Human Perception: A comparative study of how others perceive me and how I perceive myself

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to see how you as a person perceive yourself in comparison to how others perceive you. For this particular study a comparison has been made between people living together and how they view themselves versus how their friends/spouses/partners/family members view them. The hypothesis was that there would be a difference between how the individual living with you perceives you and how you perceive yourself. Individuals tend to stretch the truth about themselves and they tend to see themselves in a more positive light than others might see them. The study was conducted by handing out questionnaires consisting of Big Five and Marlowe Crowne scale. There were totally 40 participants in the study, 24 women and 16 men. The results showed no correlation and no statistical significance in any of the analyses. This was due to few participants in the study.

Keywords: Perception, others, oneself, comparison, Big Five, Marlowe Crowne
Background

**General concepts of perception**

The purpose of this thesis is to see how you as a person perceive yourself in comparison to how others perceive you. In the thesis a comparison has been made with people that live together with someone, to see if they perceive themselves as others perceive them.

Since the beginning of time mankind has always been intrigued with different types of relationships and group dynamics. Human nature is sometimes hard to understand but nonetheless fascinating and extraordinary. It makes it worthwhile investigating and there is so much yet to discover since the social codes of human nature are still not fully understood.

Individuals might perceive themselves in one way but others might perceive them in a totally different light. These differences of perception are methodical and basic (Pronin, 2008). For some individuals, their self-perception is well developed for others it might not be as well developed.

In life it can be useful to know others’s perception of oneself in different situations, as this would also tell us how our influence affects others and how close their perception of us is to how we perceive ourselves (Saleeby, 2009).

In some cases our perceptions of others change as we get to know the individual better. According to Saleeby (2009), the concept of self –perception refers to every detailed aspect of human personality.

In certain social settings we tend to become more aware of ourselves and at the same time we try to hide our feelings. Some of them are well hidden and no one can read them whereas others can clearly be understood by others despite our attempts to conceal them (Saleebey, 2009).
**Previous research**

There were three studies conducted in the 1970s with 85 married couples to examine how people perceive themselves versus how they perceive others (Taylor, Shelley, Koivumaki, & Judith, 2001). They were given questionnaires that had 3 socially desirable and 3 undesirable behaviors paired with each of 4 stimulus persons and asked to rate the extent to which the behavior was caused by situational or dispositional factors. The main finding was that people had positive behavior when circumstantial reasons were used. When the circumstantial factors were present, negative behavior was apparent (Taylor, Shelley, Koivumaki, & Judith, 2001). This behavior was most strongly for perceptions of people close to the individual, such as a spouse and friends, and less strongly for strangers and liked and disliked acquaintances. There was little evidence for the actor-observer difference, that people view their own behavior more based on specific circumstances than they view others behavior (Taylor, Shelley, Koivumaki, & Judith, 2001). It was concluded that both cognitive and motivational factors must be taken into consideration in predicting how people perceive and describe others.

**Biases**

The most well-known form of bias in perception involves people’s tendency to perceive themselves in a positive light, although the truth might be just the opposite. The same people also tend to see their futures as very bright and that every good thing that has ever happened to them is all because of how wonderful they are as individuals. Anything that points towards the opposite is ignored (Pronin, 2006).

According to Pronin (2006), despite the well documented role of self-enhancement bias in human judgment, people rarely recognize their susceptibility to it. People generally are not aware of the bias others have of them. They presume that people around them will perceive them in an extremely positive manner.

When the concept of bias is brought to the public there is a common notion that human behavior is directed by others inclination to see how beneficial another person’s action and judgment is for them (Pronin, 2006).
Individuals presume that they are more selfless and altruistic when compared to others and their motives are always directed from an inner feeling of wellness and goodness. This presumption in the long run is not beneficial or positive in any situation (Pronin, 2006).

All people in general have some sorts of prejudice, some that are more visible than others. Due to these prejudices their behavior towards others will be different depending on the prejudices that they have. This behavior can also be manifested when meeting people in larger and small gatherings (Pronin, 2006).

