

## Value Change and Post-modernism: A Preliminary Study of a German Sample

Yolanda Alonso, F Rosa Jiménez-López, Gustavo García-Vargas, Jesús Gil Roales-Nieto

*Universidad de Almería, España*

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the reporting of personal values in a sample of German participants through means of a questionnaire using open questions. The sample consisted of a total of 255 participants (60% female and 40% male) with an age range of between 18 and 100 years old. The participants indicated their personal values openly and in order of priority. The results showed that participants primarily considered personal values to be those related to basic life concerns (e.g. *family, friendship, health*) and to social relations (e.g. *honesty, reliability, empathy*). A significant trend was found among middle-age participants (31-60 years old) to report values of a political-social nature, whilst older generations (61+ years old) tended to give less importance to values related to social relations. The results were discussed making reference to the socio-cultural change related to post-modernism and were compared and contrasted with the results of major value surveys obtained in sociological studies.

*Key words:* personal values, value change, post-modernism.

This study is part of an extensive project investigating the relationship between social change and personal change in the shaping of personality in the post-modern world, carried out in different European and American countries (Jiménez-López, Roales-Nieto, García-Vargas, Vallejo, Lorente, & Granados, under review; Jiménez-López, Roales-Nieto, Vallejo, & Preciado, under review; Jiménez-López, Segura, Moreno, & Lorente-Molina, 2012; Roales-Nieto, 2009; Roales-Nieto, Preciado, Malespín, & Jiménez-López, 2013a, b; Roales-Nieto & Segura, 2010). The aim of this project is to verify the psychological scope of the change in values predicted by the theory of intergenerational value change (TCIV- Abramson & Inglehart, 1992; Inglehart, 1977, 1997) in population samples from different countries with different cultural characteristics, using a methodology allowing participants to report personal values whilst being affected by social desirability to the minimum possible extent.

There is a broad consensus in the fields of philosophy, social psychology and sociology regarding the notable change in values in countries industrialised since the 1960s-1970s. From a social point of view, this change is related to the transition from the *modern world*, which characterised our society in the last two centuries, to *post-modernism* (e.g. Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1998; Giddens, 1990; Inglehart, 1977, 1997; Inglehart & Klingemann, 1996; Lipovetski, 2006; Tranter & Western, 2010). This evolution has taken place simultaneously with that of historical determining factors which have dramatically transformed our society over the past 50 years, and are primarily related

\* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Dr. Yolanda Alonso, Departamento de Psicología, Universidad de Almería, 04120 Almería, Spain. Email: yalonso@ual.es. Agradecimientos: este estudio estuvo financiado por el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia de España, Plan Nacional I+D+I, proyecto SEJ2005-05844/PSIC.

to economic development, an increase in well-being and security, urbanisation and the expansion of the media. Widespread opinion maintains that these circumstances have contributed to a transition from modern values (positivist, secular-rational) towards post-modern ones (related to self-expression and personal development) or from the value of physical and material security to the value of psychological well-being and personal autonomy (Abramson & Inglehart, 1992; Inglehart, 1977; Inglehart & Klingemann, 1996; Tranter & Western, 2010).

The profile of personal values which make up a society and its tendency for change has been extensively studied since the 1960s. Drawing on the intergenerational change theory, this shift in values –referred to by Inglehart (1977) as the *silent revolution*– has been interpreted as a substitution of materialistic values for post-materialistic values as those which drive our lives. However, other authors have questioned this theory and the value categories deriving from it, arguing that it is not a substitution which can be seen but a co-existence of values (for example Jiménez-López *et al.*, under review; Klages 1985, 1988; Klein & Pötschke 2000; Roales-Nieto, 2009; Roales-Nieto & Segura, 2010; Roales-Nieto *et al.*, 2013a,b).

The empirical data on which social change theories are based has been obtained from extensive, regular surveys carried out in various countries (mainly the *World Value Survey* and *Eurobarometer* but also the *Schwartz Value Survey* and the *Speyerer Werteforschung*). The tools used to gather information in these surveys generally consist in structured interviews in the format of closed-answer questionnaires. That is to say, the participants must choose or score their own values from a list of given values or stated value indicators (for example Schmidt, Bamberg, Davidov, Herrmann, & Schwartz, 2007); these surveys are based on the belief that all participant value ideas can be found on said lists.

