

THINKING STYLES AND MORAL VALUES IN YOUTH

Claudia SĂLCEANU¹

Abstract: *Moral values and thinking styles are two variables that help people in making decisions, in solving problems and in maintaining harmony between each other. We tried to discover how youth perceive moral values, we discovered significant differences between male and female concerning moral values and we discovered significant differences between moral values based on different thinking styles. We used Rockeach Value Survey (1973) and Thinking Styles Inventory by Sternberg and Wagner (1992) to question 118 participants. Conclusions of the study are discussed.*

Key words: *thinking styles, moral values, youth.*

1. Introduction

Our research operates with two important aspects of human development: moral values and thinking styles, which we feel important to define.

The Oxford Dictionary (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>) defines values as principles or standards of behavior; one's judgement of what is important in life.

Oyserman (2001) states that at the individual level, values are internalized social representations and sociocultural goals that people appeal to as the justifications for their actions. However, individuals in a society are likely to differ in the relative importance assigned to a particular value. Values, to which individuals feel they owe an allegiance as members of a particular group or society are seen as the glue that makes social life possible within groups.

Oyserman (2001) explains that values contain cognitive and affective elements and have a selective or directional quality. Though values are not actions themselves, nor specific checklists of what to do and when, they are often evoked as reasons for an action.

Values can also be defines as the qualities of things, actions, ideas, phenomena to correspond to social necessities and ideals generated by those necessities or as the sum of qualities which add importance to an object, a human being, a phenomenon (Coteanu, Seche & Seche, 1996).

Our research is based on the work of Rokeach about general value systems. "A value system is an organized set of preferential standards that are used in making selections of objects and actions, resolving conflicts, invoking social sanctions, and coping with needs or claims for social and psychological defenses of choices made or proposed" (Williams, 1979, p. 20).

¹ Ovidius University of Constanţa, claudiasalceanu@yahoo.com

Rokeach categorized values into two major types. He speaks about *instrumental values* and *terminal values*. The instrumental values are also subcategorized in *moral values* (which refer to maintaining interpersonal relationships) and *competence values* (which refer to personal characteristics), (Rokeach, 1973, as cited in Melin, Nordqvist and Sharma, 2014).

Terminal values refer to desirable “end-states of existence” or outcomes and they are also two kinds indicated by the author: *personal values* (which include preferred personal outcomes) and *social values* (which include preferred group or societal outcomes), (Rokeach, 1973, as cited in Melin *et al.*, 2014).

The second important aspect of our research involves the concept of thinking styles. Zhang (2002, p.180) considers that thinking styles, as an individual-difference variable, may vary depending on the stylistic demands of a given situation and, in addition, they are partially socialized, which suggests that they can be modified.

Although thinking styles are popularly viewed as being value free, Kogan (1989, as cited in Zhang, 2002) has conducted a significant research in this domain to prove otherwise.

Our research is grounded in Sternberg's theory about thinking styles. Sternberg (1988, 1997) proposed the theory of mental self-government. The basic assumption is that people, like societies, govern themselves and establish systems and organizations for this governance. Sternberg proposed 13 thinking styles, which fall under five dimensions of mental self-governance (Albaili, 2007): functions - people have different styles for focusing on different functions or tasks – legislative, executive and judicial styles; levels - individuals may vary in terms of their concern for detail – local and global styles; leanings - people may prefer tasks that require them to go beyond existing rules and structures and tasks that are aimed at effecting substantial change – liberal and conservative styles; forms - various ways in which people govern themselves: monarchic, hierarchic, oligarchic and anarchic styles; scope - preference for tasks that require working independently of other people or in interaction with others – internal and external styles.

Zhang (2002) argues that the theory of mental self-government has been operationalized through a few inventories, including the Thinking Styles Inventory (by Sternberg and Wagner, 1992). Research has been conducted that has demonstrated both the internal and external validity as well as the reliability of these inventories. Researchers have examined the nature of thinking styles described in Sternberg's theory by testing the thinking styles against a number of constructs that are believed to be associated with the thinking style construct. Zhang (2002) presents a brief summary of the findings: Biggs (1987, 1992) – learning approaches and thinking styles; Holland (1973, 1994) – personality types and thinking styles; Coopersmith (1981) – self-esteem and thinking styles.

2. Research Subject Field and Methods

The current study involves 118 participants, of which 51 young men and 67 young women. All participants are between 24 and 35 years of age: 64 participants between 24 and 27 years, 29 participants between 28 and 32 years and 25 participants between 33 and 35 years. All participants are residents of the city of Constanţa.

We used Rokeach Value Survey (1973) and Thinking Styles Inventory by Sternberg & Wagner (1992). The evaluation was carried out during October-June 2014.

