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A Cross-Cultural Investigation of Personal Values: The Israeli-Palestinian Case

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to assess the personal values of Israeli and Palestinian students in light of the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1980). Based on Sagie and Elizur's (1996) multifaceted approach, personal values that are individual-centered (i.e., associated with one's home, family, or work) were distinguished from the collective-centered values (i.e., associated with life areas such as religion, sports, or politics). We hypothesized that individual-centered values will be more important than collective-centered values to each individual, with either a higher individualistic orientation (e.g., Israeli) or a higher collectivistic orientation (e.g., Palestinian). The magnitude of the difference between both value types will differ, however, according to the cultural orientation. As compared to the Palestinians, we predicted that the Israelis would rank higher individual-centered values and lower collective-centered values. Using data obtained from two large samples of Palestinian (N=597) and Israeli students (N=452), the hypotheses were examined and supported. Avenues for further research are outlined.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the analysis of personal values (Elizur & Sagie, 1999; Sagie, Elizur, & Koslowsky, 1996; Sagie & Koslowsky 1998; Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Triandis 1994, 1995). Personal values are desirable or important states, objects, goals, and behaviors, transcending specific situations and applied as normative standards to judge and choose among alternative modes of behavior (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). These values are relevant to various life areas or domains, such as home and family life, work, religion, culture, sports, and politics (Sagie & Elizur, 1996; Guttman, 1994; Jordan, 1992). Guttman (1994) observed "many previous researchers have made distinctions among values according to area of life... but few have hitherto studied the interrelations among simultaneous value behaviors in the several areas of life" (pp. 130-131). Following his recommendation, one aim of the present study was to analyze the interrelations among personal values in multiple life areas. Furthermore, although much research attention is currently paid to cross-cultural analysis of personal values, a comparative investigation of multiple life areas in more than one cultural environment is quite rare. Thus, another aim of the current study was to compare personal values of two neighboring societies that differ in cultural characteristics: Israelis and Palestinians.

Recently, Sagie and Elizur (1996) explored personal values of two Israeli samples, business students and computer personnel, pertaining to six life areas, namely: work, religion, culture, sports, and politics, as well as the more inclusive domain of life in general, which primarily concerns home and family. This list is not exhaustive, and other areas (e.g., economics, technology, and education) can be added; nevertheless, the list includes some of the most central domains of human behavior. In their study, Sagie and Elizur demonstrated that parallel sets of personal values guide people in the various life areas. In accordance with earlier research (e.g., Elizur, 1984; Elizur, Borg, Hunt, & Beck, 1991), these authors distinguished among three modalities within each life area: instrumental, affective, and cognitive. Instrumental or material personal values are desirable or important states, objects, goals and behaviors that have direct concrete and practical consequences. For example, economic security, work benefits, and sport achievements. Affective values, such as love, friendship, and spiritual or religious experiences, reflect feelings or emotions. Finally, certain values are cognitive in nature in the sense that they reflect knowledge, awareness, and cognition; e.g., meaningful life or work, contribution to society, spiritual integrity, and broadening one's horizons. Whereas the life area facet is specific to the study of work values, the modality facet is common in various branches of the behavioral research such as attitudes and motivation (cf. Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Based on facet analysis (Shye & Elizur, 1994), the life area and value modality facets were used for the definition of personal values. Facet analysis is a theoretical approach combined with a set of statistical procedures enabling the researcher to formally define a given construct by specifying its contents (e.g., relevant items) and structure (i.e., main attributes). Facet, the primary concept in this approach, is a group of elements together with a rule specifying the group boundaries (i.e., which elements belong to the set and which ones do not) and internal order. More than one facet can be used for defining a construct; each additional facet further differentiates among the construct contents. Thus, facets are used for systematically analyzing the contents of a construct, and a multifaceted definition provides a structured and exhaustive rule for describing such contents. Indeed, Sagie and Elizur's (1996) definition of personal values incorporated all the combinations of the aforementioned six life areas and three value modalities. Further, these authors used both facets in order to construct an instrument for tapping the respondents' personal values (see below).

