

## Intergenerational Differences in Materialism and Postmaterialism Values in a Spanish Sample

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### ABSTRACT

The present study evaluates the personal values reported by a sample of participants using an open format in which participants identified and prioritized their most important values in life. They were also asked to identify the values and priorities that, in their opinion, were most important to people of their generation. Four hundred and forty-nine participants took part in the study (40.3% men, 59.7% women), which were distributed among three age groups: young group (18-35 years old,  $n= 196$ ), adult group (36-60 years old,  $n= 154$ ) and senior group (more than 61 years old,  $n= 99$ ). The results show that reports of personal values and generational values are very similar in the case of adult and senior groups, and very different in the case of young adults, with a differential report of post-materialistic values. The results are discussed in the context of Intergenerational Change of Values Theory. *Key words:* Personal values, Intergenerational value change, postmaterialism.

### RESUMEN

El presente estudio evalúa los valores personales que informan una muestra de participantes en un formato de respuesta de ordenación abierta que requería identificar y priorizar los valores más importantes. Igualmente, se preguntó a los participantes por los valores que, en su opinión, orientaban la vida de la mayoría de las personas de su generación. Participaron en el estudio 449 personas (40,3% hombres, 59,7% mujeres) que se distribuyeron en tres grupos de jóvenes (18 a 35 años,  $n= 196$ ), adultos (36 a 60 años,  $n= 154$ ), y mayores (mayores de 61 años,  $n= 99$ ). Los resultados indican, principalmente, que el informe entre valores personales y valores del grupo generacional es similar en el caso de adultos y mayores y diferente en el caso de jóvenes, con la resultado diferencial de valores postmaterialistas. Se discuten los resultados en el marco de la teoría sobre el cambio intergeneracional de valores.

*Palabras clave:* valores personales, cambio intergeneracional, postmaterialismo.

During recent decades, the literature concerning the social change shows a deeply transformation of the western personal values. These values form the basis of the modern personality characterized by the predominance of reason and the conservation of the emotional base inherited from the romantic personality (i.e., Elias, 1969, 1977, 1987; Majima & Savage, 2007; Roales-Nieto, 2003, 2006, 2009).

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The new psychological order has been gaining importance since the 1960s in the most developed western societies -in the USA, especially beginning with the sociopolitical trend known as the New Establishment, (see Gross, 1997)- and has resulted on a new model of personality named *post-modern personality*. The new personality being different from the other precedent models of personality, romantic and modernist, developed historically in the West cultures (Bauman, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006; Beck, 1986, 1999, 2008; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1990, 2002; Giddens, 1990, 1992, 1999; Giddens & Hutton, 2000; Habermas, 2001; Hoffer, 1951; Lasch, 1979, 1991, 1995; Lipovetsky, 1987; Lipovetsky & Charles, 2004; Roales-Nieto, 2003, 2006; Sennett, 1998, 2003, 2006, 2008; Vattimo, 1985, 1989).

On the other hand, some authors advocate that this *new form of being* could affect fundamental elements of the modern personality (e.g., Zygnum Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Francis Fukuyana, K.J. Gergen, Anthony Giddens, Martin L. Gross, Ronald Inglehart, Christopher Lasch, Giles Lipovetsky or Richard Sennet, among others) and, contend that we are at a point of no return and towards a new form of being human. On the contrary, other authors understand that this social change can be readjusted to maintain the essence of the modernist values that characterize western civilization (e.g., Fukuyama, 1999; Huntington, 1997; Putnam, 2000).

This idea of social and personal change suggests that people of developed countries have become more reflexive, less traditional and more interested in freedom, quality of life and self-expression. Nevertheless, until now little empirical evidence exists on this change in values, other than the series of studies resulting of the two surveys conducted by teams of sociologists in numerous countries. The first being the World Values Survey<sup>1</sup> conducted by Ronald Inglehart (supported by the World Values Study Group) and the second being the European Barometer<sup>2</sup>. It is important to notice that both surveys used a closed interview format (Inglehart, 1977, 1990, 1997; Abramson & Inglehart, 1992, 1995).

