

Andrea E. Abele *
Susanne Bruckmüller **
Bogdan Wojciszke ***

You are so kind – and I am kind *and* smart: Actor – Observer Differences in the Interpretation of On-going Behavior

Abstract: *The dual perspective model of agency and communion predicts that observers tend to interpret a target's behavior more in terms of communion than agency, whereas actors interpret their behavior more in terms of agency. The present research for the first time tests this model in real interactions. Previously unacquainted participants had a short conversation and afterwards rated their own behavior (actor perspective) and their interaction partner's behavior (observer perspective) in terms of agency (self-confident, assertive) and communion (trustworthy, empathic). Supporting the dual perspective model, observers rated the actor's behavior higher on communion than on agency, and higher on communion than actors themselves did. Findings for actors were more complex: Actors rated their own behavior as more agentic than observers did. However, they also rated their behavior high on communion. We discuss implications for the dual perspective model as well as for (mis)understandings in social interactions.*

Key words: actor-observer differences, agency, communion, dual perspective model

Imagine a conversation with a stranger. You introduce yourself and listen to what the other person says about him-/herself. Afterwards you reflect on the encounter and since it was a generally positive interaction you arrive at the conclusion that the other person was a really charming person, kind and friendly; you also reflect on your own behavior and consider how well you presented yourself. Were you kind and friendly? And did you act in a competent or confident manner or did you maybe seem insecure or nervous? Again, since the interaction went well, you walk away thinking that you were confident and assertive. The other person might reflect on the interaction in a similar fashion and might come to the conclusion that *he/she* came across as smart and confident, and that *you* were kind and friendly. What was going on here? How did the same reflections on the same behavior lead to different interpretations of two people's actions?

The above description is an example for actor – observer differences in behavior interpretations. In social interactions, we are both actors performing certain behaviors and observers perceiving the behavior of others. Jones and Nisbett (1971) were among the first to argue that these different perspectives influence behavior interpretations.

They were concerned with *causal* attributions, i.e., how actors and observers interpret the causes of a behavior. They suggested that actors interpret their behavior more externally in terms of the situation, whereas observers interpret the same behavior more internally in terms of the actor's personality (e.g., Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek, 1973; see also Malle & Knobe, 1997; Malle, Knobe, & Nelson, 2007; Robins, Spranca, & Mendelsohn, 1996; Storms, 1973; Taylor & Fiske, 1975).

The question of how we interpret the *meaning* of behavior has also received much research attention in social psychology (e.g., Carlston & Skowronski, 1994; Jones & Thibaut, 1958; Newman & Uleman, 1989). However, it has rarely been analyzed with regard to actor-observer differences. As behaviors are usually open to different interpretations (e.g., Rim, Uleman, & Trope, 2009; Wojciszke, 1994) it may well be that these interpretations also depend on perspective, i.e. whether a behavior is judged from the actor perspective or from the observer perspective. The two studies reported here tested this possibility.

Why should we expect actor-observer differences in behavior interpretations? We build on recent theorizing and research on the fundamental content dimensions

* Social Psychology Group, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Bismarckstr. 6, 91054 Erlangen, Germany; abele@phil.uni-erlangen.de

** University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany

*** University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Sopot Campus, Poland

of “agency” and “communion” (also referred to as “competence” and “warmth”, Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Bakan, 1966; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Paulhus & Trappnell, 2008; Peeters, 1992, 2001; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Ybarra et al., 2008). Agency comprises competence, goal achievement, individuality, and self-assertion. Communion emphasizes the individual as a social being and compromises cooperation, morality, warmth and trustworthiness. These two dimensions reflect the “duality of human existence” (Bakan, 1966) and the basic goals of social behavior, namely forming and maintaining social connections (communion) and pursuing goals and manifesting skills and accomplishments (agency).

The Dual Perspective Model

In our dual perspective model of agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, 2014) we link the fundamental dimensions to the basic perspectives in social interaction, actor versus observer. According to Peeters and colleagues (Peeters, 1992, 2001; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990), the evaluative meaning of traits reflects their adaptive potential for humans in general. This adaptive potential may be defined from the perspective of the trait possessor, and traits adaptive for the trait possessor are *self-profitable*. They are directly and unconditionally profitable (in case of positive traits) or harmful (in case of negative ones) for the trait possessor. A trait’s adaptive potential may also be defined, however, from the perspective of another person who observes the trait possessor or interacts with him/her. Traits that are adaptive from the perspective of another person have been called *other-profitable*. These traits are directly beneficial for other people when positive and directly harmful for them when negative. We argue that traits belonging to the communion dimension tend to be other-profitable, because they inform the perceiver about attributes of the target that convey his/her benevolent vs. malevolent intentions (see also Fiske et al., 2007). Agency traits, on the other hand, tend to be self-profitable, because they refer to attributes that allow trait possessors to effectively pursue their goals.

