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Thinking Styles and Moral Values in Adulthood

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Abstract

Moral values are the root of human behaviour, representing a link between individual orientations and individual behaviour. They are highly influenced by the social environment and by the social position, as well as by the way people analyse a situation, solve a problem and behave in a certain situation. Thinking styles are the cognitive foundations of an individual's choices and decisions. The objectives we set out are: 1) to offer an overview on adults perception of moral values; 2) to discover the existence of significant differences between male and female adults regarding their moral value systems and 3) to distinguish the differences between the adult's classification of moral values due to the predominance of a certain thinking style. Using the Rokeach Value Survey (1973) and the Thinking Styles Inventory by Sternberg & Wagner (1992), we questioned 130 participants, between 36 and 65 years of age. We discovered that today's adults value health, family security or wisdom (terminal values) and ambition, responsibility or love (instrumental values). Using Mann-Whitney test and Kruskal-Wallis test we discovered that while men value freedom and excitement, women value peace (terminal values). For instrumental values, women value cleanliness and men value logic significantly different. We also found significant differences between men and women regarding their moral value systems based on the predominance of a certain thinking style.

Keywords:

Thinking styles, moral values, adulthood;

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1. Introduction

The fact that values are at the root of behaviour is a widely held assumption in the social sciences (Deth & Scarbrough, 1995, p.21). Moral values play the role of selective orientation elements for individuals in the world they live in (Williams, 1968, Pepper, 1958, *apud* Deth & Scarbrough, 1995, p.22). They are decoders of possible actions that allow the identification of potential gratifications and benefits which are derived from personal preferences, depending on motivation, needs and personal goals (Deth & Scarbrough, 1995, p.22).

According to Duverger (1961, p.32), moral values imply a certain position from social groups or individuals, regarding what is good or bad, just and wrong, agreeable or disagreeable, useful or harmful. The processes of value change currently unfolding, have led to a vast list of value orientations, dimensions and patterns.

Romanian psychologist I.A. Dumitru (2001, p.110) classifies values in three large groups: professional values (ambition, wealth, competence, creativity, conscientiousness, intelligence, work, professional security, entrepreneurial spirit); psychosocial values (self control, love, social recognition, independence, responsiveness) and moral values (altruism, honesty, faith, dignity, wisdom, humanity, responsibility).

Our research is grounded in the theory of Milton Rokeach (1973) regarding moral values. For Rokeach values are strong and sustainable beliefs regarding specific conducts or final states of existence, desirable as much socially as personally. He argues that an individual's values have the tendency of grouping into value systems. Rokeach defines these systems as a resistant organization of beliefs regarding preferable ways of behavior along a continuum of importance (Rokeach, 2000, p.22).

Values influence decision making as they contain a judgmental element (Parashar, Dhar & Dhar, 2004, p.144). This is the liaison between moral values and thinking styles, which describe the way an individual obtain and process information. The orientation of an individual toward an idea, a relationship or a fact often contains an assessment the individual makes. Woolfolk (2006, p.18) defines thinking styles as the way individuals think, perceive and remember the information. Thinking styles refer to a certain way in which an individual makes a decision, otherwise said, at the cognitive foundations of an individual's choices and decisions.

Honey and Mumford (2000, p.56-57) argue that when cognitively related to their environment, people behave differently with respect to their thinking styles, which can be grouped in four categories: active (loves to act and it is well equipped to experience); reflexive (loves to study information and knows how to analyze); theoretical (needs to rank information in order to achieve solutions and it is well equipped to make conclusions); pragmatist (loves practical things and knows to plan).

Sternberg (2002, *apud* Turki, 2012, p.140) defines the thinking styles as a way of thinking that the individual prefers and describes how the individual uses the capacities he possesses. Sternberg (1988, 1993, 1997, *apud* Turki, 2012, p.140) classified individuals according to their ways of thinking into thirteen categories. The ways of thinking in terms of form include: monarchic, hierarchic, anarchic and oligarchic style. The ways of thinking in terms of functions include: legislative, executive and judicial style. The methods of thinking in terms of level include global and local style. The ways of thinking in terms of the trend include liberal and conservative style. The ways of thinking in terms of scope include external and internal style.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research subject field and methods

The current study involves 130 participants, of which 85 female adults and 45 male adults. All participants are between 36 and 65 years of age. They are all residents of the city of Constanta. We used the Rokeach Value Survey (1973) and the Thinking Styles Inventory by Sternberg & Wagner (1992). The evaluation was carried out during October-June 2014.