Ronald Inglehart's thesis of Intergenerational Value Change (i.e., Inglehart 1970, 1971, 1990, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) has been formulated using the results of these surveys. According to this theory, older generations have developed *materialist values* (rational-secular values) while confronting life's hardships in a social climate of scarcity and insecurity as well as a high appraisal for working with effort. On the contrary, the new generations grew up in social contexts of prosperity and security and have been progressively incorporating a system of values that prioritize *post-materialist* or *self-expression values* related with the development of personal autonomy, harmony in personal relationships, solidarity and tolerance, well-being, etc. Some studies have reported that the change is, in fact, profound in the political sector (Hunter, 1991; Wuthnow, 1989), in the exploration of values (Ray, 1996; Tranter & Western, 2003, in press), and the social evaluation of materialist values (Belk, 1985; Kasser, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

From this perspective, people with a profile of materialist values would mainly be interested in maintaining physical and economic security and would take up values important for confronting life's challenges (for example, work, ethics in relationships, etc.). Contrary, the people with a post-modernist values profile would mainly be in-

terested in psychological well-being, in the pursuit of happiness, in being in-love and being loved, in being in harmony and pleasure. According to the theory, this change in values would take place, above all, in youngest generations while older generations would continue maintaining the values of a modernist personality structure.

Typically, sociological and psychosocial studies evaluate the values in closed forms of response through ordination or qualification. The advantage of both forms is, mainly, their simplicity for analyze data. The disadvantages are two. One is the limited options given to choose and, the other disadvantage is a higher effect of social desirability (see an analysis in Roales-Nieto, 2009). An alternative form for the evaluation of personal values would be an open format in which participants would be more freedom to choose given that they would be asked to write his/her personal values without restrictions. The advantages of an open format are several: 1) it reduces the social desirability; 2) it reduces the time in responding; and 3) it permits that personal values easily show up in contrast to limited the participants' response to an specific list of standard values.

Spain is a country that has been incorporated later into the world of well-being and of full economic development and has gone through a process of social change beginning with the democracy system. Consequently, it represents an special opportunity for analyzing the process of values transformation across generations. Roales-Nieto (2009) found an important coincidence between the reports given by adult and senior participants between their own values and those they attributed to their respective generations. Another interesting result was that young participants reported a relevant contrast between their personal values and those they attributed to their generation. This same attribution was reported by the adult and senior participants with respect to the young group. Moreover, it is important to notice that all the groups agreed in categorizing the young groups with hedonistic characteristics while these characteristics were not report for the adult and senior generations. However, the results obtained did not allow to clearly confirm the intergenerational change of values. That is, hedonistic values appeared in the young group, which are greatly related with post-materialistic values but they also valued the work, education, honor, respect, and the family. More specifically, 33% of the young people reported the family as the first value and 64% wrote it as being a value. Finally, values such as peace, solidarity, ecology and other relative to self-expression in Inglehart's terms were not reported.

The main objective of the present study is to look for the materialist and post-materialist profiles in Spain to test the displacement of values according to the Intergenerational Values Change Theory.

In addition, the present study continues the interest in contrasting the similarities and differences between the values that each age group states as their own values compared to the values they think about others in their own generation. These data would allow the evaluation of the generational profile and the sense of belonging and identification with values that, until now, have not received too much attention in empirical investigations. There are some exceptions (e.g. McKenna, Barnes-Holmes, & Barnes-Holmes, 2007; Chan, Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, & Stewart, 2009), but they are not in the area of values evaluation.

## METHOD

### *Participants and design*

Four hundred and forty-nine people were discretionally selected for this study from the Spanish country and organized into three groups according to the criteria laid out in Roales-Nieto (2009):

The Young group formed with those participants born after 1970. The number of participants was 200; the Adult group that was formed with participants whose age was older than 36 and younger than 60 years old. The number of participants was 160. And the Senior group that was formed with participants older than 60 years old. The number of total participants for this group was 100.

