Chapter 1:

General Introduction
People constantly try to predict others surrounding them. What is she thinking? What is he feeling? What will she do? These social predictions are part of our everyday life and most people think that they are good judges of other people's thoughts, feelings, and characteristics. However, often predictions about other people are biased and only moderately accurate (e.g., Ickes, 2003; Gagné & Lydon, 2004). For example, predictions about how someone else feels in a certain situation are often based on predictions about how oneself would feel in that situation (e.g., Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003). These predictions about another person's feeling that are based on the self are likely to be inaccurate to the extent that the other person is different from oneself. Given the frequency and prevalence of social predictions in everyday life, these predictions, in particular the extent to which they are accurate or biased, warrant further investigation. The present dissertation contributes to the research on person perception by investigating biases of people's predictions of others as well as the accuracy of these predictions. We will investigate how people make predictions about others and the conditions under which these social predictions are biased. We will show that social predictions can be biased and accurate at the same time and we will investigate the relational consequences of biased and accurate social predictions.

We will start this first chapter by discussing methodological and statistical challenges that come along with person perception research. We will discuss different ways to measure bias and accuracy and illustrate why bias and accuracy are independent concepts. After that we will review the literature on biases and accuracy in person perception and describe how the current dissertation contributes to this literature. We will end this chapter with an overview of the studies presented in the three empirical chapters.

Why to Study Bias and Accuracy in Person Perception?

The motivation that underlies the study of bias and accuracy of person perception is to understand how certain perceptions can influence our behaviour. For example, in order to understand a manager's hiring decisions it is necessary to understand how she perceived the applicants and whether her perception was maybe biased by a stereotype which influenced her decision. Only if we are aware of the biases that influence our perceptions are we able to correct for them (Lepore & Brown, 2002). Or, another example, in order to understand why some relationship partners are more satisfied with their relationship than others, it is helpful to know that partner's view of each other is often positively biased and
that this bias plays an important role in maintaining a happy relationship (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). These two examples illustrate that biases in person perception can have negative as well as positive consequences. The goal of research on the accuracy and bias of person perception therefore is not simply to try to eliminate bias and enhance accuracy. Rather, it is about understanding when people are biased and when people are accurate and identifying the consequences of bias and accuracy for interpersonal relationships.

It should be noted that the term person perception is mostly used for research on people’s perception of others’ personality (Bernieri, Zuckerman, Koestner, & Rosenthal, 1994; Gangestad, Digeronimo, Simpson, & Biek, 1992; Swann & Gill, 1997). Other terms are used to describe research on how people perceive and predict others’ traits, thoughts, and behaviours, including interpersonal perception (Kenny, 2004), social perception (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977), and empathic accuracy (Ickes, 1997). For the present dissertation we chose to use the term person perception, but in a broader sense, including perceptions and predictions about other’s traits, emotions, and behaviours. Below, we discuss how exactly bias and accuracy in person perception can be studied.

Bias and Accuracy in Person Perception

Are bias and accuracy in person perception merely two sides of the same coin? One could argue that bias is a lack of accuracy and that accuracy is a lack of bias. The definitions of bias and accuracy are conceptually different, however, and suggest that bias and accuracy are independent concepts (Epley & Dunning, 2006; Gagné & Lydon, 2004). Bias is commonly defined as “a systematic tendency to make errors of perception or judgement in a particular direction” (Noller & Ruzene, 1991, p. 204). To illustrate, Mary is biased in her perception of John if she overestimates how extravert John sees himself. Accuracy, on the other hand, is commonly defined as the correspondence between people’s perceptions of a target and the targets self-perception (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). To illustrate, Mary is accurate in her perception of John, if she rates John on a number of personality dimensions and her ratings correspond to the ratings John provides for himself on the same dimensions. To depict this difference between bias and accuracy, consider the simplified examples given in Table 1.1. Mary, in this example, is largely biased, because she overestimates how high John scores on every trait. Nevertheless, she is accurate because she agrees with John on which trait is more pronounced. Alice is less biased in that her ratings are on average close to the John’s self-ratings. At the same time Alice is less accurate, however, because the
correspondence between the importance given to the traits by Alice and by John is smaller. As can be seen in this example, in most cases of person perception accuracy and bias are independent of each other and perceptions can be biased and accurate at the same time. To consider bias and accuracy as opposites of the same coin would thereby limit research on person perception and tell only half the story.

