

The Pollyanna Myth: How Highly Agreeable People Judge Positive and Negative Relational Acts

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Abstract

Although people high in agreeableness have often been shown to be positively biased toward others, four studies provide evidence that agreeableness is associated with extremity effects, not simple positivity effects, in social judgment. Across studies, agreeable participants judged prosocial behaviors more favorably, but antisocial behaviors more unfavorably, than did disagreeable participants. In support of a goal-congruence mechanism, Study 1 showed that communal goals, rather than perceived similarity, mediated the effects, and Studies 2–4 demonstrated that agreeable perceivers were particularly sensitive to communal (vs. agentic) violations. A longitudinal study of real-life impressions supported the laboratory evidence that agreeable people are highly sensitive to both the prosocial and antisocial behavior of others (Study 4). We discuss how the current account complements and extends existing theories of agreeableness.

Keywords

agreeableness, relational transgressions, social judgment, person perception, negativity effects

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People, it turns out, are not perfect. They screw up. They say hurtful things. They cheat on their partners or lie to their employers. Although exposure to these negative relational acts is unavoidable, the way in which such acts are judged and evaluated is not inevitable. Existing research suggests that the nature of the transgression itself affects how it will be judged. In particular, transgressions in the morality/warmth/communion domain tend to be judged more harshly than transgressions in the ability/competence/agency domain (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Kammrath, Ames, & Scholer, 2007; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Reeder & Brewer, 1979). In this article we investigate individual differences in people's sensitivity to communal transgressions: What kinds of people might be particularly disapproving of noncommunal acts?

A likely source of such individual differences, we hypothesize, is a person's deeply held goals and values. Current research on the effects of goals (Fitzsimons, 2006) and values (Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Miller & Luthar, 1989) on evaluative judgments provides evidence that the strength of goals and values consistently predicts the strength of responses to goal- and value-relevant events (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grassman, 1998; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). The stronger the goal, the more intense will be the reaction to both goal-congruous and goal-incongruous events (Lewin, 1935). Goal congruence theories thus suggest that individuals who hold strong communal goals and values may be, in fact, the most likely to judge noncommunal behaviors negatively.

Support for a connection between a person's communal values and his or her evaluative standards has been found in research examining cross-cultural differences in moral judgment for individuals from individualistic versus collectivistic cultures (Laham, Chopra, Lalljee, & Parkinson, 2010). People in collectivistic cultures tend to view community violations as moral issues in ways that individuals from individualistic cultures do not (Miller & Luthar, 1989) and are more punitive toward targets who engage in violations of community and hierarchy than are individuals from an individualistic culture (Laham et al., 2010). Precisely because of the value placed on duty and hierarchy in collectivistic cultures, violations of such standards are judged more harshly.

Although variation in social judgment standards has been examined at the cultural level, little research has examined variation at the individual level. The few existing studies have, however, supported the claim that goals and values play a role in individual variation. Trafimow, Bromgard, Finlay, and Ketelaar (2005) found, for example, that people who value honesty have lower thresholds for categorizing others

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as liars. In addition, research by Wiltermuth, Monin, and Chow (2010) demonstrated that higher internalization of moral precepts predicted increased condemnation of immoral acts.

In this article, we propose that individual differences in agreeableness may be a broad personality factor that influences judgments of communal behaviors and transgressions. Because agreeable individuals strongly value relationships, prosocial behavior, and smooth interpersonal interactions (De Raad & Oudenhoven, 2008; Ode, Robinson, & Wilkowski, 2008; Roberts & Robins, 2000; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002), they often experience more distress about relational transgressions (Robinson, Meier, & Solberg, 2005; Suls, Martin, & David, 1998; Van Kleef, Homan, Beersma, & van Knippenberg, 2010). Consequently, we hypothesize that agreeable individuals will demonstrate extremity effects in social judgment—judging communal behaviors more positively and judging communal transgressions more negatively. Importantly, these extremity effects should emerge solely when agreeable perceivers observe behaviors that are clearly and directly relevant to communal values and concerns (i.e., behaviors high and low on the communion dimension). Goal-congruity effects should not be observed for behaviors that are not relevant to these goals (such as behaviors high and low on the agency dimension).

Reconciling Accounts of the Highly Agreeable Perceiver

Many previous studies suggest a portrait of highly agreeable individuals as “Pollyanna” perceivers who see the best in everyone (Matlin & Stang, 1978). Past research has repeatedly found, for example, that agreeable individuals generally perceive others as positive, agreeable, and trustworthy (Kenny, 1994; Paulhus & Reynolds, 1995; Wood, Harms, & Vazire, 2010). Even when others are being difficult, agreeable people readily give empathy (Graziano, Habashi, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007), forgive transgressions (Koutsos, Wertheim, & Kornblum, 2008), and engage in prosocial conflict behavior (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001; Wilkowski, Robinson, & Meier, 2006).

If agreeable perceivers are negatively affected by goal-incongruous behaviors, why does a preponderance of evidence fail to show any negativity effects for agreeable people who interact with others who behave noncommunally? This apparent paradox can be elucidated by considering the evidence that effective self-regulation is a hallmark of agreeableness (Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip, & Campbell, 2007; Ode & Robinson, 2007; Rothbart, 1989). Although agreeable perceivers may initially judge a communal transgression more harshly, the self-regulation component of the trait means that agreeable perceivers are adept at reevaluating, reappraising, and inhibiting any downstream negative reactions (Ahadi & Rothbart, 1994; Laursen, Pulkkinen, & Adams, 2002; Rothbart, 1989). Consequently, an investigation of how agreeable individuals judge communal behaviors and transgressions must focus on initial unregulated judgments, an area about which we know very little.

If it can be demonstrated that highly agreeable people are initially *more* disapproving than others of such transgressions, it makes it all the more impressive that they self-regulate so effectively to achieve more positive downstream attitudes and behaviors. It also raises interesting questions about the potential costs of such regulation, a point we return to in the General Discussion.

