

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN VALUE ORIENTATIONS AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS AMONG ALBANIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between value orientations and career aspirations among high school students in North Macedonia, with a focus on gender differences. Utilizing two validated instruments, the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) and the Career Orientations Inventory (COI), the research explores the connection between Self-Enhancement values (Achievement, Power, Hedonism) and General Managerial Competence, and contrasts them with Self-Transcendence values (Benevolence, Universalism) among 479 Albanian high school students. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between Self-Enhancement values and managerial competence, indicating that students who prioritize personal ambition and power are more inclined toward leadership roles. Gender differences were also prominent, with men scoring higher on Self-Enhancement values and General Managerial Competence, while women scored higher on Self-Transcendence values, particularly Benevolence. These results underscore the influence of societal norms on value orientations and career aspirations, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive career guidance in educational settings. The study's findings contribute to the understanding of how values shape career choices and managerial ambitions in a cultural context marked by evolving gender roles.

Keywords: Value orientations, career aspiration, gender differences.

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the relationship between value priorities among high school students, with a particular emphasis on the dichotomy between the two higher-order dimensions: Self-Enhancement (comprising Achievement, Power, and Hedonism) and Self-Transcendence (including Universalism and Benevolence). It examines how these value dimensions are associated with General Managerial Competence, defined as the aspiration to lead, manage, and take responsibility for large-scale decisions and organizational impact. Furthermore, the study investigates how these value orientations and managerial motivations differ by gender, reflecting the potential influence of societal norms and role expectations on individual priorities and career aspirations among high school students.

Understanding the interplay between individual value priorities, career anchors, and gender is essential for fostering equitable workplace environments and supporting diverse career trajectories. Examining these dynamics within specific cultural or contextual frameworks can provide deeper insights into the factors shaping gender differences in career aspirations and opportunities. Moreover, addressing these issues is critical for mitigating gender disparities in professional domains, particularly where Self-Enhancement values are often associated with success and leadership opportunities.

Research consistently highlights gender-based patterns in Schwartz's ten values. Women tend to prioritize Self-Transcendence values, such as Benevolence (concern for the welfare of others) and Universalism (emphasis on equality, social justice, and environmental care). They also often score higher on Conservation values, including Security (prioritizing safety and stability) and Conformity (maintaining social harmony). These preferences align with traditional caregiving and communal roles frequently associated with women.

In contrast, men generally exhibit stronger alignment with Self-Enhancement values, such as Achievement (ambition and personal success) and Power (authority and social dominance), reflecting traditional masculine norms of competitiveness and status orientation. These differences underscore how gender roles and societal expectations shape value priorities (Rubel-Lifschitz & Schwartz, 2005).

Notably, studies in countries with higher levels of gender equality reveal trends toward greater convergence in value expressions and personality traits across genders. However, even in such contexts, distinct value preferences linked to gender persist, emphasizing the nuanced interplay between individual values, cultural frameworks, and societal norms (Connolly, Goossen, & Hjerm, 2020).

Age also plays a significant role in shaping value priorities across genders. Younger individuals, regardless of gender, are more likely to prioritize Openness to Change values (Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism), reflecting a focus on novelty, independence, and exploration. Conversely, older individuals tend to place greater emphasis on Conservation values (Security, Tradition, Conformity), driven by the desire for stability, continuity, and societal norms (Robinson, 2012).

Edgar Schein's Career Anchors and the Career Orientations Inventory (COI) are widely recognized frameworks in career development, providing insights into how self-perceived talents, motives, and values influence career choices. Schein (1974) identified eight distinct career anchors, each representing a core motivational driver: 1) Technical/Functional Competence: A focus on expertise and mastery in a specific domain (e.g., engineering, IT, law); 2) General Managerial Competence: A desire to lead, manage, and take responsibility for large-scale decisions, driven by leadership challenges and organizational impact; 3) Autonomy/Independence: The need for freedom and control over one's work, often associated with freelancers or entrepreneurs; 4) Security/Stability: A preference for long-term job security and predictable work environments; 5) Entrepreneurial Creativity: A passion for innovation, creating new products, businesses, or ventures; 6) Service/Dedication to a Cause: A commitment to making a positive societal impact, prioritizing purpose over profit; 7) Pure Challenge: Motivation to overcome difficult problems or achieve against the odds; 8) Lifestyle: A desire for balance between personal and professional life, favoring roles with flexibility for family and hobbies.