Individuals commonly feel that they are not susceptible to prejudice. Even in situations where these signs of prejudice are shown they still tend to deny that they are prejudiced. If another person has another opinion we tend to perceive this individual as prejudiced. The more their opinions differ from our own the more prejudiced we perceive them to be (Pronin, 2006).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, individuals that have a different view from us are considered more prejudiced and this is because of “ideology and personal experience” according to Pronin (2006). On the other hand when people with the same views as us also have these two factors, they are considered knowledgeable and not prejudiced. Recently it has been proven that when people see others as prejudiced they also become more competitive and more conflicted according to Pronin (2006).

Social psychologists Richard Nisbett and Edward Jones developed a theory in 1972 about the basic mechanisms behind how you see yourself and how others see you (Pronin, 2008). This theory is also known as the “actor-observer” bias/ systematic divergence theory (Kugler & Pronin, 2010).

Their theory was based on the fact that most people see their own actions as bound by situations whereas one thinks that other people’s actions are based on their internal and stable inner self. An example mentioned in Pronin’s article is that of a person arriving late for a job interview and informs the interviewer that the lateness was due to bad traffic while the interviewer blames it on the individual’s irresponsibility. Although this difference might appear self-serving, Jones and Nisbett pointed out that the fact that because it is not the same, it does not always promote a positive aspect for oneself and suggested that in part reflects basic and non-motivational qualities of perception (Pronin, 2008).
They also noticed that people tend to take in different information when it comes to the perception of themselves and how they see others. Considering the structure of the human visual system, people can use far less visual aid to themselves and their actions than to others and others’ actions. They have the information concerning their own feelings and intentions, which has to do with their own actions and it is precise and accurate information. As a result, people know when these actions are not able to correspond to their inner thoughts and wishes because of specific situations. When it comes to another individual, the knowledge of their intentions is not as precise and many times it can be wrong (Nisbett & Jones, 1972).

Nisbett and Jones also argued that observers focus more on dispositional and less situational circumstances in accounting for the observed individuals’ responses than they offer themselves as mentioned in the previous paragraph. It may in some cases reflect the observed individuals need to justify his or her actions. One might think that this might have something to do with one’s own self-worth but this process seems to have no correlation at all. (Ross et al., 2004)

**Perception of oneself and others**

Recent research has built upon Nisbett’s and Jones theory as mentioned earlier, and that builds on the fact that we generally have access to internal feelings when perceiving ourselves and our own behavior. When it comes to the perception of others, one main sense is used and that is our vision. We only have the ability to see their external behavior and we have no clue what feelings or inner needs that motivate people to act or think the way they do (Pronin, 2008).

As a result, we tend to perceive ourselves via something known as “introspection”, which means looking inwards to our inner feelings and thoughts. On the other hand while perceiving others we use something known as “extrospection”, looking outwards to observable and external behavior. It also seems that people may value those sources of information in a different manner when considering themselves versus others according to Pronin (2009). To sum it up, we judge others based on what we see, but ourselves based on our thoughts and feelings (Pronin, 2009).

This difference in information that people possess when perceiving themselves versus perceiving others affects how people evaluate their own and others’ behavior.
For example during a job interview, people think others can only get a glimpse of them from such encounters. In general, people feel they know others better than others know them (Pronin, 2008).

During social gatherings, people are aware that most of their own internal thoughts and feelings and others’ observable behavior and this is known as *interpersonal knowledge*.

Another point of view that is worth mentioning is the one where people often misconstrue the thoughts and motives of others. In these cases, also known as *pluralistic ignorance* the misconstruals occur even though others share one’s own motives and beliefs and act in the same way as oneself (Pronin, 2008).

The last two standpoints that will be mentioned in this context will be about miscommunications and conformity. When it comes to miscommunication, people often fail badly in their efforts to communicate. These communication failings often reflect the fact that people know what they intend or mean to communicate while others focus on what they actually say (Pronin, 2009).