3. Objectives

The objectives we set out are: (1) Offering an overview of today's youth perception of moral values; (2) Discovering the existence of significant differences between male and female young people regarding their moral values systems; (3) Discovering the existence of significant differences between participants who find themselves in a certain stage of development; (4) Distinguishing the differences between the youth's classification of moral values due to the predominance of a certain thinking style.

4. Hypotheses

The hypotheses we set out are: (1) We presume that there are significant differences between male and female young people regarding their perception on moral values; (2) We presume that there are significant differences between young people's perception of moral values due to their development stage; and (3) We presume that there are significant differences between young people's thinking styles and their classification of moral values.

5. Findings and Results

For **the first objective** of our study we used the mean rank of all participants and we established the hierarchies of terminal and instrumental values. The lowest mean rank is the most important value, which was ranked first by the participants.

Regarding terminal values, the choices are: health (4.44), family security (7.14), inner harmony (7.54), self-respect (7.83), freedom (8.09), wisdom (8.22), true friendship (8.24), a comfortable life (8.60), equality (9.58), mature love (9.74), social recognition (10.14), pleasure (10.18), a sense of accomplishment (10.29), an exciting life (10.92), a world at peace (11.14), a world of beauty (12.08), salvation (12.19) and national security (14.41).

We live in society with lots of diseases and health problems caused by viruses, unhealthy food, chemicals, etc. and today's young people have to face different kind of illnesses which maybe didn't affect other generations as much. Furthermore, media is full of shows and information about how to stay healthy and to feel good with one's self, so health (*physical and mental well-being*) is the most important terminal value.

The post-Communist generation didn't experienced all the inconveniences of a war situation or the fears that an attack on one's country would imply, so having no such experiences leads toward choosing national security (*protection from attack*) as the least important terminal value.

Regarding instrumental values, the choices are: ambitious (7.08), responsible (7.58), courageous (7.69), capable (7.95), loving (7.96), honest (8.37), clean (8.54), loyal (9.37), intellectual (9.41), broad minded (9.86), self controlled (9.92), imaginative (10.18), polite (10.25), independent (10.31), logical (10.34), forgiving (10.64), helpful (11.48) and obedient (13.98).

The most important instrumental value is ambition (*hardworking and aspiring*), explainable by the fact that achievement in today's society implies a lot of work, competence, knowledge and specific goals. The least important instrumental value is obedience which usually post-adolescents and youth reject, due to the characteristics of this stage in development, full of attempts to win one's independence.

The second objective is to discover the existence of significant differences between male and female young people regarding their moral values systems.

We used Mann-Whitney test for independent samples to compare mean rank for both terminal and instrumental values, using gender as grouping variable (1=female, 2=male).

While young men value freedom (*independence and free choice*) more than young women (mean rank 1=68.18, mean rank 2=48.10, $U=1127.00$, $p=.002$), young women value family security (*taking care of loved ones*) more than young men (mean rank 1=54.09, mean rank 2=66.61, $U=1346.00$, $p=.048$).

Due to the characteristics of the modern society, young men are oriented more and more toward social, spiritual and productive engagement. They try to gain the social status of an adult and economic independence. Verza & Verza (2000) think that this is part of what gives youth its specificity.

Ann Birch (2000) believes that one of the guiding lines in human development during youth is the manifestation of protection attitudes, which, in conjunction with gender stereotypes, explains the difference between male and female participants on the family security terminal value.

It is also interesting the fact that, as Rokeach argues, both “family security” and “freedom” are terminal social values. Youth is, on the other hand, that stage in human development when the social identity may be in expansion, while interpersonal relationships grow, at work, with friends, at home.

As far as the instrumental values are concerned, polite (*courteous and well-mannered*), (mean rank 1=65.87, mean rank 2=51.14, $U=1282.00$, $p=.02$), and clean (*neat and tidy*), (mean rank 1=65.21, mean rank 2=52.00, $U=1326.00$, $p=.037$) are valued more by young men.

Being polite is a matter of etiquette. It's about respect, and being considerate of people's feelings, culture and values. Being polite is also a good way to make friends. And one of the dominant characteristics of this stage of development is the strengthening of personal and formal relationships.

Being clean is another important aspect. Today's world of fashion emphasizes the importance of this domain in men's everyday life. More and more young men fall under the umbrella of the “metrosexual” look. “Metrosexual” is a man with a strong sense of aesthetics, preoccupied by his own image, especially in the field of fashion. He has an extensive care for his own person and an obsession of quality for every thing that surrounds him.

The third objective of the research is discovering the existence of significant differences between participants who find themselves in a certain stage of development.

We split the sample in 3 groups, based on the development stages proposed by Şchiopu & Verza (1997). The samples we've obtained have 64 participants between 24 and 27 years (group no. 1), 29 participants between 28 and 32 years (group no. 2) and 25 participants between 33 and 35 years (group no. 3).