The self-profitability vs. other-profitability approach taken by Peeters and colleagues, hence, suggests that the fundamental dimensions should be analyzed with respect to actor versus recipient/observer perspective. Social behavior and social cognition always involve two perspectives – the perspective of an actor who performs the act in question, that is the “self,” and the perspective of an observer or recipient of the action in question, that is the “other.” In social interactions, perspectives may change quickly as people take turns and are actors, then observers/recipients, then actors again, and so forth. However, at a given moment and with regard to a specific act, a person is either actor or observer/recipient, and in describing and interpreting behavior, he/she does this either from the perspective of the actor/self or the observer/recipient. We argue that the fundamental content dimensions of agency and communion are differentially linked to perspective, that

is, actor versus observer/recipient (Abele & Brack, 2013; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008).

Our model makes three key predictions:

1. Communion is the primary of the two dimensions. In support of this reasoning it has been shown that the communion factor explains about twice as much variance in trait ratings as the agency factor (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), that communion traits are processed faster than agency traits (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001), that people spontaneously describe others in more communal than agentic terms (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011), and that they rate others higher on communion than on agency (for a summary see Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). They also tend to rate themselves higher on communion than on agency (e.g., Abele, 2003; Uchronski, 2008; Ybarra, Park, Stanik, & Lee, 2012). It is still unclear if this last-mentioned finding may be due to self-presentational concerns as people are aware of the fact that others will primarily judge them based on their communal qualities and therefore monitor their reputation by presenting themselves as communal (Ybarra et al., 2012), or whether it maybe due to the fact that communion is not only highly other-profitable, but also somewhat self-profitable because of the indispensability of benevolent relations with others for survival (see Abele & Wojciszke, 2014).
2. In the observer/recipient perspective, communal content is more relevant than agentic content. In support of this prediction, research has shown that people base their judgments of others more on their communal than their agentic traits (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999, 2000; Kenworthy & Tausch, 2008; Scholer & Higgins, 2008; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998).
3. In the actor perspective, agentic content is more relevant than communal content. In support of this prediction, research has revealed that people appreciate agentic traits more in themselves than in others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), that they base their self-esteem more on agentic than on communal traits (Abele, Rupperecht, & Wojciszke, 2008; Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2012; Wojciszke, Baryla, Parzuchowski, Szymkow, & Abele, 2011), and that agentic traits are a better predictor of actual behavior than communal traits (Abele, 2003; Corrigan & Konrad, 2007; Helgeson, 1994; Kirchmeyer, 1998).

The present research continues on this line of research. Whereas previous research has mainly tested the above hypotheses for hypothetical situations (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke, 1994) or with non-experimental methods (Gebauer et al., 2012; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008), we will here test them in real face-to-face encounters – for the first time, to our knowledge. Moreover, while the findings for the observer perspective are highly

consistent across studies (relevance of communion is higher than that of agency), the findings for the actor perspective are less clear. On the one hand, actors tend to interpret their behavior more in terms of agency when compared with observers. On the other hand, actors often also interpret their behavior more in terms of communion than agency. Hence, it seems that the higher relevance of agency in the actor perspective is especially observed when compared to the observer perspective, but less so when compared within the actor perspective. As mentioned above, this may be because although communion is first and foremost other-profitable, it also has an element of self-profitability: while it mostly benefits others if an actor is friendly, honest, and empathic, it also benefits the actor to some extent since it makes positive relations with others more likely. Accordingly, communion ratings of trait words are not only highly correlated with these traits' other-profitability ratings, but also somewhat with their self-profitability (while agency ratings only correlate with self-profitability, see Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). Thus, in addition to testing the Dual Perspective Model, the present study further explores this importance of agency and communion in the actor perspective.

Present Research

We realized an encounter in which two previously unacquainted persons talked to each other and afterwards rated both their own behavior and the interaction partner's behavior with regard to agency and communion. Our general hypothesis was that the same behavior (of both interaction partners) would be interpreted differently depending on perspective, that is, actor (the person him- or herself, i.e., self-ratings) versus observer (the interaction partner, i.e., ratings of the other person).

Building on the reasoning and previous findings summarized above, observers should interpret their interaction partner's behavior more in terms of communion than agency because, generally speaking, a person's communion is more directly relevant for the observer than this person's agency (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, 2014; Peeters, 2008). This leads to two hypotheses:

Hypothesis (1). Observers rate the observed behavior higher for communion than for agency (comparison of both dimensions within the observer perspective).

