Who do we think of as good judges? Those who agree with us *about us*

Jinseok S. Chun [a,*], Daniel R. Ames [a], Jose N. Uribe [b], E. Tory Higgins [a]

[a] *Columbia University, United States*
[b] *University of Michigan, United States*

ABSTRACT

The present research considered what leads perceivers to evaluate someone as a good or poor judge of people. In general, we found a substantial role for agreement: perceivers evaluated another person as a good judge when he or she agreed with their perception of someone's characteristics. Importantly, the effect of agreement depended on who this "someone" was. We found that perceivers' evaluation of another individual as a good judge was more heavily shaped by agreement about their own characteristics than by agreement about a third-party target's characteristics. This effect emerged across a range of samples and research designs, including multi-rater evaluations among developing business professionals, experimentally controlled settings, and a survey in which US adults reported on existing relationships. Moderation analyses suggested that the effect of agreement was particularly strong in situations where the agreement could more effectively satisfy perceivers' motives to (a) feel relational connectedness and (b) verify the accuracy of their perception.

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1. Introduction

While answers to the question of "who is a good judge" have been accumulating (e.g., Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954; Letzring, 2008; Rees, Rothman, Lehavy, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013; Vazire, 2010), a related question appears to have received little attention: Who do people *think* is a good judge? In the present paper, we address this question. Our research focuses on *good-judge evaluations*, which we define as the extent to which a focal person is believed by someone else to accurately assess people's characteristics such as personalities, mental states, abilities, and attitudes. Research has found that such good-judge evaluations have meaningful real-world effects, including shaping behaviors surrounding relationship formation and development, as well as interpersonal exchange and collaboration (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Hofmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009).

The extent to which people evaluate another person as a good judge likely has many sources. We focus here on how *agreement* in social perception shapes good-judge evaluations. Research has shown that people are motivated to (a) experience relational connectedness with others and (b) feel confident in their perception of the reality. Importantly, it has been demonstrated that reaching agreement with others in social perception can satisfy both of these motives (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Levine, 2009; Hardin & Higgins, 1996). We predict that the satisfaction of these two motives will in turn lead people to perceive another person

who is agreeing with them (i.e., who is satisfying these motives) in a positive light, believing that the person is a competent judge of people. In short, we expect that people's good-judge evaluations will be positively affected by the extent to which the judge agrees with their perception of a target individual's characteristics.

Not all kinds of agreement are equal, however. Previous research has differentiated between the self and a third party as the bases of agreement and discussed their distinct implications (Blackman & Funder, 1998; Kenny & West, 2010). Accordingly, we distinguish between two different types of agreement in social perception: *agreement-about-self* and *agreement-about-third-party* (see Fig. 1). Agreement-about-self is the convergence between a perceiver's perception of him- or herself and the judge's perception of the perceiver (Swann, 2011). Agreement-about-third-party is the convergence between a perceiver's perception of a third-party target and the judge's perception of that same target (Echterhoff et al., 2009).

While we expect that both kinds of agreement in social perception often matter to good-judge evaluations, we predict that agreement-about-self will matter more than agreement-about-third-party with the following motivational reasons. First, feelings of connectedness that arise from agreement should be greater when the shared opinion is about a significant target (Echterhoff, Higgins, & Groll, 2005). Because the self is a target of ultimate significance for many people, the positive effect of agreement on good-judge evaluations may also be especially strong when the basis of the agreement is the self. Second, people tend to assume that they know themselves well (Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, & Ross, 2001). Because they have stronger confidence in the knowledge about themselves compared with a third-party target,

* Corresponding author at: Management Division, Columbia Business School, Columbia University, 3022 Broadway, Uris Hall, New York, NY 10027, United States.
E-mail address: jsc2203@columbia.edu (J.S. Chun).

Agreement About Self

When a perceiver evaluates a person as a good judge based on their degree of agreement in views of the perceiver
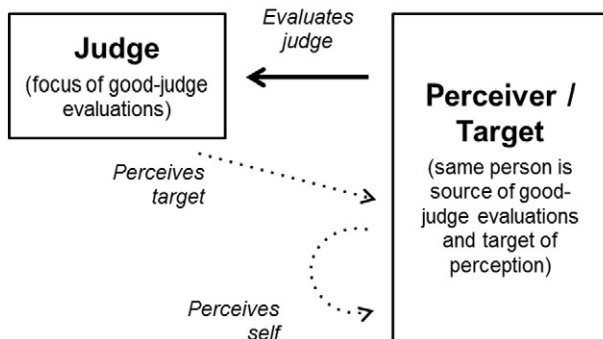
Agreement About Third Party