An analytical-transversal study was followed (Kelsey, Thompson, & Evans, 1986).

### *Instruments and measures*

Values were evaluated using the *Survey of Personal Values* (SPV) -an open format survey- (for a description of SPV, see Roales-Nieto, 2009). The SPV is a survey with open responses where participants write his/her values following an orderly and prioritized method until a maximum of 10 values. The SPV contains questions related to socio-demographic data and four sections of questions about values (A, B, C & D). In this study, we only employed the A and B sections. These sections ask about the most important personal values (section A) and the values attributed to the participant's own generation (section B).

In section A, the participant read the following:

“Please write what the PERSONAL VALUES *that are driving your life*. Please, do it BY RIGOROUS ORDER OF IMPORTANCE. You may write up to a maximum of 10. Think of the MOST IMPORTANT VALUES FOR YOU, those that you believe are driving your life and order them beginning with number 1 for the most important value and so on.”

In section B, the participant read the following:

“Please indicate the PERSONAL VALUES *that are driving the life for most of the people in your generation*. Please, do it BY RIGOROUS ORDER OF IMPORTANCE. You may write up to a maximum of 10. Think of the most important values that you believe are driving the lives for most of the people in your generation and order them beginning with number 1 for the most important value and so on.”

The criteria followed to categorize the data obtained with the SPV were in agreement of the Inglehart's criteria. They were as follows: (a) *post-materialistic* or self-expression values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), referring to personal well being, relationships with others, etc., (b) *materialist* or secular-rational values, referring to personal and economical security, and (c) values *not classifiable* according to the previous categories. The

Percentage Difference Index (PDI, Abramson & Inglehart, 1995) was calculated between post-materialist and materialist values. PDI indicates the predominance of one type of response (i.e., equivalent to a post-materialist value) over another (materialist value) at a given point in time for a single variable (Miller, 1974). For each group and condition, PDI values were calculated subtracting the percentage of materialists values from the percentage of post-materialists values, yielding a measure that is equivalent to a mean score (Abramson & Inglehart, 1995, p.13). Resulting negative index values indicate a predominance of materialist profiles, while positive values in PDI indicate a preponderance of post-materialist profiles. The possible range of PDI values are -100 to +100.

### *Procedure*

Participants were voluntarily recruited across different places in Spain (see Table 1). Each participant was told that the data obtained would be treated in a way that scrupulously respected the confidentiality and the anonymity of the responses. Each participant was given a copy of the SPV and the instructions for completing it that included a statement about the anonymity of the responses, the confidential treatment of data, and emphasis on providing the responses as sincere as possible. The participants answered individually the survey in a unique record beginning with section A and not being able to return to write in an already section. Once the survey was finished, participants put it in an envelope and closed it. Data was obtained during the period 2003-2005.

## **RESULTS**

Socio-demographic characteristics of participants can be seen in Table 1. The final sample, excluding the surveys that were returned blank, invalid or unfinished, were: (a) 196 participants in the young group (59.7% female, 40.3% male) with a mean age of 24.4 ( $SD= 4.81$ , range: 18-35 years-old); (b) 154 participants in the adult group (51.3% female, 48.7% male) with a mean age of 44.96 ( $SD= 6.72$ , range of 36-58 years-old); and (c) 99 participants in the senior group (59.6% women, 40.4% men) with a mean age of 63.94 ( $SD= 6.38$ , range 60-95 years-old).

As can be appreciated in Table 1, the characteristics of the sample indicate a fairly well-balanced group across the majority of the socio-demographic variables; the distribution variables of sex, education level and economic status are similar to those of the general population in their age range. Likewise, the origins of the participants were adjusted well with the geographic distribution of the Spanish population.

