (*t*s ranged from $-.92$ to 1.26). In the case that a target had two informant ratings, these were averaged into one index. The second column of Table 2 provides the correlation between informant ratings and the participants' self-ratings for the BFI. Once again, we see good agreement in every domain save Agreeableness. Agreeableness, while clearly an important construct for perceivers, is generally associated with lower interjudge agreement—particularly in low acquaintance situations (for a brief review, see Ames & Bianchi, 2008). It is nonetheless slightly peculiar that these knowledgeable informants can neither agree strongly with one another nor with the target individual as to the level of Agreeableness that the target displays. Nevertheless, the general convergence is strong enough to justify combining these indices for one of our three accuracy indices. The realistic accuracy criterion in this study thus represented the mean of the target's self-rating on a trait dimension and the informant index (which was either a single informant rating or, in 78 cases, the mean of two informant ratings).

Table 3 provides the accuracy estimates for each of the three indices across both conditions. The first and fourth data columns provide the peer consensus in each condition. This estimate indicates the extent to which individuals who have had no significant previous contact with the target individual agree with each other about the target's standing on a trait dimension. There was relatively strong consensus for Extraversion and Openness in both conditions; in addition, in the Values condition, peers could agree to some extent on a target's level of Conscientiousness. There

was no discernible difference in overall level of consensus for the Facts (*M* = .28) or Values (*M* = .29) condition. On the whole, these estimates are similar in terms of strength to those from previous studies examining consensus in zero acquaintance situations (e.g., Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002). Thus, for at least some traits, peers seem to be interpreting personal disclosures in similar ways. However, it is possible that these individuals came to agree by relying upon shared implicit theories about the disclosures' relations with trait dimensions, and that these observations have no real-world basis. If this were the case, we would expect little self-peer agreement.

The second and fifth data columns in Table 3 indicate that these disclosures may indeed have relevant relations to personality traits as assessed via self report. This is not at all unexpected, as the individual who generated the disclosures also generated the personality assessment that served as the criterion. In fact, one could make a strong case that self-peer agreement might be the most appropriate index of accuracy in this context, as the information provided was implicitly indicative of the individual's sense of self. Relevance of disclosures to self-reported personality was not specifically mandated in the study's instructions, but it was quite likely to exist. In the Facts condition, we observed significant self-peer agreement correlations for every trait save Neuroticism. Effects were strongest for Extraversion and Openness, a finding parallel to the peer consensus results. The Values condition also showed four significant self-peer agreement correlations, with the exception falling in the domain of Conscientiousness. There was no substantial overall advantage in terms of self-peer agreement for the Facts (*M* = .26) or Values (*M* = .24) condition.

As mentioned before, although self-peer agreement is a useful indicator in this context, a realistic accuracy criterion may be preferable if one wishes to determine the real-world validity of impressions formed in response to different types of disclosure. In this case we compared the mean peer judgment to the aggregated self and informant rating which should, in theory, provide a more reliable and less biased accuracy criterion. The third and sixth data columns of Table 3 seem to indicate that disclosure, regardless of type, led to at least moderate accuracy in almost every domain. The lone exception was Neuroticism in the Facts condition. Otherwise, each accuracy correlation was significant in each condition. Once again, Facts (*M* = .30) and Values conditions (*M* = .30) were virtually equivalent in terms of accuracy.

The fact that most self-peer agreement and accuracy correlations are significant is actually fairly surprising, given that in face-to-face, zero acquaintance situations accuracy is generally low in every domain save Extraversion and almost never significant for domains such as Neuroticism and Openness (Beer &

Table 3
Accuracy across indices and conditions.

