

Differences of religion and sex in the value systems of Northern Ireland adolescents

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The purpose of this study was to investigate similarities and differences in the value systems of Northern Ireland post-primary pupils controlling for religion and sex.

The respondents selected for this study consisted of all fourth-year post-primary pupils ($n = 751$) present on the day of interviews, attending 12 second-level schools in the counties of Antrim and Londonderry. The achieved population of 15 year olds consisted of 315 females and 436 males. In all, 384 Protestants and 367 Catholics participated in the survey. The pupil population was representative of working- and middle-class backgrounds, and was drawn from urban and rural areas near to and far from the border, and from areas of severe political violence as well as areas of relative peace and tranquillity.

The instrument employed in this study was Form E of the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973). The Rokeach Value Survey instrument consists of two sets of 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values. These values are set out in Tables 1 and 2. In Form E respondents are presented with alphabetized lists of 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values accompanied by a defining phrase. Respondents are asked to rank order the values 'in order of importance to you'.

The test-retest reliabilities obtained for Form E are 0.74 for terminal values and 0.70 for instrumental values (Feather, 1971).

The senior author was present on all occasions to administer the survey instrument to fourth-year post-primary classes, one class at a time.

Pupils were asked to study the lists of values carefully, and then to place the number 1 beside the value that was most important to them; then to place the number 2 next to the value which was second most important to themselves. The value which was least important was to be ranked 18. Pupils were asked to work slowly and carefully, and were reminded that the end result 'should show how you really feel'.

The average completion time was 20-25 minutes. No names were entered on the questionnaires to ensure anonymity. No attempt was made to disguise the survey; it was presented as a value survey. In all, only three questionnaires were spoiled.

Two hypotheses were tested in this study. Firstly, it was expected that there would be a significant difference between religious groups in the ranking of the terminal and instrumental values *a sense of accomplishment, salvation, ambitious, independent and responsible*, with Protestants assigning a higher rank to these values in so far as they express the essence of the 'Protestant ethic'.

Secondly, with regard to differences between the sexes, it was expected that there would be a significant difference between the sexes in ranking the values *mature love, family security*, and on being *obedient and loving*. It was predicted that girls would place a higher ranking on these values than boys due to the traditional role assigned to women in Irish society. This hypothesis rests on the assumption that Irish girls are socialized into a domestic and subservient role which is highly family and home oriented.

Results

All pupils

Tables 1 and 2 show the terminal and instrumental value medians and composite rankings of values for the entire pupil survey (first two columns).

For all the pupils ($n = 751$), at the very top of the positive terminal value hierarchy

Table 1. Terminal value medians and composite rank orders for post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland

	All pupils (<i>n</i> = 751)		Protestants (<i>n</i> = 384)		Catholics (<i>n</i> = 367)		Male (<i>n</i> = 436)		Female (<i>n</i> = 315)			
	Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank		
A comfortable life	8.3	(7)	8.1	(7)	8.6	(7)	0.50	7.2	(5)	9.7	(8)	0.001
An exciting life	7.9	(6)	7.1	(6)	9.0	(8)	0.01	7.6	(6)	8.2	(6)	0.90
A sense of accomplishment	12.7	(15)	13.0	(16)	12.4	(14)	0.20	12.3	(15)	13.3	(17)	0.01
A world at peace	2.8	(1)	2.4	(1)	3.3	(2)	0.05	3.2	(1)	2.3	(1)	0.02
A world of beauty	11.8	(14)	11.4	(12)	12.7	(15)	0.01	11.1	(12)	12.3	(14)	0.20
Equality	9.7	(10)	11.2	(11)	7.9	(6)	0.001	9.3	(9)	10.4	(11)	0.10
Family security	7.1	(5)	6.6	(5)	7.6	(5)	0.10	7.9	(7)	6.8	(5)	0.001
Freedom	4.2	(2)	5.0	(3)	3.3	(1)	0.001	3.7	(2)	4.9	(3)	0.002
Happiness	5.1	(3)	4.9	(2)	5.4	(3)	0.20	5.9	(3)	4.1	(2)	0.001
Inner harmony	11.7	(13)	12.0	(13)	11.4	(13)	0.20	12.5	(14)	11.1	(13)	0.20
Mature	9.0	(8)	8.8	(8)	9.1	(9)	0.90	8.3	(8)	10.1	(9)	0.001
National security	13.9	(18)	13.8	(18)	14.1	(18)	0.90	14.0	(18)	13.9	(18)	0.95
Pleasure	9.7	(11)	9.7	(10)	9.7	(11)	0.90	9.5	(11)	10.1	(10)	0.50
Salvation	13.2	(16)	13.0	(15)	13.5	(17)	0.90	13.2	(16)	13.3	(16)	0.95
Self-respect	11.4	(12)	12.1	(14)	10.7	(12)	0.01	11.7	(13)	11.0	(12)	0.20
Social recognition	13.4	(17)	13.5	(17)	13.2	(16)	0.90	13.7	(17)	13.0	(15)	0.20
True friendship	6.5	(4)	6.3	(4)	6.7	(4)	0.50	7.2	(4)	5.8	(4)	0.01
Wisdom	9.1	(9)	8.8	(9)	9.4	(10)	0.50	9.5	(10)	8.8	(7)	0.20

