

A COMPARISON OF ESTONIAN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' VALUE PRIORITIES IN 2000 AND 2009

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Abstract. The aim of the present study was to compare the Estonian senior high school students' value priorities in cohorts of 2000 and 2009. A questionnaire based on five value types from the *Schwartz Value Survey* (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987) – Self-direction, Achievement, Conformity, Power, and Tradition – was used for data collection. The study revealed a significant increase in the importance of Self-direction, Conformity and Tradition during the last decade, while Power and Achievement did not reach statistically significant difference across cohorts. At the same time, the hierarchical structure (the values' respective rankings) had remained the same – values related to Self-direction and Achievement were most important, and Tradition least important for the respondents. Values related to Achievement were found to be more important to boys in gender comparison. The results of the study are compared to the results obtained by earlier research on values and discussed in the context of societal change.

Keywords: high school students' values, value stability vs value change, Schwartz Value Survey, Estonia

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1. Introduction

Values have been seen by psychologists as an integral part of the human condition, influencing our perceptions, attitudes, and behavior (e.g. Rokeach 1973, Schwartz 1992). Rokeach (1973:5) defined the value concept as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence”. Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) formulated that values are concepts or beliefs which pertain to desirable end states or behaviors; transcend specific situations; guide the selection or evaluation of behavior and events; and are ordered by relative importance. Based on empirical research it has been argued that some indicated value preferences motivate people's actual behavior more than others, on

account of being less moderated by normative pressures to perform certain behaviors. In a study conducted in the US, Bardi and Schwartz (2003) found that, for example, the Tradition values related strongly to the behaviors that express them; Power and Self-direction moderately; and Conformity and Achievement only marginally. In empirical research, values have also been found to be systematically linked to moral reasoning (Lan, Gowing, McMahon, Rieger, and King 2007).

1.1. Value stability and value change

While the topic of values has generally enjoyed great popularity in social science research over many decades, there are some issues that have remained relatively understudied. One of these issues is the question of value stability and value change. It has been noted that “[the] value literature in psychology has assumed that values are largely stable, and perhaps as a result of this, very little has been said regarding value change” (Bardi, Lee, Hofmann-Towfigh, and Soutar 2009:914). Eminent value researchers (e.g. Rokeach 1973, Hofstede 2001) have claimed that values are rather resistant to change. For example, Schwartz, Bardi, and Bianchi (2000) found values in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia to lack significant changes over time even during remarkable ideological and socio-cultural transitions, such as have taken place in the Central and Eastern Europe over the last decades. Drawing upon data gathered in two separate periods after the collapse of the Soviet regime – 1989–1991 and 1996–1997 from samples of teachers and students, the authors concluded that “despite the collapse of the communist regimes, adolescents were exposed to value-relevant life circumstances quite similar to those adults had experienced under communism” (p. 234).

Some of the literature on values has documented a noticeable but short-lived change in people’s value priorities due to some societal tragedies. Verkasalo, Goodwin, and Bezmenova (2006) documented a change in adolescents’ and students’ values due to the WTC attacks on September 11, 2001. More precisely, they found the scores of respondents’ security values higher and the scores of stimulation values lower immediately after the WTC attacks in comparison to the period before the onslaught. However, shortly the ratings of these value categories returned closer again to the scores obtained before the tragic events in question.

Value change has also been linked to major societal processes such as economic development (Inglehart 1997). For example, Inglehart and Baker (2000), using data from the three waves of the *World Values Surveys*, which included 65 societies, found evidence of both massive cultural change and the persistence of distinctive cultural traditions. Economic development was associated with shifts away from absolute norms and values toward values that are increasingly *rational, tolerant, trusting, and participatory*.

In addition to economic development, values are subject to change also due to major socio-political transformations. In a sample comparison of the change in Turkish youngsters’ value orientation from 1989 to 1995, Çileli (2000) found that the value orientations had undergone major changes toward a more competitive

and individualistic orientation, leading the author to conclude that “values are modified to fit the changes the society experiences” (p. 297). A longitudinal study on values in Estonia with data sets from 1995 to 2005 also found remarkable changes in people’s value priorities over the decade (Vihalemm and Kalmus 2008). Values centered around the individual (such as *self-respect* and *self-realization*) as well as the importance of *clean environment* had significantly increased and universal and collectivist values such as *world at peace*, *inner harmony* and *honesty* had decreased among Estonians. Furthermore, a comparison of value rankings of younger and older adults in 2008 showed that the hierarchical structure of values had changed. *Self-direction* had become more important to the new generation, whereas conformity and tradition values less important (Tulviste, Kall, and Rämmer 2011).

