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Full Length Article

Partners among Strangers: A social Relations perspective on personality and collaborative partner preferences in first encounters

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative partnerships are often formed following a first encounter. For example, unacquainted individuals may collaborate to complete a project, develop a product, or solve a problem. Using the Social Relations Model, this study examined the extent to which first-encounter trait perceptions predicted collaborative partner preferences. Previously-unacquainted participants ($N = 297$, 55 groups, 55.9% female) interacted dyadically and provided round-robin ratings of extraversion, honesty-humility, competence, and partner preference. At the target level, individuals who were consistently viewed as extraverted and competent were consistently preferred more as partners. At the relationship level, individuals who were uniquely viewed as honest-humble and competent were uniquely preferred more as partners. Findings underscore the relevance of target- and relationship-specific perceptions in predicting first-encounter collaborative partner preferences.

1. Introduction

People are selective in whom they collaborate with (Abele & Brack, 2013; Barclay, 2013). Although collaborative partnerships involving two or more individuals offer benefits, they are also associated with potential risks and costs, especially when formed following a single encounter (Dunbar, 1988; Kerr & Bruun, 1983). Individuals can mitigate the risks of initiating collaborations at first encounters by selecting partners with care, seeking out those willing to share valuable resources, and avoiding those likely to impede mutually beneficial outcomes (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Neuberg & Cottrell, 2002). This selection is often guided by the impressions that individuals form of one another's

traits during social interactions (Hrkalovic et al., 2025), as trait impressions provide informative cues about whether someone is likely to be an effective collaborator (Derfler-Rozin et al., 2022). For example, extraversion impressions may signal positive interpersonal engagement (Wilmot et al., 2019), honesty-humility impressions may signal morality (Brambilla et al., 2012), and competence impressions may signal problem-solving ability (Biancardi et al., 2017).

Understanding how trait impressions that emerge through social interactions shape collaborative partner preferences requires studying them directly in social contexts (Wheatley et al., 2024), where individuals interact with one another, form impressions in real time, and base their partner preferences on those impressions. Using effects from

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the Social Relations Model (SRM; [Kenny & La Voie, 1984](#)), this study examined (1) the cross-time consistency of partners' target- and relationship-specific impressions of one another's traits across successive interaction phases and (2) the extent to which first-encounter impressions of target- and relationship-specific extraversion, honesty-humility, and competence are associated with partner preferences in collaborative tasks.

1.1. Trait Impressions in First Encounters

First encounters, referring to the initial interaction between two or more individuals with no prior history of communication, are essential in establishing trust and rapport, particularly in settings where sustained relationships are anticipated ([Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992](#)). They set the tone for future interactions by enabling individuals to gauge whether their values, interests, or goals align with those of their new acquaintance ([Ambady & Skowronski, 2008](#); [Back et al., 2020](#)), and provide foundational information that individuals use to form initial impressions of one another ([Todorov et al., 2015](#)). Such impressions can be highly consensual and accurate for certain traits ([Back et al., 2010](#); [Vartanian et al., 2012](#); however, see [Hrkalovic et al., 2025](#); [Siuda et al., 2022](#)), determine whether future encounters will occur ([Riggio & Friedman, 1986](#)), and affect how the relationship progresses ([Cafaro et al., 2012](#)).

Personality traits that are activated and expressed in first encounters are particularly likely to dominate interaction partners' initial impressions of one another. To begin with, first encounters provide multiple situational cues that can activate extraversion-related behaviors such as initiating conversation, smiling frequently, displaying friendliness, and engaging enthusiastically with others ([Lucas et al., 2000](#); [McCabe & Fleeson, 2012](#)). Moreover, first encounters can activate individual differences in honesty-humility. Collaborative ventures that require one individual to entrust resources to another create distinct situational affordances that allow for deception and exploitation ([Sherman et al., 2015](#)). In such situations, those high in honesty-humility are likely to prioritize sincerity and reciprocate trust ([Ashton et al., 2014](#); [Thielmann et al., 2023](#)), whereas those low in honesty-humility are likely to act in a self-serving or deceitful manner ([Hilbig et al., 2018](#)). Finally, collaborative situations involving tasks that require knowledge, intelligence, or skillfulness create situational affordances that can activate competence. In such situations, competent individuals are more likely to demonstrate strategic problem-solving skills, assume a position of leadership ([Rosenfield et al., 2006](#)), and establish themselves as valuable contributors early on in the encounter ([Rubin et al., 2002](#)).

1.2. Using the Social Relations Model (SRM) to Examine Trait Impressions in First-Encounters

Given that collaborative partner preferences are largely shaped by trait impressions formed during social interactions, it is important to use an approach that can disentangle the underlying sources of these impressions. The SRM ([Kenny & La Voie, 1984](#)) is a statistical approach that divides interpersonal trait impressions into three effects. Specifically, the *target effect* reflects one's tendency to be viewed in a similar way by all interaction partners, the *perceiver effect* reflects one's tendency to view all interaction partners in a similar way, and the *relationship effect* reflects the idiosyncratic views that two specific interaction partners elicit from one another ([De Vries, 2010](#); [Kenny et al., 2006](#)). In turn, the SRM allows us to quantify each effect's contribution to the total variance in any trait impression. *Target variance* (i.e., *consensus*) indicates the level of agreement among perceivers about a target's standing on a trait. *Perceiver variance* (i.e., *assimilation*) indicates the extent to which perceivers use different standards when evaluating targets. *Relationship variance* (i.e., *uniqueness*) indicates the extent to which individuals differ in their unique views of specific targets ([Back & Kenny, 2010](#)).

Using the SRM confers an important methodological advantage by

enabling us to delineate the extent to which trait impressions are shaped by a target's tendencies (e.g., some targets tend to be viewed by others as extraverted), a perceiver's tendencies (e.g., some perceivers tend to view others as extraverted), or a dyad's idiosyncrasies (e.g., a particular perceiver uniquely views a particular target as extraverted). By contrast, relying solely on self- or observer-reports makes it difficult to quantify the degree to which trait impressions are driven by target, perceiver, or relationship-specific effects. The SRM, therefore, introduces valuable nuance to the study of how trait impressions emerge and evolve, making it particularly relevant for examining first encounters in which individuals rapidly form evaluations of one another.

1.3. Cross-Time Consistency of Target- and Relationship-Specific Effects of Trait Impressions in First Encounters

When individuals interact for the first time, their emerging impressions of one another's traits likely develop over the course of the encounter, reflecting the dynamic nature of early person perceptions. First-encounter trait impressions may either consolidate into relatively stable evaluations of others or be revised as interaction partners accumulate additional interpersonal information about one another. Assessing cross-time consistency, therefore, provides insight into whether trait impressions represent enduring social knowledge about interaction partners, or provisional judgments that remain sensitive to contextual features of a particular interaction and, in turn, whether trait impressions can reliably predict collaborative partner preferences. Higher consistency would suggest that trait impressions are carried forward across subsequent interaction phases, shaping collaborative partner preferences in a more durable way. Lower consistency would suggest that trait impressions are contingent on the immediate task demands or situational features, allowing collaborative partner preferences to remain more malleable.

Moreover, from a social relations perspective, trait impressions originate from multiple sources, and each underlying source displays varying consistency across time ([Kentrou & Buczny, 2025](#)). Examining the cross-time consistency of each SRM effect for any given trait allows us to quantify the extent to which an individual who exhibits a certain target, perceiver, or relationship effect at one point in time also exhibits a similar target, perceiver, or relationship effect, respectively, at a later point in time ([Kenny, 2020](#)). By statistically partitioning trait impressions into their underlying sources, the SRM can thus be used to assess the degree to which each source remains consistent across time, providing a more fine-grained understanding of how trait impressions evolve over the course of a first encounter.

