



Situational construal is related to personality and gender

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ABSTRACT

Using the Riverside Situational Q-Sort (RSQ), this study investigates the relationship between personality, gender and individual differences in perceptions (or construals) of four situations experienced by undergraduate participants ($N = 205$) in their daily lives. Results indicate that while people generally agree about the psychological characteristics of situations, they also have reliably distinctive perceptions that are related to personality and gender. Further, lay judges are fairly accurate in predicting the systematic ways in which personality and gender are related to distinctive perceptions, showing that these relationships align with prior theorizing and with common sense. The small but reliable individual differences in situational construal demonstrated by this research may accumulate into large and consequential effects over time.

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1. Introduction

For some the world is a hostile place where men are evil and dangerous; for others it is a stage for fun and frolic. It may appear as a place to do one's duty grimly; or a pasture for cultivating friendship and love.

Gordon Allport (1961, p. 266)

An individual's perception of his or her social environment has two possible sources: (1) the objective features of the stimulus situation and (2) the psychological attributes of the person who perceives it (Murray, 1938). Therefore, to understand each individual's distinctive view of the world requires methods to measure the objective features of his or her situation as well as the individual's personality.

Numerous methods – including self-report, peer-report, and countless inventories – have been developed to assess personality. The measurement of psychologically relevant features of situations lags far behind (Reis, 2008; Wagerman & Funder, 2009). Researchers who otherwise emphasize the “power of the situation” typically neglect to specify the psychologically active ingredients that give situations their power. Only recently have investigators renewed attention to the importance of conceptualizing situations (Reis, 2008) and developing tools for situational assessment (Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2010, 2012; Wagerman & Funder, 2009).

One reason why researchers may have shied away from investigating situations is that such an endeavor immediately confronts a difficult conceptual question: Where do situations exist: in the objective world or in the eye of the beholder? Many writers have noted that every situation is inevitably filtered through the perceptions of each person who experiences it (Hogan, 2009; Magnusson, 1974; Murray, 1938; Nystedt, 1981; Rauthmann, 2012; Reis, 2008). As Mischel (1977, p. 253) observed, “any given, objective stimulus condition may have a variety of effects, depending on how the individual construes and transforms it” and Bem and Allen (1974, p. 518) went so far as to claim that “the classification of situations... will have to be in terms of the individual's phenomenology, not the investigator's.” In other words, these comments imply, situations exist primarily if not only in the eye of the beholder.

While such comments seem reasonable, they can be taken too far. Objective reality exists and matters. The best direct evidence that objective properties of situations matter consists of experimental social psychology's many demonstrations of experimental manipulations that affect all people in the same way or, at very least, enough people in the same way as to generate statistically significant findings. Indeed, the assumption that objective aspects of situations yield predictable behavioral results is built into every interpretation of a significant mean difference between an experimental and control condition.

An even more serious conceptual problem is that when situations are defined solely by how individuals construe them, the analysis reverts back into the study of personality (Wagerman, 2007). Consider two people playing a game. One is characteristically competitive and the other is not. The first individual might construe the game as involving and motivating and respond with

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a high level of activity and engagement. The second might construe the game as pointless and respond with behavioral and emotional withdrawal. The differences in these individuals' behaviors could be explained on the basis of their distinctive perceptions, but in the course of this analysis the situation itself – the actual game – has disappeared! The situation's objective properties have ceased to be a concern. Instead, analytical focus has returned to differences between individuals, where conventional personality analysis began in the first place.

Defining situations in terms of individual construals also opens the risk of circularity. The first person's competitive behavior might be "explained" on the basis of his or her perception of the situation as competition-evoking – which is not helpful. If situations are to be deemed important and worthy of study in their own right, they must be separated from the perceptions (and personalities) of the people in them (Block & Block, 1981; Reis, 2008; Sherman et al., 2010).

Thus, any attempt to understand how people perceive their social environment must begin by addressing the question "What are the objective properties of situations?" Such properties could include easily observable facts such as the ambient temperature or the number of other people present. But more psychological properties are both likely to be more behaviorally important and certain to be more difficult to measure. The only method to approach objective assessment of properties such as these is through the time-honored criterion of *consensus*. For example, if all or almost all observers agree that a situation "contains emotional threats" or is "potentially enjoyable," these descriptions can for all intents and purposes (except, perhaps, ultimate philosophical ones) be considered "objective" properties of the situation. Throughout the rest of this article, therefore, we shall use the terms "consensual" and "objective" interchangeably.

The availability of objective conceptualizations of situations would make it possible to address two central questions concerning how they are construed: (1) how much and in what ways do two (or more) individuals construe the (objectively) same situation differently? And (2) to what degree and in what ways does an individual's construal of a situation differ from its objective nature? The first question speaks to Allport's (1937, 1961) conceptualization of personality influencing different ways individuals perceive and therefore respond to the same situation (see the epigram at the beginning of this article). The second goes to Murray's (1938) classic distinction between *alpha press*, the situation as it is, and *beta press*, the situation as it is perceived. Discrepancies between alpha and beta press, Murray believed, could reflect not just personality but psychological dysfunction.

Despite its long-recognized importance (Allport, 1937; Murray, 1938), situational construal has been surprisingly neglected by empirical research. A few groundbreaking studies have examined particular aspects of situational construal. Research on rejection sensitivity has demonstrated that some individuals interpret ambiguous behaviors from their romantic partners as signs of impending rejection, often with self-fulfilling effects (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). Other studies have examined the propensity of aggressive children to interpret ambiguous stories as including characters with hostile intentions (e.g., Dodge, 1993; Dodge & Frame, 1982). These differences in construal may stem from an increased propensity to organize their memories around hostile themes (Zelli, Cervone, & Huesmann, 1996; Zelli, Huesmann, & Cervone, 1995). While research like this is valuable we are not aware of studies that have simultaneously addressed the contrast between the situation as perceived and its objective features or assessed situational construal across a range of properties (rather than just one), in a variety of situations that the individual has actually experienced.

1.1. The current study

The goal of this research is to examine the ways in which personality may be related to distinct perceptions, or construals, of the situations people encounter in their daily lives. Participants completed five lab sessions over five weeks. During the first session, participants provided information about their own personalities. This included measures of some of the most widely researched personality traits: Well-Being, Depression, the Big Five, and Narcissism, among others. During the remaining four lab sessions—spread across four weeks—participants wrote a brief description of what they were doing the previous day at a time specified by the researcher.¹ Typical responses included "I was doing homework," "I was at home with my friends," and "I was watching TV." After writing their brief description, participants rated that situation's psychological properties using the Riverside Situational Q-Sort (RSQ) Version 2.0. Later, research assistants independently read each description and then rated the participant's situation using the RSQ. The average of the four ratings formed a consensual or "objective" view of the situation's psychological properties. In data analysis, linear regression partialled these consensual views out of the participant's ratings, leaving residuals which represent each participant's distinct view, or construal. Finally, analyses examined the relationships between these construals and relevant personality traits.

1.2. Research questions and hypotheses

The overall research question concerns whether personality—broadly defined—is related to distinctive perceptions of situations. Based on Allport's (1961) perspective and everyday experience, we expect a positive answer to this general question.

Specifically, Five Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2008) offers grounds for expecting how Big Five personality traits will relate to situation construal. Based on the conventional understanding of the meaning of this trait, persons who are high on Agreeableness should perceive equivalent situations (on average) as more cooperative, less competitive, and less insulting compared to those low on Agreeableness. Persons high on Conscientiousness should perceive their situations as ones in which it is important to do their absolute best, to be perceived as hard-working, and where success is important as compared to those who are lower on Conscientiousness. Persons high on Extraversion should perceive their situations as opportunities to grab the attention of others and to socialize with others as compared to those low on Extraversion. Persons high on Neuroticism should construe their situations to be more anxiety inducing, more negative, and more insulting than those low on Neuroticism. Those high on Openness should perceive their situations to be more aesthetically involving and intellectually stimulating compared to persons low on Openness.

Beyond the Big 5 personality traits, persons who are depressed can be expected to perceive their situations as more negative, limiting, and evocative of self-pity than those who are less depressed (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). Persons who are high in well-being should construe their situations to be less stressful as well as more pleasant and enjoyable than persons lower on well-being (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Finally, persons who are high on Narcissism should construe their situations as opportunities to be the center of attention (Raskin & Terry, 1988), to advance their sexual prowess (Holtzman & Strube, 2010), to express their charm (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010),

¹ We discovered early during pilot testing that the question "what situation were you in?" is not meaningful to most participants. Asking, instead, "what were you doing?", although technically a question about behavior, yielded brief and informative situational descriptions.

and to control others compared to those who are less Narcissistic (Holtzman, Vazire, & Mehl, 2010; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

While these informal predictions – derived both from prior research and from common sense – are useful, an empirical test requires that we quantify our expectations. To do so we gathered lay predictions of how people high on each of these aforementioned traits (e.g., high in Agreeableness, high in Depression) would tend to perceive their situations. These lay predictions allow us to directly quantify the degree to which patterns of predicted construal are related to patterns actually observed in our data (see Section 2).

