



01 Jan 2004

Reputation Management

Amy L. Bone

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsmine.mst.edu/oure>

Recommended Citation

Bone, Amy L., "Reputation Management" (2004). *Opportunities for Undergraduate Research Experience Program (OURE)*. 216.

<https://scholarsmine.mst.edu/oure/216>

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars' Mine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Opportunities for Undergraduate Research Experience Program (OURE) by an authorized administrator of Scholars' Mine. This work is protected by U. S. Copyright Law. Unauthorized use including reproduction for redistribution requires the permission of the copyright holder. For more information, please contact scholarsmine@mst.edu.

Reputation Management

Amy L. Bone

University of Missouri-Rolla

Abstract

This study examined the idea that the importance of various characteristics to determining the quality of reputations differs for men and women in ways consistent with their mating-relevant concerns. Based on earlier work, I first wanted to identify dimensions along which reputations might be judged. One hundred students were asked to sort ninety-one characteristics of reputations into sets of characteristics they saw as similar to each other. A cluster analysis of the resulting co-occurrence matrix produced twenty-three distinct clusters. These clusters were used as the basis for creating reputation scales from participants' ratings of the importance of each characteristic to both men's and women's reputations. Participants consistently rated characteristics as more important to the other sex's reputation than to their own, suggesting that reputations serve mating-relevant functions (at least in a college-aged sample), but there were few other effects.

Reputation is defined as “the commonly held evaluation of a person’s character” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1999, p. 272). It “is what other people think of us-i.e. it is based on external perceptions and conventions. It is not based on what we ourselves think it is (or even ought to be). It is based on external perceptions and values” (Griffin, 2002, p. 7-8).

The purpose of this study was to examine the idea that the importance of various characteristics to determining the quality of reputations differs for men and women in ways consistent with their mating-relevant concerns. In an earlier study done by Dr. Sharpsteen, some of his students were asked to list the characteristics they thought were important to determining the quality of people’s reputations; they came up with ninety-one different characteristics total. A questionnaire was developed from these characteristics and given to numerous students. The questionnaire required both males and females to rate how interested they would be in knowing each of the ninety-one characteristics of a man and a woman. Based on Dr. Sharpsteen’s earlier work, I wanted to identify dimensions along which reputations might be judged and how important participants rated these characteristics to both men’s and women’s reputations.

I could not find any information on studies done specifically on reputation. Also, there was a limited amount of literature pertaining to reputation in general. Most information on reputation, its management and dimensions, pertained more to marketing than to people, which was what I was interested in. But even the marketing view can somewhat be applied to the general subject of reputation. For example, “a corporation’s reputation is what others think it is. More importantly, it is based not just on external perceptions, but on the behavior which is supported by these perceptions” (Griffin, 2002, p. 9) So reputation management in marketing should come from a judgment of how one works on the outside, as well as on the inside (Griffin, 2002). This idea relates well to the idea of people’s reputations and how those should be and are managed and judged by others.

Beyond the marketing aspect, there was some information that could be related to the subject of reputation. The idea of popularity can be seen as related to one’s reputation. There are two major factors involved in one’s popularity: the social group and the person who desires to belong to that group. Those who contain a superior personality are not always welcome or popular in groups. If someone is new to a group and has this superior personality, he/she will be ignored by the group or the group will attempt to make him/her conform to the group (Wieman, 1936). So popularity can be tied back to one’s reputation, especially in groups. And this reputation in groups may be affected by one’s personality, which is an important aspect of a person.

Attribution and overattribution can also be related to reputation. “Social psychologists have long noted that people...tend to inflate the importance of dispositions and neglect the importance of situations in explaining behavior” (Lewin, Heider and Ichheiser as cited in Doris, 2002, p. 93). Americans have a tendency to use trait attributions to describe a person’s behavior. “Stereotyping is the most obvious problem. Dion and associates (1972:288-9) found that both men and women rated attractive persons (of both the same and opposite sex) as having more socially desirable personalities, better character, and better prospects for happiness than less attractive people” (Doris, 2002, p. 93) And people are quick to making these artificial

attributions without realizing they are doing so (Doris, 2002). This information helps show that how one's behavior is explained by attributing it to traits without the situations the behavior occurs in being considered. One's reputation could be judged partially by his or her behavior, even though behavior is largely situational and not characteristic of the person. The information also shows that some people are judged even by something as meaningless as their outer appearance. And this judgment is then carried over or attributed as how the person's personality is which could possibly affect one's reputation judgment.

