

# **Relationship between cynical hostility and values from educational perspective - preliminary research**

**Michalina Sęktas, Artur Sawicki, Luiza Pianka,  
Paweł Andrzej Atroszko**

Uniwersytet Gdański

Sęktas M., Sawicki, A., Pianka, L., Atroszko P. A. (2016)., Relationship between cynical hostility and values from educational perspective - preliminary research. W: J. Leśny, J. Nyćkowiak (red.) *Badania i Rozwój Młodych Naukowców w Polsce. Nauki humanistyczne i społeczne* (s. 98-104). Poznań: Młodzi Naukowcy

# Relationship between cynical hostility and values from educational perspective - preliminary research

Sęktas Michalina<sup>(1)</sup>, Sawicki Artur Józef<sup>(1)</sup>, Pianka Luiza Anna<sup>(1)</sup>, Atroszko Paweł Andrzej<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup>Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Gdańsk

Sęktas Michalina: michalina.sektas@gmail.com

Keywords: *cynicism, beliefs, happiness*

Abstract:

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between cynical hostility and values. Research is grounded in Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values, in which values are defined as a cognitive representation of motivation, aspirations and goals. Cynical hostility is a trait that is characterized by mistrustfulness, malevolence, negative attitude towards others, and situating oneself in the opposition to others. The study was conducted among 244 students (151 women, 89 men, 4 people did not report gender), with mean age  $M = 21.33$  ( $SD = 2.80$ ). *Cook-Medley Hostility Inventory – Brief* and *Short Schwartz's Value Survey* were used. As predicted, cynical hostility was positively related to power and achievement and negatively related to benevolence and universalism. In life cynical students are motivated by power, authority, wealth, success, ambition, abilities, having influence on people and events. Being an honest, forgiving, loyal, responsible, and helpful person is less important for them. Moreover, environment and unity with nature, equality, world-peace, social justice as well as openness seem irrelevant to them. These results can be especially significant from educational perspective, owing to the fact that the role of educational process is to prepare young people to participate in the community, and to shape adaptive attitudes and values.

## 1. Introduction

The goal of education has been invariant since always: to prepare young people to adult life, which means not only providing them with essential knowledge as people colloquially understand it, but also shaping adaptive attitudes and values (Forman & Cazden 1995). Since specific values, such as universalism and benevolence, together with attitudes and behaviors related to them are closely associated with happiness and good psychosocial functioning (Lyubomirsky 2008), it is of highest importance to instill these values in young people. Values are defined as desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Schwartz 1994, p. 21). Factor analysis showed that there are ten values situated on two dimensions. First dimension is from Self-Enhancement to Self-Transcendence and the second is from Openness to change to Conservation (Schwartz 2012). Self-Enhancement consists of achievement and power, whereas Self-Transcendence comprises universalism and benevolence. Conservation consist of conformity, tradition, security. Openness to change encompasses: stimulation, hedonism and self-direction.

According to Schwartz "the high importance of benevolence values derives from the centrality of positive, cooperative social relations in the family, the main setting for initial and continuing value acquisition. Benevolence values provide the internalized motivational base for such relations. (...) Universalism values also contribute to positive social relations. They are functionally important primarily when group members must relate to those with whom they do not readily identify, in schools, work-places, etc.". What is more, it is noticed that "pursuing power values may harm or exploit others and damage social relations" (Schwartz 2012 p. 15). This point of view holds implication that children should be instilled with values from the poles: Self-Transcendence and Openness to change, as there are premises that they are more adaptive. It should be done by their parents, but also by other authority figures such as teachers. Social support is crucial for maintaining psychological and physical health and wellbeing. World Health Organization (WHO) considers social wellbeing as an essential component of health and quality of life.

In Polish schools it is observed that in the atmosphere of rivalry children and adolescents are focused on their own interests and emphasizing their own success, rather than on social, political and economic awareness which highlights that individuals' problems are not weaknesses and together as a community people are able to search for the best solutions to solve these problems (Potulicka & Rutkowiak 2010). This kind of atmosphere does not aid the high level of social trust and leads to development of unpropitious attitudes and values from the poles: Self-Enhancement and Conservation. According to the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) 75% of people in Poland believe it is better not to trust people they do not know

personally (Boguszewski 2014). Distrust and the belief that everyone is motivated mainly by their own interests is strictly related to the concept of hostility. Cynical hostility, defined as an enduring, negative attitude toward others involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, has progressively been established as a psychological characteristic with a negative impact on health, and recently its potential role is starting to be recognized in educational studies (Sawicki et al. in press). Psychological functioning of cynical people is based on the belief that others are motivated by selfish concerns (cynicism), expectation that people are a frequent source of mistreatment (mistrust), and interpreting others' actions as involving aggressive intent (hostile attributional style)(Smith et al. 2004). There is also strong evidence that cynical hostility is negatively related to social support (Smith et al. 2004).

