

Marks of Distinction? The Schwartz Value Scale and Traditional Communities

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Abstract

Any attempt to examine human values faces at least three major challenges: definition, universality, and measurement. What is meant by the term 'value'? How does it fit into our psycho-emotional architecture? Universality adds further complexity. Assuming that we can define with some precision what is meant by the term 'value' – or any specific value in one culture – are these the same across cultures? The final question that of measurement, is perhaps even more challenging. This brief paper attempts to discuss the past efforts of scholars who sought to address these three questions and then present the results of a somewhat informal attempt to investigate this among the youth of two Northeastern traditional communities, the Pnars (Jaintias), most of whom live in eastern Meghalaya, and the Dimasas, mostly in Assam. It is hoped that this simple study might serve as a means of raising interest in the area of human values and inspire more rigorous research into this fascinating field.

Introduction

Any attempt to examine human values faces at least three major challenges: definition, universality, and measurement. Definition stands as very challenging. What is meant by the term 'value'? How does it fit into our psycho-emotional architecture? Universality adds further complexity. Assuming that we can define with some precision what is meant by the term 'value' – or any specific value in one culture – are these the same across cultures? Can it be said that the concept so painstakingly defined is the same for an Angami agriculturalist and a Manhattan stock broker? Can it be said

that everyone shares the same values in general, though admittedly with differing attachments to various values? And to take it a step further, what meaning might it have to compare how much one Angami or stock broker to another person of similar background? The final question that of measurement, is perhaps even more challenging. To continue the previous thought, if one Angami values 'conformity' very strongly and another does not value it at all, can we say that Angamis value conformity only moderately?

This brief paper attempts to discuss the past efforts of scholars who sought to address these three questions and then present the results of a somewhat informal attempt to investigate this among the youth of two Northeastern traditional communities, the Pnars (Jaintias), most of whom live in eastern Meghalaya, and the Dimasas, mostly in Assam. It is hoped that this simple study might serve as a means of raising interest in the area of human values and inspire more rigorous research into this fascinating field.

Theories

Determining one's values seems a mainstay of various efforts at personal life coaching (Baker, 2012; Pulliam, 2017), though compilations of values in these seem idiosyncratic and unjustified theoretically. Scholarly interest in the sphere of human values waxes and wanes. One researcher will offer some approach to the topic; others affirm or challenge the attempt; interest slowly fades. Gecas (2008) mentions that despite the surprising lack of overall interest in the topic of values, interest in it seems to peak during those times that the values of society are challenged.

In an early attempt during an age of uproar, Robin M Williams attempted to pin values down. He began to define values as attitudes that impel individuals towards various actions and behavior, asserting that values are:

important causal components in individual conduct and in the functioning of social systems. To develop adequate indicators for the needed analysis will require major efforts and much ingenuity. ... Because of the lack in the past of standardized

measures and comprehensive reporting, the existing data are scanty, fragmentary, and diffuse (Williams, 1967, p. 22)

How to make the common judgments (in the 1970's U. S. A.) of an apparently wandering and disintegrating society, he asks, without some standard with which to measure the moral collapse that so many had perceived.

American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1935) attempted to reaffirm the importance of teleology, action towards some goal, in human behavior to counter the strong positivism of his era that asserted only causes as meaningful. Parsons attempted to ground values in empirical reality, but Spates (1983, p. 27) concludes that Parsons ultimately failed to do this, and rather had imposed pre-ordained categories on reality and that his results were too abstract to spur research. Interest in the topic faded to a great extent after Parsons.

Interest was rekindled by the work of Milton Rokeach in the United States in the 1970's (an era in which many thought the society was falling apart). For his studies Rokeach developed the *Rokeach Value Survey*. This consisted of lists of 18 'terminal values' and 18 'instrumental values'. Terminal values are described as 'desirable end-states of existence; examples are 'a comfortable life', 'an exciting life', 'family security' and 'salvation'. Instrumental values are ideal modes of behavior such as 'ambitious', 'open-minded', 'logical' and 'polite'. One way of seeing this is what a perfect life looks like, and how one best can get there, guiding principles for and in the subject's life. The subject simply ordered each set of values from 1-18 from the most important personally to the least important.

