

# I Live in My Own Bubble:

## The Values of Talented Adolescents

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Values are commonly thought to be important in the construction of personal and group morality, in personality, and as a basis for living life. The Rokeach Values Survey (RVS) was administered to gifted and talented adolescents in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. Two groups were compared in this study: Group I, pre-September 11, 2001 ( $n = 191$ ;  $M = 64$ ,  $F = 127$ ); and Group II, post-September 11, 2001 ( $n = 96$ ;  $M = 36$ ,  $F = 60$ ). Results showed that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon did not affect the values of the talented teenagers. Values were ranked thus: Terminal Values: (1) Salvation, (2) Freedom, (3) Self-Respect, (16) World of Beauty, (17) Social Recognition, (18) National Security. Instrumental Values: (1) Love, (2) Honesty, (3) Imagination (16) Obedience, (17) Politeness, (18) Cleanliness. Qualitative analysis was conducted of student essays and interviews.

The State of Ohio Department of Education funds 16 Ohio Summer Honors Institutes each year through a competitive grant process with a \$1 million per year line-item expenditure. The small north central private college campus where the study was conducted has received grants from the Ohio Department of Education for 15 years to provide summer programming for identified gifted and talented high school freshmen and sophomores. The grant provides these talented students with 7½ days of intensive college-level instruction in liberal arts classes (philosophy, political science, biomedicine, creativity studies, visual arts, theater, toxicology, religion, classical music composition, creative writing, mathematics, physics, psychology, biology, law, and other fields and domains).

Each 7½-day intensive institute begins with an assessment session; instruments administered have included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Piirto, 1998b; Piirto & Johnson, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c); the High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ; Piirto & Fraas, 1995; Piirto & Johnson, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c); the Overexcitabilities Questionnaire (OEQ I and OEQ II; Falk &

Piirto, 2001; Piirto, Cassone, & Fraas, 1996; Piirto, Beach, Cassone, Rogers, & Fraas, 2000a, 2000b; Piirto, 1992, 1994, 1998b, 2002, 2004); and the Rokeach Values Survey (RVS; Piirto, 2002b, 2002c, 2003).

Several studies on the overexcitabilities of talented youth (Flint, Schottke, Willmore, & Piirto, 1997; Piirto, 1992, 1994, 1998b, 2002; Piirto, Beach, Cassone, Rogers, & Fraas, 2000a, 2000b; Piirto, Cassone, & Fraas, 1996) led to this study.

### Theoretical Framework

This study continues an exploration of overexcitabilities in adolescents and other factors within Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, which is a theory of adult development that speaks to the possibility that people can live up to a personality ideal and are shaped by values that can be modified and changed as one moves from Level I (the lowest) to Level V (the highest). One grows from level to level through conflict, and one's propensity for growth is termed "developmental poten-

tial.” The levels are not fixed in time, that is, they do not occur at certain ages, but they may occur simultaneously as a person is in a conflict of growth and development.

At Level I, Primary Integration, the motivation to act is based on primitive drives. At Level II, Unilevel Disintegration, one experiences multiple points of view and conforms to external standards. At this level, if one’s actions appear to be nonconforming, such nonconformity is not based on principles the person has developed him- or herself, but rather upon group pressure because, at Level II, one follows styles, doctrines, and superiors with little evaluation. At Level III, Unilevel Disintegration, one is increasingly influenced by inner beliefs as he or she experiences internal conflict between what ought to be and what is. This level is marked by existential despair and much self-reflection. At Level IV one emerges from this conflict, beginning to behave with a view toward the perfecting of the self and of service to others. This level is similar to Maslow’s final stage of self-actualization. However, the Dabrowski theory includes one more level, Level V, at which selflessness and a sense of universal unity prevail. In Dabrowski’s theory of development, the first two levels are characterized primarily by sensual and psychomotor overexcitabilities and the need to fulfill bodily and sensual needs. The higher three levels require emotional, imaginal, and intellectual overexcitability.

This study of the values of talented adolescents was conducted because values and personality ideal seem to be related. Hague (1993), in a similar study, wrote,

Regardless of the question of how often real and ideal do perfectly merge, the major contribution that Dabrowski made . . . is that values are not merely ideas conceived of and ranked in the abstract, but, rather, realities felt and lived. One cannot place a value without experiencing . . . the tension between it and other values in real life situations. (p. 34)

The Rokeach Values Survey was used because of its long history and its ease of administration to teenagers. It is also the same instrument Hague (1993) used. The Rokeach Values Survey (RVS) has been in use for more than 30 years. It consists of two scales of 18 values, one an Instrumental Values list and one a Terminal Value list. Instrumental Values are beliefs or conceptions about desirable modes of behavior that are instrumental to the attainment of desirable end states (such as behaving honestly or responsibly; Rokeach, 1979, p. 48). Terminal Values are beliefs or conceptions about ultimate goals or desirable end states of existence that are worth striving for (such as hap-

piness or wisdom; Rokeach, 1979, p. 48). Respondents move stickers to rank order the items on the list. Directions are as follows: “Rank each value in its order of importance to you. Study the list and think of how much each value may act as a guiding principle in your life” (Rokeach, 1983). According to Rokeach (1979) we may operationally define values as “core conceptions of the desirable within every individual and society. They serve as standards or criteria to guide not only action but also judgment, choice, attitude, evaluation, argument, exhortation, rationalization, and . . . attribution of causality” (p. 2).