Work values and culture

Personal values differ from each other in the degree of their importance to the focal individual (Levy, 1986). Value sets associated with the various life areas vary as well in their relative importance to the person. In their study, Sagie and Elizur (1996) found that personal values pertaining to life in general (home and family) were considered by the respondents to be most important, followed by work, culture, sports, religion, and politics. This rank order, however, was based on an Israeli, Western-oriented sample. As the contribution of cultural factors is significant to the shaping of personal values (Rokeach, 1979; Sagie et al., 1996; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1998; Schwartz, 1994), the generalizability of the results to other, especially non-Western, cultural groups is questionable.

The Middle East provided an appropriate opportunity for conducting a cross-cultural confirmation of these conclusions. Israelis and Palestinians differ in several respects including cultural orientation (West versus East), relative emphasis upon modernism and tradition, and degree of political crystallization. Additionally, and most meaningful for the aims of the current study, the Palestinian society is more collectivistic and less individualistic than its Israeli counterpart is (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Sagie, Elizur & Yamauchi, 1996; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1998). The individualism/collectivism cultural dimension describes the way in which the individual defines him/herself as either an independent agent or a part of the collective (Hofstede, 1980). In individualistic cultures, values are focused on the person, his or her intrinsic identity, self-development and personal achievements, either at work or in other life areas (Ho & Chiu, 1994). Additionally, individualism is concerned with one's inner circles (e.g., the core family). Conversely, values adopted in collectivistic cultures emphasize the supremacy of the group (e.g., extended family, clan, or society) over the individual, and reflect one's collective identity, public life and shared achievements.

Applying the individualism/collectivism cultural dichotomy to the study of personal values reveals that the relative importance of certain life areas depends on the extent of one's tendency toward individualism or collectivism. Although each life area is meaningful everywhere, its *relative* importance to the person may vary according to the cultural orientation. Specifically, the core family and the workplace appear to be the most significant domains of life for each person in every country (England, 1991; MOW International Research Team, 1987), yet, their importance is probably higher for an individualist (e.g., Israeli) than for a collectivist (e.g., Palestinian). Accordingly, values that are associated with these life areas (i.e., individual-centered values) are probably more important to the former than the latter. The opposite may be true for domains such as religion, sports, and politics, which are typically considered to be more communal. Personal values associated with these life areas (i.e., collective-centered values) are probably more important to the Palestinians than to their Israeli counterparts.

In fact, each life area may have private as well as communal components (e.g., values, activities, and attitudes). As Ho and Chiu (1994) reported, religion can be regarded as either personal belief or participation in group-worship and membership in religious institutions. Similarly, personal athletics and group games are private and communal forms of sports respectively, and keeping the individual legal rights and obligations versus the involvement of political activities, parties, or movements, are individualistic and collectivistic forms of politics. Nevertheless, the collectivistic interpretations of the behaviors in these three realms are more typical, at least in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Thus, values associated with these realms are primarily collectivecentered and could be expected to be more meaningful for collectivists than for individualists. Indeed, there is another reason for the proposition concerning religion. Being more conservative and traditional, the Palestinians are supposed to put more emphasis on this life area.

In sum, two hypotheses, universal and culture-laden, were formulated. Based on the across-countries evidence concerning the centrality of one's family and work (MOW, 1987), the universal hypothesis was:

H1: Personal values associated with life in general (home and family) and work (i.e., individual-centered) would be more important to both Israelis and Palestinians than values associated with religion, culture, sports, or politics (collective-centered).

The culture-laden hypothesis was:

H2: Individual-centered personal values would be more important to persons whose society emphasizes the individualistic orientation (Israelis) than to those persons whose society is lower in this orientation (Palestinians). Conversely, collective-centered personal values would be more important to persons whose society emphasizes the collectivistic orientation (Palestinians) than to persons whose society is lower in this orientation (Israelis).

