# Asymmetry in Judgments of Personality: Others Are Less Differentiated Than the Self

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**ABSTRACT** Previous evidence suggests that judges rely more heavily on implicit personality theories when they rate relatively unfamiliar others. One further implication of this evidence is that correlations among traits should be stronger in other ratings than in self-ratings, particularly when (a) judges lack trait relevant information and/or (b) motivational accuracy is low. We tested these predictions by comparing self- versus other ratings on the Big Five in two studies. Study 1 used previously published data to demonstrate clear self/peer differences in the average relations between Big Five dimensions (excluding Extraversion). Study 2 was based on self- versus other ratings in 12 samples. Overall, the intercorrelations among Big Five traits (excluding Extraversion) tended to be significantly stronger in peer ratings than in self-ratings. The most consistent effect involved the relation between Neuroticism and Agreeableness (overall $r = -.43$ and $-.29$ in the peer ratings and self-ratings, respectively). In addition, as expected, the degree of relation among traits varied depending upon the type of target being rated (i.e., spouse vs. dating partner vs. friend vs. stranger). Implications of these findings are discussed.

If one is a responsible individual, is he or she also a relaxed individual? At first glance, the personality trait literature would suggest that this is not necessarily the case. In general, major trait dimensions such as conscientiousness and emotional stability would be considered to be largely orthogonal; accordingly, one's standing on one of the dimensions should imply little about his or her standing

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on the other. However, there is reason to believe that the answer to this question depends upon the target of the trait assessment. When making judgments about the self, we may find that qualities such as conscientiousness and emotional stability are largely unrelated but that when making judgments about others these two concepts are much less distinguishable from each other. Both personality and social psychologists have examined the issue of differential structure in self- and peer judgments, and these literatures can certainly inform one another in terms of understanding basic personality perception.

### Implicit Personality Theories, Familiarity, and Evaluativenes

Individuals employ implicit personality theories that potentially can have important implications for trait structure (for a review, see Schneider, 1973). People may have a priori notions about how traits correlate and thus can use information about one trait to fill in significant gaps in information about another. Moreover, people may have pre-existing beliefs about how traits are related to observable physical phenomena, such as physical attractiveness; the physical attractiveness halo effect (i.e., what is beautiful is good; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) is an example of an implicit personality theory that encompasses both of these components. Trait raters can be expected to rely less on implicit personality theories when they have specific, trait-relevant information at their disposal and fall back on these implicit theories when they do not have such information.

In this regard, work in social psychology indicates that reduced familiarity with the target is associated with a simpler structure of attributes. Linville, Fischer, and Yoon (1996) demonstrated that individuals tend to perceive higher covariation of attributes in outgroups rather than ingroups. Interestingly, although this study's main focus was on intergroup processes, there is another possible explanation for these findings: level of acquaintanceship. It is noteworthy that in this study, the level of familiarity mediated outgroup covariation effects. For example, using an outgroup that is as familiar to the rater as the ingroup (e.g., gender) did not lead to increases in covariation among rated attributes. Prentice (1990) examined open-ended self-descriptions and response latencies in relation to the self, familiar others, and unfamiliar others. Prentice essentially found that individuals use different schemes to describe the self than to describe others. Of particular interest, participants used more evaluative terms when describing others than when

describing the self. Also noteworthy was a general finding of a continuum with self and unfamiliar others representing the opposite endpoints and familiar others falling somewhere in between. In other words, not only do self-representations differ from peer representations, representations of unfamiliar peers differ from those of familiar peers.

Peabody (1970, 1990) distinguished between evaluative and descriptive components of trait meaning in an effort to fully explicate the differential ability to hold inconsistent beliefs about a target individual's characteristics. General findings are that people tend to describe themselves with more inconsistent traits than they describe others (Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988); it is important to note, moreover, that this effect is not simply due to a tendency toward positive self evaluation (Hampson, 1997). In addition, this tendency tends to be stronger in more familiar targets (Hampson, 1997, 1998). Also of interest is that descriptive inconsistencies (such as endorsing a target as both generous and thrifty) are more common than evaluative inconsistencies (such as endorsing a target as both thrifty and stingy) when judging others in general (Hampson, 1998). Thus, we tend to view more inconsistencies in the self versus others and in more familiar others than unfamiliar others; furthermore, consistency in global evaluations of others seems to be particularly important to the perceiver.

Analogous to the descriptive-evaluative differences outlined earlier, researchers have also been concerned with differences in the perception of morality and competence. Morality-related traits (e.g., honest, truthful, aggressive, egoistic) refer more to the goals of the target individual, and these goals are often construed in highly evaluative terms. Competency traits (e.g., capable, intelligent, efficient) refer more to the efficiency with which these goals are obtained (Wojciszke, 2005). Wojciszke, Bazinska, and Jaworski (1998) found that people tend to view morality traits as more important than competency traits, that people seek more information about morality traits, that morality trait judgments better predicted overall impressions of target individuals, and that the evaluative implications of morality information were stronger and more stable than those of competency information. Overall, it is clear that the way in which we view others varies based on familiarity with the target and depends heavily on highly evaluative trait concepts.