In addition to the particular ways in which traits relate to the construal of situations, it is also important to consider how large of an effect to expect. For example, if we predict that persons high on Openness should tend to perceive their everyday situations as more aesthetically involving and intellectually stimulating than those lower on Openness, how large of a construal effect is reasonable to expect? To address this question, consider the source of an individual's perception of his or situation. According to Murray (1938) a perception of a situation stems from both *alpha press*, the actual objective properties of the situation, and *beta press*, the individual's distinctive construal of those properties. The focus of this study is on the degree to which personality is related to beta press.

From a statistical perspective, relationships between personality and distinctive perceptions of situations require (and are limited by) variability in personality and perceptions. Research on person perception (e.g., Funder, 1999; Jussim, 2012; Kenny, 1994) has repeatedly demonstrated that people are generally accurate perceivers of others in their social worlds, which implies that they are likely to be accurate perceivers of their social contexts (i.e., situations) as well. Indeed, in many respects the entire enterprise of experimental social psychology relies on participants similarly and accurately perceiving the experimental manipulations (i.e., situations) they encounter. Notwithstanding occasional claims that individual construals are all-important, people by and large respond to reality as they must (Rauthmann, 2012). Therefore, when decomposing an individual's perception of a situation into the constituent parts outlined by Murray (1938), the lion's share of the variance should be accounted for by objective features of the situation, or alpha press, and only a small portion by distinctive construal, or beta press. Thus, it is anticipated that the relationship between personality and one's distinct perception of a single situation should be small. Still, every individual experiences countless situations every day and, as was noted by Abelson (1985), small effects cumulate over time into important outcomes.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Two-hundred and twenty-one undergraduate participants from the University of California, Riverside were solicited via fliers and through an online university psychology participant pool. Data collection began in the fall of 2007 and concluded in the spring of 2009. Because the research gathered reports during multiple lab sessions across 5 weeks and because situational ratings were not gathered until the second session, participants who did not return after the first session ($n = 12$) could not be included in further analyses. In addition, among the remaining 209 participants, $n = 3$ participants completed the study twice; data from their second participation was dropped prior to any analyses being conducted. Finally, one participant's data was dropped, prior to analysis, for suspicion of random reporting. This left a final sample of 205 participants (105 female, 100 male). The ethnic breakdown, reflecting

the diverse undergraduate population at UC Riverside, was: 38% Asian, 27% Hispanic/Latino, 13% Caucasian, 13% Other, and 1% No Response. Two male participants did not return after the first two sessions, thus analyses including data from sessions 3–5 have a total of 203 participants; however, because of missing data on some measures the N s for any particular analysis in any given session may be slightly less. Participants were compensated \$12.50 per hour, with a maximum payment of \$75.00 for completing all five sessions. Data from this project have been published in two previous papers (Sherman et al., 2010; 2012), but the analyses presented here are novel.

2.2. Procedure

Participants came to the lab for a total of five sessions over five weeks. The sessions were at least 48 h apart. During the first session participants received information about the study and completed demographic questionnaires and several personality measures (see Section 2.3). During the second session, participants were asked to describe what they were doing the previous day at one of four pre-specified times (10 am, 2 pm, 5 pm, or 9 pm) by writing on a 3 × 5 inch (8 × 13 mm) index card. Participants were instructed to specify only one situation. For example, if a participant said that at 5 pm he or she was going shopping then eating dinner with his or her mom, we asked the participant to revise to specify only one of these (i.e., either shopping or eating dinner with mom). In addition, participants were instructed that if they were sleeping at the indicated time, they should write down what they were doing right before they went to sleep or right after they woke up. Participants were next asked to describe the psychological characteristics of that situation with the Riverside Situational Q-Sort Version 2.0 (RSQ; Sherman et al., 2010; Wagerman & Funder, 2009) using a computer-based Q-sorter program developed by the Riverside Accuracy lab.² This procedure was then repeated for each of the next three sessions over the course of the next three weeks, again, with each session being at least 48 h apart from the previous.³

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. California adult Q-Sort

The California Adult Q-Sort (CAQ; Block, 1978; as modified for use by non-professionals by Bem & Funder, 1978) contains 100 diverse personality characteristics (e.g., “Is genuinely dependable and responsible”; “Has a wide range of interests”) broadly covering the personality domain. Each participant assessed his or her own personality using the modified CAQ by placing each of the items into one of nine categories (1 = *extremely uncharacteristic*, 9 = *extremely characteristic*) forming a forced choice, quasi-normal distribution. The CAQ was developed by Jack Block and his collaborators to provide a common language for personality assessment that is relatively comprehensive in nature.

2.3.2. Big Five Inventory

The Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999) includes 44 items that assess the global personality traits of Agreeableness,

² Go to <http://rap.ucr.edu/qsorter/> for more information about this program and a free, downloadable copy. This website also includes complete lists of the CAQ and RSQ items used in the present study. All Q-sorting procedures described in this manuscript were completed using this tool.

³ Because each participant completed four visits and four times were used, the time × visit effects were completely confounded within participants. To counteract this, a modified Latin-square design was used such that approximately 1/4th of the participants completed the study using each of the following time sequences: 10 am–2 pm–5 pm–9 pm; 2 pm–5 pm–9 pm–10 am; 5 pm–9 pm–10 am–2 pm; 9 pm–10 am–2 pm–5 pm.

Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Openness. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 5 = *agree strongly*).⁴ The means (SDs) for each of the five composites were as follows: Agreeableness = 3.39 (0.70), Extraversion = 3.82 (0.57), Conscientiousness = 3.50 (0.61), Neuroticism = 2.76 (0.67), and Openness = 3.73 (0.52). The alpha reliabilities of the five composites were as follows: Agreeableness = .78, Extraversion = .86, Conscientiousness = .82, Neuroticism = .80, and Openness = .73.

2.3.3. Subjective Happiness

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) is a 4-item global self-assessment. Participants rated each item on a 7 point Likert-type scale (e.g. Item 1 – “In general I consider myself: 1 = *Not a very happy person* to 7 = *A very happy person*). A Subjective Happiness score was computed by averaging these four items, with the fourth item being reverse scored. The mean score for this sample was 5.29 ($SD = 1.10$) and the coefficient alpha was .80.

2.3.4. Psychological Well-Being

The Psychological Well-Being questionnaire (PWB; Ryff, 1989a, 1989b) includes 84 items that assess six positively correlated dimensions—autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance—as well as one overall factor of PWB. Participants rated each item on a six point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Mean scores on the six dimensions were combined and averaged into an overall PWB measure ($\alpha = .89$) for each participant with higher scores reflecting higher PWB ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .62$).

2.3.5. Beck Depression Inventory

The Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996) is a 21-item self-report scale that updates a widely-used instrument for measuring the severity of depression (BDI; Beck et al., 1961). Participants rated each item using a 4-point scale ranging from 0 to 3 (e.g. Sadness: “I do not feel sad” (0), “I feel sad much of the time” (1), “I am sad all the time” (2), or “I am so sad or unhappy that I can’t stand it” (3)). BDI scores were calculated by summing the ratings on all 21 items. The average BDI score in this sample was 9.15 ($SD = 7.10$), scores ranged from 0 to 36, and the full scale coefficient alpha was .84.

2.3.6. Narcissistic Personality Inventory

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) is a widely used 40-item self-report scale that measures seven factors roughly mapping onto the DSM-III criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Participants indicated which of two written descriptions best described them for each of the 40 items. An overall NPI score was calculated by giving one point for each item marked in the Narcissism keyed direction and summing across all 40 items. The average NPI score in this sample was 16.23 ($SD = 6.64$) on a 0–40 scale with a minimum score of 2 and a maximum score of 34. The alpha reliability was .83.

2.3.7. Riverside Situational Q-Sort

The Riverside Situational Q-Sort Version 2.0 (RSQ; Sherman et al., 2010; Wagerman & Funder, 2009), comprises 81 diverse characteristics of situations (e.g., “Talking is permitted, invited, or conventionally expected”; “Context is potentially anxiety-inducing”). During lab Sessions 2–5, each participant assessed

the situation he or she reported being in at a particular time the day before by placing each item into one of nine categories (1 = *extremely uncharacteristic*, 9 = *extremely characteristic*) according to a forced choice, quasi-normal distribution. The number of items placed in each category was 3, 6, 10, 14, 15, 14, 10, 6, and 3 for categories 1–9 respectively. Thus, as is characteristic of the Q-Sort method, participants are forced to decide which few items are the most and least characteristic of the situation while the majority of less relevant, or even irrelevant, items are left to the middle categories.

