Human properties

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What are properties?

Properties are explained in Nordstedts dictionary (Palmér J & Freidländer H, 1987) with words like: character traits, features, qualities, nature, characteristics, attributes. Words that are used to show that the following text is a description of someone or something. It can be easily seen that every person is more like every other human being compared to, for example, trees or hamsters. In comparison with trees, virtually everybody is very verbal and analytical. In relation to the hamsters, we are all big. The differences that may exist between us, apart from some obvious visual differences are relatively small and they depend largely on when the comparison is made. A normally timid person may appear far more temperamental than hot-tempered ones, if the comparison is made when the former is cursed and the latter is asleep.

For it to be a property (traits/characteristics/etc.), that describes a particular person in relation to other ones, it must reasonably be a scale or a contrast. I.e. we can be long or short, thick or thin. However, we rarely describe someone with obvious thing like that he or she has only one mouth, and that his/her feet are at the bottom when he stands. Table 1 suggest a number on properties with potential to be distinctive, between people.

Table 1. Some suggested distinctive human characteristics and possible opposites.

Property	Possible contrary
Temperamented	Phlegmatic
Funny	Boring
Diligent	Lazy
Aesthetic	Unaesthetic
Practical	Unpractical
Restless	Calm
Uncertain	Confident
Observer	Man of action
Emotional	Cool/logical
Adventurous	Cautious
Tall	Short
Physically proportional	Physically disproportionate
Physically weak	Physically strong
Optimistic	Pessimistic
Coordinated	Uncoordinated
Innovative	Wants to preserve
Want to be in the centre	Modest
Habitious	Curious/rebellious
Acquisitive	Uninterested in owning
Social	Unsocial
Wants luxury	Wants to live simple
Selfish	Unselfish
Mentally vulnerable	Mentally strong
Generous	Stingy
Secret	Open
Quick	Slow
Cheerful	Melancholic
Forgetful	Desirous
Sloppy	Careful
Nice	Unpleasant
Focused	Unfocused
Intelligent	Unintelligent
Honest	Ingratiating
Friendly	Unfriendly
Dreamer	Realist
Kind	Contagious
Dominant	Humble
Theoretical	Untheroretical

What is best?

There are advantages to be tall compared to the opposite short, but someone who is really long probably will hit the head more often and will have a harder time getting suitable clothes, compared to someone with a normal stature. Most people would rather be thin than thick, but being is extremely thin suffer from a greater risk to die of this compared to someone who is slightly overweight. Cheerfulness is considered to be a positive attribute. Though anyone who is constantly smiling, even in difficult times, will risk to be regarded as a lunatic. Focus on the task is great to have, until the focus turns into unresponsiveness. In short, there are probably, regarding many properties, so that there is an optimum somewhere between the extremes. For many properties, this optimum is probably in the range of the normal distribution on the property. It goes probably for all physical characteristics such as length, weight, size of ears, trachea diameter et cetera. All major discrepancies in that respect probably leads to physical and/or mental health problems. But for some other properties, especially of mental character, relatively extreme deviations may lead to success. In order to, to some extent, determine what is best asked 8 persons[1] to estimate what they think is the optimal level of the previously listed properties.

For the majority of the listed properties the interviewees did quite agree on what's best (for 30 of the 38 listed properties at least six of eight had the same opinion, table 2). Although the interviewees were asked one at a time and even though they should reasonably have somewhat different ideas about what the different features mean. Additionally, they more often thought that the optimum is located in any of the two extremes, than in the normal range. It was only regarding the property pairs temperamental/phlegmatic, emotional/cold and logical, adventurous/careful, possessiveness/uninterested in owning, wants luxury/wants to live simple, dominant/submissive that they agreed that the optimum is within the normal range. Thus, the participants believe that extreme people, in many respects, is better than what they perceive as normal people.

[1.] Six men and two women were asked to participate in the study, and all said yes. The average age was 45 years (median: 46 years, min - max: 39-48 years) and they had varying levels of education, occupation, income, family and housing conditions.

