



Anales de Psicología

ISSN: 0212-9728

servpubl@fcu.um.es

Universidad de Murcia

España

Tejerina Arreal, María; García Gómez, Pilar; García Guardia, María L.
Estructura de valores personales en una muestra de adolescentes españoles
Anales de Psicología, vol. 30, núm. 2, mayo-agosto, 2014, pp. 627-632
Universidad de Murcia
Murcia, España

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Life values structure in a Spanish sample of adolescents

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Título: Estructura de valores personales en una muestra de adolescentes españoles.

Resumen: En este estudio exploramos la motivación subyacente a través de la estructura de valores personales, en una muestra española de niños y adolescentes de 12 a 16 años de edad. En general, los resultados muestran que los jóvenes españoles de este estudio otorgan una prioridad más alta a las metas intrínsecas (relaciones interpersonales significativas, salud física, auto-aceptación) que extrínsecas (imagen, dinero, poder). También encontramos diferencias de género en determinadas metas personales. Los resultados de este estudio son similares con los ya obtenidos en un estudio longitudinal de población adolescente norteamericana, utilizando el mismo instrumento de medida y metodología. La estructura de valores de los jóvenes españoles estudiados presenta diferencias que estriban principalmente, en dar una mayor prioridad a metas relacionadas con tener apoyo en vez de metas relacionadas con esfuerzo o logro en comparación con los jóvenes norteamericanos. Se analiza la influencia cultural y de edad en la elección de las metas prioritarias de vida.

Palabras clave: Valores personales; metas prioritarias; estructura de valores; metas extrínsecas; metas intrínsecas; motivación.

Abstract: We examined the structure of personal life values as a representation of underlying motivation, in a Spanish sample of children and adolescents 12 - 16 years old. In general, results showed that youth put higher priority on intrinsic life goals (meaningful relationships, being physically healthy, self-acceptance) than extrinsic life goals (image, money, power). Gender differences were found in specific life goals. When comparing our results with another longitudinal American study using the same instrument and methodology, we found similar results, although Spanish youth value priorities goals related to support rather than striving as in American adolescents. Cultural and age trend in life priorities are discussed.

Key words: Personal values; priority goals; values' structure; extrinsic goals; intrinsic goals; motivation.

Introduction

Different cultures create distinct senses of personal identity, offering a frame of values that orient our behaviour. These values influence how we perceive stimuli and incentives in the environment; how we assess what we experience (Cohen and Cohen, 1996; Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols, and Ferguson, 2010) and the choice of life priorities we are going to consider important in our lives. From this point of view, the study of personal values allows us to address indirectly the influence of historical and cultural conditions.

Western culture conveys contradictory messages with regard to wellbeing, fostering materialistic, hedonistic and narcissistic goals, while at the same time suggesting that these pursuits will fail.

On the other hand, research results suggested some kinds of values appeared more protective (Cohen and Cohen, 1996, 2001; Tejerina and Cohen, 2005) or more salubrious than others (Deci and Ryan, 2012; Kasser and Ahuvia, 2002; Kasser and Kanner, 2004; Niemiec, Ryan, and Deci, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2010; Sheldon and Schmuck, 2001; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007; Williams, Cox, Hedberg, and Deci, 2000). These studies also showed that when participants reported how much importance they placed on a variety of life goals, the goals were separated into intrinsic or extrinsic. Specifically, intrinsic values such as self-acceptance, affiliation, or community feeling have been shown to satisfy people's psychological needs to a greater extent than extrin-

sic values such as financial success, image and popularity or fame.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that values concern what one wants or thinks important, not what one has or has already attained (Sheldon et al., 2010). Thus, actually being rich, beautiful or well-known is not necessarily problematic (Howell and Howell, 2008). Instead it is valuing these ends more than one values intrinsic ends that seem symptomatic or problematic (Niemiec et al., 2009) because people are more likely to attain the goals they value, but the consequences of doing so may be negative for some specific goals.

