Do we know when our impressions of others are valid? Evidence for realistic accuracy awareness on first impressions of personality

* Accuracy awareness – an understanding of whether their first impressions of others’ personalities are realistically accurate
* First impressions of others’ personalities are critical in that they serve to guide our thoughts and behaviours, influencing the course of further interactions and the development of relationships. Indeed, interpersonal impressions are argued to serve an adaptive function, enabling individuals to successfully engage with others in social interactions (McArthur & Baron, 1983), and affect the course of relationships development (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004).
* Contextual factors such as perceiver’s motivation can influence the accuracy of personality impressions (Biesanz & Human, 2010).
* In interpersonal perceptual domains, where the accuracy of judgements often can never be absolute, confidence and accuracy appear to be disassociated. (Ames & Kammrath, 2004)
* Interestingly, people do show accuracy awareness regarding the impressions of that they make on others; that is, those who are more confident about how they think others view in them are in fact more accurate about how others view them (Carlson, Furr & Vazire, 2010)
* In contrast, when people make personality impressions of others, those who are more confident in their personality impressions are not necessarily more accurate (Ames, Kammrath, Suppes & Bolger, 2010). Of note, however, the impressions formed in each of the Ames et al (2010) studies were based on very minimal, all nonverbal information, whereas everyday first impressions usually involve both verbal and nonverbal information and are often interactive, allowing perceivers to have some control over the course of the interaction and the information obtained.
* Across two studies involving face-to-face interactions we examine whether perceivers have accuracy awareness in their first impressions of personality. Specifically, following the social accuracy model of interpersonal perception (Biesanz, 2007, 2009, 2010), we examine two components of accuracy, distinctive realistic accuracy and normative accuracy (Biesanz, 2010; Cronbach, 1955; Furr, 2008).
  + Distinctive realistic accuracy refers to the extent to which a perceiver discerns an individual’s unique, differentiating characteristics. In the current studies, distinctive realistic accuracy is assessed by the extent to which the perceiver’s impression of the target maps onto a composite of the target’s self-, peer-, and parent- reported characteristics that is differentiated from the average person. Here term Realistic accuracy is used to denote the validity of perceiver’s impressions when compared to a broad composite of assessments and perspectives of the target’s personality
  + Normative accuracy refers to the extent to which a perceiver views the target as similar to what people generally tend to be like. Specifically, normative accuracy is assessed by the extent to which the perceiver’s impressions of specific targets map onto the average target’s personality profile across self-, peer-, and parent-reports. Applying knowledge of what people generally tend to be like can be considered a valid route to accuracy in first impressions; because people are normative on average, normative impressions will be accurate on average.
* We hypothesize that people do have accuracy awareness, knowing how realistically accurate, and thus trustworthy, their first impressions are. Furthermore, we examine whether accuracy awareness occurs within persons, reflecting calibration for a given judgement, or between persons, reflecting awareness of general levels of judgemental accuracy.
* SAM is an integration of Kenny’s (1994) social relations model with Cronbach’s (1955) componential approach to examining accuracy in interpersonal perception
* Across the two large round-robin studies, perceivers were aware of the accuracy of their first impressions. That is, those who sensed that their impressions were more accurate had indeed more accurately discerned the target’s unique, differentiating characteristics. Although this effect size was small, it was reliable across the two samples. The perceivers knew when their impressions were more or less accurate.
* Perceivers seem to be aware when factors, such as mood and concentration, have influenced the relative accuracy of their impressions, even if these factors are not consciously available to perceivers.
* Also, reporting greater realistic accuracy was also moderately to strongly associated with viewing the target more normatively. Higher levels of normative accuracy are associated with social desirability and more positive impressions (Borkenau & Zaltauskas, 2009)
* The present results are consistent with increased accuracy awareness reflecting a greater sense of having acquired more diagnostic information about the target – knowing that you know someone. However, the opposite it also possible. That is, a sense of knowing someone better leads to more positive impressions (ie familiarity principle).
* If we are aware when an impression is inaccurate, then we can lessen the weight that is placed on that impression or gather more information so that a better impression can be formed.