

Empathy and the Schwartz Value System: A Test of an Integrated Hypothesis

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ABSTRACT – This study examined the relationship between Schwartz’s (1992) 10 universal values and individual differences in empathy (Davis, 1983). Trait empathy was predicted to have the strongest positive relationship with benevolence values and the strongest negative relationship with achievement values. The pattern of correlations between empathy and the 10 values was closely associated with the predicted rank order of the correlations based on the Schwartz value system, but also varied slightly between a non-religious university ($n = 284$) and a religious university ($n = 179$).

Values are abstract cognitive structures that indicate desirable ways of behaving in a broad range of situations (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). As stable constructs, values are theoretically linked with individual differences (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994; Furnham, 1984; Herringer, 1998; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). Indeed, recent research has considered the relation between values and the five factor model of personality (Roccas et. al., 2002; Wolfradt & Dalbert, 2003; Wijnen, Vermeir, & Van Kenhove, 2007). To date however, no research has considered the relationship

between values and trait empathy. In this paper, we consider the conceptual link between values and traits, outline how individual differences in empathy should relate to Schwartz's value system, and report one study, with two samples, testing our hypotheses.

Connecting Values And Traits

For Schwartz (1994), values have five essential features. Values are thought to be 1) beliefs that 2) indicate a desirable end and 3) transcend specific situations. Values also 4) guide evaluations of information and 5) are organized in order of importance compared to other values (Schwartz, 1994). Traits, however, are enduring "patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (McCrae & Costa, 1990, p.23). Values and traits are similar in that each affects stable individual differences in behavior.

There are several plausible reasons to think values relate to personality traits. According to Roccas et al. (2002), values are useful in rationalizing behaviors that are expressive of certain traits. Also, by definition values transcend specific situations and identify desirable ways of behaving in many different contexts (Schwartz, 1992). So values are relevant predictors of behavior in many different situations and may therefore produce much consistency in behavior. This consistency in behavior may be often interpreted as traits in personality research. Personality and values may also share a similar biological basis (Roccas et al., 2002).

For the above mentioned reasons, research should test for relationships between values and traits. Indeed, researchers are beginning to undertake the study of this relationship (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994; Roccas, et. al., 2002). The following study contributes to this area of inquiry by considering the relationship of trait empathy to the Schwartz Value System.

Schwartz Value System

Schwartz (1992, 1994) introduced a model of 10 human values, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, power, and achievement, which are conceptually related to nine different motivational orientations. The structure of the model is circular with values on opposite ends having conflicting motives and values close together being similar in motivational goals. For example, the motivational orientation of benevolence, which is maintaining the welfare of ones ingroup members, may often conflict with the motivational orientation of achievement, which includes a focus on individual success. However, benevolence is less conflicting with universalism, since this motivational orientation, promoting the welfare of all humanity, is more similar to

benevolence. The circular model is supported in cross-cultural research (Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz, et al., 2001).

One benefit of the Schwartz (1994) model is that researchers can consider the relationship between multiple theoretically related values to a person variable, (e.g., attitudes). The researcher is able to test these integrated hypotheses by first identifying the strongest positive relationship and then rank ordering the magnitude of effect between each value and the person variable. This model is then tested against the data.

Recently, researchers have tested integrated hypotheses with the Schwartz value model and the five factor model of personality (Roccas et al., 2002). For example, the researchers hypothesized that the trait agreeableness would have the strongest positive relationship with benevolence values. Consequently, agreeableness would most negatively relate to the power values, since in the Schwartz model this value is organized opposite of benevolence. The researchers also predicted weaker positive relationships between agreeableness and tradition and conformity, while having lesser negative relationships with achievement, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction. The correlations between agreeableness and each of the ten values conformed to the predicted model. Other research also supports the notion that the 10 values are systematically related to different traits of the five factor model (Wolfradt & Dalbert, 2003; Yik & Tang, 1996). The above cited research underscores the need to consider the relationship between values and traits. However, there is a need to move beyond a focus on these most abstract traits (e.g. agreeableness), and measure more focused traits related to less broad behavioral domains. The present study aims to address this gap in the literature by evaluating the relationship between the Schwartz value model and trait empathy. Before discussing our predictions, we briefly consider trait empathy.