2.2. Objectives and hypotheses

The objectives we set out are: (1) Offering an overview on today's adults perception of moral values; (2) Discovering the existence of significant differences between male and female adults regarding their moral value systems; (3) Distinguishing the differences between the adult's classification of moral values due to the predominance of certain thinking styles.

The hypotheses we set out are: (1) We presume that there are significant differences between male and female adults regarding their perception on moral values; (2) We presume that there are significant

differences between adult's thinking styles and their classification of moral values.

3. 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 for adults. The lowest mean rank is the most important value which was ranked first by the participants. Regarding terminal values, the choices are: health (4.12), family security (5.94), wisdom (6.67), inner harmony (7.34), self respect (7.97), a comfortable life (9.15), freedom (9.44), true friendship (9.69), pleasure (9.92), mature love (10.40), peace (10.45), a sense of accomplishment (10.48), an exciting life (10.70), social recognition (10.85), salvation (11.26), a world of beauty (11.27), equality (11.62) and national security (13.65). Regarding instrumental values, the choices are: ambitious (7.04), responsible (7.25), loving (7.67), capable (7.71), honest (7.88), self-controlled (8.01), broad-minded (8.75), intellectual (8.78), clean (8.89), loyal (9.49), logical (9.77), courageous (10.25), independent (10.43), imaginative (10.49), polite (10.98), forgiving (11.06), helpful (12.20) and obedient (14.15). Today's lifestyle, or the way people choose to live their own life, is influenced by economic, social and cultural factors. Although this notion has many valences, one of them concerns what people understand by a healthy lifestyle. There are many types of information that reach the public through TV-shows, commercials, magazines, books, etc., in order to tell us how to live a healthy life. Furthermore, the public is overwhelmed with news about deadly or dangerous viruses, unhealthy food, chemicals used as replacements for what used to be "bio". We now have to face diseases which maybe didn't affect other generations as much. In this context, health (*physical and mental well-being*) is the most important terminal value for today's adults. Other researches that we conducted (and are soon to be published) show that health is the most important value also for adolescents and youth, because being physically and mentally healthy allows people to live a productive life, both economically and socially. The least important terminal value is national security (*protection from attack*), probably because we live with the illusion that in case of war, the treaties our country signed with other countries will provide some help.

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, motivation for winning and specific goals. The least important instrumental value is obedience maybe because today's educational ideal is the free and harmonious development of human individuality, the training of autonomous personality and the development of a certain value system that will allow the individual to be an accomplished person, with entrepreneurial spirit, in order to actively participate to the evolution of our society.

The second objective is to discover the existence of significant differences between male and female adults, regarding their moral value 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). We discovered significant differences for freedom (*independence and free choice*), an exciting life (*a stimulating active life*) and a world at peace (*a world free of war and conflict*). Men value freedom (mean rank 1=72.74, mean rank 2=51.82, U=1297.000, p=.003) and an exciting life (mean rank 1=70.45, mean rank 2=56.16, U=1492.000, p=.039) more than women. Due to the characteristics of the modern society, men are oriented toward social, spiritual and productive engagement. The social stereotypes places men as head of the family, responsible with financial aspects and family maintenance. They are active, they like challenges and they are involved in a multitude of problems both professionally and socially. Allport (1991, *apud* Sion, 2007, p.218) argues that the extension of the sense of self (the development of strong interests beyond the Self) is the authentic participation of a person in some significant spheres of human effort: economic, educational, recreational, politic, domestic and religious.

Women rank differently "a world at peace" (mean rank 1=60.58, mean rank 2=74.80, U=1494.000, p=.040). In light of the extension of the sense of self, women develop a great capacity of love and compassion (understanding the human condition of all people).

As far as the instrumental values are concerned, women value clean (*neat and tidy*) more than men (mean rank 1=58.19, mean rank 2=79.31, U=1291.000, p=.002), and men value logical (*consistent, rational*) more than women (mean rank 1=70.62, mean rank 2=55.83, U=1477.500, p=.033). Today's world of fashion (this multimillion dollars industry) emphasizes the importance of this domain in woman's

everyday life. Commercials about perfumes, makeup, hygiene products and cleaning products give priceless information on how to stay clean. This means gaining respect, social status, desirability. Florescu, Málcomete & Pop (2003, p.664) describe them as remarkable consumers, interested in material possessions, that form their beliefs through their reference groups (family and friends). They are tributary to fashion. On the other hand, men value logic because they tend to be more rational and organized than women. And so, the first hypothesis of the study was confirmed.

The third objective is discovering the existence of significant differences in ranking 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 second hypothesis of the study.