One of the main components of cynical hostility is cynicism which is characterised by a distrust of others' motives, a belief that people act mainly for their own interests or even can use someone to their advantage. That is why for cynics it is very significant to be careful and circumspect in social interaction. The fear caused by the belief that other people cannot be trusted, may be generalised so that cynics may believe that „the whole world is against them”, hence the motivation to generate and protect their resources. Self-Enhancement and Conservation values are anxiety-based (Fig. 1), whether the focus is more personal or social (Schwartz 2006).

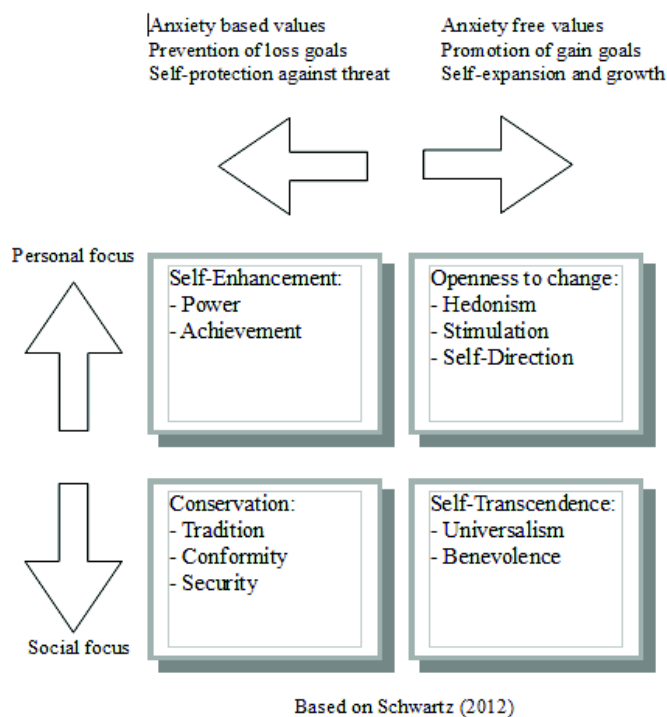


Fig. 1. Distinction between anxiety based and anxiety free values. Based on Schwartz (2006)

On the basis of previous research and theoretical frameworks it is hypothesized that cynical hostility is negatively associated with Self-Transcendence, especially with benevolence (H1). Cynical actions and beliefs are in the opposition of the values benevolence and universalism, which are the components of Self-Transcendence. As it was mentioned, Self-Enhancement is characterized by values of power and achievement (Schwartz 2012) and is on the other side of the same dimension as Self-Transcendence. The dimension is bipolar, which means that it cannot be realized in one action (Schwartz 2015). What is more, cynicism is a component of Machiavellianism - a tendency that involves immorality, detached affect and pursuit of power (Rauthman 2012). Therefore, power may be important for cynics as it would provide them with the control they are looking for (H2). Cynical hostility is a stable pattern of beliefs and behaviors which leads to worsening of health. And since it is also related to relatively inflexible way of interpreting social situations it can be expected that it is linked to more general cognitive rigidity and is negatively associated with Openness to Change (H3). Cynical hostility can be perceived as a specific approach or coping style developed to protect oneself from others. This would suggest that it is linked to the need for security, and therefore it is positively associated with Conservation (H4).

## 2. Methods

*Participants.* Two hundred and forty four students took part in this study: 151 women (62%), 89 men (36%), 4 persons (2%) did not report gender. Their mean age was  $M = 21.22$  years ( $SD = 2.80$ ). These individuals were studying at the universities from Pomerania Region in Poland: the University of Gdańsk, and Technical University of Koszalin. Students were from different faculties, courses of study, years and modes of study.

*Measures.* Cynical Hostility was measured with *Cook Medley Hostility Inventory Brief*, developed on the basis of five items from *Hostility Scale* (Cook & Medley 1954). It is a tool widely used in large scale surveys concerning health and psychosocial functioning. The response alternatives range from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (6). It showed good validity and reliability in previous studies (Clarke et al. 2008). For the present sample the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .76.