Similarly, some researchers have found that value systems in rapidly transforming cultures are characterized by wide diversity and complexity. For instance, it has been shown in research on socialization that parents in such societies are simultaneously emphasizing the so-called traditional values and encouraging achievement and independence in their children (Tudge et al. 1999, Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007, Wang and Tamis-Lemonda 2003). In the same vein, in a comparison of Estonian, Finnish and Swedish mothers’ child-rearing goals (Tulviste, Mizera, De Geer, and Tryggvason 2007) the mothers from post-communist Estonia were found to be similar to their Finnish and Swedish counterparts in stressing the self-maximization values, while differing from others by their emphasis also on rather traditional child-rearing goals (e.g. conformity, obedience, politeness, hard work, etc.).

Not only large-scale socio-political transformations, but also the historical experience of living under a particular political regime has been argued to result in a specific set of values. Bardi and Schwartz (1996) found the universalism and security values ordinarily seen as motivational opposites to be compatible in eight East European countries, leading them to hypothesize that such configuration reflected these countries’ shared experience of living under the communist rule.

1.2. The Schwartz Value Survey

Schwartz (1992, 1994) formulated a value theory based on extensive cross-cultural data. He derived 10 universal and motivationally distinct types of values (Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, and Security) and an integrated structure that results from the conflicts and congruities among all the values. According to Schwartz (1994), these 10 types are organized along two orthogonal dimensions – self-enhancement versus self-transcendence and openness to change versus conservation. The dimension of self-enhancement versus self-transcendence contains Power and Achievement at one end; at the opposite end of the dimension are Universalism and Benevolence. The other dimension in the two-dimensional space is openness to change versus conservation, which includes the value types of Stimulation and Self-direction at one end. The value types of Security, Con-

formity, and Tradition are at the conservation end of the dimension. The value type of Hedonism relates both to the self-enhancement and openness-to-change poles. The Schwartz Value Survey (SVS, Schwartz and Bilsky 1987) comprises of 56 single values belonging to the 10 motivational types (examples of these values are given above in parentheses following the value types).

As to the structure of value change, Bardi and colleagues (Bardi, Lee, Hofmann-Towfigh, and Soutar 2009) conducted four longitudinal studies based on S. H. Schwartz's (1992) value theory and concluded that in case of intra-individual value change conflicting values change in opposite directions and compatible values change in the same direction. According to the authors, an increase in the importance of any one value is accompanied by slight increases in the importance of compatible values and by decreases in the importance of conflicting values.

1.3. The current study

The main aim of the current study was to determine the changes in five Schwartz's value types – Self-direction, Achievement, Conformity, Power, and Tradition – in Estonian senior high school students' samples during the period from 2000 to 2009. This period of time in Estonia was characterized by a growth in people's economic well-being as well as some changes in the political landscape – Estonia joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, which was seen as an important factor in raising the country's political and economic profile and a landmark in re-entering the Western democracy sphere of influence.

According to the general view, the extensive development of values takes place during adolescent years. By the time individuals reach adulthood, their basic values have largely taken shape, and it is difficult to change them (see Inglehart and Baker 2000). This makes it especially important to focus on values held by adolescents. Being aware of the value priorities of adolescents, teachers can more successively reach a consensual approach in value education. At the same time, values of adolescents as well as value change during adolescent years has thus far been understudied. In most studies young adults (often college students) are the youngest participants. Other authors emphasize the dynamic, changeable and historic nature of values (Bronfenbrenner 1972). A well-adapted person's value system is characterized by its adaptability to societal changes (Goodnow 1997). Socio-cultural perspective posits that value acquisition takes place in developmental contexts that are interrelated: in the family, peer group, school, neighborhood, community, and wider society. Researchers interested in value acquisition of children have demonstrated how it is shaped by the values their parents and peers hold (Bandura 1965, Bruner 1986). Larger socio-cultural context, in turn, has an impact on value acquisition and its maintenance in family and school context (Bronfenbrenner 1979). According to the socio-cultural view, as society changes, the values held by people also change.