Trait Empathy

Davis (1983a) considers empathy a set of cognitive and affective responses to observing another's situation. Davis developed and validated a trait measure of empathy, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which includes four different dimensions of empathy; empathic concern, personal distress, perspective-taking, and fantasy. The latter two are both more cognitive processes, and the former affective responses. Empathic concern measures other oriented feelings, and personal distress taps self-oriented feelings, whereas perspective taking is considered a disposition to take another's point of view and fantasy is an ability to imagine the perspective of fictitious individuals in a story. Davis found that each of these scales related

differently to measures of interpersonal functioning, sensitivity to others, self-esteem, and emotionality.

The current research focuses on two specific dimensions of dispositional empathy, empathic concern and perspective-taking. Do individuals who rate high on empathic concern and perspective-taking have systematically different value structures, than individuals rating low on these dimensions? The following study relates the Schwartz values model to these aspects of trait empathy and makes specific predictions regarding the relationship between trait empathy and both benevolence and achievement values, while also testing an integrated hypothesis. We replicated the study on a separate sample, to consider potential variation in results due to the difference between a large state university and a small Christian liberal arts institution.

Hypotheses: Trait Empathy And Ten Basic Human Values

We believe that individuals high on trait empathy are aligned with the motivational orientation of benevolence. Benevolence values theoretically include an impetus to maintain and benefit the relations individuals have with others in groups of frequent contact (Schwartz, 1994). Also, the established relationship between agreeableness and benevolence value (Roccas et al., 2002) suggest empathy may relate most strongly to this value. Individuals high on agreeableness are “good-natured, compliant, modest, gentle, and cooperative,” (Roccas et al., 2002, p. 792). On the other hand, rating high on trait empathy involves a chronic concern for others, a tendency to take their perspective, and is known to predict helping behavior and cooperation (Batson, 1991). Since highly agreeable individuals, by definition cooperate with others, and empathetic individuals are shown to provide more help to others, it follows that trait empathy, like agreeableness, will positively relate to the importance of the benevolence value of desiring and maintaining good relationships with others from one’s in-group. The empathy-benevolence relationship would be important for understanding the variation of individual responses to viewing another in need. Benevolence may either facilitate affective responses to others or these may develop from a stable disposition to consider another’s perspective and respond emotionally. This value may also be used to rationalize and verbally express the individual’s chronic empathetic responses during social interactions. Thus, we forwarded the following hypothesis:

H1: Trait Empathy Will Have The Strongest Positive Relationship With Benevolence.

We also focus on achievement value. According to Schwartz (1994), the motivational orientation of achievement includes striving for personal success relative to social standards. Individuals who consider achievement important, value success, ambitiousness, as well as being capable and influential. This value may conflict with a chronic concern for others in social situations and therefore may be held to be less important by individuals high in trait empathy. Therefore, we predicted:

H2: Trait Empathy Will Have The Strongest Negative Relationship With Achievement Values

Lastly, the goal of this study is to test an integrated hypothesis with the 10 values in the Schwartz value model and trait empathy. Therefore, based on the first two hypotheses and Schwartz's (1994) theory of the motivational continuum underlying the circular value model, we predict a specific pattern of correlations among the remaining 8 values. Values closer in the circular model are predicted to relate similarly to trait empathy. However, these relationships are predicted to be weaker in magnitude than the achievement and benevolence relationship with trait empathy. Specifically, we predicted the following rank order, starting with the strongest positive relationship and ending with the strongest negative relationship: 1) benevolence, 2) universalism, 3) conformity, 4) tradition, 5) self-direction, 6) security, 7) stimulation, 8) hedonism, 9) power, and 10) achievement.

H3: Integrated Hypothesis. We Predict The Above Mentioned Rank Ordering Of The Correlations Between Each Value And Trait Empathy

Method

Participants

In sample one, participants ($n = 284$) were business students at a large state university. The sample included 135 men and 139 women, with 10 unidentified gender participants. Age of participants for this sample was not recorded. In sample two, participants ($n = 179$) were psychology students at a small Christian liberal arts university (Age, $M = 18.5$, $SD = 1.1$). The sample included more women (136) than men (42).

Procedure

In both samples, participants completed a packet of questionnaires in large groups. The questionnaires included the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) and the

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The order of the measures was counterbalanced.