Reputation may also be effected by rumors and gossip. According to Rosnow and Fine (1976, p. 1), "hearsay can be a precious commodity in the marketplace of social exchange." Things people hear, whether they can be proven wrong or not, have an effect on their opinions of those they interact with socially. "Rumor is information, neither substantiated nor refuted; gossip is small talk with or without a known basis in fact. Rumors seem most often fueled by a desire for meaning, a quest for clarification and closure; gossip seems motivated primarily by ego and status needs" (Rosnow & Fine, 1976, p. 4). Rumors are usually seen as mischievous. But "perhaps the clearest function of the rumor is its entertainment value. It titillate[s] the imagination" (Rosnow & Fine, 1976, p. 20). The less clear function of the rumor is the status the one telling the rumor receives. But both of these functions diminish with time, because rumors reach the point that nothing more can be added to them to make them any more interesting and keep them believable (Rosnow & Fine, 1976). Rumors and gossip can be related to reputation, because regardless of whether they are substantial or based in fact, they could still have some sort of an effect on the judgment made about one's reputation.

Method

The one hundred participants (50 females, 50 males) in the study were students enrolled in the general psychology course at the University of Missouri-Rolla. I actually collected data from sixty males, but I excluded the data from the last ten so that I would be able to look at an equal number of male and female participants. I tried to get more female participants in order to match the number of sixty males, but it was very difficult to even get fifty females participants. The male population at the University of Missouri-Rolla is much higher than that of the females.

I first wanted to identify dimensions along which reputations might be judged. I ran a reputation dimensions study using the ninety-one characteristics that Dr. Sharpsteen collected and the data from his respective questionnaires. The one hundred students who participated in my reputation dimensions study were asked to sort the ninety-one characteristics of reputations into sets of characteristics they saw as similar to each other; each participant received ninety-one note cards, each containing one of the ninety-one characteristics. The participants were also given an informed consent form before beginning, which let the participants know that they could discontinue their participation at any time without repercussions by simply returning the cards to me. After the reputation dimension study was complete and all of the data was entered, a cluster analysis of the resulting co-occurrence matrix produced twenty-three distinct clusters of similar characteristics. I then gave each of these clusters a name that generally describes the characteristics it contains (See Table 1). Then these

clusters were used as the basis for creating reputation scales from participants' ratings of the importance of each characteristic to both men's and women's reputations.

Results

In this study, I examined the idea that the importance of various characteristics to determining the quality of reputations differs for men and women in ways consistent with their mating-relevant concerns. Based on earlier work, I first identified dimensions along which reputations might be judged through the reputation dimensions study and the cluster analysis, which produced twenty-three distinct clusters. Then these clusters were used as the basis for creating reputation scales from participants' ratings of the importance of each characteristic to both men's and women's reputations. I hypothesized that I would find that certain characteristics would be seen as more important to women's reputations than men's and vice versa. For example, finding that intelligence/determination level (See Table 1) was more important to women's reputations than to men's would have helped support my hypothesis.

In order to test my hypothesis, I used a two-way ANOVA test with subjects' sex as the between-subjects variable and targets' sex (i.e., the sex for whom the importance of the characteristic was being evaluated) as the within-subjects variable to compare how men and women rated the importance of characteristics to their own reputations and to the reputations of the opposite sex.

The least squares means part of the results from the ANOVA test revealed different results than I had expected. I found that participants consistently rated characteristics as more important to the other sex's reputation than to their own, suggesting that reputations serve mating-relevant functions (at least in a college-aged sample), but there were few other effects. Another less profound finding was that women rated all of the characteristics higher in importance for themselves than men did for themselves, with only one exception, physical fitness level. There were also a few clusters where the women only slightly rated the characteristics as higher in importance for themselves than men did. These clusters included material status, masculinity/femininity level, and level of influence. So in those three areas, both women and men rated the importance of these to their own reputations very similarly. (See Table 1 and Table 2)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the idea that the importance of various characteristics to determining the quality of reputations differs for men and women in ways consistent with their mating-relevant concerns. I hypothesized that I would find that certain characteristics would be seen as more important to women's reputations than to men's and vice versa. My hypothesis was not supported. Instead of only certain characteristics being seen as more important for one sex's reputation than the others, participants consistently rated characteristics as more important to the other sex's reputation than to their own, suggesting that reputations serve mating-relevant functions (at least in a college-aged sample), but there were few other effects.

