

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORK VALUES OF UNDERGRADUATE AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN STUDENTS

Amany Saleh,
Arkansas State University, United States
asaleh@astate.edu

Tatyana Chuikova,
Bashkir State Pedagogical University, Russian Federation
chuikova_tatyan@mail.ru

Laura A Kuizin
Arkansas State University, United States
kuizin@astate.edu

ABSTRACT

This study examined work values of undergraduate students in two comparable state universities in Russia and the United States. The study investigated how work values of undergraduate students in these two cultures differ across country and gender. Examining undergraduate students' work values give us insights into their flexibility at work, motivation for employment, and job persistence. It is imperative to gain such insights of the global work force for employees and employers with respect to future employment. Such knowledge will help us address future graduates' needs as well as foster an efficient and pleasant work environment. The current study showed that there are significant differences between American and Russian students regarding work values and attitudes toward unemployment. The key findings indicated that Russian students had a more positive attitude toward work than American students on most items measuring work values, whereas American students had more negative attitude toward unemployment and a much higher life satisfaction than Russian students.

Key Words: Work Values, Career Counseling, Comparative Study, and Attitude towards Unemployment

INTRODUCTION

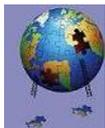
Dose (1997) defined work values as ". . . Evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discuss what is right or assess the importance of reference" (p. 228). Thus a study of work values is crucial because they are closely related to career choices and satisfaction (Duffy, 2010; Duffy, & Sedlacek, 2007; Pascual, 2009; Ryckman & Houston, 2003; Shaw & Duys, 2005).

Work values are considered one of the most influential factors impacting career development, career choices, and satisfaction (Bayrakova, 2015). The knowledge provided in this study should give us insights into the future of the workforce and future employees' attitudes toward work. Additionally, knowing the similarities and/or differences of American and Russian students give us a better understanding of the future global marketplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Values and Career Counseling

Research shows that work values appear to be mostly related to personal values (Leuty, 2013), thus career counseling may be enhanced by examining the work values held by the individuals seeking assistance. By taking work values into consideration during the career counseling process, one can learn more than just gathering information as to the best vocation based on skills and personality. Such deep



understanding may assist in determining the best occupational choice for the individual (Leuty, 2013; Rounds, 1990).

Recent research has established that work value orientations play a role in job well-being and work performance (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & De Witte, 2009). Research conducted in the field of career counseling practices indicated that work value is one of the key factors that can significantly influence career decisions and self-efficacy (Choi et al., 2013), yet career counseling practices primarily focus on the interest and aptitude of the individual being assessed.

Conversely, while work values were the least likely to be evaluated during career counseling sessions, Hirschi (2010) contends that work values are the values most susceptible to change by the influence of significant others (Wijting, Arnold, & Conrad, 1978). Thus, according to Choi et al. (2013), career counselors are positioned to be influential figures in shaping the work values of the individuals with whom they work.

Comparative Global Work Values

There is an abundance of research on work values of college students in the West but very few similar studies have been conducted in the East. Additionally, there is even less research conducted to compare work values of university students from different cultures (Duffy, 2010; Ng & Sears, 2010; Ryckman, & Houston, 2003). This information can guide career educators and counselors to better advise future generations.

According to *Work Values of University Students in Chinese Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong* (Wong & Yuen, 2012), there is a lack of a definition that is commonly agreed upon regarding 'work values' (Dose, 1997). Further, there is no consensus as to the exact nature of what constitutes these values (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). Given the lack of consensus, issues related to comparing work values can arise when conducting research. Niles (1994) indicated that "... much of the evidence seems to suggest that the work ethic is stronger in some developing countries than in the developed world" (p. 58).

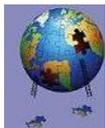
Aygün, Arslan, and Güney (2008) compared work values between Turkish and American college students. They found Turkish students to have higher achievement and hard work orientation than their American counterparts.

Coomes (2004) asserted that popular culture and history are key contributors for determining the beliefs, values, attitudes and views of individuals and groups in the world. Moreover, the traits that shape the character of one generation consequently characterize future generations (Coomes & Debard, 2004). Bayrakova agreed that work values are also a reflection of the students' cultures (2015).

