



## Why are moderators of self-other agreement difficult to establish?



Jüri Allik<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Reinout E. de Vries<sup>c,d</sup>, Anu Realo<sup>a,e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Tartu, Estonia

<sup>b</sup>The Estonian Academy of Sciences, Estonia

<sup>c</sup>Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>d</sup>Department of Educational Science, University of Twente, The Netherlands

<sup>e</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Warwick, UK

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 5 February 2016

Revised 15 May 2016

Accepted 23 May 2016

Available online 24 May 2016

#### Keywords:

Personality traits

Self-other agreement

Moderator variables

NEO-PI-3

HEXACO-PI-R

Personality judgements

### ABSTRACT

Agreement between the self and other rated personality profiles was studied in two samples involving 11,096 speakers of two languages, Dutch and Estonian, who completed two different personality questionnaires, the *NEO-PI-3* and *HEXACO-PI-R*. An outstanding agreement was achieved in the most occasions: in only 4–6% of dyadic pairs was the correlation between two randomly paired profiles higher than the actually observed correlation between true pairs. As in previous studies, we found that age and sex of participants and length of acquaintance had no significant effect on the level of self-other agreement. However, intimate knowledge helped married and unmarried couples in both samples be more accurate in their personality judgments; family members, in turn, had knowledge that made them more accurate than two people who were just acquaintances or friends. We believe that these outcomes can be explained by the contention that the judgment of another's personality is a relatively simple task, which is accomplishable for most people most of the time. In other words, because judging another person's personality is an easy task, we are not able to determine "good targets," "good judges," or "good traits." Perhaps it is only "good information" which determines the closeness of the target-judge relationship, and which has a small but reliable impact on the level of self-other agreement. This explains why it is so difficult to find individual differences in the ability to judge another person's personality.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

Although Louis Thurstone was optimistic about the development of factorial methods of analysis that could give us the tools by which to reduce the complexities of social and psychological phenomena to a limited number of elements (Thurstone, 1934), most personality researchers have remained quite skeptical about the possibility of being able to decipher personality structure. Even Gordon Allport, the founder of modern trait psychology, believed that the structure of personality, that is, what personality psychologists have attempted to establish, is incredibly complex: "Since traits, like all intervening variables, are never directly observed but only inferred, we must expect difficulties and errors in the process of discovering their nature. The incredible complexity of the structure we seek to understand is enough to discourage the realist, and to tempt him to play some form of positivistic gamesmanship" (Allport, 1966, p. 3). It took many years before it became widely accepted that the huge personality lexicons expressed

across the world's languages could be reduced to five (Goldberg, 1993) or six (Ashton et al., 2006; De Raad et al., 2014) independent dimensions. In other words, even though there are thousands of adjectives to describe personality dispositions in almost every spoken language, people use these words as if there were only five or six self-sufficient categories (De Raad et al., 2014; John, Angleitner, & Ostendorf, 1988; Lee & Ashton, 2008).

If personality structure, traditionally, looked incredibly complex from the viewpoint of researchers, then it was also not realistic to expect that a layperson could manage to solve the same task without facing serious problems. One of the leaders in the field, David Funder, expressed the opinion that "the accuracy of personality judgment is an extremely complex matter" (Funder, 1995, p. 653), meaning that accurate personality judgment is an unlikely outcome which happens only when favorable circumstances are met. It is not necessary to assume, as Funder wrote, that the personality judgements are usually accurate, or even often accurate. All that is required is that lay perceivers have ever, even once, achieved accuracy in personality judgement (Funder, 1999, p. 119).

According to the *Realistic Accuracy Model* (RAM), to make an accurate personality judgment, four conditions need to be satisfied (Funder, 1995, 1999, 2012). First, the person being judged must do

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Tartu, Näituse 2, Tartu 50409, Estonia.

E-mail address: [juri.allik@ut.ee](mailto:juri.allik@ut.ee) (J. Allik).

something relevant to exhibit the trait. Second, the trait-relevant behavior must be available to the judge. Third, the trait-relevant, available behavior must be registered. Fourth, the trait-relevant, available, and detected information must be utilized correctly to make accurate inferences about that trait (Funder, 2012). This means that personality judgment can be only conditional – at least four groups of moderating variables determine the degree to which personality judgments are accurate. Because the path to an accurate personality judgment is fundamentally uncertain, it is likely that success or failure in judgment also depends on some moderating variables. Yet, at a minimum, accuracy of judgment can be achieved with the co-occurrence of a particular set of favorable circumstances: a “good target,” who possesses “good traits,” who is observed by a “good judge,” whose judgments are based on a “good information,” and who thus applies the right inferences (Funder, 2012).

Unexpectedly, individual differences in judgeability – perhaps the most interesting among moderator variables – have been surprisingly difficult to establish (e.g., Funder, 1999; Haselton & Funder, 2006; Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979). For example, already in 1937, Gordon Allport asked the famous question: “Who are these people?” (Allport, 1937, p. 443; Human & Biesanz, 2013), meaning people whose actions, thoughts, and feelings are easier to understand and judge than others (Human & Biesanz, 2013). More than 70 years later, Human and Biesanz were obliged to admit that “despite some very interesting and important findings regarding judgeability, there still is not a clear answer to the question of who these people are” (Human & Biesanz, 2013, p. 248).