	Facts			Values		
	Peer consensus	Self-peer	Peer accuracy	Peer consensus	self-peer	Peer accuracy
<i>N</i>	59 ^a	162	98	61 ^a	74	123
Neuroticism	.20	.10	.11	.14	.20**	.27 [†]
Extraversion	.48**	.43**	.49**	.39**	.48**	.48**
Openness	.37**	.30**	.29**	.39**	.23**	.32**
Agreeableness	.13	.20 [†]	.20 [†]	.23	.19 [†]	.20 [†]
Conscientiousness	.21	.23**	.37**	.29 [†]	.06	.21 [†]
Mean	.28	.26	.30	.29	.24	.30

Note. Peer consensus is the weighted mean of the six correlations derived from all possible combinations of four raters. Self-peer is the correlation between the mean of 1–4 unacquainted peer ratings and the target's self rating. Peer accuracy is the correlation between the accuracy criterion and the mean of 1–4 unacquainted peer ratings. The accuracy criterion was the mean of 1–2 informant ratings averaged with the self rating.

^a Significance of peer consensus correlations was based on the average number of cases across which the correlations were computed. The sample sizes are smaller than expected due to the fact that some groups contained only two individuals, and thus only 1 peer rating.

[†] *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

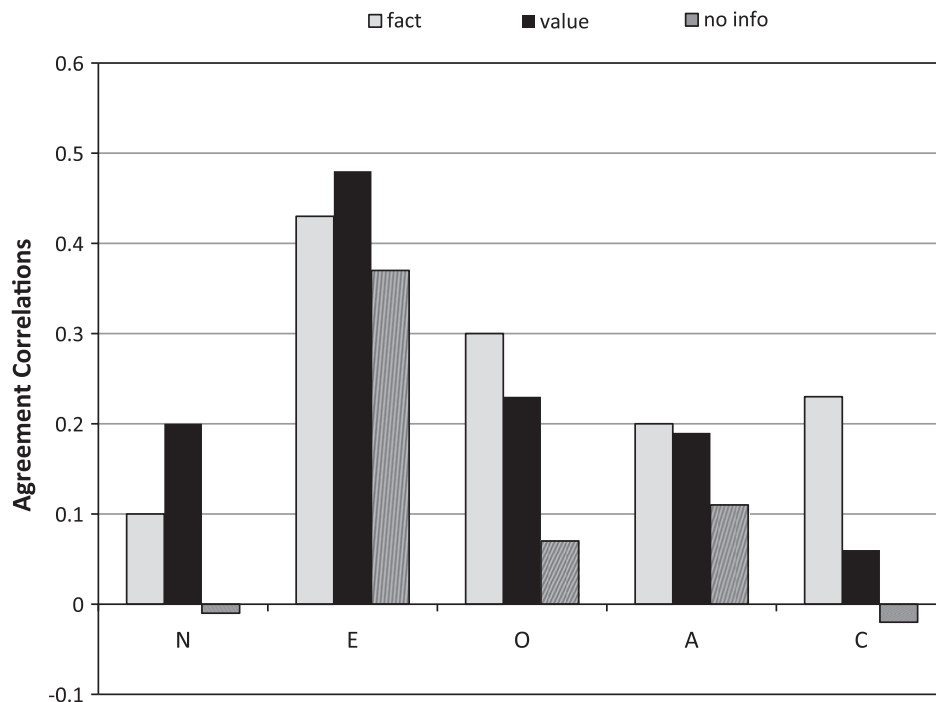


Fig. 2. Self-peer agreement: effect of disclosure by kind of information.

Watson, 2008; Watson, 1989). Fig. 2 highlights the similarities and differences between levels of self-peer agreement obtained from the two disclosure conditions in the current study and levels obtained from a recent study (Beer & Watson, 2008) which employed almost identical methodology, except that there was no direct communication between participants. It is noteworthy that Neuroticism shows a significant self-peer agreement correlation in the Values condition, as this indicates that in terms of displaying emotional stability, there was something especially revealing about disclosing personally important information (as opposed to other, perhaps less important information) to others. Conversely, it seems that the information disclosed in the Facts condition was particularly useful in determining another's level of Conscientiousness in a way that the information disclosed in the Values condition was not. Overall, the mean agreement correlations for the four traits save Extraversion were .04 with no disclosure, .21 with fact disclosures, and .17 with value disclosures.