### The Big Five Structure

Implicit personality theories represent a way to simplify the complex social world, and thus one might expect a simpler structure in ratings

of unknown others than in self-ratings or ratings of close others. However, the personality literature is somewhat conflicted on this issue. Norman and Goldberg (1966) conducted a classic study whose purpose was to demonstrate the structural similarity between self-ratings and stranger ratings. In doing so, they built on a literature that began with Allport and Odbert (1936) and stretches into the present. It is noteworthy that a very similar five-factor structure has been observed in myriad types of personality judgments, from ratings of the self (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1985) to ratings of peers (e.g., Fiske, 1949); this same structure emerges across cultures (McCrae & Allik, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1997) and even across animal species (Jones & Gosling, 2005).

Although the Big Five structure of personality has become widely accepted and recognized both in research and in practice, even some of its strongest proponents acknowledge that there are other, simpler ways of conceptualizing the trait hierarchy. Digman (1997) suggested that the Big Five can be reduced to two broader superfactors, even in self-ratings: Alpha (consisting of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness vs. Neuroticism) and Beta (consisting of Extraversion and Openness) (see also DeYoung, 2006; Markon, Krueger, & Watson, 2005). It is possible that this simpler structure might be more readily observed in the ratings of a stranger than in self- or close-other ratings. Indeed, Rosenberg and colleagues have determined that when describing others, two major dimensions arise (Kim & Rosenberg, 1980; Rosenberg & Sedlak, 1972). One is an evaluative dimension, which is similar to Digman's Alpha. The other has been termed dynamism, which is more similar to Digman's Beta in that it encompasses activity and potency (Anderson & Sedikides, 1991). Although the Big Five remain very useful dimensions across different types of judgments, it is important to allow for the possibility of systematic differences in the extent to which these traits overlap.

Borkenau and Liebler (1994) observed an interesting structural difference. They exposed participants to differential levels of information regarding a target (a partner rating, sound film, silent film, still photo, audiotape). Across two studies, factor analyses performed on each of the separate judgment types yielded a decreasing level of complexity as less information was available to the judge. In other words, fewer factors (and also larger factors in terms of their eigenvalues) can account for the variance in judgments based on an audiotape as compared to ratings based on a silent film. In their

study, the factor structure was similar for ratings of still photos and for both film conditions. These were less complex than the factor structure of partner ratings, which, in turn, were less complex than the factor structure of self-ratings. Another way to examine structural complexity is to compare the average absolute values of the factor intercorrelations. Summarizing across their studies, these intercorrelations tended to increase from self (average $r = .17$) to partner (average $r = .20$) to sound film (average $r = .27$) to still picture (average $r = .29$) to silent film (average $r = .34$) to audiotape (average $r = .35$). The effects are relatively small but systematic and in the predicted direction, indicating that differing amounts of available information may affect structural complexity.

Implicit personality theories can be employed in different ways when rating a peer. The perceiver could use a proxy such as anticipated liking or physical attractiveness and base all judgments of personality traits upon this single estimate. So the individual may have a schema for each separate trait and its relation to, say, physical attractiveness. It is also possible that the perceiver has a simpler implicit personality structure and he or she uses variables such as physical attractiveness or perceived liking to make one supertrait judgment (e.g., based on a theory of how Digman's Alpha is related to physical attractiveness). In either scenario, the perceiver likely is making more linked, interdependent judgments about others than about the self.

Given the conclusions drawn about levels of complexity in perceptions of the self versus peers in the social psychological literature, it follows that trait psychologists should attempt to integrate these findings into the framework and understanding of basic trait theory. There is a well-established literature on the acquaintanceship effect, that is, the tendency for judges to rate targets more accurately under conditions of increased familiarity with the target (Biesanz, West, & Millevoi, 2007; Funder, Kolar, & Blackman, 1995; for an exception see Kenny, Albright, Malloy, & Kashy, 1994), and it is possible that differences in trait intercorrelation may track differences in self-other agreement. In fact, these differential relations between trait dimensions could have interesting implications for self-other agreement across different types of targets and on the general effects of utilizing trait information to make social decisions.

For these reasons, it is also important to understand the mechanism of these familiarity effects. How can we explain the tendency

to see others more simply than we see the self, or the tendency to see familiar others more complexly than unfamiliar others? There are numerous possible explanations, but we will focus on three basic models in this article.

## Explanatory Models for Self/Peer Differences in Personality Perception

### *The Informational Account*

Much of the work cited above points to an informational account of differences in self- versus peer judgments of personality (cf. Funder, 1995). This model posits that increased access to information via observation, insight, or direct communication should result in a more nuanced, complex view of a target. The target about which we have the most information is the self, followed by spouses or family members, dating partners or best friends, and finally acquaintances or strangers. If an informational account holds, one would expect to see a steady decline in the complexity of personality perception as personal distance increases. Note also that an information-based account would emphasize the basic distinction between Extraversion—a highly "visible" trait that can be rated with reasonable accuracy even by strangers (Watson, 1989)—and the other Big Five traits, which show little agreement in strangers' ratings (for a discussion of the trait visibility effect, see Funder & Colvin, 1988; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Thus, an informational model would not necessarily predict that correlations with Extraversion would vary systematically across different types of targets.