Existing research suggests that cross-time consistency varies systematically between target and relationship effects. On the one hand, target effects have shown markedly high cross-time consistency. [Kenny et al. \(1992\)](#) reported a consistency correlation of 0.89 for target extraversion based on ratings made before and after 10-minute one-on-one interactions between unacquainted participants. [Park and Judd \(1989\)](#) obtained round-robin ratings of numerous traits (e.g., extraversion, honesty, intelligence) over four consecutive days, finding an average day-to-day target effect consistency of 0.98. Finally, [Park et al. \(1997\)](#) obtained round-robin ratings of college roommates' personality perceptions, finding a 6-month target effect consistency of 0.93 averaged across all traits. On the other hand, relationship effects have shown more moderate cross-time consistency. [Park and Judd \(1989\)](#) reported an average day-to-day consistency correlation of 0.79 for traits such as extraversion and warmth, and 0.73 for traits such as intelligence and assertiveness. Notably, the relationship effect showed a 6-month consistency of 0.28 averaged across all traits ([Park et al., 1997](#)). Taken together, findings suggest that relationship effects have lower cross-time consistency than target effects, both in the short term and across time periods spanning several months.

Given the limited number and scope of available studies, particularly in the context of first encounters, additional research examining the

cross-time consistency of trait impressions is warranted. First, since existing studies have derived cross-time consistency estimates largely from traits based on the Big Five model of personality (Kenny et al., 1992; Park & Judd, 1989; Park et al., 1997; Srivastava et al., 2010), estimates from traits based on the HEXACO model of personality are not available. Second, knowledge about the consistency of impressions for other attributes, such as competence, is also limited. Third, to date, the cross-time consistency of personality trait impressions has primarily been assessed by obtaining trait ratings across multiple time points and calculating correlations between these ratings (Park & Judd, 1989; Park et al., 1997). Fourth, certain studies have reported exceptionally high consistency estimates (Park & Judd, 1989; Park et al., 1997). However, a meta-analysis of dependability coefficients (i.e., test-retest reliabilities) for self-reported Big Five traits indicated that values above 0.85 are unlikely to occur (Gnambs, 2014), further raising the need for additional research to clarify this discrepancy and provide up-to-date estimates of cross-time consistency.

Taking the above into account, the following research question was proposed.

Research Question 1: To what extent are the target- and relationship-specific effects of HEXACO personality, competence, and partner preference consistent across different measurement points?

1.4. Collaborative Partner Preferences in First Encounters

The field of social cognition has traditionally relied on the fundamental dimensions of warmth (e.g., friendliness, honesty, sociability) and competence (e.g., intelligence, creativity, efficacy) to understand how individuals evaluate a potential partner's willingness and ability to collaborate (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2007). For example, Eisenbruch and Roney (2017) showed that individuals prefer to retain partners known for being generous (i.e., warm) and productive (i.e., competent). Similarly, Raihani and Barclay (2016) explored the extent to which individuals valued willingness (i.e., warmth) versus ability (i.e., competence) to cooperate when selecting a partner, finding that fair (i.e., warm) and wealthy (i.e., competent) partners were preferred over unfair and poor ones, with fairness often prioritized over wealth.

Nevertheless, focusing exclusively on these broad dimensions may obscure the distinct role of more specific trait impressions in shaping collaborative partner preferences. Recently, Hrkalovic et al. (2025) examined how perceptions of warmth and competence shaped partner selection when the importance of these traits varied depending on the task type. Individuals perceived as warmer and more competent were more likely to be selected as partners. The positive relationship between perceived warmth and partner selection was stronger in the warmth than in the competence task, whereas the positive relationship between perceived competence and partner selection was stronger in the competence than in the warmth task.

Notably, when warmth was separated into the underlying facets of morality (i.e., trustworthiness) and sociability (i.e., kindness and friendliness), sociability positively predicted partner selection, but morality did not. Moreover, although individuals perceived as more moral were more likely to be selected as partners for the warmth than the competence task, sociability did not differentially predict partner selection in the two tasks. These findings suggest that perceptions of interaction partners' extraversion (i.e., sociability) and honesty-humility (i.e., morality) may relate to partner preferences in distinct ways. Future research would therefore benefit from moving beyond the broad dimensions of warmth and competence to examine the differential role of specific trait impressions in predicting partner preferences.

Consequently, the present study focuses on impressions of extraversion, honesty-humility, and competence as predictors of collaborative partner preferences. First, individuals who are perceived as extraverted emerge as desirable partners in settings where effective collaboration is of paramount importance (Hu et al., 2019). For instance, they display a natural tendency to contribute towards collective goals

(Landy et al., 2016), are outgoing and assertive in novel situations (Averett & McManis, 1977), take the lead in establishing new partnerships (Wang et al., 2019), and often assume leadership roles (Campbell et al., 2003; Kalish & Luria, 2021). As a result, they elicit a positive first impression that facilitates rapport, mitigates discomfort, and enhances their desirability as collaborative partners (Brambilla et al., 2011).

Second, honesty-humility also has a positive impact on one's likelihood of being viewed as a preferred collaborative partner (Hilbig et al., 2013; Scigala et al., 2018). Individuals perceived as having high levels of honesty-humility foster confidence that they will prioritize collective gain over deceitful or self-serving behaviors (Zettler & Hilbig, 2020). Consequently, they are more likely to be viewed as dependable, trustworthy, and fair collaborators (Brambilla et al., 2012; Lee & Ashton, 2008). By contrast, individuals perceived as having low levels of honesty-humility are more likely to undermine or exploit the goodwill of others (Hilbig et al., 2020), limiting the possibility of harmonious collaboration (Lee & Ashton, 2012).

Finally, individuals who are perceived as competent also emerge as highly sought-after partners for collaborative exchange (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Perceived competence is closely linked to trust and dependability (Hatak & Roessl, 2011; Oleszkiewicz & Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2016). As a result, it can serve as a foundation for emergent trust in first encounters, providing reassurance that one's efforts will be reciprocated and that a potential collaborator is capable of meeting expectations and delivering quality work (Biancardi et al., 2017). Moreover, when time constraints necessitate quick assessments of others' abilities, demonstrating competence early on positions the individual as a key contributor and reinforces the desire of others to work closely with them.

Existing work on small-group interactions provides an important backdrop for the present study. Research using round-robin and multi-method designs has shown that personality trait impressions predict consequential social evaluations in newly-formed groups, including likeability, popularity (De Vries et al., 2020), power (Dufner et al., 2025), and leadership emergence (Hartel et al., 2025; Rau et al., 2019). For example, agentic dispositions such as extraversion and narcissistic admiration have been linked to leadership emergence and power via dominant, assertive, or task-focused behavior (Hartel et al., 2021; Leckelt et al., 2015), whereas more communal traits and impressions, such as trustworthiness, member-focused behavior, and calmness, are more strongly tied to outcomes such as leadership effectiveness and liking (Hartel et al., 2025). Other work suggests that these links are context-sensitive, insofar as the same dispositions may be expressed differently across situations and may also be valued differently depending on the social outcome under consideration (Dufner et al., 2025). Importantly, longitudinal evidence also indicates that the evaluative consequences of personality impressions can shift over repeated interactions, as initially attractive or agentic qualities may become less beneficial over time when interaction partners observe a broader range of behaviors (Leckelt et al., 2015; Rau et al., 2022).

The present study aims to build on this literature and make distinct contributions. First, whereas prior work has primarily focused on outcomes such as popularity, likeability, power, or leadership emergence/effectiveness, the current study examines collaborative partner preference, that is, whether someone is desired and subsequently chosen as a partner for a concrete joint task. Second, whereas prior studies have often emphasized behavioral pathways from personality to social evaluations, the current study focuses on how trait impressions themselves, formed during first encounters, relate to partner preference. Third, by applying the SRM, the present study distinguishes whether partner preferences are associated with target-specific impressions that reflect consensus among perceivers or with relationship-specific impressions that are unique to a given dyad. Finally, by examining impressions of honesty-humility, extraversion, and competence across successive on-line interaction phases, the current study also addresses whether these impressions remain stable enough across phases to plausibly guide

partner preferences. In this way, the current work complements prior small-group research by moving from broad social evaluations to the more specific question of whom people want to collaborate with, and why.