4.4. Content analysis

Finally, in an effort to explicate the nature of the mechanism underlying information quality, two independent coders were recruited to code the content of the revelations in each condition. The authors created a coding system for each condition, provided in Appendix A. There were 14 relevant categories for the Values condition and 15 relevant categories for the Facts condition. Coders were asked to provide a count for each participant across the relevant categories. Thus, each target would have values summing to a maximum of 3 across categories. For example, if a participant disclosed two habits, he or she would receive a score of "2" for the "Habits" category.

Intraclass correlations (ICCs) were computed for each category and are provided in parentheses in Fig. 3. Overall, inter-rater agreement was stronger for the Values condition (mean ICC = .97 versus .71 in the Facts condition). The greater ambiguity in the Facts revelations was expected, considering the broader spectrum of likely responses in this condition. For subsequent analyses, the first

author resolved all coder disagreements to create a single score for each participant in each category.

Fig. 3 also provides (by condition) the percentage of participants who used each category designation. The overwhelming majority of participants (74%) in the values condition mentioned family and/or friends as something very important in their lives. The next most likely revelation in the values condition was religious or spiritual beliefs (42%), followed by education or knowledge (35%). The facts condition revealed slightly more parity among category usage (SD = 13.25 versus 18.92 in the values condition), with the most frequently utilized category (Habits) being used by 46% of participants.

In an effort to determine whether any specific type of disclosure was associated with either self- or peer-ratings of personality, we computed partial self-peer agreement correlations among the Big Five in each condition, controlling for each of our content categories. These results provided little support for the notion that specific revelations were associated with greater self-peer agreement in either condition. Only one significant correlation became non-significant when controlling for any of the categories in either condition: in the Values condition, controlling for creativity dropped the self-peer agreement correlation for Openness from .23 ($p < .01$) to .09 (n.s.). In all other cases, correlations remained nearly identical.

5. Discussion

Of the moderators designated in Funder's RAM (1995), good information is probably the least clearly explicated. What exactly constitutes good information, as it pertains to accuracy in personality judgment? One clear, common sense way to examine the value of information is to consider the sheer quantity, a practice well underway in the personality judgment literature (e.g., Blackman & Funder, 1998; Carney et al., 2007). But there is also the question of information quality—how does one measure and classify this more subjective aspect of personality information? People clearly have lay theories (implicit or explicit) of information quality (Andersen, 1984; Pronin et al., 2008), but these have not yet been verified, nor