2.3.8. Independent ratings

Because one aim of this study (see Sherman et al., 2010; 2012) was to gather actual situations experienced by participants in their daily lives, it was not possible to view the participants’ situations directly. Instead independent ratings were obtained on the basis of the participants’ written, open-ended descriptions. During Sessions 2–5, participants described a situation they were in at a specified time the previous day by writing a brief description on a note card. While these descriptions were, in theory already filtered through the participants’ perceptions, in practice they typically were simple and direct descriptions of fairly objective stimulus situations, such as making dinner, studying, driving, or playing games. Thus, while cognizant of limits of this method, we used the descriptions as the basis for rating objective features of the participants’ situations. It can be noted that, in one regard, this is a conservative procedure, as any effects of construal found in this research must appear in the RSQ ratings over and above whatever influence individual construal may have had on what participants wrote on their cards.

Four research assistants, from a total pool of 22, independently read and rated each description using the RSQ. As a means of quality control (and similar to practice with the RBQ; Funder, Furr, & Colvin, 2000; Furr, Wagerman, & Funder, 2010), the four ratings for each situation were examined for profile agreement and retained if the average agreement exceeded $r = .23$, which is an empirical estimate of the profile agreement between two randomly paired situations. For approximately 50 situations, from the 814 total, a rating with low agreement was dropped and an additional rating was completed. The four ratings were then averaged to form a composite, consensual rating of the psychological properties of each situation. The average profile agreement amongst raters of the same situation is $r = .49$ ($SD = .08$), yielding an average alpha for the rater composites of $.79$ ($SD = .06$).

2.4. Quantifying construal

Theoretically, a participant’s self-reported RSQ of a single situation comprises two components: (a) the objective psychological properties of that situation and (b) the participant’s subjective view, or distinct construal, of those properties. In contrast, the composite, consensual view of a single situation is theoretically composed of only the objective psychological properties—or in Murray’s (1938) term, alpha press—of that situation as each independent rater’s own subjective construals or perceptual biases tend to cancel each other out. To separate these two components, the objective situational properties provided by the composite of independent ratings were used to predict self-reports of how each individual experienced the situation. In terms of linear regression, the portion of the self-ratings predictable from the consensual ratings represents the degree to which the participants saw the situations as others did, whereas the portion of the self-ratings not predictable from the consensual ratings (i.e., the residuals) represents the degree to which participants perceived the situations distinctively, or construed them.

⁴ All Likert-type ratings were completed using a computerized testing procedure with radio buttons for the response options.

Specifically, each self-reported RSQ profile (consisting of scores on 81 items) was predicted by its respective consensual view profile using a standardized linear regression. It is worth noting that the average profile agreement (correlation r or standardized slope coefficients) between self-rated RSQs and the consensual composite RSQs across all 814 situations (205 participants \times 4 sessions minus 6 missing sessions = 814 total self-rated RSQs) in this dataset was $r = .50$ ($SD = .20$), which is much higher than the empirically estimated expected value (under a null hypothesis) of $r = .27$. This finding suggests that the primary basis of individual perceptions of situations is their objective nature.

Each of these 814 within-subject (profile) regressions (i.e. predicting the self-reported RSQ profile from consensual composite RSQ profile for that situation) resulted in 81 residual (or construal) scores for each situation provided by each participant, which represent the degree to which that participant distinctively construed the psychological properties of that situation.⁵ These construal scores are used in subsequent analyses in two ways: (1) The correlations between personality traits and the construal scores are calculated separately for each of the four reporting sessions and then averaged to estimate the relationship between personality and distinct perceptions of a *single situation*. (2) The construal scores are first averaged across the four reporting sessions and these average construal scores are correlated with personality traits to estimate the *aggregated* relationship between personality and construal across four situations. The average within-subject (profile) correlation across the 81 construal scores for the four different reporting sessions was $r = .23$ ($SD = .12$) yielding an average within-person reliability for the construal composites of $.50$ ($SD = .19$). Further, the average inter-item correlation for the construal scores across four different situations each participant experienced was $r = .16$ ($SD = .04$) yielding an average item reliability for the construal composites of $.42$ ($SD = .08$). Both findings imply that individuals manifest distinctive styles of situational construal and justify the averaging of construal scores across the four situations.

2.5. Lay predictions

In an effort to quantify the degree to which individual construal scores matched common-sense expectations, we gathered lay predictions of how individuals high in each of nine trait constructs would generally perceive situations. Eight (4 male, 4 female) undergraduate research assistants—unfamiliar with the procedures, designs, and results of this study—independently completed RSQ ratings (using the sort procedure) for how people who are high on the traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, depression, narcissism, happiness, and psychological well-being would generally perceive situations. The descriptions of each of these traits provided to the

research assistants are displayed in [Appendix A](#). In addition, these same raters made predictions about how a male and a female would typically perceive situations. Composites of these predictions for each trait (or gender) were formed by averaging these ratings and the alpha reliabilities for these composites are as follows: Agreeableness = .85, Conscientiousness = .81, Extraversion = .88, Neuroticism = .86, Openness to Experience = .89, Depression = .91, Narcissism = .80, Happiness = .93, Psychological Well-being = .82, Female = .86, Male = .84. These composite predictions are displayed in [Appendix B](#).

3. Results

3.1. Situation content

A detailed description of the kinds of situations participants in this study reported is featured in a previous publication (see [Sherman et al., 2010, Table 1](#)). They included a wide range of typical settings of normal undergraduate student life, such as “playing games at a friend’s apartment,” “taking a midterm,” and “making dinner for me and my boyfriend.” An exploratory inverse factor analysis using an oblique rotation identified seven clusters (or types) of situations: I – Social Situations (roughly making up 36% of all situations), II – School Work in Class with Others (19%), III – School Work at Home or Alone (14%), IV – Recreating (13%), V – Getting Ready for Something (11%), VI – Work (4%), and VII – Unpleasant Situations (3%). While these results illustrate the diversity of situations participants in this sample experienced, it would be highly premature to regard them as a comprehensive or general model for the structure of situations ([Sherman et al., 2010](#)).

3.2. Are Distinctive perceptions of situations related to personality?

Is personality—broadly speaking—related to distinctive perceptions of situation? To answer this question, participant scores on the broadly-ranging CAQ were correlated with participant construal scores on the 81 item RSQ, separately for each situation experienced. This analysis produced a 100×81 correlation matrix for each of the four situations, each yielding some number of statistically significant correlates (at the $p < .05$ level). Following the procedure outlined by [Sherman and Funder \(2009\)](#), a randomization test on each of these four matrixes determined the probability of the observed number of statistically significant correlates and the average absolute r of each matrix. The results of this analysis are displayed in the top four rows of [Table 1](#). As [Table 1](#) shows, for each of the four situations experienced by participants the number of statistically significant correlations between personality traits and construal scores, as well as the average absolute r between

⁵ This analysis employs the line of best fit predicting each self-rated RSQ profile from its respective consensual composite RSQ profile (81 pairs of items). The differences between the predicted scores (\hat{y}) falling on this line of best fit and the self-reported RSQ scores (x) (i.e. the residuals) are retained as the indicators of construal. An alternative method might be a difference score approach, whereby each item on the consensual composite is simply subtracted from its paired self-rated item and the set of differences ($x - y$) reflects construal. The two methods are related but not quite the same. If the correlation between a consensual composite RSQ profile and its respective self-rated RSQ profile were 1.00, the output of the regression and the difference score methods would be identical (because $\hat{y} = y$). In the alternative case, however, if a consensual composite RSQ profile correlated $r = .00$ with its respective self-reported RSQ profile, the residuals from the regression approach would be exactly the same as the original self-reported RSQ ratings ($\hat{y} = rx$, so if $r = 0$, $x - \hat{y} = x$). In other words, the self-reported RSQ ratings would be “all construal,” with no predictability from shared reality. Therefore, the size of the relationship between consensus and individual ratings is an important aspect of construal, and the difference score method does not capture this aspect because it implicitly assumes that this relationship is the same across participants. We conclude that regression analysis yields more sensitive and appropriate measures of situational construal.

Table 1
Results from randomization tests correlating 100 CAQ items with 81 distinctive RSQ perceptions.

Situation	<i>N</i>	# Significant	<i>p</i>	Avg. $ r $	<i>p</i>
1	205	479	.005	.0587	<.001
2	203	502	.001	.0589	.001
3	203	483	.003	.0587	.002
4	203	477	.004	.0585	.001
Aggregated	205	620	<.001	.0614	<.001

Note. # Significant is the observed number of statistically significant correlations in the 100×81 correlation matrix followed by the p -value associated with such a number. Avg. $|r|$ is the average absolute r in the 100×81 correlation matrix followed by its associated p -value. The Aggregated row is the analysis on a 100×81 correlation matrix where 81 construal items are averaged with their matching items across four situations (in the case of two participants this only includes a single situation).

traits and construal scores, is higher than would be expected by chance.