Table 1.1.

Example of two judges who are more or less biases and more or less accurate in their perception of a target

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John's self report</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Alice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extravert</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaotic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accuracy  
$r = 1$  
$r = .41$

Bias  
Mean difference = 2  
Mean difference = 0.75

Table 1.1 highlights another important aspect of person perception research, namely its interpersonal nature. Research on person perception is an interpersonal discipline because it usually includes a minimum of two people, a judge who perceives another person and a target who is perceived. Investigating accuracy in person perception therefore involves investigating the correspondence between the perception of the judge and the actual characteristics of the target. Investigating bias in person perception involves investigating whether there is a systematic distortion between the perception of the judge and the actual characteristics of the target.

How to Study Person Perception

The most common way to study person perception is one in which one or more judges rate one or more targets on several personality characteristics. Those targets can be people the judges already know, strangers they meet in the experimental setting, or fictitious others, such as the average student (e.g., Ambady, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 1995; Ames, 2004a; Simpson, Orina, & Ickes, 2003). Depending on the focus of the study the
judgements made by the judges are then compared to self-ratings of the target(s), to judgements made by other judges, or to judgements made by the same judges under different conditions. For example, participants may be asked to rate the personality of a person they see on a videotape and this rating is then compared to ratings made by other judges (e.g., Lippa & Dietz, 2000). There are two important issues that researchers need to consider when choosing a design to study person perception. The first challenge is to determine the standard to which a judgment is compared to in order to establish accuracy and bias in social prediction. The second challenge is to calculate accuracy in such a way that it is not confounded with other constructs.

What is Accuracy? The first important challenge for research on accuracy in person perception concerns the question how accuracy can be established and what accuracy exactly is. In order to validate a judgement about a person there are several standards to which the judgement can be compared. So far no golden standard has been found, however, and different researchers use different standards (Funder, 1995). To illustrate, some researchers define accuracy in terms of agreement between judges (Kruglanski, 1989). If two judges independently view a target as extravert, apparently the target person makes an extravert impression and the judges are accurate to some extent. Other researchers assess accuracy by comparing a judgement with targets' actual behaviour (Funder, 1987). If a judge sees a person as extravert and this person is very outgoing and talkative during a discussion, the judgement is accurate because it predicts the target's behaviour. Finally, some researchers assess accuracy by comparing a judgement with targets' self-perception (Bernieri et al., 1994). If someone judges a person as extravert and that person sees him- or herself as extravert, there is self-other agreement.

Naturally, the best way to determine accuracy would be to use as many different standards as possible (Funder, 1995). This most favourable solution must often be sacrificed for practical reasons, however, and researchers have to choose the standard that is best suited to answer their specific research question. In the current dissertation we will mainly focus on self-other agreement as an indicator of accuracy. We decided on this standard because we are interested in the interpersonal consequences of accurate perceptions for the relationship between judge and target. Similar to the pragmatic approach, that proposes that accuracy should be defined depending on the function it has in the specific context (Swann, 1984), we propose that in an interpersonal context self-other agreement is
the most relevant form of accuracy. Interpersonal consequences are most likely to be connected to self-other agreement because this type of accuracy is most easy to be recognized by relationship partners themselves. For example, Mary’s feeling that John understands her is likely to be based on her perception of how closely his judgement is related to her self-view rather than to how consistent his judgement is with her mother’s judgement about her. Throughout this dissertation we therefore use the self as a standard to verify perceptions. Nevertheless, we do not claim that this is not the golden standard nor that it reflects “true accuracy”.

How to Compute Accuracy and Bias? The second important challenge that researchers on person perception have to meet concerns the debate on how to best calculate accuracy. Whereas bias in a judgement is uniformly viewed as a systematic deviance from a standard, there is some discord about how to best assess accuracy in person perception.

