

The Correlation of Importance and Attainability Disparity in the Personality Value System with the Meaningfulness of Life

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Abstract

The relevance of the subject is set by the contradiction existing in science concerning the understanding of psychological sense of the disparity between the importance of value and the assessment of its realization in life: in one case it is understood as sense-making, in another—as conflicting or meaning semantic vacuum. This issue was regarded in the empirical research via the identification in what way the difference of values importance and attainability parameters is connected with the level of life meaningfulness on the sample of people aged from 15 to 40 years old. The results suggested that the total difference of these parameters in the personality value system is not associated with the level of life meaningfulness, and thus, the disparity may provide values with additional incentive potential, and conflict sense, and be neutral as well. There have been found few links of life meaningfulness with the disparity of importance and attainability of some values that highlights spheres of age-related or situational tasks for a human to solve. The article proceedings may be useful from their theoretical point of view to specify patterns concerning valuable and meaning regulation of life, from practical point of view they may help to understand the complex role of values importance and attainability disparity in person's psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: value, personal value-meaning system, importance of value, attainability of value, the disparity of importance and attainability of value, meaningfulness of life

1. Introduction

1.1 Relevance of the Subject

Values reflect experience of the social community's life activity. They are interiorized and integrated into the personality structure in the form of personal values, setting the main guidelines of a person's life activity and playing the main role in its regulation.

In psychology, *substantial* sides of value- meaning regulation are mainly investigated: hierarchy of values and valuable orientations (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz 1994), structure and content of values (Cieciuch & Schwartz, 2012; Cieciuch et al., 2014), cross-cultural distinctions of life meaning and value-meaning structures of a personality (Ohbuchi et al., 1999; Salikhova, 2013; Woldu & Budhwar, 2011), the correlation of values with the meaning of life (Dezutter et al., 2014; Leontiev, 1999), mental states (Prokhorov, 2009), health and wellbeing (Brassai et al., 2011; Debats, 1996; Maercker et al., 2014). Also the *dynamics of values content* connected with age, professional and other factors is studied.

The *dynamic* sides of personality value functioning are investigated to a lesser degree. These are lines of personality's living space tension which arise upon the correlation of personality existential expectations and actual life situation, measures of value importance and perceived extent of its realization in life. Bratus (1988) writes about the dynamic side of a personality's meaning sphere in the same sense; he specifies this as a ratio of real and ideal goals. Aseev (1982) writes about the dynamic side of significance as the relation of motivation to opportunities of its realization. Relevant to this subject matters are considered in the terms of "expectation-value" in cognitive theories of motivation (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Weiner, 1986).

1.2 Problem Statement

Personality's possibilities to realize their values in life do not often coincide with the measure of their significance, due to which there arises divergence of valued and available. In science there is an inconsistent

understanding of the role of this disparity.

So, the barrier, an obstacle between value and its realization in the subject's life, from the point of view of Shakurov (2003), creates the value as that. He considers that in the absence of barriers, there opens an unlimited access to the benefits, the person is quickly satiated with them, and they lose their value for this very person.

Fantalova (2001) treats the ratio of value and measure of its attainability in life in quite an opposite way. The state when this or that value possesses great importance, but at the same time it is unattainable, is defined as a state of the irreversible and deep inner conflict. On the contrary, the state when the value is very available and is not so important is designated as the state of meaning vacuum and lack of incentives. The coincidence of value importance and attainability is characterized as the state of harmony where there are neither inner conflicts, nor internal emptiness that brakes motivation. To diagnose such states, the author modified M. Rokeach's technique. Besides ranging terminal values according to the importance criterion, the person estimates the degree of their attainability in life. It allows to determine parameters: importance (I) as the number of cases when the value was chosen as a more important one in a couple; attainability (A) as the number of cases when the value was chosen as more attainable in a couple; the difference of importance and attainability (I-A); a gross difference (I-A) for all values.

The awareness of value importance prevailing over its attainability as an inner conflict seems to be very debatable. It allows to refer a very wide range of the phenomena to this category, for example, vital plans inspiring the person and playing a sense-making role in their lives but the realization of which is postponed by the person for the future.

