

Research shows what you say about others says a lot about you

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How positively you see others is linked to how happy, kind-hearted and emotionally stable you are, according to new research by a Wake Forest University psychology professor.

"Your perceptions of others reveal so much about your own personality," says Dustin Wood, assistant professor of psychology at Wake Forest and lead author of the study, about his findings. By asking study participants to each rate positive and negative characteristics of just three people, the researchers were able to find out important information about the rater's well-being, mental health, social attitudes and how they were judged by others.

The study appears in the July issue of the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#). Peter Harms at the University of Nebraska and Simine Vazire of Washington University in St. Louis co-authored the study.

The researchers found a person's tendency to describe others in positive terms is an important indicator of the positivity of the person's own [personality traits](#). They discovered particularly strong associations between positively judging others and how enthusiastic, happy, kind-hearted, courteous, emotionally stable and capable the person describes oneself and is described by others.

"Seeing others positively reveals our own positive traits," Wood says.

The study also found that how positively you see other people shows how satisfied you are with your own life, and how much you are liked by others.

In contrast, negative perceptions of others are linked to higher levels of narcissism and [antisocial behavior](#). "A huge suite of negative personality traits are associated with viewing others negatively," Wood says. "The simple tendency to see people negatively indicates a greater likelihood of depression and various personality disorders." Given that negative perceptions of others may underlie several personality disorders, finding techniques to get people to see others more positively could promote the cessation of behavior patterns associated with several different [personality disorders](#) simultaneously, Wood says.

This research suggests that when you ask someone to rate the personality of a particular coworker or acquaintance, you may learn as much about the rater providing the personality description as the person they are describing. The level of negativity the rater uses in describing the other person may indeed indicate that the other person has negative characteristics, but may also be a tip off that the rater is unhappy, disagreeable, neurotic—or has other negative personality traits.

Raters in the study consisted of friends rating one another, college freshmen rating others they knew in their dormitories, and fraternity and sorority members rating others in their organization. In all samples, participants rated real people and the positivity of their ratings were found to be associated with the participant's own characteristics.

By evaluating the raters and how they evaluated their peers again one year later, Wood found compelling evidence that how positively we tend to perceive others in our social environment is a highly stable trait that does not change substantially over time.

Provided by Wake Forest University

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