### *The Motivational Account*

Perhaps information is not the only crucial determinant of structural complexity in personality perception, however. One could argue that differential motivation could also explain asymmetry in self- versus peer judgments of personality. For example, perhaps when we are more highly motivated to be accurate, we will more fully differentiate aspects of the target. Accuracy requires precision, and precision requires attention to details. Such an increase in attention should translate into more complex evaluations of the target. Generally speaking, a motivational model would make somewhat similar predictions to the informational model, despite very different causal

suppositions. However, we might expect to see a somewhat smaller gap between the self and highly significant others (e.g., a spouse), as well as relatively larger gap between these very salient judgments and ratings of less important others (e.g., acquaintances and strangers). Moreover, a motivational account would seem to emphasize overall differences in the level of complexity (i.e., greater complexity as a function of increasing motivation) without distinguishing particular types of relations from one another (e.g., the distinction between Extraversion vs. non-Extraversion correlations).

### *An Evaluation-Based Model*

It is important to note that these informational and motivational models both may rely heavily on global evaluative judgments. In contrast to these other models, however, an evaluation-based account emphasizes the emergence of a particular pattern of relations among the rated traits. In its simplest form, an evaluation-based model would posit that raters form an overall impression of the target (e.g., as being liked or disliked) and then generate a corresponding global judgment of that individual. Similar to an informational model, an evaluation-based account would emphasize the distinctiveness between Extraversion and the other Big Five traits, given that judgments of Extraversion are only weakly related to liking (see Weller & Watson, 2008), while the other four Big Five traits are often fairly strongly related to evaluation and liking (Goldberg, 1993). Thus, for example, a liked target would be rated as relatively high in Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness, and as relatively low in Neuroticism; conversely, a disliked target would be rated as more neurotic and as less agreeable, conscientious, and open. Consequently, evaluation-based judgments would generate stronger correlations among these traits. As suggested earlier, an evaluation-based process might operate in conjunction with either an informational or a motivational model; that is, judges might be particularly likely to rely on overall impressions of liking when they lack information and/or the motivation to render more complex judgments.

## Overview of Studies

We report two studies that examine the relations between the Big Five dimensions in self- and various types of peer ratings. Based on the evidence we have reviewed, we hypothesized that

intercorrelations among the Big Five will be higher in peer judgments than in self-rated personality. Furthermore, we expected this effect to be particularly strong for correlations not involving Extraversion; as discussed earlier, neither an informational model nor an evaluation-based model would predict substantial effects for Extraversion.

In Study 1, we examine data provided in Digman's (1997) Appendix B and attempt to determine whether differences can be observed between self and peer judgments. In Study 2, we extend the investigation to multiple samples collected over two decades in our laboratory.

## STUDY 1

We chose to analyze data from Digman's (1997) influential article specifically because these were the data first used to demonstrate an alternative, higher order structure superordinate to the Big Five. Digman's analysis was based on 14 samples and used both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to extract two superfactors that can account for much of the variance in individual differences. We used these data to investigate differences in the strength of relations between the Big Five in self- versus peer ratings.

### Method

Of the 14 samples reported in Digman (1997), we included 12 in our analysis. We initially divided the 14 samples into two groups of 7, since 7 samples provided factor score intercorrelations from peer ratings, and the other 7 samples yielded factor score intercorrelations from self-ratings. We subsequently dropped one of each sample type from the analysis because the estimates for self- and peer intercorrelations were taken from the same sample, and this would have complicated our significance tests of differences between the two types of ratings (i.e., these self- and peer-ratings were not independent).

Thus, our analysis centered upon 12 samples: 6 sets of self-ratings and 6 sets of peer-ratings. Each sample utilized a measure that tapped the Big Five trait dimensions. Among the peer-rating samples, 5 samples consisted of teachers rating children or adolescents (Digman, 1963, 1994; Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981; Graziano & Ward, 1992); the remaining sample involved peer-ratings by adults (Costa & McCrae, 1992a). The self-ratings were taken from 3 samples of young adults (John, Goldberg, & Angleitner, 1984; Yik & Bond, 1993) and 3 samples of mature adults (Barrick & Mount, 1993; Costa & McCrae, 1992b;

Goldberg, 1992). For more extensive information about these data sets, please refer to Digman (1997).