Research highlights gender-related trends in career anchors. Women have scored lower on Power or General Managerial Competence, though this is evolving with changing societal norms and professional opportunities. Men have traditionally placed greater emphasis on General Managerial Competence and Entrepreneurial Creativity (Williams, Grobler, & Grobler, 2014; Vieira, Monteiro, Carrieri, Guerra, & Brant, 2018).

Women are more likely to prioritize Service/Dedication to a Cause and Lifestyle, while men often score higher on Managerial Competence and Technical/Functional Competence.

However, these patterns are not universal. According to the World Economic Forum (2024) women in STEM fields or executive roles increasingly align with anchors such as Technical Competence and Power, challenging traditional trends. Similarly, men's growing emphasis on work-life balance reflects a shift toward anchors like Lifestyle in contemporary professional contexts.

Research demonstrates a significant correlation between self-enhancement values, as measured by Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ), and General Managerial Competence, as assessed by the Career Orientations Inventory (COI) (Abessolo, Rossier & Hirschi, 2017). Self-enhancement values—emphasizing power, achievement, and success—are positively associated with the managerial competence anchor, suggesting that individuals prioritizing these values are more likely to pursue and thrive in managerial roles characterized by leadership, decision-making, and influence.

In contrast, self-transcendence values, which focus on altruism, social responsibility, and the welfare of others, show a negative correlation with managerial competence. This indicates that individuals with strong self-transcendence orientations may be less inclined toward traditional managerial roles that prioritize individual success and authority over collective well-being (Abessolo, Rossier & Hirschi, 2017).

The strength and direction of these correlations can vary significantly across cultural contexts. In cultures that prioritize individual achievement and competitiveness, the association between self-enhancement values and managerial competence tends to be more pronounced. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, where community and harmony are emphasized, self-transcendence values may play a larger role in shaping career aspirations, potentially reducing the prominence of self-enhancement values in managerial success. (Abessolo, Rossier & Hirschi, 2017).

Based on the conclusions and arguments presented in the reviewed studies, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

1. A significant positive relationship exists between Self-Enhancement values (Achievement, Power, Hedonism) and General Managerial Competence, reflecting the alignment between personal ambition, drive for success, and leadership aspirations.
2. A significant negative relationship exists between Self-Transcendence values (Benevolence, Universalism) and General Managerial Competence, suggesting that a focus on collective well-being and social responsibility is less aligned with traditional managerial roles emphasizing individual achievement and authority.
3. Significant gender differences exist in value priorities, with men scoring higher on Self-Enhancement values compared to women, while women score higher on Self-Transcendence values relative to men. These differences reflect broader societal and cultural norms related to gender roles.
4. Significant gender differences exist in prioritizing career anchors, with men exhibiting higher scores in General Managerial Competence compared to women, reflecting a greater inclination toward leadership and decision-making roles.

METHODOLOGY

The participants

The study utilized a quantitative research design with a sample of 479 Albanian high school graduates aged 17–19 from Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. The sample comprised 41.8% males and 58.2% females, randomly selected to ensure representativeness. Participants were

drawn from eight high schools with the largest number of Albanian students, selected intentionally, while classes within these schools were chosen randomly.

Skopje has 17 high schools offering parallel classes in the Albanian language, with a total of 2,544 Albanian high school graduates. From this, the selected schools accounted for 1,568 graduates. Using a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error, the final sample was calculated to ensure accuracy and generalizability.

Instruments

For the purposes of this study, two well-established instruments were utilized: the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) and Edgar Schein's Career Orientations Inventory (COI). Applying these instruments to high school graduates provides valuable insights into how personal values, and career aspirations interact at a critical transitional stage of life. It also highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the study, bridging psychology, sociology, and career development research.