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 2012), people require three specific psychological nutrients for healthy functioning. They need to feel competent in negotiating their external and internal environments, they need to experience relatedness to other people and groups, and they need to feel autonomy or self-determination with respect to their own behaviors and lives.

A review of the research examining the association between extrinsic and intrinsic life goals and various indicators of psychological health and well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2012), in different cultures and across varied ages, has shown that more autonomous motivations (intrinsic) are more effective than controlled motivations (extrinsic), with respect to learning, behaving in healthier ways, and other outcomes.

Social contexts also could influence whether people's life goals tend to be more intrinsic or more extrinsic and that in turn could have an impact on important life outcomes (Deci and Ryan, 2012). Although it is very difficult to provide compelling data for the causal role of cultural values, at the level of personal values, some experimental evidence supported the idea that self-interested, materialistic values could

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create unfortunate social outcomes (Kasser, 2011; Vohs, Mead, and Goode, 2006).

This study examines the structure of life values in a Spanish sample of adolescents as a representation of their underlying motivational structure. That is, what they think is more important in their lives, in the sense of where they think they are going. We considered this developmental period decisive, because during this time adolescents are required to choose an identity from a multitude of options. These decisions in choosing top priorities, we believe, are consequential for the emotional and behavioural well-being of the individual (Tejerina and Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, according with social role theories (Eagly and Wood, 2012) we expect to find gender differences in the choice of life priorities or life goals that adolescent value, and we will compare our results with another USA longitudinal study of adolescents (Cohen and Cohen, 1996; 2001) using the same instrument and methodology to discuss specific cultural differences and age trends.

Method

Participants

Participants were 303 students attending to suburban and urban schools in Ciudad Real, Spain. 58.1% were girls and 41.9 % boys; 63.4% resided in the city and 36.6% in suburbs. Socio-demographic characteristics and family structure matched census figures reasonably well, with 89.8% of the adolescents living with married parents and nuclear families (parents and siblings), 8.3% living in extended families and 1% living in an institution. 81.2% had resided more than 10 years in the same place. Data related to parents' professional and educational status place this sample on the average at the medium to low socioeconomic level, with 2% of the families having one unemployed parent.

Procedure

All 6th through 10th grade students attending their homerooms in a suburban high school in Ciudad Real ($N = 103$) and in an urban high school in the same city ($N = 200$) on a particular day were asked to participate; Informed consent was signed by their parents and returned. Immigrant children were excluded from the sample to avoid bias due to language problems in understanding instructions or procedure. Response rate was 99.34%.

Field work was carried out in the two schools by a psychologist during two sessions of 50 minutes in each.

Instruments

Child Life Priority (CLP) (Cohen and Cohen, 1996; 2001) was used to assess life values in this Spanish sample of adolescents. This measure is a representation of the structure of personal values based on Henry Murray's conception of in-

dividual needs and environmental presses (Murray, 1938). This measure also captures goals reflected in the Rokeach Terminal Values (Rokeach, 1973; 1979; Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach, 1989) including chosen lifestyles (e.g., an exciting life). Because each of these goals represents a general good, the respondent is required to indicate their relative importance rather than simply rate each one.

Items assess alternative personal goals that may differentiate cultures or a single society at different historical times. All items were chosen to reflect goals usually deemed desirable. This brief measure represents each of 21 life goals by a single item (Table 1). The item "*to have children and take care of them*" was added in the Spanish sample of adolescents in order to assess this priority goal as a lifestyle based on traditional family orientation.

In order to minimize the influence of social desirability, ipsative measurement was used by asking respondents to place the items in a Q-sort distribution. From the single most important, the least important, the two next most important, ... The scores ranged from 1 to 7, distributed 1-2-4-7-4-2-1 a quasi-normal distribution.

We did back translation (Hamblenton, 1996) from English to Spanish. First, the measure was translated into Spanish, then an independent bilingual translator team translated back into English, and finally comparison was made with the original accepting identical meaning for every single item.

