

## A COMPARISON OF VALUE PREFERENCES OF PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS AND THE ONES OF STUDENTS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE NETHERLANDS

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**Abstract:** The actual study used the Values Survey Module (VSM 08) to investigate how value preferences of Czech students differ from the ones of Dutch students. Secondly, the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS 57) was used to find out if there are any differences in value preferences between Czech and Dutch students and between students of psychology and students of other disciplines. Finally, all four of the groups based on all of the combinations of nationality and study fields were compared using the Schwartz value Survey. The results of the study revealed that Czech students and Dutch students had different value preferences, whereas psychology students and students of other subjects did not differ from each other. The research also demonstrated the differences among value preferences of all four groups.

**Keywords:** values, value preferences, cross-cultural comparison, Czech Republic, Netherlands, students

### 1 Introduction

Human values have been widely researched by many researchers (see Divisenko, 2010; Furnham, 1988; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) define values as main goals in one's life. There is a tight connection between these life goals and beliefs about how to reach them. Values are considered to be the basic guiding principles that influence people's behavior, thinking, and decision-making. Wenzel and Inglehart (2010) mention values in relation to human needs. Having such high impact on the ways we fulfill our needs, they help us to make decisions about what is important in our life. According to Rokeach (1968), values can be perceived as moral standards and criteria for selection of behavior.

Rokeach (1968) names three basic components of values: the behavioral, affective, and cognitive component. The behavioral component relates to motives and intentions, whereas the cognitive one represents thinking and decision making. Finally, one's relationship toward objects in the outside world is represented by the affective component (Rokeach & Regan, 1980).

The concept of 18 instrumental and 18 terminal values by Milton Rokeach (1973) belongs to the most influential value theories. Terminal values represent the final goals people follow in their lives, which can be equality, inner harmony, freedom, comfortable life, happiness, and other. On the other hand, values that guide our way toward the above mentioned life goals are called instrumental. They can be seen as means of reaching the terminal values. The examples are courageous, independent, obedient, loving, responsible and other.

Inglehart (2000) has been studying values in the relationship to social changes. Particularly, the process of transition from agrar to industrial society and later on to post/industrial society is of special interest to him. Inglehart (2006) argues that societal changes are followed by value changes that can be described on two dimensions. Traditional values are typical for agrar societies whereas secular-rational values are mostly seen in industrial societies. Traditional and secular-rational values are considered to be the opposing poles of the first dimension that was developed to describe value changes. The opposing poles of the second dimension are survival values and self-expression values. The changes that are nowadays happening in most well-developed societies can be best described on the second dimension. Furthermore, Inglehart (2000) makes a distinction between materialistic and post-materialistic values, and this further develops his theory of societal transition. Materialistic values (safety, stability, and other) are mostly held by people living in countries where the political situation is unstable and material resources are precious. Post-materialistic values (life

satisfaction, freedom, and other) are typical for well-developed, stable, and wealthy countries. Furthermore, Inglehart (2008) concludes that value changes are more likely to happen in wealthy countries than in developing countries (in fact, the transition is much faster in these countries).

The theory of Schwartz (1994) is based on cross-cultural research of values and on studies that investigated the relations between values and variables such as gender, politics, and other. (see Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010; Schwartz, Rubel-Lifschitz, 2009; Barber & Eccles, 1992). According to Schwartz (1994), individual values can be organized into higher categories called motivational types of values; the values that belong to one category are defined by a common motivational goal. Schwartz describes 10 motivational types of individual values and 7 types of cultural values that are recognized in all cultures. However, the importance ascribed to each value differs from one country to another (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994). Schwartz (1994) lists the following motivational types of individual values: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security. It is important to mention that all 10 motivational types of values can be further localized on two dimensions. The opposing poles of the first one, conservation and openness to change, describe the conflict between the need for stability on the one hand and the need for independence on the other. Furthermore, self-transcendence and self-enhancement, the poles of the second dimension, describe the conflict between the need for domination and the need for cooperation (Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008). The motivational types of cultural values are: affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, embeddedness, hierarchy, egalitarianism, mastery, and harmony. Furthermore, Schwartz (2006a) has developed three dimensions to describe the relationships between autonomy (both intellectual and affective) and embeddedness, hierarchy and equality, power and harmony.