Taking the above into account, the following hypotheses were proposed.

Hypothesis 1. Target honesty-humility, extraversion, and competence are positively related to target partner preferences for a collaborative decision task.

Hypothesis 2. Relational honesty-humility, extraversion, and competence are positively related to relational partner preferences for a collaborative decision task.

1.5. Rationale and Overview of the Current Study

Trait impressions, particularly those formed over first encounters where individuals have no prior knowledge of one another, provide important cues about someone's suitability as a collaborator and thus play a central role in shaping collaborative partner preferences. The current study aimed to advance our understanding of (1) the cross-time consistency of individuals' first-encounter impressions of one another's traits over consecutive interactions and (2) the relation between trait impressions and collaborative partner preferences.

The rationale behind the current study was threefold. First, consecutive interactions provide opportunities for trait impressions and partner preferences to be either maintained or updated as additional interpersonal information becomes available. Consequently, examining cross-time consistency allows us to gauge whether trait impressions formed during each interaction reflect either stable and enduring or transient and context-bound judgments. In turn, evidence of cross-time consistency bears directly on whether trait impressions can meaningfully predict collaborative partner preferences. However, existing knowledge about the cross-time consistency of first-encounter trait impressions has originated from a small number of relatively dated studies that may be subject to methodological limitations, creating the need for more up-to-date and robust estimates.

Second, prior research has primarily focused on the broad dimensions of warmth and competence, yet recent work suggests that, with respect to warmth, extraversion and honesty-humility may better capture the attributes that individuals prioritize in potential collaborative partners. Using the HEXACO framework is particularly advantageous in this context, as honesty-humility uniquely captures dispositions related to fairness, sincerity, and morality, characteristics that are directly relevant to being perceived as a dependable, trustworthy, and desirable collaborative partner. By contrast, such dispositions are less clearly represented within the Big Five framework. The HEXACO framework thus allows us to more directly examine whether these moral, prosocial, or non-exploitative tendencies are associated with collaborative partner preferences within a single, theoretically coherent model of personality. Third, although trait impressions and collaborative partner preferences are formed at multiple underlying levels involving target-, perceiver-, and relationship-specific effects, this relation has not yet been investigated separately at each level.

To address these points, existing data from a two-part online study were used (Hrkalovic et al., 2025; Hrkalovic, 2022). First, participants completed a survey where they provided self-report ratings of attributes such as personality, social anxiety, trustworthiness, and intelligence. Second, one week later, participants joined an experimental session where they engaged in brief dyadic interactions, performed joint decision tasks, and rated one another on personality, competence, and desirability as a collaborative partner.

The hypotheses examined in the current study were preregistered at the start of the project (<https://osf.io/nmtq3>). The preregistration, analysis script, dataset containing all SRM effects used to perform tests of hypotheses are available on the project's OSF page (<https://osf.io/h>

[x2dm/overview?view_only=e8d22a4c5e994ca89aa604046b8d5135](https://osf.io/hx2dm/overview?view_only=e8d22a4c5e994ca89aa604046b8d5135)).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Data for the current study were drawn from the existing PARSEL dataset, a multimodal dataset intended to model decision-making processes involved in selecting partners for joint tasks (Hrkalovic et al., 2025; Hrkalovic, 2022). The sample consisted of 297 participants, 55.9% ($n = 166$) of whom were women, 42.8% ($n = 127$) were men, 1.0% ($n = 3$) were non-binary or a third gender, and 0.3% ($n = 1$) did not disclose their gender. Participants' average age was 37.39 years ($SD = 11.42$). Participants had no prior acquaintance with one another and interacted for the first time during the interaction session. Informed consent was provided by all participants. Additional sample characteristics are reported in Table S2.

2.2. Procedure

This research was approved by the Ethical Board of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Data collection for the study, which took place online between April 19th and July 14th, 2022, was conducted in Qualtrics (<http://www.qualtrics.com>) and consisted of two sessions: an intake session and an interaction session. In the intake session, participants completed a 40-minute self-report survey assessing attributes such as personality, intelligence, and social interaction anxiety. In the interaction session, participants were placed in groups of 4–6 individuals where, across multiple phases, they interacted in dyads, performed a series of cooperative and collaborative tasks, and rated one another on a series of attributes.

The interaction session consisted of four phases. At the start, participants received information about the study procedure and the upcoming cooperative task. They were not explicitly told that this task would entail cooperation, but were given instructions regarding the content of the 'decision task' that they would later perform. In the first phase (impression phase), all participants were asked to take a photo of themselves and subsequently rate one another on warmth-related adjectives (i.e., trustworthiness, kindness, sociability,) and competence-related adjectives (i.e., competence, intelligence, skillfulness) based on these photos. After all ratings were completed, the photos were displayed again in successive order, and participants were asked to indicate whether they would prefer each individual as a partner for the upcoming cooperative task. In the second phase (conversation phase), participants engaged in a series of 3-minute dyadic video conversations with one another. Following each dyadic conversation, they completed a survey assessing their perceptions of one another's personality and competence. After all interactions were completed, the photos were displayed again in successive order, and participants were asked to indicate whether they would prefer each individual as a partner for the upcoming cooperative task.

In the third phase (cooperation phase), participants engaged dyadically in a cooperative task with every member of their group, regardless of their previously-indicated partner preferences. This task involved no face-to-face interaction, and participants only viewed one another's photographs during the task. After all participants had performed the task dyadically with one another, their photos were displayed again in successive order, and they were asked to indicate whether they would prefer each individual as a partner for an upcoming collaborative task. In the fourth phase (collaboration phase), participants performed a 3-minute collaborative task with every group member, regardless of their previously-indicated partner preferences. Following each dyadic interaction, participants completed a survey assessing their perceptions of one another's personality and competence. The interaction session lasted from two to three hours and was concluded with a debriefing.

The current dataset was designed to capture partner preferences

across sequential phases that differed in the amount and type of available interpersonal information. All study phases were implemented within a single browser-based experimental environment that integrated Qualtrics with a custom WebRTC video-conferencing system and centralized participant management to ensure consistent study flow and pairing procedures across all participants. Although the technological modality differed across phases, these differences were intentional and reflected the study's goal of modeling partner preference as a sequential process that unfolds with increasing interpersonal information available to guide impression formation. Early stages relied on minimal information (facial features), followed by richer cues during live video interaction, and finally, task performance in the absence of conversation. Importantly, conversations were standardized in duration and implemented through the same interface for all participants, while later task stages removed live interaction to prevent additional communication from influencing task behavior. At the same time, the design allowed some natural variability in recording conditions (e.g., webcam models or lighting), capturing realistic online interaction environments. Interested readers are directed to [Hrkalovic et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Hrkalovic \(2022\)](#) for a comprehensive overview of the study procedure.

3. Measures

3.1. Personality

Participants rated one another on personality following the conversation and collaboration phases. Personality perceptions were measured using six items, each corresponding to one factor-level scale from the HEXACO model of personality ([Ashton & Lee, 2008](#)). Using a 9-point scale, participants indicated the extent to which they perceived every interaction partner to be either (1) insincere, unfair, greedy, and immodest, or (9) sincere, fair, greed-avoidant, and modest (honesty-humility); (1) cool, composed, independent, and unsentimental, or (9) fearful, anxious, dependent, and sentimental (emotionality); (1) not really lively and sociable, withdrawn, and with low social self-esteem, or (9) lively, sociable, socially bold, and with high social self-esteem (extraversion); (1) harsh, vengeful, and stubborn, or (9) gentle, forgiving, flexible, and mild (agreeableness); (1) careless, disorganized, not really perfectionistic, and imprudent, or (9) diligent, organized, perfectionistic, and prudent (conscientiousness); (1) not really interested in arts and sciences, not really creative, and conventional, or (9) interested in arts and sciences, creative, and unconventional (openness to experience).

