



## A comparison of self-other agreement in personal values versus the Big Five personality traits



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### ABSTRACT

Can we judge other people's values accurately, or are values too subjective to assess? We compared self-other agreement in personal values with agreement in the Big Five personality traits. Self-other agreement in four higher-order values (median  $r = .47$ ) and in six culture-specific value factors (median  $r = .50$ ) was substantial and similar to that for the Big Five personality traits (median  $r = .51$ ). When corrected for attenuation due to measurement error self-other agreement was high for all three scales (median  $r_s > .65$ ). The results suggest that people can assess values of others whom they know well with remarkable accuracy. Therefore, other-ratings of personal values can be used to validate and complement self-report value measures.

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### 1. Introduction

The limits of self-report methodology confront researchers in many areas of psychological science. People's reports of their behaviour, attitudes, and personality may be affected by various response biases such as socially desirable, neutral, or extreme responding, and acquiescence (e.g., Möttus et al., 2012; Paulhus, 1991; Schwartz, Verkasalo, Antonovsky, & Sagiv, 1997). Based only on people's potentially biased self-reports, we cannot be certain whether a person truly endorses benevolence values highly or rejects power values, nor can we be sure a person is actually extraverted or agreeable. To get around self-report biases, it is necessary to collect data with an independent method of measurement. Judgments of other people (e.g., peers, spouses, siblings, parents, etc.) who know the person well can serve this purpose. The degree of agreement between self- and other-ratings—also called convergent validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959) or consensual validity (McCrae, 1982; McCrae et al., 2004)—can clarify the accuracy of self-reports.

Self-other agreement, typically operationalized as a correlation between the two ratings, refers to the extent to which two perceivers (an informant and a target in our case) view the target in the same way (Kenny & West, 2010). Several studies have shown relatively strong self-other agreement in all the Big Five personality

traits (e.g., Allik, Realo, Möttus, Esko, et al., 2010; Connolly, Kavanagh, & Viswesvaran, 2007; Hall, Andrzejewski, Murphy, Schmid Mast, & Feinstein, 2008), in affective traits (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), and in subjective well-being (Dobewall, Realo, Allik, Esko, & Metspalu, 2013; Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). Surprisingly few studies, however, have investigated self-other agreement in personal values.

How can we explain the relative lack of interest in self-other agreement by value researchers? One reason might be that personal values are considered “too individually subjective” (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004, p. 359) to be judged by others. McAdams (1995), for instance, distinguished between individual differences in *traits*, which he described as so easily observable that even a stranger could judge them with some accuracy, and more privately held *personal concerns* like values, which are less accessible. This view is at odds with the Five Factor Theory (FFT) of personality, according to which, values, are so-called characteristic adaptations which are formed through the interaction of personality traits with the environment (McCrae & Costa, 1999, 2008). As such, values can be assessed better by direct observation than Big Five personality trait domains can (Allik & McCrae, 2002). Resolving these contradictory views requires an empirical assessment of whether self-other agreement is greater in personal values or in personality traits.

The current study examines self-other agreement in personal values, both in four higher-order values and in six culture-specific value factors. In order to assess whether values show greater or

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lesser levels of self-other agreement than personality traits, we compared self- and other-ratings of values and of personality domains in the same sample. If the level of self-other agreement in values is comparable to the level in personality traits, it would suggest that other-ratings can also be used successfully in value research.

Another way to think about self-other agreement refers to agreement about a person's profile of values or traits. Does one person accurately perceive another's hierarchy of values—the relative importance of different values to the other person? How accurate is an observer's perception of the relative degree to which different traits characterize a person? With this aim in mind, we also assessed self-other agreement regarding individual's profile of values and traits by computing—raw and distinctive—profile correlations (Furr, 2008). This approach can reveal how well an informant knows, for example, whether a target values self-transcendence highly, openness to change moderately but more than self-enhancement, and does not care at all about conservation.

### 1.1. Self-other agreement in values and other related constructs

As noted above, considerable research has examined self-other agreement in such personality constructs as traits, emotional experience, and subjective well-being. For instance, across 36 studies of the Big Five personality traits, the average correlation between self- and other-ratings was  $r = .36$  (Connolly et al., 2007). In other studies, self-other agreement in personality traits has ranged from  $r = .40$  to  $.70$  (Konstabel, Lönnqvist, Walkowitz, Konstabel, & Verkasalo, 2012; McCrae et al., 2004). Agreement correlations for affective traits are only slightly lower than for the personality domains (Watson et al., 2000). For subjective well-being, a recent meta-analysis of 44 studies yielded an average self-other agreement correlation of  $r = .42$  (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). Substantial cross-observer agreement has also been observed in such constructs as moral character (Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2013), sociopolitical (Beer & Watson, 2008) and ideological attitudes and prejudice (Cohrs, Kämpfe-Hargrave, & Riemann, 2012).