*Procedure*

In order to examine self-peer differences in average intercorrelation, we aggregated across samples within each type of rating. In order to compare each individual coefficient across self and peers, we transformed the correlations into Fisher *z*-scores and then computed a weighted average for each of them. In order to compare the overall average intercorrelation in each type of rating, we examined the matrices created by these previous calculations. Using these new estimates, we took the absolute value of each correlation (to eliminate the arbitrary effects of sign) and then averaged these values across traits. We tested our general hypothesis by averaging the correlations among all of the Big Five, save Extraversion, and we also tested each individual intercorrelation. Thus, although we will report analyses involving Extraversion, our hypotheses focus primarily on the non-Extraversion traits. Due to the directional hypotheses for correlations not involving Extraversion, we used one-tailed tests for these comparisons.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides the average intercorrelations among the self- and peer-rated traits across the 12 samples, as well as the results of testing for differences between correlations obtained from independent samples. The most noticeable trend in the data is that nearly all of the between-sample differences are significant, which is not surprising

**Table 1**
**Intercorrelations Among the Big Five in Self and Peer Ratings From the Digman Samples**

| Scale | *N* | *E* | *O* | *A* | *C* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neuroticism | | – .19* | – .27** | – .46** | – .49** |
| Extraversion | – .26* | | .49** | .00** | .01** |
| Openness | – .07** | .39** | | .11 | .26** |
| Agreeableness | – .34** | .12** | .06 | | .52** |
| Conscientiousness | – .38** | .17** | .06** | .32** | |

*Note*: *Self* $N = 2927$. *Peer* $N = 1115$. Self intercorrelations are below the diagonal.
*Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .05$.
**Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .01$.

given these large sample sizes. In fact, the only nonsignificant difference between the self- and peer ratings is the relation between Agreeableness and Openness, where $r = .11$ in the peer ratings and $r = .06$ in the self-ratings.

The data also support our decision to distinguish between Extraversion and the other Big Five traits. The relations involving Extraversion actually tend to show a pattern reverse to the more general trend, in that it tends to have stronger correlations in the self-ratings than in the peer ratings: Extraversion versus Neuroticism ($-.26$ vs. $-.19$), Extraversion versus Agreeableness (.12 vs. .00), Extraversion versus Conscientiousness (.17 vs. .01). The only exception was that Extraversion was more strongly correlated with Openness in the peer ratings than in the self-ratings (.49 vs. .39).

In contrast, correlations among the remaining traits supported our hypothesis. Specifically, five of the six correlations not involving Extraversion were significantly higher in the peer ratings than in the self-ratings, and some of these differences were substantial: Agreeableness versus Conscientiousness (.52 vs. .32), Agreeableness versus Neuroticism ($-.46$ vs. $-.34$), Conscientiousness versus Neuroticism ($-.49$ vs. $-.38$), Conscientiousness versus Openness (.26 vs. .06), and Neuroticism versus Openness ($-.27$ vs. $-.07$). Overall, the mean absolute coefficient between all Big Five traits except Extraversion was .35 in the peer ratings and .23 in the self-ratings ($z = 3.56$, $p < .01$, two-tailed). Thus, the data clearly support our hypothesis that the correlations would be stronger in the peer ratings than in the self-ratings.

## STUDY 2

Study 1 showed that there are clear differences between the magnitude of the relations among self-rated and peer-rated Big Five traits. However, this analysis is limited in a significant way: The self-peer differences were confounded due to the fact that each estimate was obtained from an independent sample. That is, The self- and peer ratings were generated by different raters under very different circumstances. In order to be confident in our conclusions, we needed to see these same differences replicated using the same samples and raters. In addition, the Digman data did not allow us to differentiate among different types of peer ratings. In this regard, it would be

interesting to examine whether differences can be observed across different types of peer ratings in addition to the documented self-other differences. Accordingly, in Study 2 we made use of 12 self-other data sets from our laboratory; in each case, the participant rated him/herself and also rated one or more other individuals. Using these data, we were able to examine trait intercorrelations across various types of peer ratings. We then conducted parallel analyses to those presented in Study 1.

## Method

### *Participants and Samples*

*Stranger samples.* We analyzed data from two studies in which participants rated both themselves and previously unacquainted individuals (overall $N = 468$). First, Watson (1989) examined 250 undergraduates who were run in 37 groups, each consisting of two to eight individuals ($M = 6.8$ participants per group). These individuals were instructed to provide their name and no other information. Each participant initially completed a set of self-ratings and then rated all of the other group members on the Big Five traits. Average peer ratings were then created by computing the mean trait scores for each target (see Watson, 1989, for more details).

Beer and Watson (in press) subsequently examined self- versus strangers' ratings of the Big Five using a virtually identical design, although these participants were instructed to say nothing at all during the experimental session. They assessed 218 undergraduates in 53 small groups, each comprised of three to five individuals ($M = 4.1$ participants per group). Once again, mean peer ratings were created by averaging the trait scores for each target.

