Abstract

The relationships among self-concepts, future job, and values were investigated in 230 students attending humanities and sciences, polytechnic, and vocational high schools in Catania (Italy). Measures: Semantic Differentials for Self-concepts and Future Job, and Inventory of Professional Values. Results: Vocational students judged as more important relationship, self-improvement, innovation, variety, and physical activity than the others; polytechnic students valued as more important leadership and salary than the others; humanities and sciences students judged as more important responsibility than the others. Vocational students considered Actual Self-concept and Future Job more positively than the others. Positive relationships among values, Self-concepts and Future Job were discussed.

Keywords: Value orientations, high school students, self-concepts, future job;

1. Introduction

One of the most important topics linked to the development of professional career in life span is represented by the analysis of professional value system which reveals what is important for individuals in their job and consistent with their professional expectations and preferences as the source of full satisfaction deriving from its own realization (see Super, 1953, 1969; Boerchi & Castelli, 2000; Perron, Fraccaroli, Pombeni, & Daoust, 2004; Catalano, Trapani, Miragliotta, & Sprini, 2006). Empirical evidences from the Italian studies, carried out by Boerchi and Castelli (2000) with high schools and university students, revealed the existence of a structure organized in different value orientations that individuals can judge more or less important in their own working life: 1) the achievement of the predetermined goals and the overcoming of obstacles and difficulties encountered in the path of life (the result); 2) the cooperation and relationships with other people for individual and collective success (the relationship); 3) the attainment of professional positions and progression in career as a result of possible promotions (the career); 4) the assumption of social roles in which dominance and exercise of power are the strengths of the performed task (the leadership); 5) the economic remuneration (the salary); 6) the professional and personal growth (the self-improvement); 7) the importance to work in a creative and innovative manner in carrying out one’s own job (the innovation); 8) the relevance attributed to the performance of different
and not repetitive or habitual activities (the variety); 9) the prominence to act in a honest and responsible way (the responsibility); 10) the importance given to the tasks that require travels and trips to know unfamiliar cultures and values (the mobility); and finally, 11) the magnitude assigned to jobs that require the performance of manual and physical jobs (the physical activity).

It appeared interesting to deepen what is estimated important by individuals within their own job in relation to the representation of Self-concept, analysed in very past research by Super (1951), Pallone, Rickard, Hurley, and Tirman (1970), Holland (1981) and Kidd (1984). For example, Super (1951) showed significant relationships between vocational development and self-concept in adolescents and adults. In addition, Pallone and colleagues (1970) verified that values of stimulation, creativity, independence, and prestige (investigated with Super’s Work Values Inventory) were negatively correlated with the image of self (measured using semantic differential schedule). Recently, few evidences were found about the relationship between value orientations and image of self and of job, and this rationale constituted the purpose of this study carried out in a sample of students from 14 to 18 year-olds in Catania, Sicily (Italy).

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 230 students (115 boys, 115 girls) aged between 14 and 18 years (M=16.6; sd=1.4) attending two high schools (humanities and sciences; n=79; 33 boys and 46 girls), two polytechnic (n=78; 46 boys and 32 girls), and two vocational schools (n=73; 36 boys and 37 girls) in Catania (Sicily, Italy). Participants were randomly enrolled and divided in two age groups: n=76 students from 14 to 16 year-olds (junior students) and n=154 students from 17 to 18 year-olds (senior students). Parental consent for the participation to this study was obtained.

2.2. Measures and procedure

2.2.1. Inventory of Professional Values

The first measure, used to analyze the value orientations, is constituted by the Inventory of Professional Values (Boerchi & Castelli, 2000). It is divided in 11 subscales, each composed by 6 statements on a response scale ranging from 1 (not at all important to me) to 4 intervals (very important to me). Each subscale indicates the importance that subjects assign to the values in their actual or future profession.

Some examples of statements for each value are reported: for the value of “results” (RES), e.g. “to have clearly in mind what are the goals that I would like to achieve”; for the “relationship” (REL), e.g. “to engage in activities that require the collaboration of many people”; for the “career” (CAR), e.g. “to do a job that gives me prestige”; for the value of “leadership” (LD), e.g. “to have the authority to manage the activities of groups or individuals”; for the “salary” (SAL), e.g. “to have a job that provides economic security”; for the “self-improvement” (IMP), e.g. “to increase my competences and abilities”; for the value of “innovation” (INN), e.g. “to create new objects or activities”; for the “variety of activities” (VAR), e.g. “to perform a non-repetitive work”; for the “responsibility” (RESP), e.g. “to feel a strong sense of responsibility”; for the “mobility” (MOB), e.g. “to engage in activities that require movement and travel”; for the “physical activity” (PHA), e.g. “to execute tasks that require physical activity”. Internal consistency reliability resulted to be satisfactory (α=.89).

