Characteristics of the Judge that are Related to Accuracy

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Abstract

There exists a substantial body of work, dating back nearly a century, exploring individual

differences in the ability to accurately judge the personality traits and characteristics of other

people. While the picture of the good judge of others' personality remains somewhat abstract,

there are some characteristics which consistently bear out as important, such as intelligence and

emotional stability. Overall, there are five characteristics which have been investigated as

correlates of this ability: (1) cognitive functioning, (2) personality, (3) motivation, (4) gender,

and (5) behavior. This chapter opens with an introduction to this area of scholarship, a brief

coverage of the conceptual framework, and the definitions and measurement of accuracy. A

description of the research within each of the five areas is then provided. Next, some theoretical

considerations for ongoing research on the good judge are illuminated. Finally, this chapter

concludes with some worthy directions for future research related to the good judge of

personality.

Keywords: accuracy, personality, traits, cognitive functioning, intelligence, motivation

Characteristics of the Judge that are Related to Accuracy

One fundamental aspect of life is the social interactions we have with other people. As a result of these interactions we learn, fall in love, set and work towards goals, and decide to undertake countless other activities. With considerable reliance on our interpersonal experiences to navigate the complex world within which we live, there should be no doubt as to the importance of accurately coming to understand those around us. An important part of this is making judgments of others' personalities, their enduring characteristics that can be used to make predictions of future thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Our perceptions of those around us – physically, virtually, or otherwise – affect how we think about and organize our world, as well as influence our own actions (Schmid Mast & Hall, 2018).

The results of our encounters with others provide social feedback as to our interpersonal effectiveness and are even related to our well-being (Letzring, 2015). We use this information to adjust and refine our patterns of interaction with others. Successive trials of engaging in this ubiquitous social process add up drastically over time, and are not only important to understanding, but also for continuing to successfully navigate, our social world.[1] Thus, the accumulation of these interactions – or *social-at-bats* – in which we attempt to make accurate judgments of others' personalities, can have real and compounding consequences (Funder, 2018, March).

As with most things in life – such as academic pursuits, salesmanship, and athletics – some people are better at accurately inferring the personality characteristics of other individuals.

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[1] Abelson (1985) provided a sophisticated and analytical account of this proposition. He used baseball to outline how what are perceived as small differences in batting averages can amount to very meaningful differences over the course of an entire season. Now imagine the impact of this over a lifetime, not just a season's worth, of social interactions!

This is precisely the focus of this chapter – to provide a synthesis of the literature that has evaluated personality judgment abilities. Before we start, I first provide a description of the process by which accurate judgments come to be made and then briefly conceptualize accuracy and its measurement. Next, I take a more in depth look at five characteristics that have been explored in the search for understanding the good judge of personality: (1) cognitive factors, (2) personality, (3) motivation, (4) gender, and (5) behavior. Finally, I wrap up by illuminating some theoretical considerations for ongoing work and intriguing directions for future research aimed toward increasing understanding of the *good judge*.

Model for the Occurrence of Judgment Accuracy

The realistic accuracy model (RAM) was developed to address the critical question of *when*, rather than *if*, judgments are accurate (Funder, 1999). This model specifies the process which *must occur* for accurate judgments of others to be made (see chapter 2 by Letzring & Funder in this handbook for a comprehensive review of the RAM). The judgment process moves through four distinct stages – relevance, availability, detection, and utilization – each of which must be successfully navigated in an ordered manner. Specifically, the RAM requires the person who is being judged to make *relevant* information about themselves *available* so such information can be *detected* and then *utilized* by the individual making the judgment. Evident from this simple description, there are two focal persons in the judgment process: the person being judged, whom I refer to as the *target,* and the person making judgments, whom I refer to as the *judge*.[2]

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[2] I exclusively use the terms *judge* and *target* to provide consistency throughout this chapter. Please note, however, that across the literature many terms have been used and are considered synonymous – judges have been referred to as perceivers, raters, assessors, and decoders, while targets have also been referred to as subjects, ratees, and encoders.

These four stages of the RAM are related multiplicatively; if any of the stages is not at least partially completed, accuracy becomes zero. Said differently, only when there is a substantial degree of success in all four stages – on the part of both the *target* and the *judge* – will a high level of accuracy be achieved (Funder, 1995). For this reason, much research has been directed toward moderator variables that make accuracy more or less likely by interacting with one or more stages of the RAM. Such moderator variables are placed into four discrete categories – properties of *traits*, quantity and quality of *information*, characteristics of the *target*, and characteristics of the *judge*. Most often the term *good* precedes each moderator (e.g., good trait), as the focus of research has been the correlates and/or causal mechanisms of enhanced accuracy (Funder, 1993).

Accuracy as a Measurable Construct

There have been a variety of approaches to the computation of accuracy (Funder & West, 1993). A large portion of personality judgment accuracy research has implemented a self-other agreement analytical strategy that uses either the summation of difference scores or correlation coefficients (based on different items for a single target or the same item across targets) as the metric for overall accuracy. While these appear to be straightforward measures, Cronbach (1955) demonstrated that such indices are comprised of multiple perceptual components and recommended that researchers should go beyond singular indicators of accuracy such as overall accuracy correlations. The two most central components identified were stereotype accuracy and differential accuracy. Stereotype accuracy, now commonly termed normative accuracy or normativity, refers to the ability to judge the generalized or *statistically average* target, which is dependent upon the judge's understanding of the "relative frequency or popularity of possible responses" on the characteristic(s) of interest (Cronbach, 1955, p. 179). Differential accuracy,

now commonly referred to as distinctive accuracy, represents judges' ability to perceive targets'

traits relative to the normative level, as well as the ability to order targets accurately on each

attribute (Biesanz, 2017; Furr, 2008; Zebrowitz, 1990). This is what most people think of when

talking about accuracy – the ability to judge others' unique levels and ordering for a given set of

characteristics (e.g., personality traits).