Rokeach's (1969) results were illuminating. Comparing different religious groups in one study, he found significant differences in how Jewish, Protestant, Catholic and non-religious Americans ranked various terminal and instrumental values. Religious Jews value most 'a sense of accomplishment', 'pleasure', and 'equality' higher than Catholics or Protestants, and 'family security', 'wisdom', and 'inner harmony' higher than

all three other groups. Catholics ranked 'national security' higher than the other three groups and 'equality' and 'pleasure' lower than all other groups. Rokeach opines that the differences might be due to cultural and socio-economic factors rather than their religious stance. In analyzing instrumental values, he distinguishes between types of values. 'Moral values', whose violation results in feelings of guilt, are values such as 'forgiving', 'honest', 'polite' and 'self-control'. The violation of 'competence values' leads more to shame; in this group Rokeach lists 'ambitious', 'broad-minded', 'independent' and 'logical'. Moral values have an interpersonal focus, but competence values focus on the personal.

In his attempt to determine changes of values among Americans between 1968 and 1971, (1974) Rokeach (1974) found that on the whole the values measured were remarkably stable in that:

family security was second and *freedom* third on both occasions; *an exciting life*, *pleasure*, *social recognition*, and *a world of beauty* were at the bottom of the national sample's terminal value hierarchy in both 1968 and 1971. For both years, the most important instrumental values were *honest*, *ambitious*, and *responsible*; the least important were *imaginative*, *logical*, *obedient*, and *intellectual* (p. 225).

Only 11 values changed significantly (unexpectedly for Rokeach,) to a small degree. Among those that grew in importance were values such as *a world of peace*, *a world of beauty*, and *equality*. None of those would surprise in an era of Vietnam, growing environmental awareness, and the civil rights movement. Interestingly, when the responses of white and black Americans were examined, no similarities were seen. Changes of higher or lower rankings were unique for each grouping. Further, division by sex showed some differences such as the fact that there were more items changing their rank among younger people than among older people.

While other interesting results have been obtained using Rokeach's approach, several challenges have been made. Typical criticisms involve the rather arbitrary nature of the 36 values, isolated by Rokeach originally through interviews, but also his own reading and reflection. The scale seems less reliable in the middle values: people tend to know what they value

strongly and disvalue strongly, but are vague about middling values (Suhonen, 1985). Further, Heath and Vogel (1978) challenged the construct validity, asserting that the survey doesn't match well with what it is supposed to measure. A recent Estonian study (Tuulik, Ounapuu, Kuimet, & Titov, 2016) concluded that the scale now lacks validity, with the values list no longer relevant, particularly in cross-cultural research. Indeed, concern about cross-cultural validity inspired Yang (1987) to develop a survey of Chinese values, the first five of which appear quite different: *Filial piety, Industry, Tolerance of others, Harmony with others, Humility...* Despite these challenges the Value Survey has been used often and so apparently profitably in a number of different areas.

Shalom H. Schwartz built on and adapted Rokeach's work, creating a new method for uncovering an individual's values and a theoretical grounding for understanding value systems. Schwartz (2012) defines values as comprised of six main features: 1) they are beliefs linked with affect, so that people who value independence strongly become angry if that is threatened. 2) They refer to desirable goals, so that if a person values helpfulness, one is motivated to pursue that. 3) Values transcend specific actions and situations; 'This feature distinguishes values from norms and attitudes that usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations' (2012, p. 4). 4) Values serve as standards and criteria for individuals and so guide selection and evaluation of personal actions. 5) They are ordered in terms of importance, which Schwartz claims also distinguishes them from norms and attitudes. 6) The relative importance of values guides actions: they demand trade-offs and decisions in the practical sphere of life.

Schwartz (2012) isolates ten fundamental values, claiming that they are universal because they meet the basic needs of all human beings:

The values theory define ten broad values according to the motivation that underlies each of them. These values are likely to be universal because they are grounded in one or more of three universal requirements of human existence with which they help to cope. These requirements are needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups.

Individuals cannot cope successfully with these requirements of human existence on their own (p. 4).