There were three blocks of reported values, respectively for each group. The Young group ( $n= 196$ ), provided a total of 1,025 responses in section A, personal values ( $M= 5.22$ ;  $SD= 1.86$ ), and 815 responses in section B regarding the own generational values ( $M= 4.15$ ;  $SD= 1.68$ ). The Adult group ( $n= 154$ ), with a total of 735 responses for section A ( $M= 4.77$ ;  $SD= 2.01$ ) and 643 in section B ( $M= 4.17$ ;  $SD= 1.70$ ). The Senior group ( $n= 99$ ) provided 501 responses in section A ( $M= 5.06$ ;  $SD= 1.94$ ) and 427 for section B ( $M= 4.31$ ;  $SD= 1.63$ ). The reported values were categorized according as

Table 1. Socio-demographic distribution of the three Groups of participants.

Variables of Distribution		Young Group N= 196	Adult Group N= 154	Senior Group N= 99
Sex	Male	79 (40.3%)	75 (48.7%)	40 (40.4%)
	Female	117 (59.7%)	79 (51.3%)	59 (59.6%)
Origin	Urban Area	23.5%	22.7%	22.2%
	Rural Area	76.5%	77.3%	77.8%
Age Range		18-35	36-58	60-95
Median Age (SD)		24.4 (4.81)	44.96 (6.72)	63.94 (6.38)
Civil Status	Single	86.2%	18.8%	4%
	Married/in Relationship	10.2%	55.9%	52.5%
	Separated/Divorced	0	22.7%	15.2%
	Widowed	0	1.3%	27.3%
	Other	3.6%	1.3%	1%
Autonomous Community	Andalucía	17.3%	26.6%	25.2%
	Aragón	5.1%	2%	4%
	Castilla-La Mancha	5.1%	2%	5%
	Castilla-León	10.2%	9%	9.1%
	Cataluña	9.1%	9.7%	5%
	Com. Valenciana	7.65%	9%	7%
	Extremadura	5%	3.2%	7%
	Galicia	8.7%	3.9%	3.4%
	Madrid	18.3%	13.6%	15.2%
	Pais Vasco	5.1%	8%	8%
Others Communities	12.75%	13%	11.1%	
Education Level	Entry Level	16.3%	29.9%	41.5%
	Mid Level	13.3%	14.9%	20.2%
	Mid Level Professional	16.3%	16.2%	11.1%
	University Level Medium	23.5%	19.5%	17.2%
	Upper Level Superior	30.6%	19.5%	10%
Social Status	Lower & Lower-Middle	27%	20.8%	26.3%
	Middle	56.1%	60.4%	61.6%
	Upper-Middle & Upper	16.8%	18.8%	12.1%

*materialist*, *post-materialist* and *unclassified* values (see Table 2 for the specific criteria to define each profile).

Taken into account the variability of responses, and the fact that participants reported their responses by ordering the respective values, two criteria were used: 1) a Limited Criteria (LC) to analyze the most important values, and (2) a Full Criteria (FC) to analyze all the values reported by each participant. In order to establish the maximum number of values that formed the LC an analysis of frequency of response was completed (see Table 3). The first three values were used for the LC analysis. This decision was taken by the fact that three responses (values) were written by up to 80% of participants in all groups and sections and there was a sharp decline in responses after the fourth value. Table 3 shows the percentage of participants that responded with values in each of the ten possible positions.

Table 4 shows the results for to the three profiles of values in each of the LC and FC, for the three groups of participants and for personal and generational values.

Table 2. Percentage of participants that reported personal values (Section A) and generational values (Model B) in each of the ten options available.