As noted, the use of other-ratings in value research is relatively scarce. Rentfrow and Gosling (2006), for example, asked informants who knew only about their target's top-ten music preferences to describe their values on an abbreviated version of the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973) and their personality traits on a 44-item Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). In this zero-acquaintanceship study, the average agreement correlation across the specific value items was  $r = .15$ . Paryente and Orr (2010) reported agreement correlations between children's perceptions of their parents' values and their mother's and father's self-reports for tradition ( $r = .41/.39$ , respectively) and self-enhancement values ( $r = .56/.52$ ). Another study of a small student sample, yielded self-peer agreement correlations ranging from  $r = .33$  (conservation) to  $r = .54$  (self-transcendence), using 28 value items of the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Bernard, Gebauer, & Maio, 2006; Schwartz, 1992). Murray and colleagues (2002) asked dating and married couples to describe their own and their partners' traits, feelings, and values, using a list of 18 values adapted from the Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) and Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach (1989) value measures. The similarity (i.e., the intraclass correlation<sup>1</sup>) between men's and women's value profiles was  $.26$  for those who were dating and  $.29$  for married couples (Murray et al., 2002).

The strongest evidence for self-other agreement in personal values comes from a study by Lee and colleagues (2009). They examined both actual and assumed similarity of values using the full SVS. They reported self-other agreement correlations for the two major value dimensions of openness to change versus conservation ( $r = .42$ ) and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement ( $r = .52$ ). They also reported self-other agreement for the ten broad values, with correlations ranging from  $r = .18$  for achievement to  $r = .49$  for power. However, none of the above-mentioned studies took the examination of self-other agreement in personal values as their focus.

### 1.2. Comparing values and traits

Should we expect different levels of self-other agreement in values as compared to personality traits? If so, why? In order to answer these questions, we must first examine how values and personality traits relate conceptually. Therefore, in the next sections we discuss the similarities and differences between these two constructs.

#### 1.2.1. Conceptual similarities and differences between traits and values

Values. Schwartz's (1992) theory of basic human values defines values as desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. Schwartz (2005a) summarized the features that are common to all values as follows: "(a) Values are beliefs. But they are beliefs tied inextricably to emotion, not objective, cold ideas. (b) Values are a motivational construct. They refer to the desirable goals people strive to attain. (c) Values transcend specific actions and situations. They are abstract goals. The abstract nature of values distinguishes them from concepts like norms and attitudes, which usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations. (d) Values guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. That is, values serve as standards or criteria. (e) Values are ordered by importance relative to one another. People's values form an ordered system of value priorities that characterize them as individuals. This hierarchical feature of values also distinguishes them from norms and attitudes" (Chapter 1, Introduction). Values also differ from motives and needs, because "values are inherently desirable and must be represented cognitively in ways that enable people to communicate about them" (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002, p. 789). Recent research (Bilsky & Schwartz, 2008), however, suggests that different indicators of the same motive construct are correlated, independent of the assessment method (i.e., implicit versus explicit).

Schwartz (1992) specified ten broad values according to the type of goal or motivational concern that they express: He grounded the ten values in one or more of three universal requirements of human existence: (1) needs of individuals as biological organisms, (2) requisites of coordinated social interaction between individuals, and (3) survival and welfare needs of groups. These motivationally distinct value orientations have been recognized and discriminated by people in over 82 countries studied thus far (Schwartz, 2012). They form a quasi-circumplex structure, presented in Fig. 1, organized by the conflict (the more distant) and congruence (the closer) among the values (cf. Schwartz, 2005a).

Personality traits. According to the FFT (McCrae & Costa, 1999, 2008), individual psychological differences can be divided into basic tendencies and characteristic adaptations. Personality traits are basic tendencies that "refer to more basic, abstract ways of living that are part of the human nature, and thus found in all cultures and at all times" (McCrae, 2010, p. 58). More specifically, personality traits are enduring tendencies to behave, think, and feel in consistent ways (McCrae & Costa, 1999, 2008).

Cross-observer agreement is often taken as a major indication that personality traits are real, objective psychological attributes

<sup>1</sup> Pairwise intraclass correlations provide an estimate of similarity that captures whether judges agree on their absolute ratings of their specific values; as opposed to relative similarity of values tapped by Pearson correlations.

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