

# People know when first impressions are accurate

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First impressions are important, and they usually contain a healthy dose both of accuracy and misperception. But do people know when their first impressions are correct? They do reasonably well, according to a study in the current *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Researchers had two separate groups of more than 100 [people](#) meet in a "getting-acquainted" session much like speed-dating, until the people had spoken with everyone else in the group for three minutes each. At the end of each 3-minute chat, they rated each other's personalities, and rated how well they thought their impressions "would agree with someone who knows this person very well." To establish what the person was "really" like, the researchers had people fill out their own personality reports, which were bolstered with personality ratings that came either from friends or parents.

There is a large body of research that shows impressions can be accurate with short interactions, and the participants did a reasonably good job of seeing each other's personality. And the more accurate they felt, the closer their ratings to the friends' and parents' ratings (although this correlation was not perfect). The participants also found the highest accuracy from people who rated themselves moderately accurate—when people were highly confident of their judgment, accuracy was not greater than for moderate levels of confidence.

The research team, led by Jeremy Biesanz of the University of British Columbia, noted that there are two ways to be right about people's

personality. We can know how people are different from each other, but a good judge of persons knows that people are mostly alike—for example, almost everyone would prefer being friendly to being quarrelsome. The more people rated their partner's [personality](#) in a way typical of most everyone, the more accurate they felt their perception was. And because most people are like most people, they were indeed being accurate.

"Many important decisions are made after very brief encounters—which job candidate to hire, which person to date, which student to accept," write the authors. "Although our [first impressions](#) are generally accurate, it is it critical for us to recognize when they may be lacking.

**More information:** The article "Do we know when our impressions of others are valid? Evidence for realistic accuracy awareness in first impressions of personality" in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* is available free for a limited time at:

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