

Determinants of Artistic Interests in Adolescence: The Importance of Personal and Contextual Factors

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Abstract

The need for artistic creativity is inherent to all children, but as they grow up, the meaning of artistic expression and interest in artistic creativity changes. Entering adolescence, artistic expression for children ceases to be a part of play and begins to represent child's personality and enduring interests, which is why only some children remain interested in artistic creativity and art. In this paper, we discuss the important determinants of artistic interests in adolescence on a sample of 981 last grade students (67.2 % girls, mean age 18 years). The results indicated that the total of 40% of variance of artistic interests is explained by personality traits and personal values, while the importance of family contextual variables was negligible. Among personal factors, the most prominent role of openness to experience was observed, followed by self-actualization values and extraversion, and to some extent by emotionality and utilitarian values. People with greater artistic interest are more open to new experiences, less extraverted, slightly more emotional, and they also place greater importance on self-actualizing values and somewhat lower importance on utilitarian (materialistic) values. Further, the importance of family intellectual-cultural climate for development of artistic interests in adolescence is very weak, and is likely indirect, through personality traits.

Key words: *adolescence; artistic interests; determinants; family; personality traits; values.*

Background

The need for artistic creativity is inherent to all children, but as they grow up, the meaning of artistic expression and interest in artistic creativity changes. Entering

adolescence, artistic expression for children ceases to be a part of play and begins to represent child's personality and enduring interests, which is why only some children remain interested in artistic creativity and art. What leads to the development of long-standing interests in art and artistic creativity? What are the psychological traits of children that enhance the development of artistic interests? What is the role of personality traits, personal values, self-efficacy? What environmental factors are crucial in the development of long-term interests in the arts and how are the influences of parents, school, friends reflected in the process? In this paper, we will discuss the important determinants of artistic interests in adolescence.

Vocational interests

The focus of this paper is on key determinants of artistic interests in a sample of adolescents. Artistic interests are nicely defined within Holland's typology of vocational interests, which is one of the longest-running theories of interests, thoroughly evaluated in different countries (Einarsdottir et al., 2002; Farh et al., 1998; Leong et al., 1998; Rounds & Tracey, 1996; Tracey & Rounds, 1993), including in Croatia (Babarović & Šverko, 2006; Šverko, 2008; Šverko et al., 2014; Šverko & Babarović, 2016). According to Holland's theory, most people can be divided into 6 types: realistic (R), investigative (I), artistic (A), social (S), enterprising (E) and conventional (C) type, altogether known as RIASEC types. Each of the RIASEC types is conceived as a broad theoretical type with which we compare real persons. Because of the breadth with which RIASEC types are described, Holland sees RIASEC types as broad personality types, not just vocational interest types. Holland defined a set of personality traits, values, attitudes, skills, and activities that are typical for each of them.

Artistic interests

Holland (1997; 1976; 1959) specified in detail different characteristics that go into each of the RIASEC types, including Artistic. In general, Holland defines artistic types as relying on their feelings, emotions, intuitions, and imagination to create art forms and products. According to Holland (1966), artistic persons have complex viewpoints and attitudes and are independent, free-thinkers, flexible, spontaneous, and expressive. They are known for their originality, imaginativeness, and creativity, and are guided by their subjective interpretations and fantasies when acting in their environment. They are introspective, sensitive, introverted, and not socially tied to others. They value aesthetics, place little importance on political or economic matters, and are not bound by cultural values as most people. They come from egalitarian families that value personal growth, independence, and personal responsibility, and that belong into an above-average socio-economic group. They tend to choose artistic occupations as such environments enable their personal development, growth, and fulfilment of their personal values.

Determinants of artistic interests

According to the presented characteristics of artistic types, it is easy to speculate on possible determinants that foster artistic interests. Among the most prominent determinants, focus may be placed on personality traits, personal values, and family background. Empirical studies also confirmed theoretical expectations.