Table 2. **What is the optimum of the various properties discussed according to the participants (number of votes). When at least six thought the same, it is crossed out in green.**

Property	Over normal	Normal	Under normal	Possible contrary
Temperamented	0	8	0	Phlegmatic
Funny	6	2	0	Boring
Diligent	6	2	0	Lazy
Aesthetic	6	2	0	Unaesthetic
Practical	8	0	0	Unpractical
Restless	0	5	3	Calm
Uncertain	0	6	2	Confident
Observer	0	5	3	Man of action
Emotional	0	8	0	Cool/logical
Adventurous	0	8	0	Cautious
Tall	3	5	0	Short
Physically proportional	8	0	0	Physically disproportionate
Physically weak	1	1	6	Physically strong
Optimistic	4	4	0	Pessimistic
Coordinated	8	0	0	Uncoordinated
Innovative	4	4	0	Wants to preserve
Want to be in the centre	0	7	1	Modest
Habitious	1	6	1	Curious/rebellious
Acquisitive	0	8	0	Uninterested in owning
Social	4	4	0	Unsocial
Wants luxury	0	8	0	Wants to live simple
Selfish	0	6	2	Unselfish
Mentally vulnerable	0	1	7	Mentally strong
Generous	3	5	0	Stingy
Secret	0	6	2	Open
Quick	7	1	0	Slow
Cheerful	6	2	0	Melancholic
Forgetful	0	1	7	Desirous
Sloppy	0	2	6	Careful
Nice	6	2	0	Unpleasant
Focused	6	2	0	Unfocused
Intelligent	7	1	0	Unintelligent
Honest	5	3	0	Ingratiating
Friendly	7	1	0	Unfriendly
Dreamer	1	6	1	Realist
Kind	6	2	0	Contagious
Dominant	0	8	0	Humble
Theoretical	7	1	0	Untheroretical
Sum	120	143	41	

Are properties equitably distributed?

I think it seems that, at least in the past, there was a perception that good and bad properties are somewhat evenly distributed. He who is poor in one this is good at the other, which the following three old proverbs suggest (See About proverbs):

Anyone who can do anything is a bungler in everything.
Lucky in games, unlucky in love.
It can not be the one to the other.

Do the participants in this study think that our good and bad sides balance each other? They were asked to rank themselves on the listed properties (above normal, normal, below normal). The estimates were then combined with what each participant thought is the optimum level for each characteristic (table 2). The results suggest that the participants feel they have far more good than bad sides. Since in more than half of the cases (160 of 8 x 38 = 304 possible outcomes, table 3) they estimated that they are at what they in the previous question considered to be the optimum level (green). Besides that the participants are well-behaved and socially functioning individuals it can be due to: wishful thinking, a too coarse scale, or with their personal perception of what concepts such as honesty means (see below) they are optimal individuals.

Table 3.   A comparison between self-estimations of the characteristics and what each of the participants considered being the optimum level for each property. Green box indicates that they considered themselves to be at the same level that they previously estimated as optimal (none of the participants was during the interview aware of that their own estimates and opinions about what is optimal would be compared). Yellow fields indicate that they were one step away from what they considered to be optimal, while a red box indicates that they were two steps away.

Property	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	Possible contrary
Temperamented									Phlegmatic
Funny									Boring
Diligent									Lazy
Aesthetic									Unaesthetic
Practical									Unpractical
Restless									Calm
Uncertain									Confident
Observer									Man of action
Emotional									Cool/logical
Adventurous									Cautious
Tall									Short
Physically proportional									Physically disproportionate
Physically weak									Physically strong
Optimistic									Pessimistic
Coordinated									Uncoordinated
Innovative									Wants to preserve
Want to be in the centre									Modest
Habitious									Curious/rebellious
Acquisitive									Uninterested in owning
Social									Unsocial
Wants luxury									Wants to live simple
Selfish									Unselfish
Mentally vulnerable									Mentally strong
Generous									Stingy
Secret									Open
Quick									Slow
Cheerful									Melancholic
Forgetful									Desirous
Sloppy									Careful
Nice									Unpleasant
Focused									Unfocused
Intelligent									Unintelligent
Honest									Ingratiating
Friendly									Unfriendly
Dreamer									Realist
Kind									Contagious
Dominant									Humble
Theoretical									Untheroretical
Sum: 160	16	20	25	17	17	19	23	23	
Sum: 132	18	17	13	18	20	16	15	15	
Sum: 12	4	1	0	3	1	3	0	0	

Does different properties co-variate?