Hypothesis (2). Observers rate the observed behavior higher for communion than actors do (comparison of one dimension between observer and actor).

Regarding the actor perspective, previous findings are more complicated, as outlined above. Actors tend to interpret their behavior both in terms of agency and communion. We, hence, do not state a hypothesis with respect to a comparison of both dimensions within the actor perspective. We rather state a hypothesis for the comparison of the agency dimension between actor and observer.

Hypothesis (3). Actors rate their behavior higher for agency than observers do (comparison of one dimension between actor and observer).

Two studies tested these predictions. In Study 1, two previously unacquainted persons talked about a topic of their choice and then interpreted both their own behavior (actor perspective) and the behavior of the other person (observer perspective) with regard to two core agentic and two communal traits. In addition to testing Hypotheses (1) to (3), we analyzed causal attributions for these trait ratings. In Study 2, participants first talked about a specific (agentic or communal) topic and then again rated their own (as actors) and the other person's (as observers) behavior. Importantly, our participants in both studies engaged in a mostly *positive* interaction. Accordingly, we asked participants to rate themselves (as actors) and their interaction partners (as observers) with regard to positive agentic and communal traits.

Study 1

Method

Participants and design.

Forty female and 24 male German university students of different majors (mean age = 24.05, $SD = 3.45$) participated voluntarily. An experimenter approached them on campus and invited them to take part in the study. Always two students of the same gender who were not previously acquainted with each other participated at the same time.

The study had a 2 (perspective: actor, observer) by 2 (trait dimension: agentic vs. communal traits) by 2 (order of ratings: self [actor perspective] first, other [observer perspective] first) by 2 (participant gender: female dyad, male dyad) design with repeated measures on the first two factors. All materials were presented in paper-pencil format.

Procedure and measures.

Participants sat face-to-face at a 78 cm wide (and 156 cm long) desk. They received written instructions explaining that they would have a five minute chat about a topic of their choice to get acquainted and would then answer some questions. During the conversation, the experimenter remained in the room, but was concealed behind a screen. After the conversation, participants were seated separated from each other and received the questionnaire with the dependent measures. After they had completed the questionnaire, participants were thanked and offered to leave their email address to receive more detailed information about the study later.

Agency and communion ratings. The ratings for participant's own behavior ("actor") and the other's behavior ("observer") were made on 10 cm graphical rating scales ranging from *very little* to *very much*. The items were pre-selected for their representativeness for the dimension in question (for more details see Abele, Uchrowski, Suitner, & Wojciszke, 2008). Two items pertained to the agency dimension (*assertive, self-confident* [German: *durchsetzungsfähig, selbstbewusst*]) and two pertained to the communion dimension (*empathic, trustworthy* [German: *empathisch, vertrauenswürdig*]). Participants

answered the following question: “To what degree did your behavior [the behavior of your interaction partner] during the conversation reflect...”, followed by the respective trait.

Causal Attributions. Following each of these trait ratings, participants answered four attribution questions based on Robins et al. (1996) on a 5-point scale from 1 = *does not apply to* to 5 = *applies*. The items were: “why was your behavior as ... (the respective trait, i.e., “self-confident”, “assertive”, etc.)... as you rated it” (or: “why was the other person’s behavior as ... [again the respective trait] as you rated it”). Two attributions were internal “personality” (stable) and “current mood” (variable) and two were external “the other person” (stable) and “current situation” (variable). As an example, a participant might indicate that their own behavior had been highly assertive in this situation and that this was mostly due to their “personality” (by giving a high rating for this attribution), but not to their current mood, the other person or the current situation (by giving low ratings for these attributions).

Controls. We counterbalanced between participants whether they rated their own behavior or the other person’s behavior first. At the end of the questionnaire participants indicated their age and gender.

Results

Preliminary analyses.

We first tested the factorial structure of the trait ratings and found that both in case of actors and in case of observers there was a two-factorial structure with the two agency items forming factor 1 (48% of variance) and the two communion items forming factor 2 (27% of variance). We then computed mean scores of agency (*assertive, self-confident*, $r = .52, p < .001$) and of communion ratings (*empathic, trustworthy*, $r = .50, p < .001$) and these mean scores served as our dependent variables.

Two participants had to be excluded from all further statistical analyses (one because of too much missing data, the other one because of an outlying score; more than 3 SDs below the mean).