## Review of the Literature

This literature review will deal with the validity of the RVS, commensurability issues, and research on the values of gifted and talented adolescents. The RVS has been used in 424 studies since 1971, according to the PsycINFO database.

### Validity

In a construct validity study of the RVS, Miethe (1985) said that it exhibited less measurement error than a 100-point rating, magnitude estimation, and the hand-grip scaling procedure; thus, “rank order scaling is shown to be the best technique for measuring human values even though it achieves only an ordinal level of measurement” (p. 441).

Do values remain? Do people change their values? In a predictive validity study comparing the influence of college instruction on values, students were found to retain the values they espoused in younger years (Buier, Butman, Burwell, & Van Wicklin, 1989). Another predictive validity study of student psychotherapists found that they retained their values over a period of 20 years (Katz, Juni, & Matz, 2002). Feather (1973) found that the values of college students did not change from 1969 to 1971.

Does this mean values are fixed in adolescence and that the necessity for value shifting in order to attain the personality ideal in Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration is impossible? Some evidence indicates that this is true, though Darmody (1991) found a relationship between the attainment of formal reasoning in adolescents and value changes. However, a study of adults in their 20s showed that the RVS seems to measure fundamental values, rather than the desirability of values (Gibbins & Walker, 1993). Using another instrument, the Study of Values, Lubinski, Schmidt, and Benbow (1996) found that the top 1% of scorers on the Scholastic Aptitude Test

retained their values measured at the age of 13 into adulthood.

### Commensurability Issues

One of the major difficulties in using any specific instrument or scale to measure such vague constructs as values, creativity, personality, and the like is that an instrument measures what it measures and the operational definitions that underlie the construction of such instruments often vary. Searching through technical manuals for operational definitions often yields different definitions for the same terms. Thus, whether one can compare the values purportedly measured by one instrument with the values purportedly measured by another instrument is difficult. This is called commensurability. Are the instruments similar? Do they measure similar constructs? Do they measure the construct specified?

The issue of commensurability between the Rokeach Value Survey and other instruments has been studied. One study (Bilskyk & Schwartz, 1994) looked at personality and values and found “similar motivational dynamics” (p. 181) underlying the RVS and the Frieberg Personality Inventory in German undergraduates.

Some researchers have combined values instruments to arrive at a composite picture of liberalism and conservatism (Brasthwaite, 1998). The RVS and three other value measurement instruments were used with undergraduate psychology students, showing that security and harmony, personal accomplishment, and religiosity were related to liberalism and conservatism.

Studies using gender as a variable have shown that, in adults, stereotypes of the “typical man” and the “typical woman” are upheld because women chose values that were related to communal values and men chose values that were related to agentic values (DiDio, Saragovi, Koestner, & Aube, 1996).

One cross-cultural study was reported that used high achievement as a variable (Feather, 1998). The Rokeach Value Survey, the Tall Poppy Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Equalitarianism Scale were used to compare college students in Australia, the U.S., and Canada. American students valued high achievement, competence, and conformity; Australian students emphasized prosocial values and egalitarianism; and Canadian students gave less emphasis to affiliative contentment.

However, the choice of a specific instrument can only lead to speculations about whether that instrument measures what it says it measures. Much of the literature on the Rokeach Values Survey focuses on whether the instrument really measures values.

### Studies of the Values of Gifted and Talented Adolescents

Other studies with students who are gifted and talented utilizing the Rokeach Values Survey could not be located. Studies of the top 1% of scorers on the Scholastic Aptitude Test by the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth using the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values (AVLSV) have shown that the top scorers crystallize their values at age 13 or so (Lubinski, Schmidt, & Benbow, 1996; Schmidt, Benbow, & Lubinski, 1998). Again, whether the two instruments are commensurable is at issue. No studies comparing the AVLSV and the RVS were located. A search of *Tests in Print* (Murphy, Coneley, & Impara, 1994) and the *14th Mental Measurements Yearbook* (2001) for studies of gifted adolescents that utilized other instruments such as the Rothwell Miller Values Blank; the Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory; the Personal Values Questionnaire; the Values Scale; the Hall-Tonna Inventory of Values; and the Temperament and Values Inventory came up empty.