### 2 Method

#### 2.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to compare the value preferences of these four target groups: Czech students of psychology (Palacký University), Czech students of other subjects, Dutch students of psychology (University of Groningen), Dutch students of other subjects. The hypotheses were set up as follows:

**Hyp. 1:** It is predicted that Czech students will differ from Dutch students in terms of cultural value preferences, as measured by the Values Survey Module 08 (VSM 08).

**Hyp. 2:** It is predicted that Czech students will differ from Dutch students in terms of cultural value preferences, as measured by the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS 57).

**Hyp. 3:** It is predicted that Czech students will differ from Dutch students in terms of individual value preferences, as measured by SVS 57.

**Hyp. 4:** It is predicted that psychology students (both Czech and Dutch) will differ from students of other subjects in terms of individual value preferences, as measured by SVS 57.

**Hyp. 5:** It is predicted that, regarding the individual value preferences, the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) will show an interaction between nationality and field of study on the dimensions of SVS 57.

#### 2.2 Participants

Both the VSM 08 and SVS 57 questionnaires had been filled out by 200 university students from the Netherlands (University of Groningen) and 200 students from the Czech Republic (Palacký University). Later, 11 Czech and 11 Dutch students were excluded (out of 400) because they had not met the inclusion criteria. These criteria had been set up as follows: being a full-time student enrolled in a bachelor or master's program at either

university; being born and having spent most lifetime in the Czech Republic or the Netherlands; both the participants and their parents being citizens of either country.

The final sample of 189 Dutch students included 155 women and 34 men. The age range of the Dutch sample was 20 to 28 years with the average of 21.96 years. 93 participants studied psychology and 96 participants were students of other subjects. The 96 participants attended the following faculties: Faculty of Economics and Business 14 %, Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences 11 %, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies 3 %, Faculty of Arts 29 %, Faculty of Medicine 10 %, Faculty of Geography 10 %, Faculty of Law 11 %, Faculty of Philosophy 2 %, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics 10 %.

The final sample of 189 Czech students consisted of 94 students of psychology and 95 participants with other specialization. The other 94 participants were students at these faculties: Philosophical Faculty 32 %, Faculty of Natural Sciences 18 %, Theological Faculty 4 %, Faculty of Education 25 %, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry 4 %, Faculty of Law 8 %, Faculty of Health Sciences 4 %, Faculty of Physical Culture 5 %. The average age of all Czech students was 22.6 years with the range between 20 and 27. The sample included 31 men and 158 women.

After the exclusion of 22 participants (together with the questionnaires they had filled out), further 6 pieces of SVS 57 and 7 pieces of VSM 08 were discarded because they had been incomplete or filled out incorrectly.

### 2.3 Recruitment Procedure

The questionnaires were collected in the course of the academic year 2010/2011. All students of psychology were approached in the class. The students of other subjects were contacted on an individual basis at the university campus, in the library, and in the dormitories. Each person filled out both the SVS 57 and VSM 08 questionnaires, either in Czech or Dutch. All students were informed about the purposes of the study, the confidentiality and anonymity issues, and about the possibility to quit the study any time they wish.

### 2.4 Instrumentation

400 university students filled out the Values Survey Module 08 (VSM 08) and the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS 57). The Values Survey Module is a research tool designed for cross-cultural value comparisons between countries. The following dimensions are used to describe the differences: Small/Large Power Distance, Collectivism/Individualism, Femininity/Masculinity, Weak/Strong Uncertainty Avoidance, Short/Long Term Orientation, Indulgence/Restraint, Monumentalism/Self-Effacement (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov & Vinken, 2008). The VSM 08 consists of 28 content questions that can be answered on a five point scale (1-2-3-4-5). A certain number is there to express the degree of agreement with the statement. The scores for every single dimension are to be computed based on a formula that works with the mean scores for national samples of respondents. In the original questionnaire, there is a section with questions asking for demographic information. In the present study, this section had been taken out and was replaced by a list of demographic questions that had been created only for the purposes of the current study.

The Schwartz Value Survey was developed by Shalom Schwartz, and it comes from his theory of cultural and individual values (see Introduction). The survey contains a list of 57 values that are followed by a short description. The importance of each of the values is assessed by the ascription of one number from the scale ranging from -1 to 7.

## 2.5 Demographic Information Sheet

The demographic information sheet asked the participants to provide information from the following areas: information about themselves (gender, age, nationality, place of birth), educational background (university, year of study, field and level of study, education prior to entering the university), family background (nationality of the parents, their level of education, one-parent/two-parent family, number of siblings) and work experience (type of work, full/part-time, length of employment).

