



## What is the better predictor of students' personal values: Parents' values or students' personality?

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between young adults' values, multicultural personality traits and their parents' values. A total of 102 students and their matched parents filled in the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire and the Portrait Value Questionnaire. The influence of one's personality and one's parents' values on personal values was tested by hierarchical regression analyses and structural equation modelling. The analyses revealed a greater contribution of multicultural personality to the variance in stimulation, self-direction, universalism, and achievement values in comparison to the impact of parents' values, whereas an opposite pattern was found for power, benevolence, and conformity. Tradition, hedonism, and security were found to be linked to multicultural personality and parents' values to a similar extent. Furthermore, overall trait-like parents' values were better predictors of the offspring's trait-like values, and the same effect held for parental societal values: they predicted better the offspring's societal values. The authors discuss the need for differentiation between trait-like and societally oriented values and the application of content-tailored personality measures, in line with previous studies.

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## 1. Introduction

Up to now, on examining the link between personality and values, researchers have focused on the five-factor model (McCrae & Costa, 1997), which proposes five basic personality traits. However, general personality traits may not be sensitive enough to explain variance in values which are dependent on the cultural background. Analyzing relationships between general personality traits and values is not enough, and defining new and content-specific concepts becomes necessary. In view of the constantly advancing erosion of monocultural societies and the emergence of pluralistic ones, it is more common for people to be aware of and accept the fact that contemporary societies are made up of many cultural groups which tend to live not only next to each other but also together (Sam & Berry, 2006). In such contexts, new types of traits are becoming relevant for constructive and effective interpersonal or intergroup interaction.

In this study we go beyond exploring the relationship between personality and values. The first and most significant innovative element of this study is its introduction of a new, more content-specific measure of personality traits, and the

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linking of it with personal values. We believe that measuring multicultural personality (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000) enables us to better assess the impact of personality on culture-related phenomena such as values, since this concept was tailored to predict culturally relevant concepts such as overcoming acculturative difficulties, psychological adaptation abroad, or success in an intercultural context in general. That is, this study examines for the first time the relative influence of the multicultural personality versus that of the social environment (parents' values) on individual's personal values. We try to analyze whether basic human values are predicted by an individual's personality profile or are culturally learned strategies, transmitted within each person's family environmental context, mainly through parents' values. If personality matters more, we might allow for an interpretation that values can be seen as – at least – partially conditioned by one's biological constitution. If parents' values are the component which explains more variance in individual's preferences for pursuing some goals, then socialization should be considered as a more relevant determinant for the structure of people's value hierarchy. Furthermore, we explore the variability in the extent to which values can be considered as *societally oriented* constructs, related to parents' values, or *trait-like* ones, and associated with personality. We expect that whereas for trait-like values the individual's multicultural personality traits will be more pertinent, for societally oriented values the parents' values will be the crucial factor.

### 1.1. Personality and values

The Big Five personality dimensions and Schwartz's 10 basic human values are probably the most commonly used models within the concepts of personality and values. Both were empirically shown to be universal (McCrae & Costa, 1997; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2001), as the structure of emerging dimensions for each of the models is consistent throughout different cultures. Whereas there is empirical evidence that countries do not strongly differ in their personality profiles (McCrae & Costa, 1996) and that traits are heritable (Jang, Livesly, & Vernon, 1996), with little contribution of shared family environment (Loehlin, McCrae, Costa, & John, 1998), values vary in their importance across nations or social groups (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). This suggests that socialization or environmental transmission might be essential for the development of values.

Although there are differences, the way people tend to organize personal values according to their importance was also demonstrated to be pan-cultural (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), which suggests their adaptive function for successful societal functioning. Thus, it is often emphasized that personality is largely hereditary, while values – although rooted in the universal requirements of the human condition – are cognitive individual preferences or abstract beliefs which also reflect socialization to guide people's behavior (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz, 1992). However, there is growing evidence that personality traits and values are intercorrelated. First, various studies, mostly focused on the five-factor model and personal values, exhibited similar relationship patterns throughout different countries: Australia (Haslam, Whelan, & Bastian, 2009), China (Luk & Bond, 1993; Yik & Tang, 1996), Germany (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994), Israel (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002), and the United States (Dollinger, Leong, & Ulicni, 1996; Olver & Mooradian, 2003). If we only take into account correlations of over 0.30 in at least two studies, the previous findings could be summarized as follows: Agreeableness is associated with high benevolence and tradition, but with low power and achievement; openness to experience is related to high universalism, self-direction, and stimulation, but to low conformity; extraversion is linked with high achievement; conscientiousness is associated with conformity, while neuroticism is only weakly related to some values. Moreover, a study with samples from 33 countries by Hofstede and McCrae (2004) revealed that personality scores were substantially correlated with culture dimensions of individualism–collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity–femininity.

Hence, it has become empirically evident that the differentiation between the two concepts cannot be considered an absolute distinction. Personality characteristics should not be regarded as completely unaffected by cultural factors. McCrae and John (1992) – although strongly endorsing an evolutionary approach to traits – stressed that there exists a minimal variability in levels of personality traits which reflect the fact that different cultures developed social niches establishing distinct personality requirements.

On the other hand, values are supposed to be conditioned by three universal human needs: biological needs of individuals, necessity to coordinate social interaction, and the need for the survival and welfare of groups (Schwartz, 1992). The necessity to coordinate social interaction, in particular, leads to cultural variation. There is some evidence, however, that values and attitudes (which are related to more specific goals or situations than values) are also to some extent determined by a hereditary component. For example, half of the variance in altruism, empathy, and nurturance was found to be contributed by the genetic factor (Rushton, Fulkner, Neale, Nias, & Eysenck, 1986), while for social responsibility it was 42% (Rushton, 2004). Similarly, another study (Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1990) demonstrated that genes account for half of the variance in religious attitudes and values. In sum, there might be a considerable amount of shared variance between an individual's personal values and traits due to the underlying genetic factor or a biological bond between parental and child's values – as Waller et al. (1990) concluded, parent–child correlations should no longer be interpreted as reflecting only the influence of family environment. To shed some more light on this issue we shall analyze the contribution of parental values to the variance in personal values over the impact of personality traits, so that the supposed part of biological heritability is partially taken into account. Second, we also consider the contribution of parents' personality with the aim of excluding the possibility of stronger interference from a hereditary component within the parent–child value relationship when contrasted with the value-transmission hypothesis. If parental personality does not add a notable amount of variance to students' values, it can be assumed that the influence of parental values on their children's values rather occurs through a socialization-related process of the transmission of life priorities.

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