The measurement of accuracy necessitates some objective standard or criterion to which

the judgment is compared. In concise and simplistic terms, judgment accuracy is the "*relation*

between what is perceived and what is" (Funder, 1999, p. 3). For the purpose of this chapter (and

this edited handbook), the focus is on personality – enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and

behaviors. Because of the abstract, intangible nature of personality – compared to more

"objective" characteristics of people such as height, weight, and hair color – there has been much

disagreement and theoretical argument surrounding what is the best measure or criterion of *what*

is (Kruglanski, 1989). Most often, the criterion has been a self-assessment of the characteristic of

interest. That said, people are not always the most accurate judges of their own personality (John

& Robins, 1993; Vazire, 2010). Therefore, composites combining self-reports with behavioral

assessments, clinical ratings, and/or ratings by close acquaintances (e.g., family, significant

others, long-term friends) have been used as accuracy criteria when computing accuracy, and

provide a more *realistic* understanding of an individual's personality (Funder, 1995; Kolar,

Funder, & Colvin, 1996; Vazire, 2010).

A Perpetual Question: What Makes Good Judges?

Due to much theorizing, many analytical innovations, and myriad empirical

investigations which have taken place over the last century, we know that people have the

impressive ability to make judgments of others that are largely accurate in both description of

personality as well as prediction of behavior (e.g., Allport, 1937; Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2008; Barrick, Patton, & Haugland, 2000; Borkenau & Liebler, 1993; Estes, 1938; Kolar et al., 1996). Some researchers have gone so far as to propose that making accurate impressions is a rather simple task at which most people are proficient (Allik, de Vries, & Realo, 2016; Haselton & Funder, 2006). If true, however, this would *not* render moot the core perpetual question within this domain of scholarship: "*What are the defining characteristics of good judges of personality?*" This is because some individuals might still be better than others in this ability, and such a possibility is important to fully explore.

Indeed, there are numerous characteristics of judges that have been linked to the achievement of greater levels of accuracy (e.g., Bernstein & Davis, 1982; Biesanz, 2010; Colman, Letzring, & Biesanz, 2017; Funder, 1980, 1987, 1995; Harackiewicz & DePaulo, 1982; Letzring, 2008; Lippa & Dietz, 2000; McLarney-Vesotski, Bernieri, & Rempala, 2011), and a review of this expansive literature has centered around five core characteristics of judges: (1) cognitive functioning, (2) personality, (3) motivation, (4) gender, and (5) behavior. Even with such thematic organization, this moderator of accuracy, of the four outlined by the RAM, has seen the least consistency in results. In the following sections I unpack each of these judge characteristics, first by outlining how each should theoretically relate to personality judgment accuracy, then synthesizing the extant empirical literature, and finally in providing a brief take-away for each.

Judge's Level of Cognitive Functioning

The first cluster of variables – cognitive functioning – are cerebral in nature and involve the higher order mental processes essential for the gathering and processing of information. For the current purposes, discussion will focus on intelligence, attention, and memory. Intelligence

has been widely discussed as the most consistent characteristic that differentiates good judges from those who are less skilled (Allport, 1937; Christiansen, Wolcott-Burnam, Janovics, Burns, & Quirk, 2005; Funder, 1999; Lippa & Dietz, 2000). In particular, greater dispositional intelligence should aid in the understanding of how different personality traits are likely to manifest through behaviors exhibited by targets (Allport, 1937; Christiansen et al., 2005). Attention is another cognitive process that should be significant in aiding good judges at generating accurate judgments. To be accurate in assessments of targets, judges need to, at minimum, actively attend to relevant information made available by the targets (Cardy & Kehoe, 1984). This is because inattention will result in fewer cues being detected, which, even at high levels of correct utilization of cues on the part of the judge, would cause lower levels of accuracy to be achieved (Funder, 1995). Likely working in tandem with attention processes, memory also plays a role in achieving accuracy. Regardless of the amount of cues detected, if one does not have sufficient ability to recall and utilize information about a target, accuracy will remain elusive (Christiansen et al., 2005).

Intelligence. There are many ways that intelligence can be conceptualized – such as verbal, social, and spatial abilities – but at the apex of them all is general mental ability (GMA; Jensen, 1991). GMA denotes the ability to reason, use logic, and forecast behaviors and outcomes from complex and sometimes abstract information, and has been shown to predict a wide array of life outcomes (Gottfredson, 1997; Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2004). According to the RAM, GMA should be positively related to the utilization stage of the judgment process. Indeed, a meta-analysis found this intelligence-accuracy link for judgments being made on a wide range of target aspects – such as affective and non-affective states, personality traits, roles

and status, as well as prediction of actual target behaviors – with an average effect of $r = .23$

(Davis & Kraus, 1997).

The proposition that intelligence is positively correlated with accuracy of personality

judgments is clearly tenable; empirical work spans back to the early 20th century. Adams (1927)

discovered that the ability to rate others was positively correlated (rs > .15) with being both

mentally bright and quick, and with a tendency for observation. While not a surprising finding,

the tendency for observation to be related to judgmental ability is in line with the importance of

the detection stage of the RAM. In a similar vein, Vernon (1933) found that abstract intelligence

and scholastic performance were positively related to the ability to judge strangers (rs = .31 and

.16, respectively). On the contrary, a study using multiple methods for assessing accuracy was

unable to substantiate earlier findings, as the relation between intelligence and accuracy for

targets was not significant ($r = .04$; Estes, 1938), but several methodological differences may

explain this finding.[3] That said, a later investigation during this early research era found that

accuracy – operationalized as a composite of (1) judging targets' self-reported personality and

(2) predictions of targets' actual behavior – was positively associated with intelligence ($r = .30$;

Cline, 1955).

