

SOME FACTORS AFFECTING INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION

by

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B. S., Longwood College, 1942

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A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER, OF SCIENCE

Department of Psychology

KANSAS STATE COLLEGE  
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE



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## INTRODUCTION AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

This study was made in an attempt to identify some of the factors that help an individual make accurate evaluations of others.

This line of research has interested many psychologists. As early as 1927, Adams (1) found that averaging the judgments of several observers gave a more accurate picture of a personality than ratings by any one. Further, he stated there are two types who judge others well: "(1) inferential (more inclusive and less accurate) who observes, then rationalizes. He knows and knows how he knows. (2) emotional (less inclusive and more accurate) who emotionalizes by observations (a sort of pseudo-empathy). He knows but knows not how he knows". Adams lists these characteristics of a good judge of others: touchy, quick-tempered, glum, moody, lacking in courage, independent, anti-social or indifferent, egotistic, and not interested in, but cold-blooded toward others, whom he uses as tools. "One who is most interested in himself understands others best." This conclusion contradicts the hypothesis, frequently encountered, that good judges of personality must themselves be well-adjusted.

Ten years later, in 1937, Allport (2) presented his ideas on understanding others. In attempting to summarize and integrate the existing literature Allport proposed that excellence of judgment is most affected by (a) the inherent ability of the judge, (b) how overt, expressive, and well-defined are traits being judged, and (c) how "open" or "enigmatic" the subject is. A

good judge of others, according to Allport, will have experience, will be similar to those he is judging, will be intelligent, have insight, complexity and detachment.

While the field of interpersonal perception is by no means a new one, an increasing number of studies have been done in this area in the past three or four years. One of the most recent of these (June 1955), by Webb (16), agrees with Adams' conclusion that the number of judgments affects accuracy. "Average group ratings were reliable; (but these) group ratings were an average of individual ratings which were no more reliable than (highly unreliable) self-rating." While this finding affirms the conclusion that pooled ratings are more accurate than individual ratings, it tells us nothing about the factors which influence an individual's accuracy.

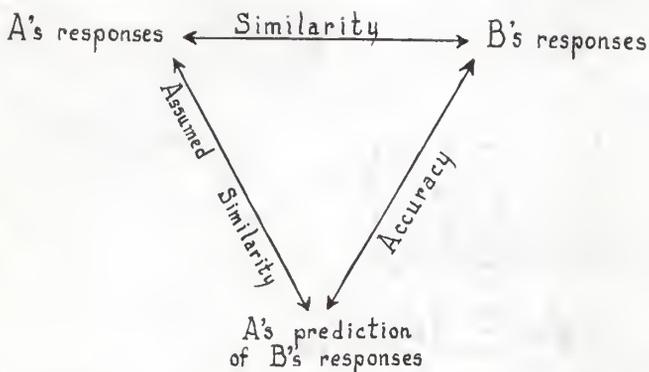
An often-used term in this field is "empathy". Dymond (7, 8) defines empathy as "the imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling and acting of another and so structuring the world as he does". She states, "Differences of ability to predict responses of others is greater than chance." Using her rating scale, she found that females were slightly better predictors than males and were more easily predicted than males. It was easier for her subjects to predict the responses of an individual who is highly empathic. Individuals with empathy are better adjusted and more secure. This conflicts with Adams' (1) conclusions, that the best judges are anti-social and otherwise somewhat maladjusted.

Norman and Ainsworth (14) support this line of theorizing with their hypothesis that "projection would be negatively related to both reality and empathy, but that the latter two variables would be positively related to each other." To them empathy (where the judge has "insight" into the other) requires a realistic estimate of others, whereas projection (where the judges does not have insight, but projects his own responses upon others) does not require a realistic estimate of others. They consider projection to be an unconscious, defense mechanism of the ego and say that it inherently implies maladjustment, insecurity and reality distortion. In their experiment, subjects filled out a personality questionnaire (GAMIN) themselves and then estimated how others would respond to the same questionnaire. The study verified that "Reality and empathy would correlate more closely with adjustment than would projection." On traits AIN, total adjustment correlated with total projection at .18, adjustment with reality at .46, and adjustment with empathy at .56. The last two are significant at the one percent level.