Concerning conformity, people are influenced by those around them and the input from different media sources but they are in denial of this and see themselves as one of kind according to Pronin (2009).

The consequences of the given facts that people’s perceptions of themselves versus others are based on very different information, whereas for self-assessments that information is largely bases on feeling and thoughts and for others it is largely an external perception of them based solely on their actions (Pronin, 2008).

Although there is a difference in these two sources of information, they still have one thing in common for the person depending on them. Each involves accurate and precise data concerning one’s internal state or about others external appearances. This information is more easily accessed than information about others mental states or one’s own external appearances. (Fang et al., 2007)
The biological and psychological aspect

Experiments in neuroscience have been made to see how the brain reacts when perceiving oneself and when perceiving others. These experiments have identified neural activity specifically involved when individuals perceive both themselves and others. Areas of the medial prefrontal cortex in the brain have been shown to activate when people make judgments about both their own internal feelings and intentions. This is applicable even for other people’s feelings and intentions (Pronin, 2008).

This research points to common brain processes uniquely involved in the perception of self and others. They suggest when observing others, people automatically imitate the mental processes behind others’ actions according to Pronin (2008).

On a very basic level, people may quench their interest in knowing others’ thoughts and feelings by thinking about what they themselves would think or feel were they that other person, rather relying on that other’s inward feelings.

This idea is in line with behavioral experiments indicating that people form and get a picture of others’ mental states by first understanding their own mental state. Then some tweaking and adjusting is done on their own mental state. Due to the absence of opposite data, people project their own traits and attitudes onto others according to Robbins & Kreuger (2005).

If we go back to Nisbett and Jones actor-observer bias, it is often understood as the inclination for people to make circumstantial reason for others actions.

Unfortunately this does not give the complete picture of the true phenomenon known as the actor observer bias. It leads us to believe that people perceive themselves as scattered individuals that are bound by circumstances. Another aspect of it would be that people see their actions as actively chosen responses to the circumstance and not bound by the circumstance (Kugler & Pronin, 2010).

The idea of the actor-observer bias that is mentioned suggests that persons that are being observed focus on the reasons, inner desire and intentions that they have in response to ongoing circumstances and that and because of this they are only inclined to making “situational” attributions when they feel that they have consciously responded to the situation (Kugler & Pronin, 2010).
The actor-observer bias coincides with the concept that people see their behavior as not affected by circumstantial indicators in social situations where they can escape social awareness according to Kugler & Pronin (2010).

**Hypotheses for the study**

The main hypothesis for this essay is to see if there would be a significant difference between how the one living with you perceives you and how you perceive yourself. Individuals tend to stretch the truth about themselves and they tend to see themselves in a more positive light than others might see them.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant difference between how the one living with you sees you and how you see yourself

Hypothesis 2: The significant difference will be that others see you more in a more negative light

Hypothesis 3: The significant difference will be that others see you in a more positive light

Hypothesis 4: Others see you in the same light you see yourself

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants consisted of pairs of people that were co-habitating with someone else. They were all from Sweden and were chosen from a list of former classmates, colleagues and friends. The age interval was from 18-60 years and the average age was 32.6 years and participation was voluntary. There were totally 40 participants in the study, 24 women and 16 men. The study started with 80 participants but in the end only 40 participants were left in the study.

**Material**

Each questionnaire had a shortened version of The Big Five Inventory along with a shortened version of the Marlowe – Crowne scale.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, the first part having ten questions from Big Five with a scale from 1-5 where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. The rating was
according to the Likert scale. The second part of the questionnaire had 15 questions from the Marlowe Crowne scale with the same scaling system as Big Five. One part was for the participant answering the questionnaire and the other part was for the participants’ co-habitant. The questionnaires were coded as A for the participant and B for the co-habitant.

The original Big Five questionnaire has between 40-120 questions whereas the Marlowe Crown scale has 33 questions.