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Data Analysis

The data had been entered into SPSS for Windows, Release Version 11.0, (© SPSS, Inc., 2001, Chicago, IL, www.spss.com). Means and standard deviations were calculated for all interval level variables. The Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted to test for normality of distribution. As for VSM 08, the instructions for data analysis and computation given by Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov and Vinken (2008) were followed. In terms of the SVS 57, corrections for scale use described by Schwartz (2006b) had been performed. Finally, the t-tests and the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied. The value of .05 was set for alpha.

### 3.2 Hypothesis 1

An independent-sample t-test had been conducted to compare the average scores of all Czech and all Dutch students on each dimension of the VSM 08. Four dimensions comparisons were significant. On the Small/Large Power Distance dimension, the group of Czech students ( $M = -4.17$ ,  $SD = 51.0$ ) scored significantly lower,  $t(357) = -2.33$ ,  $p = .020$ , than the group of Dutch students ( $M = 7.14$ ,  $SD = 42.1$ ). Levene's test indicated unequal variances ( $F = 6.33$ ,  $p = .012$ ), so the degrees of freedom were adjusted from 369 to 357. On the Collectivism/Individualism dimension, Czech students ( $M = 40.3$ ,  $SD = 55.7$ ) scored closer to the pole called Collectivism,  $t(369) = -2.20$ ,  $p = .029$ , than did Dutch students ( $M = 54.1$ ,  $SD = 65.3$ ). In terms of the Weak/Strong Uncertainty Avoidance, the results suggest that Czech students ( $M = -74.7$ ,  $SD = 55.9$ ), showed weaker uncertainty avoidance,  $t(369) = -2.11$ ,  $p = .036$ , than did Dutch students ( $M = -62.0$ ,  $SD = 60.1$ ). Regarding the Monumentalism/Self-Effacement dimension, Czech students ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 53.6$ ) scored closer to the pole called Self-Effacement,  $t(369) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .004$ , than did Dutch students ( $M = -11.0$ ,  $SD = 47.6$ ). As for the other three dimensions, the independent-sample t-tests failed to reveal any significant difference in scores between the two groups.

### 3.3 Hypothesis 2

An independent-sample t-test had been employed to compare the average scores of all Czech and all Dutch students on seven dimensions of cultural values by Schwartz. Significant differences between both groups were found on five dimensions. As for Embeddedness, the group of Czech students ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) scored higher,  $t(358) = 2.53$ ,  $p = .012$ , than the group of Dutch students ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .75$ ). On the Hierarchy scale, Czech students ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) reached a higher score,  $t(368) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .003$ , than did Dutch students ( $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). Regarding the Affective Autonomy dimension, the score of Czech students ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) was lower,  $t(358) = -4.59$ ,  $p < .001$ , than the score of Dutch students ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). In terms of the Intellectual Autonomy, students from the Czech Republic ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) reached a lower score,  $t(361) = -2.99$ ,  $p = .003$ , than did students from the Netherlands ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = .95$ ). Finally, the Czech group ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) scored lower on the Egalitarianism scale,  $t(361) = -4.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , than the Dutch group ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = .79$ ). On the remaining two dimensions, there were no statistically reliable differences between the groups.

### 3.4 Hypothesis 3

All dimensions of individual values had been subjected to a two-way analysis of variance with two independent variables: nationality (Czech vs. Dutch) and field of study (Psychology vs. other fields of study). All dependent variables were normally distributed for the groups formed by the combination of nationality and field of study, as assessed by the Shapiro-Wilk test. There was homogeneity of variance between groups as assessed by the Leven's test for equality of error variances.

The results indicate that there was a significant difference between the scores of all Czech and all Dutch students on the dimensions called Universalism, Hedonism, and Power. As for Universalism, the main effect of nationality yielded an F ratio of  $F(1, 365) = 5.77, p = .017$ , such as that Czech students ( $M = 4.14, SD = .93$ ) scored lower than Dutch students ( $M = 4.38, SD = .97$ ). Similarly, on the Hedonism dimension, the main effect of nationality yielded an F ratio of  $F(1, 357) = 44.4, p < .001$ , suggesting that the Czech group ( $M = 4.10, SD = 1.01$ ) reached a lower score on the dimension called Hedonism than the Dutch group ( $M = 4.84, SD = 1.11$ ). Further, on the Power dimension, the main effect of nationality yielded an F ratio of  $F(1, 365) = 43.8, p < .001$ , indicating that students from the Czech Republic ( $M = 2.85, SD = 1.22$ ) scored higher than students from the Netherlands ( $M = 2.05, SD = 1.10$ ). On the remaining dimensions, however, the two-way ANOVA failed to reveal any significant differences in scores between the two groups.