In a similar study, Bender and Hastorf (3, 4) tried to arrive at a measure of empathy which eliminates the effects of projection. They found that the "forecaster's own score resembles his forecast and his forecasts for different subjects resemble each other." As a result of this, the judge is more accurate if he actually resembles the subject being judged. Bender and Hastorf had undergraduates take the Allport-Vernon Scale of Values, then had each choose an associate and predict his responses to the same scale. They called the deviation of prediction from

the actual responses of the associate the empathy score, and the deviation of prediction from the predictor's own test score the "projection" score. They subtract the empathy score from the projection score and call the resultant measure the refined empathy score. It is not correlated with similarity while the raw empathy score was. They felt that projection probably was one reason why a successful forecaster of one subject could not be expected to have similar success with other subjects.

Consider what is meant by "empathy", "projection", and similar terms. These studies all employ the experimental model diagrammed in Fig. 1.



Three questionnaire administrations are involved: one which obtains A's own responses, one obtaining B's responses, and one obtaining A's prediction of B's responses. Now three measures of similarity may be employed in analyzing these responses. The extent to which A's and B's responses coincide reflects the initial similarity of the two. The degree of correspondence of A's own responses to his prediction of B's responses reflects the extent to which A assumes himself as similar to B. The degree to which A's prediction of B's responses agrees with B's own responses determines the "accuracy" of A's prediction.

Now the authors above define "empathy" as the accuracy of prediction. "Projection" is defined operationally as a high degree of similarity between A's own responses and his prediction of B's responses. As Cronbach (6) and Gage and Cronbach (10) have pointed out, if A and B are similar and if A assumes he is similar to B, then A will of necessity be accurate in his judgments. Thus Dymond's finding that subjects who were "empathic" were also easily predicted may simply reflect the fact that such judges are more "average", that is, more similar to most others. This would also be reflected in adjustment.

Norman and Ainsworth (14) label assumed similarity as projection. They then say that projection implies maladjustment, insecurity, and other negative attributes, and deduce that high assumed similarity means maladjustment. The correlation of .18 between assumed similarity and adjustment indicates that this may be true for some of their subjects. However, the fact that Fiedler (9) has hypothesized that the assumed similarity measure reflects "warmth of interpersonal relationships", and, the further fact that it is realistic to assume oneself similar to a person to whom one is actually similar, indicate that it may be injudicious to consider assumed similarity as a pure measure of projection with all the negative connotations implicit in the latter term.

Gage and Cronbach (10) have pointed out that when Bender and Hastorf (3, 4) subtract "assumed similarity" from "accuracy" to produce their measure of "refined empathy" they also eliminate from the "empathic" category the realistic judgments of people

who are actually similar to their partners. Gage and Cronbach also point out that what may appear to be accuracy may be a mental set to assume similarity. They emphasize that perception of others demands different things of the judge in different situations. A judge may be good at gathering information and bad at drawing inferences. Investigators should adequately specify what they mean to measure.

It seems likely that such terms as "empathy" and "projection" carry with them a load of surplus meaning which is attributed to the measures used and which may interfere with the researcher's interpretation of his results. If this is true, the more neutral terms "similarity", "assumed similarity" and "accuracy" might better be employed. This course will be followed throughout this thesis.

According to Taft's review of the literature (15), social detachment is prerequisite to the ability to judge people accurately. The poor judge is more socially orientated. The ability to judge the traits of people is "good in an egotist for although he is cold-blooded and not interested in others, he develops a shrewd ability of measuring others, not as human beings, but as tools". Taft summarizes studies which indicate that interpersonal perception is better in those of high dramatic and artistic interests (but not ability) and in those of superior intelligence. Perception is also best in the well adjusted. Leaders, salesmen, and those enjoying popularity are good judges, but Taft points out that this may be due to ability to influence others to respond as they wish them to respond.