According to astrologers our personal nature depends on the position of various celestial bodies when we were born. They believe, in other words, that some/all mental characteristics can be grouped and all people fall into any of the groups depending on when each was born. Although the stars discussed in horoscopes is much farther away than the moon and the sun. Some also believe that they are affected by how much of the moon is shadowed by the earth. Although the majority (74%, Sifo, 2004) do not believe in that.

The part of the theory which suggests that characteristics can be grouped and each person can be divided into one of the groups can be true even if the explanation, it depends on the position of certain stars at birth, is not. Maybe because the groupings are based on profound experience of human personalities, which is "packaged" in pure gibberish to become marketable. In the same way as acupuncture traditionally is explained by nonsense, yet (in my experience) works.

To examine the state of the groupings made in astrology, two randomly selected astrology books were studied. The traits most often treated in these was diligent -lazy (in book discussed for two zodiac signs, and five in the other, see table 4), Emotional-cold/logic (included for two and four zodiac signs). Other properties were affected only in connection with a single zodiac sign, although the selection of characteristic descriptive words in table 1 is largely taken from these two books.
Thus it is, based on this material, impossible to say if it is the case that some properties are linked from person to person. Since horoscopes were too vague.

The participants' responses do not indicate that any of the listed property pairs are linked. Because there were no systematic correlation between properties that presumably could be related, such as fast = sloppy or vice versa slow = accurate, and intelligent = theoretical and vice versa unintelligent = un-theoretic (see table 5).

Table 4. The characteristics discussed in two randomly selected books about horoscopes. The figures shown in the column under the book title refers to the total number of signs of the zodiac in which either of the properties of a feature pair (or similar ones) is listed. Red = not mentioned, yellow = sparsely discussed by one author, green = discussed by both authors and/or for more than one zodiac sign.

Property	Stefan Stenudd (2006)												Ann Petrie (1983)											
	Aries	Taurus	Gemini	Cancer	Leo	Virgo	Libra	Scorpio	Sagittarius	Capricorn	Aquarius	Pisces	Aries	Taurus	Gemini	Cancer	Leo	Virgo	Libra	Scorpio	Sagittarius	Capricorn	Aquarius	Pisces
Temperamented	1						1		1	1						1								
Funny																								1
Diligent			1				1						1		1	1		1		1				
Aesthetic	1							1											1					1
Practical																								
Restless		1																						
Uncertain																		1						
Observer																		1						
Emotional			1					1							1	1		1					1	
Adventurous	1	1																			1	1		
Tall																								
Physically proportional																								
Physically weak																								
Optimistic	1								1															
Coordinated																								
Innovative		1					1	1	1															
Want to be in the centre																	1							
Habitious									1	1													1	
Acquisitive		1																1					1	
Social			1															1		1				
Wants luxury									1											1	1			
Selfish										1										1				
Mentally Vulnerable										1						1				1				
Generous										1														
Secret								1		1													1	
Quick	1									1														1
Cheerful										1	1							1						
Forgetful																								
Sloppy			1	1																1				
Nice																				1				
Focused							1	1												1				
Intelligent										1							1		1	1				
Honest																			1	1	1			
Friendly																						1		
Dreamer						1																	1	
Kind																							1	
Dominant			1					1															1	
Theoretical																								

Table 5. Which properties are linked together from participant to participant including parents and siblings. The number in the yes (Y) column indicates the number of cases when the guessed correlation was supported by it was not supported.