Similar problems were encountered in an attempt to identify who the “good judges” of other people’s personality are. Although some subtle individual differences in the ability to judge others’ personality have been observed, no large between-individual differences have been discovered in the judgment of personality traits (Bayne, 1985; Christiansen, Wolcott-Burnam, Janovics, Burns, & Quirk, 2005; Ickes, Buysse, et al., 2000; Letzring, 2008; McLarney-Vesotski, Bernieri, & Rempala, 2011; Taft, 1955). There are, of course, individual differences in empathic accuracy – another name for self-other agreement – but they do not seem to be either large or systematic (Davis & Kraus, 1997; Ickes, 1997). The only notable moderating factor for making judgments seems to be judges’ intelligence: individuals with higher cognitive abilities tend to achieve slightly higher accuracy than those with lower cognitive abilities (Davis & Kraus, 1997; Murphy & Hall, 2011; Realo et al., 2003; Taft, 1955). In general, however, the ability to judge other people’s personality seems to be very egalitarian: it matters very little how old you are, what your sex is (Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000), or how intelligent you are (Möttus, Allik, & Pullman, 2007). Although, for example, it was reported that people with elementary education may have a small advantage over those who have university degrees in judging personality (Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010), this advantage is neither large nor convincingly explained. Thus, the identification of a distinctive group of people who are “good judges” has remained tentative at best.

Yet, the idea that some traits are easier to judge than others is one of the most stubborn ideas in personality psychology. It is a kind of dogma that visible traits, such as Extraversion, are more readily assessed from an external viewpoint than less visible traits, such as Neuroticism (Connolly & Ones, 2010; Connolly, Kavanagh, & Viswesvaran, 2007; Kenny & West, 2010; McCrae et al., 2004). According to the self-other knowledge asymmetry (SOKA) model, for instance, the self should be more accurate than others for traits low in observability (e.g., Neuroticism), whereas others should be more accurate than the self for traits high in evaluativeness (e.g., Openness) (Vazire, 2010). Visibility of traits seems to provide a straightforward explanation why greatest interjudge agreement is typically on the traits that seem most observable, and lowest

agreement is achieved on those traits that are not so directly observable from the vantage point of an external viewer (Funder & Dobroth, 1987; John & Robins, 1993). However, self-other agreement cannot be explained by the fact that people see themselves differently to how they are seen by other people: the disparity between self and external perspectives is unrelated to the visibility (or observability) of personality traits when correcting for other factors (Allik, Realo, Möttus, Borkenau, et al., 2010; Allik, Realo, Möttus, Esko, et al., 2010; Paunonen, 1989). That is, a far more important factor in self-other agreement is interindividual variance, not trait visibility. Approximately one-half of the variance in agreement level is explained by the standard deviation of the sum scores of the subscales: self-observer agreement is higher in the subscales on which individual differences are larger. After correction for the range of variance, differences in self-observer agreement are substantially diminished, although not entirely absent (Allik, Realo, Möttus, Esko, et al., 2010). In other words, if we take into account the size of individual variation, then judges who know their target well reach more or less equal level of agreement on all personality traits usually studied by personality psychologists.

Although the idea that there are “good” targets, judges, and traits – clearly distinct from “bad” targets, judges, and traits – is very popular, very little solid evidence speaks in its favor. When reviewing the facts, Chaplin (1991) concluded that moderator effects in personality judgments are small and can only be detected in very large samples with predictors that are strongly related to the criteria (Chaplin, 1991). For example, in most cases, moderator variables are not able to transform a weak form of self-other agreement into a strong one (Chaplin, 1991). Based on the evidence, thus, individual differences in self-other agreement seem to be relatively small and, hence, difficult to detect. A telling example is the effect of the type and length of acquaintance. Although acquaintance length increases accuracy in personality judgment, there is evidence that familiarity may also have a negative effect on self-other agreement (Kenny & West, 2010). The effect of length of acquaintance is neither very consistent nor large (Bernieri, Zuckerman, Koestner, & Rosenthal, 1994; Biesanz, West, & Millevoi, 2007; Gnams, 2013; Kenny, 2004; Kurtz & Sherker, 2003; Story, 2003). This means that observing the target acting in hundreds or even thousands of similar situations improves judgement accuracy only marginally (Kenny, 2004).

However, it is understandable that the accuracy of personality judgments would increase with the intimacy of the relationship. We can say, as it turns out, much less about friends and acquaintances compared to the information what we have about our family members or partners. Observing targets in situations that are not available to acquaintances allows judges to access new information about their personality (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Borkenau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Levesque & Kenny, 1993; Swann & Gill, 1997). For instance, those who have intimate relationships are more knowledgeable about thought and feelings of their targets and not only their observable behaviors (Letzring & Human, 2014). It was noticed, for example, that family members achieve stronger agreement on personality traits than those who are just friends or acquaintances (Connolly et al., 2007). Typically, spouses and partners spend a lot of time together in very different situations, they become familiar with each other’s thoughts and feelings, and get used to reactions that are not necessarily available to everyone (South, Oltmanns, Johnson, & Turkheimer, 2011). Correlations between spouses’ ratings of personality are often higher than correlations between family members, friends, or acquaintances (Beer & Watson, 2008; De Vries, Lee, & Ashton, 2008; McCrae et al., 2004). Social Investment Theory (Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005) posits that normative personality traits develop through investment in social institutions, such as age-graded social roles. It is obvious that the roles of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/951221>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/951221>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)