

Are value priorities related to dispositional optimism and resilience? A correlational study

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Abstract

The purpose was to analyse the relationship between value priorities and both optimism and resilience, in 307 Sicilian adolescents (14-18 years old). We used the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992), the Resiliency Attitudes and Skills Profile (De Caroli & Sagone, 2014), and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Results: self-enhancement and openness to change were positively related to optimism; self-transcendence was positively related to all dimensions of resilience; conservation was positively related to adaptability, control, and engagement; self-enhancement and openness to change are positively related to sense of humour, competence, and adaptability. Boys perceived themselves as more optimistic, humoristic, competent, and adapted than girls, while girls were more engaged than boys. Furthermore, boys judged the values of self-enhancement and openness to change as mainly important, while girls judged self-transcendence as most important. Future research will deepen the relationships among these constructs in young adults and the elderly.

Keywords: resilience, value orientations, optimism, adolescence

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1. Introduction

The framework of the current correlational study is represented by the perspective of value priorities, according to Schwartz's Universal Theory of Values (1992), which seem to be comprehensive of the different major orientations recognized across cultures. According to the first formulation of this theory (Schwartz, 1992), ten cross-cultural human values were described in a circular motivation continuum and grouped in four macro-areas named "self-transcendence", "conservation", "openness to change", and "self-enhancement"; the values located in adjacent regions on the continuum were motivationally similar, while those that are located in opposite regions were motivationally dissimilar and express conflicting orientations. Recently, in the last refined version (Schwartz et al., 2012), the authors have refined the configuration of the model, including some dimensions of the original 10 values and obtaining 19 more narrowly defined values.

The **area of self-transcendence** includes the following values linked to personal and community well-being: 1) *benevolence*, corresponding to protection and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in direct contact (new label - (1a): *caring for the welfare of ingroup members*) and to an internal motivation useful to support cooperative and supportive social relations (new label - (1b): *dependability* referred more to relationships with friends and less to family); 2) *universalism*, corresponding to *tolerance* (2a), safeguarding of the welfare of the others (new label - (2b): *societal concern*), and protection of nature (new label - (2c): *protecting nature*).

The **area of openness to change** consists of the following values associated with the future experiences and self-satisfaction: 3) *self-direction*, composed by (3a) *autonomy of thought*, referred to developing and practice of one's understanding and intellectual competence, and (3b) *autonomy of action* linked to exercising one's capacity to attain self-chosen goals; 4) *stimulation*, corresponding to novelty and challenge in life; 5) *hedonism*, corresponding to pleasure and gratification for oneself.

The **area of conservation** includes the following values connected to the past experiences and stability: 6) *conformity*, that is, the inclination to follow social expectations (new label - (6a): *interpersonal conformity*) or social norms (new label - (6b): *rules*, that is conformity to laws and authority); 7) *security*, that is, safety, harmony, stability of society, defense of interpersonal relations and self-image, divided in (7a) *personal security* and (7b) *societal security*; 8) *tradition* that brings to mind respect and acceptance of the customs or ideas which belong to the tradition and *humility* considered as self-effacing and submission to life's circumstances.

The **area of self-enhancement** is composed of the following values related to personal progress and improvement of social status: 9) *achievement*, that is, personal success through demonstrating one's own competence; 10) *power*, that is, the *control of material resources* (10a) and *dominance over people* (10b), with the maintaining of one's prestige and social status against the threats to one's security inherent in attacks on one's public image (new label - (10c): *face*).

The values in both versions of this theory can be grouped into sets of four higher-order values: person-oriented versus socially oriented values or self-protection versus growth values (Schwartz et al., 2012). These value orientations are analyzed with the original 40-item version of the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ-40: Schwartz et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2003) in which each portrait describes the individual's goals and life aspirations. A short version of the PVQ included 21 items (PVQ-21: Schwartz, 2003) and the most recent version, developed to measure the 19 values of the refined theory, consists of 57 items (PVQ-57: Schwartz et al., 2012). In the current study, we used the original formulation of the theory, based on the ten value priorities, as in our previous investigations with Italian samples of preadolescents (De Caroli & Sagone, 2011) and adolescents in relation to prejudicial attitudes towards ethnic outgroups (see Falanga, De Caroli, & Sagone, 2015), personality traits (De Caroli & Sagone, 2011b), with university students in relation to motherhood and fatherhood (De Caroli & Sagone, 2011a), and adults in relation to the role of vertical value transmission (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014), also with refugee asylum seekers (see Sagone & De Caroli, 2012). In all these studies, the widespread results have demonstrated that Italian adolescents and young adults consider the values of self-

transcendence and openness to change as really important, while the value of power was considered scarcely important; only the adults believed that the values of conservation, that is, specifically security and tradition, were very important.