In the early days of interpersonal accuracy research it was common to compute a difference score between the targets’ self-reports and the judges’ other-reports. Accuracy then was defined in terms of the discrepancy between the two scores, such that a small discrepancy reflected high accuracy. In the 1950’s, however, Cronbach and colleagues showed that this method was fundamentally flawed (Cronbach, 1955; Gage & Cronbach, 1955). They pointed out that, if calculated as a difference score, a judge can achieve high accuracy scores without having any true insight into the target. In fact, Cronbach and his colleagues proposed that a difference score accuracy measure can be divided in four different components of which only one (differential accuracy) represents true insight into the target. The other three components are labelled elevation, differential elevation, and stereotype accuracy. Elevation and differential elevation are components of accuracy that are based on response biases. For example, if both target and judge have a preference for the mid-point of a scale, their answers are likely to be similar. This would make the judgement seem accurate when in fact the similarity of the scores is based on a general tendency to respond similarly to scales. Therefore accuracy that is based on elevation or differential elevation is theoretically less interesting. Stereotype accuracy reflects accuracy that is based on knowledge about how people are in general. For example, John may perceive Mary as talkative. This perception could be simply based on the heuristic that women in general are talkative. This judgement based on a stereotype will result in
accuracy if the target is similar to the stereotype. Judges can thus achieve high accuracy scores if they base their judgement on a stereotype that represents the target very well. Cronbach argued that researchers should eliminate the effect of stereotype accuracy from their measure of accuracy. We think, however, that it is not always beneficial to eliminate stereotype accuracy because this accuracy component can be of theoretical interest. For example, whether and when people use stereotypes to judge others is an important question in research on how stereotypes influence our perceptions (Ames, 2004a). Also if one is interested in how our judgments are influenced by common knowledge, removing stereotype accuracy would remove the very component one is interested in (Pollmann & Finkenauer, in press). And as a third example, knowledge about the partner often consists mainly of stereotype accuracy and to a lesser extent of insight into the partner. Only knowledge that includes stereotype accuracy has been found to be related to relationship satisfaction whereas accuracy based on insight is not (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001). It is thus questionable whether researchers should always eliminate stereotype accuracy from their measures of accuracy. Only if researchers are interested in the unique effects of the stereotype accuracy and differential accuracy, it is necessary to disentangle the components. In that case, it is common to calculate two measures of accuracy, one including stereotype accuracy and one excluding stereotype accuracy (Acitelli et al., 2001).

Today, several methods allow us to separate accuracy based on response biases, stereotype accuracy, and insight. Cronbach himself proposed a method that is based on squared difference scores and that require ratings of several people in a round-robin design (Cronbach, 1955). For example, in a group of eight people, all of them provide self-ratings, judge the seven others, and are judged by the seven others on several items. With this design the four components of accuracy can be mathematically separated. Unfortunately, in most studies on person perception there is only one judge per target and in those cases this method cannot be applied. Therefore, researchers invented different methods.

As noted earlier, accuracy in person perception is commonly measured by computing a correlation between a judgement and a self-report. One way to eliminate spurious accuracy due to elevation and differential elevation consists in calculating correlations across items instead of calculating correlations across people (Lou & Klohnen, 2005; Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Murphy, 1984). For example, one person’s self-ratings on all items of a certain scale are correlated with the judge’s scores on all the items of the same
scale (the example in Table 1.1 uses this method). This method yields a correlation score for each individual or couple. It is not susceptible to elevation and differential elevation because variance due to people’s shared response biases is eliminated when correlations are computed within individuals or couples (Bernieri et al., 1994). Those item-based correlations can still include stereotype accuracy, however. In order to eliminate effects due to stereotype accuracy one needs to identify and eliminate people’s general response. This can be done for example by standardizing the data (Bernieri et al., 1994), or by calculating partial item-based correlations which control for a person’s mean response (Sillars et al., 1984).

All methods used to capture and control for the different components of accuracy have advantages and disadvantages for researchers. There is no single method that is better than all others. Consequently, researchers should base their decision which method to use on their material and the research questions they aim to answer. In the present dissertation we chose to calculate accuracy as item-based correlations because our designs involve two people and ratings on different dimensions. This measure allows us to investigate relations between accuracy and other variables because an accuracy score can be calculated for every participant. Furthermore, it allows us to decide per study on whether to include or exclude stereotype accuracy, depending on the research question. For example in Chapter three we argue that people make predictions for themselves and others based on lay theories. These lay theories represent a general response and we therefore included stereotype accuracy in the measure. In the Chapter four we are interested in the relational consequences of accuracy and those can stem from either insight into the partner or stereotype knowledge. In chapter four we therefore use both a measure that includes and that excludes stereotype accuracy to disentangle the consequences of stereotype accuracy and insight.