Second, participant scores on the CAQ were correlated with participant average construal scores (as described in the Quantifying Construal section) creating a 100×81 correlation matrix. As a reminder, there is only one correlation matrix because the construals from each of the four unique situations experienced by each participant were averaged in this analysis. Following the procedure outlined by Sherman and Funder (2009), a randomization test determined the probability of the observed number of statistically significant correlates and the average absolute r of the matrix. The results of this analysis are displayed in the bottom row of Table 1. As shown, average construal scores are related to personality above levels expected by chance. In addition, a comparison of this aggregated average absolute r with the average absolute r s from the single situations indicates that the relationship between personality and situation construal becomes stronger as the number of situations one reports increases. Overall, both of these analyses (single situation and aggregate situation) indicate that there are many meaningful relationships between personality and distinctive perceptions of situations. We now turn to some of the specifics.

3.3. How does personality relate to distinctive perceptions of situations?

While the previous analyses suggest that personality in general is related to distinctive perceptions of situations, it is important to identify ways in which specific personality traits are related to perceptions of situations. Since thorough analyses using the CAQ would require the examination of literally thousands of correlations (specifically, 8100 correlations for each method used to calculate individual construal), we instead chose to focus on nine personality scales, thought at the outset to be either broadly important for personality (i.e., the Big 5) or related to how people might perceive their situations (i.e., Happiness, Well-Being, Depression, Narcissism), as well as gender. These nine measures of personality and gender were each correlated with the previously described 81 residual RSQ scores representing a participant's distinctive perception of his or her situation (again at both the individual situation level and the aggregate level).

This analysis revealed that two pairs of correlation tables overlapped highly. Therefore, the two measures of well-being (Subjective Happiness and Psychological Well-Being, $r = .56$) were z -scored and averaged to form a composite well-being variable ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.88$). This is consistent with previous literature indicating that both hedonic and eudaimonic measures of well-being are highly related (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Nave, Sherman, & Funder, 2008). In addition, two measures of negative affectivity (Neuroticism and Beck Depression Inventory, $r = .50$) were also z -scored and average to form a composite Negative Trait Affect measure ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.87$).⁶

As in previous analyses, these data were analyzed at the level of the single situation and at the level of the aggregate situation. Participant construal scores were correlated with participant trait scores for each of the four situations they experienced and these four correlations were averaged to provide the most reliable estimate. p -Values for these correlations were determined via randomization test to eliminate potential bias caused by non-independence. The randomization test for each correlation was conducted as follows: (1) Compute the correlations between the trait and the construal scores for each of the four situations separately and average them using Fisher's r to Z and Z to r transformations. (2)

Create a pseudo-sample by pairing each subject's trait score with a randomly selected subject's set of 4 construal scores for a particular RSQ item. (3) Compute the correlations between the trait and the construal scores for each of the four situations in this pseudo-sample and average them using Fisher's r to Z and Z to r transformations. (4) Repeat steps 2–3 1000 times and retain the values to serve as the sampling distribution for the original observed correlation. (5) Count the number of values in the sampling distribution more extreme than the observed value, divide this number by 1000, and multiply by 2 (for a two-tailed test) to obtain an accurate p -value.

To estimate the relationship between personality and construal scores at the level of the aggregate situation, averaged construal scores across the four situations experienced by participants were correlated with each personality trait. Because the independence assumption is not violated in this analysis, p -values were calculated in the typical fashion via a two-tailed t -test of the correlation coefficient against 0. The results from these analyses are displayed in Tables 2–9 which are abbreviated to only include those correlations which were statistically significant at $p < .10$ for either the single situation or the aggregate situation.

Table 2 presents the results for the Well-Being construct. In general, people who are high on Well-Being tend to perceive their situations as more positive and less negative compared to persons who are low on Well-Being, controlling for the actual nature of the situation as represented by the research assistants' ratings of their open-ended descriptions. For example, people high on Well-Being tend to see their situations as ones in which their ambition can be displayed, relevant to their health, and potentially enjoyable. In addition, people high on Well-Being do not distinctively perceive themselves as being insulted, criticized, or blamed for something. These results are consistent at the levels of the single situation

Table 2
Construal correlates with well-being composite.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
52 – Participant is focus of attention	.15***	.22**
62 – Allows expression of ambition	.12**	.19**
54 – Relevant to participant's health	.11**	.18**
47 – Includes intellectual stimuli	.11**	.17*
53 – Includes sensuous stimuli	.11*	.14*
09 – Potentially enjoyable	.09*	.14*
56 – Participant controls resources	.08*	.14*
81 – Participant is complimented/praised	.08*	.13*
80 – Success requires cooperation	.07	.13*
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
12 – Is being insulted	–.12**	–.17*
25 – Allows for liking or acceptance	–.10*	–.19**
66 – Can arouse feelings of self-pity	–.10**	–.17*
01 – Trying to impress/convince	–.09*	–.13*
29 – Pos. or Neg. impression possible	–.09*	–.13*
20 – Potential for blame	–.09*	–.15*
31 – Small frustrations/annoyances	–.08*	–.14*
73 – Allows expression of masculinity/femininity	–.07*	–.11
27 – Frustrating or adverse	–.07	.13+

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and composite well-being (Happiness and Psychological Well-Being).

p -Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. Ns for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 204, 202, 202, and 202. Aggregate = correlations with average construals over four situations.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

+ $p < .10$.

⁶ The vector correlation between the construal correlates of PWB and Subjective Happiness was .74 at the individual situation level and .74 at the aggregate level. For Depression and Neuroticism the vector correlations were .61 and .54 respectively.

Table 3
Construal correlates with negative trait affect composite.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
11 – Is being criticized	.15***	.21**
12 – Is being insulted	.15***	.21**
27 – Frustrating or adverse	.10*	.17*
66 – Can arouse feelings of self-pity	.10*	.16*
19 – Needs support of others	.08*	.12*
41 – Others have hidden motives	.08*	.14*
18 – Pace is slow or fast	.08*	.13*
16 – One is unhappy/suffering	.08*	.11
58 – Has behavioral limits	.07*	.11
60 – Potentially anxiety-inducing	.07	.13*
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
74 – Advice needed/requested	-.12*	-.19**
52 – Participant is focus of attention	-.11*	-.17*
81 – Participant is complimented/praised	-.10*	-.17*
56 – Participant controls resources	-.10*	-.18*
51 – Is or potentially is humorous	-.10*	-.14*
54 – Relevant to Participant's health	-.10*	-.15*
28 – Physical attractiveness salient	-.09*	-.13*
62 – Allows expression of ambition	-.07*	-.12*
57 – Has wide range of interpersonal cues	-.07*	-.12*
46 – Trust vs. Mistrust issues raised	-.07	-.12*

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and composite negative trait affect (Depression and Neuroticism).

p-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. Ns for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 205, 203, 203, and 203. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

+ *p* < .10

Table 4
Construal correlates with agreeableness.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
81 – Participant is complimented/praised	.11*	.18*
55 – Requires self-insight for success	.11*	.18*
72 – Raises power issues	.10*	.17*
80 – Success requires cooperation	.10*	.17*
65 – Demands shift rapidly	.09*	.15*
52 – Participant is focus of attention	.09*	.14*
76 – Can be emotionally arousing	.08*	.15*
48 – Assertiveness required	.08*	.12*
19 – Needs support of others	.08*	.13*
56 – Participant controls resources	.07*	.12*
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
22 – Self-restraint desired but difficult	-.11**	-.17*
69 – Simple/clear-cut	-.10*	-.17*
12 – Is being insulted	-.09*	-.13*
51 – Is or potentially is humorous	-.09*	-.15*
21 – Allows for rational or irrational decisions	-.08*	-.13*
35 – Can cause hostility	-.08*	-.13*
37 – Potentially threatening	-.07*	-.13*
25 – Allows for liking or acceptance	-.07*	-.12*

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and Agreeableness.

p-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. Ns for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 205, 203, 203, and 203. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

+ *p* < .10

Table 5
Construal correlates with conscientiousness.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
48 – Assertiveness required	.16***	.25***
52 – Participant is focus of attention	.14***	.20**
55 – Requires self-insight for success	.14***	.23***
80 – Success requires cooperation	.14***	.18**
54 – Relevant to Participant's health	.11*	.19**
56 – Participant controls resources	.10*	.17*
36 – Allows for unusual ideas	.10*	.17*
81 – Participant is complimented/praised	.09*	.12*
72 – Raises power issues	.09*	.14*
70 – Allows expression of charm	.09*	.15*
24 – Involves competition	.08*	.15*
53 – Includes sensuous stimuli	.08*	.15*
47 – Includes intellectual stimuli	.07	.12*
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
12 – Is being insulted	-.14***	-.22**
11 – Is being criticized	-.12**	-.19**
15 – Allows for introspection	-.09*	-.14*
29 – Pos. or Neg. impression possible	-.09*	-.16*
16 – One is unhappy/suffering	-.09*	-.16*
44 – Can arouse guilt	-.08*	-.14*
01 – Trying to impress/convince	-.08*	-.16*
22 – Self-restraint desired but difficult	-.08*	-.14*
20 – Potential for blame	-.08*	-.13*
49 – Allows for immediate gratification	-.07*	-.12*

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and Conscientiousness.

p-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. Ns for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 205, 203, 203, and 203. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

+ *p* < .10.