From the refinements regarding the value priorities analysis, we have hypothesized the existence of a possible relationship with other psychological dimensions, which influence the individual's growth during adolescence, that is, resilience and dispositional optimism. The first dimension is viewed as a personal quality that permits individuals to overcome hardships and flourish (e.g., Wagnild & Young, 1993; Grotberg, 1996), to cope with adversity (Masten, 1994; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), and to restore or maintain equilibrium under significant threats (e.g., Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990; Smith & Carlson, 1997) and the second one is analyzed as a dispositional tendency (or personality trait) to expect positive outcomes, even in the face of obstacles or when bad things happen (Scheier & Carver, 1985, 1987).

1.1. Theoretical background: resiliency and dispositional optimism

The theoretical background of these two constructs is represented by the model of resilient profile (De Caroli & Sagone, 2014) on the basis of Hurtes and Allen's model (2001) and by the analysis of life orientation, according to the continuum of dispositional optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1992; Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). Firstly, the resilient profile is characterized by some qualities that allow individuals to have positive development even in the presence of stressful circumstances, such as *sense of humour* (that is, "the ability to view and deal with worrying situations by means of the humoristic style or laughing"), *competence* (that is, "the perceived self-efficacy in developing the coping strategies useful to overcome the difficulties"), *adaptability* (in terms of "the ability to adapt themselves to novelty and adversity in critical circumstances"), *engagement* (considered as "the ability to engage in search of the better solutions and ways to resist"), and *control* (in terms of "the ability to manage and control the criticality of one's environment").

Several scholars have found that highly resilient people who are considerably able to "bounce back from adversities" are also more engaged in positive social relationships and tend to use acceptance, active coping, and positive reframing as positive coping strategies, compared to low resilient people (Masten et al., 1999). Moreover, in the Italian context, we found that the more the middle and late adolescents were able to choose the contexts which were suitable to their personal needs, to see themselves as growing and expanding, and to perceive themselves as self-satisfied (all dimensions linked to psychological well-being: see Ryff & Singer, 2003), the more they showed high levels of resilience (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014).

Lastly, the optimist profile is typically present in individuals who tend to see the glass of water as half full rather than half empty and it is related to traditional personality traits (Sharpe, Martin & Roth, 2011), hope (Snyder, 2002), self-fulfillment (Archer et al., 2007), life satisfaction and well-being (Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996; Monzani, Steca & Greco, 2014), generalized self-efficacy and self-competence (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Nurttila, Ketonen & Lonka, 2015), positive coping strategies (Brissette, Scheier & Carver, 2002), internal locus of control (Carifio & Rhodes, 2002), and so on. As reported by Scheier and Carver (1985), individuals with an optimistic orientation towards life express positive expectations regarding the future, realize that it is possible to achieve the desired goals, and persist in their efforts; on the contrary, individuals with a pessimistic orientation have negative expectations, tend to become passive, and give up more easily on their goals.

According to the empirical evidences of Archer et al. (2008) and Norlander et al. (2002), individuals with a self-fulfilling profile (that is, characterized by high PA or high positive affect / low NA or low negative affect) show high levels of self-esteem and optimism and internal locus of control, compared to individuals with a self-destructive profile (characterized by low PA or low positive affect / high NA or high negative affect) who reveal low levels of self-esteem and optimism, and tend to adopt external

locus of control (see Archer, Adrianson, Plancak & Karlsson, 2007; Archer, Adolfsson, & Karlsson, 2008; Garcia, 2012). Additionally, as verified by Brissette, Scheier and Carver (2002), optimistic students report greater social support than pessimistic ones and, with reference to coping strategies, the optimists are more likely to adopt positive reinterpretation, planning and active coping strategies, while the pessimists tend to use the denial and behavioural disengagement; these factors contribute to realize a better psychological adjustment during the most important life transitions.