Note. Figures shown are the median; those in parentheses are the composite rank orders and the level of significance (*P*) for the chi-square Median Test.

comes a world at peace, freedom and happiness. At the bottom is national security, social recognition and salvation. This suggests that peace in Northern Ireland, and the world, is a leading value in the provision of freedom and happiness among school pupils in Northern Ireland.

At the top of the instrumental hierarchy of values are honest, clean and loving, and at the bottom, logical, imaginative and intellectual. The ideal of most pupils appears to be a world at peace where they are free and happy which is attained by honesty, cleanliness and love.

Protestant and Catholic sub-samples

The religious factor is an independent variable which cannot be ignored in any research into the values of pupils in Northern Ireland. In so far as religion is ascribed at birth, and in so far as the population of Northern Ireland can be divided politically by religion, the chief influence upon what is learned about many values may be decided by birth into Protestant or Catholic communal groups. One would expect, therefore, to find some differences between religions in the ranking of values.

Table 1 shows that both Protestant and Catholic pupils rank the terminal values of a world at peace, freedom and happiness either first, second or third, and that neither group seems to ascribe much importance to salvation, social recognition or national security. For pupils of different religious groups (Catholics, *n* = 367; Protestants, *n* = 389) rho correlation between terminal values was 0.94. This suggests that the terminal value systems of Catholics and Protestants are highly similar. The results show that Protestants and Catholics do not differ significantly in their ranking of 12 of the 18 terminal values.

There are two terminal values on which Protestants and Catholics differ very

Table 2. Instrumental value medians and composite rank orders for post-primary pupils in Northern Ireland

	All pupils (n = 751)		Protestants (n = 384)		Catholics (n = 367)		P	Male (n = 436)		Female (n = 315)		P
	Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank		Med.	Rank	Med.	Rank	
Ambitious	7.2	(4)	7.5	(6)	7.0	(4)	0.50	6.3	(3)	8.4	(8)	0.01
Broadminded	12.1	(15)	12.5	(15)	11.4	(15)	0.20	11.5	(15)	12.8	(15)	0.10
Capable	10.3	(11)	10.2	(10)	10.4	(12)	0.90	10.2	(10)	10.5	(12)	0.90
Cheerful	7.2	(5)	7.1	(4)	7.3	(6)	0.80	7.4	(5)	6.9	(4)	0.30
Clean	5.5	(2)	5.2	(3)	5.9	(2)	0.10	5.8	(2)	5.2	(3)	0.20
Courageous	10.7	(13)	10.5	(11)	10.9	(14)	0.50	10.2	(11)	11.4	(14)	0.02
Forgiving	8.3	(8)	8.3	(8)	8.4	(7)	0.90	9.5	(9)	7.5	(6)	0.001
Helpful	7.8	(7)	7.3	(5)	8.5	(8)	0.02	8.2	(7)	7.3	(5)	0.10
Honest	3.8	(1)	3.5	(1)	4.1	(1)	0.20	4.4	(1)	3.0	(1)	0.001
Imaginative	14.3	(17)	14.4	(17)	14.1	(17)	0.20	13.8	(17)	14.9	(17)	0.01
Independent	10.9	(14)	11.2	(14)	10.6	(13)	0.30	10.8	(13)	11.0	(13)	0.95
Intellectual	12.8	(16)	12.8	(16)	12.7	(16)	0.90	12.3	(16)	13.3	(16)	0.05
Logical	15.2	(18)	15.4	(18)	14.9	(18)	0.10	14.7	(18)	15.7	(18)	0.01
Loving	5.9	(3)	5.2	(2)	6.7	(3)	0.001	6.4	(4)	5.2	(2)	0.01
Obedient	10.2	(10)	10.6	(13)	9.8	(10)	0.20	10.8	(12)	9.5	(9)	0.02
Polite	10.4	(12)	10.5	(12)	10.2	(11)	0.90	11.2	(14)	9.5	(10)	0.01
Responsible	7.6	(6)	8.0	(7)	7.3	(5)	0.30	7.7	(6)	7.6	(7)	0.98
Self-controlled	9.0	(9)	9.6	(9)	8.5	(9)	0.10	8.2	(8)	10.4	(11)	0.001