Regarding terminal values hierarchy, we found significant differences as Table 1 shows:

Table 1
Significant differences for terminal values between samples based on age criteria

	Inner harmony	Salvation	Self-respect
Mean rank 1	59.40	62.79	54.30
Mean rank 2	70.17	43.29	75.47
Mean rank 3	47.38	69.88	54.30
Chi-Square	5.997	9.500	8.426
Asymp. Sig.	.050	.009	.015

Participants between 33 and 35 years of age value inner harmony (*freedom from inner conflict*) more than the others. It is a stage of development in which many of the wishes regarding family life, a space for living or a job are solved. It's a time to build a favorable climate for children and self.

Participants between 28 and 32 years of age value salvation (*saved; eternal life*) more than the others and participants between 24-27 and 33-35 years of age value self-respect (*self-esteem*) equally. Youth is the stage of development in which self-identity is formed, and self-esteem is based also on personal, social and professional achievements.

The final objective is to distinguish the differences between the youth's classification of moral values due to the predominance of a certain thinking style. We used Kruskal-Wallis test for more than 2 independent samples and Mann-Whitney U test for 2 independent samples and we confirmed the third hypothesis of the study.

While we found no significant differences between legislative (N=64), executive (N=48) and judicial (N=30) thinking people concerning their hierarchy of terminal values, we discovered significant differences regarding imaginative (*daring and creative*), for legislative thinking people (Chi square=8.681, $p=.013$) and responsible (*dependable and reliable*), for executive thinking people (Chi square=7.627, $p=.022$) as instrumental values. Legislative thinking people prefer tasks that require using creative strategies and generating new approaches and solutions (Albaili, 2007) and they use their instrumental values to achieve those goals. People who have an Executive style are more concerned with the proper implementation of tasks within a set of guidelines and therefore appreciate responsibility more than the others.

For monarchic (N=14), hierarchic (N=87), oligarchic (N=12) and anarchic (N=21) thinking people, we discovered significant differences regarding terminal value an exciting life (*a stimulating, active life*), (Chi square=7.826, $p=.050$). People who have a Monarchic style like to do one thing at a time, devoting to it almost all energy and resources (Albaili, 2007). They like to be involved in projects, to be busy. We found no significant differences regarding the instrumental values.

Global (N=56) and local (N=83) thinking people rank differently true friendship (*close companionship*) as terminal value. Mann-Whitney test is 1782.500, accepted for $p=.020$. Regarding instrumental values, responsibility is valued more by global thinking people. Mann-Whitney test is 1864.50, accepted for $p=.048$. People who have a Global style like to deal with generalities and abstractions. This kind of activities is usually easier to solve by team work and through techniques like brainstorming, which means to generate a large number of ideas to solve a problem. People need to be dependable and reliable in order to solve a certain problem.

Internal (N=65) and external (N=64) thinking people rank differently family security (*taking care of loved ones*) as terminal value. Mann-Whitney test is 1580.00, accepted for $p=.018$. This is a task that requires them to work along, focus inward and be self-sufficient. Regarding instrumental values, honesty and responsibility are ranked significantly different. External thinking people like responsibility (U=1637.50, $p=.037$) and honesty (U=1549.00, $p=.012$) more than the others. People who have an external style like to work with others, to focus outward and to be inter-independent. This means that being dependable and reliable, on one side, and sincere and truthful, on the other, is a key trait that ensures success.

Conservative (N=78) and liberal (N=46) thinking people value health differently. Conservative people appreciate it more (U=1352.00, $p=.019$) because they usually prefer familiar tasks, that require the application of and adherence to existing rules and structures (Albaili, 2007:6). They do not take chances, they are careful and cautious in every aspect of their lives. Regarding instrumental values, these two thinking styles ranked differently

logical (*consistent, rational*) and honest (*sincere and truthful*). While conservative thinking people value honesty more ($U=1402.00$, $p=.042$), liberal people value logic ($U=1366.50$, $p=.027$). Liberal individuals prefer tasks that require them to go beyond existing rules and structures, and tasks that are aimed at effecting substantial change (Albaili, 2007). These are situations in which logic, analysis, synthesis, generalization and reasoning are important variables in ensuring success in problem-solving.

According to the theory of mental self-government, people vary in their relative preferences for these styles and may use more than one style as well as flexibly switch from one to another as they adapt to changing task requirements. The stylistic preferences are also viewed as being socialized and as functions of one's interactions within the sociocultural environment (Sternberg, 1988, 1997, as cited in Albaili, 2007).

6. Conclusions

Taken together, the results clearly confirm the existence of differences between thinking styles and moral value ranking. Although these moral systems may suffer changes in time, due to the constant development and transformation of adolescent's personality and identity, this remains a subject of interest, to be studied furthermore.

Other information may be obtained from the address: claudiasalceanu@yahoo.com

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