3.2. Competence

Participants rated one another following the impression, conversation, and collaboration phases using three adjectives designed to assess competence ([Kirmani et al., 2017](#); [Leach et al., 2007](#)). These adjectives were *skillful*, *intelligent*, and *competent*. Accordingly, participants responded to three questions (i.e., "How skillful would you say this person is?", "How intelligent would you say this person is?", and "How competent would you say this person is?"), using a 7-point scale (1 = *extremely not*, 7 = *extremely*).

3.3. Partner Preference

Partner preference was first measured using a single item ("Would you want to do a decision task with this person?") with two categorical response options (*no*, *yes*). If the participants provided a positive response, they were prompted to indicate the strength of their preference ("How strongly do you want to be paired with this person?") on a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*very much*). In the current study, the two questions were combined to create one continuous variable ranging from 0 (*Would not prefer to have this person as a partner*) to 100 (*Would prefer to have this person as a partner, with maximum confidence in*

this decision). We note that the two questions were also analyzed separately, and these analyses can be found in Table S32-S34 of the Supplement.

Participants provided their partner preferences at three points. First, they indicated their partner preferences for the upcoming cooperative task while only viewing photographs of one another (following the impression phase). Second, they indicated their partner preferences for the upcoming cooperative task after engaging in brief dyadic conversations (following the conversation phase). Finally, they indicated their partner preferences for the upcoming collaborative task (following the cooperation phase). Participants could select unlimited partners and, regardless of their choice, everyone interacted dyadically with one another. They were not made aware that they would interact with all participants, but the researcher indicated that their selection would be important for calculating their bonus payments.

3.4. Control Variables: Attractiveness and Similarity

Participants rated one another using one adjective designed to assess attractiveness and one adjective designed to assess similarity. To assess attractiveness, they responded to the question "How attractive would you say this person is?" while, to assess similarity, they responded to the question "How similar (in values and beliefs) would you say you are to this person?" Both items were rated using a 7-point scale (1 = *extremely not*, 7 = *extremely*). Perceptions of attractiveness and similarity were assessed following the impression, conversation, and collaboration phases of the interaction session.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Social Relations Model (SRM)

Data from the interaction session were collected using a round-robin design, where measures were obtained from every possible dyad formed within a group ([Wong et al., 2022](#)). Each group contained at least four members, allowing us to apply the SRM to the data. The SRM divides every form of trait impression into three underlying effects: the target effect, the perceiver effect, and the relationship effect ([Back & Kenny, 2010](#)). In turn, the SRM computes three components that quantify each effect's contribution to the total variance in any trait perception: target variance, perceiver variance, and relationship variance ([Kenny et al., 2006](#)). The Supplement contains additional information about the SRM.

All round-robin variables were analyzed with Social Relations Analyses (SRAs) performed using the R package *TripleR* ([Schönbrodt et al., 2012](#)). First, the target, perceiver, and relationship variances for each round-robin variable were estimated. Second, the target and perceiver effects for each individual participant and the relationship effects for each dyad were estimated. Each participant's target and relationship effects for every variable were exported to a new dataset for subsequent analyses. *TripleR* was also used to perform tests of statistical significance for variance components.

4.2. Cross-Time Consistency of the Target, Perceiver, and Relationship Effects.

Cross-time consistencies of the target, perceiver, and relationship effects for HEXACO personality, competence, and partner preference were examined using Within and Between Analysis (WABA; [Dansereau et al., 2016](#)). The first part of the analysis (WABA I) examines the proportion of within-group and between-group variation in each variable, and the second part (WABA II) examines the extent to which all variable pairs in a dataset covary primarily within groups, between groups, or both/neither within and between groups ([Klein & Kozlowski, 2016](#)). Moreover, WABA provides statistical (*F* test) and practical (*E* test) significance tests ([Dansereau et al., 1984](#)). In the current study, results from WABA II were used to evaluate the cross-time consistency of the SRM

components. The Supplement contains additional information about WABA.

The consistencies of effects for HEXACO personality were examined between the conversation and the collaboration phase. The consistencies of effects for competence were examined between the impression and conversation, the conversation and collaboration, and the impression and collaboration phases. Finally, the consistencies of effects for partner preference were examined between the impression and conversation, the conversation and cooperation, and the impression and cooperation phases.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

All hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression. Age, gender, attractiveness, and similarity were included as control variables. Given that demographic characteristics can systematically influence interpersonal evaluations and partner preferences in social interaction contexts, age and gender were included as predictors in the first block of each regression model. Age may introduce variation in communication patterns or perceived maturity, potentially affecting both how individuals behave during interactions and how desirable they are perceived as potential collaborators. Gender may introduce variation in social interaction dynamics and impression formation processes, potentially affecting whom individuals prefer to collaborate with. We note that, due to limited sample size, the response categories 'non-binary/third gender' ($n = 3$), and 'prefer not to say' ($n = 1$) were excluded from the regression analyses reported in the current paper. All regression analyses were also performed by combining the above categories into one, and treating gender as a multi-categorical factor with dummy coding in the regression. Both analyses produced identical results, so only analyses treating gender as a dichotomous variable are reported in the current paper. Furthermore, given that research on interpersonal attraction and group processes suggests that individuals tend to prefer partners who are attractive and demographically similar to themselves, attractiveness and similarity were included as predictors in the second block of each regression model.

The hypotheses were tested using target/relationship effects for personality and competence assessed following the conversation phase, and target/relationship effects for partner preferences assessed prior to the collaboration phase. Each hypothesis was first tested using target and relationship effects estimated from single-indicator SRAs for all the HEXACO scales, and then using two-indicator SRAs for honesty-humility and extraversion, and single-indicator SRAs for the remaining HEXACO scales. For honesty-humility, three separate two-indicator SRAs were performed, using the original trait-descriptive item (extent to which they perceived every interaction partner to be either (1) insincere, unfair, greedy, and immodest, or (9) sincere, fair, greed-avoidant, and modest) and the adjective *honest*; using one trait-descriptive item and the adjective *sincere*; and using the two adjectives *honest* and *sincere*. For extraversion, two-indicator SRAs were performed using the original trait-descriptive item (extent to which they perceived every interaction partner to be either (1) not really lively and sociable, withdrawn, and with low social self-esteem, or (9) lively, sociable, socially bold, and with high social self-esteem) and the adjective *sociable*. For brevity, only results from single-indicator SRAs are reported in the main paper. Detailed results, including two-indicator SRAs, are reported in the Supplement (Table S6). These analyses produced comparable results to the single-indicator SRAs.

We note that certain hypotheses originally included in the preregistration were not examined and are thus not reported in the current paper. An explanation of this deviation is provided in the supplement.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptives

Pearson product-moment correlations between HEXACO target and relationship effects assessed at the conversation and collaboration phases were examined. The lower diagonal portion of Table 1 presents correlations for the target effects, and the upper diagonal portion presents correlations for the relationship effects. At the target level, convergent correlations between the two phases ranged from 0.22 (agreeableness) to 0.55 (openness to experience). Target extraversion (0.49) also showed a moderate correlation. At the relationship level, convergent correlations between the two interaction phases ranged from 0.45 (agreeableness) to 0.80 (extraversion). Openness to experience also showed a strong correlation (0.77). Table S4 of the Supplement contains a detailed overview of correlations among variables examined in the current study.

5.2. Social Relations Analyses (SRAs)

Overall, personality impressions were largely relational, suggesting that participants tended to form unique, relationship-specific impressions of particular interaction partners. Extraversion showed the highest target variance, while the remaining traits showed relatively low target variance. Second, competence impressions showed relatively low target variance, but higher perceiver and relationship variance. Finally, collaborative partner preferences were largely relational across both phases, suggesting that they were primarily driven by relationship-specific impressions rather than by consensus on which individuals were most desirable as collaborative partners. SRA results are explained in further detail below.