In the beginning there were more than 16000 trait names that were categorized into four groups and eventually they were narrowed down to five trait factors. The Big Five consists of five trait factors, which capture most of what we mean and call personality. These five factors were originally identified through a factor analysis of the Allport- Odbert trait. Gordon Allport and Henry S.Odbert conducted one of the most well-known and influential studies in trait psychology.

The same five factors from Allport-Odbert have emerged from a wide variety of personality tests.

The five factor questionnaire consists of the traits known as openness (how transparent and honest an individual can be) conscientiousness (the ability to do something careful and well), extraversion (how outgoing someone is), agreeableness (how easygoing a person is perceived to be) and neuroticism (a way of measuring how emotionally stable an individual is) These traits together are known as OCEAN. These five factors divide human personality into five parts which later on gives an idea of an individual’s personality.

Many personality psychologists consider the discovery and validation of the Big Five to be one of the major breakthroughs within the field of contemporary personality psychology.

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS), is the most commonly used social desirability bias (SDB) assessment and it is basically described as a test for an individual’s need for approval which might affect the honesty of the trait description process.

It has also been called the Need for Approval scale and it was created by Crowne and Marlowe in 1960. It contains more than thirty true or false items that describe both acceptable and unusual behaviors, as well as those deemed unacceptable but prone to happen.
The test has received a lot of attention and because of this questions have been raised concerning how the test works. What one refers to as *classic social desirability interpretation* suggests that the tendency to report information that is colored by social desirability concerns is best conceptualized as a personality trait, which can be measured via the Marlowe Crowne (MC) scale.

The scale measures actual respondent behaviors and attitudes, rather than the tendency to edit self-reports. It is designed to measure social desirability independent of psychopathology. In others word, it assesses whether respondents are responding truthfully or are misrepresenting themselves in order to manage their self-presentation.

The belief that the Marlowe Crowne scale is able to identify persons with an inclination to supply survey interviewers with self-serving information comes from numerous empirical studies that have documented consistent relations between these measures and a range of sociological and psychological variables of substantive interest. The Marlowe Crowne scale has been used in several studies and is one of the common scales used in determining social desirability.

**Procedure**

The participants received their questionnaires via email or in paper form. Instructions were given on how to fill in the questionnaire. Each participant had to answer one set of questions about themselves and another set of questions about the individual they were residing with. The aim of the questionnaire was for each participant to answer the questions without thinking too much on each question, honestly and individually.

The Big Five part of each questionnaire from every participant was compared to his/hers co-habitant and each individual’s Marlowe Crowne score was also be analysed.

A multiple regression test was used for Big Five to see if there were any statistically significant changes. The variables included were age, gender and amount of years known. This means the amount of years the habitant and co-habitant have known each other.

A multiple regression was also run for Marlowe Crowne with the same three variables as the Big Five analysis.
It is always important to check the reliability for statically data and in this case a Cronbach’s alpha test was administered. A Cronbach’s alpha reliability is used to measure how closely a set of items are related.

The last analysis administered was a two tailed Pearson’s correlational test. It was used to see if there was any correlation between Marlow-Crowne and Big Five.

**Ethics**

In the study all the participants were informed that participation was voluntary and they were also informed that the study was about perception and the ability in perceiving others and oneself. Each participant was also informed that he/she would be anonymous and their respective questionnaires were coded with alphabets and numbers.

The study was conducted in compliance to the Swedish Science Council’s ethical guidelines. The integrity, privacy and anonymity of each participant were protected accordingly.

There are four basic requirements for research within the social sciences: the requirement for information, the requirement for consensus, the requirement for usage and the requirement for confidentiality:

- **The requirement for information**: The researcher must always inform the participants about the purpose of the study.
- **The requirement for consensus**: The participants in the study have to right choose if they want to participate or not.
- **The requirement of usage**: The information gathered from the respective participants is only to be used for research purposes.
- **The requirement of confidentiality**: The information about the participants should be stored properly so that no unauthorised person has access to it.
Results

The purpose of the study was to find out how you as a person perceive yourself in comparison to how others perceive you. The main purpose was to see if this comparison had a significant difference. There were three sub hypotheses that were also used in this thesis