These studies do seem contradictory. Characteristics that correlate with accuracy in one study do not do so in another. One reason for this is that accuracy of judgment depends on the conditions and elements of the situation, as well as on the characteristics of the judge and/or subject being judged. Most studies have concentrated on personality characteristics in the judge and ignored situational and other determinants of accuracy.

One ignored determinant might well be the amount of information the judge receives. Does information help in the understanding of others? If so, what kinds of information and how much would be most effective? Not enough satisfactory research has been done on this. According to Lorge (12), information about the frequency of particular responses to items seems to be of greatest value. This knowledge improves the ability of poor judges by helping them to make judgments less extreme in error, so that their perception becomes comparable to mediocre and good judges.

An excellent summary of some of the studies mentioned and of other previous studies in this field is found in "The Perception of People" by Bruner and Taguiri (5). Their survey of the literature "deals with two traditional areas of inquiry: First, the recognition or identification of emotions in others; Second, the judgment or perception of personality." This study is concerned with the latter.

Bruner and Taguiri report that such things as culture, role relationships, the factor of realism, the demands of the situation and the internal state of the perceiver are of utmost importance in forming impressions of other people.

In summary, we find that some investigations are contradictory, some appear accurate over a small area, and some, realizing their own limitations, urge further research. The present study attempts to study two aspects of such judgments: the relationship between similarity and accuracy, and the effects upon accuracy of increasing the amount of information available to the judge. The following hypotheses were advanced:

- A - People who are similar are more accurate judges than those who are dissimilar.
- B - Judges with a relatively large amount of information about their partners will be more accurate than those with relatively little information.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

The participants in this study were drawn from two classes of General Psychology at Kansas State College. All of the students in these two classes were administered questionnaires which included (a) fourteen items from the California F scale, (b) a list of fourteen occupations which the respondent was asked to rank in order of preference, (c) seven items dealing with attitudes toward negroes, and (d) seven items dealing with the respondent's attitudes toward himself. Only the F scale and occupational choice responses were included in this study.

The students were divided into three sections in such a way that each section had the same mean F scale score. Each section was assigned, at random, one of three experimental variations, to be described below. In the experiment proper, members of the sections were then given varying amounts of information about other students and were asked to fill out the questionnaire described above as they felt these others would respond. In the following, students who estimated the responses will be referred to as judges (Js), and those who served as the objects of judgment will be called subjects (Ss).

The experimental treatment consisted in providing the three sets of Js with varying amounts of information, as follows:

Variation I: Js were given only the name and major field of each S assigned to their group, and were asked to estimate his responses to the questionnaire.

Variation II: Before making their estimates Js were given the Ss name and major field, plus additional background information (written on the blackboard) including his age, his home town, size of home town, his church membership and church attendance, and his parent's occupation.

Variation III: Before making their estimates, Js were given all the information in Variation II, and in addition heard a tape recording by the S of his interests, goals and aspirations. The recordings varied in length from one and one half to five minutes.

To facilitate collection of the data, the appropriate information was presented to groups, ranging in number from three to eight Js. Consequently, only those class members were accepted as Js whose free hours coincided with the free hours of several other students.

Ss, whose responses the Js predicted, were selected from a third section of General Psychology. They were selected on the basis of having (a) free time in common with a large number of Js, and (b) F scale scores which varied over a wide range. In order to check on the consistency of a J's accuracy of prediction, it was decided to have each J predict the scores of four different Ss. In order to provide for four judgments by each J and to fit in with the free hours of Js, a total of fourteen Ss had to be selected.

In practice, then, during any one experimental hour three groups of Js, representing subgroups from the larger experimental sections, were present in three different rooms. The four Ss present during a particular hour went to these rooms one at a time and remained in each room while an Experimenter presented the Js with the information appropriate to their treatment. The S then left the room and the Js attempted to predict his responses to the questionnaire. When all the Js had finished estimating the responses of one S, another S was brought in until estimates had been made for each S.

Thus the J's own responses to the questionnaire, the J's prediction of the S's responses, and the S's own responses were available for comparison.