For now, it seems that some literature about gifted youth mentions values, but little measurement has been done utilizing the Rokeach Values Survey or any other instruments besides the aforementioned Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values used by the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth. However, the necessity for gifted and talented adolescents to have “values” has been advocated, especially by researchers who focus on leadership (Feldhusen & Kennedy, 1988; Karnes & D’Ilio, 1990). The need for considering the values of the gifted and talented has been stressed in career guidance (Kerr, 1990). Gender differences in values have been discussed in case studies of adult women (Leroux, 1988). Some have written about “values education” (Nelson, 1981). Often, authors speak about instilling values, inspiring values, and modeling values for the gifted and talented, but as far as I could determine, few empirical studies of the actual values of gifted adolescents have been conducted. That is perhaps why this study, with a relatively large and diverse group of U.S. talented adolescents, may contribute to the literature.

### Method

This study looked at the responses to the Rokeach Values Survey by 279 9th and 10th graders (males = 96, females = 183). In completing the RVS, 18 Terminal Values and 18 Instrumental Values were rank ordered by moving stickers from one column to another. Ninth and

10th graders from 36 of the 88 counties of Ohio and from urban, suburban, and rural districts in Ohio were administered the RVS during four seasons of Ohio Summer Honors Institutes held at a small north-central Ohio liberal arts university.

### How Were the Students Identified as Gifted and Talented?

Ninth- and 10th-grade students eligible to attend the 16 Ohio Summer Honors Institutes are identified as gifted and talented by the Ohio Rule for the Identification of Gifted Students (SHB 282). Ohio identifies gifted students in four areas: Superior Cognitive; Specific Academic; Creativity; and Visual and Performing Arts.<sup>1</sup> Identification is mandatory in Ohio. Notification of parents is mandatory, although service is not. Thus, the Ohio legislature has financed the tuition-free 16 Ohio Summer Honors Institutes for any freshman and sophomore high school students who have been identified as gifted and talented in any of the four areas.

### Demographics

Ohio is a state with 11,373,541 people, making it the seventh most populated state in the U.S. Located in the Great Lakes Area, its center is 500 miles from New York City and 400 miles from Washington, DC, sites of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, respectively. Eighty-five percent of Ohioans are White, 11.5% are Black, 1.9% are Latino, and 1.5% are Asian.

### The Participants

Students ranged in age from 14 to 17. Most had been identified as gifted in the Superior Cognitive and Specific Academic areas of the Ohio Rule for the Identification of Gifted and Talented Students. Their GPAs ranged between 3.0 and 4.0, with the majority having a GPA of 4.0. They had all passed all five sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test. Recommendation letters for the students used descriptors such as “outstanding work ethic,” “natural born leader,” “mature,” “enthusiastic,” “dedicated,” and “conscientious.” The students’ ethnicities and demographics of residence (rural, urban, suburban) were commensurate with the state demographics. The application form does not ask for parent income or other financial information, but about one third of the students attended on scholarship (Ball & Starkey, 2000; Shadle & Shadle, 2001). Students came from 36 of the 88 counties in Ohio, with most from

Cuyahoga County (the Cleveland area), Franklin County (the Columbus area), and Stark County (the Akron area). Most (45%) were from suburban areas, with 19% from urban areas and 35% from rural areas.

### The Study

The RVS was administered to the students in the assessment sessions in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. Two methods were used to add to the interpretation of what the rankings mean. Students wrote essays about why they chose their top and bottom values. These essays were typed and content analyses were conducted according to value, but the essays were not coded nor analyzed for themes. Interviews were also conducted with students during the program and analyzed for themes (Buckalew, 2001; Miller, McClair, Prusha, & Roberts, 2002). Students were selected for interviews by convenience sampling (e.g., in evening activities, during rest periods and breaks, etc.).

This study discusses only the top-ranked and bottom-ranked values. The reason for considering the top and bottom values has to do with what the “middle muddle” described by Hague (1993):

Some participants complained about the difficulty of juggling 18 variables at one time, saying it was simply too many to handle. Some found that certain values stood out clearly as high-order values for them, while other [values] clearly were at the bottom of their ranking. The top three and the bottom three were usually quite distinct; the remaining 12 values formed a kind of “middle muddle” with little or no clear distinction [among] them. Some participants reported that they really could not discriminate these middle values, and that they had no clear rationale for their order. (Hague, 1993, p. 33)

The Ohio students, like the people in Hague’s study, noted the difficulty of ranking values. One young woman said, “All the stickers, though, were very hard to put in numerical importance because all of the values given seem equally desired.” One young man compared the task to what Walt Whitman must have endured:

Walt Whitman, one of the greatest contemporary poets of all time, wrote a book. This book, called *Leaves of Grass*, was always being revised, and changed. . . . As he aged, Whitman began to re-evaluate his ideas, and priorities changed. I experienced a similar altering of priorities as I placed

the idea-bearing stickers in their ranks. Many times, I changed my mind, but am fully satisfied, and prepared to justify, their final placement. (2000 M16)

The students were divided into two groups: those who filled out the RVS before the events of September 11, 2001 (Group I:  $n = 191$ ; Piiro, 2002a) and those who filled out the RVS after the events of September 11, 2001 (Group II:  $n = 96$ ). Two samples were analyzed (Piiro, 2002b). The first was of surveys completed in the years 1999, 2000, and 2001. The second was of surveys completed in the summer of 2002. Two thirds of the 287 students were female ( $n = 188$ ) and one third were male ( $n = 99$ ). This gender configuration is typical of the 16 Ohio Summer Honors Institutes held throughout the state (Jeannie Goertz, State Coordinator of Gifted and Talented, personal communication, September, 2003).