There were a few other limitations involved with this study. First, I did not have a very representative subject sample. The sample was not representative, because, although it may have represented the general psychology students at the university, it did not represent the entire university population. A way I could improve the

representativeness of the sample would be to expand my subject pool beyond just the students enrolled in the general psychology course. The reason one would want to try to do this is to increase the study's validity and the ability to apply or generalize the results to more than just the general psychology students. One problem with this is how to get other students in other courses at the university to participate. This is something one may want to consider when doing research in the future.

A second limitation of this study is the different ways some of the ninety-one characteristics could have been interpreted by the different participants. One characteristic could have meant different things to many of the participants. These different interpretations could possibly have come from the way the characteristic description was worded or the cultural differences in participants. For example, one of the characteristics was asking how important how ditzy someone is and many participants were not sure what the word ditzy meant. One way I could have improved this weakness was to be sure to make the characteristic descriptions more culturally friendly, meaning that I should have tried to use words that do not have multiple meanings and are common to most everyone.

The third limitation was the limited sources used to create the ninety-one characteristics used in the reputation dimensions study. These characteristics were collected earlier from some students in Dr. Sharpsteen's classes. Since these characteristics came only from Dr. Sharpsteen's students, some characteristics that would be considered very important in considering one's reputation may have been left out or not thought of and some characteristics that are not considered to be that important by many may have been included. One could help make this better by asking for characteristics from people beyond just Dr. Sharpsteen's students. Even if characteristics were only collected from students at the university in different classes, there should be some different opinions expressed in the characteristics reported. Once again, one would have to deal with the problem of how to get others involved.

A possible limitation in this study may also have been that there were too many characteristics for the participants to sort. This fact may have led to fatigue and caused the participants to give less attention to their grouping of the characteristics as time passed. One thing that may have helped with this limitation would be to require the participants to give their clusters of characteristics names. In this study, they just had to sort the characteristics into piles of what they believed to be similar characteristics. Having them have to place a label on these sorted piles might have made them pay a little more attention to how and why they were grouping the characteristics the way that they were. Another thing that may have helped this limitation would be to include fewer characteristics to sort, but this would have produced another limitation in return; I would have had to find a way to validly determine which characteristics should be included or excluded from the study.

A final limitation was that a few of the characteristics were repeated, meaning that they were in the ninety-one characteristics more than once. Seeing the same characteristic more than once may have been confusing to the participants. They also may have forgotten what pile they placed the first one in and ended up placing the same exact characteristic in two different piles. If the latter was the case, not enough participants did that to cause an effect on the clusters created from the reputation dimensions study and cluster analysis. One way this could be improved is by simply

removing any repeated characteristics so that each characteristic is included only once. I would have done this in my study, but I was unaware there was two of a few of the characteristics until after I had already begun running my study. And I wanted every participant to have the same number of cards.

Aside from the limitations of the study, it also had its strengths. This study offered more insight about reputations and how men and women rate the importance of different characteristics to their own sex's and their opposite sex's reputation. It has also provided a base or foundation for further research on reputation.

There are different things I would try to improve about my study in future research endeavors. Many of these improvements would deal with trying to reduce or eliminate some of the limitations mentioned above. First, I would want to try to get students beyond the general psychology students to participate. This way my sample could be representative of a broader group than that one course's students.

Secondly, I would make sure that the way the characteristics are described is clearer and more culturally friendly. To help make this a possibility I would want to use common words and words without multiple or hidden meanings. I could also provide an explanation of the characteristics I think may be confusing or unclear. It would be difficult to completely control this, but it could definitely be improved upon in the future.

Third, I would like to collect characteristics that are considered to be important in judging one's reputation from a more representative group. I would want to ask for characteristics from more students than just those in one professor's classes. It would also be beneficial to ask students beyond simply the psychology department. This way I would have a better chance of different characteristics being brought forward that may have been overlooked. This might be a little difficult for two reasons. First of all, I would have to figure out how to get other students on campus to participate. Secondly, I would still want to control how many characteristics are used during the reputation dimensions study so that the participants are not overwhelmed.