Research on Bias

Several fields of research are especially interested in biases in person perception, that is, when and why people make systematic over- or underestimations in their perception of others. In the following we will review research on those biases that play a role in the present dissertation. This research includes research on the projection bias (Ames, 2004b; Katz & Allport, 1931; Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002), the emotional intensity bias (Chambers & Suls, 2007), and positive illusions (Murray et al., 1996).
**Projection Bias.** One of the most prevalent biases in person perception stems from people’s tendency the use of the self to predict others (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). People tend to project their own feelings, preferences, and traits onto others, such that they overestimate the similarity between themselves and others. The projection bias process manifests itself, for example, in the false consensus effect (Katz & Allport, 1931; Krueger & Clement, 1994; Ross et al., 1977). When people are asked to estimate the percentage of people who hold a certain attitude, their estimation will be biased in the direction of their own attitude. For example, if Monique is a big fan of board games and is asked to estimate what percentage of people like board games, she is likely to overestimate this percentage, because she herself likes board games and she projects her liking of these games onto others. Especially people in close relationships tend to perceive their partner as being more similar to them than is actually the case on various dimensions, including traits, values, and day-to-day feelings (Murray et al., 2002). Perceptions of others, and especially close others, are thus biased, because they are too closely related to our self-perceptions.

The projection bias is a very prevalent bias and only a few moderators of the effect are known, one of which is perceived similarity (Ames, 2004b). The more someone is perceived as being similar to the self, the more projection is used to predict this person. If someone is perceived as dissimilar, the judgement is more likely to be based on stereotypical information. For example, students who are asked to predict the emotional reaction of a fellow student are likely to base the prediction on what they predict for themselves. Students who are asked to predict the emotional reaction of an older person are likely to base the prediction on stereotypical information they hold about older people (Pollmann, Finkenauer, & van Dijk, 2008). In the second chapter we will add to the knowledge on the projection bias by introducing a new boundary condition that influences the extent to which people rely on the self. In the second chapter we will investigate whether the use of the self to predict others depends on the order in which predictions are made. We argue that if people make predictions about themselves first, they focus more on themselves and perceived similarity between the self and others is reduced. This, in turn will reduce the projection bias. Importantly, this effect will only manifest itself when the target is perceived as similar. When the target is perceived as dissimilar no focus on self should take place. We will introduce a theoretical framework that explains how exactly the order of predictions affects activation of the self. This framework will add to our knowledge on the
projection bias by specifying in more detail when and why people use the self to predict others.

*Emotional intensity bias.* Another bias that influences our perception of others is the emotional intensity bias (Chambers & Suls, 2007). Research on social comparison and self-other judgments revealed that people perceive their own affective experiences as more intense than those of other people (Miller & McFarland, 1987). For example, others are thought to experience less embarrassment and to be less influenced by it (Van Boven, Loewenstein, & Dunning, 2005; Sabini, Cosmas, Siepmann, & Stein, 1999). Students think that they personally are more concerned about drinking than their peers are (Suls & Green, 2003). More general, people think that others are less likely to experience guilt, sadness, anger, happiness, shame, fear, and jealousy than they themselves (Sabini et al., 1999). This bias is thought to stem from the differential access people have to their own affective experiences and those of others (Chambers & Suls, 2007). People have direct access to their own affective experiences but only have indirect access to others’ affective experiences via behaviour or facial expressions. Those behaviours or facial expressions may not reflect the full intensity of the affective experience because people often mask their feelings in social situations. The intensity of others’ affective experience is therefore underestimated.

In the third chapter we will investigate whether this emotion intensity bias can also be found in affective forecasts people make for others. Thus whether people think that others future affective reaction will be less intense than their own. We will embed this question into the affective forecasting literature which traditionally focuses on yet another bias, namely the impact bias. The impact bias reflects people’s tendency to overestimate their emotional reaction to future events. We will investigate whether this impact bias can also be found in affective forecasts for other people or whether it is diminished by the emotional intensity bias. In the second chapter we thus bring together research on an intrapersonal bias (the impact bias) with research on an interpersonal bias (the emotional intensity bias). By doing so we extend the knowledge on affective forecasting by investigating it in an interpersonal setting and we extend the knowledge on emotion perception of others by investigating it in a context that is future-directed.