Because of a lack of time, four Js in Variation III and two in Variation II were able to judge only three Ss. In addition, one J in Variation III arrived late and judged only two Ss. Because some Ss' schedules were more flexible than those of others so that they were more often available for the experiment, certain of the Ss were judged by more Js than were others.

Cronbach's (6) profile similarity score was used in analysing the accuracy of prediction for the F scale. The profile similarity score is obtained by taking the difference between the J's response and the S's response on each item of the questionnaire, squaring the difference, summing the squares over all items, and taking the square root of this sum.

Three profile similarity scores were obtained for each judge-subject pair: (a) The profile similarity between a J's own response and his prediction of a S's response was defined as the J's assumed similarity to that S on the F scale. (b) The profile similarity between a J's own response and a S's own response was defined as the actual similarity between this judge-subject pair on the F scale. (c) The profile similarity between a J's prediction of a S's response and the S's own response was defined as the accuracy score of the J in predicting that S's responses to the F scale.

Spearman's rank order correlation method was used in the analysis of occupational ranking. In the same manner as above, three rank order correlation coefficients were computed for each pair. Again, assumed similarity was determined by comparing

a J's own response with his prediction of a S's response, actual similarity by comparing the J's own response, with the S's own response, and accuracy by comparing the prediction of the J's estimate of the S's response with the S's actual response.

## RESULTS

### Relation Between Similarity and Accuracy

A few people judged only two or three Ss. Therefore, to facilitate statistical analysis, only those who judged four were included in this analysis.

For any judge-subject pair, there are three sets of calculations possible: (a) similarity between J and S; (b) assumed similarity, that is, the similarity between J's own pattern and his estimate of S's pattern; and (c) accuracy, the extent to which J's estimates of S's responses coincide with S's actual responses.

Therefore, the relationships between these variables were computed for each J using Kendall's rank correlation coefficient, tau (11). That is, for each J the correlation was computed between (a) his similarity to the four Ss and his accuracy in judging them, (b) his similarity to Ss and the extent to which he assumed himself similar, and (c) his assumed similarity and his accuracy in judging the Ss.

To determine the over-all relationship between these variables, the actual distribution of correlation coefficients was compared by means of chi square with the distribution to be expected if the variables were independent.

As Table 1 shows, the relation between similarity and accuracy on the F scale is much higher than expected by chance.

Table 1. Relation between similarity and accuracy-F scale

	Observed	:	Expected
$+1.00$ & $+1.67$	21		7.5
$+1.33$	14		9.4
0	6		11.2
$-.33$	2		9.4
$-.67$ & $-1.00$	2		7.5
Total	45		45
$\chi^2=38.81$	$P < .001$		$df=4$

These results support Meidinger's (13) findings that those who were similar were significantly more accurate in judgment than those who were dissimilar.

Table 2. Relation between similarity and assumed similarity-F scale

	Observed	:	Expected
$+1.00$ & $+1.67$	4		7.2
$+1.33$	16		8.9
0	8		10.8
$-.33$	9		8.9
$-.67$ & $-1.00$	6		7.2
Total	43		43
$\chi^2=8.00$	$P > .05$		

Table 2 presents the relation between assumed similarity and actual similarity on the F scale. As can be seen, the relationship is not statistically significant. Individuals do not assume themselves as more similar to those whom actually they resemble.

Table 3. Relation between assumed similarity and accuracy-F scale

	Observed	:	Expected
+1.00 & +.67	10		7.7
+.33	16		9.6
0	6		11.5
-.33	11		9.6
-.67 & -1.00	3		7.7
Total	46		46.1
$\chi^2=10.66$			$P < .05$

Table 3 represents the relation between assumed similarity and accuracy on the F scale. There is a low positive relationship. Thus, a J who assumes himself similar to a S is somewhat more accurate in judging that S.

When one considers the relationship between the same three variables in judgments of occupational preference, the results differ from those found in judgments of the F scale. As shown by Table 4, similarity of judge to subject does not affect accuracy of judging occupations, whereas accuracy and similarity were highly related in F scale judgments.