With the aim of exploring if the participants' responses fit with the value index offered by said lists, Roales-Nieto (2003) developed a questionnaire with open questions which obtained information about what participants considered to be personal values and what values they felt were guiding factors for other people, without having to keep within a given list of possibilities. Furthermore, with the objective of avoiding possible bias related to social desirability, the questionnaire was carried out anonymously and in writing.

During the last few years, the benefits of using this process for assessing values have been demonstrated through various studies carried out using samples of the general Spanish population (for example Roales-Nieto, 2009; Roales-Nieto & Segura, 2010), samples of university students (Jiménez-López *et al.*, 2012), samples of nursing students and professionals (Jiménez-López, 2011; Jiménez-López, *et al.*, under review) and with Hispanic, New York city residents (Roales-Nieto *et al.*, 2013a, b). This procedure seems to offer certain advantages over traditional methods either ranking (ordering a list of given values by importance) or rating (giving separate valuations of values from a given list), which predetermine the values participants report on (Inglehart & Klingemann, 1996; see also Klein, Dülmer, Ohr, Quandt, & Rosar, 2004). However, the extent of this difference needs to be clearly determined by studies which directly compare the results obtained through the different procedures.

Along these lines, this article presents an initial examination of the use of this methodology in assessing personal values in a sample of the German population, in an attempt to expand existing data about the typical value profiles for different generations. It is intended, therefore, to be an empirical and descriptive pilot study, aimed at ascertaining which personal values are reported by participants and what differences can be seen in the reporting of values between people of different ages.

## METHOD

### *Design and Participants*

This study follows an exploratory, transversal-analytical and correlational design (Kelsey, Thompson, & Evans, 1986). A random sample of participants was selected from inhabitants of the German areas of Breisgau, The Black Forest (in Baden-Württemberg) and Berlin. A total of 255 people took part in the study (153 women, 102 men). In line with the research's main objective, the sample was divided into three age groups: Young People group (YG,  $n=92$ , age range 18-30 years old); Adult group (AG,  $n=97$ , age range 31-60 years old); and Senior group (SG,  $n=66$ , over 61 years old).

### *Instrument and measures*

A German version of the RPV (*Report of Personal Values*) questionnaire, originally designed by Roales-Nieto (2003) was used for data collection. This is a questionnaire in which participants can freely write up to ten values in order of priority (a detailed description of the tool can be found in Roales-Nieto & Segura, 2010). Following general and socio-demographic data, the questionnaire is divided into four sections. Only Section A, which refers to own personal values, was considered in this study (in sections B, C and D, the same type of information is sought, but referring to what values participants consider to be characteristic of the majority of people in their age range and in different generations). Participants received the following instructions in section A:

"Think of the MOST IMPORTANT PERSONAL VALUES that are driving your life. Create a list of these values where #1 is your most important value, #2 is your second most important until you reach a maximum of 10 values".

### *Procedure*

Questionnaires were handed out in cafes and various free-time spaces to people who participated voluntarily. In every case, before giving the questionnaire to the participant, a brief introduction was given, emphasising the necessity of the answers being honest and guaranteeing total confidentiality of data. The participants completed the questionnaire privately and without a time limit. To guarantee anonymity, the questionnaires were accompanied by an envelope into which the participants placed said questionnaire once finished. The envelope was then sealed and given back to the person who had initially handed it to them.

### Data analysis

Contingency tables with Pearson's  $\chi^2$  were used to identify statistically significant differences between the values reported by the different age groups. To better detect the magnitude and direction of differences in the reported values, standardised residuals (SRs) were used. This measure indicated if each value category was mentioned more or less frequently than expected. The SPSS.20 statistical package for Mac was used for the analysis.

## RESULTS

The sample's socio-demographic data is shown in Table 1. With regard to the variable of gender, all groups had a higher number of females than males. In spite of being a small sample, the distribution of civil state, level of education and social class variables does not differ significantly from the general population.

In the reporting of values indicated by the participants, some were analysed together due to their semantic similarity. Therefore, for example, "God", "belief in God", "faith in God" or "devotion" were all categorised as *religious* values. The value *honesty* also included "frankness"; friendship included "friends", etc. The 30 most frequently mentioned

Table 1. Socio-demographic distribution of the three groups of participants.