*Positive illusions.* The third way in which perceptions of others are generally biased is by positive illusions (Murray et al., 1996). People have a strong tendency to view their romantic partner in an overly positive light. Specifically, in happy relationships people tend
to see more positive characteristics in their own partner than in the typical dating partner, they perceive their partner more positively than the partner perceives him- or herself, and they perceive their partner more positively than the partner is perceived by a friend (Murray et al., 1996; Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000). People thus overestimate the extent to which their partner holds positive traits and underestimate the extent to which their partner holds negative traits. This rosy view of one’s partner is functional for the relationship, because people who idealize their partner more also hold more positive views about their relationship and are less likely to break up (Murray et al., 1996). Nevertheless, positive illusions represent a bias and thus perceptions of one’s partner are often distorted. The forth chapter of the present dissertation investigates how people perceive their romantic partner. We do not focus explicitly on positive illusions, but it seems noteworthy to say that the person perception data we report in that chapter is likely coloured by positive illusions. That is, the perception of the partner’s characteristics is likely to be overly positive.

Taken together, there are several biases that influence people’s perceptions of others. In the three empirical chapters of the current dissertation we will investigate these biases and add new insights into when and how people’s perceptions of different targets are biased. We will span a wide range of targets in that the reported studies include predictions about similar and dissimilar others (Chapter 2), friend and strangers (Chapter 3), and the own relationship partner (Chapter 4). By doing so, we will try to paint a more complete picture of the biases that are prevalent in person perception and their implications for people’s relationships. In the next section we will review the relevant literature on the accuracy of person perception and how the chapters contribute to this aspect of person perception.

Research on Accuracy

As noted above, research on person perception is not complete if one only looks at how biased those perceptions are. One also has to consider the accuracy of person perception. Research on the accuracy of person perception often focuses on moderators that determine when a judgement is more or less accurate (for a review see Funder, 1995). A person perception judgment is thereby considered accurate when it corresponds to some extent to a predefined criterion. According to Funder (1995) moderators of the accuracy of person perception can be best categorized into four groups: research on the judge, research
on the target, research on the relationship between judge and target, and research on the trait or behaviour that is judged. Specifically, research on the judge aims to identify those individuals who are better in predicting others than other individuals. Research on the target aims to identify individuals who are easier to read and predict than others and, who therefore elicit more accurate predictions from judges. Research on the relationship compares predictions of people in different relationships types, ranging from relationships between strangers to those of married couples, to investigate how the relationship between judge and target affects accuracy of the prediction. Finally, research on traits compares the accuracy of predictions about different traits to investigate whether there are traits that are easier to predict than others. The findings presented in the present dissertation will be relevant for some of these aspects. In order to provide the reader with a complete overview, however, and because findings on one factor may be important for other factors, we will review the literature on all four factors.

Are some judges more accurate than others? People vary greatly in how accurate they are in person perception (Ickes, 2003) and there is a long-term interest among researchers in trying to identify those judges who are more accurate than other judges (e.g., Christiansen, Wolcott-Burnam, Janovics, Burns, & Quirk, 2005; Valentine, 1929; Vernon, 1933). This search for characteristics that make someone a better judge than others turned out to be more challenging than expected with some inconsistent and surprising results.

First, research identified several factors that increase person perception accuracy. Intelligence is consistently found to be related to more accurate person perception. Different studies found that higher intelligence is associated with higher accuracy in rating other’s performance and emotions, inferring thoughts and emotions, and inferring personality from videotaped targets (Hauenstein & Alexander, 1991; Christiansen et al., 2005; Davis & Kraus, 1997; Lippa & Dietz, 2000). Furthermore, in some studies more extravert people were found to be better at decoding nonverbal cues in social situations (Akert & Panter, 1988) whereas other studies found that not extraversion but openness was related to more accurate person perception (Christiansen et al., 2005; Lippa & Dietz, 2000).

Second, there are traits that are associated with less accurate person perception, including narcissism and autistic traits (Ponnet, Roeyers, Buysse, De Clercq, & Van Der Heyden, 2004; John & Robins, 1994). People who score high on narcissism have a strong tendency to self-enhance and view others’ performance as worse than their own. Their
perceptions of others are therefore less accurate. People with autistic traits are known to be impaired in their social skills and to have difficulty reading other people’s minds (Baron-Cohen, 1995) which translates into lower empathic accuracy scores (Ponnet et al., 2004).