Table 4. Relation between similarity and accuracy - occupations

	Observed	:	Expected
$+1.00$ & $+0.67$	9		7.7
$+0.33$	7		9.6
0	12		11.5
$-0.33$	7		9.6
$-0.67$ & $-1.00$	11		7.7
Total	46		46.1
$\chi^2=3.03$		$P > .50$	

Considering occupations again, Table 5 shows that the relation between actual similarity and assumed similarity is much higher than expected by chance. This is quite contrary to the comparison of actual similarity and assumed similarity on the F scale.

Table 5. Relation between similarity and assumed similarity - occupations

	Observed	:	Expected
$+1.00$ & $+0.67$	23		8.0
$+0.33$	8		10.0
0	8		12.0
$-0.33$	6		10.0
$-0.67$ & $-1.00$	3		8.0
Total	48		48
$\chi^2=34.57$		$P < .001$	

Table 6 compares assumed similarity and accuracy in relation to occupations. As may be seen when a J assumes himself similar

to the S he is judging he is more accurate. However, it should be noted that while the correlation is positive, it is also slight. The same is true of this relationship in judgments on the F scale.

Table 6. Relation between assumed similarity and accuracy - occupations

	Observed	:	Expected
$+1.00$ & $+1.67$	13		7.7
$+1.33$	15		9.6
0	8		11.5
$-.33$	4		9.6
$-.67$ & $-1.00$	7		7.7
Total	47		46.1
$\chi^2 = 11.08$		$P < .05$	

#### Effects of Information Upon Accuracy

It was predicted that the Js who were given the most information about Ss would be more accurate in their judgments than those who received less information. As a measure of accuracy, profile similarity scores were computed between J's estimates of the S and the S's actual responses. An array of accuracy scores was made and the scores were divided into quartiles. Quartile 1 represents the most accurate judgments, and Quartile 4 represents the least accurate scores.

The correlation between accuracy and increasing information in F scale judgments does not support the original hypothesis.

In fact, it is slightly, but not significantly, in the opposite direction (Table 7). Thus more information about the S does not increase the J's accuracy.

Table 7. Relation between accuracy and amount of information on the F scale.

	<u>Accuracy</u>				Total
	Most Q1	Q2	Q3	Least Q4	
Variation I	22	17	19	18	76
Variation II	20	17	20	17	74
Variation III	16	22	18	22	78
Total	58	56	57	57	228
$\chi^2 = 2.57$		$P > .85$		$df = 6$	

Table 8 shows the relationship between accuracy and the amount of information when occupational preferences were judged. It is evident that the observed frequencies would be expected by chance less often than five percent of the time.

Table 8. Relation between accuracy and amount of information - occupations

<u>Amount of Information</u>	<u>Accuracy</u>				Total
	Most Q1	Q2	Q3	Least Q4	
Variation I	16	17	15	24	72
Variation II	24	17	13	18	73
Variation III	15	21	27	13	76
Total	55	55	55	55	220
$\chi^2 = 12.54$		$P < .05$		$df = 6$	

However, deviations in Table B are not systematic. Thus, Variation II has the largest number of judgments in the most accurate quartile, and the second largest number in the least accurate quartile and though Variation III unexpectedly has fewer judgments than any other variation in the most accurate quartile, it also has fewer than the other variations in the least accurate quartile.

#### DISCUSSION

The results are inconclusive and raise certain questions. Most especially, why do the results for judgments of F scale scores and of occupations differ? Can it be that the areas in which judgments are made affect results? Can a judge be accurate about one facet of a personality and completely inaccurate about another? If so, why? Will a judge have more insight regarding others in areas where he himself is best adjusted and less insight in areas where he has some maladjustments? The study raises more questions than it answers.

Can it be that with regard to the F scale, it may hurt a judge's ego to recognize himself in a subject but that with regard to occupations it would not be as threatening to say, "I am like this person"? But if one is similar and assumes he is similar, how can he be inaccurate so often, especially when assumed similarity is related to accuracy?