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant difference between how the one living with you sees you and how you see yourself

Hypothesis 2: The significant difference will be that others see you more in a more negative light
Hypothesis 3: The significant difference will be that others see you in a more positive light
Hypothesis 4: Others see you in the same light you see yourself

The age interval between the participants was a wide range one from 18-59 years. (M= 32.65, SD = 10.38). A wide interval of amount of years of knowing a person was also included from 1- 37 years (M= 10.57, SD =9.876)

A multiple regression for Big Five was run to see if there were any statistically significant changes. F(3,95) = 0.820, p < .0005, $R^2 = 0.069$. The variables included were age, gender and amount of years known. All four variables added statistically significant to the prediction, $p < .05$

A multiple regression was run for Marlowe Crowne with the same three variables as the previous analysis. F(2,37) = 1,019, , $p < .0005$, $R^2 = 0.052$. All four variables added statistically significant to the prediction, $p < .05$

The reliability given was 0.6 in Cronbach alpha for Marlowe Crowne. A correlational test was also run by using Pearson’s two tailed and the r value was 0.145. This showed a weak correlation between Marlowe Crowne and Big Five.

There were no significant differences between how people perceived themselves and how others perceived them to be.
The tables below show the basic information about the study and all the participants in it

**Table I for Reliability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount (N)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cases valid</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cases excluded</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The three cases were excluded due to low values in the survey

**Table II for Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Participants (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Amount of participants in the survey

**Table III scores for Big Five and Marlowe Crowne**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>32.65</td>
<td>10.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Five (Participant A)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31.25</td>
<td>3.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Five (Partner B)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31.48</td>
<td>3.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe Crowne</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>42.08</td>
<td>4.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of years known</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>9.876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SD- Standard Deviation. Min- Minimum Age. Max- Maximum Age
Discussion

The information that is gathered from how people see themselves and how others perceive them is very different and since people tend to see themselves in a more positive light than others see them, there should have been significant results in the given study.

There were not any significant results in any of the statistically analyses done and none of the hypotheses were proven or disproven due to few participants. The questionnaires were sent out to almost double the amount of participants that participated in the study. As questionnaires were sent out, several people felt that the questions were too private or that it might endanger the relationship with the other person. Another reason was that sometimes only one person participated in the cohabitating situations and then that pair had to be removed from the study altogether. In the future to increase the amount of participants, one could use an online website where the survey would be uploaded so that people would feel a deeper sense of anonymity.

The other aspect concerning the participants that had to be taken into consideration is how to know that each participant answered objectively or how they want to be perceived. The Marlowe-Crowne scale was used for one of these reasons so that the questionnaire would be more objective and honest but nevertheless there is not a hundred percent guarantee of this.

If more participants had been used from several parts of the world, a larger statistical significance could have been made as well led to two further questions for future research. Whether there is a greater or lesser percentage of perception of oneself and others around the world and how large this percentage of statistical significance would be.

For further research, one could compare men and women’s perception of others and see if there is a significant difference between the genders. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, if a study was made with participants from all over the world, a larger statistical significance could be measured and this would have given an overall view of the population. One could divide this future study in countries or even continents and make comparisons among them, checking if perceptions of others and oneself is cultural and a gender based concept.
As long as people are in position to perceive themselves and to perceive others, discrepancies in those perceptions will exist and it will entail conflicts in opinions. When people judge themselves based on their good intentions but others based on just the opposite they are likely feel sad and dismayed over others failure to meet them halfway (Pronin, 2008).

When people view their own perceptions and beliefs as objective reflections of the truth but others as distorted by prejudice, they are likely to feel annoyed and enraged over others unfair treatment (Pronin, 2009).

Individuals can keep in mind that it is not only their own behavior that is sensitive to the restriction of the situation but others behavior as well. This might encourage them to be more charitable and generous when others fail to meet their expectations. Those individuals can also recognize that others mistakes may not be because of a conscious intent to misbehave or to be mean, but rather because of unintended influences that those others themselves would make (Pronin, 2008).