Finally, there are also traits that intuitively should be related to accuracy in person perception but in fact are not. Those traits include self-reports on empathic ability or person perception accuracy and gender (Bernieri et al., 1994; Davis & Kraus, 1994; Ickes, 2003; Swann & Gill, 1997). Often people think that they are better judges of others than they actually are, which makes that self-reported accuracy is generally unrelated to actual accuracy (Swann & Gill, 1997). Furthermore, because women, as compared to men, are more socially oriented, emotionally responsive and sympathetic, there is a stereotype that they are more accurate in their person perception (Ickes, 2003). In most cases, (with a few exceptions, see (e.g., Vogt & Colvin, 2003)) this stereotype of women does not translate into more objectively accurate person perception, however (e.g., Lippa & Dietz, 2000). Sex differences in the accuracy of person perceptions may arise when gender is confounded with motivation. Motivation is known to improve personality judgements (Klein & Hodges, 2001) and sometimes simply mentioning that the accuracy of the judgement will be assessed can enhance women’s motivation to be accurate, probably because they want to live up to the stereotype (Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000). As soon as men are motivated to perform well (e.g., by means of monetary rewards), their level of accuracy increases and is similar to the one observed for women (Klein & Hodges, 2001).

In sum, research has struggled to find characteristics that make someone a better judge than others. Only few characteristics, including intelligence, narcissism, autism, and motivation are consistently found to predict someone’s person perception accuracy. It should be kept in mind that even the more consistent findings should be viewed with some caution because there are several different ways to measure person perception and a judge who is accurate in inferring others’ thoughts and feelings in an empathic accuracy design (Ickes, 1997) may not be automatically accurate in judging others’ personality from a written description. Although the target of prediction is not the main focus of the studies in the present dissertation, this research is nevertheless relevant because we kept these possible moderators in mind and, when necessary, controlled for them.

*Do some targets elicit more accurate judgements?* The second group of moderators of the accuracy of person perception concerns target characteristics. Research on the
influence of the target on person perception accuracy has been far more unambiguous than research on the judge. There are several traits that are found to make a good target including extraversion, expressiveness, emotional stability, and agreeableness (Ambady et al., 1995; Colvin, 1993). These results are not surprising and the explanations are straightforward. The more people talk and behave, the more information is available to judge them, therefore expressive, extraverted people are easier to read than shy, introverted people. Furthermore, people with more a consistent mood and more consistent behaviour are easier to judge because their current mood and behaviour is a good indicator for their general personality. People with unstable mood and behaviours are harder to judge because their current mood and behaviour may not reflect their general personality (Funder, 1995). Throughout the dissertation we will investigate how people perceive different targets, but the focus is not on the characteristics of the target directly, but rather on the relationship of different targets with the judge, a subject we will turn to next.

_Do some relationships between target and judge enhance accuracy?_ Research on the influence on the relationship between judge and target on person perception accuracy has also been relatively straightforward. The level of acquaintanceship between judge and target is one indisputable factor that influences the accuracy of person perception. In general, friends’ perceptions of each other are more accurate than those of strangers (Funder, Kolar, & Blackman, 1995; Ickes, 2003; Funder & Colvin, 1988). As people have more contact with each other the accuracy of their perception of each other increases. Most of the increase in accuracy takes places within the first eight months of acquaintanceship (Ickes, 2003). The relationship between the judge and the target thus plays an important role for the accuracy of person perception, but this role is most prevalent for the difference between strangers and acquaintances. As noted in the section about bias, in the present dissertation we will investigate person perception for different targets. Specifically, we will investigate the accuracy of predictions made for friends and strangers (Chapter 3) and the accuracy of judgements about the own relationship partner (Chapter 4). In Chapter three we will investigate whether people are more accurate in predicting future emotional states of a friend compared to a stranger. In Chapter four we will investigate how accurate perceptions of one’s own relationship partner relate to relationship well-being.