*Friend samples.* We present data from three samples in which participants rated trait characteristics of both themselves and their friends (total $N = 1{,}260$). The first sample ($N = 558$) consisted of 279 dyads from the Iowa City area who participated in a study examining "the nature and quality of friendship" (see Watson et al., 2000). The participants had known each other for an average of 33.6 months. The other two samples ($N$s = 440 and 262) were University of Iowa undergraduates who participated in two studies of the "self-based heuristic," that is, the tendency for judges to rate others as similar to themselves (see Weller & Watson, 2008). As part of these studies, the students rated both themselves and a friend (i.e., "someone who you know rather well and with whom you feel close") on the Big Five traits.

*Dating samples.* We report results from three samples of currently dating couples (overall $N = 587$). The first sample ($N = 272$) is described in greater detail in Watson et al. (2000). It consisted of 136 heterosexual couples from the Iowa City area who had known each other for an average of 36.0 months and had been dating for an average of 18.2 months. The second sample ($N = 178$) consisted of 89 heterosexual couples from the Iowa City area who had known each other for an average of 36.1 months and had been dating for an average of 22.8 months. The final sample ($N = 137$) was composed of individuals from the Iowa City area involved in current dating relationships. They had known their partner for an average of 22.7 months and had been dating for an average of 13.7 months.

*Married couples.* We examined relations among self- and spouse ratings in four samples of married couples (overall $N = 1{,}022$). The first sample ($N = 148$) is described in Watson et al. (2000); it consisted of 74 couples from the St. Louis area who had been married an average of approximately 17 years. The second sample ($N = 124$) consisted of 62 couples from the Iowa City area who had been married, on average, slightly more than 8.5 years. The third sample ($N = 170$) was composed of 85 couples from the Iowa City area who had been married an average of 11 years. The final sample consisted of participants in the longitudinal Iowa Marital Assessment Project (IMAP; see Watson & Humrichouse, 2006; Watson et al., 2004). We analyzed self- and spouse ratings from 580 participants at the Time 1 IMAP assessment, when they had been married approximately 5 months on average (see Watson et al., 2004, more details).

### *Big Five Measures*

Within a given sample, all participants completed self- and other-rating versions of the same Big Five measure. Participants in the married, dating, and friendship samples completed one of three different Big Five measures: the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992a) and 44-item and 54-item versions of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John and Srivastava, 1999). The NEO-FFI is a short form of the revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992a) and contains 12-item scales for each of the five factors. The 54-item version of the BFI includes an 18-item scale to assess Openness and 9-item scales to measure each of the other traits (see Watson et al., 2000, for more details and for psychometric data on this measure). The 44-item version of the BFI contains eight-item scales assessing Neuroticism and Extraversion, a 10-item

Openness scale, and 9-item measures of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (see Watson & Humrichouse, 2006; Watson et al., 2004).

The strangers in Watson (1989) rated themselves and their fellow group members on Norman's (1963) 20 bipolar scales, which yielded four-item scales for each of the Big Five traits (see Watson, 1989, for more details). For instance, Agreeableness was assessed using these four items: *good-natured* versus *irritable, not jealous* versus. *jealous, mild, gentle* versus *headstrong*, and *cooperative* versus. *negativistic*. Finally, the participants in the Beer and Watson (in press) study completed self- and peer-rating versions of the 40-item Big Five Mini-Markers created by Saucier (1994) from a longer set of factor markers developed by Goldberg (1992). Each trait was assessed by a scale consisting of eight adjectives.

### *Procedure*

The procedure for Study 2 was broadly similar to that of Study 1, except that, because we had access to the raw data for the Study 2 samples, we were able to combine the samples to yield overall data for each type of rated participant. First, we standardized the scores in each individual sample to eliminate differences in metric across our various Big Five measures; this, then, allowed us to combine data from samples using different measures. We then aggregated these scores into four subgroups based on the nature of peer relationship (married couples, dating couples, friendship dyads, and strangers). Because each participant provided both self- and peer ratings in this study, we used a different significance test (in this case, for dependent samples) to the test for differences between correlations than the one used in Study 1. Finally, we aggregated all individual samples in order to get an overall comparison similar to the one presented in Study 1.

## Results and Discussion

### *Strangers' Ratings*

Table 2 provides the intercorrelations for the self- and peer ratings from the stranger-rating samples, as well as results obtained by testing for differences between dependent correlations (with no common index). Seven of the 10 correlations differed significantly between self- and peer ratings; it is noteworthy that the only one of these significant differences involving Extraversion was its correlation with Openness (.10 vs. .23). In this case, the relation between self-rated Extraversion and Openness was actually greater than the corresponding coefficient in the strangers' ratings. This again supports the

**Table 2**
Intercorrelations Among the Big Five in Self and Peer Ratings From the Stranger Samples

| Scale | *N* | *E* | *O* | *A* | *C* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neuroticism | | −.13 | −.36** | −.51** | −.45** |
| Extraversion | −.15 | | .10* | .05 | −.08 |
| Openness | −.17** | .23* | | .50** | .55** |
| Agreeableness | −.30** | .16 | .15** | | .58** |
| Conscientiousness | −.28** | .11 | .21** | .29** | |

*Note*: $N = 468$. Self intercorrelations are below the diagonal.
*Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .05$.
**Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .01$.

notion that Extraversion may be a special case in terms of trait intercorrelations.

