



## Replication Study

## I still cannot see it – A replication of blind spots in self-perception

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## ABSTRACT

Gallrein, Carlson, Holstein, and Leising (2013) tested a novel form of so called “blind spots” as conceived in the social reality paradigm that contrasts self- and metaperception with one’s reputation (i.e., the *consensual* impression one makes). They found that people are not always aware of the unique views that others have of them, providing evidence for *distinctive blind spots in self-perception*. The current research replicates this finding and the original effect size using a larger set of personality ratings (Study 1), a more diverse set of informants (Study 1) and two different cultures (Study 1 vs. Study 2). This replication suggests that the blind spot phenomenon is robust across item sets, participant samples, and language communities.

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## 1. Introduction

People tend to believe that they know themselves better than other people know them (Vazire & Mehl, 2008). Indeed, the self has “privileged access” to feelings, motives, and thoughts, and people are able – in principle – to observe their own behavior in all situations (Hofstee, 1994; Vazire, 2010). Nevertheless, research has also demonstrated substantial limits to self-knowledge in a wide range of domains (e.g., overestimation of performance; Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004). Furthermore, a growing body of research shows that the impressions others have of an individual’s personality can provide valuable information above and beyond the individual’s self-perception (Connelly & Ones, 2010; Vazire & Mehl, 2008), suggesting others sometimes know things the self does not know or will not tell.

Gallrein, Carlson, Holstein, and Leising (2013) investigated the existence of so-called “blind spots”; that is, features of targets’ personalities that others are aware of, but which are oblivious to the targets themselves (Luft & Ingham, 1955). Similar to past work using a social reality approach to self-knowledge, the authors used the consensual impressions of knowledgeable others (i.e., informants) as a way to measure what a person is really like (Hofstee, 1994; Kenny, 2004). Given this accuracy criterion, “social reality blind spots” refer to aspects of people’s personalities that others

*consensually perceive* but that the self does not report. However, going beyond previous research (Leising, Erbs, & Fritz, 2010), Gallrein et al. (2013) conceptualized self-perceptions as targets’ perceptions of their own personality as well as targets’ *generalized metaperceptions*, or their beliefs about how other people generally perceive their personality (Carlson & Kenny, 2012; Kenny, 1994). Thus, blind spots refer to the characteristics that others consensually attribute to a person that the person does not attribute to him/herself (i.e., self-perceptions) or to his/her reputation (i.e., general metaperceptions).

Gallrein et al. (2013) found evidence for the existence of such blind spots using a person-centered approach, which essentially indexes self-knowledge as the degree to which people perceive their own characteristic pattern of traits (i.e., self-perceptions and metaperceptions) as being similar to how others describe that pattern (e.g., more outgoing than kind or responsible). Thus, the social reality blind spot is measured as a pattern of traits that others – and only others – *consensually* attribute to a target. Going further, Gallrein et al. (2013) identified two forms of blind spots. The first is the *distinctive blind spot* which is the pattern of traits that informants – and only informants – consensually attribute to *particular* targets. The average profile correlation expressing the level of agreement between informants in that regard was  $r = .26$ . The second is the *normative blind spot*, which is the personality pattern that informants – and only informants – attribute to the *average* target. This normative profile correlates strongly with the rated social desirability of traits, suggesting that typical informants tend to attribute more positive personality characteristics to

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targets that targets fail to attribute to them themselves (cf. Leising et al., 2010).

Given the increased interest in replication in the field of personality and social psychology (Asendorpf et al., 2013; Nosek, Spies, & Motyl, 2012; Pashler & Wagenmakers, 2012), we present two studies aiming to replicate the previous findings. We believe that a replication of the blind spot is important given the growing literature on the adaptiveness of self-knowledge (e.g., Tenney, Vazire, & Mehl, 2013; Ward & Brenner, 2006). Indeed, people's reputations likely affect how they are treated by others (e.g., when Tina has a reputation of being "arrogant" and thus others avoid her; cf. Leising & Müller-Plath, 2009), and poor insight into social reality makes it difficult for people to effectively navigate their social environment (e.g., modify problematic behaviors). Thus, a replication of the existence of this blind spot will hopefully encourage future work that explores outcomes of poor self-knowledge or interventions designed to shed light on these blind spots.

In addition to replicating the original effect, the current studies also provide a number of important extensions. First, Study 1 employs a larger and more diverse set of personality items and, second, a more sophisticated strategy for recruiting informants. Unlike most research where targets recruit or nominate their own informants, or "target-nominated informants" (TNI), we recruited informants in a classroom setting. This is important as TNI tend to hold extremely positive views of targets (Leising, Gallrein, & Dufner, 2014; Leising et al., 2010) and informants who like their targets tend to perceive targets in normative ways, or ways that reflect the typical person's personality (i.e., Leising, Ostrovski, & Zimmermann, 2013; Leising et al., 2010). The reliance on TNI in the original research likely underestimated the blind spot effect due to variance restriction, a hypothesis tested in the current work. Third, given that the original effect was only observed in a German sample, Study 2 investigates the blind spot in a large sample from the US to demonstrate the generalizability of the effect across cultures and languages.

