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The “portrait” of values in family: A cross-age study in Sicilian context

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Abstract

Purpose: to analyze the similarities and the differences in relation to the value priorities and their representation among grandmothers, mothers, and granddaughters belonging to 40 Sicilian families. Measures: Portrait Values Questionnaire and Semantic Differential Technique. Results: grandmothers considered more important the values of security and conformism than the others; mothers judged more relevant the values of universalism and tradition than the others; granddaughters considered more important the values of stimulation, hedonism, and achievement than the others. In addition, mothers considered more positively the representation of self-enhancement and caring for the others than grandmothers and granddaughters.

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1. Introduction

Educational psychology has confirmed the relevance of human values on the development of individuals and the importance of family environment as an agency of transition from the past (represented by the presence of grandparents) to the present (the parents) and the future (the grandchildren), underlining the change of value priorities linked to life experiences and age (Schönpflug, 2001; Barni, 2009; Knafo & Schwartz, 2009). According to the perspective of Schwartz & Bilsky (1987), human basic values are considered as “conceptions of the desirable

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that influence the way people select action and evaluate events” (p.550) and are ordered by importance relative to one another and the relative importance of the set of relevant values guides action. Scholars described ten cross-cultural human values, grouped in four areas (self-transcendence, conservation, openness to change, and self-enhancement): *benevolence* (preserving and enhancing the welfare of persons with whom one is in direct contact, providing an internal motivational base to promote cooperative and supportive social relations) and *universalism* (appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of the others and of nature); *security* (safety, harmony, stability of society, of relations, and of Self), *tradition* (respect and acceptance of the customs or ideas which belong to the tradition), and *conformity* (inclination to follow social expectations or social norms); *self-direction* (independent thought and action, creativity), *stimulation* (novelty and challenge in life), and *hedonism* (pleasure and gratification for oneself); *achievement* (personal success through demonstrating one’s own competence) and *power* (social status and prestige, control of resources, dominance over people). The typology of human basic values has been analyzed in several countries (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995; De Caroli, Sagone, & Falanga, 2011; Barni, 2009; De Caroli & Sagone, 2011a), revealing significant differences for age: thus, as shown in Schwartz (1996) & Capanna et al. studies (2005), adults considered as really important the values linked to the conservation (that is, security, tradition, and conformity), while adolescents attributed a greater importance to the openness to change (that is, stimulation, self-direction, and hedonism). Specifically, De Caroli & Sagone (2011b) pointed out that Italian and American mothers judged really important the values linked to the areas of self-transcendence and conservation, while less important the values included in the area of self-enhancement. In addition, De Caroli & Sagone (2011a) and, more recently, De Caroli and her colleagues (2011) found that Italian middle adolescents and young adults considered really important the values of benevolence, universalism, self-direction, and hedonism, while scarcely important that of power.

In relation to this topic, Barni (2009) verified that, in Italian families, grandmothers and mothers judged as more important the values linked to the area of conservation, while adolescents considered as more relevant the values of openness to change than their grandmothers and mothers did; moreover, grandmothers, mothers, and adolescents attributed a greater importance to the values of self-transcendence. More recently, also Barni, Rosnati & Scabini (2011) found a very low relationship between value priorities expressed by parents (that is, conformism and security) and those expressed by their daughters/sons (that is, hedonism, self-direction, and stimulation). Little evidences have been analyzed in relation to the differences or the similarities emerging from the same family groups, comparing the value priorities expressed by grandparents, parents, and granddaughters/grandsons. Accordingly, this last comparison represented the rationale of this current study carried out in Sicilian context in order to extend the results of Barni and her colleagues’ researches.

1.1. Purpose of study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the similarities and the differences in human basic values and their representation expressed by grandmothers, mothers, and their own daughters, belonging to the same family. In relation to the differences linked to the age, we hypothesized that: 1) grandmothers and mothers will consider as more important the values of tradition, conformity, security than daughters; in addition, daughters will judge as more important the values of hedonism, self-direction and stimulation than grandmothers and mothers; 2) grandmothers and mothers will represent the tradition and caring for the others more positively than daughters; on the contrary, daughters will represent the change and self-enhancement more positively than grandmothers and mothers.

1.2. Participants

The sample was composed by grandmothers, mothers, and their own daughters belonging to 40 Sicilian families, recruited from three Public Junior Schools in Catania, Sicily (Italy). The age of the grandmothers ranged from 53 to 82 years ($M=63,8$, $ds=7.9$); the mothers’ age ranged from 27 to 50 years ($M=39,3$, $ds=5.3$) and their daughters’ age ranged from 12 to 14 years ($M=13,7$, $ds=.87$).

1.3. Measures and procedure

The first measure used to explore the value priorities was represented by the Italian version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Capanna et al., 2005). It is constituted by 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-points ranging scale from 1 ("not like me at all") to 6 ("very much like me"). The PVQ was used to measure the 10 types of values: *benevolence*: e.g. "It's very important to him/her to help the people around him/her"; *universalism*: e.g. "He/she thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally"; *tradition*: e.g. "He/she tries to do what his/her religion requires"; *conformity*: e.g. "It is important to him/her always to behave properly"; *security*: e.g. "It is important to him/her to live in secure surroundings"; *hedonism*: e.g. "He/she seeks every chance he/she can to have fun"; *self-direction*: e.g. "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him/her"; *stimulation*: e.g. "He/she likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do"; *power*: e.g. "It is important to him/her to be in charge and tell others what to do"; and *achievement*: e.g. "Being very successful is important to him/her".