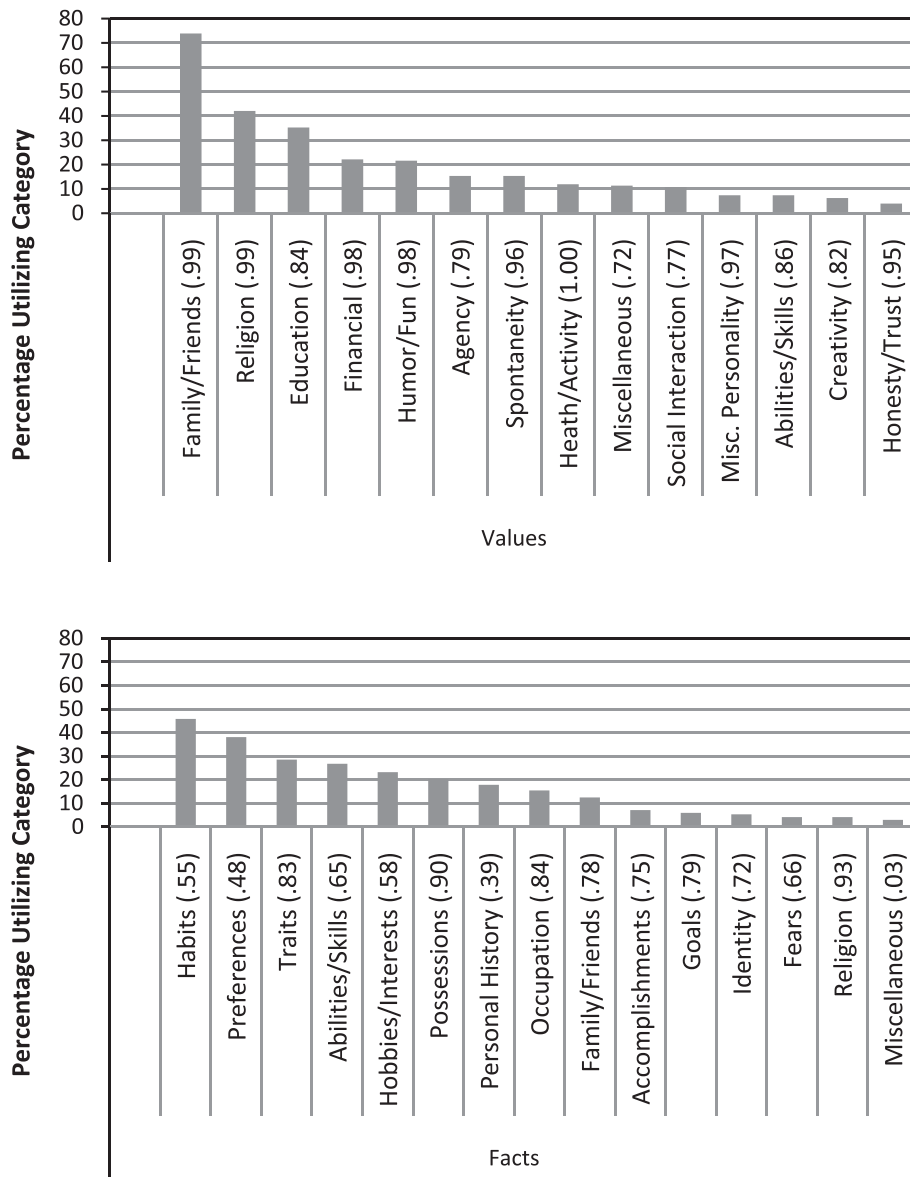


Fig. 3. Revelation content: percentage of individuals reporting by type of disclosure (inter-rater reliability for each category provided in parentheses).

is there an extant framework for understanding the core aspects of information quality in general. Thus, the purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to evaluate the accuracy of lay theories of information quality, and (2) to move toward a general model of information quality.

First, we partially replicated previous findings (Pronin et al., 2008), demonstrating that both actors and observers believe that value-related information is more useful than other personal facts, though the difference in relative perceived utility varies between actors and observers. So, does revealing a value really provide greater insight into the discloser's general personality than does revealing some individuating fact? In other words: are our lay theories of information quality correct in an objective sense? From these data, the answer appears to be no. We found no clear, general advantage for one type of disclosure versus the other. For Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Agreeableness, the results were fairly similar across disclosure conditions, with all three trait categories yielding significant accuracy correlations regardless of accuracy criterion (self or aggregated self and informant ratings).

Despite the absence of a general trend in terms of information type, the different disclosure conditions did yield some discrepant

results. Specifically, the disclosure of values seemed to provide insight into the discloser's level of Neuroticism. This is particularly noteworthy given that Neuroticism is widely considered to be a low-visibility trait (Funder & Drobth, 1987; Vazire, 2010); consequently, observing a significant accuracy correlation in such a restricted rating environment is fairly surprising. In the Facts condition, the accuracy correlation for Neuroticism was as low as is typical in low acquaintance situations (e.g. Beer & Watson, 2008; see also Fig. 2). On the other hand, the disclosure of facts seemed to be particularly useful in determining the discloser's level of Conscientiousness. Thus, using (Funder's, 1999) terms, perhaps the difference between the two disclosure conditions was more specifically one of *diagnosticity*, or a trait \times information interaction, as opposed to a generalized difference in information quality.