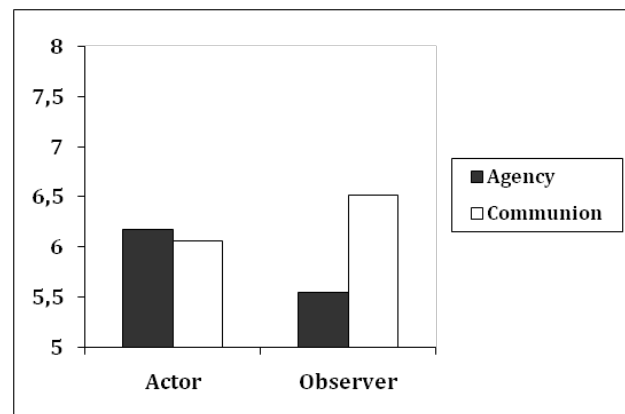
Preliminary analyses revealed no effects of the order of ratings, all $F_s < 1.04, p_s > .30$. We omitted this factor in all further statistical analyses.

Ratings of actors and observers.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a 2 (gender of dyad: women, men) by 2 (trait dimension: agentic, communal) by 2 (perspective: actor, observer) mixed measures ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors¹. We found a significant trait dimension effect, $F(1, 60) = 5.60, p = .02$, with higher communion than agency ratings overall. This main effect was qualified by an interaction of trait dimension and perspective, $F(1, 60) = 10.52, p < .001$ (see Figure 1). Supporting Hypothesis (1), observers rated the actor’s behavior higher on communion

($M = 6.52, SD = 1.38$) than on agency ($M = 5.55, SD = 1.50$), $t(61) = 4.31, p < .001, d = .55$. Supporting Hypothesis (2), observers also rated the actor’s behavior higher on communion ($M = 6.52$) than the actors themselves did ($M = 6.06, SD = 1.48$), $t(61) = 2.26, p < .03, d = .29$. Supporting Hypothesis (3), actors rated their behavior higher on agency than observers did ($M_s = 6.17$ and $5.55, SD_s = 1.44$ and 1.50 , respectively), $t(61) = 2.31, p < .03, d = .30$. Moreover, the difference between communion and agency ratings was lower in case of actors ($M = -.11, SD = 1.71$) than in case of observers ($M = 0.97, SD = 1.77$), $t(62) = 3.28, p < .01, d = .42$. There were no further effects, $F_s < 2.46, p > .12$.

Figure 1. Agency and communion ratings from the actor vs. observer perspective (Study 1)



Causal Attributions.

Table 1 shows the causal attributions for own and other’s agency and communion ratings. There were no gender differences, $F_s < 1.39, p > .17$. Most relevant for the present research, attributions did not differ between dimensions, $F < 1$. Regarding actor-observer differences, we only found that external stable attributions (“partner”) were higher in the actor ($M = 3.56, SD = .69$) than in the observer perspective ($M = 3.11, SD = .62$), $t(61) = 4.25, p < .001, d = .69$. Internal stable (personality) attributions were always highest and did not differ between perspectives. There were no further effects, $t_s < 1.56, p > .12$.

Table 1. Mean attributions (standard deviations in parentheses) of agency and communion ratings in Study 1

	Actor		Observer	
	Agency Ratings	Communion Ratings	Agency Ratings	Communion Ratings
Internal stable (“personality”)	3.97 (.83)	3.97 (.80)	4.08 (.73)	4.06 (.80)
Internal variable (“mood”)	3.44 (1.09)	3.37 (.97)	3.46 (.82)	3.27 (.98)
External stable (“partner”)	3.54 (.84)	3.60 (.89)	3.08 (.81)	3.15 (.83)
External variable (“situation”)	3.76 (1.07)	3.75 (.94)	3.73 (.76)	3.60 (.99)

¹ For both studies, we also tested our hypotheses with dyadic analyses (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). The findings are essentially the same as reported here.

Discussion

Study 1 fully supported our hypotheses. The same behaviors in a getting-acquainted encounter were interpreted differently depending on perspective. Supporting H1, observers rated the behaviors higher on communion than on agency and supporting H2, they also rated the behaviors higher on communion than actors did. Supporting H3, actors rated their behavior higher on agency than observers did, both in absolute terms and relative to communion. Additionally, in line with previous findings, there was a primacy of communion effect with overall higher communion than agency ratings.

The causal attribution measures revealed no differences between the agency and communion ratings. Causal attributions were always highest for the internal, stable reason, i.e., personality. This is in line with Malle (2006), who showed that in case of positive behaviors both actors and observers tend to attribute behavior to personality. The additional finding that actors attributed their behavior interpretations more to their interaction partner (external, stable attribution) than observers did is in line with Jones and Nisbett's (1971) classical formulation of the actor-observer difference. Importantly, these effects were not moderated by trait content, that is, they were the same for agentic and communal traits.