Expanding upon these early works, many studies have explored the intelligence-accuracy

link for a variety of relationships and in different contexts. For instance, both GMA and verbal

intelligence were significantly positively correlated with personality judgment accuracy for

same-sex twin siblings, even after controlling for similarity among twin pairs (rs = .12 and .13,

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[3] In this study, accuracy was measured in several atypical manners. As related to this particular result, the first was having judges select the 10 most applicable descriptors of targets from a checklist of 41 options and comparing those selections to criteria obtained in a clinical setting. The second relevant method was to have judges attempt to match a description of two behaviors with a correct personality sketch for a total of seven targets.

respectively; Harris, Vernon, & Jang, 1999). Furthermore, a series of studies measuring

intelligence using the Wonderlic Personnel Test have returned mixed results. Scores were found

to be related to accuracy of personality judgments made based on nonverbal cues of strangers

(Lippa & Dietz, 2000), as well as for judging acquaintances ($r = .24$), but not when judging

targets engaged in an interview ($r = .13$; Christiansen et al., 2005). However, a more recent study

did not replicate the relation between judges' intelligence scores on that test and overall accuracy

($r = -.01$; Letzring, 2008).

In addition to GMA, the narrower construct of dispositional intelligence has also been

found to be related to accuracy of personality judgments ($r = .52$; Christiansen et al., 2005).

Dispositional intelligence is very similar to the construct of emotional intelligence (see Mayer,

Roberts, & Barsade, 2008), but rather than a focus on emotions, emphasis is placed on thoughts

and knowledge about the interrelations among behavior, traits, and situations (Christiansen et al.,

2005). De Kock, Lievens, and Born (2015) have fully replicated the work of Christiansen and

colleagues (2005) within the field of industrial and organizational psychology. Specifically, it

was found that dispositional intelligence was significantly related to judges' level of accuracy in

assessments of targets' in the domain of communication and people management, and this

connection was stronger for dispositional intelligence than GMA ($r = .34$ vs .20). Relatedly, it

has been found that both emotional intelligence and dispositional intelligence were significantly

related to distinctively accurate judgments of extraversion and, the notoriously difficult to judge,

neuroticism (Premack, 2011). In sum, while there is mixed evidence of a link between general

intelligence and accuracy, more narrow intellectual functions do appear positively associated

with personality judgment accuracy.

Attention. Attentiveness to the target, whether in-person, while observing audio-video recordings, or evaluating social media profiles, should play a role in the accuracy of judgments. This makes theoretical sense as inattention would result in fewer cues being detected (Funder, 1995), which even for high levels of cue utilization would likely result in lower levels of accuracy. In support of this position, Cardy and Kehoe (1984) found that selective attention was positively and significantly related to distinctive accuracy for hypothetical instructors' classroom behavior based on vignettes.[4] Not surprisingly the differences in accuracy found between those high versus low in selective attention were greater when cognitive demands were high rather than low. In a similar vein, another investigation also demonstrated the importance of attentional demands of the situation in which the judgment process occurs (Biesanz, Neuberg, Smith, Asher, & Judice, 2001). Specifically, distracted judges – those making judgments in situations with high attentional load – were more prone to committing errors and achieving lower personality judgment accuracy. Alternatively, a more recent study investigated the role of being an active and selective, compared to a passive but attentive, perceiver of information available on the social media platform of Facebook (Waggoner, Smith, & Collins, 2009). It was found that judges choosing the quantity and type of information they viewed (i.e., paid attention to) achieved similar levels of accuracy on judgments of political affiliation, religiosity, and the Big Five personality traits as did judges who viewed the same information but without an active role in selecting which cues to see. Taken together, these three studies provide evidence for the importance of attention to judgmental ability, and that it is more about actually attending to the

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[4] The measure used for making judgment ratings was a Behavioral Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) with five different dimensions. For each vignette used, three critical incidents were incorporated for each dimension. The accuracy criterion for each dimension rated for each hypothetical instructor was the averaged effectiveness rating by trained assessors across the three critical incidents included in each vignette.

information (i.e., cues) than taking an active role in selection of informational cues one

evaluates.

      Memory. Another important factor is the working memory of judges. Even if detection

of information is rather high, judges must possess an ability to recall the behaviors and

expressions of targets, and then consider how those might be indicative of target's stable

personality attributes. In sum, memory capabilities are thought to be critical for proper utilization

of cues (Christiansen et al., 2005; Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson, & Reeder, 1986).

While not a direct look at this connection, research has demonstrated that working memory is

positively related to making accurate judgments based on rules or a set of criteria (Hoffmann,

von Helversen, & Rieskamp, 2014). For instance, a rules-based judgment process to what makes

a job attractive might include evaluation of criteria such as salary, workplace collegiality,

technology, vacation time/sick leave, etc. In short, executing such rule-based strategies while

forming judgments involves inhibiting irrelevant cue information and attending to cues that are

important, which is precisely what is suggested by the utilization stage of the RAM. Aside from

this study, research evaluating the relation between accuracy of personality judgments and

judges' memory capability is virtually non-existent. In fact, I am only aware of one such study

(Krzyzaniak, 2018), which looked directly at this relation as part of a larger investigation of

effects of cognitive functioning and physical fitness on personality judgment ability. The results

of this study failed to demonstrate that memory, specifically recall of target behaviors, was

significantly predictive of either normative ($d = .03$) or distinctive accuracy ($d = .12$). However,

this single test of the relation between memory and accuracy, which was embedded in a larger

study, should not inhibit further scholarly attention. Rather, given the theoretical role of memory

to the judgment process and the current scarcity of research, I assert that this is an area of scholarship ripe for empirical exploration.