In an attempt to explain this disclosure-domain interaction, we coded the content of the participants' disclosures. We found that disclosures in the Facts condition centered on individuating personal habits, preferences, traits, and hobbies. Thus, the advantage for perceiving Conscientiousness in this condition seems fairly sensible, as these categories could all potentially be a rich source of information about this domain. Specifically, habit and preference

disclosures seemed to provide opportunities to comment on personal meticulousness, which is a likely cue to Conscientiousness. Explaining the comparative advantage for accurately judging Neuroticism in the Values condition is more difficult. Participants most commonly named family and friends, religion, and education as core values, and none of these categories seems likely to be a rich source of information specifically pertaining to Neuroticism. It is important to note at this juncture that disclosure content was not the only cue available to perceivers. Perhaps when it comes to judging Neuroticism, there are nonverbal cues that become more salient when discussing important versus unimportant issues.

Still, lay and professional theorists alike might be surprised by the fact that Neuroticism was the only trait domain for which value revelations proved more useful than the more mundane fact revelations. And in fact, some aspects of the content coding may suggest that the quality of values-related information is somewhat undersold in the current analysis. Specifically, there was a notable restriction in variability of disclosures across the two experimental conditions on two fronts. First, over seventy percent (see Fig. 3) of participants in the Values condition utilized the family and friends category. This essentially removes a degree of freedom in terms of range of expression as the accuracy estimates in this case depend to some degree on between-target variability. Second, there was frequently an extra layer of variability in the Facts condition relative to the Values condition. Once a value category is chosen, the variation across subjects typically ceases: the manner in which one discloses a value is fairly normative within a given category (e.g., "My family is very important to me"). However, in the Facts condition the information that qualified as "habits", for example, could consist of a wide range of behaviors, each relevant to different trait domains (e.g., frequently bringing meals to the elderly, maintaining a separate drawer for argyle socks). Although this secondary lack of variability in responses is not as stark in all value categories (e.g., agency, abilities), it is certainly prominent in the most-utilized categories (family and friends, religion). This difference in the nature of the disclosures (in concert with the chosen coding system) precluded some potentially useful analyses (e.g., lens model analysis), and may have better served judges in the Facts condition. Thus, it is possible that the equivalent general accuracy observed might actually speak to the power of values-related information: despite a relative lack of variability, participants could still form somewhat accurate judgments of personality. Future studies may attempt to better equate variabil-

ity across information to ensure a clearer comparison between these types of information. Despite all of this, one could still argue that in natural settings fact-related disclosures do indeed vary more across individuals than value-related disclosures, and thus the variability difference should be considered as characteristic of this type of revelation. In other words, one feature of good information is that it differentiates one person from another, and this is a natural advantage of unique yet largely mundane personal facts.

Of course, the explanations presented for the asymmetry (or lack thereof) in information quality across conditions essentially are anecdotal, as our attempts to utilize the content coding in more formal analyses were largely futile. There are several possible reasons for the mechanistic ambiguity. First, although the aim of our study was to focus primarily on the value of direct communication, the experimental procedure did allow for some (fairly restricted) behavioral observation. Although the unique and differential contributions of direct communication can be observed both by comparing our findings to previous results (e.g., Beer & Watson, 2008) and by comparing accuracy across conditions, the multiple available channels of information exchange partially undermined the ability to observe content as a specific moderating factor. In the future, it would be instructive to examine the impact of personal revelations in the absence of the discloser in order to eliminate the potential influence of these behavioral cues. Second, the classification system was ad hoc in nature. We cannot definitively claim that these two major content areas and 29 subcontent areas are reliable and/or valid dimensions of disclosure. Furthermore, even if they were, we did not have the requisite statistical power to examine potential configural effects of particular combinations of disclosures.