Ye (2015) examined work values and career adaptability of 407 Chinese college students. He found that extrinsic rewards such as large salaries, good working conditions, and intrinsic rewards such as challenge and independence correlated positively with the likelihood of putting forth effort at work, and having flexible, and adoptive attitude toward work assignments.

Work Values in the Global Labor Market

Much of the literature on labor market contends that globalization and international competition have changed the dynamics of the market (Aygün, Arslan, & Güney, 2008). Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, and DeWitte (2010) argued that flexibility and the ability to respond to the fast changing consumer needs had become a major priority for most employers. Addressing this concern, international organizations are looking for employees who are flexible, innovative, and self-motivated. The fast-paced changes in the labor market of the 21st Century due to globalization and the advances in technology have made the process of hiring and retaining personnel a complex and challenging task (Savickas, et al. 2009).



Wong and Yuen (2012) emphasized the importance of studying work values of undergraduate students due to the close relationships between work values and career choices. Therefore, understanding undergraduates' work values of future employees have major implications for human resources departments in all organizations (Ma, 2005).

Work values can be important predictors of individual attitudes towards work (Dose, 1997) and job satisfaction (Judge, & Bretz, 992). Bayrakova (2015) asserted that, "Work values are a reflection of the value that a person ascribe to work, the meaning that a person attributes to that work, and a person's humanistic values. Work values are thus concerned with how an individual will demonstrate interest in the work at hand at the level of values" (p. 71). She argued that students, during their time at the university, examine and develop their values, which include work values.

Gender and Work Values

The literature on gender difference among cultures regarding work values is scarce. Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) found gender differences in work values among college students. They reported that male students placed more value on extrinsic rewards such as large earnings, and advancement opportunities while female students placed more value on working environment and potential contribution to the community. On the other hand, Aygün et al. (2008) found no gender differences regarding work values in their comparative study of American and Turkish undergraduate students.

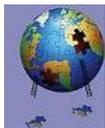
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study relied on Vroom (1964) Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), which hypothesizes that individual motivation to work and strive is depended on their expectation to successfully achieve their goals. EVT predicts that if a student had high expectation of finding a job, he/she will work harder to secure the job than an individual with low expectation. According to EVT, unemployed individuals with high work values are more willing to invest a considerable effort and time in retaining and advancing in their job (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Feather (1990, 1992a, 1992b) developed a survey based on Vroom's EVT to measure the attitudes and the meaning of having a job to the unemployed.

The authors of this study reasoned that gaining an understanding of undergraduate students' work values and attitudes towards employment will give us insights into the impact of culture on such values and lead to better communication among cultures. This knowledge will also lead to better college and career counseling. This will result in better placement of students, which will reduce the number of changes of academic majors and dropout rate of college as well as reduce the numbers of years it takes students to graduate from college. Additionally, a better job placement of graduates will lead to increased job satisfaction and, in turn, increased work place productivity.

METHOD

Students were randomly selected via email and were given the Work Values survey, developed by N.T. Feather (Feather, 1990), which contains 14 questions pertaining to work values. The participants indicated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to what degree they valued having a job and disliked being unemployed. Cronbach's α of the survey is .84 ($M=2.98$; $SD=.71$). The instrument was utilized in earlier studies (Chuykova, 2012, Van den Broeck et al., 2009; Vansteenkiste, et al., 2005). Demographic questions included gender, age, and academic major as well as a question assessing student' general life satisfaction were added by the researchers. The Survey was translated to Russian before it was disseminated to students at Bashkir State Pedagogical University. Approximately 1400 surveys were emailed to students in all disciplines on both campuses, with a return of 314 completed surveys (response rate 22.5%). The email sent to the participants contained information



about the study, including the names of the lead faculty researchers and doctoral student researcher conducting the study, purpose of the investigation, and disclosure of confidentiality assurance.

PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

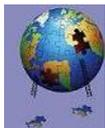
Participants in this study included 159 students attending Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and 171 students from Bashkir State Pedagogical University in Ufa, Russia. Participants in this study were randomly selected from a list serve from the main campuses of each institution. All participants in this study were undergraduate students.