## Results

Data from 4 years (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002) were collected. These were divided into two groups: Group I (pre-September 11, 2001) and Group II (after September 11, 2001). The students in both samples ranked their values similarly, with only a few percentage points of the total separating them. There was no difference in the last-place rankings of National Security and Clean, nor in the first-place rankings of Salvation and Loving between the two groups, and gender differences were slight. Because so many  $t$  tests were run on this ordinal data, I decided not to discuss the few gender differences that were found. Rather, the group as a whole, Groups I and II, will be discussed with reference to their ranked choices (see Table 1).

Terminal Values were these: Salvation (29% of students ranked Salvation first), Freedom, Self-Respect, Wisdom, Family Security, A World At Peace, True Friendship, Sense of Accomplishment, Inner Harmony, An Exciting Life, A Comfortable Life, Health, Equality, Mature Love, Pleasure, World of Beauty, Social Recognition, and National Security (no student ranked this first). Instrumental Values were these: Loving (18% of students ranked this first), Honest, Imaginative, Independent, Broad-Minded, Ambitious, Courageous, Intellectual, Loyal, Self-Controlled, Responsible, Capable, Forgiving, Logical, Helpful, Obedient, Polite, and Clean (no students ranked this first).

The gifted and talented students' comments on essays and in interviews about their first three values (Terminal—1: Salvation, 2: Freedom, 3: Self Respect; Instrumental—

Table 1

### Values in Descending Order by First Choice

	Terminal Group	Instrumental Group
1	Salvation	Loving
2	Freedom	Honest
3	Self-Respect	Imaginative
4	Wisdom	Independent
5	Family Security	Broad-Minded
6	A World at Peace	Ambitious
7	True Friendship	Courageous
8	Sense of Accomplishment	Intellectual
9	Inner Harmony	Loyal
10	An Exciting Life	Self-Controlled
11	A Comfortable Life	Responsible
12	Health	Capable
13	Equality	Forgiving
14	Mature Love	Logical
15	Pleasure	Helpful
16	World of Beauty	Obedient
17	Social Recognition	Polite
18	National security	Clean

1: Loving, 2: Honest, 3: Imaginative) and their last three values (Terminal—16: World of Beauty, 17: Social Recognition, 18: National Security; Instrumental—16: Obedient, 17: Polite, 18: Clean) will be discussed here.

### The Conflict About Salvation

Many students (29%) chose Salvation as the number one Terminal Value. One 16-year-old female stated, "Salvation is very important to me. I have attended Catholic school all my life, so I have Catholic ideals and values firmly ingrained within me. I believe that all life with God in heaven is far more important than anything on earth." Some responses could be viewed as proselytizing or justifications for their own religious views:

Salvation should be the most important goal in everyone's life. People are always setting goals and buying things without remembering where it all came from. The world is filled with materialistic things. . . . After physical death, there is the option of eternal life. . . . Being humble and in touch with God gives everyone a sense of stability and security that cannot be found in earthly things. (2000 F03)

My values are and will always be a direct reflection of what I believe to be true. So, the first thing affecting my values will be my faith and my relationship with God. I put salvation first because it is important to me to know I have it, but I'm also concerned for the salvation of others. (2001 M20)

Being saved and having eternal life is my #1 priority in this lifetime (point blank). (2002 F29)

Other students put Salvation last. This made the group mean ranking for Salvation go as high as number 6 and as low as number 10 because of the strong feelings about this value:

Salvation is not very important in life. Salvation requires a specific belief in a religion. I have always found organized religion "helta-skelta." Salvation, in my opinion, is not highly required to lead a good life. (2000 M07)

I rated salvation lowest for one simple reason: I am an atheist. I find the idea of a perfect heaven created by an omnipotent deity to be too perfect, so much so that I think the concept is ludicrous. . . . All religion, and therefore salvation, is a primitive and ineffective way of explaining our surroundings and should have died out long ago. (2000 M04)

Lowest—I'm an existentialistic atheist and believe in reincarnation. (2000 F39)

I don't know what I believe in anymore; I'm not sure if there is a God, or if there is, if I want to worship Him. (2002 F01)

### Why Were National Security and A World At Peace Ranked So Low?

National Security was ranked lowest on the Terminal Values scale. It received no first choices. Before 2002, students did not think that National Security was important enough to worry about, perhaps because the country had not been in any wars recently. One student (2000 F13) asked why should she value it since she was a baby when the Gulf War was fought? She wrote this:

National Security is [ranked so low] because my government does not define who and where I have developed as a person. I don't like war, I don't

believe in it, but I'm 16 and this is the time in my life when I'm supposed to feel invincible. The only war I have seen is the Gulf, and that war was far away from me. I see values as a personal standing and a personal road to take, not how well-armed my country is or isn't.