In contrast, all six non-Extraversion correlations differed significantly for self and peers in the predicted direction: Neuroticism versus Openness (−.36 vs. −.17), Neuroticism versus Agreeableness (−.51 vs. −.30), Neuroticism versus Conscientiousness (−.45 vs. −.28), Openness versus Agreeableness (.50 vs. .15), Openness versus Conscientiousness (.55 vs. .21), and Agreeableness versus Conscientiousness (.58 vs. .29). Note, moreover, that the magnitude of these correlational differences was quite large in this sample. Overall, the mean absolute magnitude of relation between all Big Five traits except Extraversion was .49 for strangers' ratings and .23 for self ratings. In summary, the stranger sample shows a similar yet stronger effect than the one observed in Study 1.

### *Friendship Samples*

Table 3 provides the results from the friendship samples. Five of the 10 correlations differed significantly between self- and peer ratings; replicating results seen in the stranger sample, the only one of these significant differences that involved Extraversion again was its relation to Openness (.29 vs. .17). However, in this case (as in the cases that follow), the correlation in the peer ratings was stronger than that in the self-ratings.

Of the six non-Extraversion correlations, four differ significantly across the friend versus self-ratings, all in the predicted direction:

**Table 3**
Intercorrelations Among the Big Five in Self and Peer Ratings From the Friendship Samples

| Scale | *N* | *E* | *O* | *A* | *C* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neuroticism | | − .21 | − .15 | − .39** | − .14 |
| Extraversion | − .24 | | .29** | .12 | .05 |
| Openness | − .11 | .17** | | .27** | .26** |
| Agreeableness | − .27** | .14 | .04** | | .40** |
| Conscientiousness | − .12 | .10 | .02** | .29** | |

*Note*: $N = 1{,}260$. Self intercorrelations are below the diagonal.
*Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .05$.
**Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .01$.

Neuroticism versus Agreeableness ( − .39 vs. − .27), Openness versus Agreeableness (.27 vs. .04), Openness versus Conscientiousness (.26 vs. .02), and Agreeableness versus Conscientiousness (.40 vs. .29). Overall, the mean absolute magnitude of relation between all Big Five traits except Extraversion was .27 for peer ratings and .14 for self-ratings. Thus, the results from the friendship dyads are similar to those obtained with the strangers; the basic self/peer difference is replicated, but the effect clearly is smaller than in the stranger ratings.

*Dating Couples*

Table 4 provides the findings from the dating couple samples. Of all the samples, the dating couples show the fewest self-peer differences in the trait correlations. Only two of the 10 comparisons yielded a self/partner difference: Neuroticism versus Agreeableness ( − .42 vs. − .23) and Extraversion versus Openness (.19 vs. .08). The mean absolute magnitude of relation between all Big Five traits except Extraversion was .19 for the partner ratings and .13 for the self-ratings. Thus, these participants yielded relatively weak effects overall, although we again obtained a substantial difference in the correlation between Neuroticism and Agreeableness in the two sets of ratings.

*Married Couples*

Table 5 provides the data from the married couple samples. Three of the 10 correlations differed significantly between the self- and spouse

**Table 4**
Intercorrelations Among the Big Five in Self and Peer Ratings From the Dating Samples

| Scale | *N* | *E* | *O* | *A* | *C* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neuroticism | | − .36 | − .07 | − .42** | − .20 |
| Extraversion | − .32 | | .19* | .25 | .21 |
| Openness | .02 | .08* | | .10 | .04 |
| Agreeableness | − .23** | .27 | .03 | | .26 |
| Conscientiousness | − .19 | .13 | − .05 | .24 | |

*Note*: $N = 587$. Self intercorrelations are below the diagonal.
*Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .05$.
**Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .01$.

ratings, and once again the only one of these significant differences involving Extraversion was its association with Openness (.31 vs. .21 in the spouse versus self-ratings, respectively).

Of the six non-Extraversion correlations, two differ significantly between the spouse ratings and the self-ratings, both in the expected direction: Neuroticism versus Agreeableness ( − .45 vs. − .34) and Openness versus Agreeableness (.29 vs. .12). Overall, the mean absolute magnitude of relation between all Big Five traits except Extraversion was .24 for the spouse ratings and .19 for the self-ratings. It is noteworthy that we again found a significant difference in the association between Neuroticism and Agreeableness across the two sets

**Table 5**
Intercorrelations Among the Big Five in Self and Peer Ratings From the Married Samples

| Scale | *N* | *E* | *O* | *A* | *C* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neuroticism | | − .26 | − .17 | − .43** | − .20 |
| Extraversion | − .30 | | .31* | .19 | .16 |
| Openness | − .10 | .21* | | .27** | .09 |
| Agreeableness | − .34** | .23 | .12** | | .29 |
| Conscientiousness | − .21 | .19 | − .03 | .34 | |

*Note*: $N = 1{,}022$. Self intercorrelations are below the diagonal.
*Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .05$.
**Difference between self- and peer correlations is significant at $p < .01$.

of ratings. In fact, this significant difference emerged consistently across all five analyses in Study 1 and Study 2.