Adolescence, in addition, has been identified by many researchers as a period during which people are more vulnerable to social change and more likely to adapt to the transformation of life circumstances (Schwartz, Bardi, and Bianchi 2000).

Therefore, if any major changes have taken place during this period of time between the two measurements, they are most likely to be reflected in the value ratings of the high school senior student respondents of our study. Given the economic growth during most part of the period of data collection and the socio-political influence of entering the European Union we expected the 'individualistic' values of Self-direction, Achievement and Power to have increased, and the contrasting 'collectivistic' values of Conformity and Tradition to have decreased over time.

Another interest of our study was to look at the possible gender differences in both samples' value priorities. The Schwartz Value Survey has been used on many occasions also in Finland, a country close to Estonia both geographically and culturally. Therefore, we expected the Estonian adolescents to be similar to their Finnish peers with boys valuing Power and Achievement higher than girls, as it was reported by Verkasalo, Tuomivaara and Lindeman (1997) as well as by Silfver (2007) in her more recent cross-cultural comparison of Finnish and Peruvian adolescents.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The samples of the study consisted altogether of 210 senior high school students studying in municipal high schools of the two largest towns in Estonia: Tallinn and Tartu. All students came from the middle-class background. The questionnaires were completed at school during a psychology class. Participation in the study was anonymous, strictly on voluntary basis and had no effect on the students' school grades. In 2000, 57 female and 42 male students completed the questionnaire. In 2009, 74 female and 37 male students completed the questionnaire. The age of the respondents varied from 17 to 20 years ($M = 18.2$, $SD = 0.60$).

Procedure

The participants were asked to complete a value preferences questionnaire based on a selection of culturally universal motivational value types identified by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987). The participants were asked to complete a value preferences questionnaire based on a selection of culturally universal motivational value types identified by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987). The selection was made on the basis of previous research findings showing that the Estonian mothers of preadolescents seem to emphasize in their child-rearing values simultaneously the modern Western values (such as self-direction and achievement) on the one hand, and the so-called traditional values (such as conformity) on the other hand (Tulviste, Mizera, and De Geer 2012, Tulviste, Mizera, De Geer, and Tryggvason 2007).

These five types were Power (consisting of single value items such as *authority, social power, wealth*), Achievement (*successful, ambitious, capable, influential*), Self-direction (*creativity, choosing one's own goals, curious, freedom-loving, independent*), Tradition (*devout, humble, moderate, respect for tradition, accepting one's portion in life*), and Conformity (*obedient, self-discipline, honoring parents and elders, politeness*). The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent these values were seen as guiding principles in their lives on a Likert-type scale from -1 ('opposed to my values') to 0 ('of no importance') to 5 ('of supreme importance').

3. Results

To account for the same respondent rating value items belonging to five different value types, a general linear model repeated measures MANOVA with Respondent's Rating as a repeated factor, and Cohort and Gender as between-subject factors revealed statistically significant effects of Cohort ($F(1, 205) = 17.2$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$), Respondent's Rating ($F(4, 820) = 351.0$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .63$), and Respondent's Rating X Gender interaction ($F(4, 820) = 3.1$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .01$).

3.1. Comparison of two cohorts

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations by Cohort, and the results of repeated-measures ANOVAs with Respondent's Rating as the repeated variable, and Cohort and Gender as between-subject factors. There were statistically significant differences (at $p < .05$) across cohorts between three value types – Self-direction, Conformity, and Tradition.

Table 1. The mean scores and standard deviations of the five value types by Cohort, and the results of repeated-measures ANOVAs with Respondent's Ratings as the repeated factor, and Cohort and Gender as between-subject factors

Value type	year 2000 ($n = 99$) $M(SD)$	year 2009 ($n = 110$) $M(SD)$	Results of ANOVAs for Cohort
Self-direction	3.64 (0.69)	3.95 (0.60)	$F(1, 205) = 7.90^*$
Achievement	3.45 (0.75)	3.66 (0.74)	ns ¹
Conformity	2.74 (0.91)	3.15 (0.90)	$F(1, 205) = 8.46^*$
Power	2.46 (0.96)	2.68 (0.87)	ns
Tradition	1.03 (0.85)	1.46 (1.01)	$F(1, 205) = 13.73^{**}$

Note. Superscripts mark significant differences as follows: ** $p < .001$; * $p < .01$; ns = statistically non-significant effect; ¹ = statistically significant Gender effect is reported in the text.