Materials

Schwartz Values Survey (SVS). Participants completed the Schwartz (1994) Values Survey. The scale contains 56-items measuring the relative importance of 10 different values. Participants are asked to rate the importance of 56 values on a 9-point scale (-1 = opposed to my values, 0 = not important, and 7 = of supreme importance). More specifically, each item asks individuals to rate the importance of a value in terms of it being a guiding life principle. Multiple items measure specific latent values. For example, value items such as helpful, honest, forgiving, loyal, and responsible indicate the importance of the latent value benevolence. All items collapse to ten latent values, a model which finds support in prior factor analyses (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). The importance ratings of items are averaged according to the ten latent values. These composite scores are computed and used in all analyses.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Participants completed 21 items of the self-report measure of individual differences in empathy (Davis, 1983). The original scale includes four dimensions relevant to trait empathy, with each sub-scale containing 7 items. We excluded 7 items that measure the dimension fantasy, since we felt this dimension was irrelevant to the current research. Each item is constructed in a Likert style format with a 5-point scale (1= "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree"). The first factor is empathic concern, and taps other oriented feelings. For example, one item measuring empathic concern is, "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me". The second factor is perspective taking, which measure propensity to take another's point of view. An item example for perspective-taking includes, "I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both." Lastly, personal distress measures the tendency to experience negative self-oriented feelings (e.g. anxiety and discomfort) during social interactions. A personal distress item reads, "being in a tense emotional situation scares me". Davis (1983) provides much support for the validity of the four sub-scales.

Results

Partial Correlations in Sample One. We first computed the partial correlations between each value and empathy (Table 1). We were primarily interested in the positive forms of empathy, empathic concern and perspective-taking, and we computed a composite score on these items for each participant. These scores were

then correlated with a composite score on each of the 10 values. In computing the values composite score, we subtracted each individuals mean response from each rating. This is to reduce response bias. As predicted, empathy showed its strongest positive correlation with benevolence values, $r = .32, p < .001$. However, contrary to predictions, empathy showed its strongest negative correlation with power, $r = -.30, p < .001$, as opposed to achievement values, $r = -.17, p = < .01$.

Table 1
Partial Correlations And Reliabilities For The SVS Values
Sub-Scales In Both Study Samples

Values	Predicted Order	Correlations		Reliabilities	
		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 1	Sample 2
Universalism	9	.17**	.15**	.81	.76
Benevolence	10	.32***	.27***	.75	.77
Conformity	8	.07	.19*	.67	.71
Tradition	7	.13*	.09	.68	.45
Security	5	-.03	-.04	.66	.68
Power	3	-.30***	-.39***	.81	.77
Achievement	1	-.17**	.06	.41	.72
Hedonism	2	-.11	-.27***	.60	.65
Stimulation	4	-.14*	-.07	.80	.69
Self-Direction	6	-.07	-.05	.70	.70

Note. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; Sample 1 = large state university business students ($n = 284$); Sample 2 = small Christian liberal arts university psychology students ($n = 136$).

Testing the Integrated Hypothesis in Sample One. Next, to test the integrated hypothesis, we computed a Spearman Rho correlation between the predicted and actual rank order of the correlations between empathy and the 10 values. The correlation was strong and statistically significant, Spearman's Rho = .93, $p < .001$. A graph of the correlations shows that the pattern of correlations closely matches the predicted pattern based our integrated hypothesis.

Partial Correlations in Sample Two. The partial correlations were computed the same as in sample one. The partial correlations support our hypothesis that benevolence values have the strongest relationships with trait empathy (see Table 1). Empathy showed the strongest positive correlation with benevolence values, $r = .27, p < .001$. Again however, power values were most negatively correlated with trait

empathy, $r = -.39$, $p < .001$, as opposed to the predicted achievement values, $r = .06$, *ns*.

Testing the Integrated Hypothesis in Sample Two. Next, we tested if the predicted rank ordering of the simple correlations fits the actual rank ordering in the data. We used a Spearman's Rho correlation to test this hypothesis. There was a strong positive correlation between the predicted model and the data, Spearman's Rho = .78, $p < .01$. The patterns of correlations were, with one interesting exception, achievement, similar within the two samples. Empathy negatively related to achievement values in sample one, but had a slightly positive non-significant relationship in sample two.