An alternative explanation for the primary importance of communion observed in Study 1 could be that in the kind of conversation that participants were engaged in (getting acquainted), communion plays a more important role than agency. Although this, of course, does not explain the observed differences between actor and observer, the topic of the conversation could be an important boundary condition. To address this concern, we varied the topic of the conversation in Study 2.

Study 2

We conducted Study 2 to conceptually replicate the findings of Study 1. We extended the design of the second study in the following ways. First, we now specified the topic that our participants talked about to gauge the generalizability of the findings. Specifically, we asked our participants to either talk about a topic that is related to the dimension of agency or a topic related to the dimension of communion. We did not expect differences in behavior interpretations depending on conversation topic. However, we wanted to test this potential confound. As a second extension, we added a third agency and a third communion rating to enhance the reliability of our measures.

Method

Participants and design.

A total of 42 female and 40 male German university students of different majors (mean age = 24.41, $SD = 2.99$) participated voluntarily. They received 3 Euro as compensation. An experimenter recruited them on campus and always two students of the same gender participated.

The study had a 2 (trait dimension: agency vs.

communion ratings) by 2 (perspective: actor, observer) by 2 (topic: communal, agentic) by 2 (order of ratings: actor perspective first, observer perspective first) by 2 (participant gender: female, male dyads) design with repeated measures on the first two factors. All materials were presented in paper-pencil format.

Procedure and measures.

Participants sat face-to-face with each other and received written instructions. Depending on condition, instructions either asked participants to talk about "how to cheer up a friend" (communal topic) or about "how to prepare well for an exam" (agentic topic). We informed participants that they would engage in this conversation for about five minutes and would afterwards answer some questions. We also asked participants for the permission to audio-record their conversation for research purposes. The experimenter then turned on the audiotape and took a seat behind a screen. At the end of the conversation, participants were seated separated from each other and completed the questionnaire with the dependent and other measures. Finally, participants were thanked and offered to leave their email address to receive detailed information about the study later.

Agency and communion ratings. Ratings of own and other's behavior were again performed on 10 cm graphical rating scales ranging from *very little* to *very much*. Three items pertained to the agency dimension (*determined* [German: *zielstrebig*], in addition to the items used in Study 1); three items pertained to the communion dimension (*friendly* [German: *freundlich*] in addition those used in Study 1). Participants were again asked to rate the extent to which their or their partner's behavior during the conversation reflected these traits.

Results

Preliminary analyses.

We again tested the factorial structure of the trait ratings and found that both in case of actors and in case of observers there was a two-factorial structure with the three communion items forming factor 1 (45% of variance) and the three agency items forming factor 2 (23% of variance). We then computed mean scores of agency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$) and communion ratings (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$) and these mean scores served as our dependent variables.

Four participants (two women, two men) had to be excluded from all further statistical analyses because of too many missing data (two persons) or because of outlying scores on one of the dependent variables (more than 3 SD s below the mean in the respective condition).

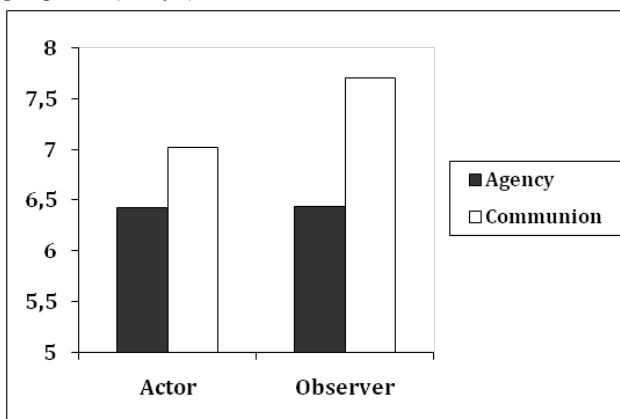
Preliminary analyses revealed no effects of the order in which the ratings had been made, all F s < 1.62 , p s $> .20$. We therefore omitted the order factor in all further analyses. Length of the conversation ($M = 244$ sec, $SD = 68$) did not influence participants' responses, all r s $\leq .13$, ns . Finally, we inspected the audiotapes in order to insure that participants had talked about the assigned topic and found that this was the case.

Ratings of actors and observers.

We tested our hypotheses by means of a 2 (conversation topic: communal, agentic) by 2 (participant gender: female dyad, male dyad) by 2 (perspective: actor, observer) by 2 (trait dimension: agency traits, communion traits) mixed factor ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors. We found no effects of conversation topic, $F_s < 1$, and we also found no gender effects, $F_s < 1.06$, $p_s > .30$.

