

Getting to know you: Values, traits, and an acquaintanceship process in a longitudinal study of dormitory roommates

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Introduction

In recent years there is growing interest with the factors that affect interpersonal acquaintanceship. For the most part, however, acquaintanceship has been studied from the perspective of personality traits. Much less attention has been given to personal values, another important aspect of individual differences.

Values represent desirable goals that serve as guiding principles in one's life (Schwartz, 1994). Unlike traits, which represent consistent patterns of conduct, values are representations of one's preferences. As such, values are as important in affecting behavior, but are less visible than traits. Therefore, acquaintanceship with one's values should reflect deeper interpersonal connection.

The present study is the first to explore acquaintanceship in terms of personality traits *and* personal values. Its primary goal is to study the similarities and differences in acquaintanceship with these two aspects of individual differences. Another goal of the present study is to identify the characteristics of the "good judge" and the "good target" (Funder, 1995). At present, not much is known about these important social qualities. This research is also among the first to study acquaintanceship longitudinally. It will be accomplished by studying naturally evolving relations between dormitory roommates.

Method

Participants

Eighty-five roommate dyads (170 students), which were living in the Hebrew University dormitories (mean age = 24, 65% females, 60% first-year students).

Materials

Big-5 traits. Saucier's (1994) Mini-Markers, adapted for self and other report. Reliabilities exceeded .70.

Personal values. A short (46 items) version of the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992) adapted for self and other report. Reliabilities exceeded .63.

Relationship quality. Relationship Depth scale of the Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991). Reliabilities = .89 (T1), .90 (T2).

Liking of roommate. Adapted from Stafford and Canary (1991). Reliabilities = .84 (T1), .89 (T2).

Procedure

Roommate dyads were recruited for the study during the first days of a new academic year. They were approached in their dormitories and were offered to volunteer for the study in return for personal monetary compensation. In the first wave of data collection (T1) each roommate filled out self-report (personality traits, personal values, relationship quality, liking of roommate, demographic info) and other-report (personality traits, personal values) questionnaires. Three months later (T2) the dyads were approached again for the second wave of the study, which included filling out the same packet of questionnaires.

ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study explored acquaintanceship between dormitory roommates, focusing on personal values and personality traits. In two waves (three months apart) 170 participants completed personality and values questionnaires describing themselves and their roommates, and rated the quality of their dyadic relationships. The results showed that self-other agreement was, on average, stronger for traits than for values. In both waves, self-other agreement was strongest for the trait Extraversion and for the value Tradition. Relationship quality moderated agreement on traits and values, such that agreement was stronger as relationship improved. Profile-based analyses were used to explore the contribution of specific traits and values as moderators of agreement. The analyses showed that the trait Neuroticism and the value Power were associated with reduced agreement and that the trait Agreeableness and the value Benevolence were associated with increased agreement. Taken together, the results reveal the similarities and differences in acquaintanceship with someone else's traits and values, and the important role of personal characteristics in moderating these processes.

Relationship Quality as a Moderator of Agreement

- Quality of relationship moderated agreement on both values and traits: Better relationship was associated with higher agreement in T2 on most values and on most traits (Figures 3 & 4).