Overview of Studies

This article represents the first attempt to show that in the absence of strong social-regulation concerns, agreeable people are more sensitive to prosocial and antisocial behaviors. In Studies 1 through 3, participants judged the personality and behavior of fictional targets, and in Study 4 they judged the personality of a roommate at the start and end of their time living together as roommates. Across all studies, in support of the goal-congruence mechanism, agreeable perceivers showed extremity effects for goal-relevant (e.g., communal and non-communal) but not for goal-irrelevant behaviors. Taken together, the studies suggest that the highly agreeable person may be an individual who is highly attuned to the prosocial and antisocial behaviors of others, and who reacts strongly to both.

Study 1

Study 1 tested the hypothesis that perpetrators of antisocial acts would be judged more harshly by agreeable than by disagreeable perceivers. Participants listened to audio recordings of “overheard” cell phone conversations, in which the speaker revealed herself to be either the perpetrator or victim of an antisocial act. This design allowed us to control for exposure to the antisocial act itself; all participants were exposed to the communal transgressions. However, only in the perpetrator stories did participants judge a target who *committed* the communal transgression. After listening to each recording, participants evaluated the speaker. We hypothesized that perpetrators (but not victims) would be evaluated more negatively by highly agreeable participants. We further hypothesized that these negativity effects would be mediated by the communal goals and values of highly agreeable people. However, it was possible that negativity effects could emerge for agreeableness through a different mechanism—highly agreeable people likely feel very dissimilar from people who perpetrate antisocial acts, and this feeling of dissimilarity could lead to negative judgments of perpetrators. In this study, we measured both communal goals and perceptions of similarity to test both as potential mediators.

Method

Participants. One hundred twenty-one participants (68 female, M age = 21.16) from an introductory psychology course completed the online study and were compensated with course credit.

Procedure. Participants logged on to the study website from their personal computers. After giving consent to participate, they completed the survey in two sections. In the target rating section, participants were asked to listen to eight phone conversations (four perpetrator, four victim) and to provide trait ratings of each speaker. In the background questionnaires section, participants were asked to provide demographic information and to complete the Big Five Personality Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) and the Circumplex Scale of Interpersonal Values (CSIV; Locke, 2000). The order of the two sections was counterbalanced across participants. After completing the survey, participants submitted their responses and were directed to a debriefing page.

Target phone conversations. Participants were instructed to imagine they were completing a research study in the psychology department when they overheard one side of a cell phone conversation from another research participant who was working in an office directly across the hall. Participants were told they would be asked to listen to eight versions of this overheard phone conversation, and in each case to make personality inferences about the speaker based on what she said. All eight recordings were made by the same female actor and each lasted approximately 30 s. All scripts began with the same opening and ended with the same closing. Between the opening and closing, the script revealed the actor to be a perpetrator or victim of an antisocial act. Sample scripts are reproduced below.

Perpetrator: Oh, she told you? Yeah, I got that job at Wildcraft diner! . . . Yeah, I decided to apply right after you did, you made it sound like it would be an awesome place to work. . . . Well, I guess they just liked me more. . . . Oh, c'mon, get over it. It's just a job. . . .

Victim: Oh, she told you? Yeah, I couldn't believe it. . . . I thought I had that job at Wildcraft diner in the bag and then I found out she applied right after me and got it. . . . Well, I'm just feeling really stressed about it. I really need the money. . . . I really hope I can figure something out. It sucks to have to be so stressed about this. . . .

Each of the four perpetrator scripts was matched with a corresponding victim script, as shown above. The actor was instructed to read the perpetrator scripts with a tone that reflected a lack of remorse and to read the victim scripts with a tone that reflected distress.

Participants listened to each script by clicking an audio link on the study web page. They listened to the eight scripts in one of two counterbalanced orders, such that half the participants heard a particular perpetrator script before the corresponding victim script and half the participants heard the victim script before its corresponding perpetrator script. No effects of presentation order were observed in the results.

Target ratings. Participants rated each speaker on a 10-item semantic differential scale. Semantic differential scales contain

a set of highly evaluative trait adjectives, and mean scores reflect a global good–bad evaluative dimension (Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994). Each item on the scale used in this study was anchored by a negative adjective on one end and a positive adjective on the other: *positive–negative*, *destructive–constructive*, *unselfish–selfish*, *hurtful–helpful*, *kind–unkind*, *cold–warm*, *uncaring–caring*, *insensitive–sensitive*, *respectful–disrespectful*, and *unfair–fair*. These items were rated on 7-point Likert scales. Item ratings were highly correlated ($\alpha = .96$) and were averaged to create an evaluative judgment score for each of the eight targets. Evaluative judgment scores ranged from -3 to 3 , with higher numbers representing more positive judgments. The mean evaluative judgment score for perpetrator targets was -1.17 ($SD = 1.19$), whereas for victim targets it was $.57$ ($SD = .87$). Participants also rated their perceived similarity to each target on a scale from -3 (*extremely dissimilar*) to 3 (*extremely similar*).

The Big Five Inventory. Participants' level of agreeableness was assessed using the Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), which contains nine statements designed to measure agreeableness ($\alpha = .80$), rated on a scale from *disagree strongly* (1) to *agree strongly* (5). Sample statements include "Is helpful and unselfish," "Is considerate and kind to almost everyone," "Has a forgiving nature," "Tends to find fault in others" (reverse-scored), and "Starts quarrels with others" (reverse-scored). Agreeableness scores for each participant were computed by averaging ratings from the nine items (after reverse scoring the negative items).

The Circumplex Scale of Interpersonal Values. The CSIV (Locke, 2000) is a 64-item questionnaire designed to tap a person's interpersonal values and goals around the 8 octants of the interpersonal circumplex (8 items per octant). The stem "When I am with other people, it is important to me that . . ." is provided, and participants are asked to rate each item on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). Sample items include, "I feel connected to them" (high communion) and "They keep their distance from me" (low communion). Alphas for octant subscales ranged from $.73$ to $.84$. Octant scores on the CSIV were combined according to Locke's (2006) formula to create a composite measure of strength of communal values and goals.