As cultural life can reflect either communal activities or personal experience, no specific reference to this life area was made here; we had no priori expectation concerning the difference in culture's importance between both national groups. Similarly, we had no reason to propose any difference between both national groups in the rank order of personal values reflecting either the instrumental, affective, or the cognitive value modality.

Method

Subjects

Two samples of undergraduate and graduate students took part in the current study: 597 Palestinians and 452 Israelis. All the Palestinian participants were Moslem or Christian Arabs living in East Jerusalem or the Palestinian Authority; the Israeli participants were Jews living in Israel. The Palestinian sample consisted of students from seven universities and colleges. These were: Al-Quds Open University, Bethlehem (N=38); Al-Quds University, Jerusalem (N=25); Bethlehem University, Bethlehem (N=122); Birzeit University, Birzeit (N=220); Al-Najah University, Nablus (N=62); Polytechnic Institute, Hebron (N=60), and Hebron University, Hebron (N=70). The Israeli sample consisted of students from four universities in Israel. These were: Hebrew University, Jerusalem (N=103); Tel-Aviv University, Tel-Aviv (N=108); Ben-Gurion University, Beer-Sheva (N=119), and Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gran (N=122). The total Israeli and Palestinian sample composed of 1049 respondents.

About 40% of the respondents studied business; the rest of the Palestinian sample studied either English or engineering. The remaining Israeli students took different areas of study. Gender composition of both samples was roughly equal; 52% (542) of the composite sample was men. The Palestinians, however, were younger than the Israelis were; the mean ages were 20.8 and 24.9 years respectively for both samples.

Instrument and Procedure

The Sagie and Elizur's (1996) 54-item personal value questionnaire was used in the study. Nine items represent each of the following life areas: life in general, work, religion, culture, sports, and politics. These nine items include three cognitive, three affective, and three material items. The Hebrew version of the questionnaire that was previously employed by Sagie and Elizur (1996) was also administered to the current Israeli sample. Because the curriculum of all the Palestinian respondents was entirely or partially in English, the questionnaires distributed to them were in English (see Appendix 1). Using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, all the value sets pertaining to the six life areas were found to be highly reliable, in the range .82-.91; the coefficients pertaining to the modalities were in the range .81-.84 (Table 1).

Each respondent was asked to consider the items in every life area separately (e.g., Section A in Appendix 1), and to mark first the single most important item and the single least important item to him or her. Then, the respondents marked each of the remaining items in the specified life area, using a scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 6 (most important). This procedure was used in order to increase the scale sensitivity (i.e., the difference between more and less important value items within each life area). Background questions were introduced at the end of the questionnaire.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the composite sample: mean scores (that reflect degree of value importance), standard deviations, and intercorrelations. The correlations among value modalities were high (.77 or more); similarly, high correlations were obtained between life in general and work (.71), and between each of these life areas and culture (.45 and .50 respectively). Although positive, all the other correlations were low to medium in size (.17 to .39). The importance of the three value modalities was almost equal; the cognitive modality (M=4.26; SD=.80) slightly preceded the other modalities, the affective (M=4.22; SD=.81) was in between, and the instrumental modality was considered by the respondents to be least important (M=4.04; SD=.83).

Table 1

Variable	Mean	<u>SD</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Life areas								
1. Life in general	4.81	.99	(.82)					
2. Work	4.74	1.01	.71*	(.89)				
3. Culture	7.28	1.00	.45*	.50*	(.87)			
4. Sports	3.97	1.23	.23*	.31*	.41*	(.82)		
5. Religion	3.65	1.19	.17*	.28*	.33*	.34*	(.85)	
6. Politics	3.59	1.35	.19*	.27*	.27*	.39*	.38*	(.91)
<u>Modalities</u>								
1. Cognitive	4.26	.80	(.84)					
2. Affective	4.22	.81	.80*	(.81)				
3. Instrumental	4.04	.83	.77*	.82*	(.81)			

Personal Values of the Composite Sample: Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations (N = 1049)

Note: Life areas and modalities are ordered according to the size of their mean scores. Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) coefficients are displayed (within parentheses) in the diagonal cells. All scales range from 1 (least important) to 6 (most important.).