Table 1

Cluster Description	Characteristics
Sexual Strategy	*Whether the person primarily hangs out with same gender (3) or with the opposite sex (77)
Sexual Sociability	*Who the person dates(14) *How many people the person dates (91) *Whether the person is dating anybody (28) *How many people the person has had sex with (32)
Marital Status	*Whether the person is married (29)
Social Status	*How many people the person knows (33) *Who the person's friends are (34) *The sorts of groups the person belongs to (46) *How popular the person is (67) *What others say about the person (81) *Whether the person is in a fraternity or sorority (83)
Public Behavior and Sociability	*How much the person likes hanging out with other people (10) *How well the person gets along with others (49) *How the person acts around other people (68) *How sociable the person is (76) *How the person behaves in public (21)
Level of Drug/Alcohol Use	*How much the person drinks (50) *Whether the person uses drugs or not (54) *How much partying the person does (25) *The sorts of activities the person is involved in (22)
Religion/Spirituality Level	*How involved the person is in church (72) *Whether the person goes to church (78) *How much community service the person does (6)
Moral Level	*What the person's moral character is like (52) *What the person's moral standards are (57) *How traditional the person is (64)
Family/Gender Values	*How the person treats his mother (43) *How good a spouse the person would be (89) *What kind of family the person comes from (42) *Whether the person treats men and women differently (39) *How good the person's cooking skills are (27)
Material Status	*What the person's status is (61, 71) *How much money the person makes (7) *How much money the person has (85) *The type of job the person has (70) *The kind of car the person drives (12)

Edu/Career Goals/Achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *What the person's career goals are (47) *The person's achievements (84) *How well the person is doing in school (40) *How much the person studies (79) *How much education the person has (26)
Intelligence/Determination Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How smart the person is (17) *How brainy the person is (65) *How articulate the person is (88) *How determined the person is (18) *How much of a leader the person is (87)
Masculinity/Femininity Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How masculine/feminine the person is (53, 82)
Physical Fitness Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How athletic the person is (11, 62) *How strong the person is (23)
Outer Appearance Rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How much the person weighs (31) *How the person is built (59) *The person's hair color (4) *How good-looking the person is (9) *The person's hygiene (2) *The person's race (20) *The kinds of clothes the person wears (16) *Whether the person has piercings or tattoos (36)
Flirtatious Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How flirtatious the person is (37) *How often the person smiles (58)
Personal Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How predictable the person is (55) *How cautious the person is (56) *The person's sense of humor (5) *The kind of personality the person has (45) *How confident the person seems to be (24) *How open the person is to new ideas (63)
Selflessness Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How helpful the person is (44) *How caring the person is (80) *How nurturing the person is (8) *How generous the person is (66) *How dependable the person is (35) *How trustworthy the person seems to be (41) *How well the person listens (19) *How friendly the person is (13) *How nice the person seems to be (15) *How concerned the person is about others (1)
Integrity Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How much integrity the person has (74)
Arrogance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How cocky the person seems to be (30) *How snotty the person is (69) *How ditzy the person is (73)
Level of Aggressiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *How aggressive the person is (48, 90) *How violent the person is (86) *How dominating the person is (38)

Level of Intolerance	*How critical the person is (60) *How opinionated the person is (75)
Level of Influence	*How powerful the person is (51)

Note: Number in parentheses represents the specific characteristic number

Table 2 ANOVA Test Results

Cluster Description		Sex of Subject	
		Men	Women
Sexual Strategy	men	2.77	3.8
	women	3.86	3.03
Sexual Sociability	men	2.34	4.5
	women	4.56	3.05
Marital Status	men	2.03	4.94
	women	5.15	3.04
Social Status	men	2.97	3.55
	women	3.42	3.19
Public Behavior and Sociability	men	4.26	5.32
	women	4.98	5.15
Level of Drug/Alcohol Use	men	3.78	5.01
	women	4.58	4.4
Religion/Spirituality Level	men	2.22	3.65
	women	2.94	3.31
Moral Level	men	3.91	5.57
	women	5.14	5.07
Family/Gender Values	men	2.28	4.76
	women	4.11	3.26
Material Status	men	2.38	3.5
	women	2.79	2.42
Edu/Career Goals/Achievements	men	3.15	4.86
	women	4.24	3.98
Intelligence/Determination Level	men	3.57	4.97
	women	4.55	4.44
Masculinity/Femininity Level	men	2.35	3.96
	women	4.17	2.71
Physical Fitness Level	men	3.33	3.84
	women	3.71	2.65
Outer Appearance Rating	men	1.83	3.51
	women	3.99	2.46
Flirtatious Level	men	2.07	4.9
	women	4.89	4.03
Personal Nature	men	3.8	5.15
	women	4.82	4.65
Selflessness Level	men	3.89	5.59
	women	5.14	5.28
Integrity Level	men	4.64	5.58
	women	5.3	5.35

Arrogance	men	3.43	4.58
	women	4.49	4.29
Level of Aggressiveness	men	3.16	5.37
	women	4.32	3.84
Level of Intolerance	men	3.5	4.93
	women	4.53	4.46
Level of Influence	men	2.57	3.64
	women	3.14	2.6

Acknowledgements

I would like to give much of the credit of my research to Dr. Sharpsteen of the University of Missouri-Rolla Psychology Department. My research not only branched from his earlier research, but he was also a major part in aiding me throughout the entire research process.