Reported Values	Section	Young Group	Adult Group	Senior Group
First Value	A	100%	100%	100%
	B	100%	100%	100%
Second Value	A	98.9%	98.7%	100%
	B	97.4%	96.7%	99%
Third Value	A	95.4%	94.8%	97%
	B	88.2%	85.7%	92%
Fourth Value	A	84.2%	66.8%	76.7%
	B	60.7%	63.6%	65.6%
Fifth Value	A	65.3%	46.7%	53.5%
	B	35.2%	37%	35.3%
Sixth Value	A	36.2%	31.2%	32.3%
	B	17.8%	18.2%	23.2%
Seventh Value	A	21.4%	18.2%	23.2%
	B	10.2%	9%	8.1%
Eighth Value	A	11.2%	11.7%	14.1%
	B	5.6%	5.2%	4%
Ninth Value	A	7.6%	7.8%	6%
	B	2%	1.9%	3%
Tenth Value	A	3%	3.2%	4%
	B	0.5%	1.3%	1%

Table 3. Criteria for analysis of the value profiles.

Criteria	Data	Post-Materialist Profile	Materialist Profile	Undefined Profile
Limited Criteria (LC)	First three values reported by each participant	Report of 2 or 3 post-materialistic values.	Report of 2 or 3 materialistic values.	Any other combination of values.
Full Criteria (FC)	All of the values reported by each participant	Report a majority of post-materialistic values.	Report a majority of materialistic values.	Any other combination of values.

Table 4. Profiles of personal values and generational values reported by each age group according to the limited (LC) and full criteria (FC).

Group	Report	Criteria	Post-materialist Profile	Materialist Profile	Undefined Profile
Young	Personal Values	LC	24.5	38.3	37.2
		FC	19.9	36.7	43.4
	Generational Values	LC	56.7	24.5	18.8
		FC	54.1	19.4	26.5
Adult	Personal Values	LC	18.7	55.8	25.3
		FC	20.7	55.8	23.4
	Generational Values	LC	16.9	54.5	28.6
		FC	15.6	60.4	24
Senior	Personal Values	LC	16.1	55.5	28.3
		FC	21.2	57.6	21.2
	Generational Values	LC	23.2	49.5	27.3
		FC	18.2	52.5	29.3

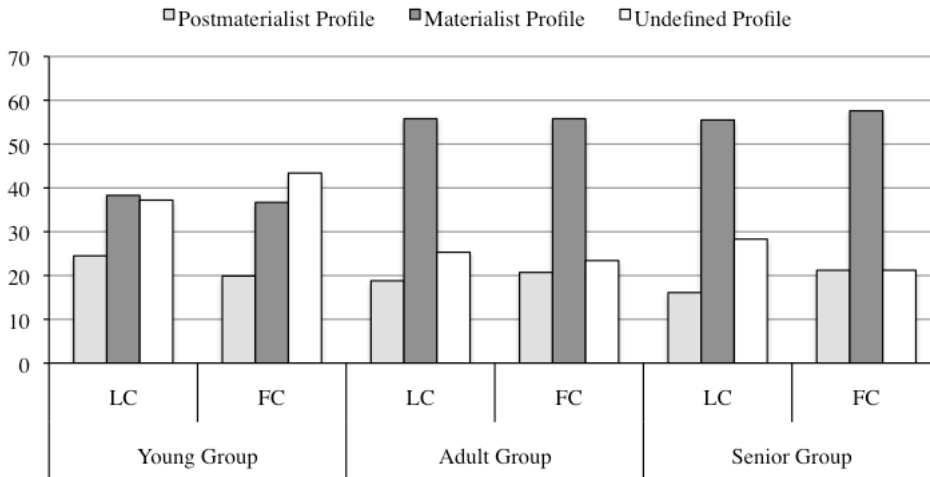


Figure 1. Percentage of Participants of the three age groups in each profile according to personal values reported for the two criteria of analysis, Limited (LC) and Full (FC).

A graphic representation can be seen in Figure 1, which shows the distribution of value profiles for all groups in personal values, as in Figure 2 that shows the distribution of profiles for generational values.