3.2. Gender differences

A two-way ANOVA also revealed a significant Gender effect for Achievement, $F(1, 205) = 4.03$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$, with men scoring significantly higher ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.71$) than women ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.81$).

3.3. Comparison of value hierarchies

As seen in Table 1, the value hierarchy (i.e. the rankings given to each type as indicated by the mean values) remained the same across the two measurements. Self-direction and Achievement were valued highest, and Tradition was valued lowest among the respondents both in 2000 and in 2009.

All value types were revealed to be significantly different from each other both by and across cohorts.

The respondent's age had a significant positive correlation only with the value type of Self-direction, $r = .24$, $p < .001$.

3.4. Intercorrelations between the value types

Intercorrelations between the value types by cohorts are shown in Table 2. In both cohorts, Achievement values correlated strongly and positively with Self-direction and Power values, and Conformity values with Tradition values. However, there were also some noteworthy changes from the 2000 cohort to the 2009 cohort – while there was no significant correlation between Self-direction and Conformity in 2000, there appeared to be a rather weak ($r = .25$), but statistically significant positive correlation between these value types in 2009. Also, the positive correlation between Achievement and Conformity had become statistically significant in 2009 ($r = .30$). Furthermore, the rather weak ($r = -.27$) but statistically significant negative correlation between Self-direction and Tradition values in the 2000 cohort had disappeared in the 2009 cohort.

Table 2. Intercorrelations between the five value types by cohort

Value type	year 2000 (n = 99)				
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Self-direction	–	.56*	–.06	.36*	–.27*
2. Achievement	.55*	–	.10	.62*	–.12
3. Conformity	.25*	.30*	–	.06	.48*
4. Power	.34*	.67*	.14	–	–.06
5. Tradition	.10	.00	.59*	.11	–
	year 2009 (n = 110)				

Note. * $p < .05$; the results of the two cohorts are situated as follows: year 2000 above the diagonal; year 2009 below the diagonal.

4. Discussion

As hypothesized, the results of the study showed that Self-direction had gained more importance over the period of ten years among the Estonian high school students. As to Achievement and Power, there were no changes in their relative importance.

Surprisingly enough, Conformity and Tradition – which we expected to decrease over time, reflecting the ‘Westernization’ of the value priorities in Estonia, had gained in importance. This result seems to be consistent with the results of a recent comparative study on the socialization values of Estonian, Russian-Estonian and Swedish mothers which showed the co-existence of values related to self-direction with those of traditional values similarly to previous studies on socialization goals in Estonia after regaining the independence (Tulviste, Mizera, and De Geer 2012). However, one should remember that despite their increase in importance over time, the value types of Conformity and Tradition were still rated significantly lower than Self-direction and Achievement in the students’ value hierarchy, which probably reflects the mothers’ different value orientation from the adolescents. While both cohorts of adolescents clearly favor values typical of an individualistic society, their mothers seem to favor the autonomous-relatedness values typical of many societies in transformation (for example, in Turkey – Kagitçibaşı 2005, and in Estonia – Tulviste, Kall, and Rämmer 2011). Already the teenagers of the first cohort (year 2000) have spent the years crucial to value system formation in a society exposed to the Western-style mass media.

Our result (three value types gaining more importance, none of the value types decreasing in importance) also contradicts the structure of value change proposed by Bardi and colleagues (Bardi, Lee, Hofmann-Towfigh, and Soutar 2009), according to which an increase in the importance of any one value is accompanied by slight increases in the importance of compatible values and by decreases in the importance of conflicting values. In our study, all value types showed an increase in the mean ratings over the decade between the two measurements. In present Estonia the public debate over *value education* (or *character education*, see e.g. Lockwood 2009) is heatedly discussed in the context of public school curricula and the search for desirable societal values is gaining popularity in mass media and public forums. Could it be that values in general are becoming more important to people, especially the Estonian adolescents who are the main focus of value socialization practices? Perhaps the increase in importance across the three value types measured in our study mirrors the fact that ‘values are becoming more valued’?