Other responses were similar:

Out of all 18 of these things, I viewed "National Security" as the least to consume my thoughts with. This is not to say that protection from attack is not important, but I would not stress about it. There are officials that we voted in to protect us that we have put our trust into. They will put our safety at the top of their priority list. (2000 F18)

I chose National Security last because this is not of great importance to me. Sure, I love the U.S. and what it stands for, but every government has its faults. A world without government to both insure and trample people's rights may be just as good. (2000 M11)

I ranked National Security last because I personally do not fear attack on the greatest country in the world, the United States of America. (2001 M06)

18. National Security—The president's a schmuck, but we're still quite powerful. (2001 F19)

The second group, who took the Rokeach Value Survey in 2002, 9 months after the attack on September 11, 2001, surprised. Essays and follow-up interviews indicated that the gifted and talented students still did not consider National Security and A World At Peace as important a value as Salvation, Freedom, or Self-Respect.

National security is on the bottom of my list. It is the last thing on my mind; I can protect myself, they have enough on their hands . . . the FBI and the CIA. (2002 F60)

Many students perceived that they should place National Security higher, but resisted:

On the first set of values, my extreme choices of most important and least important were Salvation and National Security, respectively.

Salvation is the focus of my life; I believe in Jesus Christ as my personal savior and seek to follow His examples found in the Bible and to live my life according to the principles contained within and to be led by the Holy Spirit. I felt a sense of imposed guilt as I looked over the values and immediately placed National Security as the least important. In light of September 11th's terrorist bombings and the rise in patriotism, it seems to me that perhaps society would like me to value national security. I do love the United States and the freedoms and blessings which we possess, but perhaps my selfishness or my naiveté prevents me from valuing it. To value something, I'd say that I should think about it many times daily, but I value and consider Salvation, Wisdom, and True Friendship as far more important to me. Consequently, they were my top three selections. (2002 F33)

Personal interviews elaborated on the low ranking of National Security. One girl said, "I rated National Security low because I feel that I could just move to another country and it's not really a threat to my personal life." Another girl said she ranked it "Just kind of below and above. It's not so much National Security itself that ranks where it is, it's the things that I know rank above it and the things that I know rank below it that put it in its place." Another girl commented,

National Security was somewhat important not so much because of 9/11, but because we live in a country where we're used to not having bombs exploding around us and stuff randomly. It's an important thing. I think it probably would be a lot more important if we lived in another country and saw what we were comparing it to if there wasn't any national security. Like, if we lived in the Middle East, we'd have people running around in the streets with guns all the time.

Males agreed. One thought that his religious belief would protect him. He wrote, "If you have faith in the Lord, He is the only one that can protect you." Another also reflected on the difference between his beliefs and national defense: "Without a safe country and the ability to voice what you believe in, it is not worth living in." Another male referred to the *Star Trek* character Mr. Spock: "I ranked 'National Security' second and 'Equality' third. . . . It is as Spock would say, 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of a few.'" Another stated that

National Security falls into the middle of the rankings: "National security is important, but it's 12th because ups and downs help to build a person or a community of people." Another showed a global perspective over a nationalistic perspective: "I put National Security last because, even though I want our nation to be safe, I want just as much for Sierra Leone, China, and India to be safe.

Proximity to the events was another reason students used for their lack of concern. Common sentiments were that the events of September 11 "did not affect me" and "It will not happen to me." One student said her small town protected her:

Nothing really happened to me in my personal life. I didn't know [anyone] who had anybody that was affected by it. We live nowhere near New York. I just thought that it probably won't happen again—well, it could happen again, but to a big city, and I don't live in a big city. I'm 30 miles away from the biggest city, so I don't see how I could be affected by a terrorist attack in a town of only 30,000 people.

### Powerlessness and Cynicism

Another reason given by the students for their low ranking of National Security involved their feelings of powerlessness and of cynicism. Here is what some said in their essays:

"A World at Peace," "National Security," and "Equality" are ideas that I believe will never be achieved, especially equality. I would like for it to be achieved some day, but I believe it will never happen, let it be racial, religious, intelligence, financially, or based on sexual preferences. (2002 F53)

There's always war in the world, there always will be as long as religion exists for them to fight about. But, as long as the fighting is somewhere else, it really doesn't bother me. (2002 F54)

The follow-up interviews also displayed cynicism. One student said, "I ranked world peace pretty low because I thought that it was not really an obtainable goal. I thought that there would always be conflict anywhere and I would probably not be involved in the conflict personally." Another student said, "There could be peace everywhere else, but, say, the Middle East. There's been war in there for the past few centuries, so I don't think it's possible for world peace." Another student said,

It's a little idealistic to put [world peace] on a list like this with things like pleasure and health, things like that because even if it's not something you hear about on the news, there's still wars all over like Africa and South America that are still going on, but they're out of the news. It's not like, "Well, this is just going on here." You can go ahead and stop that. It's a basic human thing and it's probably always [going to] happen until one of the sides finally completely destroys the other and then they'll just start infighting, so that's why I ranked it low.