These results indicate a very similar distribution of values in the adult and senior groups, with profiles markedly materialistic as for both personal and, respectively, own generational values. In the young group, however, nearly 40% of participants showed a materialist profile of personal values (38.3% in LC and 36.7% in FC) and approximately the same percentage reported undefined profiles. The percentages of young participants with a post-materialistic values profile were 24.5% for LC and 19.9% for FC. These

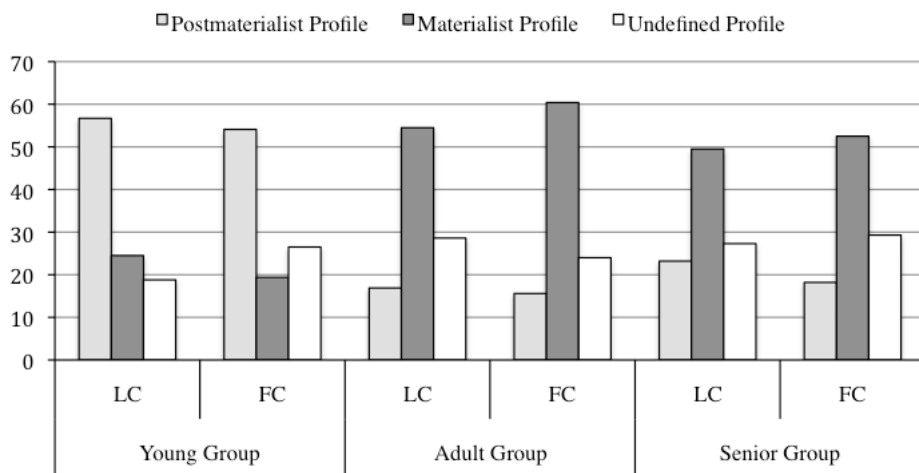


Figure 2. Percentage of Participants of the three age groups in each profile according to generational values reported for the two criteria of analysis, Limited (LC) and Full (FC).



results for personal values contrast with the profiles of values that were reported as being characteristic of their own generation. More than a half of young participants (56.7% in LC and 54.1% in FC) reported post-materialistic values for their own generation. These differences can be seen in Figure 3, where a marked contrast can be observed between both reports.

Figure 4 shows that all the PDI scores were negative (indicating a predominance of materialist values) in all cases, except for the young group with respect to their generation’s values (PDI= 32.2 for the LC and PDI= 34.7 for the FC). Also, it is important to point out that the report of personal values for the young group show a considerably lesser predominance of materialist value (-13.8 for LC and -16.8 for FC) when compared to the adult and senior groups (-37.1 and 35.1, -39.4 and 26.3, respectively).

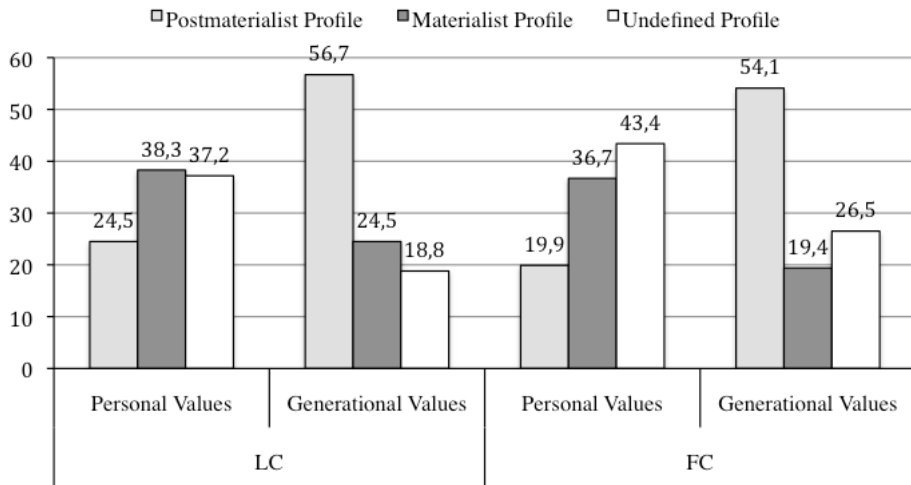
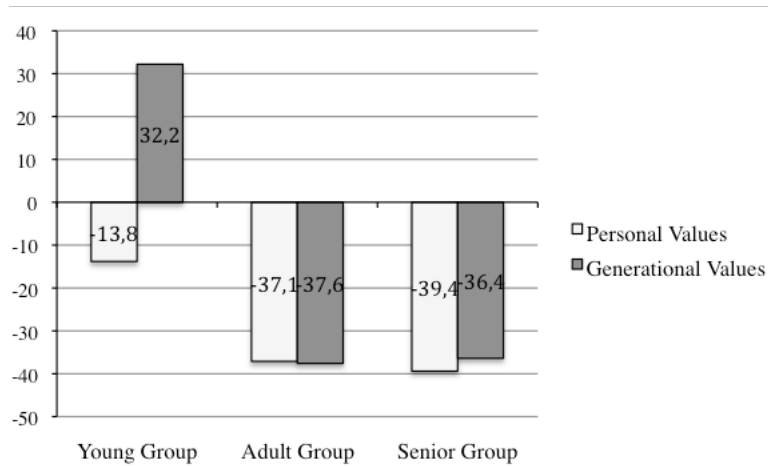