Judge's Own Personality

The second cluster of correlates is the personality characteristics of judges themselves, and is very likely the most extensively investigated. Studies have found links between judgmental ability and a multitude of favorable personality characteristics such as higher levels of agreeableness, psychological adjustment, social skills, greater tendencies for perspective-taking and empathy, as well as lower levels of neuroticism (Beer & Watson, 2008; Christiansen et al., 2005; Colman et al., 2017; Hall, Andrzejewski, & Yopchick, 2009; Human & Biesanz, 2011; Letzring, 2008; Taft, 1955). For this chapter, three aspects of personality are considered as characteristics of good judges and thus reviewed here: (1) Big Five personality traits, (2) the empathic response, and (3) psychological adjustment.

Big Five factors. The five factor model is the most widely accepted taxonomy of personality traits (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008), and encompasses the traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (the opposite of emotional stability). Such characteristics of individuals have important consequences in life (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006), including our ability to understand others' nonverbal behavior, emotions, honesty, and personality (Davis & Kraus, 1997; Hall, Andrzejewski, et al., 2009). Given that a large percentage of research studies require judgments of targets' personality to be made on measures of the Big Five traits, it is not surprising that such characteristics of judges themselves have been evaluated as potential correlates of accuracy. In general, however, there is not a large degree of consistency in how these traits are related to judgmental ability.

The relation between judges' openness to experience and their judgment accuracy has been marked by mixed findings. Early research found that qualities related to openness (such as interests in arts and drama) were related to a judge's accuracy (Estes, 1938; Vernon, 1933). More recent research had a similar finding with openness being positively associated ($r = .23$) with accuracy for judging targets' self-reported trait-relevant behavioral tendencies (Christiansen et al., 2005). On the other hand, a different study found this trait to be negatively associated with judges' overall accuracy ($r = -.20$), and with the accuracy of their judgments of targets' neuroticism in particular ($r = -.30$; Lippa & Dietz, 2000). It is possible that such findings might also be dependent upon gender of the judge, as Kolar (1995) found that openness was related to judgmental ability for females, but not males. In a related vein, it was also found that good male, but not necessarily female, judges tend to be extraverted and emotionally stable (Kolar, 1995). But for extraversion, too, there are mixed results. For example, Vernon (1933) found that good judges of others tend to be less sociable (i.e., less extraverted) – but this study did not disentangle the potential effect of gender.

More consistent findings, at least with regard to the direction of the relationship to judgmental ability, are found for the traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Controlling for gender, individuals who were more agreeable and conscientious and less neurotic made more accurate judgments of personality from first person text passages of responses to various contextual prompts (Hall, Goh, Schmid Mast, & Hagedorn, 2016). In a related vein, a review of early investigations supported the idea that emotional stability is a key feature of judgmental ability (Taft, 1955). Other research has found that judges' agreeableness was positively associated with both overall accuracy and normative accuracy in judging another's personality, but not associated with distinctive accuracy (Letzring, 2008, 2015).

Empathic response. The conscious process of attempting to envision others' points-of-view, termed perspective-taking, is a highly valued skill for positive interpersonal relations (Davis, 1996; Riggio, Tucker, & Coffaro, 1989); so too is empathy, the extension of this practice to include the matching of the thoughts and emotions of the other. Much research has shown positive relations between these tendencies and interpersonal sensitivity (Hall, Andrzejewski, et al., 2009), but there is relatively little work exploring such relations with personality judgment accuracy. That which does exist, and especially more recent work, seems to paint a rather consistent picture. An early study explored the relation of perspective-taking with accuracy in matching target self-descriptions using a forced-choice accuracy paradigm, for which a significant positive relation was found (Bernstein & Davis, 1982). However, this link was also mediated by length of observation, in that the combination of short observation lengths with high perspective-taking resulted in lower accuracy. Thus, it was argued that cognitively placing one's self in the shoes of the target, if undertaken too soon after meeting or observing someone, can perhaps hinder accuracy. This is because doing so has the potential to draw attention away from the target person, and instead place focus on imagining one's self in the given scenario.

The previous study aside, there have been several recent studies that have demonstrated the positive link between judgmental accuracy and the empathic responses of perspective-taking, empathy, fantasy, and personal distress. First, the ability to judge personality from passages of typed text was significantly associated with the tendency for empathic concern and marginally related to perspective-taking (Hall, Goh, et al., 2016). In another investigation, a reliable link was found between the empathic tendencies and normative accuracy, distinctive accuracy, and assumed similarity (Colman et al., 2017). Specifically, each empathic tendency was related to distinctive accuracy, while perspective-taking, empathic concern, and fantasy, but not personal

distress, were correlated with normative accuracy and judges' projection of themselves in

perceptions of others (i.e., assumed similarity). Building on this latter work, another

investigation was undertaken to explore the causal direction of the empathy-accuracy link

(Colman, 2018).[5] While experimental evidence for directionality of the empathy-accuracy

relation was not found, this study replicated the prior studies in that empathic concern,

perspective-taking, and fantasy correlated with normative accuracy; however, only personal

distress was significantly related to distinctive accuracy. More importantly, though, this study

found that state perspective-taking and state empathy correlated positively with personality

judgment accuracy.

Reviewing each of these investigations through the lens of the RAM, empathic

tendencies seem to be correlated with judgmental ability through the detection and utilization

stages (Colman et al., 2017). First, the processes of perspective-taking and exhibiting empathy

are active endeavors, which likely increases the attentiveness of judges to targets, thereby

increasing the detection of relevant cues. Secondly, these practices are likely to help judges

better utilize cues through increased appreciation of the others' current physical context and their

affective state of mind. In sum, possessing greater empathic tendencies – being able to

cognitively and emotionally step into others' shoes – is both a theoretically reasonable (within

the framework of RAM) and rather intuitive (lay persons often claim it promotes insight - *if you*

could only see from my point-of-view) characteristic of good judges of personality.