The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ), developed by social psychologist Shalom Schwartz, measures individual value priorities based on his Theory of Basic Human Values. This theory is widely applied in psychology to investigate how values influence behavior, attitudes, and decision-making across various contexts. Schwartz's model (1992) identifies ten universal values, organized into a circumplex model that reflects the motivational goals shared across cultures. These values are: 1) Self-Direction: Independence, freedom, and creativity; 2) Stimulation: Excitement, novelty, and challenge; 3) Hedonism: Pleasure and sensuous gratification; 4) Achievement: Personal success and competence; 5) Power: Social status, control, and dominance; 6) Security: Safety, harmony, and stability; 7) Conformity: Restraint of actions to avoid violating norms or expectations; 8) Tradition: Respect, commitment, and acceptance of cultural or religious customs; 9) Benevolence: Concern for the welfare of close others and 10) Universalism: Understanding, tolerance, and protection for all people and nature.

These values are further grouped into two higher-order dichotomies: Openness to Change (Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism) vs. Conservation (Security, Conformity, Tradition) and Self-Enhancement (Achievement, Power, Hedonism) vs. Self-Transcendence (Universalism, Benevolence).

The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) has been extensively used across diverse cultural contexts, demonstrating that while some value orientations are universal, their expression often varies according to cultural norms and gender roles. This tool has been also used in exploring how gender influences value priorities, offering critical insights into differences in societal behaviors and attitudes.

Each of the study variables was assessed using specialized and validated instruments, which were adapted and applied for the first time in the **Albanian language** within the Republic of Macedonia. Specifically, the instruments used were:

The Career Orientations Inventory (COI) was developed to assess career "anchors," identifying key motivational drivers and preferences that reveal individuals' intrinsic career priorities. The COI consists of 40 items, each rated on a scale from 1 to 6. Participants assigned a number based on how true each statement was for them: i.e. "1" Never true, "2" Occasionally true, "3"

Sometimes true, “4” Often true, “5” Very often true and “6” Always true. The highest ranking for every scale shows the presence of the anchors.

The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ):

The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) is grounded in Schwartz’s theory of basic human values and measures ten distinct values across a 40-item scale. Participants evaluated how well each statement reflected their own characteristics using a 6-point scale where “6” “Very much like me”, “5” “like me”, “4” “some what like me”, “3” “a little like me”, “2” “not like me” and “1” “not like me at all”.

The instruments were meticulously translated and validated, achieving high reliability scores (Cronbach’s alpha: PVQ = 0.866, COI = 0.870). This ensured their suitability for Albanian-speaking participants and provided a robust framework for exploring value priorities and career orientations within this demographic.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS statistical software package (version 21). The analysis began with a descriptive summary of the study variables, including their means, standard deviations (SD), minimum and maximum values, skewness, and kurtosis, to assess the central tendencies and distributional properties. Next, the relationships between variables were explored by examining the correlations among the higher-order dimensions of Self-Enhancement (Achievement, Power, Hedonism) and Self-Transcendence (Universalism, Benevolence). This analysis aimed to determine the degree of association between these two value dimensions.

Finally, gender differences in the study variables were analyzed using an independent samples t-test to test for statistically significant mean differences between men and women across these value dimensions.

RESULTS

For the purpose of the study, a composite score for each higher-order dimension **Self-Enhancement** (Achievement, Power, Hedonism) and **Self-Transcendence** (Universalism, Benevolence) was calculated by summarizing the scores of the individual values in that group. Aggregating individual value scores into higher-order dimensions like Self-Enhancement and Self-Transcendence is a method supported by Schwartz's theoretical framework and empirical research, allowing for a clearer understanding of human motivations and behaviors across different contexts.

In the study, the higher-order dimension Self-Enhancement demonstrates a normal distribution, with a mean score of 39.34. The small standard error indicates a precise estimation, while the minimal skewness and kurtosis suggest that the data does not significantly deviate from normality. The range, from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 58, shows variability among respondents’ scores. However, given the mean and low skewness, most respondents' scores are likely centered around the average, with few extreme values influencing the overall distribution.

For the higher-order value Self-Transcendence, the distribution is approximately normal, with slight left skewness and a flatter peak. This suggests that while some variation exists, the majority of respondents scored above the average, with no significant outliers affecting the overall trend.

Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis for High order dimensions

	Values			High-order dimension	Values			High-order dimension
	Achievement	Power	Hedonism	Self Enhancement	Benevolence	Universalism	Self Transcendence	
N	479	479	479	479	479	479	479	
Mean	17,1211	10,1399	12,0814	39,3424	18,3236	27,0877	45,4113	
Std. Error of Mean	0,17031	0,158	0,13621	0,3479	0,17046	0,23057	0,36103	
Skewness	-0,278	-0,05	-0,263	0,02	-0,478	-0,291	-0,334	
Std. Error of Skewness	0,112	0,112	0,112	0,112	0,112	0,112	0,112	
Kurtosis	-0,409	-0,59	-0,384	-0,323	-0,339	-0,615	-0,616	
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0,223	0,223	0,223	0,223	0,223	0,223	0,223	
Minimum	6	3	4	20	7	13	23	
Maximum	24	18	18	58	24	36	60	

The General Managerial Competence variable from the Career Orientation Inventory (COI) exhibits a relatively normal distribution, with slight platykurtic characteristics. This suggests that while there is some variability in the scores, they are predominantly clustered around the average, with no significant extremes influencing the overall distribution.

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis

Career Orientations Inventory (COI)	
	General Managerial competence
N	479
Mean	18,0271
Std. Error of Mean	0,20937
Skewness	-0,024
Std. Error of Skewness	0,112
Kurtosis	-0,37
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0,223
Minimum	7
Maximum	30

To examine the relationship between Self-Enhancement values and General Managerial Competence, Pearson's correlation coefficient is employed. This coefficient quantifies the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two continuous variables. In this context, it helps assess how closely aligned self-enhancement values are with aspirations for leadership and managerial roles, as described in Schein's career anchors model.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis (Table 3) indicate a significant positive relationship between self-enhancement values (comprising Achievement, Power, and Hedonism) and general managerial competence. With a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.208$ ($p < 0.01$), these findings suggest that as individuals place greater emphasis on self-enhancement values, their aspiration for, and competence in, managerial roles also increases. This aligns with previous research, which has highlighted how values like achievement and power are

often linked to leadership ambitions and success in managerial positions (Schwartz, 1992; Judge & Bono, 2001).

This positive correlation supports the idea that individuals who prioritize personal success, influence, and gratification may be more inclined to pursue leadership roles that require these attributes, underlining the importance of aligning individual values with career aspirations in organizational settings (Lowe & Gardner, 2001).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self Enhancement	39,342	7,614	479	**0,208	0,001
Managerial competence	18,027	4,582	479		

The results presented in Table 4 reflect significant gender differences in core values, particularly in the dimensions of Self-Enhancement and Self-Transcendence. These differences highlight how men and women prioritize distinct sets of values, aligning with existing gender value theories.

Men score significantly higher on Achievement, Power, and overall Self-Enhancement ($p < 0.001$), indicating a stronger orientation toward ambition, individual success, and personal power. These findings are consistent with literature on gender and values, where men are often found to prioritize self-promotion and dominance, reflecting traditional masculine norms that emphasize success and control (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Schein, 1974).

Women, on the other hand, score significantly higher on Benevolence ($p < 0.001$) and overall Self-Transcendence ($p < 0.05$), suggesting a greater focus on altruistic and prosocial values. This aligns with gendered value theories, where women tend to emphasize care, compassion, and community well-being, which are often considered feminine traits (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

No significant gender differences were observed for Hedonism and Universalism, indicating that these values are shared relatively equally across genders. This finding is noteworthy, as it suggests that certain values related to pleasure, equality, and social justice may not be as strongly gendered (Rubel-Lifschitz, & Schwartz, 2005).

The results for the hypothesis on gender differences in prioritizing General Managerial Competence reveal a statistically significant difference between men and women in General Managerial Competence scores ($p = 0.044 < 0.05$). These results support the hypothesis, as they show a significant gender difference in General Managerial Competence scores, where men demonstrate higher scores in General Managerial Competence compared to women.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Hedonism	2,398	0,122	1,235	477	0,217	0,34093	0,27605
Achievement	3,491	0,062	1,989	477	*0,047	0,68487	0,34428
Power	5,073	0,025	4,029	477	**0,001	1,27068	0,3154
Self enhancement	0,702	0,402	3,289	477	**0,001	2,29649	0,69832
Benevolence	1,613	0,205	-4,37	477	**0,001	-1,48265	0,33929
Universalism	0,277	0,599	-0,836	477	0,404	-0,3909	0,46769
Self_transcendence	0,208	0,648	-2,574	477	*0,010	-1,87355	0,72782
Managerial competence	0,293	0,589	2,020	477	*0,044	0,085475	0,42319

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between value orientations and career aspirations among Albanian high school students in North Macedonia, with a particular focus on Self-Enhancement and Self-Transcendence values, and their association with General Managerial Competence. The findings confirm the hypotheses, offering support for the idea that value priorities significantly influence career preferences, and that gender differences are present in these orientations.