Figure 3. Testing of the personal profiles and generational profiles reported by the young adult group for the two criteria, limited (LC) and full (FC).

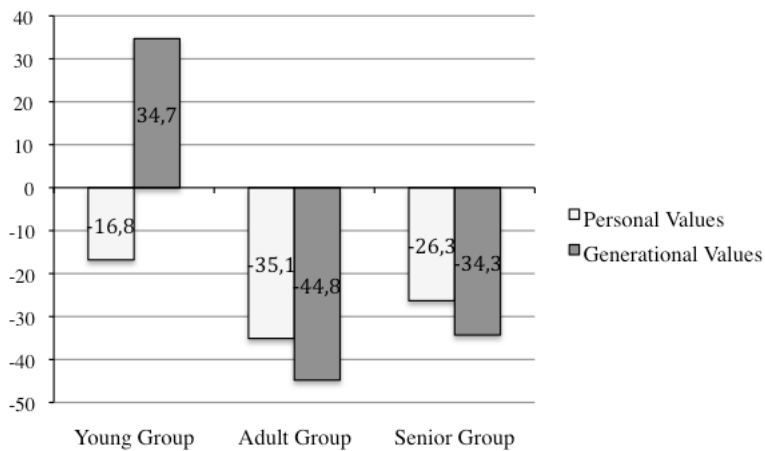
**DISCUSSION**

The present study is a preliminary exploration with regard to the intergenerational value change. To accomplish with this, an open format survey was used to obtain data about the value profiles throughout three age groups. In addition, this study has explored the beliefs about the respective values of the own generation.

According to the data obtained, the first relevant result is that when personal values are evaluated in an open format that involved ordering the personal responses, the concept of personal value appears to be very idiosyncratic with a wide range of responses across participants. In spite of the wide variability of responses and the difficulty to categorize them, this open format result in a realistic information about personal values. This study shows that it is possible to carry out an exploration of



A- PDI for the three age groups according to the limited criteria of values.



B- PDI for the three age groups according to the Full Criteria of values.

Figure 4. PDI for the three age groups in the Limited (Part A) and Full (Part B) criteria of analysis.

intergenerational value change using an open ordination method of evaluation while applying typical methods of analysis such as the PDI.

The main objective of the study was to test the predictions of Inglehart's Theory of Intergenerational Value Change about materialist and post-materialist profiles in a Spanish sample. The theory predicted in 1997 that the number of post-materialist in the population would increase with the incorporation of new generations. Inglehart (1997, p. 177, Table 5.2) informed a displacement of the PDI in Spanish population from -41 in 1981 data to -6 in the 1990 data. So, based on these predictions, the PDI between the years the present data were obtained (2003 to 2005) would clearly show a post-

materialist tendency with a positive PDI. The results obtained confirmed this only for the values that the young group attributed to their generation but not for the values that they reported as being their own. The young people showed a materialist PDI for personal values (-13.8 in Limited Criteria and -16.8 in Full Criteria) and a strong post-materialist profile for generational values (32.2 and 34.7, respectively). However, the results obtained in the young group for personal values clearly contradict the prediction of the theory.