		Young Group N= 92	Adult Group N= 97	Senior Group N= 66
Sex	Male	44%	41%	33%
	Female	56%	59%	66%
Edad	Average	24	46	73
	Range	18-30	31-60	>60
Marital status	Single	97%	28%	7%
	Married/in Relationship	12%	56%	41%
	Separated/Divorced	1%	17%	23%
	Widowed	0	1%	29%
Educational level	Elementary	1%	4%	18%
	Middel	65%	2%	1,50%
	Vocational Education	13%	27%	48%
	Graduate	18%	61%	29%
	Master/Doctorate	2%	6%	3%
Social status	Medium-low	11%	8%	3%
	Medium	57%	71%	62%
	Medium-high	32%	21%	34,50%

values, and those used for analysis, can be seen in Table 2. Some examples of items which were not considered due to appearing very infrequently were: “environment”, “intellectuality”, “sex”, “order”, “tradition”, “cleanliness”, “tranquillity”, “punctuality”, “ambition”, “home”, “acknowledgement”, “humour”, “luxuries” and “patience”.

From the descriptive analysis of the data shown in Table 2, significant differences between the groups were found in relation to the frequency of mentioning values. Young people reported the values of *honesty*, *family*, *friends*, *love*, *loyalty*, *work*, *fun*, *success* and *education* more frequently than the other groups. For all of these values, the mentioning frequency was distributed from most to least between the youngest to the oldest participants, presenting middling frequencies in the adult group. The senior group

Table 2. Percentages of most frequently mentioned values by each age group.

YG (18-30)	%	AG (31-60)	%	SG (>61)	%
Honesty	51	Honesty	45	Health	50
Family	46	Health	41	Friendship	36
Friendship	43	Family	38	Family	35
Love	42	Friendship	37	Honesty	33
Loyalty	27	Love	37	Religion	27
Money	26	Justice	35	Empathy	24
Reliability	26	Tolerance	35	Money	23
Health	24	Safety	31	Justice	20
Empathy	24	Reliability	31	Reliability	20
Tolerance	24	Empathy	30	Safety	18
Justice	21	Respect	27	Happiness	18
Job	21	Liberty	25	Peace	17
Respect	21	Peace	25	Love	15
Fun	20	Confidence	21	Confidence	15
Confidence	17	Job	20	Loyalty	11
Liberty	16	Loyalty	16	Fun	9
Success	15	Fun	15	Liberty	9
Safety	11	Religion	14	Education	9
Education	11	Happiness	14	Tolerance	8
Happiness	10	Money	11	Job	8
Religion	9	Commitment	11	Respect	5
Commitment	9	Solidarity	10	Individuality	5
Politeness	9	Individuality	9	Politeness	5
Peace	7	Education	9	Success	3
Individuality	7	Success	5	Commitment	3
Discipline	5	Politeness	5	Solidarity	3
Solidarity	3	Self-improvt.	3	Discipline	2
Self-improvt.	3	Discipline	3	Dignity	2
Consumption	3	Dignity	1		
Dignity	1				

reported the values of *health*, *religion* and *happiness* with more frequency than the young people and adult groups. In these cases, the downward trend was also homogenous, from oldest to youngest, with intermediate scores in the adult group. In this group (AG), the values of *justice*, *tolerance*, *security*, *reliability*, *empathy*, *respect*, *liberty*, *peace*, *trust*, *commitment* and *solidarity* were most frequently reported. In this case, the differences with the other age groups were variable, sometimes showing more similarity to the senior group (as is the case with *security* and *peace*), and on other occasions, with the young people group. The scarce mention of values such as *individualism*, *personal development* and *dignity* in all groups should be noted.

As well as the descriptive evaluation of the values directly expressed by the participants, for the statistical analysis, these values were grouped into categories following the value lexicon construction method developed by Bardi, Calogero, and Mullen (2008), the results of which are displayed in table 3.

The frequency distribution of categories reported by the different groups is shown in figure 1. The senior group displays a higher frequency for the value categories of *health*, *religion* and *well-being*. In the adult group, *ethical*, *universal*, *solidarity/tolerance* and *social order* value categories stand out, and in the young people group, the categories of *social relations*, *familism*, *money*, *individualist*, *affective*, *hedonistic* and *work-related* values are highlighted.