Only a few students were more hopeful. One student in an interview said that she had ranked A World At Peace in the top half: "I thought it was a good thing, a good value. I know it's not possible to obtain world peace. But, if everyone . . . [will] try to obtain world peace, it will be better than if you don't try to obtain world peace." Essays also contained some hope: "For the first scale, I ranked Freedom and National Security first for two reasons: (1) because of the terrible attack of 9/11, and (2) because I participated in God, Flag and Country Speech Contests and feel it is very important."

### Highest Terminal Values

*Freedom.* A disjunction between the values of Freedom and of National Security seemed to be present because, while students ranked National Security last, they ranked Freedom second. Freedom was the first preferred Terminal Value for the whole group (see Table 1). Students spoke of freedom as being necessary, yet their low ranking of National Security seemed to indicate that they took freedom for granted. In addition, whether freedom is to be defined as personal freedom or political freedom was also an issue. One girl said, "I need freedom and independence. I need to be able to move, breathe, and change, to voice my ideas and opinions, and to be original and unique."

I value my freedom and opportunities in this country. I wish to live a good, prosperous life with all the freedom I am entitled to. (2001 M21)

Freedom is number one because every person in between me and my goal is a nail in my coffin. I'd choose to die rather than live without choice. (2000 M10)

I placed Freedom at the top of the list because I feel it is essential to happiness. National Security

and World Peace are both connected to freedom, obviously; however, they are 12th and 13th on my list because I don't think about them on a daily basis. (2001 F21)

I feel that I need freedom just as much as air or water. Although rules can sometimes be useful, I tend not to like them. Most likely this is because I am my own person, and I am independent. At my age, I am not very concerned with the world; I do not care whether or not it is beautiful. It is possible to say that I live in my own bubble filled with joy, happiness, and friends. I know of current events and world news; however, these do not really affect me. (2000 F07)

*Self-Respect.* Females in both groups valued Self-Respect to a greater extent than did males, but the whole group ranked it third. Some seemed to feel that self-respect comes before everything, and the rest of the values fall in, in sort of a domino effect:

Self-Respect [is] the first step of getting somewhere in life. You have to believe in yourself in all your entirety. With self-respect you gain wisdom. There's this quote I like: "Know thyself." Well, after you really know yourself, you have to be one of the wisest people in the world. Since you're wise, you will respect all around you and know right from wrong, which will let you meet new people to bond with and befriend. After all, the wisdom of life and closeness to other people—I feel that is where the inner harmony plays a part, which will then lead to salvation. Next thing you know is that you are finally really happy in life, so happy you're at the point where you finally notice the little things. I read in a book somewhere happiness is good [for] your health and studies have shown you live longer. Once you master the art of being able to take care of yourself, you can help those around you—like family, for instance. If you get your family to see what you see then they will want to help the people in the world, too. That's how you can come about world peace. It may take awhile, but in the end it's smooth sailing because then you get freedom, your respect from other people. This knowledge will help you find your soul mate. In your eyes the world is beautiful. A sense of accomplishment overwhelms you. Therefore, just from a little self-respect . . . people can accomplish so much which



is very exciting and rewarding. . . . Since you have world peace you will have national security. (2001 F10)

Before you can respect anyone or do anything, you must respect yourself. By having a high self-esteem, you will be more inclined to stand up for yourself and trust what you're doing is right. A lot of teenagers don't have self-respect and are swayed by others (peer pressure); many of them do the wrong things and make the wrong decisions. By having self-respect, you can do anything you want with your life because you will know inside that you can do it. (2000 F01)

### Highest Instrumental Values

*Loving.* Students showed loving hearts. One female said, "I rated loving first because everyone needs to be loved, and most people like to show others compassion and respect back. Personally, I think it is one of the most important values and needs." Another said, "Without love, no human being can survive. I feel that it is important not only to receive love, but give it, as well. I feel that love improves us as people, and with the right support, anyone can accomplish anything." Another: "Love is always needed in order to be anything else. You have to love in order to forgive or be honest, etc. Love has always been the most needed element in my life." Another showed a desire to improve her loving: "I am a loving person, but at the same time, I need to be loving to outcasts, not just my friends, so I still need to work in that area."