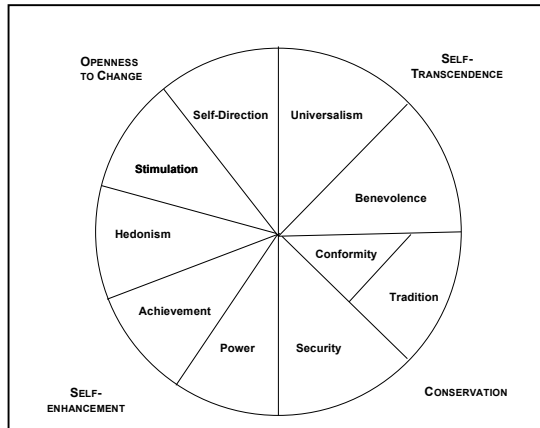
Thus the value *stimulation* has, as its goal, excitement, novelty and challenge; it is rooted in an individual's need to keep an appropriate level of activation. *Conformity* leads one to restrain from actions that will upset others, and is sourced in people's need to avoid actions that get in the way of orderly group activity. Schwartz seems to root this value and others ultimately in group survival: you won't bring home that mammoth for supper if one hunter is disruptive of the stalking group.

For Schwartz the ten universal values are *self-direction*, *stimulation*, *hedonism*, *achievement*, *power*, *security*, *conformity*, *tradition*, *benevolence*, and *universalism*. It should be noted that Schwartz asserts that all of these are necessary parts of individual and group life: one could not survive without any action towards hedonism or pleasure. Schwartz succinctly defines the basics of each value:

1. Self-Direction. Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring.
2. Stimulation. Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
3. Hedonism. Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.
4. Achievement. Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
5. Power. Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
6. Security. Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.
7. Conformity. Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
8. Tradition. Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provides to the self.
9. Benevolence. Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').
10. Universalism. Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (S. H. Schwartz, 2006).

These ten values are related to each other in a certain structure. Some values are closely aligned with others, so that, for example, pursuit of power and personal achievement go hand in hand. Some values are diametrically opposed to others: seeking success for oneself obstructs efforts towards improving the welfare of others who are in need. On this basis he has constructed a value wheel, seen in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: Schwartz Value Wheel, from *an overview...* (2012)



The four corners represent more fundamental stances of the person. *Conformity and tradition* share a single wedge because both have a common goal of cooperation with a smaller or larger group. Further, the order of the value circle expresses a continuum of motivation: tradition and security, for instance, both aim to preserve existing social arrangements that give certainty to life. Schwartz has also teased out two different spectra with regard to the value circle: openness to change vs. conservatism and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence. These are presented in the corners of the circle, near the values that correspond most strongly to each other.

There are at least three obvious challenges to Schwartz's formulation. Firstly, is it possible to say that the ten values are universal? While they seem to be so, one could question if *self-direction*, for instance, could possibly have the same meaning for a western banker and a *jhumming* subsistence farmer from a tribal community. This has been strengthened by

the recognition of *Yang's* Chinese value list mentioned earlier. And indeed, Schwartz himself has expanded the list of values to now consist of 19 rather than 10. Many of the additions are divisions of previous values; for example, *Security* in the new scale becomes *Security-societal* and *Security-Personal*. Schwartz also adds *Face* defined as 'security and power through maintaining one's public image and avoiding humiliation' (Schwartz et al., 2012). Might other values be unique to traditional communities?

The second difficulty arises from the first. Are different value profiles really comparable? If, for an Angami Naga, 'achievement' is measured (among other things) by the sponsoring of feasts to the clan and the village, and, for a New York hedge fund manager by the envy of her peers and the little people of the land, what might it mean to compare the value of *achievement* between Nagas and hedge fund managers? McCrae and Terracciano (2006) argue that personality stereotypes (e.g., Canadians are 'nice') fail in cultural studies, not least because differences within cultures are much broader than differences perceived between cultures. This is reaffirmed by Niranjana et al. (2013) in a highly technical statistical analysis which shows that such comparisons hold little water. Could we say, then, that the Khasis value achievement more than the Japanese do? Are differences between the Japanese and the Khasis more extreme than the range of difference within each group? What exactly might that mean? It means at least that one has to look at such comparisons (not least the ones here, of course) with great caution.

Thirdly, criticism from Niranjana et al. (2013) among others points out that members of various cultures will respond differently. There can be difference in meaning as discussed earlier here, but also that some value constructs might be more differentiated in some cultures than in others, and that some cultures resist extreme responses. After a complex statistical analysis, they conclude that survey items can often not measure the same value in different cultures (Niranjana et al., 2013).