## 2. Study 1

The main goal of Study 1 was to replicate Gallrein et al.' (2013) findings using a larger and more diverse set of personality items and a more diverse sample of informants. While Gallrein et al. (2013) used 37 self-generated items to measure the Big Five (Goldberg, 1993), the current study included 107-items that measured: (a) the Big Five, (b) self-esteem, (c) interpersonal style, (d) personality pathology, and (e) person-descriptive adjectives from the natural language. As in the original research, targets nominated three informants (TNI), but the experimenters also nominated six additional informants from the targets' university classes. Given that classmates have little choice but to interact with – and thus get to know – each other, university classes likely represent an environment where informants *know*, but do not necessarily *like* each other (Oltmanns & Turkheimer, 2006). For each target, we took care to recruit classmates who reported liking the target (CM+), but also classmates who reported not liking the target too much (CM–).

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Sample

Participants were recruited in large classes at a university in the East of Germany. Initially, 85 seminar groups comprising at least eight students willing to participate were recruited. For each seminar we selected one person as the target. The target was asked to complete an online personality questionnaire. We also selected six classmates as informants for each target. These informants were

asked to also evaluate their respective target using the same personality questionnaire. For a seminar group to be included in the study, at least three classmates had to report liking their respective target (CM+), and three had to report not liking their respective target too much (CM–). The complete assignment algorithm is described below.

Out of the 85 targets we initially identified, 73 (female = 38; age:  $M = 23.19$ ,  $SD = 3.45$ ) completed the questionnaire and had at least one CM+ and one CM–. The targets were well-educated, with 51 (69.9%) reporting having "Abitur" (comparable to A-level exams). Across all seminars, 400 classmates were recruited as informants. Two informants were excluded due to missing data leaving 200 CM– (female = 135, sex not reported = 1; age:  $M = 23.66$ ,  $SD = 4.22$ ) and 198 CM+ (female = 133, sex not reported = 4; age:  $M = 23.44$ ,  $SD = 4.39$ , not reported = 2). On average each target had  $M = 2.75$  ( $SD = 0.49$ ) CM– and  $M = 2.73$  ( $SD = 0.48$ ) CM+. Classmates were also well-educated, with 125 CM– (62.50%) and 126 CM+ (63.6%) reporting having Abitur. Most informants described themselves as "friends" ( $n_{CM-} = 4$ ,  $n_{CM+} = 74$ ), "acquaintances" ( $n_{CM-} = 39$ ,  $n_{CM+} = 56$ ) or just "classmates" ( $n_{CM-} = 195$ ,  $n_{CM+} = 185$ ) of the targets. Additionally, we asked the targets to recruit three informants from their own personal social networks (TNI). These informants were also asked to describe their respective target using the same personality online questionnaire. Fifty-six of the targets recruited an additional 147 TNI (female = 78, sex not reported = 10; age:  $M = 30.14$ ,  $SD = 12.73$ ), with an average of  $M = 2.01$  ( $SD = 1.24$ ) TNI per target. Seventy-four TNI (50.3%) reported having Abitur. Most TNI described themselves as "friends" ( $n = 75$ ) of the targets, followed by "family members" ( $n = 45$ ), "classmates" ( $n = 24$ ), "romantic partners" ( $n = 18$ ) and "acquaintances" ( $n = 13$ ).

#### 2.1.2. Procedure

Participants were recruited in two phases. In phase 1, a research assistant briefly advertised the project in university seminars and collected email addresses of students interested in participating. These students received an email containing a link to a short sociometric online questionnaire in which they were asked to report how much they liked and how well they thought they knew each of their classmates. For completing this stage of the study, participants were reimbursed with either 5 € or 0.5 h of course credit. Based on the levels of liking and knowing assessed during the first stage, we then assigned one target and six informants per class. To avoid statistical non-independence, we chose only one target per class. A student was declared a target when at least three of his/her classmates reported not liking that student very much (i.e., mean liking for each informant  $< 3$  on a scale from 1 [*not at all*] to 5 [*very much*]) and when three other classmates reported liking the same student at least somewhat (i.e., mean liking for each informant  $> 3$  on a scale from 1 [*not at all*] to 5 [*very much*]). Thus, to qualify as a target, a student needed to be liked by at least three classmates and to be disliked by at least three other classmates. If a potential target was liked and disliked, respectively, by more than three potential class informants, we chose those classmates as informants who reported knowing the target best.

In the second phase, targets and informants received an email informing them that they had been selected for continued participation. Targets were asked to provide more detailed self-perceptions and metaperceptions, using a different online questionnaire, and informants were asked to describe the personality of their respective targets using the online informants' questionnaire. Targets were also asked to recruit three TNI from their personal social networks via email. For this purpose, we provided the targets with pre-formulated emails that they only had to forward to their respective TNI. The TNI also described the targets' personalities using the online informants' questionnaire. After completing

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