Significant and positive relations between these two profiles have demonstrated that highly optimistic individuals report a more resilient profile than less optimistic ones (Sagone & De Caroli, 2015), whereas very little evidence referring to the influence of value orientations on resilience and dispositional optimism have been verified in adolescents and young adults, taking into consideration the cultural differences linked to value priorities (see Maercker et al., 2015; Stanley et al., 2015). The lack of data on these relationships represents the rationale of this current study, which was carried out with healthy Sicilian adolescents; so, it will be necessary to verify the existence of the relationships among these constructs and then to explore the direction of the influence of value priorities on resilience and dispositional optimism in young adults and older people.

1.2. Purpose of the study

We are very interested in the analysis of value orientations as variables that could influence the growth of individuals (especially of adolescents) and their relationships with two other important psychological characteristics (that is, dispositional optimism and resilience), both related to positive personality.

In our previous research (De Caroli & Sagone, 2011b), we found that the more the adolescents scored high in: *energy*, the more they judged self-direction and hedonism as very important; *agreeableness*, the more they attributed importance to benevolence; *conscientiousness*, the more they attributed importance to security; *emotional instability*, the less they considered hedonism as mostly important; and finally, *openness to experience*, the more they valued self-direction and conformity as mostly important. This evidence points out the relationship between personality traits and value orientations and highlights the importance of these two dimensions in the social, moral, and psychological development of adolescents.

Considering the meanings and multiple psychological implications of these issues, the most direct and positive relationships that we expected to discover are referred to the value priorities of self-enhancement, openness to change, and self-transcendence (seemingly addressed to the future, the openness to challenges of everyday life, and contact with the others) with high optimism and resilience; on the contrary, we expected to find relationships between the values of conservation (most probably oriented to the past and the maintaining of the status quo) with low optimism and resilience.

Differences for sex will be verified to confirm the superiority of boys in setting a high value on openness to change and self-enhancement whereas that of girls in self-transcendence (see Capanna et al., 2005; Sagone & De Caroli, 2011a; Schwartz et al., 2012). In addition, as reported in our previous study (see De Caroli & Sagone, 2014), we expected to confirm the evidence that girls will be more resilient than boys. Finally, we expected that boys would be more optimistic than girls, even if a very reduced number of research papers have been demonstrated these sex differences.

1.3. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 307 healthy Sicilian adolescents, divided into 145 boys and 162 girls, aged from 14 to 18 years ($M=16,05$; $sd=1,5$). These were randomly recruited from two State Senior Schools in East Sicily (Italy). Parental consent for underage adolescents for study participation was obtained.

1.4. Measures and procedure

We used the Italian version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992), the Resiliency Attitudes and Skills Profile (De Caroli & Sagone, 2014), and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier & Carver, 1992). These measures were used in the same fixed order of presentation for all participants.

The **Portrait Values Questionnaire** (PVQ-40; Schwartz, 1992; Capanna et al., 2005) was used to explore the value priorities grouped in four areas (self-transcendence, conservation, self-enhancement, and openness to change), by means of 40 short verbal portraits of different people, gender-matched with the respondent; each portrait describes a person's goals or wishes that point implicitly to the importance of a value. Participants answered on a 6-point ranging scale from 1 (corresponding to 'not like me at all') to 6 intervals (corresponding to 'very much like me'): e.g. "It's very important to him/her to help the people around him/her"; "It is important to him/her always to behave properly"; "It is important to him/her to live in secure surroundings"; "He/she likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do"; "It is important to him/her to be in charge and tell others what to do", and "Being very successful is important to him/her". Cronbach's alpha for this measure ranged from 0.75 (openness to change) to 0.81 (self-transcendence).

The **Resiliency Attitudes and Skills Profile** was used to analyze the characteristics of resilient individuals (RASP: Hurtes & Allen, 2001; for the Italian school-context, see De Caroli & Sagone, 2014) and consisted of 34 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (corresponding to strongly disagree) to 6 intervals (corresponding to strongly agree). We used the Italian version of RASP including the following dimensions of the resilient profile: (a) sense of humour (e.g., "Laughter helps me deal with stress"); (b) competence (e.g., "I know when I am good at something"); (c) adaptability (e.g., "I can change my behavior to match the situation"); (d) engagement (e.g. "I try to figure out things I do not understand"); (e) control (e.g., "I avoid situations where I could get into trouble"). Cronbach's alpha for this measure ranged from 0.57 (engagement) to 0.73 (sense of humour).