_Do some traits elicit more accurate judgements?_ There is ample research comparing accuracy for different traits in order to identify traits that are easier to perceive than others.
It is conceivable that a characteristic like ‘outgoing’ is easier to perceive than the characteristic ‘ruminating’. Not surprisingly therefore, it has been found that more visible traits are more accurately perceived than less visible traits. Several studies found that people achieve higher accuracy when judging others’ extraversion and conscientiousness than when judging their agreeableness and emotional stability (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Bernieri et al., 1994; Funder & Dobroth, 1987; Norman & Goldberg, 1966). People thus seem to be able to infer personality from what they can observe and are accurate to the extent that the trait is observable.

Another distinction that can be made between traits is how relevant the trait is for the judge and the relationship. People seem to be pragmatic in their accuracy and achieve higher accuracy scores for traits that are relevant in the specific relationship context (Gill & Swann, 2004). For example, relationship partners achieve higher accuracy scores for traits that are relevant for the relationship (e.g., “caring” in romantic relationships) compared to traits that are less relevant for the relationship (e.g., “imaginative” in romantic relationships). These findings suggest that there is a certain functionality in person perception, in that people come to know those aspects of their partner that are relevant for their relationship. Furthermore, the more accurate knowledge someone has about the partners the more committed this person is to the relationship, an indicator of relationship quality (Gill & Swann, 2004). People thus tend to have accurate, relationship specific knowledge, which is beneficial for the relationship.

Research on person perception does not only include judgements about others traits, but also judgements about others thoughts, feelings and behaviour (e.g., Ickes, 1997; Van Boven et al., 2005). Although there is ample research comparing the accuracy of different traits, so far there is no study that directly compares the accuracy of different kinds of perceptions, namely traits, feelings and behaviour. In Chapter four we aim to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive comparison of people’s accuracy on different traits, preferences, and behaviours. We will measure accuracy on traits that vary in visibility, relevance, and abstraction level. Most importantly, we will relate this accuracy on different dimensions to relationship quality to investigate which type of accuracy is most beneficial for the relationship.

In sum, the accuracy of people’s person perception varies along several dimensions. A wide range of factors come into play when trying to determine when people are accurate,
including who is judging, who is judged, what the relationship is between judge and target and what is judged. In the present dissertation several of these factors are directly investigated, controlled for, or discussed. Covering all the different aspects of accuracy research would exceed the scope of this dissertation, nevertheless we will add to the knowledge of most of the factors known to affect people’s accuracy in person perceptions that we have discussed. That is, throughout the dissertation, we will address the accuracy of judgements for different targets, different relationships, and different traits.

**The Interpersonal consequences of Accuracy and Bias**

Apart from investigating when and why people are biased and/or accurate when perceiving others the present dissertation also aims to investigate the consequences of biases and accuracy for the relationship between judge and target.

As noted in the section on biases the consequences of biases can be either positive or negative for the relationship. Positive illusions tend to have positive consequences because the more someone overestimates the positive qualities of one’s partner, the more satisfied this person is with the relationship (Murray et al., 1996). The projection bias and the use of stereotypes, on the other hand, are commonly seen as having negative consequences. Judgements that are too egocentric may reduce understanding between partners and judgements based on stereotypes can increase perceived dissimilarity between partners. The relational consequences of some other biases remain unclear, however. In our third chapter we will investigate the consequences of biases in predictions of others’ emotions. We argue that people will be biases in their predictions of others’ emotions because they tend to be biased when predicting their own emotions, too. We argue that this bias can have positive relational consequences, thou. When predictions for the self and others are similarly biased, both the judge and the target will make the same prediction and they would therefore agree on it. This agreement should enhance the feeling of understanding in the relationship.

Second, we will also investigate the relational consequences of accuracy. The effects of accuracy on the relationship are thought to be very straightforward. The more accurate partner knowledge someone has the happier this person should be with the relationship. The coordination of daily life and activities should be easier and the relationships should be more harmonious when partners know each other. Also, partners’ knowledge of each other should provide them with a sense that they are able to predict their partner. This perception
of predictability of the partner should provide them with a feeling of control which is a key aspect in successful social relationships (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Although the assumption that knowledge contributes to relationship well-being is appealing, evidence on the link between knowledge and relationship well-being is mixed. Research revealed that only under certain circumstances more accurate partner knowledge is related to more relationship well-being. For example, only when the traits that are judged accurately are more concrete and relevant for the relationship does accurate knowledge contribute to the relationship (Gill & Swann, 2004; Neff & Karney, 2005). Furthermore, accurately inferring one’s partners thoughts about the relationship is only positively related to relationship well-being if it concerns positive thoughts. Accurately inferring that the partner thinks negatively about the relationship is actually detrimental for relationship well-being. In sum, although the rational behind the accuracy – relationship well-being link is straightforward, research so far has generated mixed results. In our forth chapter we aim to provide a more comprehensive investigation of this link by simultaneously investigating accuracy on different dimensions. This way we hope to shed more light on the relational consequences of accuracy.