Individuals should remind themselves that there often is a wide gap between intention and action, and that it is only fair to apply the same standard of judgment to others as to oneself.

In conclusion, you know yourself best and although you may be perceived differently by someone else, you are true to yourself when you are the one that you were intended to be without any pretenses.
References


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Appendix 1: Questionnaire
Kod 90B

INFORMATION TILL DELTAGARE


Kön:

Ålder:

Del I


1. Stämmer absolut inte
2. Stämmer ganska dåligt
3. Stämmer varken bra eller dåligt
4. Stämmer ganska bra
5. Stämmer absolut
Jag ser mig själv som någon som...

_1 Är reserverad
_2 Är pålitlig
_3 Tenderar att vara lat

Skriv en siffra framför varje påstående för att ange hur mycket påståendet stämmer eller inte stämmer.

1. Stämmer absolut inte
2. Stämmer ganska dåligt
3. Stämmer varken bra eller dåligt
4. Stämmer ganska bra
5. Stämmer absolut

_4 Är avspänd, hanterar stress väl
_5 Har få konstnärliga intressen
_6 Är utåtriktad, sällskaplig
_7 Tenderar att hitta fel hos andra
_8 Gör ett grundligt jobb
_9 Blir lätt nervös
_10 Har livlig fantasi

Del II

_1 Jag tvekar aldrig att hjälpa någon i nöd
_2 Av till tvekar jag om jag kommer att lyckas i livet
_3 Jag känner mig ibland förbitrad om jag inte får min vilja igenom
_4 Jag är väldigt mån om hur jag klär mig

_5 Om jag kunde gå på bio utan att betala och vara säker på att ingen skulle se det, så skulle jag absolut göra det.

_6 Jag tycker ibland om att skvallra

Skriv en siffra framför varje påstående för att ange hur mycket påståendet stämmer eller inte stämmer.

1. Stämmer absolut inte
2. Stämmer ganska dåligt
3. Stämmer varken bra eller dåligt
4. Stämmer ganska bra
5. Stämmer absolut

_7 Jag kommer ihåg när jag låtsades vara sjuk för att slippa något

_8 Det har funnits tillfälle när jag har utnyttjat någon

_9 Jag tycker inte att det är särskilt svårt att komma överens med högljudda och avskyvärda människor.

_10 Ibland så vill jag ge igen, istället för att förlåta och glömma

_11 Ibland så har jag verkligen insisterat att få min vilja igenom

_12 Jag har nästan aldrig känt behovet att be någon att dra åt skogen

_13 Jag blir ibland irrriterad om människor ber mig om tjänster

_14 Jag har aldrig känt att jag har blivit straffad utan orsak

_15 Jag har aldrig med flit sagt något som har sårat någons känslor
INFORMATION TILL DELTAGARE

Frågor om hur du ser din partner/sambo/vän.

Kön:

Ålder:

Längden av bekantskap:

Vilket förhållande du har till personen:


1. Stämmer absolut inte
2. Stämmer ganska dåligt
3. Stämmer varken bra eller dåligt
4. Stämmer ganska bra
5. Stämmer absolut
Jag ser min partner/sambo/vän som någon som...

_ 1 Är reserverad
_ 2 Är pålitlig
_ 3 Tenderar att vara lat
_ 4 Är avspänd, hanterar stress väl
_ 5 Har få konstnärliga intressen

Skriv en siffra framför varje påstående för att ange hur mycket påståendet stämmer eller inte stämmer.

1. Stämmer absolut inte
2. Stämmer ganska dåligt
3. Stämmer varken bra eller dåligt
4. Stämmer ganska bra
5. Stämmer absolut

_ 6 Är utåtriktad, sällskaplig
_ 7 Tenderar att hitta fel hos andra
_ 8 Gör ett grundligt jobb
_ 9 Blir lätt nervös
_ 10 Har livlig fantasi

Tack!