In response to this, researchers who use the survey in measuring cross-cultural values are warned not to do so without adjusting the data through a complex centering of scores on individual respondent's means

(Littrell, 2008). It is important to note that this study excused itself from this requirement. The technique used of simple comparison of means is crudely basic, but is justified by the exploratory nature of this present study. Further, it does not attempt a cross-cultural comparison. By comparing means we learn something; the more sophisticated statistical analysis will produce more justifiable results and provide important new directions of future inquiry.

In sum, then, it seems most helpful to simply proceed and see what results from the inquiry. The expectation is not results and conclusions that are eternally true, but rather whether what comes of the study might encourage more efforts in this area and with this tool.

Procedure

An exploratory effort with Dimasa youth attending college and those recently graduated produced interesting results, which will be outlined in the discussion of the present study. For this study, a group of almost 100 college students from St. Anthony's Extension College in Byndihati, Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, were surveyed. The survey was in English, the second language of the students. Because of this, some of the questions were simplified for greater ease of comprehension and there was present an assistant conversant in both languages to trouble shoot.

The survey form was an adaptation of the Schwartz Portrait Values Questionnaire consisting of 21 questions. Two questions from each value were included along with an extra question on *Universalism*. For example, in probing responses with regard to *Conformity*, statements were:

- She believes people should do as they are told. She thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no one is watching.
- It is important to her to always behave properly. She wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.

Respondents (M=34; F=51) were offered six options for each statement, with responses assigned values as is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Survey Options and Response Values

Response	Assigned Value
1) This is not like me at all.	-1
2) This is not like me.	0
3) This is a little like me.	2
4) This somewhat like me.	3
5) This is like me.	5
6) This is very much like me.	7

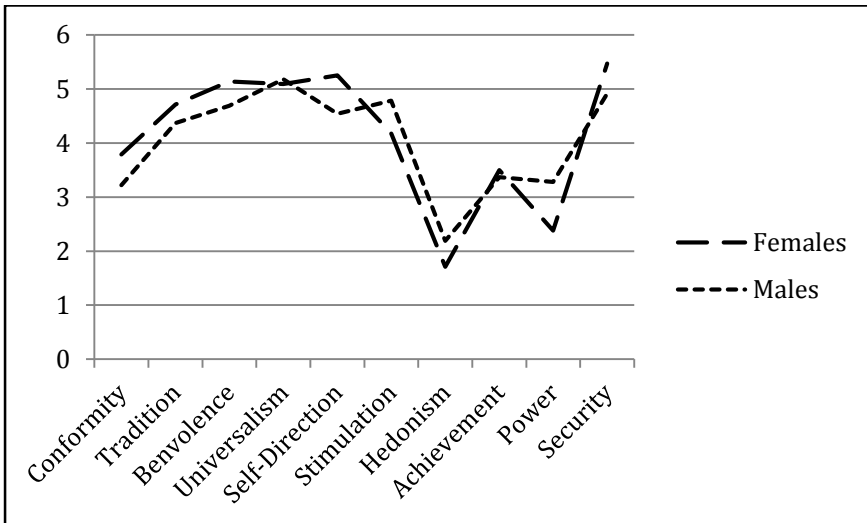
Assigned values are skewed toward positive responses because responses in many trials show a tendency to be positive. All of the values are (theoretically) somewhat desirable. In addition earlier studies encountered evidence of socially desiring responses in which the respondents give answers that make themselves look good. Given this, the weighted values offer better discrimination of responses. Responses for the two (or three) items were then averaged to assign each respondent a score for each value. The mean of these respondent scores were then used to give a group value score.