* <u>р</u><.01.

Rank order of personal value sets in the various life areas was similar to that obtained by Sagie and Elizur (1996). Namely, the composite sample considered life in general to be the most important life area (M=4.81; SD=.99), followed by work (M=4.47; SD= 1.01), culture (M=4.28; SD= 1.00), sports (M=3.97; SD= 1.23), religion (M=3.65; SD= 1.19), and politics (M=3.59; SD= 1.35). As presented in Table 2, minor deviations from this hierarchy were found in the two sub samples. For the Palestinians, work preceded life in general (means were 4.60 and 4.54 respectively; SDs= 1.01 and 1.08), and for the Israelis, very slight difference was found between politics and religion (means were 3.30 and 3.29 respectively; SDs=1.29 and 1.14). In accordance with the first hypothesis (H1), however, for both the Israelis and Palestinians the mean scores for life in general and work (i.e., individual-centered values) were much higher than the mean scores of the remaining life areas, religion, culture, sports, and politics. It is interesting that out of the latter,

values associated with culture, the mixed personal-communal life area were most important for the two national samples.

Although no meaningful difference was found between the rank orders of the Palestinian and Israeli life areas, significant differences were found within each life area, except for culture, between the average scores of both samples (Table 2). In accordance with the second hypothesis (H2), life in general (home and family life) was found to be more important to the Israeli respondents (M=5.17, SD=.71) than to their Palestinian counterparts (M=4.54, SD= 1.08); t-value was highly significant (t[1047]=-10.91, p<.001). Almost equally significant was the difference observed between the work values of both samples. Here too, the Israeli mean (4.92, SD=.85) was higher than the Palestinian mean (4.60, SD=1.01; t[1047]=-5.10, p<.001). Conversely, the Palestinians were higher on these life areas that appear to involve more communal aspects: sports (means were 4.24 and 3.61, SDs=1.15 and 1.24, respectively; t[1047]=8.45, p<.001), religion (Ms=3.92 and 3.29, SDs=1.15 and 1.14; t[1047]=8.77, p<.001), and politics (Ms=3.81 and 3.30, SDs=1.36 and 1.29; t[1047]=6.17, p<.001).

Table 2

Personal Values of the Palestinians (N = 597) and Israelis (N = 452): t-test for Equality of Means

	Palest	nians	Israe	elis	
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-test
Demographic Characteristics					
1. Age	20.8	6.3	24.9	5.8	
2. Sex (% of females)	46		49		
Life areas					
1. Life in general	4.54	1.08	5.17	.71	-10.91 [°]
2. Work	4.60	1.01	4.92	.85	-5.10°
3. Culture	4.25	1.06	4.33	.91	1.32
4. Sports	4.24	1.15	3.61	1.24	8.45 °
5. Religion	3.29	1.15	3.29	1.14	8.77 °
6. Politics	3.81	1.36	3.30	1.29	6.17°
Modalities					
1. Cognitive	4.29	.88	4.23	.68	1.13
2. Affective	4.26	.88	4.16	.71	1.98ª
3. Instrumental	4.13	.90	3.92	.71	3.98 °

Note: A t-test for independent samples was used to test the equality of the means of both national samples; positive values denote higher Palestinian means and negative values indicate higher Israeli means. ^a p < .05, ^b p < .01, ^c p < .001.

For culture, whose components could be considered as either personal or public, no meaningful difference was observed between the two samples. Finally, despite the lack of a priori hypothesis, the means of all value modalities were higher for the Palestinians than the Israelis; two differences (for instrumental and affective values) were significant. Nevertheless, the fact that all three differences were in the same direction may detract from the meaningfulness of these results. The differences may reflect a general trend of the Palestinians to attribute higher importance to all value items and not an emphasis on a specific value modality.