*Honesty.* One female said: "I really dislike it when people lie." A disdain for lying was mentioned by many others as a reason for placing Honest high on the list. "People should be compassionate and truthful about everything," remarked one participant. Another said, "Honesty for me is very important. You have to be able to trust and rely on other people, so without honesty, these virtues would not be [possible]." A male said, "You can't have any kind of relationship with anybody who is dishonest. A good obedient dog is easy to find, but a good honest friend is special." Another male commented that honesty is rare: "The more I live, the more often I see that morals are rare. It occurred to me all my classmates have cheated in school."

*Imaginative.* Students valued imagination more than intellect. As one female said, "I chose Imaginative as my first choice on the second list because . . . I live for being

creative and original." Another said, "I think that being imaginative is something that should be praised just as intelligence is." Still another: "Being imaginative is important because it isn't really fun to be intellectual all the time." One female thought, "It is important to be creative and reflect on experiences so you don't forget what you learned and so you don't miss any possibilities or ideas." Another male said, "At the top was Imaginative. I believe the moment you stop using your imagination, you realize you're not a kid anymore. Where's the fun in being 40 with both feet on the ground?" One young man summed it up:

Being imaginative is one of the neatest things in the world. If a person is imaginative, [he or she can] excel in the arts, design, and philosophy. An imaginative person could be good at any career. Imagination provides people with a different way of looking at things. Say [an unimaginative] person were to watch a movie. This person would get a lot less out of it than an imaginative person would.

### Lowest Instrumental Values

*Clean.* Students overwhelmingly put Clean at the bottom of the rankings. Perhaps it was because this value just didn't seem to fit in with the others and the students didn't know where to put it. One young woman commented, "The last choice was Clean, and that is only because it seemed less important than the others and not because it's not important at all." Another said, "I chose Clean as my lowest choice because cleanliness has little to do with intelligence. Some of the most brilliant and creative people I know are very messy, but that does not affect how smart and capable they are." The males also spoke disparagingly about the value Clean: "I put 'Polite' and 'Clean' at the bottom not because I am mean or have bad hygiene, but because I feel a contribution to yourself or society is more important than a 'thank you' or a tidy floor in your room. . . . As I have heard it stated, the floor is, in reality, the biggest shelf in your house."

A gender-related sidenote might be appropriate here: The females spoke of cleaning as part of their duty, but none of the males did. "You don't always have to be tidy. Sometimes it is better to do the other things than worry about when you are going to clean"; "Disorganization increases memory, you have to remember what you did with everything. I just don't care to clean (with exceptions in personal hygiene of course)"; "Cleaning for me is hard to do. . . I just don't want to take the time. . . Maybe when I get older I will clean more, but for now it's just a bother."

*Polite.* While the students were thought by us adults at the honors institutes to be quite polite, they placed 'Polite' as a low value, probably because it was less important relatively speaking. Polite was number 17 of their Instrumental Values. A male said that he didn't believe that politeness was unimportant, but it was "of secondary importance to the others." A female echoed his thoughts: "[Being] clean, helpful, polite, loving, forgiving, loyal, and obedient are all important to me, but are closer to the bottom because I think a little bit of forgiveness or love can go a very long way." Another male thought that one could not be frank if one were polite: "Being polite, however, does quite the opposite in terms of good. To be polite usually means to bend the truth or to lie to a person, which always creates more harm than good." Another male echoed him: "I am often a blunt person and tact (politeness) seems arbitrary to me."

### Lowest Terminal Values

*Social Recognition.* Social recognition was not important to the students because they felt they were already viewed as being different. As one young man said, "Social recognition, although tempting, was placed at the bottom because I don't care what people think of me as long as I can face myself at night and say I'm doing what I want and having a ball." Another commented, "When you admire someone, in a way you are lessening yourself." One male said, "I really don't care if I am popular or liked by certain people. If they don't like me for who I am, then they do not deserve my friendship."

*A World of Beauty.* Students ranked A World of Beauty 16th. One female student voiced this reason: "A world of beauty is important to me, but I feel that the other choices seemed just a bit more important." One male said, "I just don't believe that beauty has anything to do with life. Sure, it's nice, but it isn't necessary."

### Themes From the Interviews

Three themes emerged from the interviews (Buckalew, 2001). The first concerned the influence of the students' families on the development of their values: "It takes a village to raise a child and it begins with Mom and Dad"; "Parents have all the responsibility." Mothers were specifically mentioned more often than fathers.

The second theme was the lack of responsiveness of their schools to what they valued: "It is not responsive. Period"; "I don't like going to school at all"; "It's boring and unresponsive"; "I have absolutely no decent choices."

Students felt that their values were not being considered because schools couldn't bridge the gap between emphasis on teaching to low/middle students and to those like themselves, who needed intellectual challenges. Perhaps this disdain for the lack of effort their schools put into shaping students' values counted for the relatively low place of Intellectual.

A third theme in the interviews was that the students felt they had a personal responsibility to develop their values and to match their college choices with those values.