Values were measured with *Short Schwartz Values Survey* (Lindeman & Verkasalo 2005), a 10-item tool with 9-point Likert response scale which showed good psychometric properties in previous research (Lindeman & Verkasalo 2005). The scale has following instruction: "Please, rate the importance of the following values as a life-guiding principle for you. Use the 8-point scale in which 0 indicates that the value is opposed to your principles, 1 indicates that the values is not important for you, 4 indicates that the values is important, and 8 indicates that the value is of supreme importance for you."

*Procedure.* Data collection used convenience sampling. Students were invited to participate anonymously in the study during lectures or classes. More than 90% of all present students agreed to do so. One hundred ninety eight (81.1%) participants filled in 'paper and pencil' questionnaires and forty six (18.9%) students completed online versions of the questionnaires. Participation in the study was anonymous and no monetary or other material rewards were offered.

*Statistical analyses.* Means, standard deviations, percentages and correlation coefficients were calculated. All statistical analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS 22.

### 3. Results

Tab.1 presents mean scores, standard deviations and percentages for the study variables as well as their interrelationships. Cynical hostility correlated positively with power and achievement values, and negatively with universalism and benevolence values. Cynical hostility did not correlate with hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, tradition, conformity and security.

### 4. Discussion and conclusions

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were confirmed. Cynical hostility was positively associated with Self-Enhancement and negatively associated with the second pole of that dimension, that is Self-Transcendence. A coherent profile of cynical hostile person has emerged from these results. They strive for power and achievement, which suggests that they are trying to control their environment, whereas values such as benevolence or universalism are of little importance for them. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were not confirmed. What is more, the direction of the relationship between cynical hostility and values from the dimension of Openness to change/Conservation was opposite to the expected, even though the correlations were statistically non-significant. This could be due to the specificity of the sample comprising students of public universities, both from social science and engineering fields, for which groups there might be specific patterns of relationships between values and attitudes and behaviors. For example, in previous study students differed as far as relationships between values and emotional empathy were concerned, depending on the gender and field of study (Myyry & Helkama 2001).

The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between cynical hostility and values from the perspective of emphasizing the importance of instilling right values to children. It should be an educational goal of schools - institutions which should teach young people how to function properly in society. Adaptive attitudes, if they are not cultivated in the early stages of development, may be very difficult to shape in later years. Non-adaptive beliefs may be very resistant to change. Values are fairly stable psychological characteristics. They only change under certain circumstances (Bardi & Goodwin 2011). One such circumstance is a major life transition. A new life situation is likely to elicit many frustrations and unexpected outcomes to habitual behavior which may challenge the existing value system, possibly leading to its change. Values and beliefs interact (Goodwin et al. 2012), therefore revising one's beliefs may contribute to the change of values that constitute main motivation. This matter is extremely important in Polish context given the CBOS data as well as international researches on values, according to which living under communist regimes may have encouraged both social cynicism and power values (Schwartz & Bardi 1997).

**Tab.1.** Correlations between studied variables

	<i>M (SD)/%</i>	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1.Sex <sup>a</sup>	36% males	.08	.28**	.25**	.03	.17**	.04	-.06	-.24**	-.20**	-.05	-.02	-.05
2.Age	21.22 (2.80)		.19**	.22**	.06	.02	.06	.00	.04	.03	.05	.05	.04
3.Cynical hostility	19.02 (4.38)			.17**	.14*	.09	-.01	.05	-.17**	-.20**	-.10	-.04	-.06
4.Power	3.60 (2.16)				.56**	.33**	.29**	.20**	.00	-.04	.06	.05	.22**
5.Achievement	5.62 (1.74)					.43**	.48**	.42**	.11	.02	.00	.07	.12
6.Hedonism	4.94 (2.02)						.63**	.45**	.02	.02	.10	.07	.06
7.Stimulation	5.09 (1.91)							.46**	.15*	.07	-.04	.08	.05
8.Self-direction	6.22 (1.72)								.24**	.24**	-.10	.01	.04
9.Universalism	4.72 (1.91)									.52**	.27**	.19**	.36**
10.Benevolence	5.70 (1.86)										.43**	.46**	.50**
11.Tradition	3.85 (2.10)											.56**	.44**
12.Conformity	4.95 (1.95)												.55**
13.Security	5.40 (1.84)												

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ; <sup>a</sup>0 = women, 1 = men

More and more research show that interventions derived from positive psychology are effective when it comes to enhancing well-being and ameliorating depressive and anxiety symptoms. Interventions related to cultivating gratitude and forgiveness, hope therapy or mindfulness therapy endorse communal motivations instead of focusing on individualistic values, and in effect increase the level of happiness (Lyubomirsky 2008; Sin & Lyubomirsky 2012). Benevolence and universalism may serve as a base for public welfare and contribute to social capital. Low social capital is associated with lower level of health (Kawachi et al. 1997). Reinforcing rivalry and striving for achievement and power may consolidate these attitudes, which are likely to suppress the development of current society.