Table 6
Construal correlates with extraversion.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
52 – Participant is focus of attention	.15***	.22**
17 – Allows for seeking reassurance	.10*	.20**
30 – Possible tension	.09*	.17*
64 – Allows for sexual construal of stimuli	.08*	.12*
02 – Counted onto do something	.07*	.13*
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
68 – Can arouse internal conflicts	-.15***	-.22**
69 – Simple/clear-cut	-.08*	-.14*
78 – Others occupy various social roles	-.08*	-.10
73 – Allows expression of masculinity/femininity	-.07*	-.11
05 – Minor details important	-.07	-.13*
41 – Others have hidden motives	-.07	-.13*
39 – Calls for quick resolution	-.06	-.12*

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and Extraversion.

p-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. Ns for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 204, 202, 202, and 202. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

+ *p* < .10.

Table 7
Construal correlates with openness.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
59 – Includes aesthetic stimuli	.13***	.21**
47 – Includes intellectual stimuli	.12***	.20**
54 – Relevant to Participant's health	.09 [†]	.16 [†]
07 – Can demonstrate intellectual capacity	.08 [†]	.12 [†]
63 – Raises issues of personal adequacy	.08 [†]	.12 [†]
06 – Evokes lifestyle/political values	.08	.15 [†]
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
50 – Social interaction possible	–.12**	–.22**
26 – Others need/desire advice/reassurance	–.09 [†]	–.11
03 – Talking permitted/invited/expected	–.09 [†]	–.12 [†]
71 – Allows for social comparison	–.08 [†]	–.13 [†]
78 – Others occupy various social roles	–.08 [†]	–.13 [†]
25 – Allows for liking or acceptance	–.07 [†]	–.14 [†]
66 – Can arouse feelings of self-pity	–.06	–.12 [†]
69 – Simple/clear-cut	–.06	–.12 [†]

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and Openness.

p-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. *Ns* for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 203, 201, 201, and 201. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

[†] *p* < .10.

Table 8
Construal correlates with narcissism.

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Positive correlates</i>		
52 – Participant is focus of attention	.15**	.22**
17 – Allows for seeking reassurance	.10 [†]	.18 [†]
45 – Close relationships present or could develop	.09 [†]	.16 [†]
07 – Can demonstrate intellectual capacity	.09 [†]	.16 [†]
64 – Allows for sexual construal of stimuli	.09 [†]	.14 [†]
30 – Possible tension	.08 [†]	.15 [†]
48 – Assertiveness required	.08 [†]	.13 [†]
70 – Allows expression of charm	.08 [†]	.13 [†]
<i>Negative correlates</i>		
41 – Others have hidden motives	–.11 [†]	–.19**
18 – Pace is slow or fast	–.10 [†]	–.17 [†]
69 – Simple/clear-cut	–.10 [†]	–.16 [†]
71 – Allows for social comparison	–.09 [†]	–.14 [†]
12 – Is being insulted	–.09 [†]	–.12 [†]
34 – Allows honestly or deceit	–.09 [†]	–.16 [†]
78 – Others occupy various social roles	–.08 [†]	–.12 [†]
29 – Pos. or Neg. impression possible	–.08 [†]	–.12
05 – Minor details important	–.08 [†]	–.14 [†]

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and Narcissism. *p*-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. *Ns* for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 191, 189, 189, and 189. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

[†] *p* < .10.

and the aggregate situation; however the effect sizes are larger at the level of the aggregated situation. This increase reflects two facts: (1) that construal scores were somewhat stable and reliable across different situations (see Quantifying Construal section) and (2) personality traits are better associated with average construal tendencies across multiple situations than construal tendencies

Table 9
Construal correlates with gender (*F* = 1, *M* = 2).

## – RSQ item	Single	Aggregate
<i>Males perceive higher</i>		
20 – Potential for blame	.18***	.29***
10 – Another is under threat	.14***	.23***
35 – Can cause hostility	.14***	.22**
37 – Potentially threatening	.13**	.22**
28 – Physical attractiveness salient	.13**	.19**
61 – Includes demands	.10 [†]	.17 [†]
73 – Allows expression of masculinity/femininity	.10 [†]	.15 [†]
33 – Potential undermining/sabotage	.08 [†]	.14 [†]
21 – Allows for rational or irrational decisions	.08 [†]	.14 [†]
<i>Females perceive higher</i>		
19 – Needs support of others	–.13**	–.22**
48 – Assertiveness required	–.12**	–.18**
32 – Evokes warmth/compassion	–.12**	–.21**
52 – Participant is focus of attention	–.11 [†]	–.17 [†]
06 – Evokes lifestyle/political values	–.10 [†]	–.17 [†]
40 – Allows for emotional expression	–.10 [†]	–.17 [†]
36 – Allows for unusual ideas	–.10 [†]	–.16 [†]
76 – Can be emotionally arousing	–.09 [†]	–.13 [†]
80 – Success requires cooperation	–.08 [†]	–.13 [†]
47 – Includes intellectual stimuli	–.07	–.12 [†]

Note. RSQ Item content abbreviated. Single = averaged correlations between self-reported RSQ item residuals (controlling for independent ratings) from four situations experienced by participants in daily life and participant gender.

p-Values for the "Single" column determined via randomization test to account for non-independence. *Ns* for each of the four correlations contributing to the meta-analytic results were 205, 203, 203, and 203. Aggregated are correlations with average construals over four situations.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

[†] *p* < .10.

in a single situation. This is true for Tables 3–9 as well, but we will only mention it here to avoid repetition.

To test the accuracy of lay observers in predicting the pattern of results in Table 2, the lay prediction ratings for Happiness and Psychological Well-Being (see Appendix B) were averaged to form a Well-Being prediction composite and this prediction composite was correlated with the observed patterns of correlations (both single and aggregate levels). The lay predictions correlated *r* = .36 with these observed correlations indicating that persons have a reasonable idea about how people who are high (vs. low) on Well-Being might tend to perceive situations.⁷

Table 3 presents the results concerning Negative Trait Affect. In general, people who are high in Negative Trait Affect (i.e., Neuroticism and Depression) tend to distinctively view their situations as quite negative. For example, people who are high on this dimension see their situations as frustrating and adverse as well as ones in which they are being insulted and criticized compared to people who are low on this dimension. In addition, people high in Negative Trait Affect do not see themselves as being the center of attention, do not think they are being complimented or praised, and perceive their situations are less humorous than others might. To test the ability of lay observers to predict the pattern of results in Table 3, the lay predictions for Depression and Neuroticism (see Appendix B) were average to form a Negative Trait Affect prediction composite and this prediction composite was correlated

⁷ Because this correlation, and all other lay prediction correlations, are calculated across the 81 RSQ items the *N* for each analysis is 81 and all correlations greater than .184 can be considered statistically significant at the .05 alpha level (one-tailed) to the degree to which one considers the 81 RSQ items to be a random sample of the population of situation characteristics.

with the observed patterns. The lay predictions ratings correlated $r = .57$ with the observed correlations for both the single and aggregate levels of analysis indicating that persons are quite adept at understanding how people who are high (vs. low) on Negative Trait Affect tend to perceive situations.

Table 4 presents the correlations between Agreeableness and distinctive perceptions of situations at both the single and aggregate levels of analysis. People high on Agreeableness tend to perceive themselves as being in situations where they are complimented and praised, that require self-insight for success, and they do not believe that “Self-restraint is desired but difficult” compared to those who are low on Agreeableness. In addition, people high on Agreeableness also tend to distinctively view their situations as requiring more cooperation than those who are low on Agreeableness, which would seem to be consistent with the construct. Lay predictions of how people who are high on Agreeableness would distinctively perceive their situations (see Appendix B) correlated $r = .17$ and $r = .18$ with the observed patterns of correlations for the single and aggregate levels of analysis respectively. This indicates that people are only marginally accurate in their judgments about how people who are high (vs. low) on Agreeableness tend to perceive situations.