Pearson's standardised residuals analysis shows the value categories for each age group having a different frequency to what was expected. As can be seen in table 4, the young people group scores significantly higher than expected in *affective* and *money* values, and lower in those related to *health*, *religion* and *social order*. The adult group scores higher than expected in *social order*, *solidarity* and *universal* values, while it scores lower in those related to *money*. With regard to the senior group, it scores

Table 3. Value categories resulting from the universe of replies given by participants

Categories	Direct results included
Ethical values	Respect, loyalty, honesty, reliability, commitment.
Familism values	Family.
Religion values	Religion.
Job and professional values	Job.
Social order values	Security/safety, discipline.
Affective values	Love.
Social relationship values	Friendship, politeness, confidence.
Individualism values	Self-improvement, success, training/education, individualism, dignity.
Health values	Health.
Solidarity and tolerance values	Tolerance, empathy, solidarity.
Hedonism values	Fun.
Welfare values	Happiness, well-being.
Universal values	Justice, liberty, peace.
Money values	Money, consumption.

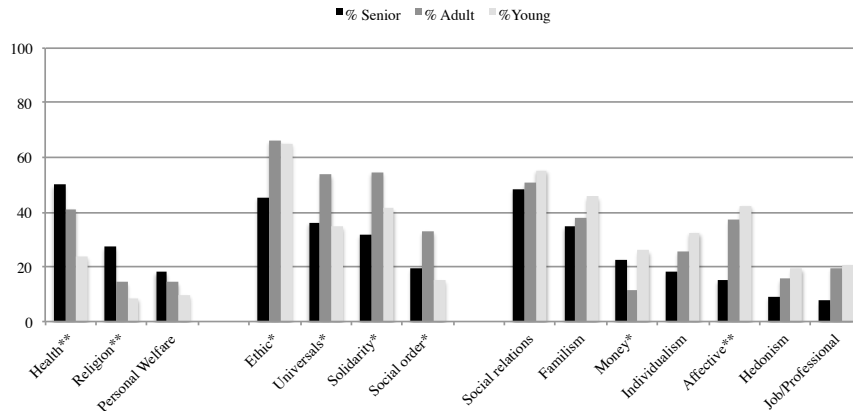


Figure 1. Value profiles showed by the three age groups, indicating the statistically significant differences (\*\*=  $p < .01$ ; \*=  $p < .05$ ).

Table 4. Significant differences in the reported values between age groups

	$\chi^2$ Pearson	$p$	SR		
			YG	AG	SG
Affective values	13.839	.001	+2.3		-3.6
Health values	12.250	.002	-3.3		+2.5
Religion values	10.214	.006	-2.3		+3.0
Social order values	8.979	.011	-2.3	+2.9	
Money values	7.064	.029	+2.0	-2.0	
Universal values	8.162	.017		+2.9	
Solidarity values	8.705	.013		+2.7	-2.3
Ethical values	8.318	.016			-2.9

Notes: SR= Standardized residuals; YG= Young group (age 18-30); AG= Adult group (31-60); SG= Senior group (>61)

higher than expected in *health* and *religion*, and lower in *affective*, *solidarity* and *ethical* values. It is important to note that no significant difference was found between the three age groups for values related to *family*, *work*, *social relations* or *personal welfare*, nor *hedonistic* or *individualistic* values.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined values which were solicited employing an open format and were given by participants who regarded them as those which drive their life. The type of instrument used is unusual in the field of value assessment; it follows a line of research which has revealed important data in recent years (Jiménez-López, 2011; Jiménez-López, *et al.*, 2012; Roales-Nieto 2009; Roales-Nieto & Segura, 2010; Roales-Nieto *et al.*, 2013a,b).

Given the open format of the questionnaire and its instructions, the first thing which should be considered are those values which were spontaneously reported with the highest frequency as being personal values –those related to basic life parameters such as family, health, friendship or attitudes which enable co-existence (above all, the value of *honesty*). The analysis of the differences between age groups showed a clear tendency in the adult group to mention political and social values as being important –the values which in our categorisation fall under the categories of ethical, universal, solidarity and social order values. The older participants showed a significant tendency to place importance on values related to *health* and *religion*, whilst regarding those related to *ethics* and *solidarity* to be considerably less important than the young and middle-aged participants. There were no differences found between the three age groups in relation to the most basic values (those related to family, the social network or work), nor *individualism* values.