The second measure consisted of the semantic differential technique (Osgood et al., 1957), applied to explore the representation of the following four concepts: tradition, change, self-enhancement, and caring for the others. Each concept was judged through a list of 26 opposite adjectives (e.g., desirable-undesirable), valuable on 7-intervals Likert scales. The two measures were administered to daughters in individual setting during the school time by an expert researcher, after parental consent to participation to the current study; grandmothers and mothers completed these measures at home and with the explanation about the goals of this study provided by the same researcher.

1.4. Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out by the SPSS Version 15.0 using the analysis of variance. Type of groups (grandmothers, mothers, and their own daughters) was considered as an independent variable, while mean scores obtained in PVQ and semantic differentials were counted as dependent variables.

2. Results

2.1. Value priorities: differences for groups

Descriptive analyses showed that, for grandmothers, the most important values were represented by security, conformity, and tradition, while the least important values were constituted by achievement and power; in addition, for mothers, the most important values were represented by benevolence, universalism, security, and tradition, while the least important value was given by power; finally, for daughters, the most important value was represented by hedonism, while the least important value was constituted by power. Thus, grandmothers valued as generally relevant the search of safety, harmony, stability of relationships, acceptance of the customs belonging to the tradition, and respect of social expectations, while granddaughters judged as mainly important the gratification for oneself and the search of pleasure. Mothers considered as primarily important preserving and enhancing the welfare of nature and of persons with whom one is in direct contact and the search of safety and harmony. In all three cases, social status and prestige, control of resources, and dominance over people were considered narrowly important value priorities.

Comparing the mean scores obtained by the three groups in value priorities analyzed by PVQ (Tab.1) statistical analysis showed that grandmothers considered more important the values of security ($F_{(2,78)}=3,35$, $p=.04$) and conformity ($F_{(2,78)}=8,83$, $p<.001$) than the others; mothers judged more relevant the values of universalism ($F_{(2,78)}=7,98$, $p=.001$) and tradition ($F_{(2,78)}=7,21$, $p=.001$) than the others; daughters considered more important the values of stimulation ($F_{(2,78)}=7,10$, $p=.001$), hedonism ($F_{(2,78)}=22,52$, $p<.001$), and achievement ($F_{(2,78)}=6,26$, $p=.003$) than the others. No significant differences for type of groups were found in the other values.

Table 1. Value priorities: differences for type of groups

Values	Type of groups		
	Grandmothers	Mothers	Daughters
Benevolence	4.44 (.95)	4.70 (.91)	4.53 (.88)
Universalism *	4.48 (.83)	4.88 (.87)	4.30 (.83)
Self-direction	4.11 (.88)	4.27 (.79)	4.35 (.98)
Stimulation *	3.32 (1.21)	3.43 (.99)	4.11 (.99)
Hedonism *	3.61 (1.29)	3.32 (1.13)	4.74 (1.03)
Security *	4.72 (.81)	4.55 (1.05)	4.20 (1.23)
Tradition *	4.53 (.83)	4.59 (.77)	3.91 (1.05)
Conformity *	4.57 (.89)	4.49 (.85)	3.87 (1.05)
Achievement *	3.23 (1.08)	3.44 (1.04)	3.96 (1.22)
Power	2.60 (1.22)	2.38 (1.01)	2.94 (1.11)

2.2. Representation of value concepts: differences for groups

In relation to the representation of value concepts, similarly grandmothers, mothers, and daughters judged more positively the concepts of self-enhancement, tradition, and the caring for the others, but less positively the change. Comparing the mean scores obtained by the three groups, mothers considered more positively the representation of self-enhancement ($F_{(2,78)}=4,66$, $p=.012$) and caring for the others ($F_{(2,78)}=3,07$, $p=.05$) than grandmothers and daughters (Table 2).

Table 2. Semantic differentials: differences for type of groups

Concepts	Type of groups		
	Grandmothers	Mothers	Daughters
Self-enhancement *	4.93 (.83)	5.31 (.54)	4.90 (.71)
Caring for the others *	4.87 (.88)	5.30 (.71)	4.98 (.70)
Change	4.67 (.93)	4.72 (.89)	4.84 (1.01)
Tradition	4.88 (.91)	5.17 (.65)	5.01 (.69)

3. Conclusion

This study was carried out in order to analyze the similarities and the differences among grandmothers, mothers, and their daughters within each family in relation to value priorities and the representation of the main social values. According to the first hypothesis, results demonstrated that grandmothers considered as more important the values of tradition, conformity, security than the others; in addition, mothers considered as more relevant the values of tradition and universalism than the others. Daughters judged as more important the values of hedonism, stimulation, and achievement than grandmothers and mothers. In relation to the second hypothesis, results showed that mothers represented the self-enhancement and caring for the others more positively than the others. These results partially confirmed the initial hypotheses.

These findings showed more relevant differences than similarities among the three groups in relation to the values and their representation. Thus, grandmothers and mothers were oriented toward the values linked to the past, such as researching security and maintaining socially established expectations (considered by Bilsky & Schwartz as “deficiency values”), while daughters were oriented toward the values connected to the future, such as the research of novelty in everyday life, pleasure and gratification for oneself, and personal success (considered by the authors as “growth values”). This datum appeared strictly linked to the life patterns developed during the life span from the adolescence to the aging. These in-depth differences in value priorities could be the “core” of the intra-family

conflict and an obstacle to the familiar cohesion and the adaptability useful to guarantee an adequate familiar functioning, as reported in Olson and colleagues' model (1989).

Among the limits of the present study, it is possible to indicate the importance to replicate this investigation with a larger number of Italian families in different parts of the same country for the representativeness of the sample and to consider other types of social values in order to emphasize the role of vertical value transmission from one generation to another. Future research could analyze the similarities or the differences on value orientations also in grandfathers, fathers, and grandsons.

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