Value	Median Females	Median Males	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Conformity	3.79	3.82	858.0	-.081	.935
Tradition	4.71	4.37	734.5	-1.203	.229
Benevolence	5.14	4.69	732.0	-1.207	.220
Universalism	5.09	5.18	841.0	-.235	.814
Self-Direction	5.25	4.54	622.5	-2.229	.026*
Stimulation	4.18	4.78	685.0	-1.650	.099
Hedonism	1.71	2.19	713.5	-1.397	.165
Achievement	3.50	3.37	850.5	-.149	.882
Power	2.38	3.28	625.5	-2.175	.030*
Security	5.47	4.91	648.0	-2019	.043*
<i>*Statistically significant p<.05</i>					

Results

A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the score for each value between males and females. Distributions of the engagement scores for males and females were similar, as assessed by visual inspection. The difference in scores was significant for only 3 values: *self-direction*, *power* and *security*. These similarities and difference are easily seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Pnar Males vs Females, 10 values



Perhaps most interesting is how consistent identification with these values is for both young men and women. It is difficult to assign reasons for the items on which there is a statistical difference, small as it is, without lapsing into stereotypical categories. I will hazard to say that young women identifying themselves slightly more in *self-direction* and *security* might reflect the fact that Pnar society is matrilineal. The identification with *power* for young men would fit stereotypical expectations for males, and serve more strongly as an ideal for them. Can we say this presents a ‘Pnar Value Profile’ or even a ‘Pnar College Student Profile’? Surveying a greater number of Pnar students, and more from less rural areas, might make a difference. With larger samples, more differences might be distinguished. The present findings, while interesting, must be taken cautiously.

Comparisons

It is also interesting to compare these results with results from an earlier study on Dimasa student values. The data gathered for that study was collected *via* an internet survey using a much shorter 10-item instrument to facilitate a higher rate of completion. Thus even though the same basis of the Shalom Value Survey centers the study, statistical analysis seems inappropriate. So, this again, suggest comparison with Pnar values.

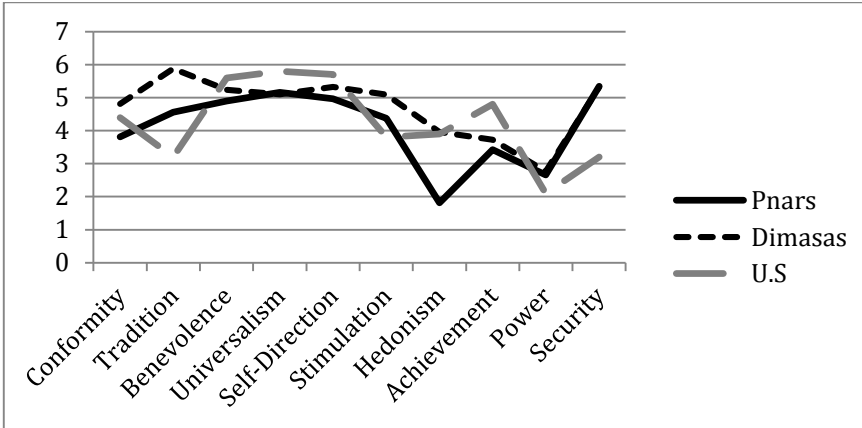
Sex	Conformity	Tradition	Benevolence	Universalism	Self-Direct	Stimulation	Hedonism	Achievement	Power	Security
F	5.91	6.76	6.18	6.38	6.45	5.43	4.14	4.1	3.38	6.76
M	5.69	6.84	6.21	5.97	6.16	6.24	4.93	4.51	3.47	6.14

The Dimasa study showed a very close pattern of Dimasa valuing when women and men were compared. Analysis within the study showed only one statistically significant difference, that of Dimasa males valuing *hedonism* more highly than females. This seems to accord with usual cultural expectations. This similarity held in whatever way the data was split: age and location also showed no difference in the response pattern. It should be remembered here that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence: the study used a rather small sample of 26 women and 68 men. It is possible, though perhaps risky, to compare the raw results of that study with the present endeavor, as can be seen in Table X and Chart Z.

Table 4: Pnars, Jaintias, U.S.

