



Work or family or both? Value trajectories and their prediction over ten years



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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that values are developed during young adulthood. This study investigated whether and when developmental trajectories of values depend on gender, language region, cognitive competence, expected education duration, and ambition. Longitudinal data of 2620 adolescents in Switzerland were collected at eight waves of measurement over 10 years. Latent growth model analysis revealed that work values mainly increase between ages 16 and 20, whereas family values primarily increase after age 20. This pattern fits the major life and career roles sequence: Becoming established in one's career comes first, and focusing on family building follows later. The initial levels and development of values were essentially affected by gender, but other individual factors such as cognitive competence, expected education duration, and ambition also showed some effect, particularly on family values. These new insights into the development of values improve the understanding of the career decisions and career behavior of adolescents.

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Individuals' career preferences and career decisions have been explained and understood by means of—among other factors—individuals' values (Hirschi, 2010; Johnson & Elder, 2002; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Rokeach, 1973; Super, 1990). Values are abstract concepts or beliefs about desirable states or behaviors that guide the selection or evaluation of behaviors and events, which in turn are sequenced by their relative importance (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Stressing the important role of values, career research has intensively studied the effect of values on educational decisions and early career development (e.g., Eccles, 2005; Hirschi, 2010; Rimann, Udris, & Weiss, 2000), but the focus has rarely been on the development of the values themselves.

Although most research has treated values as rather stable (e.g., Jin & Rounds, 2012; Rodrigues, Guest, & Budjanovcanin, 2013; Schein, 1978), the rare studies on value development have indicated that values develop during the transition to

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adulthood (Bardi & Schwartz, 1996; Jin & Rounds, 2012; Johnson, 2001; Lindsay & Knox, 1984; Porfeli, 2007) and change as people age and enact major life and occupational roles (Daniel, Fortuna, Thrun, Cioban, & Knafo, 2013; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Prior research has even suggested that values and behaviors mutually influence one another (Johnson, 2001; Porfeli, 2008). Porfeli (2007) proposed a discrepancy model in which dissatisfaction results from a perceived discrepancy between either different but conceptually related values or between a value and an associated experience. If a discrepancy is perceived, individuals tend to either adapt their behaviors or change their values in order to reduce the discrepancy. Especially during early career stages, changes are likely spurred by the newly encountered experiences. With respect to work values, Johnson (2001) demonstrated that the participants' work values underwent an adjustment process during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This adjustment was based on the increasing knowledge of the potential job and career choices, which led to more realistic and prudent values (Jin & Rounds, 2012). The idea of adjustment between one's personality-defining values and one's environment is also in line with the research on personality development. For example, Robins, Caspi, and Moffitt (2002) showed that work experiences during young adulthood were related to changes in personality. In another study, Scollon and Diener (2006) demonstrated that personality traits and social roles (satisfaction with aspects of one's life) can change jointly: The more that satisfaction with work and relationships increased, the steeper the increase in extraversion and decrease in neuroticism. Such findings imply that life experiences have an effect on people's perception of themselves, their lives, and their values. During young adulthood, people may be especially prone to such changes because they engage in new social roles (e.g., their work role). Thus far, existing research on value development has suffered from methodological limitations. For example, many studies have been based on a cross-sectional cohort comparison instead of longitudinal data (e.g., Smola & Sutton, 2002). In-depth knowledge of value trajectories would likely aid the understanding of occupational aspirations as well as the early career choices and career development of adolescents (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011; Johnson, 2001). Values have been shown to have an effect on thoughts and direct behavioral tendencies (Boldero & Francis, 2002; Porfeli & Vondracek, 2007), likely influencing individuals' life courses and career planning as well as career choices. Moreover, because the development of values and identities has been found to be determined by personal and contextual factors (Vondracek & Reitzle, 1998; Vondracek, Silbereisen, Reitzle, & Wiesner, 1999), intraindividual differences were included in this study in order to achieve a more specific understanding of adolescents' career planning and career choices.

Following Smola and Sutton's (2002), as well as Jin and Rounds' (2012) call for further research on work values and factors that affect their development, we contribute in two ways to the career literature in a broader sense and to the career choice and career development literature in a more specific sense: First, we focus on the early career phase and value changes with regard to work and family values. Second, we examine how value trajectories individually differ. Using data from a Swiss longitudinal youth study, we provide a fine-grained picture regarding the development of values from ages 16 to 26. This age span includes the transition from upper-secondary education (age 16–approx. 19) and to qualified employment or higher education (approx. age 20); this transition has been shown to be crucial for the personal and occupational development of young people (Arnett, 2000). This knowledge is likely to indicate how adolescents and young adults make their career decisions in order to achieve a good fit between their values and their career.

Values

Values are generally oriented toward specific life domains such as work or family. Work values include intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of work. While extrinsic work values refer to material aspects of work (e.g., income, promotion, advancement, recognition, and job security), intrinsic work values, which this study focuses on, refer to the actual content of work (e.g., self-development, autonomy, competence, dedication, and cooperation; George & Jones, 1997; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Family values include the importance of partnership, the creation of one's own family, and having children (Mayer, Kuramschew, & Trommsdorff, 2009).

These two sets of values—intrinsic work values and family values—were chosen in our study for several reasons. Firstly, it has been shown that mainly intrinsic work values are relevant in predicting career development (Hirschi, 2010). Secondly, according to Mayer et al. (2009), some adolescents tend to place importance on getting married and having children in the future, which is a reflection of family values. These family values can act as an alternative to an ambitious career or conflict with work values and the pursuit of a career. Individuals, particularly females, appear to attempt a combination of work and family roles in their career. This can result in a work-family conflict, which heavily depends on the work-family culture (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Thus, both of these value sets are important to an individual's career choice. Thirdly, the considerable amount of research that has focused on work-family and family-work spillover, as well as the work-family conflicts demonstrating the importance of the two domains (Demerouti, Peeters, & van der Heijden, 2012; Georgellis & Lange, 2012; Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006; Kelly et al., 2014; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014; Ruppanner, 2013), is in line with our emphasis on the trajectories of work and family values. Examining the interplay of work and family issues in the current study is intended to emphasize the particular importance of both themes in the development of people's lives.

The current study

Findings from prior research are ambiguous regarding the trajectory of work values. Jin and Rounds (2012) hypothesized an increase in intrinsic work values during the adolescent and college years because of "a normative value change toward expanding the self and gaining more information" (p. 328). The results of their meta-analysis did indeed show a trend toward

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