When a perceiver evaluates a person as a good judge based on their degree of agreement in views of a third party
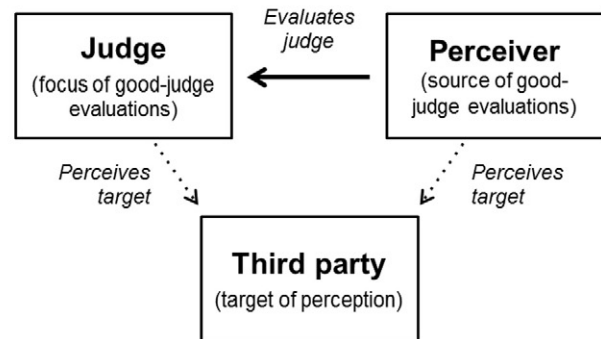
Fig. 1. Structure of agreement-about-self and agreement-about-third-party.

people might react more strongly to agreement about themselves (Arkes, Boehm, & Xu, 1991). If another person disagrees with people's perception of themselves (whom they think they know very well), they may regard the judge's view as a challenge to their own competence as accurate perceivers, reacting negatively as a result. For these reasons, we expect the effect of agreement-about-self to be greater than agreement-about-third-party.

An alternative possibility is that people would actually put less weight on agreement-about-self when evaluating judges because they assume that others cannot really perceive their personal characteristics accurately due to their intricate and complex nature (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005). In other words, they might generally assume that other people cannot actually "know them" and, as such, discredit the validity of strong convergence between their self-view and a judge's perception of them. As a result, in evaluating good judges, people might discount the informational value of agreement-about-self, recognizing their own privileged perspective. Instead, they might place more emphasis on agreement-about-third-party because in such cases they and a judge might have potentially equal access to "the truth."

While acknowledging this alternative, we nonetheless expected that people would react more strongly to agreement-about-self than agreement-about-third party because self-perception is a central and principal reality they experience (Leary, 2007). Given its significance, people may want to feel connected to others and verify the accuracy of their perception particularly regarding this reality (Swann, 2011). This leads to our central prediction about which kind of agreement more heavily influences good-judge evaluations: We expected to find stronger overall links between good-judge evaluations and agreement about the self than agreement about a third party.

Beyond this basic effect, we also sought to examine *when* particular kinds of agreement might matter more or less. Earlier, we argued that agreement would affect good-judge evaluations because it gives individuals feelings of relational connectedness and confidence in their perception. We thus expected that the effect of agreement would depend on the extent to which these two motives can be satisfied by the agreement. First, we predicted that the effect of agreement might become stronger if the person who is agreeing with them is someone who is relationally close to them (Echterhoff et al., 2005) because he or she is in a position to satisfy their relational needs more effectively. In contrast, agreement might have a weaker effect when it is with a person they are not close to, because the person does not and cannot strongly satisfy their relational motives.

Therefore, we expected that liking for the judge would increase the effect of agreement.

Second, we predicted that the effect of agreement-about-third-party would become stronger if people think that they have rich and accurate knowledge about that third-party target. When people think that they have fairly reliable appraisals of a third-party target (i.e., they are highly familiar with the target), they will have more confidence in their perception of him or her (Beaupré & Hess, 2006), and such confidence would make it especially important that the judge verifies their perception of the target. Therefore, the extent to which people think they know a third-party target (i.e., familiarity) might moderate the relationship between agreement-about-third-party and good-judge evaluations.

We believe that our account and results are relevant for several traditions of research. In particular, our work draws on and contributes to research on self-verification theory (Swann, 2011) and shared-reality theory (Echterhoff et al., 2009). Both self-verification and shared-reality phenomena are based on agreement in social perception. However, these lines of thinking have generally not been integrated in prior research: Self-verification scholarship has examined agreement-about-self whereas empirical work on shared-reality has focused mainly on agreement-about-third-party. The present research bridges these two areas, yielding empirical results and an account that shed light on the joint operation of self-verification and shared-reality.

1.1. Overview of studies

We conducted four studies testing the (relative) effects of agreement-about-self and agreement-about-third-party on good-judge evaluations. Study 1 used multi-rater evaluation data drawn from a large population of MBA students. Studies 2 and 3 were conducted in experimental settings, confirming the causality of the effects found in Study 1 and addressing alternative explanations. Study 4 used a survey format to gather adults' reports on existing acquaintances, testing our predictions about moderating conditions. We operationalized agreement as actual convergence in social perception (i.e., objective agreement) in Studies 1, 2, and 3 whereas it was measured as people's perception of convergence (i.e., subjective agreement) in Study 4. We report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions in these studies.

2. Study 1

Study 1 employed a large multi-rater evaluation dataset collected over a period of seven years in a Master of Business Administration