Discussion

In one study, with two samples, we tested the relationship between trait empathy and each of the 10 values outlined in the Schwartz value model. We predicted that benevolence would have the strongest positive relationship with trait empathy. Also, we hypothesized that achievement would have the strongest negative relationship with trait empathy. Both samples supported the hypothesis that benevolence had the strongest positive relationship with trait empathy. Both samples however, failed to support that achievement was most strongly negatively related to trait empathy. In each sample, power had the strongest negative relationship with trait empathy.

Following the work of Schwartz (1994, p. 24), we assume that the 10 values can be arranged in a clockwise fashion around the two-dimensional circle. Based on this model we tested an integrated hypothesis, by considering how trait empathy might relate to each of the 10 values within this arrangement. We predicted a rank ordering of the simple correlations between trait empathy and each value. In each study our predicted model fit the data well. The Spearman's Rho correlations were strong in both studies. This data bolsters support for the circular structure of the Schwartz value model and also indicates the values related to trait empathy. However, in each sample we observed some minor deviations from the predicted model, as well as observed differences between samples.

Both studies observed the strongest positive correlation between benevolence values and trait empathy. Since benevolence values are based on motivation to maintain and promote the welfare of individual's associated with groups of frequent contact, we predicted that trait empathy would be related to these values. Trait empathy is generally defined as a set of cognitive and emotional responses to others experiences and predicts several positive interpersonal behaviors. This research, however, doesn't address the several possible reasons why benevolence values relate to trait empathy. If traits are antecedents of values, as Furnham (1984) suggests, then

this relationship may be due to individuals high in trait empathy having a need to justify these responses in a verbal, intentional, and conscious manner. Conversely, these values may also precede trait development of empathy. Individuals who highly value benevolence may subsequently have consistent cognitive and affective responses to other group members, and this consistency in other-oriented responses may be observed in measures of trait empathy. These two explanations, however, neglect that benevolence values and trait empathy may also share similar biological antecedents, such as temperament, or early life experiences, such as parenting style, attachment, and other meaningful socialization processes.

Even though the test of the integrated hypothesis did find strong support from statistical comparison of the predicted model to the observed model, both samples included deviations from the predicted model. Each sample showed the strongest negative correlation between power values and trait empathy. Power values are conceptually related to a motivational orientation that promotes a high social status in relation to others and also dominance over others and resources (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). These individuals value wealth, authority, social power, and preserving a public image. In reflection, it makes much sense that individuals that rate power values as very important would be less empathetically concerned with others' experiences. Indeed, we did predict a negative relationship between power and trait empathy. Future research may consider how trait empathy or the lack of it, impacts the importance of power values.

Another interesting finding is that the relationship between achievement values and trait empathy varied between samples. In sample one, which involved business students from a large state university, we observed a weak negative relationship. However, in sample two, which included students from a small private Christian university, we observed a weak non-significant positive relationship between achievement value and trait empathy. In speculation, it may be that achievement has different meanings to these separate samples. In the Christian university setting, achievement may include successfully helping others, making others aware of Christian religion, and living a life according to this religion. However, at the large state university, we assume a less homogeneous religious composition of students, and this may influence the meaning of achievement. For this sample, the meaning of achievement may reflect more the values outlined in the model, as control over others and success in attaining resources, relative to others. Of course these are merely post hoc explanations and it should be noted that the two samples also differed in the distribution of gender, with the private Christian University having much more women than men, compared to the large state University, which had a relatively even distribution.

There are some limitations to the current study. First, there were suboptimal inter-item reliabilities for some of the 10 values outlined in SVS. For example, the inter-item reliability for achievement in study one was, $r = .41$. Second, the results are survey data that are correlational and cannot distinguish between the alternative reasons regarding why and how values are related to trait empathy. Future research may address the many alternative hypotheses regarding why and how values are related to trait empathy. The current studies suggest a starting point, by addressing the role of benevolence in the process of the chronic emotional experience of empathy.

Conclusion

In a single study, with two samples, we tested the relationship between the 10 basic values outlined by Schwartz (1994) and trait empathy. We found support for the hypothesis that benevolence values were most strongly correlated with trait empathy. Future research will benefit by considering the role of benevolence values in trait empathy. We also supported the structural model of the 10 values by testing an integrated hypothesis regarding trait empathy and each of the values. As demonstrated in this research, as well as by prior studies, specific traits have reliable relationships with certain values. Theory and research on traits and values will benefit by outlining these relationships and testing for the several potential explanations for their existence.

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