*Summary of Individual Sample Analyses*

Across these four samples, we compared 24 individual correlations that did not involve Extraversion. Of these, 13 correlations (54.2%) differed significantly across the two sets of ratings, and in every instance the magnitude of the correlation was stronger in the other-ratings than in the self-ratings. The most replicable effect involved the correlation between Neuroticism and Agreeableness, which yielded significant differences in all four samples. In addition, the correlations between (a) Openness and Agreeableness differed significantly in three of the four comparisons, whereas those between (b) Openness and Conscientiousness and (c) Agreeableness and Conscientiousness differed in two of four cases.

Table 6 provides the aggregated estimates of the non-Extraversion correlations for self- and peer-rated personality across all levels of acquaintanceship in Study 2. One can see a general trend of greater intercorrelation among peer ratings versus self-ratings; in every case, the correlations among these traits are higher in the other-ratings (mean *r*s range from .19 to .49; overall mean $r = .28$) than in the self-ratings (mean *r*s range from .13 to .23; overall mean $r = .17$). As we have seen, the strangers' data clearly yielded both the biggest difference and the strongest overall correlations. Beyond that, it is difficult to see any clear, systematic trend in the other samples. Indeed, the mean correlations are as high or higher in the married couples than in the friends and dating samples.

**Table 6**
**Study 2 Summary Data**

| Samples | *n* | Self | Peer |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stranger | 468 | .23 | .49 |
| Friends | 1260 | .14 | .27 |
| Dating | 587 | .13 | .19 |
| Married | 1022 | .19 | .27 |
| Overall | 3337 | .17 | .28 |

*Note*: The value shown is the average magnitude of the correlations (ignoring sign) among Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

### Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

Taken together, the results from Studies 1 and 2 provide strong and largely consistent evidence that the perceived relation among the Big Five traits differs between self- and peer judgments. Study 1 demonstrated a general self/peer difference across samples varying in type of rating, type of target, and even cultural background. Study 2 replicated this general effect and allowed us to examine relations among peer-rated traits across types of targets. We observed a general trend toward a greater degree of intercorrelation among trait judgments as the personal distance between a judge and his or her target grows. This is apparent in that the stranger ratings clearly showed the strongest trait intercorrelations (specifically, the mean of the six non-Extraversion correlations was |.49| in these data). As discussed earlier, this increased nonindependence in ratings of strangers could reflect some combination of informational (i.e., raters use implicit personality theories in the absence of adequate trait-relevant information), motivational (i.e., raters have reduced motivation to judge strangers accurately), or evaluation-based (i.e., judges base their ratings of strangers on global perceptions of liking) processes.

Conversely, and somewhat surprisingly, the dating sample showed the weakest overall differences. This relatively small effect could perhaps be attributed to the unique interpersonal context that is dating. There are multiple possible biases involved in the perception of a relatively new romantic partner, and it is likely that a purely informational account of the effects makes less sense in this instance, taking into account the considerable motivational forces that can arise when judging a relatively new romantic partner. One could argue that these results make sense because an individual is highly motivated to evaluate his or her new partner accurately as important decisions may be made in the future based on these evaluations. In addition, it is possible that relatively new romantic partners are highly engrossed in their partner, leading to a very nuanced view of his or her personality. On the other hand, one could also argue that new romantic partners should be using a more superficial and highly evaluative system of information processing about their partner (along the lines of the "honeymoon effect" identified by Watson &

Humrichouse, 2006), so that we should have observed opposite effects. In this regard, in a review of actor-observer effects, Malle (2006) found stronger self-other attributional differences when the actor and observer were intimates than when they were nonintimates. So this particular situation certainly warrants further research, and it could prove highly informative in determining the actual mechanism of familiarity effects.

More specifically, the differences between the two sets of ratings did depend, in part, on the traits themselves. As predicted, correlations involving Extraversion showed little systematic self/peer difference. In fact, only the correlation between Extraversion and Openness consistently showed a significant self-peer difference across the Study 2 samples (note, however, that a key exception was that this relation actually was stronger in self than in peer judgments in the strangers' sample). We argued earlier that these relatively weak effects for Extraversion could arise for either of two reasons. First, it is a trait that is more easily ratable across different types of relationships, even at very low levels of acquaintance (Beer & Watson, in press; Watson, 1989). Because raters can rely on valid cues to judge Extraversion, there is little need to invoke implicit personality theories. Second, among the Big Five, Extraversion has the weakest links to evaluation and liking (Goldberg, 1993; Weller & Watson, 2008). Thus, the relative independence of judgments of Extraversion could reflect either informational or evaluative processes, or some combination of the two.

Neither of these models offers a simple, clear explanation for our unexpected findings regarding the relation between Extraversion and Openness (i.e., that the correlation was significantly stronger in the self-ratings in the strangers' sample but was significantly stronger in the peer-ratings in each of the other samples). Further research is necessary to determine the robustness and generalizability of this reversal effect before attempting to interpret it.