Table 1. Childs Life Priority items.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Affiliation | To have friends and family who will love and be near me |
| Power | To be the leader or person in charge of a lot of people |
| Succour | To always have someone who would take care of me |
| Exciting | To have an enjoyable and exciting life |
| Fame | To be known and admired by many people |
| Good | To be a really good person |
| Health | To be healthy |
| Useful | To do something that will be useful even after I die |
| Children | To have children and take care of them |
| Looks | To be very attractive (handsome or pretty) |
| Myself | To be myself no matter what |
| Nurture | To take care of others who need me |
| Love | To love and be loved by someone of the opposite sex |
| Patriot | To do all I can to defend my country |
| Rich | To be rich |
| Safe | To never have anything awful happen to me |
| Commun | To spend my time with people who feel the way I do about things |
| Self-understanding | To understand myself |
| Work | To really love my work |
| God | To do what God wants me to do |
| Sex | To have a satisfying sex life |
| Poor | Not to be poor |

Statistical analysis

Using SPSS 15.0, we analysed descriptive statistics on socio-demographic data and goal priorities. Alpha coefficients were used to calculate internal consistency.

We analysed the structure of life values by exploratory common factor analysis and varimax rotation. The factor solution was selected on the following criteria: minimum 40% of explained variance, loadings $> .40$, minimum of three loadings per factor, and scree-plot of Cattell.

Gender differences in life goals were assessed through independent t test, and effect sizes are provided and were calculated even when meaningful differences were not found.

Results

Goal priorities choices and personal values analyses

Results in adolescents' goals priorities in this Spanish sample do not support the argument that Western societies are becoming more interested in money, fame, and power (Table 2). These three life goals were chosen on the average at the bottom of the list. And one of the goals representing attachment to others such as *affiliation* was placed even higher than the two goals reflecting self-focus or individualistic values such as *to be myself no matter what* and *to understanding myself*. Same results were found in the American sample aged 12 to 20. As well as in the USA study, the majority of youth in this Spanish sample place a high priority *on being a good person*.

Table 2. CLP items distribution in the Spanish sample compared to Americans.

| ITEMS | Mean Spain | SD Spain | Frequency Spain | | Mean USA | SD USA | Frequency USA | |
|------------------------|------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| | | | Most Important | Least Important | | | Most Important | Least Important |
| 1. Affiliation | 6.35 | .95 | 186 | 1 | 5.2 | 1.1 | 107 | 0 |
| 2. Health | 5.43 | .93 | 35 | 0 | 5.2 | 1.1 | 92 | 0 |
| 3. Good | 5.08 | .95 | 18 | 0 | 4.8 | 1.1 | 57 | 2 |
| 4. Soccor | 4.56 | .98 | 3 | 2 | 3.7 | 1.1 | 7 | 18 |
| 5. Myself | 4.56 | .95 | 7 | 0 | 4.5 | 1.2 | 49 | 9 |
| 6. Love | 4.49 | 1.1 | 17 | 0 | 4.8 | 1.3 | 63 | 7 |
| 7. Nurture | 4.48 | .96 | 5 | 3 | 4.5 | 1.1 | 33 | 2 |
| 8. Children | 4.42 | 1.0 | 6 | 2 | | | | |
| 9. Exciting | 4.22 | 1.1 | 5 | 3 | 5.1 | 1.2 | 129 | 0 |
| 10. Safe | 4.15 | .9 | 2 | 3 | 3.8 | 1.1 | 12 | 13 |
| 11. Self-understanding | 4.14 | .8 | 5 | 0 | 4.3 | 1.1 | 32 | 11 |
| 12. Commun | 3.88 | .7 | 2 | 0 | 3.9 | 1.0 | 7 | 16 |
| 13. Poor | 3.88 | 1.0 | 2 | 4 | 3.6 | 1.1 | 3 | 23 |
| 14. Work | 3.84 | .92 | 1 | 4 | 4.1 | 1.0 | 5 | 4 |
| 15. Useful | 3.70 | 1.0 | 2 | 9 | 3.3 | 1.3 | 13 | 67 |
| 16. God | 3.42 | 1.1 | 1 | 25 | 4.0 | 1.6 | 81 | 52 |
| 17. Sex | 3.38 | 1.2 | 2 | 27 | 3.5 | 1.2 | 4 | 60 |
| 18. Looks | 3.09 | 1.0 | 1 | 16 | 3.5 | 1.2 | 3 | 41 |
| 19. Fame | 3.04 | 1.0 | 0 | 16 | 3.1 | 1.3 | 6 | 72 |
| 20. Patriot | 3.02 | 1.2 | 2 | 30 | 3.4 | 1.3 | 12 | 56 |
| 21. Rich | 2.78 | 1.3 | 2 | 58 | 3.2 | 1.6 | 28 | 132 |
| 22. Power | 2.14 | 1.0 | 0 | 100 | 2.6 | 1.2 | 4 | 160 |