These facts highlight the need for a clearer understanding of information quality. There is no current model for evaluating the relative quality of information as it pertains to trait judgments. Thus, there is no consensual taxonomy for what constitutes "good information." It is our hope that future research aims to address this gap in the literature, specifically focusing on which particular bits of information, be it direct communication or behavioral observation, are most diagnostic in evaluating different trait dimensions. Fig. 4 represents an early—and certainly not exhaustive—model of information quality. Indeed, work is already underway classifying situations beyond the simple strong versus weak designation presented here (Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2010; Yang, Read, & Miller, 2006), which could be understood as a sub-factor of behavioral observation. In addition, there is a fairly extensive liter-

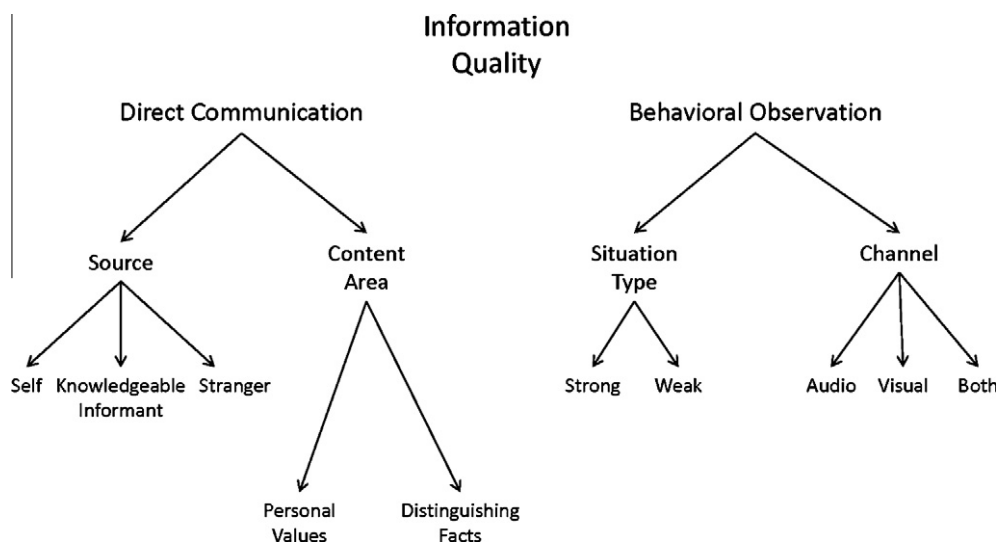


Fig. 4. Working model of information quality.

ature examining the differential quality of various channels of behavioral observation (e.g., Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Borkenau & Liebler, 1992). Other recently published work (Vazire, 2010) could be construed as generally (albeit tangentially for these purposes) addressing the trait-specific quality of information sources (i.e., who should we trust with what type of information?). The current study is an early step toward classifying and understanding different content areas of directly communicated information. Future work should focus on further systematizing this endeavor. For example, in terms of open-ended descriptions, would a self- or peer-generated description be a richer source of trait information to would-be perceivers? Perhaps there is an interaction of content area and source, such that values information provided by a knowledgeable informant yields more accurate personality judgment than does self-disclosed values information. Finally, important individual differences may exist in the type of information sought or disclosed in natural settings. Future studies may focus on these natural inclinations among both perceivers and disclosers, specifically in terms of judgmental accuracy: are people who tend to seek values information generally better judges of personality? Are people who tend to disclose individuating facts better targets?

The work here has advanced our knowledge in a few key ways. First, we have some indications that while our lay theories of informant quality are consistent, they may not be entirely accurate. Second, we have highlighted the value of self disclosure in general. This subtype of direct communication seems to provide a clear advantage in terms of accuracy relative to situations in which such communication is absent. In other words, speaking of oneself, even very briefly, can serve to clarify one's identity to others. Finally, we have established that although there was no clear, generalized advantage for one major content area of direct communication over the other, there was some evidence of specific trait \times information interactions that warrant further exploration.