The Present Dissertation

Our review of the literature on bias and accuracy in person perception revealed that many processes influence our perception of others. Person perception can be biased in many ways and accuracy is determined by various different factors. In the present dissertation we will add to the literature by investigating in more detail when and how perceptions are biased, whether biased perceptions can also be accurate perceptions, and what the relational consequences are of biased and accurate person perception. We will describe the goal of each of the studies reported in this dissertation in more detail below.

Chapter 2: Moderators of the Projection Bias. The second chapter focuses on the projection bias and investigates in more detail when exactly this bias emerges and whether it varies systematically as a function of the target. As discussed earlier, people use the self to predict others, but the degree to which they do so depends on the level of similarity they perceive to the target. In addition to the perceived target similarity, we argue that another moderator plays an important role in the use of the self to predict others, namely whether predictions about others are preceded by predictions about the self, so the order in which people make their predictions. If people make self-predictions before other-predictions, the
self becomes highly accessible and this influences the degree to which people use the self to predict another person. We will use a social cognitive model to explain this effect. By doing so we contribute to the literature on the projection bias in that we specify the conditions under which the self is used to predict others.

Chapter 3: Accuracy and Bias in Empathic Forecasting. The third chapter investigates both bias and accuracy of empathic forecasts – predictions about how someone else would feel after a certain event. As noted above, affective forecasting research shows that people’s predictions about how they will feel in response to a future event are biased (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). People tend to overestimate the intensity and longevity of their emotional reaction. We extend this literature by investigating whether the impact bias can also be found in people’s predictions about how someone else will feel in response to a future event. People’s perceptions about others’ emotional life tend to be biased in that they underestimate the emotional reaction of others (Miller & McFarland, 1987). We will answer the question of whether this effect can also be found in people’s predictions about others’ emotional reactions. We will investigate this in empathic forecasts made for friends and for strangers. Furthermore, we will investigate the accuracy of forecasts made for the self and another person. So far, the accuracy of forecasts has not received much attention and we will add to the literature by showing that people’s forecasts are quite accurate. We will investigate whether people accurately forecast to what extent they feel certain emotions. Importantly, we will also investigate interpersonal accuracy. That is, whether people’s forecasts for the other person correspond to the other person’s own forecast. We will discuss the motivations and consequences underlying biased and accurate empathic forecasts.

Chapter 4: The Consequences of Accuracy. In the forth chapter we focus on people’s knowledge of different traits, preferences, and behaviours of their marriage partner. We investigate whether accurately knowing one’s partner is beneficial for relationship well-being. Furthermore, we contrast the effects of knowing one’s partner with the feeling of knowing one’s partner. We show that accurately knowing one’s partners traits, preferences, and behaviours does neither enhance nor reduce the satisfaction of either oneself or the partner. Furthermore, we show that accurate partner knowledge is independent of the feeling of knowing and understanding one’s partner. Thus, people’s feeling that they know their partner is not based on how well they actually know their partner. The subjective
feeling of understanding one’s partner is positively related to relationship satisfaction. It thus seems that knowing one’s partner is not important for relationship satisfaction; rather it is the feeling that one knows one’s partner that does the trick. These results show that although accurate person perception received a lot of research attention, its role in interpersonal relationships is subordinate to people’s subjective experience of accuracy.

Chapter 5: General discussion. In the last chapter we will summarize the contributions of the present studies to the research on accuracy and bias in person perception. We will discuss the implications of the studies in the broader context of interpersonal relationships and give implications and suggestions for further research.

Final Note

The reader who actually reads this whole dissertation from beginning to end will discover some overlap in the issues discussed in this general introduction and the introductions of the empirical chapters. This stems from the fact that the empirical chapters are based on articles that are published or submitted for publication. The advantage is that the chapters can be read individually and that the reader automatically gets more familiar with the most important issues, because those are the issues that are repeated.