The **Life Orientation Test-Revised** (LOT-R: Scheier & Carver, 1992; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) is a measure of dispositional optimism, formed by 10 items each evaluable on a 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha=0.79$) (from 1 equal to strongly disagree to 5 intervals equal to strongly agree). Three positive items assessed the optimistic disposition (e.g., "Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad"), three negative items valued the pessimistic one (e.g., "I rarely count on good things happening to me"), and four items were used as fillers. It is possible to obtain two different scores, respectively, for optimism and pessimism or one total score only for optimism considered as a continuum from low to high optimism (see Segerstrom, Evans, & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2011; Monzani et al., 2014). In the current study, we used the total score to assess the dispositional optimism as a measure of generalized expectancy about the individual's future (see Sagone & De Caroli, 2015).

1.5. Statistical analysis

The data analyses were carried out by the SPSS 20, using the t-test, linear correlation, and linear regression with a stepwise method. Mean scores were obtained in PVQ, LOT-R, and RASP and were counted as dependent variables, while gender was the only independent one.

2. Results

2.1. Value priorities, optimism, and resilience: descriptive analyses

As found in previous researches carried out by Capanna et al. (2005) and De Caroli and Sagone (2011), participants judged the areas of self-transcendence ($M=4,58$, $sd=,74$) and openness to change ($M=4,49$, $sd=,75$) as mostly important compared to those of conservation ($M=4,05$, $sd=,70$) and self-enhancement ($M=3,68$, $sd=1,01$) ($p<.001$). T-tests revealed significant differences for gender in three of four areas of value priorities, indicating that boys judged the values of self-enhancement ($M_{boys}=3,99$ vs. $M_{girls}=3,40$; $t_{(305)}=5,35$, $p<.001$) and openness to change ($M_{boys}=4,58$ vs. $M_{girls}=4,41$; $t_{(305)}=2,02$, $p=.044$) as mainly important, while girls judged the values of self-transcendence as primarily important ($M_{boys}=4,47$ vs. $M_{girls}=4,68$; $t_{(305)}=-2,56$, $p=.011$).

Levels of dispositional optimism were equal to $M=19,6$ ($sd=5,1$), with significant differences for gender ($t_{(305)}=5,94$, $p<.001$): boys were more optimistic than girls ($M_{boys}=21,3$ vs. $M_{girls}=18,00$).

In relation to dimensions of resilience, participants had reached lower levels of adaptability ($M=4,21$, $sd=,70$), control ($M=4,47$, $sd=,85$), and sense of humour ($M=4,49$, $sd=1,2$), compared to levels of engagement ($M=4,60$, $sd=,67$) and competence ($M=4,68$, $sd=,80$) ($p<.001$). Differences for gender in four of five dimensions of resilience were noted: sense of humour ($M_{boys}=4,76$ vs. $M_{girls}=4,25$; $t_{(305)}=3,98$, $p<.001$), competence ($M_{boys}=4,79$ vs. $M_{girls}=4,58$; $t_{(305)}=2,44$, $p=.015$), adaptability ($M_{boys}=4,35$ vs. $M_{girls}=4,08$; $t_{(305)}=3,48$, $p=.001$), and engagement ($M_{boys}=4,48$ vs. $M_{girls}=4,71$; $t_{(305)}=-3,02$, $p=.003$). This means that boys perceive themselves as more humouristic, competent and adapted than girls, whereas girls were more engaged than boys.

2.2. Value priorities and dispositional optimism

Using the linear correlation analysis (Table 1), the results indicate that for all participants the value priorities of self-enhancement and openness to change were positively related to optimism (even if the statistical deepening carried out with stepwise linear regression confirmed only the moderate influence of self-enhancement on optimism: $\beta=.224$, $t=4,017$, $p<.001$).

Table 1. Correlations between PVQ and LOT-R

Areas of PVQ	Optimism
Self-transcendence	-,067 ,244
Conservation	-,051 ,373
Self-enhancement	,224** ,000
Openness to change	,202** ,000

2.3. Value priorities and resilient profile

As found by the linear correlation analysis (Table 2), the results indicate that the area of self-transcendence was positively related to all dimensions of resilience and, mainly, to adaptability, control, and engagement. Furthermore, the area of conservation was positively related to adaptability, control, and engagement; additionally, the value priorities of both self-enhancement and openness to change were positively related to sense of humour, competence and adaptability.