Psychological adjustment. It stands to reason that well-adjusted individuals – marked by

qualities such as high life satisfaction, self-esteem, and general well-being, and less depressive

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[5] This study also incorporated a manipulation of training design, but discussion of that aspect is not within the purview of this chapter. Interested readers may contact the author for a copy of the complete write-up of this study.

symptomology – are likely to experience less social anxiety and be able to focus their efforts on the detection and utilization of informational cues, thus allowing for greater accuracy. Indeed, it has been found that greater purpose in life was positively related to overall accuracy ($r = .18$; Letzring, 2008). However, subsequent research has indicated that psychological adjustment is not related to distinctive accuracy of personality judgments (Human & Biesanz, 2011; Letzring, 2015). Alternatively, it might also be the case that psychological adjustment is related to greater normative accuracy, as increased outward focus during social interactions would provide a better understanding of what people are like on average. Indeed, recent work provides evidence that psychological adjustment is positively related to normative accuracy (Human & Biesanz, 2011; Krzyzaniak, 2018; Letzring, 2015). Based on the available research, the take-away message is that psychological adjustment is not the most central characteristic of good judges, but having high levels should not be inhibitory to one's judgmental ability. In fact, well-adjusted judges are likely to be more adept at creating comfortable interactions in which targets would make more relevant cues available (Letzring, 2008), a point which is further elucidated in the subsequent section of this chapter on the *Behaviors of Judges*.

Motivation of the Judge

The third of the five individual characteristics of judgmental accuracy is motivation. According to the RAM, motivation should affect the detection and utilization stages of the judgment process; yet findings are mixed. On the affirmative, using a novel five-item measure of motivation to be accurate, one investigation demonstrated that a rather strong link exists between this characteristic and both normative and distinctive accuracy for judgments of video-recorded targets (ds = .36 and .64, respectively; Letzring & Colman, 2018). In several other studies using videotaped targets, however, motivation was not found to be related to accuracy. In one of the

studies (Hall, Blanch, et al., 2009; Study 5) both monetary (participants were told the top percent

of judges would receive compensation) and ego-relevant (participants were told skill for judging

other people is related to positive attributes, such as intelligence) manipulations were tested. The

monetary manipulation resulted in a non-statistically significant decrease ($d = -.36$) in the

accuracy of judgments of personal status and trait dominance compared to a control condition.

Moreover, the ego-relevant manipulation showed no effects on accuracy ($d = .00$). Adding to

this, two other studies manipulating ego relevance reported in Hall, Blanch, et al. (2009) failed to

impart differences for levels of accuracy for judgments of extraversion ($d = .01$; Study 6) as well

as judgments of trait dominance ($d = .01$; Study 7).

The above video-observation studies notwithstanding, information gathering behaviors

by judges is another important avenue by which motivation can impact the level of accuracy

achieved for targets with which judges directly interact. For example, one study found that

judges who were motivated to create accurate impressions were more succinct and direct in their

questioning and were also less biased while gathering information from targets (Neuberg, 1989).

To this end, Neuberg and his colleagues have also discovered that expectancies on the part of

judges led targets to behave in line with those expectations; that is, the judge created a self-

fulfilling prophecy (Judice & Neuberg, 1998; Neuberg, 1989; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987). For

instance, in simulated interviews, judges with a motivation to confirm negative expectations of

targets asked fewer questions and were less encouraging.[6] This behavior resulted in targets'

confirmation of the negative expectations (Judice & Neuberg, 1998). Alternatively, interviewers

with the goal of being accurate overcame the negative expectations by asking more questions and

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[6] The negative expectations were based on purported low scores on three job-related dimensions:
being goal-driven, sociability, and problem-solving skills.

being more encouraging of targets. Adding a wrinkle to these empirical findings, Biesanz et al.

(2001) found that attentional demands for judges moderates the effect of accuracy motivation.

Specifically, distracted judges are more prone to expectancy effects in their questioning of

targets as well as to making judgments that are in line with those expectancy effects.

Lastly, a few studies have investigated the effect that explicit accuracy goals have on

personality judgment accuracy. In one such study, it was explained to the experimental group of

participants that, "…it is important that you form the most accurate impressions possible for each

person" (Biesanz & Human, 2010, p. 591). The group receiving this explicit goal (as compared

to a no-goal group) achieved a significantly greater level of distinctive accuracy, but also had a

reduced level of normative accuracy. In another study (Colman, 2015), an attempt was made to

replicate and extend these findings. In particular, this investigation sought to independently

increase either normative accuracy without decrement to distinctive accuracy, or increase

distinctive accuracy without a decrement to normative accuracy. Ultimately, neither the direct

replication nor the extension of the study was successful. However, an important take-away was

that none of the explicit goals produced a reduction in judgmental accuracy. In sum, the relation

between motivation and personality judgment accuracy seems to be rather complex. That said, it

seems harm is unlikely to result from attempting to induce motivation for accuracy (with the

exception of offering a monetary incentive).

Gender of the Judge

The fourth characteristic, which has been a recurring theme in this area of scholarship, is

the gender of judges. It has been speculated that gender differences in judgmental ability might

arise due to a motivation to adhere to accepted gender roles (e.g., women being more socially

sensitive; Graham & Ickes, 1997; Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000). To this point, research cutting

across a wide range of content domains such as lie detection, personality traits, thoughts and

feelings, intelligence, and dominance has relatively consistently revealed that women have a

slight advantage over men when it comes to interpersonal accuracy (Hall, Gunnery, & Horgan,

2016). Compared to other characteristics that have been widely explored (e.g., nonverbal

behavior, judgments of affective states), however, investigations on gender differences in

personality judgment ability is limited. Additionally, a large proportion of such research comes

from secondary or supplementary analyses in studies designed to answer other research

questions, although some investigations seeking primarily to explore gender differences do exist.