There was again a significant main effect of trait dimension, $F(1, 74) = 69.51$, $p < .001$, with higher communion than agency ratings. There was also a significant main effect of perspective, $F(1, 74) = 6.95$, $p = .01$, with observer ratings being generally higher than actor ratings. These two main effects were qualified by the predicted dimension by perspective interaction, $F(1, 74) = 6.20$, $p < .02$ (see Figure 2). As predicted, observers rated the behaviors higher on communion ($M = 7.70$, $SD = 1.10$) than on agency ($M = 6.43$, $SD = 1.61$), $t(77) = 8.27$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$, and observers rated the behaviors higher on communion than actors did ($M = 7.02$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(77) = 4.85$, $p < .001$, $d = .57$. Contrary to H3, there was no actor-observer difference for agency ratings, $t < 1$. However, relative to observers, the difference between ratings of communal and agentic traits was lower for actors ($M = .60$, $SD = 1.65$) than for observers ($M = 1.26$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(77) = 2.55$, $p = .02$, $d = .29$. This finding may be taken as an indicator for the relatively higher importance of agency in the actor than in the observer perspective.

Figure 2. Agency and communion ratings from the actor vs. observer perspective (Study 2)



Discussion

Study 2 again revealed the primacy of communion effect with overall higher communion than agency ratings. It fully supported our hypotheses on observers' behavior interpretations. Trait dimension and perspective interacted such that observers interpreted the actors' behavior more in terms of communion than agency (H1) and more in terms of communion than actors themselves (H2). Contrary to H3, actors did not rate their behavior higher on agency than observers did; however, in accordance with a higher importance of agency in the actor perspective (and thus in line

with H3), the difference between agency versus communion ratings was smaller for actors than for observers. As outlined earlier, people often describe themselves as more communal than agentic, possibly due to an element of self-profitability in communion and, relatedly, self-presentational concerns. Moreover, people more readily attribute traits to others than to the self and tend to see their own behavior as more multifaceted and flexible (Heider, 1958; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988).

Study 2 also ruled out an alternative explanation for the primary importance of communion, that is, the kind of conversation that participants were engaged in. We here varied the conversation topic but received the same results as Study 1.

General Discussion

The distinction between the actor versus observer perspective has received much attention in attribution research (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Malle, et al., 2007), but less so in person perception and behavior interpretation research. In the present studies, we draw upon research and theorizing about the fundamental content dimensions of agency and communion and upon the Dual Perspective Model of actor – observer differences in the “profitability” of agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, 2014; Peeters, 1992, 2001). We tested our hypotheses after real face-to-face encounters, thereby extending previous research that has not yet examined actual interactions.

Supporting the first general hypothesis of the dual perspective model, both studies revealed the primacy of communion as the ratings for communal traits were generally higher than for agentic traits (e.g., Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Fiske et al., 2007; Ybarra, et al., 2012). Supporting the second hypothesis of the dual perspective model (and our present Hypotheses 2 and 3), observers interpreted the other person's behavior more in terms of communion than agency, both in absolute terms (observers' ratings were higher for communion than for agency) and in relative terms (observers' ratings for communion were higher than actors' ratings for communion). These effects emerged similarly in both studies showing the robustness of these findings.

The findings for actors' behavior interpretations were more complex, but do support the claim that agency is more important in the actor perspective than in the observer perspective (Abele, 2003; Corrigan & Konrad, 2007; Helgeson, 1994; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Wojciszke et al., 2011). Hypothesis 3 was clearly supported in Study 1, both in absolute (higher ratings of agency than of communion in the actor perspective) and in relative terms (higher ratings of agency in the actor perspective than in the observer perspective). H3 also received some indirect support in Study 2 (only relative to observers did actors rate their agency higher than their communion). However, the findings also show an importance of communion in the actor perspective. Actors' ratings of agency and communion were similar in Study 1, while actors in Study 2 rated themselves higher on communion than on agency. It seems that both agency and

communion are important for actors, albeit for somewhat different reasons (agency: for self-evaluation and self-profitability in terms of pursuing one's goals; communion for impression management and self-profitability in terms of getting along with others). A closer investigation of when and why agency or communion matter more for actors, and, hence, when and why actors interpret their behavior more in terms of agency or communion, is an important question for future research.

Study 1 additionally showed that there were no differences in attributions for the two dimensions, and Study 2 showed that the findings were independent of conversation topic as they not only emerged in free conversations (Study 1) but in conversations with a predetermined – agentic or communal – topic (Study 2), as well.