Results

Agreeableness and target judgments. Because the judgments of targets were collected in a within-participants design, we analyzed the data using a multilevel modeling approach. The data was structured as eight target judgments (Level 1) nested within participants (Level 2). Target judgments were regressed on target type (victim or perpetrator; Level 1 predictor), participant agreeableness (Level 2 predictor), and an Agreeableness \times Target Type interaction term (cross-level interaction). We hypothesized a significant interaction between participant agreeableness and type of target, such that agreeableness would be positively associated with evaluations of victim

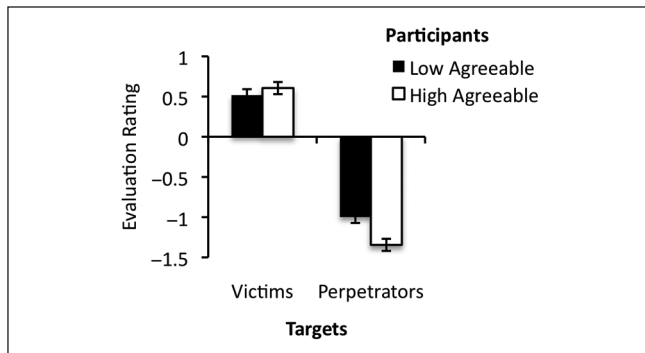


Figure 1. Effect of agreeableness and target type on target evaluation

Bars represent predicted values from a multilevel regression predicting the evaluative judgments of perpetrator and victim targets made by high and low (± 1 SD) agreeable perceivers (Study 1).

targets but negatively associated with evaluations of perpetrator targets.

The results indicated a significant main effect of target type, $F(1, 797.36) = 683.01, p < .001$, such that judgments were more negative for perpetrator than for victim targets.¹ There was no main effect of participant agreeableness on target judgments, $F(1, 116.15) = 2.50, ns$; instead, as hypothesized, the effect of agreeableness was moderated by target type, as indicated by a significant Agreeableness \times Target Type interaction, $F(1, 797.49) = 10.88, p = .001$. This interaction is depicted in Figure 1. Further analysis revealed that the simple slope for agreeableness was significantly negative when the targets were perpetrators, $\beta = -.13, t(296.33) = -3.31, p = .001$, but not when the targets were victims, $\beta = .03, t(297.03) = .84, ns$.

We also examined participants' judgments as a function of the other four Big Five personality dimensions. No effects of other personality predictors were significant, $F_s < 2.5, ps > .10$.²

Similarity. To rule out the possibility that agreeableness was associated with extremity effects simply because highly agreeable participants saw themselves as more dissimilar from the perpetrators than did less agreeable participants, we ran a model that included perceived similarity to the target as an additional Level 1 predictor. Although perceived similarity was indeed a predictor of target judgments, $\beta = .48, t(897.93) = 18.46, p < .001$, the interaction effect for agreeableness remained significant when perceived similarity was included in the model, $F(1, 789.87) = 8.10, p = .005$.

Communal goals and values. We hypothesized that agreeable people judge antisocial actions harshly specifically because these actions are discordant with their communal goals and values. That is, we expected communal goals and values to mediate the extremity effects of agreeableness. We measured communal goals and values with the CSIV, and as expected, CSIV communion was significantly correlated with agreeableness ($r = .56, p < .001$). We tested our mediation hypothesis by running a model that included both CSIV communion and agreeableness as Level 2 predictors. This analysis revealed a significant Communion \times Target Type interaction, F

(1, 795.83) = 21.59, $p < .001$, such that communal goals and values predicted harsher judgments of perpetrators, $\beta = -.23, t(301.29) = -5.02, p < .001$, but not of victims, $\beta = .04, t(302.69) = .87, ns$. When CSIV communion was included in the model, the original Agreeableness \times Target Type interaction became nonsignificant, $F(1, 795.72) = .01, ns$.

Gender effects. Female participants ($M = 3.20$) were significantly more agreeable than male participants ($M = 2.75$), $t(117) = 2.47, p = .02$. The two-way interaction between target condition and participant gender was not significant, $F(1, 780.98) = .27, ns$, which indicates that, on average, women and men did not differ from each other in how they viewed the perpetrator and victim targets. There was, however, a significant three-way interaction between agreeableness, target condition, and gender, such that the extremity effects of agreeableness were stronger for men than for women, $F(1, 781.04) = 9.36, p < .01$. This heightened agreeableness extremity effect for men was unexpected and did not replicate in subsequent studies.

Discussion

In this study, perpetrators of communal transgressions (but not victims of these acts) were judged more negatively by agreeable than by disagreeable participants. This study thus provides preliminary evidence that when highly agreeable perceivers observe another person's antisocial actions, they judge more harshly, not more generously, than those low in agreeableness. We hypothesized that these effects would be driven by the communal goals and values component of agreeableness. Consistent with this prediction, we found that these effects did not depend on perceptions of similarity but were mediated by the level of communal goals and values held by participants. This analysis provides preliminary support for our prediction but is limited by the current methodology. As both agreeableness and communal goals were measured with self-report scales at the same time point, we cannot draw strong causal conclusions. Thus, Study 2 was designed to more rigorously address the issue of whether extremity effects in agreeableness are limited to targets who directly facilitate or impede the communal goals and values of agreeable perceivers.

Study 2

In Study 1, participants were asked to make global good-bad judgments about fictional university students on the basis of the students' behavior toward other students. These types of scenarios are typically employed in studies of moral and evaluative judgments (Miller & Bersoff, 1992) but do not capture a first-person, relational perspective. In Study 2, participants were asked to imagine themselves in a dyadic decision-making situation with another student and to report how they would feel toward this partner if he or she behaved in certain ways.

Participants were given two fictional conflict scenarios (one academic, one romantic) and asked to read several options for how the counterparty might behave toward them in each situation. Four types of counterparty conflict behavior were

presented: high and low communion and high and low agency (De Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon, 2000; Rusbult, 1987). In line with a goal-congruity hypothesis, we hypothesized that agreeableness would be associated with stronger evaluative feelings about communal and noncommunal partner behaviors but would not show extremity effects for reactions to behaviors that varied along the agentic dimension.

Method

Participants. Seventy participants (55 female, M age = 18.67) completed the online study and were compensated with either course credit in a distance education psychology course or with cash.