For instance, one such study demonstrated that women provide more positive ratings of

targets than men, although this effect was rather small (rs = .10 to .25; Winquist, Mohr, &

Kenny, 1998). Even so, the effect was consistent across each of the Big Five traits at zero-

acquaintance, short-term acquaintance, and long-term acquaintance. Expanding upon this *female*

positivity effect, a more recent study sought to explore the role of gender on the normative and

distinctive accuracy of first impressions of personality (Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz,

2011). Paralleling previous research (Marcus & Lehman, 2002; Winquist et al., 1998), female

judges in this sample consistently formed more positive (i.e., normatively accurate) impressions

of targets.

The results have been mixed, however, among studies chiefly concerned with the ability

to accurately judge the unique characteristics of others (i.e., distinctive accuracy). Much research

has failed to find any gender differences at all for the Big Five traits or otherwise (e.g.,

Christiansen et al., 2005; De Kock et al., 2015). For example, using a gender-balanced round-

robin design with 25 eight-person groups, there were no gender differences in either consensus

(i.e., inter-judge agreement) or self-other agreement for judgments of the Big Five personality

factors (Marcus & Lehman, 2002). However, some investigations do report an accuracy

advantage for females across the Big Five traits based on ratings of individuals shown in

videotaped dyadic interactions (Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007; Schmid Mast, Bangerter, Bulliard,

& Aerni, 2011; Vogt & Colvin, 2003), as well as based on first-person text passages (Hall, Goh,

et al., 2016).

   Given the inconsistent results of studies exploring gender differences in personality

judgment accuracy, a review at the trait level is warranted. To start, while Schmid Mast and

colleagues (2011) found that women were better assessors of personality than men, it was also

noted that the gender effect seemed to be driven primarily by differences in judgments of

neuroticism. Similarly, in another study gender differences did not emerge for judgments across

the traits of extraversion, neuroticism, and masculinity-femininity (Lippa & Dietz, 2000).

However, when accuracy was analyzed by each individual trait, women achieved greater self-

other agreement than men for judgments of neuroticism. Additionally, there is evidence that

females are more accurately able to judge intelligence (Carney et al., 2007; Murphy, Hall, &

Colvin, 2003) and openness to experience (Carney et al., 2007) based on video recordings of

targets. Moreover, there is some evidence for gender differences, with females being more

accurate for judgments of extraversion as well as positive and negative affect (Ambady et al.,

1995; Carney et al., 2007).

   An interesting, yet noteworthy, twist to this is the effects of judge-target similarity for

gender and ethnicity on accuracy. It has been shown that female judges of female targets

achieved higher accuracy than male judges of male targets (Letzring, 2010). This may be due to

similarity between the judges and targets promoting understanding of likely trait-behavior

associations, and therefore enabling better detection and utilization of relevant cues in making

judgments (De Kock, Lievens, & Born, in press; Letzring, 2010). However, the fact that judge-target similarity was only found for women may be a reflection of females being both better judges and better targets. Overall, if a gender difference in judgmental ability exists, it would likely favor women. That said, I caution against making any large and sweeping generalizations since differences that were found were of rather small magnitude.

Behavior of Judges

A rather new area of scholarship, and the fifth and final characteristic related to the understanding and description of good judges of personality, surrounds the behaviors that contribute to this important ability. The RAM outlines that judges are responsible for recognition and processing of cues that are made available by targets, regardless of why they are made available. Even so, it is commonplace for individuals to elicit information from others during interpersonal dealings. Thus, a possible characteristic of good judges would be skills for such cue elicitation. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that judges are able to behave in ways that increase cue availability, and those cues aid in the achievement of greater judgment accuracy (Letzring, 2008; Lievens, Schollaert, & Keen, 2015).

In one study (Letzring, 2008) it was discovered that judges' use of basic social skills (e.g., eye contact, expressing warmth) and a lack of negative behaviors (e.g., seeking reassurance or advice, undermining or obstructing the target) were positively related to accuracy. It was concluded that such behaviors on the part of judges serve to increase targets' comfort and increase their willingness to reveal information (i.e., cues) about their true selves, which can then be detected and utilized when making judgments of the targets. Indeed, exploring this proposition, Letzring (2008) specifically evaluated the impact of having good judges present during interactions with targets. The assumption was that *if* good judges are cue elicitors, *then*

having more good judges within a recorded situation should increase observer accuracy. This was precisely what was found – observers of groups that contained at least one good judge had higher accuracy than observers of groups with no good judges. A subsequent series of studies (Lievens et al., 2015) investigated this cue elicitation prospect within assessment centers. It was found that role-players can be trained to elicit trait specific cues by behaving in a predetermined manner and/or asking specific questions aimed at invoking trait relevant behavior. Indeed, these cue elicitation strategies resulted in significantly greater levels of accuracy by assessors who only observed the assessment center exercises. In sum, the currently available evidence supports the notion that good judges are more skilled at eliciting relevant informational cues from targets.

