

Abstract

We evaluated whether adolescents' value orientations upon entering college influenced adult generativity and well-being. Social, financial/family, personal recognition, and creative orientations were identified in the sample. Having a social value orientation had the most positive outcome profile, followed by having a financial/family or creative orientation.

Background

During adolescence and emerging adulthood, individuals must face a series of transitional and developmental challenges. One of the most demanding is the individual's need to form one's own identity and sense of self. Inherent in this process is the need to identify one's values and goals independently of other influences. This is commensurate with recent calls for further research into how a sense of purpose develops during this period (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003).

Along this line, we had two primary research goals in the current study. First, we sought to evaluate what *types* of value/purpose orientations are evident during this transitional period. Following Damon and Bronk (2007), we suggest that different people orient towards different types of purposes and values that guide their decisions.

Second, we evaluated whether these different orientations differentially predict proximal and distal positive life outcomes. At senior year, we assessed three positive outcomes: personal development during college, satisfaction with college, and service-learning participation. We then assessed participants as mid-life adults, and evaluated their personal growth and generativity.

Method

Participants: 416 Notre Dame college seniors (57% male; $M_{age} = 22.1$ years at T1, 35.2 at T2)

Reliabilities of Interest: Personal Development during College (T1, $\alpha = .83$), Loyola Generativity (T2, $\alpha = .88$), Psychological Wellbeing - Personal Growth (T2, $\alpha = .91$)

Value Orientation Factor Analysis

	P	F/F	R	C
Participating in a community service program	.77	.11	-.04	-.08
Influencing social values	.74	-.09	.06	.05
Helping others who are in difficulty	.73	.04	-.12	.00
Helping to promote racial understanding	.72	-.02	-.07	.20
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	.51	-.13	.19	.22
Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment	.45	.09	.06	.24
Having administrative responsibility for the work of others	.03	.75	.17	-.05
Being successful in a business of my own	-.01	.75	.01	.09
Being very well off financially	-.20	.72	.29	.03
Raising a family	.23	.48	-.17	-.08
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field	.03	.23	.78	.08
Becoming an authority in my field	.08	.19	.78	-.01
Making a theoretical contribution to science	-.02	-.13	.57	.11
Creating artistic work (painting, sculpture, decorating, etc.)	.12	.06	-.11	.78
Becoming accomplished in one of the performing arts (acting, dancing, etc.)	.06	.03	.15	.73
Writing original works (poems, novels, short stories, etc.)	.15	-.09	.14	.61

Interfactor Correlations

	P	F/F	R	C
Prosocial	----	.01	.08 [^]	.27 ^{**}
Financial/Family		----	.24 ^{**}	.01
Pers. Recognition			----	.14 ^{**}
Creative				----

Proximal Outcomes at T1

	PersDev	Sat.	S-L
Prosocial	.19 ^{**}	.12 [*]	.21 ^{**}
Fin./Family	.21 ^{**}	.11 [*]	-.16 ^{**}
Recognition	.16 ^{**}	.08 [^]	-.21 ^{**}
Creative	.11 [*]	-.04	-.20 [*]

Correlations with Wellbeing at T2

	Gener.	PG
Prosocial	.31 ^{**}	.26 ^{**}
Financial/Family	.07	.11 [^]
Pers. Recognition	.07	.05
Creative	.15 ^{**}	.06

Multiple Regressions Predicting Wellbeing at T2 (Controlling for Sex)

	Gener.	PG
Prosocial	.28 ^{**}	.23 ^{**}
Financial/Family	.06	.14 [*]
Pers. Recognition	.03	.02
Creative	.06	.00

Conclusions

In our study, we sought to (1) identify value orientations evident in adolescence and emerging adulthood and (2) evaluate whether these orientations were differentially related to proximal and distal positive outcomes.

As for the first goal, we suggest four different orientations were present. First, individuals with a prosocial orientation focus on helping others and influencing the social structure. Second, financial/family-oriented people focus primarily on personal finances, but also on raising a family. Third, those oriented toward personal recognition focus on gaining the respect and recognition of their colleagues. Fourth, creatively-oriented individuals focus on originality and artistic achievement.

In our study, it appears as though a prosocial orientation is most related to positive outcomes. It was associated with greater personal development, satisfaction with college, service-learning participation at T1, and with greater generativity and personal growth at T2. Creative and financial/family orientations demonstrated some positive mid-life outcomes, while personal recognition scores were largely unassociated with wellbeing.

We suggest then that people do orient toward different values, even as emerging adults. In addition, it appears as though a prosocial orientation is most adaptive. Therefore, institutions should focus more on how best to develop prosocial goals among their students. Future research should evaluate which programs and practices best predict prosocial value development.

For more information, visit www.nd.edu/~dlapsle1

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