Taken as a whole, our findings appear to be consistent with both an informational and an evaluative model of self/peer differences in personality perception. Although a motivational account can explain some aspects of our data (most notably, the increased correlations among strangers' ratings), it does not predict the strong contrast between Extraversion and the other four Big Five traits that we observed. Our studies were not designed to tease apart the informational and evaluative explanatory models; note, moreover, that they

are not mutually exclusive and may, in fact, work in concert under many circumstances. Further research is necessary to pinpoint the mechanism of the general self/peer differences observed here.

Finally, we must consider the broader significance of our findings. One could argue that these correlational differences generally are not large and thus are trivial. We would counter by emphasizing the pervasiveness of the effect. Overall, 18 out of the 30 correlations not involving Extraversion were significantly greater in peer ratings than in self-ratings across our two studies. Moreover, none of the 30 correlations was significantly greater amongst self-ratings than among peer ratings. Finally, one difference—namely, that involving the association between Neuroticism and Agreeableness—replicated consistently across all five analyses; furthermore, the magnitude of this difference was relatively large in both Study 1 (overall mean $r = -.46$ and $-.34$ in the peer and self-ratings, respectively) and Study 2 (overall mean $r = -.43$ and $-.29$, respectively).

## Implications of the Findings

As discussed earlier, social psychologists long have been aware of perceptual differences in self- versus peer judgments (e.g., Linville et al., 1996; Prentice, 1990). Social perceivers estimate their own trait expression to be more variable than is seen by others (Krueger, Ham, & Linford, 1996). However, it seems that the personality literature has largely ignored these differences in favor of emphasizing the obvious commonalities in trait ratings across different types of targets. We do not believe that our findings undermine any structural axioms in the literature: The same five factors consistently emerge across different types of targets (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1985; Digman, 1997; Fiske, 1949; Norman & Goldberg, 1966), and we would not propose that peer ratings conform to a different overarching classification system.

At the same time, however, an improved understanding of the general perceptual differences in the relations among higher order traits could have theoretical implications for a number of issues pertaining to personality judgment. For example, it is possible that the lower levels of self-other agreement observed in certain contexts are due, in part, to differences in trait interrelations between judgments made by a perceiver and judgments made by a target. In addition, there could be significant practical implications of these

findings. In Study 1, for instance, we see considerably stronger relations between Conscientiousness and other Big Five traits in the peer judgments. Thus, returning to the question posed at the very beginning of this article, it appears that we do tend to believe that responsible individuals also are relaxed, open, and cooperative. This can have important practical implications, for example, when an interviewer is evaluating a job applicant or when an admissions officer is rating a prospective student. Our results strongly suggest that raters in these contexts will form overly general impressions that may not be particularly accurate. This is an important issue for future research.

Finally, we should note that our findings have significant implications for future work in this area. We highlight two related points here. First, in studies of self-other agreement, it is not uncommon for researchers to present only the convergent correlations (e.g., the correlation between self- and other-rated Agreeableness) without also reporting the discriminant correlations (e.g., relations between self-rated Agreeableness and self- and other-rated Neuroticism) (for examples of this practice, see Watson, 1989; Watson et al., 2000). Our results suggest that this common practice potentially can be rather misleading, given that trait judgments of others can be relatively nonspecific and may not simply reflect the target characteristic. For instance, in certain contexts (e.g., rating a stranger), a trait rating may largely reflect the extent to which the target is liked versus disliked, rather than providing specific trait-relevant information. We therefore encourage future researchers to report and examine discriminant correlations in studies of person perception.

Second, we have argued that the magnitude of these trait correlations is influenced, in part, by the amount of relevant information that is available to the rater. This, in turn, suggests that these trait correlations can provide important clues about the amount of information that is available to judges and, in turn, about the validity of their subsequent ratings. This again suggests the desirability of reporting these associations more routinely in studies of person perception. Suppose, for example, that a researcher obtains supervisor ratings of his/her employees and finds that these trait judgments are strongly interrelated. These results may suggest that the supervisor lacked substantial trait relevant information and that, accordingly, these judgments should be viewed with some skepticism.

*Conclusion*

There is little debate that we see ourselves quite differently than we see others. The simple aim of this work is to demonstrate a classic effect in a novel context, that of personality judgment—specifically, the relation between trait judgments made about the self versus another. Now that we have established the existence of this general effect, there is much work to be done in terms of identifying antecedents and consequences of these self-other differences as well as determining boundaries on the effect. Why are dating couples seemingly largely immune to these self/peer differences? If we increase the amount of information that is available to raters, can we expect trait intercorrelations in peer judgments to decrease? What if we manipulate motivation? What is the relation between accuracy in person perception and self/peer symmetry of trait intercorrelations? It is our hope that this work will spark interest in questions such as these and ultimately enhance our understanding of personality perception.

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