It should also be noted that this behavioral characteristic may operate in harmony with some of the factors already discussed. For instance, specific motivations activating attentional processes toward targets, such as anticipation of future interactions (Neuberg & Fiske, 1987), may also lead judges to increase cue elicitation behaviors. In a similar fashion, those who have a propensity for perspective-taking and empathy may also naturally engage in behaviors that provide comfort for interaction partners. Additionally, highly empathic individuals may inquire about current thoughts and feelings, which might allow additional cues to be offered by targets. Furthermore, it is possible that those who are more sociable or extraverted will naturally elicit more cues as a by-product of continuing their interaction with targets, as compared to introverted individuals who may actively seek to reduce such stimulating experiences. In a similar vein, those who are well-adjusted have greater social skills and experience less social anxiety (Langston & Cantor, 1989; Riggio, Watring, & Throckmorton, 1993), which in turn allows for increased engagement with targets in a reposeful manner. Ultimately, these are questions that

can, and should, be answered by future research. At this point in time, it can simply be concluded that cue eliciting behaviors is but one of many characteristics of good judges.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Having now concluded our review of the correlates of the ability to make accurate judgments of others' personalities, let us now review a few important theoretical and methodological considerations for the continuation of research in this area. First, as explored in the preceding sections, there are inconsistencies in conclusions that have been drawn within this expansive literature. It is probable that such discrepancies are, at least in part, a reflection of the varying methodological approaches used up to this point. Providing some support for this position, when studies use tests in similar domains and/or use similar methodologies for investigating judgment accuracy, results are more consistent with one another (Schlegel, Boone, & Hall, 2017). This indicates that the contextual specificity of judgment accuracy becomes an important question to explore, and that such factors are important to consider when trying to build upon the current literature through replication and extension, as well as when attempting to synthesize and/or meta-analyze the existing literature. Alternatively, the inconsistencies may also be a reflection of different researchers having examined psychometrically different constructs. For instance, the judgment measures for personality vary widely – even when similar on a conceptual level. For example, much work has used variations of the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 2008), but others have used the HEXACO (Ashton & Lee, 2009) or versions of personality trait measures from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006). It is important that subsequent work in this area of scholarship consider these possibilities.

Another issue worthy of mention is the fact that research on the good judge has almost exclusively focused on the detection and utilization stages of the RAM. Recall that these two

stages are associated with the judge, while the relevance and availability stages are associated

with the target (Funder, 1995). Because of this, much research has only passively considered the

heterogeneity of the target pool. Intuition suggests the ability to judge others accurately should

not necessarily be dependent on the target person. That is, part of being a good judge is the

ability to correctly ascribe the personality characteristics of those who are least understood, as

well as those who are the most understood. This implicit assumption has led some to use a

diverse set of targets in terms of factors such as personality, experiences, and gender, as well as

situations in which targets are observed or interactions occur.

This methodological decision, which is commonplace, is opposite of what the RAM, with

the multiplicative conceptualization of the judgment process, would suggest is best. To this

point, recent work by Rogers and Biesanz (2018) has demonstrated that good targets should be

evaluated by judges in order to promote the observation of maximal differences in judgmental

ability. Centrally, good targets are characterized by making a substantial number of relevant cues

available in the external environment for judges to detect and use. Recall that according to the

RAM, if cues are not relevant to the attribute being judged and/or available for detection, even

great judges will be unable to make accurate judgments. Admittedly, however, the exclusive use

of good targets would change the search for characteristics of the good judge in an important

way. Specifically, the primary question would change from *who is the good judge of everyone* to

asking the narrower question of *who is a good judge of easy targets*? While this is certainly an

important question to answer, it is not the original question that has driven almost nearly a

century's worth of empirical effort. Perhaps, however, the original question is too broad and thus

should be narrowed to provide a realistic opportunity to find consistent results. Even so, if

researchers move forward with the exclusive use of good targets when investigating variables

thought to be related to good judges, it would behoove them to consider how such findings are likely to generalize to the accurate perception of *all targets*.

Future Directions

If the past century is any indication, it is likely that this area of research will continue to develop as interest in the good judge of personality is not likely to dwindle. As noted in the previous section, the inconsistencies in conclusions that have been drawn to this point may be, at least in part, a reflection of the varying conceptual and methodological approaches that have been used. Therefore, the development of new methodological techniques and further refinement of core theoretical underpinnings should allow for more nuanced investigations of the correlates of good judges. Incremental change is often the most prudent path to success, and I suggest that future research within this domain should take a similar approach. To this end, I now outline several worthy future directions including the development of a standardized measure, investigation of context specificity, as well as exploring best practices in training for and application of superior personality judgment skills.

Standardizing the Assessment of Judgmental Ability

The development and utilization of standardized measurements and methodological protocols is seen within other fields of psychological inquiry (e.g., clinical). While these, too, can be seen for some areas of interpersonal perception, such as for decoding nonverbal cues (e.g., Nowicki Jr. & Duke, 1994; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979), a standardized measure of the ability to accurately judge personality traits does not yet exist. This state of affairs necessitates that researchers create their own stimulus materials (e.g., videos of targets) in order to assess accuracy, which is time-consuming and slows the pace of confirming previous findings and making new discoveries. Moreover, the lack of a standardized measure makes it difficult to

compare findings across time, research groups, and even similar studies in the same domain of judgment (Schlegel et al., 2017), which is important to ensuring a generalizable and replicable scientific literature. As such, one important future undertaking for scholars immersed within this research field is to develop and validate a standardized assessment for personality judgment ability. Such a test (or set of tests) would certainly be useful (Murphy, 2016), especially if it would allow for cross-domain comparisons and longitudinal designs (Hall, Andrzejewski, Murphy, Schmid Mast, & Feinstein, 2008). Admittedly, this would be a large undertaking, but worthwhile nonetheless. To this point, some preliminary work has demonstrated feasibility of such a measure, and identified some basic attributes a standardized measure should incorporate (e.g., length of stimuli, # of targets; Letzring & Colman, 2018).

