

Short Report

Do We Know Who Values Us?

Dyadic Meta-Accuracy in the Perception of Professional Relationships

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People often need to know what others think of them; for example, to gauge whom to approach to collaborate or invite out, or from whom to seek assistance. Research on *metaperceptions* shows strong evidence for generalized meta-accuracy (i.e., people knowing whether the rest of the world tends to see them, for example, as extraverted or intelligent) but less for dyadic meta-accuracy (i.e., people knowing how other people view them differently; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Levesque, 1997; Malloy & Albright, 1990; Malloy, Albright, Kenny, Agatstein, & Winquist, 1997). In metajudgments of individual traits and abilities, people generally assume that they make the same impression on all interaction partners, rather than differentiating their unique impressions on each (Kenny, 1994). However, for more relational constructs such as friendship, liking, humor, considerateness, and interestingness, perceivers can typically differentiate others' unique evaluations (DePaulo, Kenny, Hoover, Webb, & Oliver, 1987; Kenny, 1994; Levesque, 1997).

Why does dyadic meta-accuracy exist for relational constructs? Kenny and DePaulo (1993) theorized that dyadic meta-accuracy exists only because people believe their evaluations will be reciprocated by others. If people believe their evaluations will be reciprocated, they can introspect about their opinions of others to infer others' likely opinions of them. Kenny and DePaulo (1993) argued that existing data are less consistent with a second mechanism—sensitivity to relationship-relevant cues—because these cues are managed actively and interpreted selectively. We present evidence for this second mechanism by demonstrating dyadic meta-accuracy when controlling for presumed reciprocity.

METHOD

Participants

The entire first-year Master's in Business Administration (M.B.A.) class of a major university completed measures

halfway through their first semester. The 239 individuals (69% male, 58% U.S. citizens) were split into 16 round-robin groups of 14 to 15 people each.

Procedure

Given the importance of building relationships with others who can help students' careers, participants recorded their perceptions of "value as a future professional contact" on a 9-point scale (1 = *much less than average*, 5 = *average*, 9 = *much more than average*) for each individual in the round robin. They also reported how they believed each other group member rated them (i.e., their metaperceptions).

Analysis

To preserve statistical independence, the group was the unit of analysis for significance tests. We report accuracy and reciprocity as within-subjects correlations (DePaulo et al., 1987).

RESULTS

Interpersonal judgments were analyzed using the Social Relations Model (Kenny & La Voie, 1984). In our perception measurements, 20% of variance resulted from consistency in how perceivers used the scale, 13% of variance resulted from consensus in ratings of targets, and 67% of variance resulted from dyadic effects and measurement error. In our metaperception measurements, 37% of variance resulted from consistency in how perceivers believed the rest of the world viewed them, 4% of variance resulted from perceivers' consistent views of others as harsh vs. soft judges, and 59% of variance resulted from dyadic effects plus error. Using formulas from Lashley and Bond (1997), we found that all components were significant ($p_{\text{rep}} > .999$).

Generalized meta-accuracy was significant, $r(237) = .26$, $d = 0.54$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .997$. Individuals knew, on average, how valued they were by the group. Dyadic meta-accuracy was also significant, $\bar{r} = .44$, $t(15) = 29.7$, $p_{\text{rep}} > .999$, $d = 15.3$; this finding indicated that perceivers could distinguish between people who valued them more and those who valued them less.

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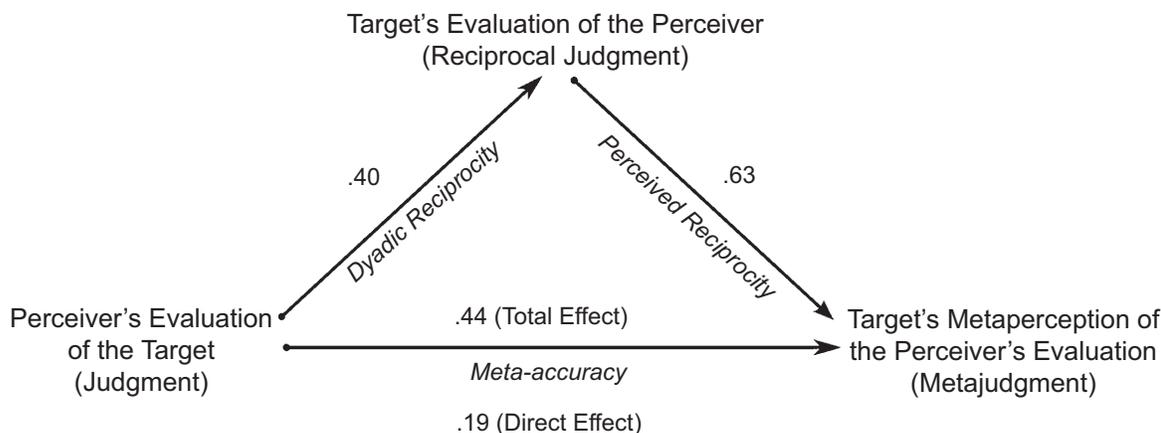