Table 5 presents the correlations between Conscientiousness and distinctive perceptions of situations at both the single and aggregate levels of analysis. Persons high on Conscientiousness tend to see their situations as ones in which “Assertiveness is required,” where success requires self-insight, and as relevant to their health. In addition, conscientious people tend to perceive their situations as ones in which they are not being insulted or criticized. Overall, conscientious individuals tend to distinctively view situations as more focused around success and work than do people who are less conscientious. Lay predictions of how people who are high on Conscientiousness tend to perceive their situations (see Appendix B) correlated $r = .32$ and $r = .30$ with the observed patterns of correlations for the single and aggregate levels of analysis respectively. This indicates that people are reasonably accurate in their judgments about how people who are high (vs. low) on Conscientiousness tend to perceive situations.

Table 6 displays the correlations between Extraversion and distinctive perceptions of situations at both the single and aggregate levels of analysis, which is by far the least impressive table of correlations. Despite the small number of statistically significant correlations between Extraversion and construal, those that did reach traditional levels of statistical significance seem consistent with the construct. For example, it does not seem surprising that extraverts tended to perceive their situations as ones in which they are the center of attention. Further, lay predictions of how people who are high on Extraversion would perceive their situations correlated $r = .31$ and $r = .32$ with the observed patterns of correlations for the single and aggregate levels respectively. This indicates that even if the observed relationships between Extraversion and construal are small, lay perceivers are reasonably successfully in anticipating the overall pattern.

Table 7 displays the correlations between Openness and distinctive perceptions of situations at both the single and aggregate levels of analysis. Consistent with the construct, people high on Openness tend to perceive their situations as including both aesthetic and intellectual stimuli as well as evoking lifestyle or political values as compared to those low on Openness. Lay predictions of how people who are high on Openness would perceive situations (see Appendix B) only correlated $r = .08$ with the

observed patterns of correlations in Table 7 (for both single and aggregate levels). Thus, despite the fact that the observed pattern of construal correlates for Openness seems consistent with the construct, lay judges were not very good at predicting this pattern.

Table 8 displays the correlations between Narcissism and distinctive perceptions of situations at both the single and aggregate levels of analysis. Consistent with the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the construct (Holtzman et al., 2010; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin & Terry, 1988), people who score high on Narcissism tend to view their situations as ones in which they are the focus of attention, can demonstrate their intellectual capacity, express their charm, allow for sexual construal of stimuli, and require assertiveness. Lay predictions of how Narcissists would perceive situations (see Appendix B) only correlated $r = .02$ with the observed patterns of correlations in Table 8 (for both single and aggregate levels). Thus, although the observed pattern of construal correlates for Narcissism appeared consistent with the construct, lay judges were poor at predicting this pattern.

Lastly, Table 9 displays the correlations between participant gender (dummy coded Females = 1, Males = 2) and distinctive perceptions of situations at both the single and aggregate levels. Males tend to perceive that their situations include more “Potential for blame,” “Potential for undermining or sabotage,” and potential for others to be “Under threat.” Females are more likely to perceive their situations as characterized by the items, “Needs support of others,” “Evokes warmth or compassion,” and “Allows emotional expression.” Overall, these patterns seem to reflect a tendency for men to perceive situations as involving more issues of status and dominance, or “getting ahead,” and a tendency for women to perceive situations as involving more issues of warmth and friendliness, or “getting along.” Lay predictions of how men would perceive situations (see Appendix B) correlated $r = .20$ and $r = .21$ with the observed patterns of correlations for single and aggregate levels respectively. Predictions of how women would perceive situations correlated $r = .23$ and $r = .25$ with the observed patterns of correlations for single and aggregate levels respectively. These correlations indicate that lay perceivers are reasonably accurate at predicting how men and women distinctively view situations.

4. Discussion

This study began with two research questions: (1) Is personality—broadly speaking—related to distinctive perceptions of situations, and (2) In what ways are specific personality traits associated with distinctive perceptions of situations? The answer to the former question is clearly “Yes” as evidenced by the results in Table 1, while the latter question is addressed by the results in Tables 2–9.

The results in Tables 2–9 largely met our expectations and are consistent with common sense. People who scored high on Well-Being tended to view their situations as distinctively more pleasant than those who scored low. Depressed and/or Neurotic people, in contrast, tended to view their situations as distinctively less pleasant, including instances of frustration, insult, and sadness. Narcissistic persons tended to distinctively view their situations as ones in which they are center of attention, as affording opportunities to express their charm, and as containing more sexual opportunities. People who scored high on Agreeableness tended to distinctively view their situations as providing opportunities to

cooperate and get along with others. And persons scoring high on Openness tended to distinctively view their situations as containing intellectual and aesthetic stimuli. Unexpectedly, however, Extraversion did not show many associations with distinctive perceptions of situations. While some of the associations make sense (e.g., Extraverts tended to distinctly view themselves as the center of attention), others are more confusing (e.g., Extraverts tended to distinctly view themselves as being in situations that contain possible tension). Interestingly, the personality trait most associated with distinctive perceptions of situations was Conscientiousness. One particularly interesting result is that those scoring high on Conscientiousness tended to view their situations as distinctly more relevant to their health compared to those low on Conscientiousness. Such a result is in line with and might provide at least partial explanation for the well-established connection between Conscientiousness and health and longevity (Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Kern & Friedman, 2008).

This study demonstrates that the main source of the typical person's view of a situation is its objective nature. Despite occasional pronouncements that individual construals are all-important, people have to respond to situations as they really are in order to thrive or even survive. However, individuals also reveal distinctive patterns of individual construal. A further finding of this study is that the way a person distinctly perceives, or construes, one situation is positively correlated with how that same person distinctly perceives another situation. The likely cause of such consistent perceptual distinctiveness is that the person brings his or her own motives, perceptual system, and personality traits into each new situation he or she encounters. Indeed, this study also demonstrated that personality traits are more strongly associated with accumulated construals aggregated over multiple situations than with construals of a single situation.

In addition, this study demonstrates that lay or common-sense predictions about how personality is related to distinctive perceptions can be reasonably accurate. Lay predictions about how personality traits would be associated with the way people perceive situations were most impressively accurate for Negative Trait Affect (i.e., Neuroticism and Depression), Well-Being (i.e., Happiness and Psychological Well-Being), Extraversion, and Conscientiousness. The lay predictions were also reasonably accurate for gender and Agreeableness, but not very accurate for Openness and Narcissism. One possible explanation for the relative inaccuracy of the predictions for Openness and Narcissism is that these two traits may be more complex or opaque to lay judges. It is possible that content area experts on these two constructs might make different, and more accurate, predictions. However, it should be noted that for all of the traits in which lay predictions were made, the composite predictions were positively associated with the observed construal patterns indicating that these judgments are not completely off the mark.

4.1. Size of effects

While the relationships between personality and distinctive perceptions of situations displayed in Tables 2–9 are relatively small compared to other effect sizes in personality and social psychological research (i.e., they are smaller than the typical r s of .20–.40), it should be noted that such effect sizes are only to be expected. After all, people largely respond to reality and these residuals emerge only to the extent that perceptions stem from sources distinct to each individual, limiting the size of the correlations that can emerge. However, it would be misguided to conclude the effect sizes of the relationship between personality and perceptions of situations to mean that this relationship is unimportant.

When evaluating any effect size, it is imperative to consider the context in which the effect occurs. The relationship between personality and distinctive perceptions of situations seen here tends to hover around $r = .10$ for single situations. However, participants' distinctive perceptions of situations demonstrated consistency across their four situations and aggregated construals were more strongly associated with personality traits. This finding implies that people have reliable biases, or construals, of the situations they encounter on a daily basis that emerge in as few as four situations, which is consistent with Rauthmann's (2012) recent work identifying perceiver effects in situation perception. This finding also implies that, while the relationship between personality and distinctive perceptions of situations may be relatively small for a single situation (or even four situations), over the course of days, months, years, and lifetimes, the cumulative effects could be quite large (Abelson, 1985). Ordinary experience would seem to validate this expectation. In our everyday lives, people are not constantly entrenched in disagreements about their social worlds, but subtle differences in perception are apparent, consistent, and consequential over time.

4.2. Utility of the RSQ

This research is the fourth published study to use the Riverside Situational Q-Sort (RSQ) since its initial report by Wagerman and Funder (2009). Thus, beyond its substantive merits, this study adds to our understanding of the properties and utility of the still developing RSQ. Previous publications have shown that the RSQ can be used to measure the similarities and differences between two or more situations (Sherman et al., 2010), to test specific psychological theories about situations (Sherman et al., 2012), and to examine cross-cultural differences and similarities in relationships between situations and behavior (Funder, Guillaume, Kumagai, Kawamoto, & Sato, 2012). This study adds a demonstration of how the RSQ can quantify the degree to which people see the same situations as similar or different in psychologically meaningful ways. Other uses for the RSQ may be discovered or developed as research continues to progress.