Assessing the Developmental Trajectory of Judgmental Ability

A second worthy area for exploration is the development of judgmental ability over the lifespan, particularly in childhood. Research has explored when and how theory of mind develops in children (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001), as well as how it is associated with accuracy (Bernstein & Davis, 1982; Colman et al., 2017). Yet, little research has explored the early development of personality judgment ability. However, one such cross-sectional study explored accuracy of judgments by 8-, 13-, and 18-year-olds of other individuals in their age group (McLarney-Vesotski, Bernieri, & Rempala, 2006), and found that accuracy for judgments of the Big Five personality traits generally improved with age. Eight-year-olds were accurate only in judgments of extraversion, 13-year-olds achieved accuracy for the traits of extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness, while 18-year-olds were accurate in judgments of extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, but were significantly inaccurate on the trait of agreeableness. This study certainly gives some important insights on judgmental ability of youth,

but still more can and should be learned about the development of this skill given the importance

of accuracy to everyday life. This is certainly an area where a standardized measure of

personality judgment accuracy would be beneficial, as longitudinal investigations are necessary

for this suggested line of inquiry.

Exploring Contextual Specificity of Judgmental Ability

There is ample research exploring the generality of judgmental ability, but findings have

been mixed (e.g., Boone & Schlegel, 2016; Cline & Richards Jr, 1960; Schlegel et al., 2017).

This leads to the question of whether some people are more accurate at assessing personality

within certain contexts. This is not reframing the generality question of whether a good judge of

personality is also a good judge for other domains (such as emotion, honesty, etc.), but rather if

some contexts are better for making accurate judgments than others due to individuals'

experience and knowledge of trait-behavior links. For example, might teachers be better at

judging broad personality attributes when assessing others in a learning situation? Alternatively,

might performance assessors have a knack for accurately rating employees based on cues

available within the workplace (see De Kock et al., in press)? This is an interesting empirical

question now that the psychological nature of situations are being conceptualized and quantified

(Funder, 2016; Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015), which might allow for a more nuanced

understanding of the processes that might underlie situational specificity. If this is indeed a factor

that contributes to variability in judgmental ability, it would likely provide insight into avenues

for beneficial application of such skills.

Applied Opportunities for Good Judges of Personality

Another important direction for research within this domain is exploring the manners in

which good judges are able to capitalize on their skills. One such realm where superior skills in

judgmental ability should be valued is leadership (Colman, Letzring, & Lion, 2018; Schmid Mast, Jonas, Cronauer, & Darioly, 2012). This is because leaders with accurate understanding of followers are better positioned to design work for, inspire motivation within, and provide intellectual stimulation to their employees (Colman & Lion, 2018). Beyond leadership, there are other domains in which good judges are likely to provide advantages. For instance, teachers who are good judges might be able to structure content in more interesting ways for students to engage with and learn material. Additionally, it is possible that health care providers with high judgmental accuracy ability are especially likely to make decisions among treatment options based upon which an individual is most likely to implement and adhere to. In short, researchers should keep an eye toward the value of this skill while continuing their research agenda. Coverage of other applied implications and applications of trait accuracy research is provided in Section V of this handbook.

Training and Development of Good Judges

Under the assumption that there are a multitude of areas which would benefit from increased judgmental ability (as just discussed), it would be advantageous for future empirical work to explore the training and on-going development of this important skill (see also chapter 21 by Blanch-Hartigan & Cummings in this handbook). It has been concluded that on average across psychological domains (e.g., emotion recognition, lie detection), training aimed at increasing person perception accuracy is effective (Blanch-Hartigan, Andrzejewski, & Hill, 2012). However, virtually nonexistent are studies looking at the trainability of personality judgment accuracy. One recent study (Colman, 2018) attempted to increase personality judgment accuracy by training perspective-taking or empathy skills. However, the brief, text-based intervention was not successful and led to more questions than answers. For instance, given that

in-person training with practice and feedback is the most effective strategy for other person

perception accuracy domains (e.g., empathic accuracy, deception detection; Blanch-Hartigan et

al., 2012), it remains unclear if such training designs are efficacious for the domain of

personality. Ultimately, this line of inquiry is ripe for investigation, and is certain to be of

interest to basic and applied researchers alike.

Conclusion

As Gage (1953) noted more than 60 years ago about what characterizes good judges of

personality, "the results are far from conclusive… [and the] full story is not yet in" . Even with

that conclusion, scholars were not convinced that meaningful moderators of this ability simply

did not exist – hence, research continued then and is still thriving now. Today, looking at

variability among people's level of accuracy in judging personality, there is adequate evidence

that this is an individual difference (Christiansen et al., 2005; Letzring, 2008; Rogers & Biesanz,

2018), and many possible correlates have been identified, most of which were discussed in this

chapter. Although smaller and more inconsistent effects are found for this moderator of accuracy

than others outlined by the RAM (e.g., the target; Biesanz, 2010), individual differences in this

ability deserve no less scholarly consideration or empirical attention moving forward.

Much like other scholars have indicated, there does not yet exist an extremely clear

portrait of the good judge of others' personality. However, if pressed to describe the profile of a

good judge, I would tentatively describe *her* as being *agreeable*, *emotionally stable*,

psychologically well-adjusted, and having *above average intelligence* with the *motivation* to

make accurate impressions. When engaging in the personality judgment process, she would have

a *tendency for empathy* and *actively engaging with targets* in an effort to elicit information to

which *attention is given* and *recalled* as judgments are being made. Even with this tentative

description of an optimal profile of the good judge, there is much work to do, and, dare I say, this

is an exciting time for such research. Scholars are now in a position, especially with the

increasing number of analytical tools at their disposal, to make great strides in further

identifying, characterizing, and hopefully training *good judges* of others' personality.

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