Procedure. Participants logged on to the study website from their personal computers. After giving consent to participate, they completed the survey in two sections. In the conflict rating section, participants read about an academic and a romantic dyadic conflict. The order of conflict situations was counterbalanced across participants. After reading each conflict scenario, participants read four possible conversation openers that the counterparty might say to them in opening a discussion about the situation. Participants were asked to imagine how they would react if someone actually behaved that way in a similar real-life situation. They were also asked how similar this response was to the way they themselves would behave in the situation. In the background questionnaires section, participants were asked to provide demographic information and complete the Big Five Personality Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). Agreeableness scores ($\alpha = .79$) were computed from this measure as in Study 1. After completing the survey, participants submitted their responses and were directed to a debriefing page.

Conflict scenarios. Participants read about two dyadic conflict situations, one in an academic context and one in a romantic context. In the academic conflict situation, participants were asked to imagine that they were working on a paper for a class with an assigned partner and that they and their partner had just swapped drafts of their respective sections of the paper. Upon reviewing the drafts, it became clear that each person had a very different understanding of the assignment and that one or both parties would need to make major revisions to their section of the paper before it could be submitted. In the romantic conflict situation, participants were asked to imagine themselves in a scheduling conflict with their romantic partner. A good friend of the romantic partner was playing an important gig with his or her new band, and the romantic partner wanted the participant to attend the event in support of the friend. On the same night, however, the participant's family was hosting a major family dinner, which the participant was expected to attend with his or her romantic partner so that the family could meet him or her. Pilot testing of these scenarios indicated that undergraduate students perceived them as vivid, believable, and genuinely difficult dyadic dilemmas.

Counterparty behaviors. After reading each scenario, participants were told that they would read four different ways

that the counterparty might open a conversation about the conflict. The four conversation openers for each scenario represented high and low communion and high and low agency, respectively. The four conflict responses for the academic scenario are reprinted below.

High Communion: Hey! I was wondering if you had gotten a chance to take a look at the drafts yet? I went over them this morning and it's looking like we took on two different approaches. At first I thought it might work since both parts sound really good on their own, but now I'm a little worried that it will look unclear once everything is put together. How are you feeling about it? I was thinking we should maybe set up a time this week to go over everything together. What do you think?

Low Communion: Hi. [pause] This kinda sucks. [pause] Looks to me like our points pretty much contradict each other, yeah? [heavy sigh] What a mess. We're f***ed. [pause] Whatever. I guess I'll just start over. What a waste of time.

High Agency: Hi, I finished reading the draft you sent this morning. The two of us took on really different approaches, and it needs to be fixed. Though your creativity adds a nice touch, my section follows the instructions more closely. The project is worth a lot, so we need to make sure we stay within what the professor wants. I'll tell you what you should change in order to match up better with the guidelines.

Low Agency: So . . . [pause] Our approaches seem pretty different . . . no? I don't know. [sigh] I tried to follow the assignment pretty closely. Yours seems ok to me too though . . . [pause] I guess we probably have to change something before we can turn it in. Right? We could change either one, or both. What do you want to do?

The order of the four conflict behaviors within a given scenario was counterbalanced across participants.

Behavior identification and perceived similarity. Participants rated each behavior on four descriptive adjectives using scales from -3 (*extremely disagree*) to 3 (*extremely agree*). The perceived warmth of each behavior was computed by averaging the ratings given to the adjectives *warm* and *cold* (reverse scored), and the perceived assertiveness of each behavior was computed by averaging the ratings given to the adjectives *assertive* and *unassertive* (reverse scored). Participants also rated how similar the behavior was to how they would personally respond in the situation by answering the question, "How likely would you be to say something similar yourself in this situation?" on a scale from -3 (*extremely unlikely*) to 3 (*extremely likely*).

Behavior evaluations. After reading each counterparty response, participants were asked how they would react if someone actually said this response in a real situation. They rated their agreement with six statements describing possible

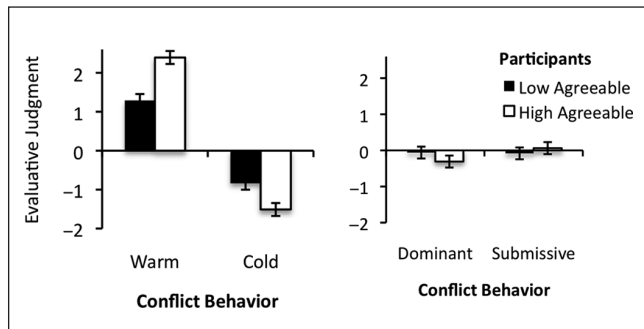


Figure 2. Effect of agreeableness, behavior valence, and behavior domain on global evaluations

Bars represent predicted values from a multilevel regression predicting evaluative judgments of different conflict behaviors made by high and low (+/- 1 SD) agreeable perceivers (Study 2).

reactions to the counterparty: “I would feel positive toward the person,” “I would feel approve of how they are handling the situation,” “I would feel comfortable with this response,” “I would feel negative toward the person,” “I would feel disconnected from the person,” and “I would not like this response.” Response ratings were made on 7-point Likert scales from -3 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). Item ratings were highly correlated ($\alpha = .95$) and were averaged, after reverse scoring the negative items, to form a global evaluation score for each behavior viewed by the participant.

Results

Agreeableness and behavior evaluations. To assess whether evaluations of the different types of conflict behavior were moderated by agreeableness, the data were analyzed using a multilevel modeling approach, with behavior ratings (Level 1) nested within participants (Level 2). Behavior evaluations were predicted using a categorical variable for behavior valence (negative–positive) and for behavior domain (communion–agency), as well as a Valence \times Domain interaction term. To look at the effects of agreeableness, a term for participant agreeableness was included, as well as all the two- and three-way interactions with agreeableness. The results revealed the hypothesized three-way interaction between agreeableness, behavior valence, and behavior domain, $F(1, 483.18) = 27.20, p < .001$. This interaction is depicted in Figure 2. The low communion behavior was evaluated significantly more negatively the higher the participant’s level of agreeableness, $\beta = -.20, t(293.79) = -2.82, p = .005$, whereas the high communion behavior was evaluated significantly more positively, $\beta = .32, t(293.79) = 24.53, p < .005$. Evaluations of the low agency, $\beta = .04, t(293.79) = .60, ns$, and high agency, $\beta = -.07, t(293.79) = -1.04, ns$, behaviors were not significantly associated with participant agreeableness.