## Discussion

### Limitations of the Study

The use of ordinal data has been criticized, as discussed in many of the comments on the Rokeach Value Survey (e.g. Gibbins & Walker, 1993; Hague, 1993; Johnston, 1995). Asking students to write an essay on why they chose their top choices and their last choices may have ameliorated the "middle muddle" flattening effect of ranking. Gender comparisons were made with no sign of significant differences.

### Surprises

The low ranking of National Security for both groups was one of the surprises (one could even say "shocks") of the study.

Another surprise was the relatively low ranking of the Instrumental Value "Intellectual." One would think that academically talented teenagers would have placed intellectual value higher than eighth. Here are some of the students' comments: "I feel that intellect is very important in order to help solve universal enigmas that can be overcome with reason. It isn't the perfect quality, but at least intellect tries to solve problems"; "I placed intellectual first because, to enjoy life, you have to understand it." One of the young women said, "I love possessing knowledge and being intelligent. Many of my peers find that being intelligent is a flaw, but I find it is an advantage."

However, anti-intellectualism was also present. One male said, "At the bottom was Intellectual. If I spent my entire life gathering facts, what would I have to reflect on?" Another confounded Intellectual with Intelligent: "Being intellectual is not necessary in life. A person can have 1,000 other values and have a splendid life without being intelligent." One female said, "I think being intellectual is important, but one does not have to be really smart to be a good, fun person."

## Importance of the Study

Values form beliefs and may predict actions. Few studies have been done on the values of the gifted and talented, but much is said of these students' roles in a meritocratic society. Some say that these gifted students are our future leaders; for example, 17 years ago, Congress passed the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title IV, which noted that gifted and talented students were a "natural resource vital to the future of the Nation and its security and well-being." This view of certain human beings as a "natural resource" implies that other humans are not. Critical theorists criticize the idea of the meritocracy, but for educators in the field gifted and talented education, this idea is seldom questioned. If these students are to be our future leaders and if they are a prime natural resource, the values they hold are important because they will influence their future decisions and actions.

Adolescents in the early high school years often hold onto the values that have been instilled in them at home, school, and church. Students may go into depression as they become relativists; that is, when they grow and develop into considering other points of view as having value and when their own family-based values are in question, their confusion can lead to depression. The present study showed that gifted and talented adolescents seem to have few doubts as to what values are important. Most were also open to the possibility that their values would change (Buckalew, 2001). Many upheld the value of Salvation as being the primary Terminal Value even though they were attending public high schools where the separation of the teaching of religion and teaching about religion is strenuously held. A study of self-concept and personality attributes of students in a similar Midwestern state who were upperclassmen attending a residential high school for the humanities, sciences, and mathematics (Adams, Dixon, & Cross, 2001) showed that they devalued religiosity and spirituality. What do these differences between students at a residential high school and students at a 1-week summer program show?

The four graduate students who analyzed the 2002 data wrote an interesting conclusion to their study:

The subjects used for this research were removed, both physically and emotionally, from the events of September 11. None had a loved one killed or injured in the attacks. None had a person close to [him or her] involved in the aftermath clean-up. None had even gone to "Ground Zero" to visit the

wreckage. While there were some who placed A World at Peace high on their list, most did not. Nobody placed National Security high. These findings are somewhat surprising because world peace has been disrupted [and] the security of our nation has broken down. [In spite of this] the youth at a [the institute] feel little threat [and] find minimal intimidation from these catastrophic events. (Miller, McClair, Prusha, & Roberts, 2002)

I would concur and state that the findings are not merely surprising, but perfidious. In discussions with colleagues about this study, we find ourselves conjecturing why talented high school students in Ohio would feel so invulnerable. Is it their developmental age, where the feeling of invincibility leads some to drive drunk, take physical risks, and think that nothing will ever happen to them? Is it some kind of politically correct education, perhaps a result of having parents who grew up in the 1960s where it was not "cool" to be patriotic? Is it in their lack of global awareness? Is it in growing up in a materialistic "me" culture where youthful altruism and sacrifice is not emphasized?

When I presented this study at an international conference (Piirto, 2002b), the discussion ranged long and wide. People were as surprised at the high ranking of Salvation for these modern urban, suburban, and rural teens as they were at their low ranking of National Security. Certainly, further studies are called for. And, if these results are representative, educational implications and modifications perhaps should follow.

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## End Notes

1. The Ohio Rule for the Identification of Gifted Students states that students identified for (1) Superior Cognitive Giftedness must score two standard deviations above the mean minus the standard error of measurement on an approved individual or group intelligence test; (2) Specific Academic Giftedness must score above the 95th percentile on an academic area on an approved individual or group achievement test; (3) Creative Thinking must score one standard deviation above the mean minus the standard error of measurement and at a certain level on an approved checklist; (4) Visual and Performing Arts must show by display or audition and must score at a certain level on an approved checklist.

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