RESULTS

The following section details the participants' responses to the fourteen survey items regarding work values. In response to the first statement, "Work is the most important thing in life," Russian students had a higher mean ($M=3.47$) than American students ($M=2.76$). Russian students had a lower mean ($M=2.01$) than American students ($M=3.33$) in responding to the statement, "I prefer to be working even if this implies a wage similar to welfare." Russian students had lower mean ($M=2.87$) than American students ($M=3.92$) when agreeing with the statement, "One should work to be part of the society." However, Russians had a higher mean ($M=3.5$) than Americans ($M=2.67$) in responding to the statement, "It is not necessary to work in order to contribute." Similarly, Russians had a higher mean than Americans ($M= 4.23$, $M= 3.92$) in agreeing with the statement, "Even if I won the first prize in the lottery, I would prefer to contribute in my job." However, Americans had a higher mean than Russians in responding to the statement, "Working adds meaning to my life" ($M=4.06$, $M=3.63$). In responding to the statement, "Accepting a job is better than being unemployed," American students had a higher mean than Russian students ($M=4.32$, $M=3.37$). American Students agreed more than Russian students with the statement. "Being unemployed is about the worst thing that has happened to me" ($M=3.00$, $M=2.05$). More Americans agreed with the statement "Even if unemployment benefits were high, I prefer to work," than Russians ($M=4.20$, $M=3.80$). Also, more Americans agreed with the statement, "It is more important to me to find employment," than Russians ($M=4.43$, $M=3.44$). On the other hand, more Russian students agreed with the statement "Receiving unemployment benefits is a proper way to earn a living," than American students ($M=3.79$, $M=1.58$). More Russians ($M=4.40$) yet agreed with the statement, "I don't enjoy leisure time unless I have earned it" than Americans ($M=3.20$). There were no statistical significant differences between American and Russian students in responding to the two following statements: "As an unemployed person, I feel I fail short" ($M=3.53$, $M=3.30$), and "I hate being unemployed" ($M=3.97$, $M=4.06$)(Table 1). Results of t-test comparative analysis of two groups are included in Table 2.

In examining gender difference regarding work values, the authors found a significant difference in 11 out of the 14 items in the survey. Females had higher means than males in responding to items 1, 4, 5, 12, 13, and 14, while males had higher means responding to items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10. There were no statistical differences between males and females in their responses to survey items 6, 9, and 11 (Table 3). Results of t-test comparative analysis of two groups are included in Table 4.

There was a large statistical significant difference between Russian and American students in their life satisfaction as a whole (Tables 5 & 6). American student had a much higher mean than Russian students as they responded to this survey item ($M=4.03$, $M=1.67$).



DISCUSSION

The comparative value of this study is immense since it is the first study to compare work values of Russian and American undergraduate students. This is especially important because Russian youth are participants in a newly developed Russian economy, which strives to compete globally. The new Russian economy encompasses capitalist and free trade ideologies while retaining some remnants of the old communist/socialist system. On the other hand, American students are only familiar with the capitalist economy, yet both groups will graduate to work in one global economy. The study examined the differences in these students' attitudes toward work and their aspiration for gainful employment. Niles (1994) asserted that work ethics is strong in some developing countries than in developed countries. The findings of this study support this contention as well as an earlier research of Aygün, Arslan, and Güney (2008).

According to Choi et.al (2013), while extensive research has been conducted over several decades on career interests and decision self-efficacy (Rounds & Armstrong, 2005), far less research has been conducted in the area of work values. Moreover, although some studies have been conducted on work values in general, very little research can be found that specifically compares American student work values to Russian student work values. The findings of this study help bridge the gap in the literature and provide insights into American and Russian students' work values and attitudes towards employment. This knowledge can serve career counselors better advise undergraduate students. This information can also aid human resource officers in fostering conducive working conditions that accommodate their interest and needs.

The findings give insights into undergraduate students' work values and attitudes toward employment of American and Russian students. However, the findings should not be generalized for the Russian and American societies since this study only included a sample of undergraduate students from both countries.

IMPLICATIONS

Knowledge of work or employment values are directly linked to future employees' flexibility and willingness to respond to the needs of their future careers (Van den Broek, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & De Witte, 2010). This knowledge indicates students' motivation to find employment and job flexibility. This information can be used to better place employees in the labor market.