Understanding which sources of information are most relevant to personality has both theoretical and practical ramifications. In terms of theory building, it provides a framework within which to couch our work and identifies gaps in the literature. But ultimately, the real value in answering these questions lies in the inherent practical utility of the knowledge. If one's goal is to discern the conscientiousness of a new acquaintance, which questions should one ask? Whom should one ask? We do not currently have definitive answers to these questions. We would urge other researchers to join work already in progress (e.g., Holleran & Mehl, 2008; Letzring et al., 2006; Vazire, 2010) aimed at finding these answers.

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Appendix A

A.1. Values

A.1.1. Family and friends

Any disclosure of values related to friends or family went into this category. Examples of these values ranged from spending time with family and/or friends to simply finding family and/or friends important in life.

A.1.2. Religion

Any disclosure of values related to religion, spirituality, and/or religious figures went into this category. Examples of these values

ranged from considering religious activity important in life to simply valuing a relationship with God.

A.1.3. Education/knowledge

Any disclosure of values related to general educational attainment or the pursuit of knowledge went into this category.

A.1.4. Finance

Any disclosure of values related to financial security and/or economic wellbeing went into this category.

A.1.5. Humor/fun

Any disclosure of values related to valuing a sense of humor and/or having fun in life went into this category.

A.1.6. Health/physical activity

Any disclosure of values related to physical activity was placed into this category. Examples ranged from disclosure of specific exercises and/or sports that participants considered important in life to simply valuing eating healthy and/or staying active. Simple disclosure of valuing "health" would also suffice.

A.1.7. Abilities/skills

Any disclosure of values related to any type of skill or ability was placed into this category. Examples of skills that participants found important in life ranged from organizational to social skills. Examples of abilities ranged from getting along with others to driving.

A.1.8. Social interaction/relationships

Any disclosure of values related to valuing interaction with people in general (excluding family and friends) went into this category.

A.1.9. Spontaneity

Any disclosure of values related to living in the moment or being spontaneous went into this category.

A.1.10. Honesty/trust

Any disclosure of values related to honesty, authenticity, and/or trust went into this category. Examples ranged from simply being honest and/or trustworthy to being loyal.

A.1.11. Creative endeavors

Any disclosure of values related to finding creativity, art, and/or music important went into this category.

A.1.12. Agency

Any disclosure of values related to finding any general type of success important went into this category. Any disclosure of values related to being a hard worker, following through with work responsibilities, etc. also went into this category. Examples ranged from educational success to having a successful career. Any disclosure of values related to having goals and/or aspiring toward future entities went into this category as well. Moreover, any mention of valuing the future went into this category. Any disclosure of values related to finding integrity and confidence in the self and/or others also went into this category. Many participants also found having a sense of pride (in the self, others, country, etc.) to also be an important value in life. Many participants considered it an important value in life to make a contribution to society or to leave a lasting impression and/or legacy on society. Several participants found motivation, drive, tenacity, etc. to be important values in life and those disclosures were also placed into this category.

A.1.13. *Miscellaneous personality*

Any disclosure of values related to finding any type of personality trait or characteristic important in life went into this category. Several participants simply found having a “good personality” to be an important value in life. Any disclosure of valuing various philosophies and/or mindsets also went into this category. Examples included being open-minded. A handful of participants found justice and/or fairness to be an important value in life. Examples included the “golden rule” of doing unto others and also simply being treated/treating others fairly. Some participants found it important to be independent. A select few participants found it important in life to have a clean appearance or simply valued cleanliness. Those disclosures were placed into this category. Any disclosure of values related to specific feelings went into this category. Any mention of simply valuing “feelings” also sufficed for classification into this category. Some participants simply disclosed a value for “security,” “adventure,” “morals,” and/or “leadership.” Those disclosures were placed into this category.