Extraversion and behavior evaluations. To demonstrate the discriminant validity of our theory of agreeableness, we also

examined whether extraversion showed a pattern of results similar to agreeableness, that is, whether extraversion was associated with more extreme judgments of the high-and low-agency targets. In short, the answer was no. Extraversion did not interact with any target condition in predicting target judgments, $F_s < 1, p_s > .30$.³ Although a lengthy discussion is not possible here, the absence of extremity effects for extraversion provides additional support for the notion that the effects are not simply driven by perceiver–target similarity or dissimilarity.

Similarity. Perceptions of similarity were positively correlated with target evaluations, $\beta = .54, t(524.83) = 16.90, p < .001$, but all interaction effects with agreeableness remained significant when perceived similarity was statistically controlled.

Behavior identifications. Multilevel models of behavior ratings revealed that participants high in agreeableness perceived the high communion behaviors as more warm ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) and perceived the low communion behaviors ($\beta = -.29, p < .001$) as more cold than did participants low in agreeableness. They also perceived the high agency behaviors as more assertive, $\beta = .18, p = .02$. To control for individual differences in behavior identifications, we analyzed behavior evaluations again, this time using participants’ own continuous ratings of warmth and assertiveness for each behavior rather than using categorical variables for the different behavior conditions. The interaction between participant agreeableness and rated behavior warmth in predicting behavior evaluations remained significant, $F(1, 499.87) = 16.70, p < .001$. There was again no significant interaction between participant agreeableness and rated behavior assertiveness, $F(1, 502.42) = 1.57, ns$.

Gender effects. Female participants ($M = 3.01$) were similarly agreeable to male participants ($M = 2.97$), $t(79) = .90, ns$. There was a significant three-way interaction between target warmth, target dominance, and participant gender, such that female participants showed more extreme judgments for warm and cold targets (but only these targets) as compared to male participants, $F(1, 477.08) = 5.51, p < .05$. The four-way interaction between agreeableness, target warmth, target dominance, and participant gender was not significant, $F(1, 477.11) = .72, ns$, which indicates a similar pattern of agreeableness extremity effects for men and for women.

Discussion

When imagining themselves in an academic or romantic conflict, highly agreeable people indicated they would feel very positively about a partner who showed high communion but very negatively about a partner who showed low communion. Low agreeable participants were less enthusiastic about communal partner behavior but also less disapproving of noncommunal partner behavior. This pattern of extremity effects was not observed for high-and low-agency partner behaviors. Thus, agreeableness extremity effects were limited to the communion domain. Taken together, Studies 1 through 2

provide the first empirical demonstration that highly agreeable perceivers are more evaluative than low agreeable perceivers when it comes to goal-relevant (i.e., communal and noncommunal) target behavior.

Study 3

Research has shown that when presented with a mix of information, all perceivers generally weigh negative behaviors more heavily than positive behaviors (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Our own research has shown that this negative-weighting effect is most pronounced when the negative behaviors are noncommunal acts (Kammrath et al., 2007). In the present research, we hypothesized that this heavy weighting of noncommunal acts will be especially pronounced for perceivers high in agreeableness.

Participants in Study 3 were given a single positive episode of a target's behavior, leading them to form an initial positive impression of the target. The trait domain (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness) of the positive behavior was manipulated across conditions. After rating their first impression of the target, participants read 10 more behavior episodes, 6 of which described additional positive behaviors in the trait domain but 4 of which described negative behaviors in the domain. The question of interest: "How much would impressions worsen after participants viewed the negative information?"

The Big Five trait domains used for the targets in this study can be grouped into two higher order factors (Digman, 1997; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; McCrae & Costa, 1989) that match up with agency (extraversion and openness) and communion (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability). In previous research using the same paradigm (Kammrath et al., 2007), we found that impressions declined more precipitously when the negative behaviors were communal violations (disagreeable, unconscientious, and emotionally unstable behavior) than when they were agentic violations (introverted or closed behavior). We hypothesized that this pattern of differential sensitivity to communal versus agentic behavior violations would be heightened in highly agreeable participants.

Method

Participants. Sixty-one participants (40 female, M age = 21.30) from an introductory psychology course completed the online study and were compensated with course credit.

Procedure. Participants logged on to the study website from their personal computers. After giving consent to participate, they completed the survey in two sections. In the target rating section, participants were asked to read about five fictional targets and to provide ratings of their first and final impressions of the targets. For each target, participants first read 1 positive target behavior, rated the personality of the target, and then read 10 more target behaviors (6 positive, 4 negative)

and rated their final impression of the target. In the background questionnaires section, participants were asked to provide demographic information and complete the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). The order of sections was counterbalanced across participants. After completing the survey, participants submitted their responses and were directed to a debriefing page.

Targets and target ratings. The design of this study closely followed that of Kammrath et al. (2007). Participants read about five targets, one for each of the Big Five trait dimensions. The seven positive and four negative behaviors for each target were identical to those used in previous research (Kammrath et al., 2007). A sample positive item for agreeableness was "Sam drove home for the weekend, missing a party at school, to watch his younger sister perform in a play." A sample negative item read, "When a Freshman in Sam's advanced seminar went out of her way to introduce herself, Sam brushed her off coldly."

Participants first read an initial positive behavior performed by the target. They were then asked to rate the target on the relevant trait dimension. The rating scales were anchored by four adjectives representing the negative pole of the trait dimension and four adjectives representing the positive pole. The agreeableness target, for example, was rated on a scale from -3 (*cold, mean, selfish, unfair*) to 3 (*warm, kind, giving, fair*). Adjective anchors were selected from the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003) and Goldberg's Big Five adjective markers (Goldberg, 1992). After rating their first impression, participants then read the remaining six positive (P) and four negative (N) target behaviors, presented in the following order: PPNPNPNPP. After reading the additional target information, participants rated their final impression of the target. Targets were presented to participants in one of five random orders.