It would be argued that the report of the young people over their personal values would be slanted, wanting to appear more materialistic than they actually are. But post-materialist values enjoy of “good press” and are socially promoted. Therefore, to think that young participants in this study would want to seem different from who they really were reporting values that are socially categorized as “old-fashioned” does not seem likely (Belk, 1985; Kasser, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). In either case, the contradictory and singular nature of this result need to be replicated and studied more in depth.

The data of the PDI for adult and senior generations appear to fit the prediction of the Inglehart’s theory, which predicted the value shift to post-materialism in younger generations while the older generations might continue showing a more materialistic profile.

The report each participant gave for his or her own age group brings up the discussion of *generational identification* (e.g., seeing oneself as having the same or similar values that of one’s generation). That is, sharing values. The results indicate that adults and seniors share values with their generations in form of similar PDI scores, but the young people do not because they reported personal values with a materialistic PDI and generational values with a strong post-materialistic PDI. So, generational identification is evident between adult and senior group and is broken with young people. This could mean that young people consider themselves profoundly different from their peers, and implies a strong lack of generational identification. This *rupture in generational identification in the young group* was advanced in a previous study (Roales-Nieto, 2009) and needs to be thoroughly studied and replicated in order to transcend the limitations of the present study.

In conclusion, partial aspects of Ronald Inglehart’s approach were replicated regarding the intergenerational transformation of values in that the young group showed a clear post-materialist PDI when reporting the values of their generation. However, the results of this study contradict the theory in other aspects. For example, predominance of materialistic profiles has been observed in all age groups in the reports on personal values. Also, according to Abramson and Inglehart (1995, p.13) generational replacement alone should contribute to about a one point gain per year on the PDI in favor of post-materialism, but the results indicate that this effect was not produced in this sample.

It should be kept in mind that this is an exploratory study with a final distribution of participants that guarantees a homogeneous whole sample without important sociodemographic bias. However, the reduced size did not permit generalization of the results to the general population. Because of this limitation, in spite of the novelty and importance of the data obtained, the conclusions derived from the results should be handled cautiously. Further studies with representative samples of the general population

should be welcome to replicate the results. Additionally, the richness of the data suggests that a procedure of open evaluation of personal values might be superior compared to those obtained using closed evaluations (which obligate participants to select, rate or order values from a predetermined list). All in all, it will be necessary to conduct studies that might compare directly both types of procedures in measuring personal values.

A final methodological weakness of the study concerns the grouping of participants in only three groups instead of grouping participants in terms of birth cohort (e.g., defining generation as 10-year birth cohorts). However, the reduced number of participants in our study impeded this organization of the sample. Nevertheless, according to the approaches of the Inglehart's theory, the exact cohort of birth is less important than the occurrence of "formative events" in a given country or region in determining the possibility of applying the term "generation" to those people who have been influenced by those special formative events during their formative years. The age group between 18 and 34 years-old in our study are comprised of people born between 1970 and 1987, who have lived their formative years in a democratic society. Furthermore, the different results between this group and the other groups in the report of post-materialist values, seems to warrant that this simple grouping was adequate in capturing this difference. However, in order to test if these results can be replicated or if differences are found between distinct subgroups of young people, it is necessary to conduct studies with larger samples that can permit an adjustment for age.

#### NOTES

1. The characteristics, instruments and data of this study are available on its official website: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>
2. The data about cultural values in the European survey are available at the following web address: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies:jsessionid=599E481314EBD5AA04566C5F97B22B92?keyword=cultural+values>

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