4.3. Experimental vs. correlational design

The present study sought to examine the ways in which people perceive situations they actually experience in their social worlds. This research design is advantageous because it acknowledges that people may actively seek out particular situations (Ickes, Snyder, & Garcia, 1997), unlike experimental designs which may impose situations arbitrarily. However, the correlational design of this study is also limiting because it did not allow us to directly view the situations participants experienced. Instead we relied on the participant's reporting of their situations on index cards and consensual third party ratings of the situations described on these cards to provide a window into the actual situations participants experienced. We believe this was a reasonable practice, because the brief written descriptions typically summarized simple and concrete aspects of situations, such as whether they involved studying, socializing, or playing a game, and raters showed little difficulty in coming to consensual RSQ descriptions of them.

However, it must be recognized that participants' personalities may have contributed to their objective situations. For example, people high on neuroticism may have self-selected into situations where they would be criticized, or done things to evoke criticism. Such effects cannot be separated from, and may have contributed to construal as assessed in the present analyses. At the same time, it should be recognized that our measure of consensual reality

rests on ratings of descriptions – written by the participants themselves on 3×5 cards – which may have already been “pre-constructed.” To the extent that this is true, the methods of the present study would tend to *underestimate* the effects of individual construal. While these countervailing influences perhaps cancel each other out, an important next step in this research is to bring situational perception into the experimental laboratory, where objective observers can directly see and rate the situations that participants experience. Research currently in progress is pursuing this goal.

4.4. Implications

If the results of this study were described in one sentence, it would be that when it comes to differences in how people view their everyday environments, personality matters. This conclusion has important implications for the all too common everyday experience of hearing about a situation second hand. For instance, consider the following hypothetical example: Your co-worker Jon tells you that the department boss was overly critical and insulting during an office meeting earlier today. What should you infer about the actual events? The results of this study suggest that it would probably be correct to infer that indeed Jon was criticized and perhaps even insulted during the meeting, because people are generally accurate perceivers of their social environments. However, this study also demonstrates that you might be wise to slightly adjust your inference about the events based on what you know about Jon’s personality. If you have noticed Jon to be overly sensitive to criticism in the past, or if you happen to know that Jon scored high on a Neuroticism scale of a personality test, you might do well to suspect that the boss was not quite as critical and insulting as he made it sound. On the other hand, if Jon is generally resilient to criticism and a “happy-go-lucky” guy, you might consider moving to a new department yourself!

As we have already noted, while the relationships between personality and construal of social environments may be relatively small for a single situation (such as the hypothetical one just mentioned), the associations can grow quite large over the course of many situations (Abelson, 1985). A preliminary assessment from an ongoing data collection project suggests that most people may experience somewhere between 10 and 30 different situations each day. Assuming an average effect size r of .10 between personality and situation construal for a single situation and applying the Spearman–Brown prophecy formula suggests that personality may have associations with construal over a single day nearing $r = .70$. This conclusion has important implications for psychological well-being as clinical practitioners might focus efforts to reduce personality disorders on helping clients change their perceptions.

5. Conclusion

Fifty years ago, Gordon Allport observed that our personalities shape the way we view the world. While previous research has focused on how specific traits such as hostility (Dodge, 1993; Dodge & Frame, 1982) or rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1998) relate to perceptions of particular hostile or rejecting situations, respectively, this study is the first—to our knowledge—to demonstrate that personality is related to how people view the properties of situations they experience on a daily basis. Research in personality science has progressed dramatically in recent years and the agenda for the future of personality science has been outlined (ARP call for papers, 2010, <http://www.personality-arp.org/call.htm>). Amongst this agenda is a call to better

understand the psychological processes that underlie differences in personality. This research indicates that the ways in which people differentially perceive their social worlds is perhaps one of the core processes involved.

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Appendix A. Research assistant prediction rating guides

Happiness – a mental state of well-being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Think about how someone high on this trait would view these items in general.

Psychological Well-Being (Well-Being) – characterized by positive psychological functioning and human development. This includes aspects of autonomy, mastering one’s environment, feelings of personal growth, having positive relations with others, purpose in life, and accepting one’s self. Think about how someone high on this trait would view these items in general.

Depression – a state of low mood and aversion to activity that can affect a person’s thoughts, behavior, feelings and physical well-being. Depressed people may feel sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, or restless. They may lose interest in activities that once were pleasurable, experience loss of appetite or overeating, or problems concentrating, remembering details or making decisions; and may contemplate or attempt suicide. Insomnia, excessive sleeping, fatigue, loss of energy, or aches, pains or digestive problems that are resistant to treatment may be present.

Openness to experience – (inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious). Appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity, and variety of experience.

Conscientiousness – (efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless). A tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement; planned rather than spontaneous behavior.

Extraversion – (outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved). Energy, positive emotions, surgency, and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others.

Agreeableness – (friendly/compassionate vs. cold/unkind). A tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.

Neuroticism – (sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident). A tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability.

Narcissism – Characterized by inflated sense of one’s own importance and a deep need for admiration from others; holding feelings of superiority, entitlement, vanity, and/or self-sufficiency and/or behaving in a manner that is exhibitionistic, authoritarian, and/or exploitative.