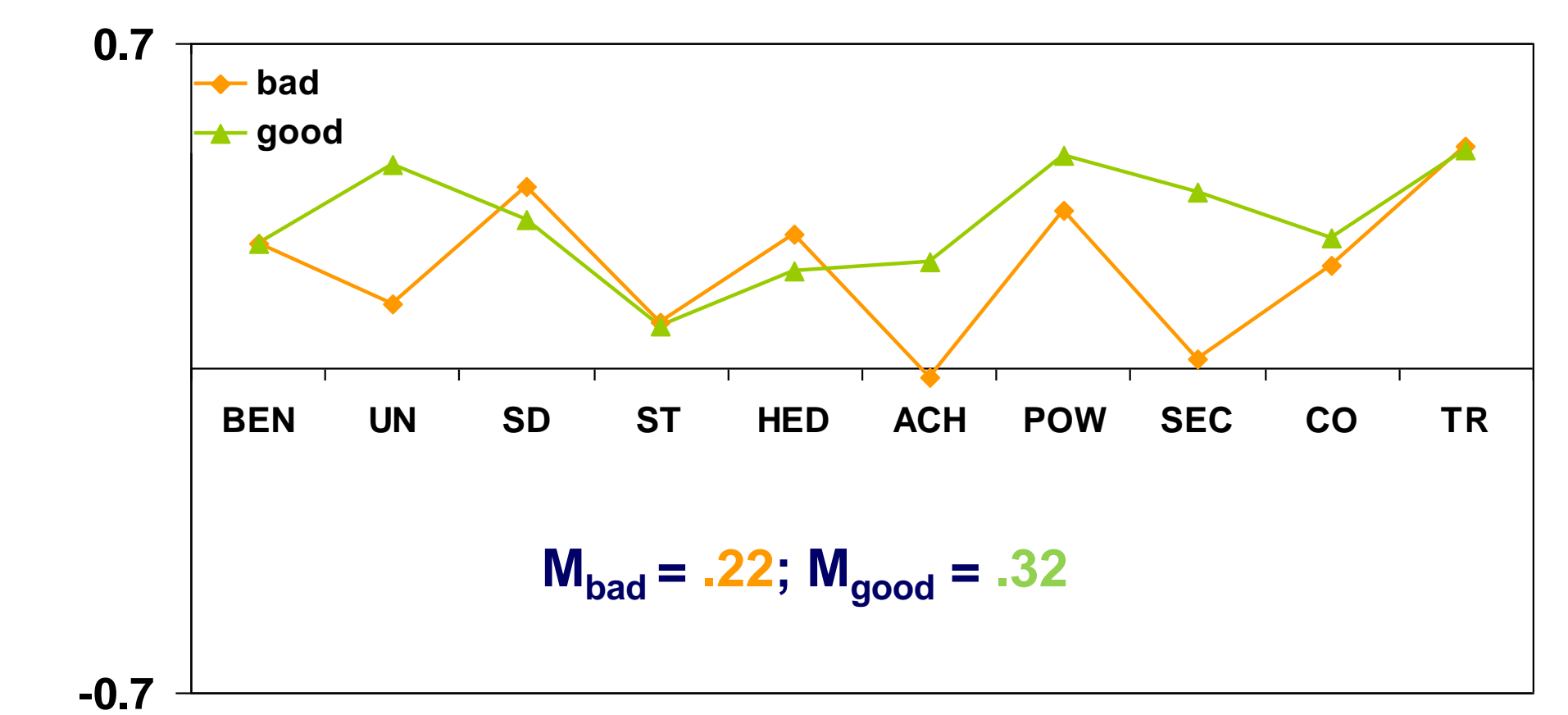


Figure 3: Self-other agreement on values in T2 for roommates with good vs. bad relationship