Unlike youth Americans, neither of the Spanish adolescents chose as the most important life goal in their lives fame and power. Moreover, one third of the sample chose *power* (*To be the leader or person in charge of a lot of people*) and one fifth chose *to be rich* as the least important life goals in their lives. Neither of the Spanish youth placed *health, being good, self-understanding, myself, and spend time with people who feel the way I do*, as the least important goal in their lives.

The resulting four factors are given in Table 3, and included 19 of the 22 goals. Three items did not load on any factor: *to never have anything awful happen to me, to do something that will be useful even after I die, and to really love my work*.

The first factor we named *Self-focus-materialistic* and included the following goals ("+" more important and "-" less important): +To be myself no matter what, +To take care of

others who need me, +To be a really good person, +to spend my time with people who feel the way I do about things, +To be rich, +To understand myself, -To have a satisfying sex life, -Not to be poor. Alpha coefficient for this factor was .36.

The relatively low alphas are an evitable consequence of the built-in negative correlations of these ipsative items.

The second factor we called *Support*, included: +To have friend and family who will love and be near me, +To always have someone who would take care of me, - To be the leader or person in charge of a lot of people. Alpha coefficient was .36.

The third factor, *Service*, included: +To be healthy, +To do all I can to defend my country, +To do what God wants

me to do, -To love and be loved by someone of the opposite sex. Alpha coefficient was .41.

Fourth factor was *To have children*, included: +To have children and take care of them, -To be known and admired by many people, -To have an enjoyable and exciting life, -To be very attractive (handsome or pretty). Alpha coefficient was .45.

The Q-Sort technique forces a correlation among items that is, on the average, negative, because a highly placed item requires that other items will be less highly placed. For this reason, and because each priority is represented by a single item, we could not expect and did not find higher correlations among the items. This justifies lower internal consistency for the priority goals factors. Correlations near to zero show that factors are inter-independent.

Table 3. Factor structure of personal values in the Spanish sample aged 12 to 16.

| Self-Focus-Materialistic | |
|---|---------|
| Items | Loading |
| To be myself no matter what | 0.626 |
| To take care of others who needs me | 0.560 |
| To be a really good person | 0.543 |
| To spend my time with people who feel the same way I do | 0.431 |
| To be rich | 0.428 |
| To understand myself | 0.394 |
| To have a satisfying sex life | -0.598 |
| Not to be poor | -0.477 |
| Support | |
| Items | Loading |
| To have friends and family who will love me | 0.633 |
| To always have someone who would take care of me | 0.581 |
| To be the leader or in charge of a lot of people | -0.525 |
| Service | |
| Items | Loading |
| To be healthy | 0.589 |
| To do all I can to defend my country | 0.546 |
| To do what God wants me to do | 0.417 |
| To love and to be loved by someone of the opposite sex | -0.589 |
| To haveChildren | |
| To have children and take care of them | 0.558 |
| To be known and admired for many people | -0.640 |
| To have an enjoyable and exciting life | -0.612 |
| Be pretty or handsome | -0.400 |