Equivocal approaches to the role of divergence between valued and attainable are found in different directions of psychology. The defensive mechanism of rationalization by means of which the person reduces the assessment of object's appeal at its inattainability was described by Freud (1989) in psychoanalysis. According to ideas of achievement motivation (Atkinson & Feather 1966), the power of aspiration to achieve the goal is defined not only by its importance for the subject, but also by a subjectively estimated achievability. According to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Gawronski, 2012), there is an aspiration to coherence of cognitive representations of the outside world and oneself; when there is a contradiction there is a motivation to their coordination. In general, the majority of approaches indicate the tendency to coordinate the parameters of value importance and attainability and their analogs. However, there have also been revealed opposite tendencies. Thus, motivational effects of the reaction to failure can be expressed not only in the decrease of the unattainable purpose attractiveness, but its growth as well (Atkinson & Feather, 1966). Researches available in this problem field concern, as a rule, situational changes of motivation in separate life or experimental situations. They do not affect value- meaning structures of the personality that regulate person's activity in large-scale and prolonged in time value-meaning contexts in general.

1.3 Objective of the Research

The *objective* of the empirical research was to identify the psychological sense of the divergence between importance and attainability parameters of value as the sense-making according to Shakurov's opinion, or conflicting and devastating due to Fantalova's point of view.

1.4 Substantiation of Research Methodical Approach

To settle the designated contradiction, the disparity of value importance and attainability was correlated with the results of the Life-Purpose Orientations Questionnaire (LPO) that estimates the general meaningfulness of life (Leontiev, 1992). Thus, if Shakurov's position is right, then there will be obtained a direct connection of value importance and attainability disparity with the level of life meaning. If Fantalova's point of view is correct, then such links have to be reverse as both deep inner conflicts, and meaning vacuum according to contents correspond to a low degree of life meaning. The application of this test is specified by the fact that it measures meaning fullness of life in its temporal development via the assessment of intelligence of person's past, present and future, and also the feelings of control over it. The states described by Fantalova (2001) are also connected with personality's psychological time. The value unattainable at the moment keeps its incentive potential only due to the existence of temporary vital prospect, the future, and in the conditions of "inner vacuum" both attainability and value are attributes of the present.

2. Methods

2.1 Data Collection Methods

The following methods were applied for obtaining the empirical evidences.

1) Life-Purpose Orientations Questionnaire (LPO) including the following parameters: goals in life (Goals), emotional intensity of life (Process), self-actualization satisfaction (Result), life locus of control (LC-Life), Ego locus of control (LC-Ego), general meaningfulness of life (ML) (Leontiev, 1992).

2) The Rokeach (1973) technique as modified by Fantalova (2001). In pairs subjects compared twelve terminal values by criteria of their importance and attainability. The list included the following values: active life, health (both physical and mental), interesting job, the beauty of nature and art, love (both sensual and spiritual closeness to a partner), wealth (absence of financial constraints), close friendship, self-confidence (absence of inner conflicts and doubts), cognition (including ability to extend knowledge and get new experience), freedom (independence of mind and action), happy family life, creativity. Each group of students was given the list of values in their native languages.

The following criteria were defined in each group: 1) importance (I) as the number of cases when the value was chosen as a more important one in a couple; 2) attainability (A) as the number of cases when the value was chosen as more attainable in a couple; 3) the difference of importance and attainability (I-A); 4) total difference (I-A) for all values.

2.2 Description of the Survey Sample

The current research has surveyed 341 subjects (180 men and 161 women) at the age of 15 to 40 years, among them: Suvorov military school cadets, 15-17 year old (n=75); psychology students, 19-20 year old (n=50, 50 women); graduate students, 22-28 year old (n=36, 25 men, 11 women); women, 22-30 year old (n=55); women, 31-40 year old (n=45); men, 22-30 year old (n=35); men, 31-40 year old (n=45).

2.3 Methods of Data Processing

The data were processed applying the descriptive statistics procedures, independent two-sample Student t-test, correlation analysis based on the Pearson's formula.

Data were analyzed both in a cumulative sample and in age and gender-related groups.