	Y	N (pcs)	P1	P1 P	P1 M	P1 S	P2	P2 P	P2 M	P2 S	P3	P3 P	P3 M	P3 S	P4	P4 P	P4 M	P4 S	P5	P5 P	P5 M	P5 S	P6	P6 M	P7	P7 P	P7 M	P7 S	P8	P8 P	P8 M	P8 S1	P8 S2
Temperamented+ emotional	11	20			1	1	1				1					1	1	1								1	1				1	1	
Calm+ confident	12	19	1	1		1		1	1	1		1									1							1		1	1	1	
Innovative+ curious	15	16	1		1			1		1		1	1	1		1	1				1	1				1	1				1		1
Fast+ practical	15	16			1	1		1	1			1	1	1			1					1		1		1		1		1	1		1
Adventutous+ curious	15	16	1	1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1							1						1	1		
Curious + optimistic	10	21							1	1				1		1	1				1			1		1					1		1
Intelligent+ theoretic	18	13				1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1					1	1	1	
Cheerful+ optimistic	18	13		1	1	1		1		1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1						1	1		1
Restless+ adventurous	13	18		1		1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1		1			1			1				1					
Fast+ sloppy	7	24	1											1			1	1	1	1											1		
Unselfish+ nice	17	14	1	1	1	1		1				1	1			1	1		1	1	1	1				1	1			1	1		

Do we inherit properties?

There seems to be a widespread and ancient belief that we inherit characteristics from our parents, which old proverbs testify on (see About proverbs), for example:

The apple does not fall far from the tree.

We think we know that some features more or less depends on genetic inheritance, this goes for:
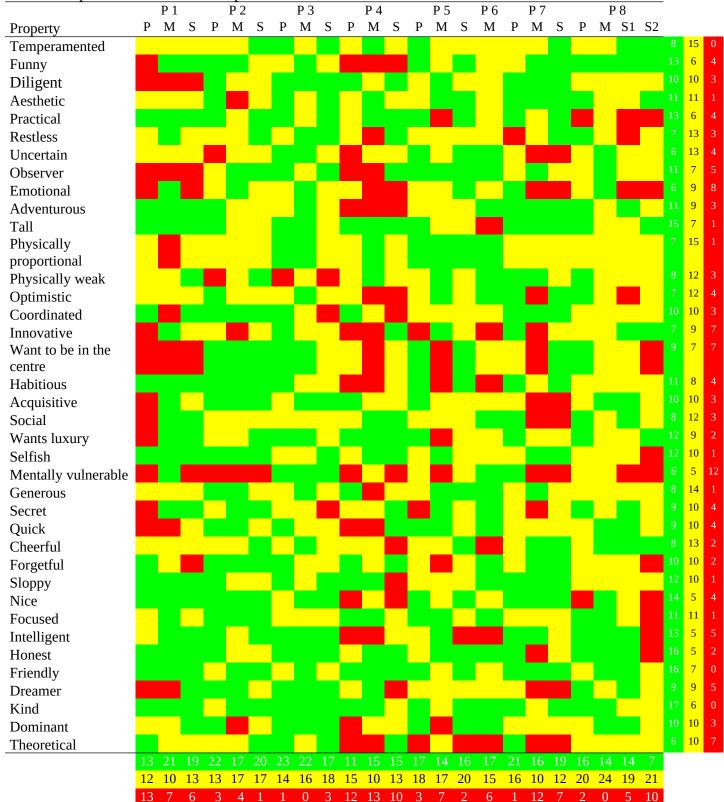
- Skin, hair and eye colour.
- Body constitution, i.e. stature, foot length et cetera.
- Intelligence.
- The risk of certain diseases.

Thus, the participants ought to be more like their siblings than others regarding these properties. But it is not supported by the results of this study. Since as many thought that they are different from their sibling/siblings in terms of intelligence and stature as those who thought they were the same in these aspects.

It is also reasonable to believe that social characteristics like niceness, kindness and friendliness to some extent depends on how our parents are and how we were brought up. If it is true, we should be more like our siblings than others, in these aspects. And among the participants in this study (table 6), it was more common that they rated themselves on the same level as the siblings regarding these properties (niceness: 5 of 8, kindness: 5 persons, friendliness 6 persons), than for all properties, where on average only 3 estimated the same value on themselves and their sibling/siblings. But on the other hand, in my experience, most people are quite nice, kind, and friendly. And those who excel in the other direction are few. Though they might set the level for what the opposite means. The responses suggest that this is the case since only one participant regarded any of their near ones to unfriendly. And no one considered himself to be unfriendly.