Compared to the U.S.A study these priority goals were reduced to four factors (Table 4). The first, named *Service* had a test-retest reliability coefficient over a 2.5 years span of .50. Second factor named *Striving*, test-retest reliability coefficient was .22. Third factor named *self-focus*, test-retest reliability

coefficient was .50. Fourth factor *love/sex* included two items: + sex, + love. Affiliation and Community did not load on any factor. Test-retest coefficients were .33 and .25, respectively.

Table 4. Correlations between Life Priority Factors.

| | Children | Support | Service |
|--------------------------|----------|---------|---------|
| Self-focus-Materialistic | -0.255 | -0.285 | -0.348 |
| Children | ---- | -0.112 | -0.295 |
| Support | | ---- | -0.183 |
| Service | | | ---- |

Gender analysis

In the present study, we found gender differences related to the *self-focus-materialistic* factor. In general, girls gave a higher priority to almost all life goals in this factor than boys. Particularly *To be myself no matter what* ($t(301) = 2.51, p = .01, SE = .29$) *To take care of others who needs me* ($t(301) = 4.67, p < .000, SE = .54$) *To be a really good person* ($t(301) = 3.18, p = .002, SE = .37$), *To spend my time with people who feel the same way I do about things* ($t(301) = 2.81, p = .005, SE = .33$), *To understand myself* ($t(301) = 2.03, p = .04, SE = .24$). Since boys gave a higher priority to being *rich* ($t(301) = 4.97, p < .000, SE = .58$) and *to have a satisfying sex life* ($t(301) = 4.24, p < .000, SE = .49$). No significant gender differences were found in *not to be poor* although boys placed this goal higher than girls. Three of these goals showed the same gender differences in the American sample: Girls placed a higher priority *to be a really good person*, *to take care of others who need me* and boys *to being rich*.

In the *support* factor, we found that girls gave a higher priority to affiliation, *to have friends and family who will love me and be near me* ($t(301) = 2.19, p = .03, SE = .25$) and boys to power, *to be the leader or person in charge of a lot of people* ($t(301) = 2.92, p = .004, SE = .34$). In the American sample, girls also gave a higher priority *to have friends and family* than boys, but there were not significant differences in the *power* priority among boys and girls.

There was not gender difference in the *service* factor, neither in its constituent items. These results were also found in the American sample of adolescents.

We did not found gender differences in the priority to *have children and take care of them*, in Spanish adolescents. The negative loadings of this factor implicate a lower priority on *fame, an exciting life and being attractive physically*. The only gender difference found in their constituents items is that boys place a higher priority on fame such as *to be known and admired by many people* than girls ($t(301) = 2.13, p = .03, SE = .25$). In the USA sample, no gender difference was found for this life goal.

Unique items that did not load on any factor showed that boys placed a higher priority than girls on *never have anything awful happen to me* ($t(301) = 2.02, p = .045, SE = .23$), *to do something useful even after I die* ($t(301) = 1.63, p = .1, SE = .19$) and *to really love my work* ($t(301) = 0.44, p = .66, SE =$

.05) without reaching the significance level. No gender differences were found in American adolescents for these goals.

Finally, we found in this cross-sectional study nine goals that clearly did not showed gender difference: *Not to be poor, to have children and take care of them, to have an exciting life, be pretty or handsome, to have someone who would take care of me, to be healthy, to love and be loved by someone of the opposite sex, to defend my country, and to do what God wants me to do*. In the American longitudinal sample, over the age span 12 to 22, six priorities showed neither gender nor age groups differences: *enjoying work, avoiding tragedy, spend time with people who feel the same way I do, not to be poor, being famous, and leadership or power*.