3. Results

3.1 Results of the Correlation Analysis of all Values

The distribution of all measured variables in the sample was close to normal; it allowed to apply the correlation analysis using Pearson's formula.

Interrelations of LPO test scales with the total difference (I-A) of values in the general sample and in groups divided according to age and gender are presented in the table 1.

Table 1. Interrelation of values total difference (I-A) with LPO test scales

Groups	LPO Questionnaire's scales					
	Goals	Process	Result	LC-Ego	LC-Life	ML
General sample (n=341)	-0.4	-0.06	0.02	-0.09	-0.09	-0.05
Suvorov military school cadets, 15-17 year old (n=75)	-0.01	-0.03	-0.07	-0.09	-0.06	0.02
Psychology students, 19-20 year old (n=50, 50 women)	-0.02	-0.16	0.05	-0.09	-0.09	-0.04
Graduate students, 22-28 year old (n=36, 25 men, 11 women)	-0.20	-0.16	-0.02	-0.12	-0.18	-0.10
Women, 22-30 year old (n=55)	-0.07	-0.15	-0.16	-0.04	-0.11	-0.13
Women, 31-40 year old (n=45)	-0.08	-0.08	-0.05	-0.10	-0.09	-0.06
Men, 22-30 year old (n=35)	0.32*	0.35*	0.08	0.13	0.15	0.21
Men, 31-40 year old (n=45)	0.06	-0.11	0.11	0.00	0.05	0.03

* - p<0.05; ** - p<0.01; *** - p<0.001

3.2 Results of the Correlation Analysis of High Rank Values

There were also calculated interrelations of LPO test scales with the difference (I-A) of high rank values. Three additional indicators were entered into the analysis: 1) value difference (I-A) of the 1st rank; 2) total value difference (I-A) of the 1st and 2nd rank; 3) total value differences (I-A) of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd rank. There was also defined the measure of their interrelation with LPO scales for these indicators. Results are presented in the table 2.

Table 2. The interrelation of total high rank values difference (I-A) with LPO test scales in the general sample

Values	LPO Questionnaire's scales					
	Goals	Process	Result	LC-Ego	LC-Life	ML
Value difference (I-A) of the 1st rank	-0.7	-0.05	0.02	-0.08	-0.09	-0.04
Sum of value difference (I-A) of the 1st and 2nd rank	-0.02	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08	-0.07	0.03
Sum of value differences (I-A) of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd rank	-0.02	-0.07	-0.07	-0.08	-0.07	0.03

* - $p < 0.05$; ** - $p < 0.01$; *** - $p < 0.001$

In groups divided according to age and gender, there was also defined the measure of LPO test scales interrelation with indicators of difference (I-A) for each value. In some groups there have been revealed single reliable correlations of some LPO scales with importance, attainability, and difference (I-A) of specific values.

4. Discussions

4.1 Discussion of Results in the General Sample

According to the obtained results there is no interrelation of total difference (I-A) with LPO test scales in the general sample. It means that both at a large, and at an insignificant difference (I-A) of values, the satisfaction with life, meaning fullness of the present, future and past can take any figures: from minimum to maximum. The opposite statement is also true: at any level of life meaning the total difference (I-A) can take any figures.

When the sample was divided into groups according to age and gender, interrelations in the majority of groups were not singled out either. Only in one group of young men (aged 22-30), two LPO test scales—meaningfulness of life in the future and present—are not densely interconnected with the total difference (I-A) of values.

The difference (I-A) of values standing on the top of hierarchy and defining the main directions of personality activity turned out not to be connected with the level of life meaningfulness.

The obtained data testify that the disparity of values importance and attainability both of the deficiency ($I > A$), and profit ($I < A$) type are not connected with the meaningfulness of life. So, the prevailing of importance over attainability of the value does not testify to the existence of the inner conflict or meaning vacuum. In this case, there would be present reliable feedbacks of (I-A) difference with the meaningfulness of life. These results agree with the research data of people who undertook suicide attempts and were characterized by the destruction of their own life values (Nasibullov, 2002). When compared with the control group, there was revealed that suiciders had less difference (I-A) of values though it did not imply the state of inner harmony at all. Moreover, the reduction of difference was even connected with the strengthening of tendency to a suicide risk.