As far as the Authors are aware, the present study is the first to investigate the relationship between cynical hostility and values which concerns the particular large but fairly well defined in terms of demographics group in the society, that is the university students. Valid and reliable measures were used in the study. One of the major limitations of this study is the relatively small and homogenous sample of students. Moreover, sample was not representative, therefore the conclusions cannot be generalised into the whole population of students in Poland. More research among students is required on the possible moderator variables of the relationship between values and cynical hostility. Socioeconomic status could be one such moderator. It could be hypothesized that students with lower socioeconomic status may show more positive relationship between cynical hostility and conservation values congruent with the assumption that cynical hostility is driven by need for security.

## 5. Literature

Bardi A, Goodwin R (2011) The dual route to value change. Individual processes and cultural moderators. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 42: 271-287.

Boguszewski R (2014) Komunikat z badań CBOS. Zaufanie w relacjach międzyludzkich.

Clarke P, Fisher G, House J et al. (2008). Guide to Content of the HRS Psychosocial Leave-Behind Participant Lifestyle Questionnaires: 2004-2006. Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research; Ann Arbor, University of Michigan

Cook W, Medley DM (1954) Proposed hostility and pharisaic-virtue scales for the MMPI. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 38: 414-418.

Goodwin R, Polek E, Bardi A (2012) The temporal reciprocity of values and beliefs. A longitudinal study within a major life transition. European Journal of Personality 26(3): 360-370.

Forman EA, Cazden CB (1995) Myśl Wygotskiego a edukacja: wartości poznawcze współpracy z rówieśnikami. Dziecko wśród rówieśników i dorosłych. Eds. A. Brzezińska, G. Lutomski, T. Czub, B. Smykowski, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo: 147-179.

Kawachi I, Kennedy BP, Lochner K et al. (1997) Social capital, income inequality and mortality. American Journal of Public Health 87 (9): 1491-1498.

Lindeman M, Verkasalo M (2005) Measuring values with the short Schwartz's value survey. Journal of Personality Assessment 85(2): 170-178.

Lyubomirsky S (2008) *The how of happiness. A scientific approach to getting the life you want.* Penguin.

Myrsky L, Helkama, K (2001) University students' value priorities and emotional empathy. Educational Psychology 21(1): 25-40.

Potulicka E, Rutkowiak J (2010) *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji.* Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.

Rauthmann JF (2012) The Dark Triad and interpersonal perception. Similarities and differences in the social consequences of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Social Psychological and Personality Science 3(4): 487-496.

Sawicki A, Atroszko B, & Atroszko P (in press) Uwarunkowania i potencjalne konsekwencje cynicznej wrogości w perspektywie edukacyjnej, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Athenae Gedanenses.

Schwartz SH (1994) Are there Universal Aspects in the Structure and Content of Human Values? *Journal of Social Issues*, 50:19-45.

Schwartz SH (2006) Les valeurs de base de la personne. Théorie, mesures et applications. Revue française de sociologie 47(4): 929-968.

Schwartz SH (2012) An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture 2 (1): 11.

Schwartz SH (2015) Basic individual values. Sources and consequences. *Handbook of Value: Perspectives from Economics, Neuroscience, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology* 63.

Schwartz SH, Bardi A (1997) Values and adaptation to communist rule. *Political Psychology* 18: 385-410.

Sin NL, Lyubomirsky S (2009) Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions. A practice-friendly meta-analysis. Journal of clinical psychology 65(5): 467-487.

Smith TW (1992) Hostility and health. Current status of a psychosomatic hypothesis. Health psychology 11(3): 139.

Smith TW, Glazer K, Ruiz JM et al. (2004) Hostility, anger, aggressiveness, and coronary heart disease. An interpersonal perspective on personality, emotion, and health. Journal of Personality 72(6): 1217-1270.