In addition, all of us have probably noticed the differences between siblings, even though they have the same parents and reasonably also fairly similar upbringing. The difference is partly explained by that no more than half of the genes are the same for two siblings with the same parents. The differences are also explained by the fact that they were born in different years, at different times of the year and that they have different order numbers in the line of siblings. The last difference has been shown (Schoenberg E 2008) to have a significant impact on the property pairs adventurous/cautious creature of habit/curious and rebellious, dominant/submissive. However, these similarities/differences did not show up in this study.

Table 6. The correspondence between the participants' rankings of themselves compared to their father (P)/mother (M) and siblings (S1-2). A green field indicates that their perception of themselves is consistent with the perception of the related parties. While red indicates that they were so far apart as possible in this three-step scale.

Property	P1 P	M	S	P2 P	M	S	P3 P	M	S	P4 P	M	S	P5 P	M	S	P6 M	P7 P	M	S	P8 P	M	S1	S2	(G)	(Y)	(R)
Temperamented																								8	15	0
Funny																								13	6	4
Diligent																								10	10	3
Aesthetic																								11	11	1
Practical																								13	6	4
Restless																								7	13	3
Uncertain																								6	13	4
Observer																								11	7	5
Emotional																								6	9	8
Adventurous																								11	9	3
Tall																								15	7	1
Physically proportional																								7	15	1
Physically weak																								8	12	3
Optimistic																								7	12	4
Coordinated																								10	10	3
Innovative																								7	9	7
Want to be in the centre																								9	7	7
Habitious																								11	8	4
Acquisitive																								10	10	3
Social																								8	12	3
Wants luxury																								12	9	2
Selfish																								12	10	1
Mentally vulnerable																								6	5	12
Generous																								8	14	1
Secret																								9	10	4
Quick																								9	10	4
Cheerful																								8	13	2
Forgetful																								10	10	2
Sloppy																								12	10	1
Nice																								14	5	4
Focused																								11	11	1
Intelligent																								13	5	5
Honest																								16	5	2
Friendly																								16	7	0
Dreamer																								9	9	5
Kind																								17	6	0
Dominant																								10	10	3
Theoretical																								6	10	7
(Green)	13	21	19	22	17	20	23	22	17	11	15	15	17	14	16	17	21	16	19	16	14	14	7			
(Yellow)	12	10	13	13	17	17	14	16	18	15	10	13	18	17	20	15	16	10	12	20	24	19	21			
(Red)	13	7	6	3	4	1	1	0	3	12	13	10	3	7	2	6	1	12	7	2	0	5	10			

Does our own perception of ourselves agree with others?

It could be that we have such different views on each other's properties, that it is not possible to make a coherent picture even of common friends. But the results from when I asked the seven participants, who know me well, how they perceive me, their answers showed rather large convergence regarding some factors (table 7), even though they were asked one at a time without any of the other participants present.

Table 7. The perception of me among the seven participants who know me well. The cases in which there was consensus (7 of 7) or close to consensus (6 of 7) are crossed out in green (13 of 38). The cases in which there was total disagreement (estimates range from above normal to below normal) are highlighted in red (15 of 38). My perception of myself is highlighted with black outlines.