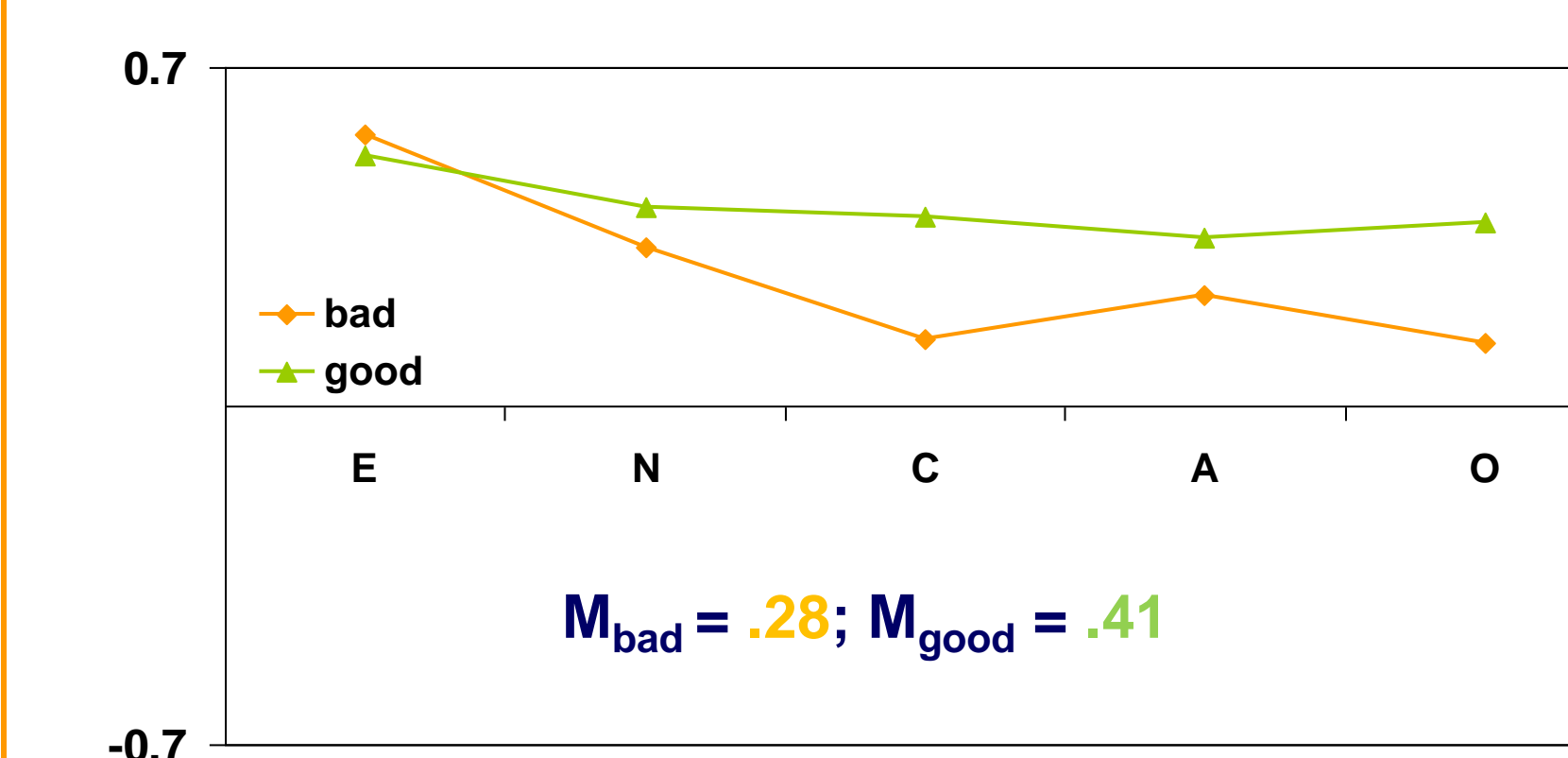


Figure 4: Self-other agreement on traits in T2 for roommates with good vs. bad relationship

- Notwithstanding, analyses of profile-based agreement revealed that *changes* in relationship quality from T1 to T2 had a stronger effect on agreement about values ($\beta = .28, p < .01$) than about traits ($\beta = .16, ns$).

Results

Self-Other Agreement

- For values (Fig. 1), agreement was highest on Tradition, and lowest on Achievement.
- Acquaintanceship length had no significant effect on agreement.

