Getting the balance right? A mismatch in interaction demands between target and judge impacts on judgement accuracy for some traits but not others

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the role of target and judge interaction demands on first impression accuracy ($n = 195$). Specifically, the role of targets' self-presentation concerns and judges' information processing demands on accuracy for interpersonal traits (i.e., traits likely to be accentuated within an interpersonal context) and less interpersonal traits (i.e., traits less likely to be accentuated within an interpersonal context) was examined. Pairs of unacquainted participants ($n = 88$; females $= 52$, males $= 36$) interacted for ten-minutes in one of three interaction conditions that sought to vary interaction demands by manipulating the degree to which participants were aware of judging and/or being judged. Accuracy was assessed by correlating judgements formed with a measure of target's personality that comprised an average of self-ratings and informant-ratings ($n = 107$). Findings revealed that in interaction conditions where there was a mismatch in evaluation expectations – when a participant knows he or she will judge but not that he or she will be judged – accuracy for "less interpersonal" traits is diminished. Findings are discussed in relation to Patterson's (1995) parallel process model of interpersonal communication and Funder's realistic accuracy model (1995). Limitations in terms of the generalisability of the findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

People routinely judge the personalities of those around them, and the accuracy of such judgements can have important consequences impacting on who they choose to hire, collaborate with, trust and befriend (Funder, 1999). Personality research has examined the moderators of the validity of initial personality judgements (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2008; Beer & Watson, 2008; Blackman & Funder, 2002; Wall, Taylor, Dixon, Conchie, & Ellis, 2013) and has shown that 'accuracy' or agreement between a judge's rating of a target and the target's personality score, is nuanced in terms of characteristics of the *judge* (Human & Biesanz, 2012; Letzring, 2005, 2008), *target* (Akert & Panter, 1988), the *information* on which a judgement is based (Letzring, Wells, & Funder, 2006) and the specific *trait* in question (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002). Although much substantive accuracy research is concerned with these moderators (see Funder, 1999) less literature has explored proximal influences such as interaction demands, motivation and 'forewarning' on 'real' interactions (cf. Hall et al., 2009). Forewarning targets and judges about their role within an interaction has begun to be examined in the communications and emotion literature (e.g., Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000) and the field of deception detection (Forrest & Feldman, 2000); however, the role of target and judge interaction demands on the 'accuracy' of initial personality judgements has not yet been examined. The present study examines variations in target and judge interaction demands on Big-5 judgement accuracy.

2. Importance of target and judge interaction demands

Social interaction is complex and is not a passive process (Swann, 1984). Interaction typically involves managing our *own* behaviour whilst simultaneously making social judgements of *others*. The subtleties involved in this everyday task of being a target and a judge is captured in Patterson's (1995) parallel process model of communication. This model assumes that a person's social judgements and behaviours are parallel processes shaped by goals and expectancies (see also Patterson & Stockbridge, 1998), therefore, our cognitive resources within an interaction are affected due to managing our own behaviour and impressions of another. Indirect evidence suggests that the impact of different interaction demands on perceptions is mixed. Specifically, there is evidence to

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suggest that the more impression management demands placed on people (the targets) the *less* accurate they will be when rating how their partner (the judge) perceives them (i.e., meta-perception; Patterson, Churchill, Farag, & Borden, 1992). In contrast, research has reported *enhanced* interpersonal sensitivity when targets are instructed to 'try hard' to make an 'accurate' impression (Ickes et al., 2000; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) yet this accuracy was not examined from a trait perspective. Moreover, 'trying hard' may not always result in enhanced accuracy and has been shown to be moderated by relationship status (Snodgrass, 1985). Studies have concluded that judges instructed to be 'accurate' may overthink an automatic judgement process (Forrest & Feldman, 2000; Klein & Hodges, 2001) or withdraw effort and perform worse (Jamieson & Harkins, 2007). Further indirect support for the importance of interaction demands on judgements comes from research reporting that power imbalances between target and judge interferes with information processing (Rodriguez-Bailon, Moya, & Yzerbyt, 2000). Although none of these studies examined personality judgement accuracy the findings reveal the differential effects that interaction demands can have on judgements.

Indeed, Funder (1995, 1999) posits that an accurate judgement depends on good cue availability from a target combined with a judge noticing and correctly interpreting these cues. Thus, the question of what happens to judgement accuracy when targets are also judges, as is often the case in most everyday dyadic interactions (i.e., self-presenting whilst simultaneously judging others), is an interesting and open question.

In relation to personality judgements, self-presentation demands placed on targets may shape first impression accuracy in important ways. For example, consider two people, William and Jenny, on a first date: the cues that Jenny reveals arguably depends on the degree to which she seeks to manage her presentation. As intimated in the parallel process model of communication, the judge (i.e., William) is also important as the cues on which judges rely in such scenarios likely depends on the degree to which they are attending to these if the situation requires it. It is argued here that the interaction demands placed on targets *and* judges may shape targets' self-presentation efforts and judges' social information processing, and impact on 'accuracy'.