Fig. 1. Results of regression analyses examining targets' meta-accuracy in their judgments of how they are evaluated by others, which is the association between the perceiver's evaluation of the target (judgment) and the target's metaperception of the perceiver's evaluation (metajudgment). The figure shows the total effect of the perceiver's judgment on the target's metajudgment and the direct effect of the perceiver's judgment when the target's evaluation of the perceiver (reciprocal judgment) is controlled.

Did participants' dyadic meta-accuracy result from a heuristic of presumed reciprocity alone? We first conducted mediation analyses (Baron & Kenny, 1986; see Fig. 1 for results). The first step was establishing dyadic meta-accuracy, the association between a participant's metaperceptions and how that participant was actually perceived by others. The second step was establishing *dyadic reciprocity*, the extent to which people genuinely reciprocated each other's opinions, or the correlation between how a participant perceived others and how that participant was perceived by others, $\bar{r} = .40$, $t(15) = 19.4$, $p_{\text{rep}} > .999$, $d = 10.01$. The third step was establishing *perceived dyadic reciprocity*, the correlation between a participant's metaperceptions and how that participant perceived others, $\bar{r} = .70$, $t(15) = 38.2$, $p_{\text{rep}} > .999$, $d = 19.7$. In the fourth step, when reciprocity was included in the model, the coefficient for accuracy decreased from .44 to .19, Sobel test $Z = 5.45$, $p_{\text{rep}} > .999$. However, dyadic meta-accuracy remained significant, $\bar{r} = .19$, $t(15) = 12.3$, $p_{\text{rep}} > .999$, $d = 6.4$. Reciprocity was a partial, but not full, mediator of dyadic meta-accuracy.

We then investigated whether people are sensitive to relationship-relevant cues or whether they indiscriminately apply the reciprocity heuristic. Those people who perceived greater reciprocity were indeed those whose relationships were more reciprocated, $r(237) = .33$. This finding suggests that presumed reciprocity is not merely a heuristic that perceivers apply equally, but is itself a cue that people use to achieve dyadic meta-accuracy.

DISCUSSION

We tested and found support for Kenny and DePaulo's (1993) theoretical argument that presuming reciprocity enables perceivers to achieve dyadic meta-accuracy. Although projecting their beliefs accounted for much of perceivers' accuracy, it did not account for all of it. People do not appear to achieve accuracy through introspection and projection alone.

The absence of complete mediation provides suggestive evidence for Kenny and DePaulo's (1993) second mechanism, which they proposed yet dismissed. We suggest perceivers also use feedback from their social landscape to determine their relative standing with others, even if such feedback from interaction partners tends to be rare and noisy (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & McNulty, 1992). Individuals appear to be at least partly sensitive to how they are regarded by others. This finding suggests that people have more insight into their relationships than previously believed. Future research should seek to understand how we achieve this sensitivity. Because dyadic meta-accuracy can help us know which relationships to pursue and which to avoid, these results have important implications for the formation of social networks.

Our results also extend evidence for dyadic meta-accuracy to perceptions of professional value, a judgment not previously explored and for which accuracy was substantial. One might expect dyadic meta-accuracy across relational constructs for which it is acceptable, and even normative, that people hold different schemas about how to judge others. In the case of personality traits, most perceivers presumably interpret party-going as a sign of extraversion. However, we all have our own taste for who is likable, funny, interesting, or potentially a valuable contact in the future.

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