Table 2. Correlations between PQV and RASP

Areas of PVQ	RASP humour	RASP competence	RASP adaptability	RASP control	RASP engagement
Self-transcendence	,245**	,280**	,451**	,496**	,424**
Conservation	,074	,194**	,433**	,590**	,230**
Self-enhancement	,331**	,259**	,322**	-,033	,108
Openness to change	,434**	,290**	,204**	-,085	,152**
	,000	,000	,000	,138	,008

The statistical deepening with stepwise linear regression confirmed that:

- sense of humour was influenced greatly by openness to change ($\beta=.316$, $t=4,956$, $p<.001$) and poorly by self-transcendence ($\beta=.190$, $t=3,683$, $p<.001$) and self-enhancement ($\beta=.145$, $t=2,310$, $p=.022$) ($R=.481$; $R^2=.224$);
- competence was influenced greatly by self-transcendence ($\beta=.255$, $t=4,727$, $p<.001$) and poorly by openness to change ($\beta=.143$, $t=2,146$, $p=.033$) and self-enhancement ($\beta=.174$, $t=2,655$, $p=.008$) ($R=.398$; $R^2=.150$);
- adaptability was influenced significantly by self-transcendence ($\beta=.295$, $t=4,715$, $p<.001$), self-enhancement ($\beta=.319$, $t=6,830$, $p<.001$), and conservation ($\beta=.234$, $t=3,734$, $p<.001$) ($R=.581$; $R^2=.331$);
- control was influenced mostly by conservation ($\beta=.440$, $t=7,189$, $p<.001$) and self-transcendence ($\beta=.225$, $t=3,614$, $p<.001$) but negatively by openness to change ($\beta= -.123$, $t= -2,636$, $p=.009$) ($R=.618$; $R^2=.375$);
- engagement was influenced greatly by self-transcendence ($\beta=.423$, $t=8,209$, $p<.001$) and poorly by self-enhancement ($\beta=.107$, $t=2,078$, $p=.039$) ($R=.437$; $R^2=.186$).

3. Discussion and conclusions

The empirical evidence emerging this study confirms of the expected relationships between value orientations (according to the Schwartz's theory) and the positive traits of personality in adolescence (in line with the perspective of the "positive psychology"; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This study provides further evidence of a general trend existing in the population of Italian adolescents: in fact, these adolescents are likely to attribute a high value to caring for the well-being of ingroup members and the safeguarding of their environment (mainly in the group of girls) and to promote the search for novelty and challenges of their life (mostly in the group of boys). In relation to dispositional optimism, the results indicate that the boys expressed a widespread tendency to expect positive outcomes even in the face of adversity, compared to girls. For dimensions of resilience, the results

underline the fact that the adolescents of our sample are more likely to adapt themselves to novelty and adversity in critical circumstances, to manage and control the criticality of their environment and to deal with stressful situations using laughter (mostly for boys), the engagement in overcoming difficult and unexpected circumstances (typically found in the group of girls), confirming the previous empirical evidence in the Italian school-context (see De Caroli & Sagone, 2014).

Considering the influence of value priorities on dispositional optimism, the results demonstrate that the more the adolescents of our sample judged the values linked to the maintenance of prestigious social status and self-realization as most important, the more they expressed high levels of dispositional optimism.

Referring to the influence of value priorities on dimensions of resilience, the results showed that the more these adolescents judged the values linked to the caring for the well-being of ingroup members, family and their friends as most important, the more they were able to adapt themselves to novelty and adversity in critical circumstances, to control their environment, and to be positively engaged in stressful situations when searching for better solutions to resist. Moreover, the more these adolescents judged the values associated with conservation of own customs and defense of traditional ideas as mainly important, the more they were able to manage their environment and to be engaged in discovering new ways to resist stress and efforts. Finally, the more these adolescents considered the value priorities connected to the enhancement of their own social status and openness to novelty as primarily important, the more they were likely to use the humoristic style in critical circumstances and to demonstrate their own competence in searching for adequate coping strategies.

The expected predictions about the influence of values on the personality dimensions of optimism and resilience have been largely confirmed. Future research in the same socio-cultural context could explore the direction of the influence of value priorities on the resilience and dispositional optimism also in young adults and the elderly.

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