The present study analyzed behavior interpretations on positive traits following a generally positive interaction, but no behavior interpretations on negative traits after a negative interaction. Although actor-observer differences in causal attributions have been shown to be stronger for negative than for positive behaviors (cf. Malle, 2006), we would generally expect that other than to causal attributions, behavior interpretations would be less affected by the behaviors' valence. Observers should interpret actors' negative behaviors more in communal than in agentic terms, i.e., rate others higher on negative communal traits (or lower on positive ones) following a negative interaction than actors would rate themselves; similarly, actors should interpret their negative behavior more in agentic terms and rate themselves relatively higher on negative agentic traits than observers would. Future research should extend the present findings to the interpretation of negative behaviors. The present studies and their theoretical rationale can serve as a starting point for many other questions concerning actor-observer differences in the interpretation of behavior, for example the importance of power differences between actors and observers. Such differences might have an additional impact on behavior interpretations such that high power (an inherently agentic position) might lead to more extreme agency ratings of both one's own behavior (higher) and the other's behavior (lower), whereas low power (more of an observer-position) might lead to more extreme ratings of communion for one's own behavior (higher) and the other's behavior (lower).

The present findings also have a number of practical implications. First, people may systematically overestimate own agency and underestimate others' agency and as a consequence, they may unintentionally become arrogant or unfair in judging other people's agentic skills. These effects might even be intensified when power differences between interacting individuals come into play. In addition, by placing too much weight on the other's communion in a brief first encounter, we might regard such a brief interaction as much more informative about the other person's communion than it actually is – and as more informative about communion than about agency. To our knowledge, nobody has yet examined this intriguing question of whether the robustness of first impressions varies systematically with regard to agency and communion.

At any rate, knowing how actors and observers perceive the same behavior differentially might help to develop strategies to avoid or dissolve resulting misunderstandings. In conclusion, the present findings show that perspective matters in person perception. The same behavior may have different meaning depending on whether it is considered from the actor or the observer perspective. The fundamental content dimensions help to make sense of these different interpretations of on-going behavior.

References

- Abele, A. E. (2003). The dynamics of masculine-agentic and feminine-communal traits. Findings from a prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 768-776.
- Abele, A.E., & Brack, S. (2013). Preference for other persons' traits is dependent on the kind of social relationship. *Social Psychology, 44*, 84-94.
- Abele, A.E., & Bruckmüller, S. (2011). The bigger one of the "Big Two": Preferential processing of communal information. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47*, 935-948.
- Abele, A. E., Rupperecht, T., & Wojciszke, B. (2008). The influence of success and failure experiences on agency. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 38*, 436-448.
- Abele, A. E., Uchrowski, M., Suitner, C., & Wojciszke, B. (2008). Towards an operationalization of the fundamental dimensions of agency and communion: Trait content ratings in five countries considering valence and frequency of word occurrence. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 38*, 1202-1217.
- Abele, A.E., & Wojciszke, B. (2014). Communal and agentic content in social cognition: A dual perspective model. In Olson, J. & Zanna, M. (Eds), (2014). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 46*, in press.
- Abele, A. E., & Wojciszke, B. (2007). Agency and communion from the perspective of self-versus others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 93*, 751-763.
- Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence. An essay on psychology and religion*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Carlston, D. E., & Skowronski, J. J. (1994). Savings in the relearning of trait information as evidence for spontaneous inference generation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66*, 840-856.
- Corrigan, E. A., & Konrad, A. M. (2007). Gender role attitudes and careers: A longitudinal study. *Sex Roles, 56*, 847-855.
- De Bruin, E. N. M., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (1999). Impression formation and cooperative behavior. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 29*, 305-328.
- De Bruin, E. N. M., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2000). What people look for in others: Influences of the perceiver and the perceived on information selection. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*, 206-219.
- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J. C., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 11*(2), 77-83.
- Gebauer, J., Wagner, J., Sedikidis, C., & Neberich, W. (2012). Agency-communion and self-esteem relations are moderated by culture, religiosity, age, and sex: Evidence for the "self-centrality breeds self-enhancement" principle. *Journal of Personality, 81*, 261-275.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Helgeson, V. S. (1994). Relation of agency and communion to well-being: Evidence and potential explanations. *Psychological Bulletin, 116*, 412-428.
- Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1971). *The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Jones, E. E., & Thibaut, J. W. (1958). Interaction goals as bases of inference in interpersonal perception. In Tagiuri, R. & Petrucci, L. (Eds.), *Person perception and interpersonal behavior* (pp. 151-178). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Judd, C. M., James-Hawkins, L., Yzerbyt, V., & Kashima, Y. (2005). Fundamental dimensions of social judgment: Understanding the relations between judgments of competence and warmth. *Journal of*

- Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 899-913.
- Kenworthy, J., & Tausch, N. (2008). Beliefs about the utility and stability of trait attributions in an intergroup context: Differences between warmth and competence. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 1121-1129.
- Kashy, D. A., & Kenny, D. A. (2000). The analysis of data from dyads and groups. In Reis, H. T. & Judd, C. M. (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (pp. 451-477). New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirchmeyer, C. (1998). Determinants of managerial career success: Evidence and explanation of male/female differences. *Journal of Management*, 24, 673-692.
- Malle, B. (2006). The actor-observer asymmetry in attribution: A (surprising) meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(6), 895-919.
- Malle, B. F., & Knobe, J. (1997). Which behaviors do people explain? A basic actor-observer asymmetry. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 288-304.
- Malle, B. F., Knobe, J. M., & Nelson, S. E. (2007). Actor-observer asymmetries in explanations of behavior: New answers to an old question. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 491-514.
- Newman, L. S., & Uleman, J. S. (1989). Spontaneous trait inference. In Uleman, J. S. & Bargh, J. A. (Eds.), *Unintended thought* (pp 155-188). New York: Guilford.
- Nisbett, R. E., Caputo, C., Legant, P., & Marecek, J. (1973). Behavior as seen by the actor and as seen by the observer. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, 154-164.
- Paulhus, D. L., & Trapnell, P. D. (2008). Self-presentation of personality: An agency-communion framework. In John, O. P., Robins, R. W. & Pervin, L. A. (Eds.), *Handbook of personality psychology: Theory and research (3rd ed.)* (pp. 492-517). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.
- Peeters, G. (1992). Evaluative meanings of adjectives in vitro and in context: Some theoretical implications and practical consequences of positive-negative asymmetry and behavioral-adaptive concepts of evaluation. *Psychologica Belgica*, 32(2), 211-231.
- Peeters, G. (2001). In search for a social-behavioral approach-avoidance dimension associated with evaluative trait meanings. *Psychologica Belgica*, 41(4), 187-203.
- Peeters, G. (2008). The evaluative face of a descriptive model: Communion and agency in Peabody's tetradic model of trait organization. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 1066-1072.
- Peeters, G., & Czapinski, J. (1990). Positive-negative asymmetry in evaluations: The distinction between affective and informational negative effects. In Stroebe, W. & Hewstone, M. (Eds.), *European review of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 33-60). London: Wiley.
- Rim, S., Uleman, J. S., & Trope, Y. (2009). Spontaneous trait inference and construal level theory: Psychological distance increases nonconscious trait thinking. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 1088-1097.
- Robins, R. W., Spranca, M. D., & Mendelsohn, G. A. (1996). The actor-observer effect revisited: Effects of individual differences and repeated social interactions on actor and observer attributions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 375-389.
- Sande, G. N., Goethals, G. R., & Radloff, C. E. (1988). Perceiving one's own traits and others': The multifaceted self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 13-20.
- Scholer, A. A., & Higgins, E. T. (2008). People as resources: Exploring the functionality of warm and cold. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 1111-1120.
- Storms, M. D. (1973). Videotape and the attribution process: Reversing actors' and observers' points of view. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 27, 165-175.
- Taylor, S. E., & Fiske, S. T. (1975). Point of view and perceptions of causality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32, 439-445.
- Uchrowski, M. (2008). Agency and communion in spontaneous self-descriptions: Occurrence and situational malleability. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 1093-1102.
- Wojciszke, B. (1994). Multiple meanings of behavior: Construing actions in terms of competence or morality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 222-232.
- Wojciszke, B., & Abele, A. E. (2008). The primacy of communion over agency and its reversals in evaluations. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 1139-1147.
- Wojciszke, B., Bazinska, R., & Jaworski, M. (1998). On the dominance of moral categories in impression formation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 1245-1257.
- Wojciszke, B., Baryla, W., Parzuchowski, M., Szymkow, A., & Abele, A. E. (2011). Self-esteem is dominated by agentic over communal information. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41, 617-627.
- Ybarra, O., Chan, E., & Park, D. (2001). Young and old adults' concerns about morality and competence. *Motivation and Emotion*, 25, 85-100.
- Ybarra, O., Chan, E., Park, H., Burnstein, E., Monin, B., & Stanik, C. (2008). Life's recurring challenges and the fundamental dimensions: An integration and its implications for cultural differences and similarities. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 1083-1092.
- Ybarra, O., Park, H., Stanik, C., & Lee, D. S. (2012). Self-judgment and reputation monitoring as a function of the fundamental dimensions, Temporal perspective, and culture. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 200-209.

Acknowledgements

The present research was supported by grants to the first author (DFG Ab 45/10-2), to the third author (NCN 2012/04/A/HS6/00581) and to the first and the third author (Humboldt 3.4 Fokoop). We thank Stefanie Book, Monica Cunitz, Lisann Knoll, Lisa Lockenvitz, Vanessa Ufert, and Valerie Wiesner for their help in data collection.