Property	Above normal	Normal	Below normal	Possible contrary
Temperamented	1	4	2	Phlegmatic
Funny	6	1	0	Boring
Diligent	7	0	0	Lazy
Aesthetic	0	4	3	Unaesthetic
Practical	3	2	2	Unpractical
Restless	4	3	0	Calm
Uncertain	1	1	5	Confident
Observer	0	1	6	Man of action
Emotional	3	2	2	Cool/logical
Adventurous	4	3	0	Cautious
Tall	7	0	0	Short
Physically proportional	5	2	0	Physically disproportionate
Physically weak	1	5	1	Physically strong
Optimistic	5	2	0	Pessimistic
Coordinated	2	1	4	Uncoordinated
Innovative	5	2	0	Wants to preserve
Want to be in the centre	2	5	0	Modest
Habitious	2	3	2	Curious/rebellious
Acquisitive	3	3	1	Uninterested in owning
Social	7	0	0	Unsocial
Wants luxury	1	3	3	Wants to live simple
Selfish	2	2	3	Unselfish
Mentally vulnerable	1	4	2	Mentally strong
Generous	3	3	1	Stingy
Secret	0	1	6	Open
Quick	6	1	0	Slow
Cheerful	6	1	0	Melancholic
Forgetful	1	2	4	Desirous
Sloppy	3	2	2	Careful
Nice	7	0	0	Unpleasant
Focused	5	2	0	Unfocused
Intelligent	6	1	0	Unintelligent
Honest	6	1	0	Ingratiating
Friendly	6	1	0	Unfriendly
Dreamer	0	2	5	Realist
Kind	5	2	0	Contagious
Dominant	4	1	2	Humble
Theoretical	6	1	0	Untheroretical

The participants totally agreed on that I am diligent, tall, social and nice. In my case the length is quite characteristic (I am 193 cm tall), so it does not say much about whether it is generally easy to place people even on a three grade scale. Regarding the other three, it's probably even harder to do any grading since the level varies depending on the situation. What the results are really saying is that the participants' perception of the me they knew is more diligent, social, and friendly than their references in general. Though the participants are friends of mine and we would probably not be friends if we did work out well together (i.e., if they considered me to be unsociable and unpleasant). So the result does not mean that I generally am perceived as social and friendly. Myself I do not consider myself to be social but I think I'm tall, diligent and nice.

Furthermore, I rated myself the same as the majority of participants (at least 4 of 7) regarding 25 of the 38 listed pairs of properties (even though I did not have the others' answers when I tested myself). While me only disagreed with at least 4 participants regarding 13 of the properties. Overall, I think these results suggest that those who know someone well, can have an opinion about the person that correspond fairly well with both others and the person's own opinion about his/her properties.

The 13 property pairs where my opinion differed from the majorities were:

Practical vs. impractical, emotional vs. cold/logical, physical proportionate vs. physically disproportionate, Want to be in the centre vs. modest, habitious vs. curious/rebellious, acquisitive vs. uninterested in owning, social vs. unsocial, wants luxury vs. want to live simple, selfish vs. unselfish, mentally vulnerable vs. mentally strong, generous vs. stingy, sloppy vs. careful, and friendly vs. unfriendly.

In the case of the pairs: emotional vs. cold/logical, Want to be in the centre vs. modest, greed vs. uninterested in owning, social vs. loner, wants luxury vs. want to live simple, selfish vs. unselfish, mentally vulnerable vs. mentally strong, generous vs. needles, sloppy vs. careful, and friendly vs. unfriendly, the difference can be partly explained with that others only can judge how I act with them, while I also can take in account how I feel in general, and how I act when I am all alone.

In their own estimation of the property pair forgetful vs. desirous, several participants claimed that they are good in remembering certain things (which they know a lot about, and/or they are interested in), but less good in remembering other things. If it is the case in general, and if we judge others memory in comparison to our own, the effect could be that those who are not interested in the same things, will both perceive the others memory as less good than their own. Since both may feel that the other person can not remember things that are "easy" to remember. The same reasoning could possibly apply to properties like: sloppy vs. accurate (someone who is sloppy in areas where the assessor believes that it is important to be careful, will perhaps be regarded as sloppy even if he/she is very careful in other areas). If the reasoning is correct, it could explain the widespread opinions about me regarding these two property pairs.

An additional reason for the differences in the assessments may be that we have different ideas about what different properties imply. The large amount of synonymous to the selected words (see table 8 in the Swedish original version of this book) with, perhaps, slightly different meanings leaves much room for varying opinions. In addition, a portion of the words selected to describe the studied properties are, according to the dictionary, even to some extent interchangeable. For example: phlegmatic and lazy and pessimistic and melancholic.

Thus, it is reasonable to believe that we have a somewhat different opinion about what different characteristics means. A comparison between my opinion and another persons ditto suggests that this is the case (se table 9 in the Swedish version of this book).

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