Discussion

Results from this Spanish youth sample do not support that Western societies are becoming more interested in money, fame and power (Astin, Green, and Korn, 1987; Kasser and Kanner, 2004; Sheldon et al., 2010). These three life goals were chosen on the average at the bottom of the list. Affiliation was placed higher than individualistic goals, even that these self-focus goals are consistent with the developmental period we studied. The majority of youth in this Spanish sample placed a high priority on being a good person. Same results were found in American adolescents using the CLP measure (Cohen and Cohen, 1996; 2001). Unlike Americans, neither of the Spanish chose fame and power as the most important life goal in their lives. Furthermore, one-third and one-fifth of the Spanish sample chose power and to be rich as the least important life goals, respectively. Power and fame showed a gender difference in the Spanish sample in which boys placed higher priority than girls. Neither gender nor age trend differences were found in the longitudinal American sample for these goals.

Spanish youth personal goals structure explained by four factors (Self-focus-materialistic, support, service and having children) also reflected differences compared to the one found in American youth. The *self-focus-materialistic* factor compared to the Americans includes a mix of goals in which not only Spanish adolescents placed their goals priorities in understand themselves, be themselves, and being a good person, like Americans did. Priority goals that are in concordance with the developmental period we studied. But unlike Americans, affiliated and materialistic priority goals were included in this factor as well. Gender differences were found in this factor showing traditional roles. Girls gave a higher priority to all life goals in this factor than boys with the exception of boys giving a higher priority to being rich. In accordance with this traditional pattern, moderate effect sizes were found in *nurture* in girls and money or being *rich* in boys. The same gender differences were found in the American sample. Other studies as well, have shown the same gender difference pattern according to gender schema and social role theory (Ryckman and Houston, 2003)

The *service factor* showed priorities to have good health, to do what god wants me to do, to defend my country, in detriment to love and be loved by someone of the opposite sex. Americans included similar goals.

Compared to the American sample, results were very different for the other two factors explaining life goals. Since Spanish youth gave priority to goals related to *support* like having friends and family near me, and have someone who take care of me in detriment of power or leadership, American youth gave priority to goals more related with *striving*, such as leadership, useful, or enjoy work in detriment of taking care of me, safety, not be poor or health. This result could be also explained by age trends in some specific goals like the need to be taken care of me, which decline over 16 years old (Cohen & Cohen, 1996) as well as by cultural differences, where in American society striving always has been a reinforced value leading to certain success or reward. Spanish adolescents seem more protected and support more reinforced.

Finally, *to have children and take care of them* explained a traditional orientation in Spanish youth in detriment of *fame, attractiveness and to have an exciting life*. No gender differences were found. Since this goal was not assessed in the USA study, we cannot compare.

In summary, girls placed a higher priority than boys to all the goals in the self-focus factor and affiliation, since boys placed a higher priority to be rich, power and fame. No gender differences were found in the service factor, nor to have children and take care of them. Although similar results were found in the American sample, relating gender differences, Spanish girls gave higher priority to intrinsic than extrinsic values than American girls did, such as fame and power. This could be explained by age trends since our sample age range goes to 16 y/o and the American goes to 20 y/o. But cultural differences could influence as well, showing in general, a more traditional pattern in the Spanish sample.

Some limitations of the study must also be acknowledged. First, the sample although being representative of a small region in Spain, does not allow generalizing these results to the overall Spanish population. A more representative sample or more studies in other regions would be necessary. Second, we have to bear in mind that when comparing our results on goal priorities with American adolescents, even using the same measures, the samples are not coetaneous. Third, some of the results on values might be more specific, if we analyse specific age groups. Also because other studies about values have found that sex differences explain less variance than age (Schwartz and Rubel, 2005), developmental patterns in personal values should be an objective in future research. Fourth, a great number of societal, group and individual characteristics can be associated to values. We would need to explore this information in order to find the effect of these variables.

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(Article received: 27-9-2012; reviewed: 29-10-2012, accepted: 12-3-2013)