Work values are believed to be universal but they vary according to different variables such as gender or culture (Bayrakova, 2015). The findings of this study demonstrated distinct differences between American and Russian undergraduate students' work values and attitudes towards employment. The results also established differences in male and female students' work values and attitudes toward employment in both countries. Career Guidance and counseling services can benefit from such knowledge by better understanding students' attitudes toward work. The knowledge will enable us to better guide students into academic majors or place new employees in the work place that best suit their needs and motivation.

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Table 1
Comparative Means and Standard Deviations of Work Values of Russian and American Students

Survey Items	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error of Mean
Work is the most important thing in life	Russian	171	3.47	1.13	0.086
	American	156	2.76	1.03	0.082
I prefer to be working, even if for a wage similar to welfare	Russian	171	2.01	1.10	0.084
	American	157	3.33	1.17	0.094
One should work to be part of the society	Russian	170	2.87	1.23	0.094
	American	156	3.92	0.91	0.073
It is not necessary to work in order to contribute	Russian	170	3.52	1.16	0.089
	American	155	2.67	1.14	0.091
Even if I won the first prize in the lottery, I would prefer to continue in my job	Russian	170	4.23	1.084	0.083
	American	155	3.92	1.11	0.089
Working adds meaning to my life	Russian	171	3.63	1.18	0.090
	American	156	4.06	0.80	0.064
Accepting a job is better than being unemployed	Russian	170	3.37	1.21	0.093
	American	155	4.32	0.73	0.59
Being unemployed is about the worst thing that has happened to me	Russian	170	2.05	1.19	0.091
	American	154	3.01	1.19	0.96
Even if unemployment benefits were high, I prefer to work	Russian	167	3.80	1.14	0.088
	American	155	4.20	0.66	0.531
It is important to me to find employment	Russian	168	3.44	1.16	0.090
	American	154	4.43	0.67	0.054
As an unemployed person, I feel I fall short	Russian	168	3.30	1.31	0.10
	American	155	3.53	1.18	0.094



I hate being unemployed	Russian American	169 153	4.06 3.97	1.05 1,02	0.081 0.082
Receiving unemployment benefits is a proper way to earn a living	Russian American	169 155	3.79 1.58	1.26 0.76	0.097 0.061
I don't enjoy leisure time unless I have earned it	Russian American	165 155	4.40 3.20	0.89 1.17	0.069 0.094



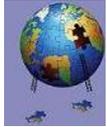


Table 2
Independent Sample t-test for Russian and American Students' Work Values

Item	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Means Differences	Std. Error Differences	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Work is the most important thing in life	5.900	325	.000	.71086	.12048	.47384	.94789
I prefer to be working, even if for a wage similar to welfare	-10.505	326	.000	-1.32588	.12622	-1.57419	-1.07758
One should work to be part of the society	-8.805	310	.000	-1.05249	.11954	-1.28769	-.81729
It is not necessary to work in order to contribute	6.626	325	.000	.84837	.12803	.59649	1.10025
Even if I won the first prize in the lottery, I would prefer to continue in my job	2.564	323	.011	.31271	.12198	.07274	.55269
Working adds meaning to my life	-3.774	325	.000	-.42668	.11306	-.64909	-.20426
Accepting a job is better than being unemployed	-8.380	323	.000	-.94611	.11290	-1.16821	-.72401
Being unemployed is about the worst thing that has happened to me	-7.222	322	.000	-.96066	.13302	-1.22235	-.69897
Even if unemployment benefits were high, I prefer to work	-3.846	320	.000	-.40406	.10505	-.61073	-.19738
It is important to me to find employment	-9.250	320	.000	-.99459	.10752	-1.20613	-.78305
As an unemployed person, I feel I fall short	-1.618	321	.107	-.22596	.13962	-.50064	.04872
I hate being unemployed	.784	320	.434	.09123	.11640	-.13778	.32025
Receiving unemployment benefits is a proper way to earn a living	18.828	322	.000	2.20580	.11716	1.97531	2.43629
I don't enjoy leisure time unless I have earned it	10.388	318	.000	1.20606	.11610	.97763	1.43449