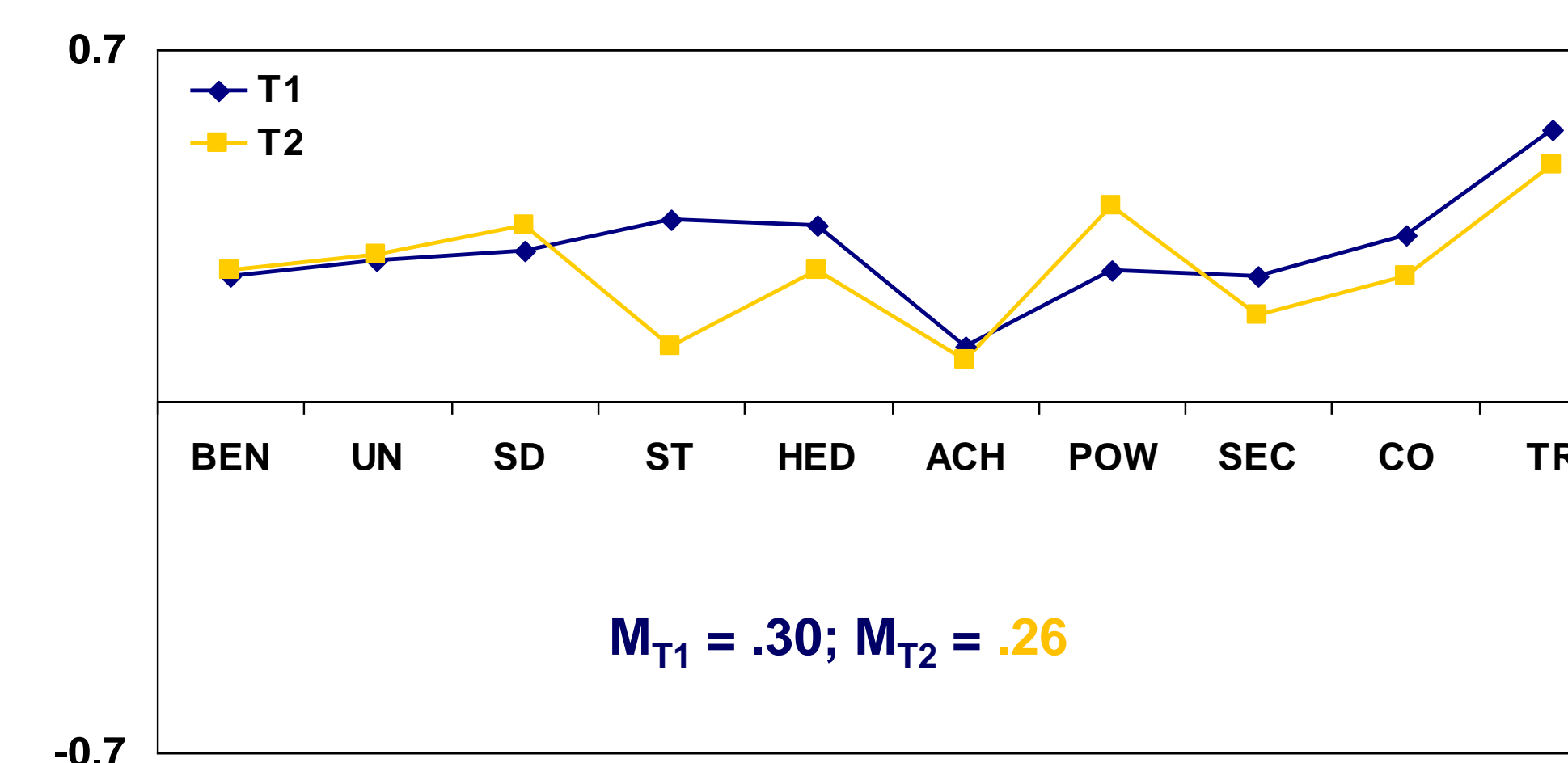


Figure 1: Self-other agreement on values in T1 and T2

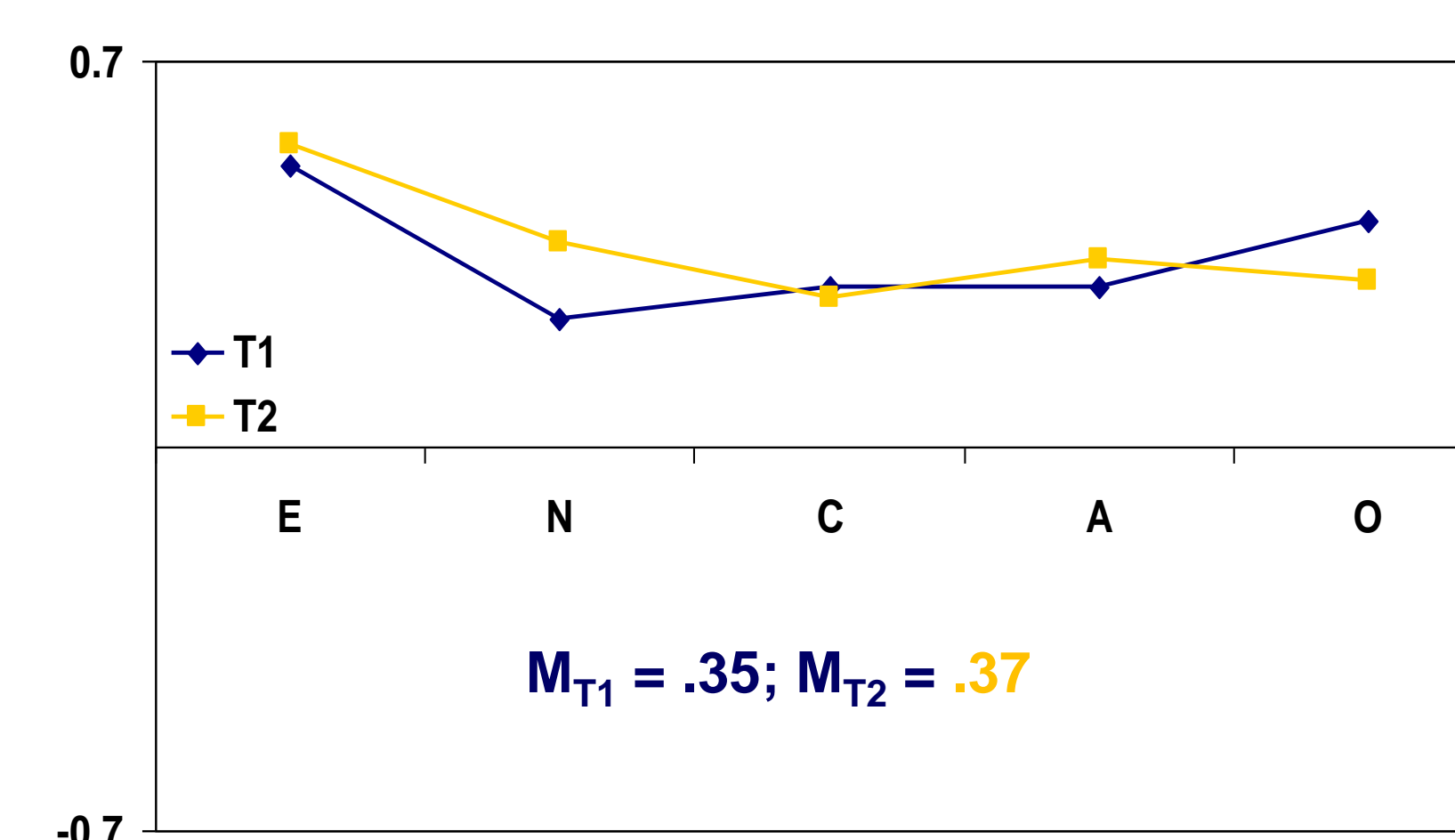


Figure 2: Self-other agreement on traits in T1 and T2

- Agreement on traits (Fig. 2) was higher than on values in T1 and, more so, in T2.
- For traits, agreement was highest on Extraversion, and lowest on Neuroticism (T1) and Conscientiousness (T2).
- Acquaintanceship length had no significant effect on agreement.

Good Judge and Good Target

What were the characteristics of individuals who accurately perceived their roommates' traits and values? They were high on *Agreeableness* and low on *Neuroticism*, and they valued *Benevolence* and devalued *Hedonism* and *Power* (Table 1). The same traits and values characterized good targets (i.e., individuals whose characteristics were relatively accurately perceived; Table 2).

Table 1: Correlations of judge's values/traits with self-other agreement (T2)

Trait/Value	Agreement on Values	Agreement on Traits
Neuroticism	-.24**	-.29**
Agreeableness	.23**	.19*
Benevolence	.19*	.14
Hedonism	-.07	-.17*
Power	-.16*	-.21**

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 2: Correlations of target's values/traits with self-other agreement (T2)

Trait/Value	Agreement on Values	Agreement on Traits
Neuroticism	-.20**	-.47**
Agreeableness	.17*	.34**
Benevolence	.27**	.22**
Universalism	.00	.15*
Hedonism	-.07	-.17*
Power	-.14	-.23**

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Conclusions

- As predicted, it is simpler to accurately perceive someone else's traits than values.
- Self-other agreement on values, more than on traits, depend on relationship quality.
- Another factor that affects agreement is visibility. In contrast, mere length of acquaintanceship has no effect on agreement.
- High Agreeableness and Benevolence, and Low Neuroticism, Hedonism and Power, are the characteristics of the good judge and of the good target.