### 3.5 Hypothesis 4

On all 10 dimensions, the two-way ANOVA failed to reveal significant difference in scores between all students of psychology (both Czech and Dutch) and all students of other subjects.

### 3.6 Hypothesis 5

As for the Conformity dimension, there was a significant interaction between nationality and field of study,  $F(1, 366) = 6.30, p = .012$ . Czech students of psychology ( $M = 3.81, SD = 1.17$ ) reached a lower score,  $F(1, 366) = 4.10, p = .044$  than Czech students of other subjects ( $M = 4.13, SD = 1.08$ ), as indicated by the analysis of simple main effects. The two groups of Dutch students did not differ on this dimension,  $F(1, 366) = 2.33, p = .13$ . On the Benevolence dimension, there was a significant interaction between nationality and field of study,  $F(1, 361) = 4.32, p = .038$ . Dutch students of psychology ( $M = 5.15, SD = .82$ ) reached a significantly higher score,  $F(1, 361) = 7.40, p = .007$ , than Dutch students of other subjects ( $M = 4.82, SD = .82$ ). There was no difference between Czech students of psychology and other subjects,  $F(1, 361) = .056, p = .81$ . Furthermore, Czech psychology students ( $M = 4.82, SD = .76$ ) reached a significantly lower score,  $F(1, 361) = 7.30, p = .007$ , than Dutch psychology students ( $M = 5.15, SD = .82$ ). Students of other subjects from the Czech republic and from the Netherlands did not differ on this scale,  $F(1, 361) = .065, p = .80$ .

## 4 Discussion

We accept the first hypothesis saying that Czech students differed from Dutch students in terms of cultural value preferences measured by VSM 08. The fact that the Czech group scored closer to the Collectivism pole probably indicates that Czech students, more than Dutch students, emphasize values such as conformity and loyalty towards one's group. In other words, the values of their in-group play an important role in their lives. There is a great emphasis on norms and group membership which may become an important source of personal identity. In a university setting, it might be difficult for students with such value preferences to stand out and express their opinion or get involved in discussions.

The fact that Czech students showed weaker uncertainty avoidance than Dutch students is one of the most striking

findings in the study. In real life, such tendencies can be seen as higher level of open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance of diversity in the society. Having in mind that it is the Dutch society (not Czech) that is well known for its liberal attitude toward ethnic diversity, sexual minorities, and immigrants, we argue that this is the most interesting finding in the whole study.

The low score on the Small/Large Power Distance dimension suggests that Czech students show greater tendency to value social equality, and they attempt to avoid strict hierarchy together with unequal distribution of power in the society.

Another finding is that all Czech students scored closer to Self-Effacement, which can be connected to tendencies toward humility and flexibility.

The comparison of values on the national level by Hofstede and Hofstede (2006) had brought slightly different results. For instance, Hofstede and Hofstede had found that the Czech population scored higher on the Small/Large Power Distance dimension than the Dutch population. Also, on the Weak/Strong Uncertainty Avoidance, the Czech sample scored higher than the Dutch sample. On the other hand, regarding the Collectivism/Individualism dimension, the results of the present study were consistent with the one's by Hofstede and Hofstede. They had also found differences between the two samples on the Femininity/Masculinity dimension where the current study did not reveal any significant differences. According to them, the Czech sample scored higher than the Dutch sample.

Next, we accept the second hypothesis saying that Czech students did differ from Dutch students in terms of cultural value preferences measured by SVS 57. The fact that they reached a higher score on the Embeddedness dimension can be interpreted as greater preferences for values such as respect, obedience, forgiveness, and politeness, when compared to Dutch students. On the dimensions called Intellectual Autonomy, Affective Autonomy and, Egalitarianism, the group of Czech students scored lower than Dutch students. In the case of Intellectual Autonomy, the results can be interpreted as lower emphasis on values some of which are freedom, curiosity, broadmindedness, and creativity. Regarding Egalitarianism, the lower score can suggest that values such as equality, social justice, loyalty and honesty are of less importance for Czech students. Finally, lower score on the Affective Autonomy dimension may be linked to lower preferences for pleasure, excitement in one's life, self-indulgence, and enjoyment.