The Ten-Item Personality Inventory. Participants' level of agreeableness was assessed using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory, which contains two items for each Big Five trait dimension, one for the positive and one for the negative pole. Each item presents participants with an adjective pair (e.g., *sympathetic, warm*) and participants are asked to rate on a scale from -3 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) the extent to which they see themselves as possessing the traits described by the adjectives. Agreeableness scores for each participant were computed by averaging ratings from the two agreeableness items (after reverse scoring the negative item).

Results

Trait domain and negativity vigilance. Replicating the results of Kammrath et al. (2007), impressions declined more precipitously for judgments of communal targets (agreeable target $D = -1.64$, conscientious target $D = -1.63$, emotionally stable target $D = -2.21$) than for judgments of agentic targets (extraverted target $D = -1.36$, open target $D = -.43$). To test the significance of this target effect, we analyzed the data using a multilevel modeling approach. Target trait ratings (Level 1)

Table 1. Effects of Different Types of Behavior Violations on Impressions (Study 3)

Trait dimension	Initial impression	Final impression
Extraversion	.06	-.11
Agreeableness	.23†	-.23†
Conscientiousness	.24†	-.31*
Emotional stability	.26*	.05
Openness	.22†	.22†

Values represent Pearson correlations between trait ratings of the target and perceiver agreeableness.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

were nested within participants (Level 2). We predicted trait ratings using target type (agentic–communal), time (initial–final impression), and a Target Type × Time interaction. As found in Kammrath et al., there was a significant a main effect of time, $F(1, 515.97) = 30.61, p < .001$, such that initial impressions were more positive than final impressions, and there was a significant Time × Target interaction, $F(1, 515.93) = 21.71, p < .001$, such that impressions of communal targets declined more precipitously after the introduction of behavior violations than did impressions of agentic targets.

Agreeableness and negativity vigilance. As shown in Table 1, perceiver agreeableness was positively correlated with initial impressions of four of the five targets, with the exception of the extraverted target. After viewing a mix of positive and negative behaviors, however, agreeable perceivers no longer demonstrated positivity effects in their final impressions of the agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable targets; on the contrary, agreeableness was associated with negativity effects for the agreeable and conscientious targets. This finding suggests that highly agreeable perceivers may be especially vigilant for instances of noncommunal (e.g., disagreeable, unconscientious) behavior.

To test the hypothesis that the disposition of the perceiver moderated the size of the Time × Target Type effect, terms for participant agreeableness and the two- and three-way interactions with agreeableness were included in the model. As hypothesized, the three-way interaction between agreeableness, time, and target type was significant, $F(1, 4512.72) = 3.79, p = .05$, and is depicted in Figure 3. When highly agreeable perceivers were judging communal targets, their initial impressions tended to be significantly more positive, $\beta = .15, t(262.77) = 2.32, p = .02$, than those of low agreeableness perceivers, but their final impressions tended to be significantly more negative, $\beta = -.12, t(262.73) = -1.94, p = .05$. There was no significant effect of perceiver agreeableness on initial impressions or final impressions of agentic targets.

Weighting effects versus encoding effects. In Study 3, we aimed to investigate the effects of agreeableness on the relative weight accorded to negative behaviors within a set of multiple observations. From Studies 1 and 2, we know that highly agreeable perceivers are likely to see each individual communal behavior as more positive, and each non-communal behavior as more negative, than are low

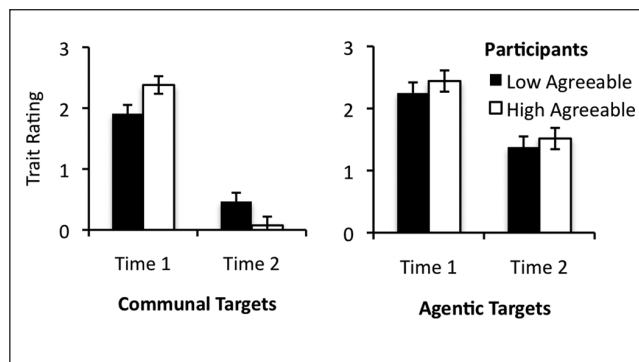


Figure 3. Differential sensitivity to communal versus agentic violations for high and low agreeable perceivers

Bars represent predicted values from a multilevel regression predicting the trait ratings of targets at Time 1 and Time 2 for high and low (+/- 1 SD) agreeable perceivers (Study 3).

agreeableness perceivers. Thus, it was important to establish that the pattern of results obtained in Study 3 could not be explained solely by such effects.

We asked a new sample of 46 participants to rate individually the 11 behaviors that comprised each target (thus, participants rated 55 behaviors in total). We used these data to predict the expected target judgments if perceivers were simply averaging across the individual behavior observations (i.e., equal weighting of all 11 behaviors). For each participant in the new sample, five “aggregate impressions” were created by averaging the ratings of the 11 behavior items that comprised each target. The results revealed that participant agreeableness was positively correlated with all five impression aggregates, with the *highest* correlations for the agreeable and conscientious aggregates ($r_s > .30, p_s < .05$). Thus, had perceivers weighted all 11 behaviors equally, agreeableness would have been positively associated with final impressions of all targets, especially the communal targets. In Study 3, however, perceiver agreeableness showed null or negative correlations with the final impressions of the communal targets, which supports the hypothesis that highly agreeable perceivers accord special weight to observations of noncommunal behavior.

Gender effects. Female participants ($M = 3.09$) were similarly agreeable to male participants ($M = 2.80$), $t(56) = 1.00, ns$. There was a significant three-way interaction between target domain, time, and participant gender, such that female participants showed more extreme judgments at Times 1 and 2 for targets in the communal domain (but only in this domain) as compared to male participants, $F(1, 507.40) = 6.26, p = .01$. The four-way interaction between agreeableness, target domain, time, and participant gender was not significant, $F(1, 507.08) = .59, ns$, which indicates a similar pattern of agreeableness extremity effects for men and for women.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 suggest that not only do agreeable perceivers judge noncommunal behaviors more harshly, but they also weight them more heavily when integrating information

from multiple observations. Agreeable perceivers thus appear to have a special vigilance for noncommunal behavior, even when it is encountered in a stream of generally positive acts. For a generally agreeable perceiver, an initial positive interaction can lead to very positive first impressions, but this impression may take a rapid downturn if subsequent communal violations occur. Disagreeable perceivers, although not as impressed by communal behavior at the outset, also seem to be less judgmental of subsequent communal violations.