Multiple discriminant analysis was employed in order to identify those life areas that best differentiate among the national samples. Specifically, we asked whether the distinct life areas, beyond demographic characteristics (i.e., age and sex), might help to discriminate between Israelis and Palestinians. Table 3 presents the results, ordered by correlation size. With a dichotomous criterion, the analysis yielded only one canonical discriminant function (Wilks' Lambda=0.67, $\chi 2[8]=414.6$, p<.001). The function correctly classified 79% of all the cases into their original

groups, a 'hit-rate' that exceeds Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black's (1995, p. 204) 'rule of thumb' for determining predictive efficacy.

Table 3

National Affiliation as a Function of Demographic Variables and Life Areas: A Multiple Discriminant Analysis (N = 1049)

Discriminating Variable	Correlation with Discriminant Function	Criterion	
Life in general	48	Palestinians	
Age	48	Centroid value	.61
Religion	.39	% Correctly Classified	80
Sports	.37	Israelis	
Politics	.27	Centroid value	81
Work	23	% Correctly Classified	78
Culture	06		
Sex	05		
		Weighted Mean	
Canonical correlation	.57	% correctly classified	79

Out of the discriminating variables, life in general was highly correlated (-.48) with the canonical discriminant function. As implied from the negative centroid value of the Israeli sample (-.80) and the positive Palestinian centroid value (.61), the higher the importance of the personal values associated with this life area was, the higher was the likelihood that the respondent was an Israeli rather than a Palestinian. A comparably high correlation was also found between age and the discriminant function (-.48); the older the respondent was the higher was the probability of his or her Israeli affiliation. As expected, moderate positive correlations were found for religion (.39), sports (.37), and politics (.27), all of which pointed to a Palestinian identity. Moderate negative correlation in the expected direction was found between work and the canonical function (-.23). Finally, very low correlations were found for culture (-.06) and sex (-.05), denoting that the contribution of these variables to the discrimination between the samples was negligible.

Discussion

Recently, Sagie and Koslowsky (1998) argued that the personal values are not expected to be salient in *every* case; yet, they are very salient and highly influential in *some* cases. Such a case is the state of conflict among social parties beyond the individual level, e.g., within the workplace, at the national, or even the international level (Weick, 1996). Conflicts between social groups magnify the individual's awareness to the distinctive values of these groups. Further, one's personal values become an important tool that could be harnessed to strengthen his or her identification with either of the rival parties. Consequently, in a case of a conflict between one's in-group and some out-group, his or her attachment with the in-group and the hostility to the other group could be expected to increase. The continuous Israeli-Palestinian conflict has therefore increased the salience of cultural values within each national environment. Hence, more than other pairs of neighboring individualistic and collectivistic societies (e.g., the USA and Mexico), Israelis and Palestinians could be expected to differ in terms of their dominant personal values.

It was found that individuals of both samples considered value sets associated with life in general and work, the domains most related to the self, or his or her small and intimate group, to be most important for themselves. The importance of culture, a life area that involves mixed personal and communal aspects, was in between, and that of the collective-centered domains: sports, religion and politics were even lower. Despite this overall agreement, the gap between the private and public sets of values was larger for the Israelis than the Palestinians. The Israelis considered those personal values guiding private life as very important and those associated with public or

communal life as very unimportant. The gap between both extreme means (5.17 and 3.29, for life in general and religion respectively), was 1.78. Conversely, the Palestinians attributed somewhat lower importance to the private domains. Moreover, they believed that even the values associated with their public life are still important. In their case, the gap between the extreme means (4.60 and 3.81, for work and politics respectively), was only .79, half the size of the Israeli gap. In sum, the current analysis provides support to the proposition that differences in Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimension of individualism versus collectivism may account for the variability in the value importance of the public and private life areas.

Several limitations of the study should be considered. First, some of the present results could be attributed to other factors, addressed above, differing between the Israeli and Palestinian societies. For example, the relatively higher level of the Palestinians' religiosity may explain the higher importance of religion's value set. Similarly, being in a state of political crystallization may increase the Palestinians some of the present finding; nevertheless, they cannot address the entire range of the differences between the responses of the two samples.