For the above mentioned dimensions, the results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Schwartz (2006b) who had compared national samples from the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. However, the findings also suggest that there were differences between both groups on the Harmony and Mastery dimensions. The present study failed to reveal any significant differences on these dimensions.

We accept the third hypothesis saying that Czech students differed from Dutch students in terms of individual value preferences on the dimensions of SVS 57. According to the higher score on the Power dimension, it is likely that Czech students value authority, wealth, social power and recognition more than Dutch students. On the contrary, lower score on Universalism can be linked to lower preferences for values including wisdom, equality, inner harmony and broad mindedness. The fact that the Czech group scored lower on Hedonism may have the meaning that Czech students emphasize values such as pleasure and enjoyment less than Dutch students.

Further, we reject the fourth hypothesis saying that psychology students (both Czech and Dutch) differ from students of other subjects in terms of individual value preferences, as measured by SVS 57.

We accept the fifth hypothesis saying that regarding the individual value preferences, the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows an interaction between nationality and field of

study on the dimensions of SVS 57. The fact that the Czech students of psychology reached a lower score on the Conformity dimension may indicate that values such as obedience, politeness, and self-discipline are of less importance for them, when compared to Czech students of other subjects. Further, Czech students of psychology reached a lower score than the Dutch psychology students on the Benevolence dimension. This may mean that they value loyalty, honesty, helpfulness and similar values less than Dutch psychology students. Finally, Dutch students of psychology scored higher on the Benevolence dimension than Dutch students of other subjects which may be linked to higher preferences for the above mentioned values.

Next, a number of limitations need to be considered. First, we would like explain that the results of the present study are not to be generalized to the Czech or Dutch population as a whole. The study worked with a very specific sample which only consisted of students who had been recruited from two universities, whereas other studies worked with the whole population. Second, the percentage of women in the sample was greater than men (see the Sample section for details). In fact, the gender distribution in our sample corresponds with the usual ratio of men to women in psychology classes. In other words, at both universities where the sample was recruited, there were more women than men among the students of psychology. Third, as for the other group (students of other subjects than psychology), the sample was slightly unbalanced in terms of study fields (see Participants section for details). The characteristics of the sample discussed above may bring some light into why we have got these results.

We also argue that the questionnaires themselves might have been the source of confusion. For instance, the SVS 57 contains a list of values, each of which is followed by a short explanation. It might be the case that some explanations are inaccurate, and the students might have failed to understand them correctly. As an example, there is the following explanation for the term "daring": seeking adventure, risks. We argue that this is not the only way to understand this term. It may also be understood as moral courage. As for VSM 08, our main concern is that the majority of questions are related to work. Although most students indicated in the Demographic Data Sheet that they had already had carried out some jobs (summer jobs, internships, part-time jobs), professional work experience may have some impact on the validity and accuracy of their answer.

As mentioned above, gender may be an important factor to influence one's value preferences. Previous research also supports the idea that women and men differ in terms of value preferences (Ryker & Others, 1992; Ryckman & Houston, 2003). According to Ryckman and Houston, who had also used the SVS 57, values such as Benevolence, Universalism, Safety and Success played a more important role for women than for men. On the remaining dimensions, however, men did not differ from women. In future research, gender can be included as third variable (besides field of study and nationality). An interesting question would be whether results similar to Ryckman and Houston's will be found among students. In future investigations, it might be possible to focus solely on psychology students. We consider this to be an important topic for research. We argue that the value preferences of psychology students, who are in fact prospective psychologists or psychotherapists, may have an impact on the process of therapy. Besides this topic, future investigation can focus, for instance, on differences between female and male psychology students. At many universities, male psychology students are rare. The work of a psychologist is considered to be a job that is typical for women. Researching the values of this group can bring more light into who really are these male students who had entered the university in order to study psychology. Further, at many universities, students can choose their further specialization since the master's level. Specializations such as neuropsychology, clinical, educational and counseling psychology are very common. Research can also address the question of how the students who had chosen a certain specialization differ from the group that had chosen another

filed. In other words, which values are important for future specialist in clinical psychology, neuroscience, and other fields when compared with each other. Another question to be discussed is whether studying psychology has an influence on one's value preferences. Future research can be done to investigate whether there are any differences between first year and last year students.

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**Primary Paper Section: A**

**Secondary Paper Section: D, G, L**

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