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Motivational interference in school-leisure conflict and learning outcomes: The differential effects of two value conceptions

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Abstract

It was hypothesized that students' value orientations are connected to their experience of motivational interference in a conflict between a school- and a leisure-related activity as well as to school marks as indicators of learning outcomes. In a self-report study with Italian adolescents ($N = 433$; $M = 14.5$ years) using a school-leisure conflict scenario, first, the relations between the 10 values introduced by Schwartz and the Inglehart-based Achievement and Well-being value orientations were investigated. Correlations and multidimensional scaling analysis showed overlaps as well as differences between the two sets of value variables. Regression analyses revealed that the Schwartz values were significantly related to the experience of motivational interference during studying and during leisure as well as to school marks. The inclusion of Achievement and Well-being value orientations explained additional variance of the three dependent variables. The relevance of individual values in explaining students' reactions to motivational conflicts is highlighted.

Keywords: Values; Value orientation; School-leisure conflict; Motivational interference; School marks

1. Introduction

The present study compares two sets of value variables stemming from different theoretical conceptions and investigates their role in the experience of motivational interference in school-leisure conflict and learning outcomes. The first question was how the 10 values introduced by Shalom Schwartz (Schwartz et al., 2001) and the two-dimensional conception of Achievement and Well-being value orientation based on Ronald Inglehart's (1997) research and used in the studies by Hofer et al. (Hofer et al., 2010; Hofer, Möhle, Kuhnle, Kilian, & Schmid, 2008; Hofer et al., 2007) are interrelated. The second question was whether the Schwartz values would predict the experience of motivational interference during studying and leisure as well as learning outcomes of Italian adolescents. And the third question was whether Achievement and Well-being value orientations, as conceptualized by Hofer et al. (2007), would add in explaining the three variables beyond the contribution of the Schwartz values. In the following, research on individual values and their relevance for learning motivation are discussed.

1.1. Individual values and academic motivation

1.1.1. Values and goals

In contrast to cross-cultural, social, and personality psychology, in education only few conceptions and studies including values can be found. There is a broad literature discussing cultural values and their influence on teaching and learning in schools (Hofstede, 1986; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). These studies focus, however, on cultural not on individual values. In one of the few studies on individual values so far, Feather (1988) has shown a relation of values (derived from the Rokeach Value

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Survey; Rokeach, 1973) and academic choices in a sample of university students. Recently, Boekaerts, de Koning, and Vedder (2006) made a plea to use the theory of basic human values from Schwartz (Schwartz et al., 2001) to better understand the content of the multiple goals that become salient in the classroom. Specifically, Boekaerts et al. (2006) conjectured that the Schwartz value circle is helpful in understanding the conflicts that may arise when students want to pursue multiple goals simultaneously. Hofer et al. (Fries, Schmid, Dietz, & Hofer, 2005; Hofer et al., 2007) dealt with the situation of students who need to study for school but at the same time are tempted to engage in specific leisure actions. Motivational conflict between school- and leisure-related actions seems to be widespread amongst young people in Western societies (Fries et al., 2005; Randel, Stevenson, & Witruk, 2000; Ratelle, Vallerand, Senécal, & Provencher, 2005). Hofer et al. (2007) analyzed how value orientations are connected to the way students deal with a situation in which two opposing goals come into conflict.

Individual values—also referred to as personal or human values (Schwartz et al., 2001) or value orientations (Fries, Schmid, & Hofer, 2007)—can be defined as generalized beliefs of a person about the desirability of behaviors and events. Values transcend specific actions and situations and provide general guidelines that influence choice and behavior (Fries et al., 2005; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Self-direction, Power, and Security are typical examples of human values (Schwartz et al., 2001). Traditionally, values are defined as trans-situational goals (Feather, 1995; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). However, they differ from the goal concept used in action theoretic frameworks (Carver & Scheier, 1998). In this framework, a goal is defined as a representation of a specific desired state of affairs that is cognitively associated to its corresponding means of attainment and to alternative goals (Kruglanski et al., 2002). In contrast, values apply across situations and domains. Persons do not pursue a specific value and achieve or fail to attain it the same way they strive for a goal. Instead, people can act according or against specific values. Values allow people to decide what to prefer and what to avoid, because goals, behaviors, events, and objects can be judged on the basis of their match or mismatch to an individual's value system (Fries et al., 2007). From an individual differences perspective, value orientations seem to be related to behavior and to perceptions of behavior. For instance, Bardi and Schwartz (2003) identified close connections between value orientation and self-reported behavior.

1.1.2. Shalom Schwartz's value circle

The predominant value conception in psychology includes the ten values proposed by Schwartz and their two-dimensional representation system. Schwartz (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz et al., 2001) assumes three universal prerequisites of human existence: (a) biological needs, (b) demands of group survival and functioning, and (c) requirement of coordinated social interaction. These prerequisites underlie 10 distinct and broad types of values, namely, Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, and Security.

On the basis of empirical research, Schwartz (Schwartz et al., 2001) provided a theoretical model that describes the relations among the ten values in a circular structure. The model also posits two orthogonal dimensions the first of which captures values ranging from self-transcendence (Universalism, Benevolence) to self-enhancement (Power, Achievement). Benevolence and Universalism values highlight concern for others and are incompatible with Power and Achievement that are related to self-interest. The second dimension extends from openness to change (Self-direction, Stimulation) to conservation of the status quo (Tradition, Conformity, Security). Hedonism is located between self-enhancement and openness to change. The 10 values and the two-dimensional representation hold for samples from different ages (Bubeck & Bilsky, 2004) as well as from different countries (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Research results highlight that people in all countries studied so far organize these values in a similar way despite variations of the scales within and between countries (Schwartz et al., 2001).

With regard to questions of academic motivation and learning, up to now no studies have been carried out including the Schwartz values. Boekaerts et al. (2006) pointed out the relevance of this value conception. The authors searched the literature for studies that examined the relationship between contextual variables and aspects of students' motivation by applying the Schwartz value circle and categorized the dependent variables of the studies in terms of the 10 value types. Specifically, Boekaerts et al. (2006) concluded that the Schwartz system could be fruitful in educational research because it covers the relations between values, thus, allowing for an analysis of potential conflicts in a multiple value perspective.

1.1.3. Ronald Inglehart's distinction between modern and post-modern values

The political scientist Ronald Inglehart (1997) made a distinction between two orthogonal value dimensions, namely modern and post-modern values. Modern values emphasize achievement, determination, thrift, and responsibility, while persons with high post-modern values judge free choice, friends, satisfaction, and leisure as important. The value dimensions proposed by Inglehart (e.g., 1997) are used to describe cultural as well as individual values. Cultural values are used in order to explain value changes. Based on data from the world value surveys (containing large-scale studies in 43 countries), Inglehart (1997) showed that post-modern values gained importance after the second World War in Western countries. Values and value changes were associated with changes in income between and within given societies, with cultural zones, and with political history. People in high-income countries and in protestant Europe had higher modern and post-modern values than those in low income and catholic European countries. Generation differences point to the fact that – at least in Western Europe – younger aged persons are higher in both modern and post-modern values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). There is empirical evidence that post-modern values do not