2.2.2. Semantic Differentials

Three Semantic Differentials were used to analyze the representation of the following concepts: Actual Self, Future Self, and Future Job (see Falanga, De Caroli & Sagone, 2012). These measures are composed by 36 pairs of opposite adjectives (e.g. desirable-undesirable, secure-unsecure) for each concept assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. Cronbach’s α for the three concepts was equal to .78, .84, and .85, respectively.
2.3. Data analysis

The analysis of the statistical significance of results was carried out using the SPSS 15.0 by means of One-Way Anova, t-tests, and Pearson’s correlation. Type of school (humanities and sciences vs. vocational vs. polytechnic schools), sex (boys vs. girls) and age groups (junior vs. senior students) were considered as independent variables and mean scores in value orientations and in semantic differentials as dependent variables.

3. Results

3.1. Professional Value Orientations

Descriptive analyses were carried out in relation to the importance assigned to each professional value by the three groups of students separately. In detail, humanities and sciences students estimated as more important the values related to the “self-enrichment” (that is, responsibility, result, and self-improvement) and less important the values linked to the “change-flexibility” (that is, mobility, physical activity, and variety) than the others (figure 1); vocational students judged as more important the value of physical activity and less important the variety than the others (figure 2); finally, polytechnic students considered as more important the values linked to “achievement of tangible goals” (that is, leadership, salary, result, and career) and less important the variety than the others (figure 3).

![Figure 1: Professional Value Orientations – Humanities and sciences students (n=79)](image1)

![Figure 2: Professional Value Orientations – Vocational students (n=73)](image2)
A 3 (type of school) x 11 (value orientations) analysis of variance indicated that vocational students judged as more important the values of relationship, self-improvement, innovation, variety, and physical activity than the other students; polytechnic students valued as more important the values of leadership and salary than the other students; humanities and sciences students judged as more important the responsibility than the other students (Table 1). Post hoc analyses by means of Bonferroni’s test confirmed these differences among the three types of schools.

Table 1: Professional Value Orientations - Analysis of variance for type of schools - Means and standard deviations - Total sample (N=230)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Group I</th>
<th>Group II</th>
<th>Group III</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>One-way Anova</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Results (RES)</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relationship (REL)</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Career (CAR)</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Leadership (LD)</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self-improvement (IMP)</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Innovation (INN)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Variety (VAR)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Responsibility (RESP)</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mobility (MOB)</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Salary (SAL)</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Physical Activity (PHA)</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Professional Value Orientations - Analysis of variance for type of schools - Means and standard deviations - Total sample (N=230)

Group I: humanities and sciences students (n=79); Group II: polytechnic students (n=76); Group III: vocational students (n=73)

Sex of students had an impact on the values of result (M_girls=53.1, sd=11.4; M_boys=49.9, sd=10.8; t(228)=2.86, p=.005), self-improvement (M_girls=50.8, sd=12.3; M_boys=46.2, sd=11.9; t(228)=2.90, p=.004), innovation (M_girls=49.2, sd=12.3; M_boys=45.8, sd=10.9; t(228)=2.22, p=.027), and responsibility (M_girls=53.1, sd=11.7; M_boys=48.2, sd=11.1; t(228)=3.25, p=.001): in fact, girls considered more important these value orientations than boys. Differences for age groups were noted in relation to the following values: relationship (M_junior=51.2, sd=10.9; M_senior=44.7, sd=10.6; t(228)=4.36, p<.001), variety (M_junior=44.6, sd=11.3; M_senior=41.1, sd=8.9; t(228)=2.57, p=.011), responsibility (M_junior=47.7, sd=11.1; M_senior=52.1, sd=11.6; t(228)= -2.71, p=.007), mobility (M_junior=48.1, sd=9.4; M_senior=44.8, sd=11.6; t(228)=2.13, p=.034), and physical activity (M_junior=55.1, sd=10.3; M_senior=45.8, sd=10.3; t(228)=6.50, p<.001). Junior students considered more important the values of
relationship, variety, mobility, and physical activity than senior ones; additionally, senior students considered more important the value of responsibility than junior ones.

3.2. Semantic Differentials for Actual and Self-concepts and Future Job

A 3 (type of school) x 3 (semantic differentials) analysis of variance was carried out on the mean scores obtained by students with reference to the representation of Self-concepts and Future Job (Table 2): the results showed that vocational students considered Actual Self and the representation of Future Job more positively than the others (Table 2). Post hoc analyses with Bonferroni’s test confirmed these differences among the three types of schools.