5.3. Personality

All the SRM variance estimates are reported in Table 2. Due to the use of a single indicator, estimates of relationship variance also contain error variance and are thus somewhat inflated. Variance estimates based on two-indicator SRAs are provided in tables S6-S7. At the conversation phase, extraversion showed the highest target variance (31%), indicating that perceivers tended to agree on the extent to which each target was characterized by low, moderate, or high levels of extraversion. The remaining personality traits, particularly honesty-humility (8%), showed low target variance. Agreeableness (30%) and honesty-humility (29%) showed the highest perceiver variance, indicating a tendency of perceivers to assimilate targets differently for these traits. The remaining traits showed either low or moderate perceiver variance. All six traits showed high relationship variance, indicating a substantial degree of uniqueness in dyad members' first impressions of specific interaction partners' personalities following brief (approximately 3 min per dyad) conversations.

At the collaboration phase, extraversion again showed the highest target variance (29%), whereas the remaining personality traits showed low or moderate levels of target variance. Emotionality and agreeableness both showed the highest perceiver variance (37%), and the remaining personality traits showed moderate levels of perceiver variance. Although all six traits showed high relationship variance, there was a decrease relative to the conversation phase, with conscientiousness showing the largest decrease (78% at conversation versus 54% at collaboration) and extraversion the smallest (52% at conversation versus 50% at collaboration).

5.4. Competence

SRAs were performed for competence, using a combination of two adjectives as indicators in each analysis. These analyses were performed separately for ratings provided at each phase. Given that the different

Table 1
Correlations Between HEXACO Target and Relationship Effects Assessed at the Conversation and Collaboration Phases.

Phase/Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Conversation Phase												
1. Honesty-humility	–	0–.02	0.16**	0.56**	0.18**	0.21**	0.37**	0.07*	0.11**	0.22**	0.18**	0.20**
2. Emotionality	0.10	–	0–.36**	0.04	0–.11**	0–.10**	0.03	0.34**	0–.27**	0–.02	0–.10**	0–.12**
3. Extraversion	0.39**	0–.44**	–	0.14**	0.11**	0.15**	0.07*	0–.20**	0.49**	0.04	0.10**	0.09**
4. Agreeableness	0.74**	0.16**	0.31**	–	0.16**	0.21**	0.30**	0.09**	0.09**	0.22**	0.08**	0.15**
5. Conscientiousness	0.33**	0–.28**	0.33**	0.30**	–	0.14**	0.18**	0.02	0.02	0.08**	0.28**	0.13**
6. Openness	0.42**	0–.17**	0.38**	0.36**	0.25**	–	0.21**	0–.05	0.15**	0.11**	0.14**	0.55**
Collaboration Phase												
7. Honesty-humility	0.58**	0.08*	0.38**	0.50**	0.30**	0.35**	–	0–.02	0.19**	0.36**	0.21**	0.30**
8. Emotionality	0–.01	0.55**	0–.44**	0.02	0–.27**	0–.26**	0–.13*	–	0–.34**	0.01	0–.17**	0–.13**
9. Extraversion	0.37**	0–.37**	0.80**	0.26**	0.36**	0.38**	0.49**	0–.48**	–	0.15**	0.24**	0.21**
10. Agreeableness	0.47**	0.14*	0.15**	0.45**	0.23**	0.25**	0.51**	0.06	0.24**	–	0.14**	0.17**
11. Conscientiousness	0.32**	0–.20**	0.30**	0.21**	0.62**	0.26**	0.44**	0–.34**	0.44**	0.27**	–	0.25**
12. Openness	0.33**	0–.18**	0.34**	0.26**	0.23**	0.77**	0.38**	0–.33**	0.45**	0.33**	0.32**	–

Note. The target and relationship effects for all HEXACO personality traits are derived from social relations analyses using a single indicator for each trait. The bottom diagonal of the table presents the correlations for the target effects, while the upper diagonal presents the correlations for the relationship effects. Convergent correlations between target and relationship effects are highlighted.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2
SRM Variance and Cross-Time Consistency Estimates at the Conversation and Collaboration Phases.

Phase/Effect	H	E	X	A	C	O	Attractiveness	Similarity	Competence	Partner Preference
Conversation										
Target	0.08 (0.33)	0.11 (0.40)	0.31 (0.71)	0.11 (0.40)	0.13 (0.41)	0.17 (0.50)	0.27 (0.73)	0.11 (0.42)	0.11 (0.47)	0.15 (0.41)
Perceiver	0.29 (0.65)	0.23 (0.56)	0.17 (0.57)	0.30 (0.58)	0.09 (0.32)	0.11 (0.38)	0.30 (0.75)	0.30 (0.67)	0.29 (0.71)	0.05 (0.19)
Relationship	0.64	0.67	0.52	0.66	0.78	0.72	0.43	0.59	0.37 (0.80)	0.80
Error ^a	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.22	–
Collaboration										
Target	0.12 (0.46)	0.10 (0.44)	0.29 (0.70)	0.06 (0.29)	0.20 (0.59)	0.21 (0.58)	0.26 (0.71)	0.14 (0.50)	0.14 (0.56)	0.18 (0.48)
Perceiver	0.33 (0.71)	0.37 (0.74)	0.21 (0.63)	0.37 (0.72)	0.26 (0.66)	0.18 (0.54)	0.31 (0.74)	0.30 (0.67)	0.23 (0.65)	0.07 (0.27)
Relationship	0.55	0.53	0.50	0.58	0.54	0.62	0.43	0.56	0.38 (0.76)	0.75
Error	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.25	–
Consistency ^b										
Target	0.58**	0.55**	0.80**	0.45**	0.62**	0.77**	0.89**	0.73**	0.66**	0.13
Perceiver	0.72**	0.65**	0.70**	0.00	0.38**	0.64**	0.87**	0.76**	0.71**	0.04
Relationship	0.37*	0.34*	0.49**	0.22	0.28	0.55**	0.64**	0.48**	0.41	0.19

Note. H = Honesty-humility; E = Emotionality; X = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; O = Openness to experience; Conversation = Assessed at the conversation phase; Collaboration = Assessed at the collaboration phase. All SRM variance estimates $p < 0.01$, with the exception of the perceiver variance estimate for partner preference at the collaboration phase ($p = 0.01$). Numbers in parentheses represent reliability estimates for target, perceiver, and relationship effects. Reliability estimates missing from HEXACO and partner selection relationship effects are due to the use of single-indicator SRAs.

^a Missing error variance estimates are due to the use of a single indicator in the respective SRAs. In this case, relationship and error variance are conflated into a single estimate. This does not apply to competence, for which two indicators were used in the SRAs.

^b Cross-time consistency estimates reflect the consistency between the conversation and collaboration phases.

* Practically but not statistically significant. WABA provides tests of both statistical and practical significance, using the F-test to assess statistical significance and the E-test to assess practical significance; ** Both statistically and practically significant.

combinations produced comparable results, the averages of all the combinations are reported in Table 2. Separate analyses for each combination of adjectives are reported in the Supplement (Table S7).

At the conversation phase, competence showed low target variance (11%), but markedly higher perceiver (29%) and relationship variance (37%). At the collaboration phase, target variance (14%) showed a slight increase, and perceiver variance showed a slight decrease (23%), relative to the conversation phase. However, relationship variance remained largely the same (38%).

5.5. Partner Preference

Single-indicator SRAs were performed for partner preference. Due to the use of a single indicator, estimates of relationship variance are somewhat inflated. The estimates are reported in Table 2. At the conversation phase, partner preference showed relatively low target variance (15%) and very low perceiver variance (5%). Instead, partner preference was largely relational (80%, including error variance), indicating that some participants uniquely preferred specific individuals as partners. At the collaboration phase, target (18%) and perceiver (7%) variance remained relatively low. Partner preference was again largely

relational, as relationship variance remained high (75%, including error variance) despite a small decrease relative to the conversation phase.