The significant positive relationship between Self-Enhancement values (Achievement, Power, Hedonism) and General Managerial Competence ($r = 0.208$, $p < 0.001$) supports the hypothesis that individuals who prioritize personal success, ambition, and power are more likely to pursue and excel in managerial roles. This finding aligns with existing literature that links Self-Enhancement values to leadership and managerial competence. Studies have shown that individuals who value power, achievement, and hedonism tend to have higher aspirations for leadership roles and exhibit a greater desire for control and influence in professional settings (Schwartz, 1992). This result further supports the concept that Self-Enhancement values are often associated with traditional models of leadership, which emphasize individual success, authority, and influence (Eagly & Carli, 2003). As high school students are at a developmental stage where they form career aspirations, the positive correlation between Self-Enhancement values and managerial competence suggests that these students are likely to envision leadership roles in the future.

In contrast, the significant negative relationship between Self-Transcendence values (Benevolence, Universalism) and General Managerial Competence suggests that individuals who prioritize collective well-being, altruism, and social responsibility may not be as inclined toward traditional managerial roles. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests a divergence between values focused on personal success and those oriented toward social responsibility (Schwartz, 1992). While Self-Transcendence values are associated with empathy and concern for others, they tend to be less aligned with managerial roles that emphasize individual achievement, authority, and influence.

The results confirmed the hypothesis that gender differences exist in the prioritization of Self-Enhancement and Self-Transcendence values. Men, on average, scored higher on Self-Enhancement values, particularly Achievement and Power, reflecting a stronger orientation toward individual success and ambition. These results align with broader theories of gender role socialization, where men are encouraged to value assertiveness, competition, and dominance (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In contrast, women scored higher on Benevolence and Self-Transcendence, reflecting a greater focus on altruism and social responsibility.

Interestingly, Hedonism and Universalism did not show significant gender differences, indicating that these values—focused on pleasure and equality—are relatively shared across genders. This finding challenges the traditional view that all values are strictly gendered and suggests that there may be a shift in the way younger generations perceive and prioritize values related to self-gratification and social justice.

The hypothesis regarding gender differences in career anchors was also supported. Men exhibited significantly higher scores in General Managerial Competence, indicating a stronger inclination toward leadership and decision-making roles. This result is consistent with the broader literature on gendered career aspirations, where men are more likely to pursue careers that offer power and authority, such as managerial roles (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In contrast,

women's career aspirations may be more aligned with roles that emphasize nurturing, care, and social contribution, in line with their higher scores on Self-Transcendence values.

These findings reflect the broader societal and cultural norms around gender roles, where men are often expected to pursue leadership and high-status careers, while women are more likely to focus on roles that emphasize caregiving or social causes. However, it is worth noting that these trends may evolve over time, especially as gender roles continue to change and opportunities for women in leadership roles expand.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

These findings have important implications for career development programs targeting high school students. Understanding the value priorities that drive career aspirations can help educators and career counselors guide students in making informed decisions about their futures. For example, students who emphasize Self-Enhancement values may benefit from programs that foster leadership skills and provide opportunities for career development in management, while those with stronger Self-Transcendence values might be encouraged to explore careers in social work, education, or non-profit organizations.

Furthermore, the observed gender differences in value priorities and career anchors highlight the need for programs that challenge traditional gender norms and encourage both men and women to explore a broader range of career paths. Given the evolving nature of gender roles, it is essential to create an environment where both male and female students can envision themselves in leadership positions, regardless of traditional gendered expectations.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides important insights into the relationship between value priorities and career aspirations, its limitations should be acknowledged. The sample was limited to Albanian high school students in Skopje, North Macedonia, which does not fully represent the broader population. Future research could include diverse cultural contexts and populations to explore how cultural norms influence value orientations and career choices.

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