Why is one more accurate in judgment when he assumes himself similar to the subject he judges? Perhaps he relaxes

when he thinks himself like the subject and therefore can pay attention to cues of the individual whereas, if he feels himself different from the subject, there must be more of an effort to understand the subject so he tries harder but the results are inaccurate because of tension and anxiety.

From the assumption that accuracy increases with information one might change to the assumption that, with some degree of information, an individual feels more qualified to judge and, therefore, makes more extreme judgments. This supports the axiom "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". This may be a possible explanation as to why accuracy did not increase with information.

The bare facts of historical background may give little insight regarding an individual's ego. And for various reasons a subject might exaggerate or otherwise falsify his goals and aspirations. Also to be considered is the fact that college students are seldom called on to make judgments of their fellows regarding their occupational preference or their F scale responses. Since students have no need to make this type of judgment of their peers they are not proficient in it.

Further study might involve judgments made after a few years of association, either daily, intimately, socially, occupationally, or socially and occupationally to discover if there is any point at which accuracy increases.

Also of interest is the question whether a person of broader and more varied experiences is a better judge of people.



As a final qualification of these results, the judges, so far as is known, had no strong motivation for accurate judgment. The consequence of their evaluation had no effect on them as individuals or even as a group. Stronger motivation might produce greater accuracy.

#### SUMMARY

A questionnaire, containing items from the California F scale and a list of occupational preferences, was administered to students in general psychology classes at Kansas State College. Some of these students were designated as judges and some were designated as subjects on the basis of time available. Judges again completed the questionnaire, this time answering as they felt a subject would. Most judges made judgments on four subjects after meeting the subject and receiving varying amounts of information about them as follows: Variation I-only subject's name and major field were given; Variation II-name, major field and some biographical data were given; Variation III-the same information as Variation II plus the addition of a tape recording of the subject telling his goals and aspirations in life.

Judges were assigned to the variations in such a way that each variation had the same mean F scale score.

Cronbach's profile similarity score was used in analysing accuracy of judgment on the F scale. Spearman's rank order correlation method was used in analysis of occupational ranking. Three rank order correlation coefficients were computed for each judge-subject pair. Assumed similarity, actual similarity, and accuracy were compared.

The results were inconclusive.

Judgments on the F scale showed that similarity does produce greater accuracy, but in occupational judgments accuracy and similarity were unrelated. In both areas when a judge assumed himself similar to a subject he was more accurate in judging that subject.

Increasing information did not increase accuracy in judgment as was expected.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge with sincere gratitude instruction and guidance by Dr. Walter H. Crockett. Without his help the successful completion of this paper would not have been possible.

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## ABSTRACT

This is a study of two aspects of interpersonal perception: the relationship between similarity and accuracy, and the effects upon accuracy of increasing the amount of information available to the judge.

The hypotheses tested were:

A. People who are similar are more accurate judges than those who are dissimilar. This holds especially when they also think they are similar.

B. Judges with a relatively large amount of information about their partners will be more accurate than those with relatively little information.

A questionnaire, containing items from the California F scale and occupational preferences, was administered to students in general psychology classes at Kansas State College. Some of these students were designated as judges and some were designated as subjects on the basis of time available. Judges again completed the questionnaire, this time answering as they felt a subject would. Most judges made judgments on four subjects after meeting the subject and receiving varying amounts of information about them as follows: Variation I-only subject's name and major field were given; Variation II-name, major field, and some biographic data were given; Variation III-the same information as Variation II plus the addition of a tape recording of the subject telling his goals and aspirations in life.

Judges were assigned to the treatments in such a way that each treatment group had the same mean F scale score.

Cronbach's profile similarity score was used in analyzing accuracy of judgment on the F scale. Spearman's rank order correlation was used in analysis of occupational ranking. Three rank order correlation coefficients were computed for each judge-subject pair. Assumed similarity, actual similarity, and accuracy were compared.

Results were inconclusive.

Judgments on the F scale showed that similarity did mean more accuracy but in occupational judgments accuracy and similarity were unrelated. In both areas, when a judge assumed himself similar to a subject he was more accurate in judging that subject.