5.6. Cross-Time Consistency of Target, Perceiver, and Relationship Effects

Overall, target and perceiver effects showed high cross-time consistency between the conversation and collaboration phases, relationship effects showed moderate cross-time consistency, whereas partner preference showed low cross-time consistency.

Specifically, the target effect was highly consistent between the conversation and collaboration phases. Extraversion showed the highest consistency (0.80), followed by openness to experience (0.77), and conscientiousness (0.62). Competence also showed high consistency (0.66), but partner preference did not (0.13). The perceiver effect was also highly consistent between the two phases. Honesty-humility showed the highest consistency (0.72), followed by emotionality (0.70) and openness to experience (0.64). Competence also showed high consistency (0.71), but partner preference did not (0.04). Finally, the relationship effect was moderately consistent between the two phases, and to a lesser extent than the target and perceiver effects. Extraversion showed the highest consistency (0.49), followed by honesty-humility

(0.37) and emotionality (0.34). Competence also showed moderate consistency (0.41), but partner preference did not (0.19). All estimates of cross-time consistency obtained from WABA II difference tests are reported in Table 2. For a complete overview of WABA results for personality, competence, and partner preference, view Tables S8-S23 in the Supplement.

6. Tests of Hypotheses

6.1. Target Effects

The first regression model included age and gender as predictors. The target effects of attractiveness and similarity were added as predictors in the second model. Finally, the target effects of all six HEXACO traits and the target effect of competence were added as predictors in the third model. Target partner preference, assessed prior to the collaboration phase, was the outcome. Results are presented in the upper half of Table 3.

The first model was statistically non-significant (see Table S26). The second model was statistically significant, $F(4, 267) = 45.59, p < 0.001, R^2_{Adjusted} = 0.40$, and, compared to the first model, showed a significant increase in explained variance, $\Delta F(2, 263) = 88.81, p < 0.001$. Target attractiveness and similarity were positively related to target partner preference. The third model was statistically significant, $F(11, 267) = 21.27, p < 0.001, R^2_{Adjusted} = 0.46$, and, compared to the second model, showed a significant increase in explained variance, $\Delta F(7, 256) = 4.77, p < 0.001$. Target similarity, extraversion, and competence were positively related to target partner preference.

To summarize, at the target level, individuals who were perceived as more similar, more extraverted, and more competent were more likely to be preferred as collaborative partners. Results therefore partially confirmed the first hypothesis, supporting the hypothesized relations

between target extraversion and target competence, on the one hand, and target partner preference, on the other hand.

6.2. Relationship Effects

The first regression model included age and gender as predictors. The relationship effects of attractiveness and similarity were added as predictors in the second model. Finally, the relationship effects of all six HEXACO traits and the relationship effect of competence were added as predictors in the third model. Relational partner preference, assessed at the collaboration phase, was the outcome. Results are presented in the lower half of Table 3.

The first model was statistically non-significant (see Table S28). The second model was statistically significant, $F(4, 952) = 80.05, p < 0.001, R^2_{Adjusted} = 0.25$, and, compared to the first model, showed a significant increase in explained variance, $\Delta F(2, 948) = 160.04, p < 0.001$. Relational attractiveness and similarity were positively related to relational partner preference. The third model was statistically significant, $F(11, 952) = 33.93, p < 0.001, R^2_{Adjusted} = 0.28$ and, compared to the second model, showed a significant increase in explained variance, $\Delta F(7, 941) = 5.92, p < 0.001$. Relational attractiveness, similarity, honesty-humility, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and competence were positively related to relational partner preference.

To summarize, at the relationship level, partner preferences were positively related to relationship-specific impressions of attractiveness, similarity, honesty-humility, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and competence. Current findings therefore partially confirmed the second hypothesis, supporting the hypothesized relations between relational honesty-humility and relational competence, on the one hand, and relational partner preference, on the other hand.

Table 3
Regression Coefficients for Predicting Target and Relational Partner Preferences from Target Honesty-Humility, Extraversion, and Competence.

Predictor	Model 2 Target				Model 3			
	B (SE)	95% CI	β	t	B (SE)	95% CI	β	t
Constant	-3.96 (3.28)	-10.41, 2.50	0-.05	1.21	-1.18 (3.24)	-7.56, 5.20	0.00	0.36
Age	0.08 (0.08)	-0.08, 0.24	0.05	1.00	0.03 (0.08)	-0.13, 0.19	0.02	0.35
Gender	1.91 (1.77)	-1.59, 5.40	0.10	1.08	0.18 (1.86)	-3.48, 3.84	0.01	0.10
Attractiveness	7.02 (1.58)	3.91, 10.12	0.27	4.45***	3.01 (1.73)	-0.40, 6.41	0.12	1.74
Similarity	15.06 (1.78)	11.56, 18.56	0.48	8.47***	7.98 (2.34)	3.38, 12.58	0.25	3.41***
Honesty-humility					0.17 (2.57)	-4.88, 5.23	0.01	0.07
Emotionality					1.95 (1.47)	-0.95, 4.86	0.08	1.33
Extraversion					3.83 (1.22)	1.44, 6.23	0.21	3.16**
Agreeableness					-0.18 (1.86)	-3.84, 3.49	0-.01	0.10
Conscientiousness					-0.23 (1.19)	-2.57, 2.11	0-.01	0.19
Openness					1.31 (0.99)	-0.65, 3.26	0.07	1.31
Competence					11.53 (3.00)	5.61, 17.44	0.26	3.84***
ΔR^2	0.41***				0.05***			
R^2	0.41				0.46			
	Relationship							
	B (SE)	95% CI	β	t	B (SE)	95% CI	β	t
Constant	-1.18 (2.19)	-5.48, 3.12	0.00	0.54	-1.21 (2.16)	-5.44, 3.03	0.00	0.56
Age	0.05 (0.06)	-0.06, 0.15	0.02	0.81	0.05 (0.05)	-0.06, 0.15	0.02	0.84
Gender	-0.08 (1.26)	-2.55, 2.39	0.00	0.06	-0.13 (1.24)	-2.56, 2.30	0-.01	0.11
Attractiveness	7.35 (1.03)	5.33, 9.38	0.21	7.14***	6.32 (1.06)	4.25, 8.40	0.18	5.98***
Similarity	11.26 (0.86)	9.57, 12.94	0.38	13.11***	8.73 (0.95)	6.87, 10.59	0.30	9.22***
Honesty-humility					3.04 (0.96)	1.15, 4.93	0.10	3.15**
Emotionality					-0.27 (0.65)	-1.54, 1.00	0-.01	0.42
Extraversion					0.18 (0.70)	-1.20, 1.55	0.01	0.25
Agreeableness					0.61 (0.80)	-0.96, 2.19	0.02	0.76
Conscientiousness					1.26 (0.53)	0.22, 2.30	0.06	2.37*
Openness					1.21 (0.53)	0.17, 2.26	0.06	2.28*
Competence					4.43 (1.19)	2.09, 6.77	0.10	3.72**
ΔR^2	0.25***				0.02***			
R^2	0.25***				0.27***			

Note. Model 1, where age and gender were entered as predictors, is omitted from the table, but is reported in the Supplement.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

7. Discussion

Collaborative partnerships often need to be formed following a first encounter, where prospective partners have little to no prior acquaintance with one another. Individuals are selective in whom they prefer to collaborate with, establishing partnerships with those believed to possess traits that will facilitate mutually beneficial outcomes. This selection process is often guided by the impressions that individuals form of one another's traits during social interactions. Consequently, traits expressed during initial encounters are particularly decisive in shaping collaborative partner preferences. The current study investigated the cross-time consistency and relations of trait impressions with partner preference in groups of unacquainted participants who joined an online meeting where they engaged in brief dyadic interactions to determine the extent to which they would like to collaborate with one another. First, at the target level, cross-time consistency was high for personality and competence, but not for partner preference. At the relationship level, cross-time consistency was moderate for personality, but not competence or partner preference. Second, at the target level, individuals who tended to be viewed as more extraverted and competent also tended to be preferred more as partners. At the relationship level, individuals who were uniquely viewed by specific dyad members as more honest-humble and competent were also uniquely preferred more as partners.