Second, the cultural dimension of both samples was not measured with one of the available scales of individualism and collectivism attitudes (e.g., Eby & Dobbins, 1997) but interpreted according to national affiliation (Israeli or Palestinian) of the respondents. However, as elaborated in depth by Sagie and Elizur (1998), the validity of attitude scales as measures of individualism-collectivism is *not* necessarily higher than that of national affiliation. In fact, national affiliation is often used as a criterion for the validation of these scales (e.g., Bierbrauer, Meyer & Wolfradt, 1994; Chan, 1994). Therefore, by determining cultural dimension according to national affiliation we just eliminated one step in the reasoning process.

Finally, the question of representativeness could be raised as well. Only two cultural societies were included in the present study, and they were represented by student samples. It could be argued that due to the Western cultural values accompanying their higher education, students are not the best representatives of their respective cultural environments. In other words, common academic background and shared Western experience may mitigate the disparity between the personal values of the two student samples. Despite this common background, however, the study demonstrated that the values of Israeli and Palestinian students still differ. Thus it could be concluded that the difference between the personal values of non-students should be even higher. In order to examine the extent of generalizability of the results, further investigation with samples from other cultural environments and occupational groups would be useful.

Future researchers may want to include additional life areas such as science, technology, education, and economics. By doing so, they will further elaborate the cross-cultural differences in other components of personal values. In summary, the present study offers new vistas for personal value research. Ultimately, awareness of which values are most important for each religious, cultural, or national group may enhance the mutual understanding between diverse groups. Such awareness is most important in conflict situation; it is especially needed in the embroiled Middle East as it can improve the prospects of peace.

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Appendix

The Personal Value Questionnaire

You are kindly requested to answer the following questions. The questions are about the importance to you, of various aspects of life. Please read the first section and circle number 1 for the least important item(s), and 6 for the most important item(s). Then, rank the other items in that section. Repeat the same procedure for each of the remaining sections.

SECTION A: The importance to you of various aspects of life in general

1. A meaningful life	123456
2. Self-fulfillment	123456
3. Contribution to society	1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Happiness	1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Love	1 2 3 4 5 6
6. Friendship	1 2 3 4 5 6
7. A comfortable life	1 2 3 4 5 6
8. Economic security	1 2 3 4 5 6
9. Success	1 2 3 4 5 6

SECTION B: The importance to you of various aspects of work life

10. Meaningful work	123456
11. Self-fulfillment at work	123456
12. Work contribution to society	123456
13. Happiness at work	123456
14. Good human relations at work	1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Friendship at work	123456
16. Work benefits	123456
17. Work security	123456
18. Success at work	123456

SECTION C: The importance to you of various aspects of religious life

19. Spiritual integrity	123456
20. Self-fulfillment	123456
21. Contribution to society through religion	123456
22. Peace of mind	123456
23. Religious experience	123456
24. Good human relations	123456
25. Observance of religious precepts	123456
26. Maintaining the tradition	123456
27. Religious style of life	123456

SECTION D: The importance to you of various aspects of cultural life

 28. Broadening your horizons 29. Self-fulfillment 30. Contribution to the society's cultural life 31. Enjoyment of cultural activities 32. Cultural experience 33. Good human relations in cultural life 34. Cultural activity 35. Creativity 	1 2 3 4 5 6 1 3 6 1 3 6
36. Cultural achievements	1 2 3 4 5 6

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SECTION E: The importance to you of various aspects of sports and athletic life

37. An interesting life	123456
38. Self-fulfillment at sport activity	123456
39. Contribution to society through sports	123456
40. Enjoyment	123456
41. Getting praise for sport achievements	123456
42. Feeling young and fresh	123456
43. Practicing physical performance	123456
44. Keeping physical fitness	123456
45. Attaining sport achievement	123456

SECTION F: The importance to you of various aspects of political life

46. Fulfilling national/social goals	123456
47. Self-fulfillment through political activity	123456
48. Contribution to society	123456
49. Satisfaction with political activities	123456
50. Finding contentment in political activities	123456
51. Good human relations	123456
52. Political doing	123456
53. Political achievements	123456
54. Social achievement through political means	123456