Study 4

Studies 1-3 examined the effects of perceiver agreeableness on judgments of fictional targets. In Study 4, we investigated the effect of agreeableness on judgments in a real-life social domain: impressions of a college roommate. On the 2nd day of orientation week, less than 48 hr after meeting their roommates for the first time, we asked a sample of 1st-year university students to provide their impressions of their roommates, as well as ratings of their own personality traits. We hypothesized that, similar to the results of Study 3, perceiver agreeableness would be positively correlated with first impressions of one's roommate. We invited participants back to the lab 2 weeks before the end of the spring semester (after 9 months of acquaintance with their roommate) and asked them to provide their current impressions of their roommate. Over the course of a year, roommates are inevitably exposed to a broader range of behaviors, including negative behaviors not likely exhibited in the first hours of meeting. We hypothesized that perceiver agreeableness would no longer be positively correlated with judgments of the roommates' communal traits and might even be negatively correlated.

Method

Participants. Participants in this study were 152 first-year university undergraduates (81 female, M age = 18.03). Participants were recruited by research assistants who set up a booth outside the freshman dining hall on the 2nd day of orientation week. Two weeks before the end of the spring semester, participants were contacted via e-mail and invited to the lab to complete a second set of questionnaires. Of the initial students who participated during orientation week, 105 completed the follow-up at year-end. Participants were reimbursed with cash after each phase of data collection.

Procedure. During the orientation-week recruitment, participants who volunteered to participate in the study were given a three-page questionnaire to complete on the spot about their perceptions of themselves and of their roommates. Among the questions in the survey, participants rated both themselves and their roommate on the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003). This yielded a measure of participants' own personality traits (and provided our measure of participant agreeableness) and a measure of their impressions of their roommate. They also indicated their willingness to

Table 2. Agreeableness and Impressions of a College Roommate Over Time (Study 4)

Trait dimension	Roommate impression	
	Year start	Year end
Extraversion	.23*	.07
Agreeableness	.19*	-.04
Conscientiousness	.17†	-.36*
Emotional stability	.15	-.07
Openness	.19*	.15

Values represent standardized beta coefficients obtained by regressing trait ratings of a roommate on the rater's agreeableness.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

participate in a follow-up study by providing an e-mail address. During the second phase of data collection, participants again provided their impressions of their roommate using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory, along with other information about their experiences with their roommate and with the university.

Results

Trait domain and impression change. Over the course of 9 months, students' impressions of their roommates declined, on average, and in predictable ways. Impressions notably declined for judgments of communal traits (agreeableness $D = -.83$, conscientiousness $D = -.75$, emotional stability $D = -.85$), whereas declines were small to none for judgments of agentic traits (extraversion $D = .21$, openness $D = -.22$). To test the significance of this trait domain effect, we analyzed the data using a multilevel modeling approach. Trait ratings of the roommate (Level 1) were nested within participants (Level 2). We predicted these ratings using trait domain (agentic-communal), time (year start-year end), and a Time \times Trait Domain interaction. The results confirmed a significant interaction, $F(1, 1108.50) = 31.79, p < .001$, such that impressions of the roommate's communal traits declined more over time than impressions of the roommate's agentic traits.

Agreeableness and impression change. As shown in Table 2, highly agreeable perceivers had more positive first impressions of their roommates. After 9 months of close acquaintance, however, perceiver agreeableness was no longer associated with positivity effects when participants were rating their roommates on communal trait dimensions.

To test the hypothesis that the disposition of the perceiver moderated the size of the Time \times Trait Domain effect, we included participant agreeableness and the two- and three-way interactions with agreeableness in the model. As hypothesized, the three-way interaction between agreeableness, time, and trait domain was significant, $F(1, 1104.92) = 6.08, p = .01$, and is depicted in Figure 4. When highly agreeable perceivers were judging their roommates' communal qualities, their initial

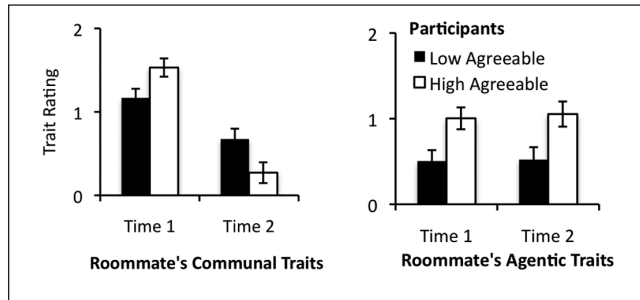


Figure 4. Effect of agreeableness and trait domain on impressions of a college roommate over time

Bars represent predicted values from a multilevel regression predicting the trait ratings of the roommate at Time 1 and Time 2 for high and low (± 1 SD) agreeable perceivers (Study 4).

impressions tended to be significantly more positive, $\beta = .12$, $t(445.46) = 2.35$, $p < .05$, than those of low agreeable perceivers, but their final impressions tended to be significantly more negative, $\beta = -.13$, $t(560.88) = -2.25$, $p = .03$. For judgments of the roommates' agentic traits, there was a positive effect of perceiver agreeableness on both initial, $\beta = .17$, $t(688.36) = 2.78$, $p = .006$, and final, $\beta = .18$, $t(811.69) = 2.62$, $p = .009$, impressions.

Gender effects. Female participants ($M = 3.15$) were significantly more agreeable than male participants ($M = 2.83$), $t(143) = 1.94$, $p = .05$. There were, however, no significant effects of gender on judgments of roommates, $F_s < 1$, $p_s > .30$.

Discussion

As hypothesized, highly agreeable Study 4 participants were likely to have more positive first impressions of their college roommates. We anticipated, however, that over 9 months, the positivity effect for agreeable perceivers would disappear, or even reverse, for judgments of the roommates' communal qualities. The data supported this hypothesis: at year-end, perceiver agreeableness was still positively associated with judgments of the roommate's agentic traits (extraversion and openness), but showed null or even negative associations with judgments of the roommate's communal traits (agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability). This study builds on the earlier experimental studies to provide support for the idea that agreeableness is not always associated with positivity effects. Although the real-world nature of this study provides a nice complement to the earlier approaches, we also acknowledge that the nature of the design makes it difficult to know for sure all of the factors that are contributing to the obtained effects.