A.1.14. *Miscellaneous (non-personality)*

Any disclosure of values that could not be categorized elsewhere went into this category. Several participants simply found “happiness” to be an important value in life. Values such as this that were related to trait-like information were placed into this category.

A.2. *Facts*

A.2.1. *Habits*

Any disclosure of facts related to personal habits or preferences was placed into this category. Examples ranged from “I take 3 showers per day” to “I must always eat a certain color M&M before moving onto the next color.”

A.2.2. *Preferences*

Any disclosure of facts that included the words “I love,” “I like,” or “I hate” went into this category. Any mention of personal favorites also went into this category. Examples ranged from “My favorite color is pink” to “I hate commercials.”

A.2.3. *Hobbies and interests*

Any disclosure of facts related to how spare time is spent was placed into this category. Examples ranged from “I play sports” to “I am a painter.” Any disclosure of distinguishing facts related to physical health went into this category. Examples included “I try to work out three times per week” and “I am an active sportsman.”

A.2.4. *Abilities/skills/special training*

Any disclosure of facts related to any type of ability, skill, special licensure, etc. went into this category. Examples ranged from “I am good at sports” to “I have a BS degree in Painting.”

A.2.5. *Traits: Personality or physical traits or conditions*

Any disclosure of facts related to any type of physical or personality trait went into this category. Examples included “I am slightly OCD” to “One of my arms is longer than the other.” These facts were both temporary and permanent. Additional examples included facts such as “I am pregnant.”

A.2.6. *Possessions/collections*

Any disclosure facts related to ownership and/or collections went into this category. Examples included “I drive a BMW” and “I have an extensive Confederate currency collection” to “I have fourteen cats.”

A.2.7. *Personal history*

Any disclosure of any distinguishing facts related to personal life occurrences or history went into this category. Examples included “My birthday is on Halloween” and “I had a baby when I was thirteen.”

A.2.8. *Occupation: Job/career/work ethic*

Any disclosure of facts related to the participants' occupation went into this category. Examples included “I've never had a job” and “I am a football coach.”

A.2.9. *Family and/or friends Information*

Any disclosure of facts actually describing friends and/or family rather than the actual participant was placed into this category. Examples included “My sister and I are thirteen years apart” and “I am named after my uncle, who died shortly before my birth.”

A.2.10. *Accomplishments*

Any disclosure of facts related to an accomplishment in life went into this category. Examples included “I built my first computer out of spare parts at work” and “I won homecoming queen for my high school.”

A.2.11. *Goals/dreams/ambitions*

Any disclosure of distinguishing facts related to desired future states went into this category. Examples included “I want to be an orthodontist” and “I want to be a nurse oncologist.”

A.2.12. *National and/or ethnic identity*

Any disclosure of facts related to where someone originated from or his or her ethnicity was placed into this category. Examples included “I am from Texas” and “I am half Korean, half black.”

A.2.13. *Fears/phobias*

Any disclosure of facts related to fear and/or phobias were placed into this category. Examples included “I am scared of the number 13” and “I have arachnophobia.”

A.2.14. *Religion*

Any disclosure of facts related to religion, spiritual activity, and/or religious figures went into this category. Examples included “I go to church every Sunday” and “I am a Buddhist.”

A.2.15. *Miscellaneous*

Any disclosure of facts that could not be categorized elsewhere went into this category. Examples included memberships and/or affiliations (e.g., “I am a member of Holly Tree Country Club”; “I'm a Zeta.”), personal problems and/or issues (e.g., “I am addicted to bubble gum”; “I am a recovering alcoholic.”), philanthropic activity (e.g., “I am a vision partner with His radio”; “I donate to Saint Jude's Children's Hospital every month.”), and travel (e.g., “I just got back from a vacation in Hawaii”; “I have been to Canada.”).

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