7.1. Target, Perceiver, and Relationship Variance

Notable differences in variance components were found across variables. At the conversation phase, extraversion displayed the highest target variance (31%), indicating that perceivers tended to agree on the extent to which each target was characterized by low, moderate, or high extraversion, whereas honesty-humility showed the lowest target variance (7%). Moreover, agreeableness (30%) and honesty-humility (29%) showed the highest perceiver variance, indicating a general tendency of perceivers to assimilate their interaction partners in terms of these traits, with the same targets being viewed as agreeable by one perceiver but as disagreeable by another, for example. The remaining personality traits showed either low or moderate perceiver variance. Finally, all six traits showed high relationship variance, indicating that dyad members largely tended to view their interaction partners in an idiosyncratic manner. However, due to the use of single-indicator SRAs, estimates of relationship variance are likely confounded with error variance, whereas estimates of target and perceiver variance may be attenuated. Consequently, the magnitude of these effects and any conclusions drawn from their use in subsequent analyses should be interpreted cautiously.

In line with the present study, reviews assessing personality perceptions at zero-acquaintance have found target variance to be highest for extraversion (Kenny et al., 1994; Kentrou & Buczny, 2025). Moreover, when Borkenau and Liebler (1992) obtained Big Five personality judgments based on thin-slice videos, target variance ranged from 0.17 for agreeableness to 0.33 for extraversion, averaging 0.22 across all traits. Additional studies have reported average target variance values ranging from 0.09 to 0.22, with extraversion consistently demonstrating the highest values (between 0.24 and 0.32; Hirschmuller et al., 2018; Kenny, 2020; Themanson, 1997). Importantly, consensual personality judgments have shown high accuracy even with little to no prior familiarity, further underscoring the role of first encounters in facilitating valid first impressions, particularly for visible personality traits such as extraversion.

At the impression phase, competence showed low target variance, but markedly higher perceiver and relationship variance. Competence was largely relational, indicating that some participants uniquely viewed certain people as competent. At the conversation and collaboration phases, target variance showed a small increase compared to the impression phase. Notably, there was a decrease in perceiver variance and an increase in relationship variance, indicating that perceivers

showed a smaller tendency to assimilate and instead resorted to generating impressions of their partners' competence on an idiosyncratic basis. Although initial impressions of competence were shaped by both perceiver tendencies and relational dynamics, relationship-specific impressions became increasingly important as the interactions progressed.

At the impression phase, partner preference showed relatively low target variance, but markedly higher perceiver and relationship variance. Partner preference was largely relational, indicating that some participants uniquely preferred certain people as partners. At the cooperation and collaboration phases, there was a decrease in perceiver variance and an increase in relationship variance, suggesting that perceivers resorted to shaping their partner preferences largely on an idiosyncratic basis. Similar to competence, although initial partner preferences were shaped to a comparable extent by perceiver and relationship effects, subsequent interaction phases shifted towards largely idiosyncratic evaluations.

7.2. Cross-Time Consistency of Target and Relationship Effects

At the target level, all personality traits showed considerable consistency. Extraversion showed the highest consistency (0.80), indicating that individuals generally viewed as extraverted during the conversation phase largely continued to be viewed as extraverted during the collaboration phase. Competence also showed marked consistency (0.66). In contrast, partner preference showed very low consistency, indicating that the general consensus on who was a desirable collaborative partner varied substantially between the two interaction phases. At the relationship level, all personality traits showed moderate consistency between the two interaction phases. Openness to experience showed the highest consistency (0.55), indicating that individuals uniquely viewed as high in openness during the conversation phase largely continued to be uniquely viewed as high in openness during the collaboration phase. Extraversion (0.49) and honesty-humility (0.37) both showed moderate consistency, whereas competence and partner preference both showed low consistency.

Current findings are largely in line with previous research. Kenny et al. (1992) reported a consistency correlation of 0.80 for extraversion, suggesting that targets who were perceived as sociable and outgoing at zero-acquaintance were largely also perceived as sociable and outgoing following a 10-minute interaction. However, consistency estimates observed in the current study are notably lower than those reported in two previous studies (Park & Judd, 1989; Park et al., 1997). The present findings, combined with meta-analytic research showing that test-retest reliability values over 0.85 are unlikely to occur for Big Five traits (Gnamb, 2014), thus indicate that earlier research might have overestimated the cross-time consistency of target effects. Our results suggest that, despite being markedly consistent, target effects nevertheless do not display perfect consistency in the early stages of acquaintance. Additional research is required to replicate current results and provide up-to-date estimates of the cross-time consistency of target effects over longer periods.

At the relationship level, consistency has previously been examined across longer periods rather than during the first few minutes of interaction. For example, Park and Judd (1989) reported an average correlation of 0.79 for traits such as extraversion and warmth, and 0.73 for traits such as intelligence and assertiveness. Park et al. (1997) showed that the consistency of Big Five relationship effects within a year was generally high and increased gradually, particularly between the two final measurement points. However, when examining the consistency of the relationship effect averaged across all traits between the first and final measurement points, results yielded a correlation of 0.28. Taken together, current and prior findings tentatively indicate that the relationship effect varies during the initial interaction between individuals encountering one another for the first time, remains largely stable between adjacent days and consecutive months, yet continues to undergo a slow but gradual change across a year.

7.3. Predictors of Partner Preferences

At the target level, extraversion and competence, but not honesty-humility, positively predicted partner preference. However, it should be noted that honesty-humility likely did not show sufficient target variance (7%) to detect this relationship. At the relationship level, honesty-humility and competence, but not extraversion, positively predicted partner preference. The current research, therefore, highlights the importance of those traits in shaping collaborative partner preferences, and further indicates that their importance operates at both the target and relationship-specific levels.

Although this study constitutes the first step in understanding how specific person attributes relate to collaborative partner preferences, future research could extend current findings by examining the degree to which first-encounter impressions of personality and competence shape partner preferences when the importance of those traits varies depending on the task that interaction partners must collaborate on, something that the current study failed to take into consideration. Research on ideal 'generalized others' has revealed a clear consensus on the importance of traits such as honesty (e.g., sincerity and trustworthiness), extraversion, and intelligence (e.g., competence; Cottrell et al., 2007; Schwartz, 1992). However, assuming a single configuration of traits equally desirable in all collaborative partners may overlook the possibility that some traits are important for specific tasks but less so for others. Indeed, importance hierarchies exist even within a set of highly valued traits, with some traits placing higher in this hierarchy than others depending on the nature of the task (Cottrell et al., 2007). Given that individuals must often collaborate on different types of tasks, if a trait is especially relevant for a given task and facilitates the collective success of the partnership or group, it should be vital to collaborate with partners who possess that trait (Abele & Brack, 2013; Barclay, 2016). Certain characteristics should, therefore, be differentially valued when identifying potential collaborators in different types of tasks (Hrkalovic et al., 2025).

Certain forms of collaboration require trust that one's partner can be relied upon to share resources and contribute towards mutual benefits as agreed (Cottrell et al., 2007). At its core, trustworthiness involves confidence that an individual will follow through with previous commitments and includes attributes such as honesty, dependability, and loyalty (Boone & Buck, 2003; Ferrin et al., 2008). Effective collaboration, therefore, necessitates that others are perceived as trustworthy and are expected to share future resources when they have previously agreed to do so (Brewer, 2002), making trustworthiness a highly valuable trait in several types of relationships and a necessary condition for effective collaborative exchange (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Deutsch, 2016). As a result, people are likely to view traits such as honesty-humility and competence as universally important when selecting partners that will help promote the acquisition of valuable resources and facilitate progress towards mutual goals (Hilbig & Zettler, 2009). Moreover, extraversion should be particularly important for affiliation-based collaborative tasks, given that it creates opportunities for affiliation. Finally, certain collaborative endeavors, such as project teams, involve a combination of intellectual tasks in which individuals must generate and then integrate complex information. To the extent that individual differences in required skills have important implications for the success of such teams, traits such as intelligence and competence should be particularly valued when selecting partners for these types of collaborative tasks (Cottrell et al., 2007).