As for the group of young (aged 22-30) men in which two LPO test scales showed interrelations with the total difference of values (I-A), it differed from other groups by the lowest level of life meaningfulness on all SMO test scales. It is most likely to speak that the gap between values importance and attainability in this group is an inner conflict and it is connected with life dissatisfaction. This result is an exception to the general notion and it demands further research of the originality specific for this contingent of people.

According to the obtained results, it is impossible to speak about the availability of sense-making effect peculiar to the disparity of values importance and attainability, if there is any then its direct relations with meaningfulness of life would have been found, but they are absent as well.

In general, the lack of statistically significant correlations showed that the disparity of values importance and attainability is not connected with unequivocal consequences: it does not increase and at the same time does not decrease the degree of life meaningfulness. In some cases the perceived inattainability of value gives it additional meaning potential, increasing its significance; that agrees with Shakurov's point of view (2003). The disparity can get another sense and be endured as the inner conflict that corresponds to Fantalova's opinion (2001). Probably there are also cases when it is personally neutral and does not lead to the emergence of additional semantic coloring of value. The availability of such different options in the general massive, as a result, levels the interrelations of life meaningfulness with the disparity of importance and attainability in the value system. So, the results did not confirm any of the opposite positions considered above and tolerate the validity of both of them.

4.2 Discussion of the Results in Groups that Differ in Age and Gender

The interrelations of LPO test results with importance, attainability, and difference (I-A) of *specific* values, revealed when the sample was divided on age and gender basis, were of some interest, though they were extremely small in numbers. These values do not necessarily occupy the first ranks in the hierarchy of values.

Some LPO scales of young (aged 15-17) people during their adaptation period in Suvorov Military School are directly connected with the difference (I-A) and attainability of values "Happy family life" and "Creativity". It reflects the situation when they are separated from their families and have to adopt necessary disciplinary requirements of a military college that block the availability of creativity. These connections disappear and new ones appear when these young men are on their last year of training in the same military school: between LPO scales and importance and attainability of value "Health". It can be explained by the prospect of self-determination within the frames of a military profession where the state of health is an important criterion of selection.

Direct connections of LPO test scales with the difference (I-A) of values "Health", "Material security", "Self-confidence" and "Freedom" were found in women aged 22-30, and such values as "Interesting work" and "Knowledge" were revealed in women aged 31-40. It can also be connected with age specifics of vital tasks and main directions of activity. Two direct connections of the scale of meaningfulness of the present with the difference (I-A) of values "Love" and "Active, exciting life" were revealed in men of 31-40 years old.

Data on direct interrelation of LPO test results with attainability and difference (I-A) of *specific* values testify to its sense-making role that confirms Shakurov's position (2003).

Thus, the disparity of importance and attainability of specific values turned out to be more connected with meaningfulness and life satisfaction, than general disparity for all values. The indicators of attainability and disparity of importance and attainability of value can be sensitive indicators reflecting both the age, and the dynamics of a personality value- meaning sphere connected with changes of life situation.

The obtained results not only clear up the psychological sense of the disparity of values importance and attainability, but also open new sides of ideas connected with the meaning of life, and such quantitative side of it as filling life with meaning. They agree with the comprehension of life meaning as the nuclear formation of a personality having a high level of generality (Frankl, 1963). In this quality the meaning of life is independent from dynamics of some more specific indicators, such as the disparity of importance and attainability of values or, that has been revealed earlier, psychological age (Salikhova, 2014). The obtained data can be useful for rendering psychological assistance to people with loss of life meaning syndrome.

5. Conclusions

- 1) The dynamic characteristics of human personal values system revealed through the disparity of importance and attainability parameters along with substantial ones, make the essential characteristic of value- meaning regulation of life activity.
- 2) The general disparity of importance and attainability parameters in the system of personality values is not connected with the degree of life meaningfulness and satisfaction. It can provide values with additional meaning potential, and reflect the existence of inner conflict, and be personally neutral as well.
- 3) The disparity of importance and attainability of some specific values is connected with the meaningfulness of life; these relations indicate the zones where age or arising from situations vital tasks of the person are solved.

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