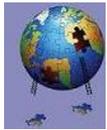


Table 3
Comparative Data of Russian and American Students Work Values by Gender

Item	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Work is the most important thing in life	Female	184	3.2935	1.14556	.08445
	Male	140	2.9071	1.09213	.09230
I prefer to be working, even if for a wage similar to welfare	Female	184	2.4674	1.32608	.09776
	Male	141	2.8794	1.28993	.10863
One should work to be part of the society	Female	184	3.2337	1.24346	.09167
	Male	139	3.5612	1.14913	.09747
It is not necessary to work in order to contribute	Female	183	3.3607	1.21392	.08974
	Male	141	2.7943	1.19234	.10041
Even if I won the first prize in the lottery, I would prefer to continue in my job	Female	183	4.1967	1.07140	.07920
	Male	139	3.9496	1.14413	.09704
Working adds meaning to my life	Female	183	3.7650	1.11655	.08254
	Male	141	3.9433	.93177	.07847
Accepting a job is better than being unemployed	Female	182	3.7088	1.15046	.08528
	Male	140	3.9857	1.07279	.09067
Being unemployed is about the worst thing that has happened to me	Female	181	2.3867	1.27133	.09450
	Male	140	2.6643	1.29532	.10947
Even if unemployment benefits were high, I prefer to work	Female	180	3.9944	.99998	.07453
	Male	139	4.0288	.90042	.07637
It is important to me to find employment	Female	180	3.7722	1.09254	.08143
	Male	139	4.1079	1.04736	.08884
As an unemployed person, I feel I fall short	Female	180	3.4778	1.26604	.09436
	Male	140	3.3286	1.24913	.10557
I hate being unemployed	Female	181	4.1989	.95114	.07070
	Male	138	3.7826	1.11878	.09524
Receiving unemployment benefits is a proper way to earn a living	Female	181	3.2155	1.54308	.11470
	Male	140	2.1000	1.25978	.10647
I don't enjoy leisure time unless I have earned it	Female	178	4.1067	1.09176	.08183
	Male	139	3.4388	1.23426	.10469

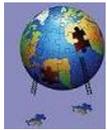


Table 4
Independent Sample t-test for Work Values by Gender

Item	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Means Differences	Std. Error Differences	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Work is the most important thing in life	-3.068	322	.002	.38634	.12592	.13860	.63407
I prefer to be working, even if for a wage similar to welfare	-2.809	323	.005	-.41204	.14668	-.70061	-.12347
One should work to be part of the society	-2.421	321	.016	-.32746	.13528	-.59361	-.06130
It is not necessary to work in order to contribute	4.196	322	.000	.56633	.13498	.30077	.83189
Even if I won the first prize in the lottery, I would prefer to continue in my job	1.990	320	.047	.24708	.12414	.00285	.49131
Working adds meaning to my life	1.529	322	.127	-.17824	.11657	-.40756	.05109
Accepting a job is better than being unemployed	2.205	320	.028	-.27692	.12561	-.52405	-.02979
Being unemployed is about the worst thing that has happened to me	-1.924	319	.055	-.27755	.14427	-.56139	.00630
Even if unemployment benefits were high, I prefer to work	-1.919	296.284	.056	-.27755	.14462	-.56215	.00706
It is important to me to find employment	-.317	317	.751	-.03433	.10816	-.24714	.17848
As an unemployed person, I feel I fall short	-2.770	317	.006	-.33569	.12117	-.57409	-.09729
I hate being unemployed	3.587	317	.000	.41629	.11606	.18795	.64462
Receiving unemployment benefits is a proper way to earn a living	6.947	319	.000	1.11547	.16056	.79958	1.43136
I don't enjoy leisure time unless I have	5.103	315	.000	.66789	.13089	.41037	.92542



earned it							
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Table 5

Comparative Means and Standard Deviations of Life Satisfaction For American and Russian Students

Cohort	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Russian	167	1.6766	.71363	.05522
American	155	4.0323	.90754	.07290

Table 6

Independent Sample t-test for Life Satisfaction of American and Russian Students

	F	t	df	Sig-(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Satisfaction	.000	-25.986	320	.000	-2.35561	.09065	-2.53395	-2.17727
		-25.758	292.200	.000	-2.35561	.09145	-2.53560	-2.17563