Note. Figures shown are the median; those in parentheses are the composite rank orders and the level of significance (P) for the chi-square Median Test.

significantly ($P < 0.001$) – *equality* and *freedom*. Rokeach (1973) has reported that equality is a value that has time and time again been found to differentiate between ideological positions. Of all 36 values, *equality* shows the greatest difference between Protestants and Catholics.

Table 2 sets out the instrumental value systems of Catholic and Protestant pupils. Both groups feel it is important to be *honest*, *clean* and *loving*, and least important to be *logical*, *intellectual* and *imaginative*.

The rank-order correlation for Catholics and Protestants was 0.95, indicating highly similar instrumental value systems. The groups differed significantly on the ranking of only two values, Protestants placing a higher value on being *helpful* ($P < 0.02$) and *loving* ($P < 0.001$).

Overall differences between the sexes

Table 1 sets out the terminal value systems of male ($n = 436$) and female ($n = 315$) pupils. The rank-order correlation for terminal values was 0.96, suggesting highly similar value systems. Despite this high correlation, males and females differed significantly in the ranking of eight of the 18 terminal values. Both boys and girls rank *a world at peace*, *freedom* and *happiness* either first, second or third. By contrast, both groups placed lowest preference on *salvation*, *social recognition* and *national security*. Boys placed a higher value than girls on *a comfortable life* ($P < 0.001$) and *mature love* ($P < 0.001$). On the other hand, girls thought it more important than boys to have *family security* ($P < 0.001$) and *happiness* ($P < 0.001$).

Table 2 shows instrumental value systems for boys and girls. The rank-order correlation

between boys and girls was 0.91. Boys and girls, despite the high correlation, differed on the ranking of 11 of 18 values. Boys and girls felt it most important to be *honest* and *clean*, and least important to be *logical*, *imaginative* and *intellectual*.

Discussion

Firstly, it was predicted that Protestant pupils would rank the 'Protestant ethic' values of a *sense of accomplishment*, *salvation*, *ambitious*, *independent* and *responsible*, significantly higher than Catholics, in so far as these values express the true 'essence' of the Protestant ethic. This hypothesis is not supported by the data. The findings show that Protestants and Catholics do not differ in the ranking of these values. On the contrary, there is almost complete agreement between religious groups in ranking these values. What is significant is the relatively low status assigned to the value *salvation* in a country where religion is celebrated with a fervour and frequency found nowhere else in the United Kingdom. As Weber (1948) has suggested, the religious motive in capitalism has diminished considerably since the Protestant Reformation, and therefore this finding might suggest that religious orthodoxy has little influence upon secular life.

In accordance with the hypothesis that female pupils would place a higher value on certain 'domestic' values than males, the results show that females actually do believe that it is more important to attain *mature love* and *family security*, and to be *obedient* and *loving*. These findings suggest that female pupils may be socialized into adopting a subservient role in Irish society, and underlines the importance of the family-oriented role assigned to Irish girls.

Finally, the greatest difference between Catholics and Protestants was found in the ranking of the 'political values' *equality* and *freedom*. Catholics placed a higher ranking on both values ($P < 0.001$). This suggests that it may be politics, rather than religion or other factors, which best discriminates between communal groups in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, the results of the research reported in this paper raise several questions. First, do the various value terms have the same meaning for Catholics as they do for Protestants? For example, communal groups may interpret the values *equality* and *freedom* in very different ways. Secondly, asking pupils to rank values without relating them to specific social, religious and political issues may pose severe problems of interpretation, understanding and comprehension for respondents and researchers. Although pupils found the survey interesting and ego-involving, it may be necessary to expand the meaning of some of these values. This problem is an obvious area for further research.

The Rokeach Value Survey is useful in so far as it indicates which values, considered with other values, are most highly rated by different groups. The method opens up new areas for social inquiry and allows researchers to concentrate upon areas most salient to public policy. Viewed in these terms, the method offers a new beginning, rather than a conclusion to value research into communal group differences in Northern Ireland.

References

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