References

- Doris, John M. (2002). *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1999). *Webster's Classic Reference Library Dictionary*. Ashland, Ohio: Landoll, Inc.
- Griffin, Gerry (2002). *Reputation Management*. Oxford: Capstone Publishing.
- Rosnow, Ralph L., & Fine, Gary Alan (1976). *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*. New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, Inc.
- Wieman, Regina Westcott (1936). *Popularity*. Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company.

Reflections on the Learning Experience

After conducting this research study and a different one previously, I have a better foundational understanding of how research is conducted in my discipline. Generally research in this field involves coming up with an idea or theory and a hypothesis that you want to test and then figuring out how you want to test it. Research that I have encountered in my discipline many times involves the constructing of a questionnaire or a survey to aid in the testing of the hypothesis. It also involves getting participants from a target group which, in my experiences, is typically general psychology students from the university. It involves collecting the questionnaire or survey responses and entering numerous amounts of data and then running several different tests on the data. The test run allows the researcher to interpret the data entered and to figure out what he/she has found or what the results were and whether or not they supported the hypothesis. Whether the hypothesis is supported or not, the research is never complete; it can always be repeated and improved or expanded.

I have expanded my understanding of the informational resources available and how to best use these resources. Since the University of Missouri-Rolla is primarily a science and technology focused university, it is sometimes difficult to find sources of information for psychology research. I learned more about and how to use alternate resources such as the Merlin system, which allows one to search the libraries of other specific schools via the Internet and request books available at these schools. In addition, there are also reference librarians available to aid students in their search for resources. They can better help ensure that all possible informational resources available have been properly searched. Colleagues and peers working in the

psychology department were also important informational resources. I am not very educated when it comes to computers and writing programs, but fortunately for me, a student working in the psychology department was able to help. This student wrote a computer program for Dr. Sharpsteen and I for the cluster analysis part of my study. This program was a very important tool used in my research.

Much of the research done in psychology does not involve an actual experiment. Many times research in psychology is conducted by getting participants to fill out a very carefully constructed questionnaire or survey about the subject or theory of interest. This is not considered an experiment because nothing is manipulated by the researcher. The method used is more observational and is used to collect information of interest in order to test the data collected and come to a conclusion on the hypothesis's support or lack thereof and why either may have occurred. I do, however, feel that I have gained knowledge regarding the fundamentals of the research design that I have typically seen used in psychology: the questionnaire and survey. I now have a better understanding of all of the considerations, time, and work that has to be put into the construction of a questionnaire or survey in order for it to be effective. An effective questionnaire or survey must be both reliable and valid; it needs to be consistent and measuring to find out the information desired. Also, the researcher needs to be sure that the questionnaire or survey's instructions, as well as the questions and/or statements that it consists of, are very clear and easily understood. I have also realized that there are always limitations that have to be taken into account when interpreting the data and various tests' results. For example, in my reputation dimensions study, I had to take into account certain limitations, such as the lack of

representativeness of my sample beyond the general psychology students, the possible differences in the interpretations of the characteristics by participants, the limited sources used for creating the list of ninety-one characteristics, etc. Even if I had tried to fix or better control the limitations of my study, they would never all be able to be completely eliminated. In addition, results are never one-hundred percent clear; they can be interpreted in different ways. Finally, since my research was based on some of Dr. Sharpsteen's earlier work, I have a better understanding of how research projects can be based on earlier works, and after finishing my project, I see how a research project is never really complete because it can always be repeated, or improved or expanded upon.

To test my hypothesis I used a two-way ANOVA test. I have had some previous experience with this test and interpreting its results from my research I conducted in my experimental psychology course. Since it has been a while since I had used the test in this class, Dr. Sharpsteen aided me in understanding the ANOVA test and interpreting its results. We primarily looked at the least squares means portion of the test results to see how participants' rated the importance of characteristics to both men's and women's reputations. I have learned how to interpret the results of my research project through the results of the ANOVA test. I found that participants consistently rated characteristics as more important to the other sex's reputation than to their own, suggesting that reputations serve mating-relevant functions (at least in a college-aged sample), but there were few other effects. A less profound finding was that women rated most characteristics higher in importance for themselves than men did for themselves, with only one exception, physical fitness level. This did not support my

hypothesis, which was that certain characteristics would be seen as more important to women's reputations than to men's and vice versa. Although I did not find exactly what expected or was hoping to find, I still learned from my experiment and it has provided more insight for future research on reputation.