Table 2: Semantic Differentials - Analysis of variance for type of schools - Means and standard deviations - Total sample (N=230)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Group I</th>
<th>Group II</th>
<th>Group III</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
<th>One-way Anova</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>F-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Actual Self</td>
<td>4.79 (.52)</td>
<td>4.80 (.59)</td>
<td>5.12 (.53)</td>
<td>4.89 (.57)</td>
<td>8.53 &lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Future Self</td>
<td>5.40 (.47)</td>
<td>5.33 (.77)</td>
<td>5.50 (.58)</td>
<td>5.41 (.62)</td>
<td>1.52 .22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Future Job</td>
<td>5.35 (.54)</td>
<td>5.24 (.71)</td>
<td>5.55 (.70)</td>
<td>5.38 (.66)</td>
<td>4.15 .017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group I: humanities and sciences students (n=79); Group II: polytechnic students (n=76); Group III: vocational students (n=73)

Differences for sex were found: girls valued the representation of Future Self (M_girl=.55, sd=.56; M_boys=.53, sd=.66; t(228)=2.67, p=.008) and Future Job (M_girl=.53, sd=.61; M_boys=.52, sd=.68; t(228)=3.61, p<.001) more positively than boys. Effects of age groups were observed: junior students expressed a more positive representation of Actual Self than senior ones (M_junior=.50, sd=.59; M_senior=.48, sd=.54; t(228)=2.88, p=.004).

3.3. Correlations between Professional Value Orientations and Semantic Differentials

Pearson’s linear correlations between value orientations and Self-concepts were found in relation to different types of school. Specifically, for humanities and sciences students, Actual Self was positively related to leadership (r(230)=.22, p=.04) and responsibility (r(230)=.32, p=.004); Future Self and Future Job were positively related to leadership (r(230)=.32, p=.004; r(230)=.24, p=.03) and responsibility (r(230)=.28, p=.01; r(230)=.31, p=.005). For polytechnic students, Actual Self was negatively related to variety (r(230)=-.34, p=.002) and mobility (r(230)=-.26, p=.022), and positively to responsibility (r(230)=.28, p=.013); Future Self was positively related to the values of result (r(230)=.31, p=.005), salary (r(230)=.23, p=.04), self-improvement (r(230)=.25, p=.03), and responsibility (r(230)=.36, p=.001); Future Job was positively related to self-improvement (r(230)=.29, p=.011) and responsibility (r(230)=.41, p<.001). For vocational students, Actual Self was positively related to salary (r(230)=.31, p=.008) and responsibility (r(230)=.33, p=.005); Future Self and Future Job were positively related to result (r(230)=.33, p=.004; r(230)=.32, p=.006), career (r(230)=.33, p=.005; r(230)=.27, p=.02), salary (r(230)=.24, p=.04; r(230)=.29, p=.014), self-improvement (r(230)=.33, p=.004; r(230)=.37, p=.001), innovation (r(230)=.36, p=.002; r(230)=.32, p=.006), and responsibility (r(230)=.46, p<.001; r(230)=.39, p=.001).

4. Discussion

The present investigation was focused on the analysis of professional values, Self-concepts, and future job in a sample of Italian students attending three different types of high schools (humanities and sciences, polytechnic, and vocational schools). In relation to the first topic, the main results indicated that students attending vocational schools valued as important the cooperation with other people for individual and collective success, the professional and personal growth, the realization of a creative and innovative job, and the performance of non repetitive tasks and of manual and physical jobs. Students attending polytechnic schools considered important the
possibility to assume dominant and prestigious social roles and the economic remuneration. Finally, students attending humanities and sciences schools judged as important to act in honest way. Differences for sex and age groups showed that girls considered important the achievement of predetermined goals and the overcoming of obstacles and difficulties in everyday life, the professional and personal growth, the performance of creative and innovative job, and the acting in honest way. These results were consistent with the findings of Boerchi and Castelli (2000). Additionally, junior students considered important the values linked to the change of professional activity (that is, mobility, variety, and physical activity), while senior students valued important to act in honest way. In relation to the second topic, findings revealed the presence of a more positive representation of Actual Self (especially, the junior students) and future job (specifically, the girls) in students attending vocational schools than the others.

About the correlations between professional values and Self-concepts, the more the students judged important the value correlated to act in honest way, the more they expressed a positive representation of Actual and Future Self-concepts and future job (without differences for the type of schools) and vice versa. For vocational and polytechnic students, the more they esteemed important the values connected to the achievement of prestigious results, the economic remuneration, the self-improvement on the job, the more they positively perceived the image of Future Self and their job.

These results could be used for promoting educational activities and programs focused on the choice of professional future career in relation to the self-image.

References