3. Self-presentation and judgement accuracy

Self-presentation (SP) concerns the regulation of one's behaviour so as to convey a specific impression to others (Baumeister, 1982; Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). This presentation of self has also been referred to as impression management (IM) and Leary and Kowalski (1990) note that IM and SP are often used interchangeably, thus SP will be used synonymously with IM.

There has been a wealth of social psychological research into the construct of IM ranging from the tactics involved (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989) to the effects of target IM on perceivers' ratings of targets in terms of likeability (Bolino, Varela, Bande, & Turnley, 2006) and attitudinal evaluations (Snyder & Swann, 1976). Research has also examined impressions of targets based on the targets' IM attempts in terms of what they do (e.g., specific tactics) (Kacmar, Carlson, & Brymer, 1999; Leary & Kowalski, 1990), and the impact of motivation on impression formation in terms of gender stereotypes (Rudman, 1998; see also Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). The question of whether the target person engaging in SP is *accurately* perceived in terms of their personality traits remains unanswered (cf. Biesanz & Human, 2010). Specifically, although research examining how targets engaging in IM fare socially is useful in terms of increasing our understanding of the social processes surrounding IM (i.e., how we judge), it is also necessary to understand when IM impacts on accuracy hence the present focus on target and judge interaction demands. This is important for at least two reasons. First, an increased understanding of when interaction demands may shape accuracy is practically important and may inform the planning of interview practices or remote assessments. Second, a focus on target *and* judge interaction

demands will enhance our understanding of social information processing from an accuracy perspective as research has exclusively examined either the target being judged *or* the demands placed on the judge. The major objective of the present study, therefore, was to explore the role of target and judge interaction demands on judgement accuracy across situations that varied in terms of judges 'knowing' or 'not knowing' that a judgement is required about the target and in terms of targets 'knowing' or 'not knowing' that they will be judged after engaging in a ten-minute getting acquainted interaction.

Studies examining first impression accuracy tend to report increased accuracy for the more "interpersonal traits" such as extroversion relative to the less interpersonal traits (and those subject to IM concerns) such as neuroticism (Albright, Kenny, & Malloy, 1988; Funder & Colvin, 1988). These findings are typically explained in terms of properties of the trait itself; whereby traits such as neuroticism are difficult to judge on the basis that there are less overt cues on which to base judgements (Funder & Dobroth, 1987; Funder & Colvin, 1988) whereas extroversion is known as a visible trait with numerous cues available to judges. Another plausible, and related explanation, is that the differences in accuracy by trait type relate to targets' concealing the more negative aspects of self and accentuating the more positive aspects of their personality (i.e., fake good, fake bad: Barrick & Mount, 1996; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1998). A number of findings are consistent with this contention. Barrick and Mount (1996) focused exclusively on the less interpersonal traits of neuroticism and conscientiousness and reported evidence of IM. In Gill and Oberlander's (2003) study investigating personality perception based on an email, they conclude that authors of an email appear to linguistically conceal aspects of neuroticism relative to the interpersonal trait of extroversion. Similarly, Paulhus, Bruce, and Trapnell (1995) demonstrated that conscientiousness may be susceptible to IM effects because people do not always feel able to act in line with their 'true' selves. Taken together, these findings suggest that targets' SP may shape accuracy in distinctive ways. Specifically, one might expect that interpersonal traits such as extroversion and agreeableness are likely to be judged *more* accurately when SP demands are high (i.e., self-enhancement) as targets will emit numerous cues about such highly observable and interpersonal traits whereas less interpersonal traits are likely to be judged *less* accurately when evaluation expectation demands are high as people may choose to conceal relevant cues from judges (i.e., self-deception) and such traits may be less relevant to a social interaction. Of course, as outlined in Section 2, there is reason to believe that the cues on which judge's focus may also vary in terms of trait type. Indeed, Ames and Bianchi (2008) assert that the relational context surrounding target and judge can shape the traits that judges focus on. In their study on supervisor–student judgements of each other they reported that students were more concerned with rating their supervisors' level of agreeableness whereas supervisors where more concerned with rating the students' level of conscientiousness.

To date, no study has directly examined the impact of different interaction demands and judgement accuracy in 'real life' contexts. Indirect evidence that targets engaging in SP may shape accuracy comes from Human, Biesanz, Parisotto, and Dunn (2012) who demonstrated that SP is positively associated with judgement accuracy. Although substantive, their study did not examine self-presentation concerns *within* an interaction nor differences across trait type. Another study by Murphy (2007) focused on how IM impacted on observers' ratings of effectiveness and found more positive impressions of intelligence for targets engaging in IM in addition to distinctive behavioural patterns. This study, however, did not examine judgements of personality; therefore, the current paper builds on this work and investigates whether different interaction demands shape accuracy.

4. Current study

In the present study, we sought to explore the role of judge and target interaction demands on personality judgement accuracy. Accordingly, a dyadic design was employed whereby each dyad member was