The value of different traits thus varies as a function of the tasks or goals that individuals engaging in a collaborative partnership aim to achieve. To illustrate this, Cottrell et al. (2007) asked participants to indicate the importance of various traits for interaction partners encountered in different types of situations. Trustworthiness, followed by cooperativeness and trustfulness, were consistently rated as highly valuable across all situations, whereas intelligence, extraversion, and agreeableness were deemed important in a more domain-specific

manner. When participants were given limited tokens with which they could purchase any of ten assorted traits to design partners drawn from various interaction contexts (e.g., coworker, friend, family member), they allocated more tokens to increase trustworthiness than other traits, even when investing in it yielded a smaller increase than by investing in another trait. The importance placed on other traits varied with the tasks and goals of each interaction context, with participants valuing intelligence and conscientiousness for coworkers; physical attractiveness for romantic partners; and agreeableness and emotional stability for family members (Cottrell et al., 2007). These findings further highlight the pervasive importance of trustworthiness and show that other traits are also often deemed necessary, albeit for a more focused and constrained set of interaction contexts (Abele & Brack, 2013; Cottrell et al., 2007).

8. Strengths and limitations

To our knowledge, these analyses are the first to examine the relation between first-encounter trait impressions and collaborative partner preferences in online settings by applying the SRM. In doing so, this research replicates previous findings attesting to the importance of honesty-humility, extraversion, and competence in predicting partner preferences, and extends current knowledge by demonstrating that these relations operate somewhat differently at the target- and relationship-specific levels. Importantly, the relationship effect represents a key component of personality perception, predicting outcomes above and beyond those predicted by target and perceiver effects alone, and providing nuance that cannot be obtained by examining interaction partners outside their unique relational contexts (Back et al., 2023; Kentrou & Buczny, 2025). Focusing on the relationship-specific level thus allows us to examine how unique impressions are shaped by the relationship between two specific individuals, challenging the assumption that traits are perceived uniformly across different relationships (Kenny, 2020). Finally, trait impressions often evolve as interpersonal relationships develop over time, and the SRM enables an examination of their cross-time consistency, something that traditional methods (e.g., self- or observer-reports) are generally less well-equipped to handle (Back & Kenny, 2010). Using the SRM thus offers a more fine-grained understanding of how trait impressions evolve across time than standard correlation analyses.

Nevertheless, this study also has certain limitations. First, all dyadic interactions took place in an online setting. As a result, any non-verbal cues that typically contribute to interaction partners' impressions of one another in a first encounter could have been more difficult to perceive. For example, when Hirschmuller et al. (2013) investigated the pieces of information leading to accuracy in perceptions of extraversion at zero-acquaintance, this included, for instance, fashionable and refined appearance. Although such information may be less readily available in online contexts, evidence from thin-slice studies indicates a high level of accuracy in perceptions even when interaction partners receive limited behavioral information about one another (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Carney et al., 2007).

Second, the long study duration necessitated the use of measures consisting of a single item (e.g., for HEXACO personality), resulting in single-indicator SRAs where relationship and error variance are conflated. This limitation is particularly consequential for traits with low target variance (e.g., honesty-humility), as measurement error may further reduce the estimated proportion of variance attributable to targets. As a result, conclusions about the relative magnitude of target effects for such traits should be interpreted cautiously, as low estimates may partly reflect measurement limitations rather than substantively weak target variance. Single-indicator SRAs further limit the reliability of trait-level inferences because a single item cannot adequately capture the breadth of a construct and does not allow random measurement error to be averaged out across items. Consequently, the estimated variance components may partly reflect item-specific noise rather than stable trait variance, reducing the reliability of conclusions about trait-

level perceiver, target, or relationship effects. However, as reported in the supplement, two-indicator SRAs were also performed whenever possible, yielding similar results. Nevertheless, we encourage future research to replicate current findings using full-length personality inventories. Third, it should be noted that the item used to measure extraversion in the current study primarily reflected sociability and may therefore not fully capture the agency/assertiveness dimension emphasized in the interpersonal circumplex framework. Future research could therefore benefit from including separate indicators of sociability and assertiveness to more fully capture interpersonal impression dimensions relevant to collaborative partner selection.

Fourth, although individuals indicated their partner preferences, they were nevertheless asked to collaborate with everyone in a round-robin manner. Given that the process of indicating partner preferences was repeated following each interaction phase, participants likely became aware that their preferences did not determine who they would subsequently enter a collaborative partnership with. Although asking all the group members to interact with one another in dyads allowed us to implement a round-robin design, it could have led them to give less consideration to their partner preferences. Finally, partner preference was represented using a composite measure that combined a binary selection decision (i.e., whether participants would select a given interaction partner for a future collaborative task) with a continuous rating of preference strength (0–100). Although this operationalization allowed us to capture partner preference as a graded construct, it also combined two conceptually distinct judgments. Importantly, in the present study, supplementary analyses treating partner preference as a purely dichotomous outcome yielded results consistent with those obtained using the composite measure, suggesting that the main conclusions are robust to alternative operationalizations. Nevertheless, future research may benefit from modeling these components separately, thereby providing a more fine-grained understanding of how interpersonal impressions translate into collaborative partner preferences.

8.1. Statement on Limitations on Generality

Findings reported in the current study are based on a sample of adults recruited via Prolific and may therefore have limited generalizability to populations differing in cultural background, socioeconomic status, or technological access. Moreover, as participants interacted online via a videoconferencing platform, conclusions about the relationship between first-encounter trait impressions and collaborative partner preferences may not extend to face-to-face interactions. Future research should replicate current findings with more diverse samples, contexts, and measurement approaches, including in-person settings.

9. Conclusion

Aiming to better understand collaborative partner preferences and person perceptions at first encounters, the current study examined the extent to which (1) partners' perceptions of one another's traits were consistent across successive interaction phases and (2) perceptions of extraversion, honesty-humility, and competence were related to collaborative partner preferences. At the target level, perceptions of personality and competence, but not partner preference, remained largely consistent, whereas at the relationship level, perceptions of personality, but not competence or partner preference, remained only moderately consistent. Moreover, at the target level, individuals preferred partners who were generally perceived as extraverted and competent, but not honest-humble, whereas at the relationship level, individuals preferred partners who were uniquely perceived as competent and honest-humble, but not extraverted. Competence, therefore, emerged as a desirable collaborative partner trait both at the level of the target and the relationship. Overall, the current study was the first to examine collaborative partner preferences in first encounters taking place online using effects derived from the SRM, highlighting specific

traits that are likely to be of importance at the target and/or relationship level during remote interactions between newly-acquainted individuals. Although the present study focused on the structure and consequences of trait impressions, an important next step is to examine the processes that give rise to these impressions. Future research could integrate targets' self-reported personality traits, behavioral indicators observed during interaction, and potential perceiver–target interactions to better understand why certain individuals evoke particular impressions and become preferred collaboration partners in first-encounter group settings.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Vasiliki Kentrou: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Jacek Buczny:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Tiffany Matej Hrkalovic:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Bernd Dudzik:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Daniel Balliet:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Hayley Hung:** Validation, Resources, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Reinout E. de Vries:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2026.104724>.

Data availability

The data and analysis scripts needed to replicate the tests of hypotheses reported in the current study can be found in the project's OSF page (<https://osf.io/nmtq3>).

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