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Brief report: Value priorities of early adolescents



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ABSTRACT

Although adolescence is considered to be the formative period of values, relatively few studies have addressed values held by adolescents. The present short-term longitudinal study explores value priorities of early adolescents from two social groups (among ethnic Estonians and Russian-speaking minority) in terms of the 10 value types defined by Schwartz, and the question whether values change during one year. 575 early adolescents filled out a 21-item version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire. Adolescents' value priorities differed from the pan-cultural value hierarchy of adults (Bardi, Lee, Hoffmann-Towfigh, & Soutar, 2009) by attributing more importance to hedonism and stimulation, and less importance to benevolence and conformity. Although Russian-speaking students rated Self-Enhancement and Openness to Change more highly than Estonians, the value hierarchy of adolescents from two social groups was rather similar. Boys considered Self-Enhancement more important than girls. More value change was observable in Russian-speaking students, and boys.

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Adolescence is a period of intensive identity development (Erikson, 1968; Meeus, 1996), when teens selectively internalize a personal value system through exploring values provided by parents, peers and society. According to Schwartz's value theory (1992), there are ten motivationally distinct value types that are ordered along two dimensions: Openness to Change (stimulation, self-direction, and hedonism) vs. Conservation (tradition and security) and Self-Enhancement (achievement, power, and hedonism) vs. Self-Transcendence (universalism and benevolence). Although people and groups differ in how important each value type is for them, the structure as well as the hierarchical order of the importance of the ten value types has found to be universal (Bardi, Lee, Hoffmann-Towfigh, & Soutar, 2009; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Benevolence, self-direction and universalism have been found to be the most important ones across cultures, followed by security, conformity, and achievement (6th), hedonism (7th), stimulation (8th), tradition, and power (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001, p. 275). As to the children and adolescents, their value structure and the hierarchy of values might differ from those of adults, and be less stable (Bubeck & Bilsky, 2004; Hofmann-Towfigh, 2007; Pohjanheimo, as cited in Verkasalo, Lönnqvist, Lipsanen, & Helkama, 2009).

The present short-term longitudinal study explores similarities and differences in the value priorities of early adolescents from the two main social groups in Estonia (ethnic Estonians and Russian-speaking minority), and of boys and girls. Despite of some similarities (an increase in the importance of individualistic values), significant differences have been pointed out in ethnic Estonians' and Russian Estonians' value priorities and parental values (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 1997; Tulviste, Konstabel, & Tulviste, 2014; Tulviste, Mizera, & De Geer, 2012; Vihalemm & Kalmus, 2008). According to Tulviste et al. (2014), ethnic Estonians place more importance on values related to Self-Transcendence (i.e., benevolence, and universalism), and less on

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Self-Enhancement (i.e., achievement, and power) and Conservation (i.e., tradition and conformity) than Russian-speaking minority. The biggest differences were observable in the youngest age group (15- to 20-year-olds). There is, however, also some evidence that the differences in Estonian and Russian-Estonian adolescents' value priorities are not as big as in case of youth or adults (Vihalemm & Kalmus, 2008). The same has been observed in other countries: values held by children of immigrants tend to differ from those of their peers in the host country less than their parents' values differ from those of non-immigrant parents (Knafo & Schwartz, 2001; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Stewart, Bond, Deeds, & Chung, 1999). Studies with adolescents have also found some gender-related differences in value priorities: boys place greater importance on power and achievement than girls (Hofmann-Towfigh, 2007; Mizera & Tulviste, 2012; Silfver, 2007; Tulviste & Gutman, 2003; Verkasalo, Tuomivaara, & Lindeman, 1996).

The study also investigates the extent to which the value priorities of early adolescents from the two main social groups, and of boys and girls change over a one-year period. Value change has been related, first of all, to economic changes and to the need to adapt to life-changing events (Bardi et al., 2009; Inglehart, 1997). In current Estonia, educational reforms are going on with the aim to rid schools from authoritarian teaching and learning methods and to minimize differences in the quality of education of children from different social groups. Russian-Estonian students are faced with more challenges of adaptation to changing environment as reforms include the plan to improve their official language proficiency by the transition to a partial Estonian language subject instruction.

Hypotheses

We expected that early adolescents' value priorities differ from the pan-cultural value hierarchy (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001, p. 275) by hedonism, and stimulation being on the top of the hierarchy instead of benevolence.

Second, we predicted some change in adolescents' value priorities in 8th grade compared to those in 7th grade.

Third, we expected that Russian-speaking adolescents would place more importance on Self-Enhancement values and less on Openness to Change values than Estonian adolescents.

Forth, we expected that both ethnic Estonian and Russian-speaking boys would consider values related to Openness to Change and Self-Enhancement more important than girls.

Method

Participants

575 early adolescents (57.5% girls and 86.4% Estonians) filled out the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz et al., 2001) twice: in the beginning of 7th grade (mean age = 13.02, SD = .38) and in the beginning of 8th grade (mean age = 14.04, SD = .41). Scores on value domains were calculated according to the guidelines provided by Schwartz (2012). Based on these guidelines, the reliability coefficients of the PVQ indexes in the present study (see the notes of Table 1) were acceptable. Only the reliability of tradition values was low. This is due to religion being relatively unimportant in Estonia.

Results

As expected, the value hierarchy of early adolescents differs from that of the pan-cultural adult value hierarchy (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Adolescents pay more importance to hedonism and stimulation (7th and 8th in the pan-cultural hierarchy), and consider benevolence less important (see Table 1).

Correlations between the two measurements of the ten values are all statistically significant, but not very strong (see Table 1). Respondents' mean value rating scores and mean rankings for each of the ten values in 7th and 8th grade by cultural group are presented in Table 2 and Fig. 1, and by gender in Table 3 and Fig. 2.

Table 1

Mean value scores in 7th and 8th grade and correlations between measurements.

Value	Mean (SD) in 7th grade	Mean (SD) in 8th grade	Correlation between measurements
Hedonism	.80 (.86)	.80 (.83)	.49***
Stimulation	.66 (.86)	.57 (.86)	.49***
Benevolence	.55 (.71)	.50 (.68)	.43***
Self-direction	.41 (.77)	.52 (.76)	.42***
Universalism	.19 (.68)	.23 (.60)	.41***
Achievement	-.13 (.80)	-.15 (.88)	.50***
Security	-.21 (.83)	-.35 (.83)	.40***
Conformity	-.67 (.86)	-.65 (.86)	.47***
Tradition	-.72 (.92)	-.70 (.93)	.48***
Power	-.97 (.89)	-.90 (.89)	.51***

Note. *** $p < .001$; the reliabilities of the ten indexes in 7th and 8th grade were .64 and .63 for hedonism, .55 and .59 for stimulation, .62 and .61 for benevolence, .46 and .45 for self-direction, .57 and .52 for universalism, .42 and .48 for security, .65 and .75 for achievement, .52 and .44 for conformity, .14 and .17 for tradition, and .52 and .60 for power.

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