From an intergenerational value change perspective (from materialist to post-materialist values), it could be expected that values related to *ethics*, *work*, *social order*, *money* or *individualism* –those characteristic of a materialist nature– would appear most among the older generations. However, this trend was not seen in our sample. The values which the adult group gave significantly more importance to were a mix of typically modern values (such as those related to social order) and typically post-modern values (*universal* and *solidarity* values). Values related with money and consumption –considered to be materialist values– were significantly mentioned by the younger age group with the highest frequency, whilst simultaneously mentioning other materialist values such ones related to social order significantly less. This could all be understood in terms of diminishing the importance of the supposed homogeneity of social change. Inglehart's hypothesis (Abramson & Inglehart, 1992) of substituting materialist values for post-materialist values is not, therefore, confirmed by this data, which concurs more with the notion of value co-occurrence (known as “value synthesis”, Klages, 2001, 2006; Klein & Pötschke, 2000; Roßteutscher, 2004). It could be deduced that the participants live without any apparent conflict, having personal values from both backgrounds. Studies which used the same instrument to gather data in a sample of Hispanic people resident in the USA did not confirm the value substitution theory either (Roales-Nieto *et al.*, 2013a).

In any case, a higher prevalence of post-materialist values was not found among the younger participants in our study. The values which differed significantly between the younger and senior age groups were those related to health and affection (mainly mentioned by older participants and younger participants respectively), which could be understood in terms of life necessities or concerns related with age, and consequently independent of possible social changes.

In addition to these values, which saw different valuations due to age, it is religion which showed one of the clearest differences between the three age groups. The adult group and young people group participants were those which mentioned more values of idealistic or ethical content, among which it would be consistent to find *religious* values. It would be expected, therefore, that in these groups, religion would score highly. *Universal* values (justice, peace, liberty) not only share their ethical character



with *religious* values, but also the fact of being controlled through distant authorities of a more judicial nature than a psychological one (whether the judges are ecclesiastical or secular). What differentiates *universal* values from *religious* values is the rational character of the former. Religion also represents abstract values with an ethical nature; however, they are not based on reason but on dogmas or on authority, and ultimately on more irrational beliefs. On the other hand, the values which we have categorised as *ethical* (respect, honesty, reliability), despite sharing a moral aspect with the others, find their validation through everyday situations related to personal relationships.

Another question stemming from this study is the concept of “personal value” itself. Although many responses obtained in the study coincided with what traditionally would be considered as values, the concept of value deduced from the open format which distinguished our questionnaire was revealed to be quite idiosyncratic. The wide range of responses led to difficulties in assessing the data, made worthwhile, in our view, by the richness of the information obtained. An open assessment of values appears to be an important alternative which should be considered in future research.

It is undeniable that data collection instruments coincide significantly with the information obtained by them. Comparing our results with those of other investigations, we found that of the main values we obtained (30 in total), only seven (happiness, tolerance, freedom, justice, honesty and health as well as spirituality if we liken it to our religion) coincided with the 40 values in Schwartz’s group (Ros & Schwartz 1995; Schwartz & Bilsky 1987, 1990) and something similar occurred with the 36 values in the Rokeach Value Survey (Debats & Bartelds 2005). If we compare them with those from recognised surveys in Germany (for example, Gensicke 1998), only about half of them coincide. Considering the exploratory study which it is, we do not aim to generalise our results nor compare them with those of other studies with a more solid methodology, but we do consider it justified to draw attention to the significant differences that we have stated. In terms of future research, we propose comparative studies to be conducted within the same population in which data would be obtained via questionnaires which gather information using both open-ended and closed questions simultaneously.

Our study showed some methodological weaknesses which should be taken into consideration for a fair assessment of the results. The sample size was small, which reduced the possibility of establishing more age groups to carry out comparisons (e.g., generation defined as 10-year birth cohorts). In addition to this, the selection of participants for this study was partially done at random, making it necessary to consider sample representation and extrapolation of results very carefully. As such, it would be prudent to regard the study as a preliminary exploration, one which meets the objective of confirming the presence of a general trend similar to those found in other studies. That said, however, the stability of response patterns found and the significant results call for further research using more representative samples.

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