At the same time, the value hierarchy had remained the same from 2000 to 2009, which is perhaps an even stronger argument for value stability than the increase in certain value types is for value change. In other words, the findings of the present study seem to reflect rather the stability of the structure of value preferences than the unstable nature of values under the influence of societal changes. Furthermore, in a comparative study of Estonian and Swedish-Estonian

mothers of adolescent children (Tulviste and Kants 2001), the hierarchy of these five value types was exactly the same as in the present study.

In their bid for 'a similarities perspective', Schwartz and Bardi (2001) found a similar pattern of value hierarchies across cultures, with some values such as, for example, Self-direction, consistently more important, and others, for example, Power and Tradition, consistently least important. The European Social Survey data on responses to a 21-item version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire in 2008 also showed that young adults in Estonia ranked Self-direction as 2nd most important value type, and Achievement, Conformity, Tradition and Power at the bottom among the 10 original value types (Tulviste, Kall, and Rämmer 2011). In this respect, the Estonian mothers' value hierarchy in 2001 and the present study's adolescents' value hierarchy from 2000 to 2009 did not differ from their finding. Interestingly, the value types considered least important also by the Estonian senior high-school students – Power and Tradition – were among those that were found to correspond quite well with the behaviors expressed in the study of Bardi and Schwartz (2003).

At the same time, Achievement, which was rated as second most important value type in our study, was found by the authors to correspond to the actual behavior rather modestly, being according to the authors too highly moderated by the normative pressures to receive lower scores from the respondents (Bardi and Schwartz 2003). It seems likely that the authors' explanation to this phenomenon – Achievement having to do with values related to academic success such as *successful*, *ambitious*, *capable* – holds true, at least in the Estonian senior high-school students' case.

Looking at gender differences, we found that boys valued significantly higher achievement-related values. This is perhaps not surprising, as there are several studies which have found similar results. Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, and Rosnati (2011) found similar gender differences between the value preferences of Italian adolescents in their responses to the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz et al. 2001) – the boys seemed to favor the Achievement values more than the girls. Also, in a large comparative research involving 70 countries, Schwartz and Rubel (2005) found that men generally tended to value types such as Power, Achievement, and Self-direction more than women. On the other hand, in a comparative study on value priorities of British and North American students, Ryckman and Houston (2003) found women from both countries placing greater importance on Achievement than men. Clearly, the value priorities vary quite greatly across cultures.

The intercorrelations between value types were in many aspects similar to those found in the earlier research – for example, the high positive correlation between Conformity and Tradition found by Ryckman, Libby, van den Borne, Gold, and Lindner (1997) and Ryckman and Houston (2003). However, more interesting were the changes that had taken place between the two measurements. The positive correlation between Self-direction and Conformity value types that appeared in the 2009 cohort was perhaps not very impressive at $r = .25$, but nevertheless noteworthy. These two value types are traditionally seen as representing polar opposites

of the underlying dimensions in the theoretical value model (Schwartz 1992). However, research that has been conducted in Estonia has shown that in this particular society, the two value types seem to go hand-in-hand, being equally important in socialization beliefs and practices (Tulviste, Mizera, and De Geer 2012, Tulviste, Mizera, De Geer, and Tryggvason 2007). Furthermore, it seems quite likely that these results reflect to some extent also the specific school environment where the respondents filled in the questionnaire, where it is equally important to succeed academically, while behaving in a polite and disciplined manner.

In conclusion, the results of the present study appeared to confirm rather the notion of relative value stability, as reflected in the consistence of value hierarchy of Estonian high school senior students from 2000 to 2009. The implications of these findings in the school context are twofold – on the one hand, it is perhaps reassuring to know that the values instilled in the children from early on are not likely to change easily, e.g. under the influence of peers. On the other hand, the achievement-related values ranking persistently (both in 2000 and in 2009) highly in Estonian children have been found to correlate negatively with empathy (Balliet, Joireman, Daniels, and George-Falvy 2008). While the issue of prosocial behavior gains momentum at schools in Estonia (the anti-bullying movement, student-student tutoring, etc.), it is clear that a lot of work needs to be done in order to bring forth the desired shift in the values underlying such behaviors.

The limitations of the study – small sample sizes and the exclusion of some value types – do not allow for broad generalizations. However, taking into account that the samples consisted of adolescents, who are still in the process of forming their world views and whose value preferences may not yet have crystallized, it is even more evident that the argument for value stability is supported by our findings.

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