General Discussion

Although all people are generally disapproving of the communal transgressions of others, the results of four studies suggest that highly agreeable individuals are more likely than others to judge such acts negatively. In Studies 1 and 2, perceiver

agreeableness was associated with more positive judgments of communal behaviors but more negative judgments of communal transgressions. In Study 3, agreeable perceivers showed a negative-weighting bias for observations of communal transgressions within a set of observations. In Study 4, agreeable perceivers lost their rose-colored glasses for perceptions of a roommate's communal traits as they got to know the roommate better. In support of a goal-congruence mechanism, Studies 2-4 showed that agreeableness was not, however, associated with negativity effects in a domain unrelated to communal goals and values (agentic transgressions). Moreover, the effect of agreeableness on judgments was mediated by strength of communal goals (Study 1), not similarity to the target (Studies 1-2). These findings suggest a more complex picture of the agreeable perceiver than has been suggested by earlier research. Agreeable individuals are not simply Pollyannas in their perceptions. Rather, they judge more extremely along the goal-relevant communion dimension.

Boundary Conditions for Negativity Effects

We expect there to exist many boundary conditions for the negativity effects associated with dispositional agreeableness, and we outline a few of them here. First, in cases where the target's behavior is neutral or ambiguous, a goal-congruency mechanism would make no predictions for how agreeableness will affect judgments. A goal-congruence account predicts that agreeable perceivers will show negativity effects only when observing behaviors that they clearly and unambiguously identify as communal transgressions. Mild or ambiguous communal transgressions provide opportunities for agreeable perceivers to show biased encoding, due to cognitive projection (Krueger & Clement, 1994), motivated information processing (Kunda, 1990; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007), or the expectancy effects of relational schemas (Baldwin, 1992). Second, for negativity effects to manifest, there must be little opportunity or incentive for the highly agreeable person to regulate away an initially negative evaluation. In our studies, to minimize self-regulation of judgments, we ensured that participants made their judgments privately and were never judging targets who were nearby or with whom they had recently interacted.

A likely reason that negativity effects have not made a strong appearance in the existing agreeableness literature is that few prior studies have met both the above conditions (not having any theoretical reason to do so). It is rare for agreeableness studies to provide perceivers with controlled and unambiguous negative stimuli. For example, strong negative interpersonal behavior is unlikely to occur during in vivo interactions between participants engaged in neutral or cooperative tasks (e.g., Kenny, 1994; Paulhus & Reynolds, 1995). Even in studies that specifically asked participants to engage in a conflictual or competitive interaction (e.g., Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996), it is not certain that unambiguous relational transgressions occurred with high frequency. A further complication in these kinds of studies is

that agreeable people pull for more agreeable behavior from partners (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcolm, 2003). Thus, the likelihood of an agreeable person experiencing a strong, unambiguous relational transgression from a partner in a single laboratory interaction might be quite small.

It is also uncommon for studies of agreeableness to examine private judgments of the other person's behavior; most studies have focused on more downstream outcomes, such as anger, hostility, and aggression. Many studies have shown that the further downstream the dependent variable, the stronger the effect of agreeableness (Friedman, Tucker, & Reise, 1995; Martin et al., 1999). Highly agreeable people can decouple their initial private reaction to negative target behaviors (e.g., blame) from the subsequent chain of psychological reactions (e.g., aggression) (Meier & Robinson, 2004; Meier, Robinson, & Wilkowski, 2006). Negativity effects should thus be less likely to emerge when there is motivation and opportunity for attitude regulation before judgment assessment.

Tensions Within the Agreeable Perceiver

These dynamics of agreeableness suggest a potential cost for agreeable perceivers; the same goals and values that make it more likely that they will be upset by communal transgressions also make it more likely that they will attempt to regulate any negative downstream response. Thus, highly agreeable people may frequently find themselves in a bind, having negative private judgments that they cannot or will not express publicly (or would feel guilt for expressing). Private evaluations matter because they may be a source of significant stress for agreeable individuals. Indeed, there are some indications in the literature that support the idea that highly agreeable individuals must do significant self-regulatory work to inhibit downstream negative reactions. Suls et al. (1998) observed that the higher a participant's level of agreeableness, the more distress he or she experienced in reaction to daily life conflicts. In a similar vein, Robinson et al. (2005) demonstrated that high threat-detection sensitivity was associated with lower levels of subjective well-being in agreeable (but not disagreeable) people. The relation between private judgments and public behavior in agreeable people is an important emerging area of research (e.g., Meier & Robinson, 2004), and we believe the current studies suggest additional directions to be explored.

Conclusion

Agreeable perceivers may often see the best in others and act in ways that draw out the best in others. The current research suggests, however, that agreeable perceivers are also highly sensitive to behaviors and traits in others that could impede their desire for harmonious interpersonal interactions. This sensitivity can sometimes result in relatively harsher judgments of others who engage in communal transgressions. The effects in the current studies were obtained across multiple method-

ologies; however, some limitations should be noted. Studies 1 through 3 used experimentally designed (and thus somewhat artificial) stimuli, whereas Study 4 had a richer design at the expense of some experimental control. Future studies that can increase the realism of the stimuli while maintaining experimental rigor (e.g., confederates who interact in prosocial or antisocial ways with participants) will be an important extension of the current work. Indeed, we believe that continuing to explore this complexity in judgment biases will complement and enrich both existing accounts of dispositional agreeableness and research on the effects of goals and values on social judgment standards.

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Notes

1. Degrees of freedom for the multilevel models presented in this article were estimated using the Satterthwaite approximation method, which yields noninteger values.
2. In this study, and all subsequent studies, agreeableness was the only Big Five personality trait that was associated with extremity effects in judgments of prosocial and antisocial targets.
3. In subsequent studies, extraversion was also not associated with extremity effects for judgments of high and low agency targets.

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