While we found no significant differences between legislative (N=73), executive (N=66) and judicial (N=20) thinking people concerning their hierarchy of terminal values, we discovered significant differences regarding imaginative (*daring and creative*), for legislative style (Chi square=6.679, p=.035). Legislative thinking people prefer tasks that require using creative strategies and generating new approaches and solutions to the problems their confronting (Albaili, 2007, p.5).

For monarchic (N1=15), hierarchic (N2=91), oligarchic (N3=16) and anarchic (N4=22) thinking people, we discovered significant differences regarding the terminal value mature love (*sexual and spiritual intimacy*) for monarchic style (mean rank 1=58.00, mean rank 2=78.18, mean rank 3=97.56, mean rank 4=69.64, Chi square=7.822, p=.050). Monarchic people prefer engaging in activities that require them to focus on only one thing at a time (Albaili, 2007, p.6). Florescu et al. (2003, p.664) describe these people as being motivated by their security needs. They have strong beliefs, are attached to traditional family values and patriotism, and are refractory to change.

For instrumental values, we discovered that hierarchic people value ambitious (*hardworking and aspiring*) more than the others (mean rank 1=81.53, mean rank 2=65.29, mean rank 3=90.56, mean rank 4=83.02, Chi square=7.907, p=.048); they also value broad-minded (*open-minded*) more than others (mean rank 1=102.13, mean rank 2=65.87, mean rank 3=87.94, mean rank 4=68.50, Chi square=12.315, p=.006); oligarchic people value forgiving (*willing to pardon others*) more than the

others (mean rank 1=64.63, mean rank 2=78.04, mean rank 3=47.03, mean rank 4=73.48, Chi square=8.155, $p=.043$).

The choices are explainable by the fact that those with hierarchic style prefer distributing their attention and energies over several tasks that are prioritized (Albaili, 2007, p.6). They are hardworking have precise goals which they rank according to the importance, amount of time, competence. They are fighters and have attitudes and values which stand at the basis of social dynamic. Those with an oligarchic style prefer working toward several objectives all at the same time without prioritizing the tasks (Albaili, 2007, p.6). In doing so, they are exposed to mistakes, they do not feel the need of proving their abilities, they do not approve of formal procedures, they tend to be more relaxed and resistant to frustration.

Global thinking people (N1=63) value inner harmony (*freedom from inner conflict*), as terminal value, less than local thinking people (N2=82), (mean rank 1=82.16, mean rank 2=65.96, U=2006.000, $p=.021$). Albaili (2007, p.5) states that people with local style prefer activities that require them to attend to very specific and concrete details, while people with global thinking style prefer dealing with problems that are general in nature and require abstract thinking. People with global style are rationalists, they cope with unexpected situations, they take chances and start new initiatives. We found no significant differences for the instrumental values in the ranking of the two categories.

Internal thinking people (N1=68) value freedom, as terminal value, (mean rank 1=65.32, mean rank 2=78.93, U=2095.500, $p=.050$) more than external thinking people (N2=76). They also value independent (*self-reliant, self-sufficient*) as instrumental value more than external thinking people (mean rank 1=60.71, mean rank 2=83.05, U=1782.000, $p=.001$). Albaili (2007, p.6) describes them as people that prefer tasks that require working independently of other people, and so, freedom (*independence and free choice*) and independence lead their hierarchy.

Conservative thinking people (N1=85) value a world at peace (*a world free of war and conflict*), as terminal value (mean rank 1=75.54, mean rank 2=63.04, U=1940.500, $p=.044$) less than liberal thinking people (N2=57). People with liberal style prefer tasks that require them to go beyond existing rules and structures, and tasks that are aimed at effecting substantial change (Albaili, 2007, p.6). This also explains why, for instrumental values, liberal thinking people value logical (*consistent,*

rational) more than conservative thinking people (mean rank 1=67.98, mean rank 2=53.21, U=1366.500, p=.027). They are motivated by their own beliefs, capable of self-achievement, they are tolerant, have social overview, they seek solutions to global problems of society (Florescu et al., 2003, p.664).

Conservative thinking people value honest (*sincere and truthful*) more than liberal thinking people (mean rank 1=57.47, mean rank 2=71.02, U=1402.000, p=.042). People with a conservative style prefer familiar tasks that require the application of and adherence to existing rules and structures (Albaili, 2007, p.6). They are influenced by culture, by social-economic status of their own country and by its traditions (Florescu et al., 2003, p.664).

4. Conclusions

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, *apud* Albaili, 2007:6).

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