	CON	TRA	BEN	UNI	S-D	STM	HED	ACH	PO	SEC
Pnars	3.81	4.56	4.90	5.16	4.97	4.38	1.82	3.43	2.66	5.35
Dimasas	4.81	5.88	5.24	5.10	5.33	5.09	3.96	3.73	2.77	5.33
U.S	4.4	3.2	5.6	5.8	5.7	3.8	3.9	4.8	2.1	3.2

Figure 4₁: Pnar, Dimasa, and US Values



Assuming that the comparison here is roughly accurate, a few points of interest emerge. First, the Dimasas hold more closely to the values of *Conformity* and particularly *Tradition* than do Pnars. This is not surprising. For the Jaintia Kingdom's interactions with the British were regular if difficult, and these took place from the start as the British took possession of Bengal. Small scale wars were fought in 1734 and 1770, and the kingdom was annexed in 1835. Interaction between the hills of Meghalaya and the British Company, (then Empire), began in the early 1800's with the British attempt to build a road between Sylhet and Assam. British administrative headquarters were later established in Sohra (Cherrapunji) and eventually Shillong. From this it can be argued that, because of their long-standing relationships with the plains of Sylhet and large British presence in the Meghalaya hills, the Pnars were colonized early and effectively.

Quite the opposite is the case with Dimasas. Though the Dimasa Kingdom was taken over in 1832, this only concerned the plains area of Cachar. The hills, home of the traditional Dimasas, continued under Dimasa rule until 1854 and then were largely neglected by the British. The hills offered no worthwhile products and, aside from the notable revolt of Veer Sambhudhan Phonglo, no threats. The relative neglect does not seem to have ended with independence: the 2014 Human Development Report for Assam shows the district of Dima Hasao second poorest in expected years

of education and most intense in the severity of multi-dimensional poverty (Government of Assam, 2014). Though obviously great strides have been reported for the Dimasa area, much remains to be done.

The argument here, of course, is that as more recently exposed to the realities of the modern world, one would expect Dimasas to hold more strongly to *Conformity* and *Tradition*, two values that reflect the ideals of traditional communities. It also might be a contributing factor to the high value placed on *Hedonism* by Dimasa youth: as a community emerging from poverty, now discovering and enjoying the pleasures of life is an understandable value. It also might mean that Pnar students are for some reason more attentive to other good things in life.

Despite these differences, there are large areas of agreement between Dimasa and Pnar students on values. Differences might be accounted for, though such exercises are always hazardous. Might this indicate a unique value profile for traditional communities?

Unsurprisingly, *Tradition* is less important to U.S. students, *Hedonism* is virtually equal to Dimasa students, though one would guess for different reasons. For U.S. students, *Achievement* is notably more important than for Northeastern community youth, and *Security* less important.

Surprising, on the other hand, is that students in the U.S. value *Power* even less than Northeastern students. Is this because they eschew power or because they sense themselves to be empowered already, and so this is not a matter of much interest? That such a question might be put in all of these cases implies the need for a qualitative facet for any study such as this.

Conclusion

The survey of Pnar students using the Schwartz Values Survey, preliminary as it is, presents an interesting picture of their value profiles. There are only a few values in which young women and men of the community differ; reasons for that were offered in terms of some aspects of Pnar culture. More differences might emerge with a larger sample. Assuming this small study represents accurate trends, however, these trends

reflect a noteworthy similarity between young men and women of the Pnar community.

When viewed in relation to results from a previous Dimasa study, there again appears to be greater similarities than differences in how youth of the two traditional communities value different life ideals. Similarly, those differences are in no way shocking given the more recent emergence of Dimasa people into the modern world.

Further, it would be of great interest to engage in intergenerational surveys. Do young and old Dimasas (or Pnars, or Hrusso-Akas, or other traditional groups) present evidence of a changing value system? Such studies have little or no immediate pay-offs. Certainly traditional communities have many important pragmatic concerns: better education, income equality, and land alienation, to name a few. Despite that unarguable reality, such a study would contribute to the community understanding of how they might be changing. Such knowledge, like any knowledge, carries with it the power to direct those changes in the way people want.

A more concrete specification of that might be the relatively low valuing of *Achievement* and *Power* among the Northeastern students. One can make the huge and dubious argument that it is good for these students to foster values more in keeping with modern life. The results here indicate that such a profile cannot be assumed, and so might be an important focus for educational programs in school with large numbers of students from traditional communities.

Despite the remaining questions and difficulties with the Schwartz model and means of measurement, the present study indicates that the Schwartz Value Survey is a viable tool – though probably far from perfect – for exploring this further. More, larger, and more rigorous studies would shed further light on how adequate the Schwartz Survey might be. It could provide valuable insights into the values of traditional communities as they move towards fuller interaction with the wider world.

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