Appendix B. Lay predictions of construal for each personality trait

## – RSQ item	AGR	CON	EXT	NEUR	OPEN	DEP	NAR	HAP	PWB	FEM	MALE
01 – Trying to impress/convince	5.56	7.00	7.44	5.25	5.22	3.44	7.11	5.78	5.22	6.00	6.67
02 – Counted on to do something	7.56	8.44	5.89	4.75	5.33	3.89	6.44	6.44	7.00	6.89	6.00
03 – Talking permitted/invited/expected	7.22	6.00	8.33	4.88	8.11	2.56	6.56	8.22	7.78	8.22	5.56
04 – Asked for something/Someone in need	7.11	7.44	5.89	4.25	5.67	4.00	5.44	5.44	6.67	7.33	5.56
05 – Minor details important	4.89	7.78	3.56	6.25	4.44	5.22	4.56	3.78	5.44	5.56	3.00
06 – Evokes lifestyle/political value	4.44	5.33	5.11	4.13	5.89	4.78	5.00	4.56	5.22	4.44	5.67
07 – Can demonstrate intell. capacity	5.44	6.89	5.56	5.38	7.67	3.78	7.67	5.56	6.78	5.22	5.89
08 – Uncertain/complex	3.22	3.11	3.11	8.13	3.67	7.11	3.78	3.11	4.00	4.00	3.11
09 – Potentially enjoyable	7.00	5.67	7.33	1.88	7.89	1.89	5.56	8.78	7.67	7.11	7.00
10 – Another is under threat	3.56	3.78	2.67	5.25	3.11	5.67	3.67	2.56	3.67	2.89	5.00
11 – Is being criticized	2.00	3.11	3.11	7.13	2.89	6.78	3.44	2.89	2.78	4.33	4.89
12 – Is being insulted	2.33	3.22	3.33	6.50	2.89	7.00	3.89	2.67	2.56	4.11	4.89
13 – One might dominate	3.78	4.22	4.78	6.13	3.56	6.56	5.11	3.67	2.89	4.22	6.89
14 – Playful	5.78	4.00	6.67	2.25	7.33	1.78	4.56	8.56	6.78	6.00	5.00
15 – Allows for introspection	5.00	6.11	3.44	5.00	6.22	5.89	4.56	4.56	6.89	5.78	3.00
16 – One is unhappy/suffering	3.00	3.67	2.78	6.00	2.78	8.11	3.44	1.89	3.67	3.78	2.78
17 – Allows for seeking reassurance	6.11	4.56	4.67	5.75	5.22	6.00	4.67	4.33	5.22	6.78	3.22
18 – Pace is slow or fast	5.00	5.67	4.89	4.63	5.56	5.33	5.44	5.33	5.11	4.67	5.67
19 – Needs support of others	6.00	4.33	5.11	5.00	4.67	7.44	3.11	3.44	4.67	7.33	2.78
20 – Potential for blame	3.56	3.33	3.33	7.13	4.11	7.11	3.56	3.56	3.33	4.00	5.78
21 – Allows for rational or irrational decisions	5.11	5.44	4.89	6.00	6.00	5.67	5.44	5.11	4.22	5.11	6.22
22 – Self-restraint desired but diff.	4.00	3.56	5.33	5.75	4.33	5.00	5.22	5.56	3.56	2.89	5.78
23 – Job needs to be done	5.56	8.00	5.22	5.25	4.67	4.67	5.67	5.44	5.78	5.78	6.89
24 – Involves competition	2.22	5.67	5.44	6.00	3.33	4.22	7.44	4.22	4.00	3.67	7.89
25 – Allows for liking or acceptance	7.33	5.56	7.78	4.25	5.78	3.56	6.44	6.78	6.33	7.00	6.89
26 – Others need/desire advice/reassurance	5.78	5.67	5.78	4.25	5.00	4.56	4.89	6.00	6.67	6.89	3.67
27 – Frustrating or adverse	3.67	3.78	3.44	6.63	2.78	7.00	4.56	2.44	3.89	3.56	4.78
28 – Phys. attract. salient	4.78	3.89	6.67	4.38	5.56	4.56	6.89	6.00	5.00	7.44	6.78
29 – Pos. or Neg. impression possible	6.44	6.00	6.89	6.13	6.22	5.56	7.56	7.00	6.89	6.00	6.33
30 – Possible tension	3.56	5.11	3.78	6.75	3.11	6.56	4.33	2.22	3.67	4.22	4.44
31 – Small frustrations/annoyances	4.11	5.22	4.00	6.50	3.44	6.56	5.11	3.22	3.89	4.11	4.67
32 – Evokes warmth/compassion	7.44	5.00	6.44	1.75	6.67	2.89	3.67	7.67	6.78	7.56	3.33
33 – Potential undermining/sabotage	2.78	3.56	3.33	5.63	3.00	5.33	5.44	3.44	3.78	3.22	4.11
34 – Allows honestly or deceit	5.22	5.78	5.89	5.25	5.44	4.78	5.89	5.44	5.11	5.11	5.33
35 – Can cause hostility	3.22	3.89	3.33	6.50	3.11	6.56	4.89	2.78	2.78	3.11	5.11
36 – Allows for unusual ideas	4.33	4.11	5.56	3.38	8.00	3.78	4.22	5.78	5.67	3.89	5.00
37 – Potentially threatening	3.33	3.22	2.56	6.75	3.22	7.22	3.11	2.44	2.56	2.44	3.67
38 – Raises moral/ethical concerns	4.22	4.00	3.78	5.63	4.89	4.33	3.56	4.00	3.89	3.89	4.33
39 – Calls for quick resolution	5.22	5.78	4.44	4.25	3.78	4.11	3.89	4.67	4.67	4.00	5.78
40 – Allows for emotional expression	5.56	3.89	7.33	3.50	7.44	3.56	5.00	7.00	6.67	7.44	3.00
41 – Others have hidden motives	3.44	4.33	3.89	6.25	3.78	5.44	6.11	4.11	3.67	4.33	4.56
42 – Could entail stress or trauma	4.22	4.44	3.67	6.88	3.22	7.11	4.22	3.00	3.89	3.33	3.67
43 – Allows for daydreaming/rumination	5.56	4.11	4.67	3.00	6.44	3.56	5.11	7.22	5.56	5.67	5.00
44 – Can arouse guilt	3.67	4.00	3.33	6.75	3.67	6.78	3.00	3.78	4.11	4.56	3.44
45 – Close relationships present or could develop	7.11	5.00	7.00	3.50	6.67	3.00	4.56	7.67	6.56	7.11	5.78
46 – Trust vs. Mistrust issues raised	5.11	5.67	5.00	6.38	4.56	6.22	5.33	4.44	4.67	4.78	4.56
47 – Includes intellectual stimuli	5.44	6.44	4.44	4.38	6.56	4.22	4.89	5.11	5.67	4.67	4.89
48 – Assertiveness required	3.78	7.22	6.56	5.13	4.67	4.44	6.11	4.78	5.22	4.33	7.33
49 – Allows for immediate gratification	5.67	3.67	6.67	4.00	6.11	3.56	6.22	7.00	4.78	5.78	5.89
50 – Social interaction possible	7.78	6.11	7.67	3.63	7.44	3.44	6.56	7.78	6.89	7.44	6.56
51 – Is or potentially is humorous	6.44	4.22	6.67	2.50	6.78	2.44	5.11	7.22	6.11	5.44	6.11
52 – P is focus of attention	4.67	5.22	6.89	3.88	5.00	4.00	7.33	6.44	4.67	4.56	6.33
53 – Includes sensuous stimuli	5.33	4.89	6.00	4.25	6.56	4.33	5.44	6.00	5.44	6.33	5.22
54 – Relevant to P's health	3.89	4.00	3.78	4.88	4.00	6.44	3.56	4.22	4.56	4.00	3.56
55 – Requires self-insight for success	5.22	6.22	4.00	5.13	4.67	5.22	4.11	5.33	6.78	5.56	3.44
56 – P controls resources	4.78	6.11	5.00	4.00	3.89	3.00	6.00	5.11	4.67	4.33	4.89
57 – Has wide range of interpersonal cues	5.67	4.89	5.00	4.88	5.44	4.67	4.00	5.56	5.00	5.78	3.44
58 – Has behavioral limits	5.00	4.89	4.33	6.00	4.22	5.33	4.78	4.44	4.89	4.33	4.89
59 – Includes aesthetic stimuli	5.44	4.78	4.78	4.13	6.33	4.44	4.78	5.67	5.11	5.78	3.78
60 – Potentially anxiety-inducing	3.56	4.56	2.89	7.50	2.67	7.00	3.56	3.11	3.78	2.89	3.22
61 – Includes demands	5.11	5.44	4.11	6.00	4.00	6.11	4.33	4.44	4.00	3.89	4.67

Appendix B (continued)

## – RSQ item	AGR	CON	EXT	NEUR	OPEN	DEP	NAR	HAP	PWB	FEM	MALE
62 – Allows expression of ambition	5.11	6.78	6.11	4.13	6.00	3.33	6.78	6.11	6.33	4.67	7.11
63 – Raises issues of personal adequacy	4.67	4.78	4.22	6.75	3.78	7.67	4.00	3.89	5.00	4.44	4.00
64 – Allows for sexual construal of stimuli	4.22	3.11	5.33	3.75	5.56	4.22	5.22	5.00	3.89	4.11	6.56
65 – Demands shift rapidly	4.11	4.67	4.00	5.63	4.78	5.67	4.22	3.89	4.11	4.33	4.78
66 – Can arouse feelings of self-pity	4.00	3.22	2.89	6.25	3.44	7.44	3.22	3.11	3.44	3.33	2.67
67 – Opposite sex is present	5.78	4.33	6.33	3.63	5.89	4.00	5.89	6.44	5.00	5.11	7.22
68 – Can arouse internal conflicts	4.22	4.00	3.22	7.13	3.44	6.78	3.11	3.11	4.56	3.56	3.44
69 – Simple/clear-cut	6.33	6.89	5.67	2.75	5.22	3.56	5.67	5.89	5.33	4.00	5.89
70 – Allows expression of charm	7.22	4.78	6.67	2.38	6.56	3.22	6.89	6.56	6.11	5.22	5.78
71 – Allows for social comparison	5.44	6.11	5.44	5.75	5.11	6.11	6.56	5.33	5.44	5.67	4.89
72 – Raises power issues	4.33	4.89	4.67	5.50	4.44	5.00	5.89	4.11	3.56	3.00	6.11
73 – Allows expression of masc/fem.	5.56	5.00	5.56	4.25	5.78	4.67	5.67	5.78	5.44	6.67	7.44
74 – Advice needed/requested	5.89	6.33	5.33	3.38	5.11	3.89	5.56	5.67	6.00	6.44	4.11
75 – P's independence questioned	3.44	3.22	3.78	5.38	2.89	6.78	3.78	3.56	3.22	3.11	3.89
76 – Can be emotionally arousing	5.33	4.89	5.22	5.38	5.56	5.78	4.22	5.78	5.56	5.33	3.89
77 – Allows for verbal fluency	5.89	5.67	5.44	3.75	6.44	3.89	5.78	5.89	6.00	4.44	4.67
78 – Others occupy various social roles	5.67	4.67	5.78	4.75	5.89	4.22	4.89	5.22	5.44	4.89	5.22
79 – P is pressured to conform	5.00	4.00	3.33	4.75	4.00	6.00	2.89	3.44	3.67	4.56	4.00
80 – Success requires cooperation	7.22	5.44	5.11	3.75	5.33	4.33	3.11	4.89	5.44	5.67	4.44
81 – P is complimented/praised	6.22	5.22	5.67	2.88	5.11	2.89	5.78	6.56	6.33	5.56	5.33

Note: Predictions are based on ratings from 8 independent judges. AGR = Agreeableness, CON = Conscientiousness, DEP = Depression, EXT = Extraversion, FEM = Females, HAP = Happiness, MALE = Males, NAR = Narcissism, NEUR = Neuroticism, OPEN = Openness, PWB = Psychological Well-Being.

Appendix C. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2012.10.008>.

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