A great number of studies explored the relations between vocational interests and personality traits, mainly focusing on relations between Holland's RIASEC model of interests and the Five-Factor Model of personality. The Five-Factor Model of personality specifies the existence of five broad personality traits – Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism, among which openness to experiences showed strongest relations with artistic interests (Barick et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2002). The same findings were observed in the HEXACO framework, which postulates the presence of the sixth personality trait that is defined as Honesty-Humility (Ashton, Lee, deVries et al., 2004; Ashton et al., 2006). In HEXACO studies, Openness to Experience also showed the closest relations to artistic interests (Holtrop et al., 2015; McKay & Tokar, 2012; Pozzebon et al., 2010, Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Šverko, Babarović & Kos, 2017).

When considering relations between artistic interests and personal values and goals, empirical studies stressed that interests and values are quite distinct psychological constructs which overlap in a logical way (Astin & Nichols, 1964; Gordon, 1975; Laudeman & Griffeth, 1978; Tan, 1998; Super, 1962; Ivey 1963; Baird, 1970; Salamone & Muthard, 1972; Breme & Cockriel, 1975; Super, 1995). Empirical findings showed that artistic interests are positively related to individualistic and self-actualizing values (Šverko & Babarović, 2006; Šverko et al., 2017).

Relations between artistic interests and family background are also specified in Holland's description of artistic types. Family is an important environment that may give rise to children's artistic interests through different influences. Family climate is determined by various factors that all influence the children's development (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Among different sources of family influences, intellectual-cultural climate, socio-economic family status and parental artistic occupations are of foremost importance. Artistic interests are encouraged in intellectually-culturally oriented families, who value more artistic experiences and intellectual conversations. Holland also postulates that artistic types grow up in families of above-average socio-economic status, which is in line with empirical findings stressing that people with higher SES give more importance to intrinsic values which related to artistic interests, while putting lower importance to extrinsic values and security (Lacy et al., 1983; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Johnson, 2002). Parental occupation is also one of the important factors within the family context as parents serve as children's role models. Artistic interests are fostered in families in which parents are artists, since previously shown.

Empirical findings mainly go in line with Holland's description of artistic type, but still do not provide broad conclusions on relations between artistic interests and personal and contextual characteristics of an individual. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore Holland's postulates on determinants of artistic interests in an adolescent sample. In this paper we wanted to study different determinants of artistic interests in adolescence, considering both personal (personality and values) and contextual ones (family climate, family socio-economic status and parental artistic occupation). The importance of potential determinants will be studied to estimate the importance of each predictor, but also to contrast the importance of personal vs. contextual determinants of artistic interests.

Method

Participants

The total of 981 final-grade students participated in the study (67.2 % girls, mean age 18 years). They were enrolled in different grammar schools and vocational secondary schools from Zagreb and other north-western Croatian cities. A heterogeneous sample of schools was selected to represent different fields of work, including adolescents with artistic interests. The total of 27 participants (3 %) were enrolled in artistic schools.

Instruments

The Personal Globe Inventory-Short (PGI-S; Tracey, 2010) was used as a measure of artistic interests. The questionnaire consists of 40 items that represent different work activities and the top 10 vocational interests (Social Facilitating, Managing, Business Detail, Data Processing, Mechanical, Nature/Outdoors, Artistic, Helping, High Prestige and Low Prestige). The participants' task was to evaluate how much they like each activity and how competent they feel in each activity, using a seven-degree Likert-type scale (1-strongly dislike/unable to do to 7-strongly like/very competent). Previous studies confirmed good psychometric properties of PGI-S (Tracey, 2010; Zhang et al., 2013), also in Croatian samples (Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Šverko, 2008). As reported previously, on this sample adequate internal consistency and structural validity of ten PGI-S observed in this sample (alphas in range .79 to .91, CI = .94, $p = .0004$; Šverko & Babarović, 2016). Artistic interests were measured with four artistic activities (draw cartoons, paint a portrait, write a play, sculpt a statue), for which respondents had to estimate both liking the activity and perceived competence in it. Internal consistency of the artistic interest scale was $\alpha = .90$.

The HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009) was used as a measure of six personality traits: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. Each personality trait was captured by 10 statements, making the total of 60 items in the questionnaire. The participants had to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements (e.g., "I would be quite bored by a

visit to an art gallery” or “On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic”) a five-point scale (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree). HEXACO-60 has firmly confirmed psychometric characteristics (Ashton & Lee, 2009), also on Croatian samples (Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Babarović & Šverko, 2013). As reported previously, in this study adequate internal consistency and structural validity of HEXACO-60 was confirmed (alphas in range .72 to .81; Šverko & Babarović, 2016).

The Values Scale (Super & B. Šverko, 1995) was used to measure five broad value orientations: Utilitarian, Social, Self-actualizing, Individualistic, and Adventurous orientation. In this study, the short Values Scale was applied. The scale consists of 60 simple statements that present the personal importance of particular goals such as “to do work where my abilities are realised (Self-Actualizing orientation) or “act on my own” (Individualistic orientation). Participants estimated the importance of each value on a four-point scale. Psychometric properties of the sixty-item version follow parameters obtained on the full version, both in international (e.g., Coetsier & Claes, 1990; Fitzsimmons et al., 1986; Langley et al., 1992; Nevill & Super, 1986b; Super & Šverko, 1995) and in Croatian samples (Šverko, 1987; Šverko & Babarović, 2006). As reported previously, adequate internal consistency and structural validity of short Values Scale was obtained on this sample (alphas in range .80-.83; Babarović et al., 2017).

The family intellectual-cultural orientation subscale, adapted from Bloom’s (1985) **Family Functioning Scale** (FFS), was used to assess family cultural climate. The family intellectual-cultural orientation subscale is short, five-items measure (e.g., “As a family, we were very interested in cultural activities”), with adequate reliability in this sample ($\alpha = .75$).

The socioeconomic status (SES) of the family was expressed as the average mother and father’s education level (“What are the highest levels of education reached by your mother/father”) and as subjective and objective estimate of the household’s financial status (“How does your family relate to the income they have” and “Estimate your net monthly household income after paying all taxes and deductions”). The reliability of this short composite SES measure was acceptable ($\alpha = .65$).

Parental artistic occupation was derived from participants’ responses to two open-ended questions considering their mother and father’s occupation. Not many participants listed the occupation of their parents as belonging to the artistic field: 13 said their mothers worked in the field, 12 stated their fathers did, and only 3 said both their parents had artistic occupations.

Results

Correlational analysis and regression analysis were performed to study determinants of artistic interests in adolescence. Table 1 shows relations between artistic interests, personality traits, personal values, and contextual characteristics of participants. Due

to the big sample (N = 981), even very small correlations ($r \geq .06$) were considered significant at the level of .05. Therefore, we will refer only to the most important relations between the explored constructs. Artistic interests are most closely related to openness to experience ($r = .59$) and to self-actualizing value orientation ($r = .24$). They are also weakly related to family intellectual-cultural climate ($r = .15$) and negatively to extraversion ($r = -.13$). According to the presented results, people with artistic interests have open personality, place great value on self-actualisation and have been raised in families dominated by intellectual-cultural climate. They also tend to be somewhat introverted due to the observed negative correlation with extraversion. Further, it is also noticeable that other variables share some common variance. For example, all value scales are moderately related and also share some variability with personality traits. Among family variables, socio-economic status is positively related to intellectual-cultural climate, and both those variables share some variability with certain personality traits. These relations suggest that some of the potential predictors have common underlying factors so we expect the results of regression analysis could give more precise information on the determinants of artistic interests.

Table 1

Relations between artistic interests, personality traits, personal values, and family variables

	ART	H	E	X	A	C	O	SA	IND	SOC	UT	AV	ICC	SES
ART														
H	.08													
E	.03	.16												
X	-.13	-.02	-.09											
A	.01	.19	-.03	.07										
C	.00	.13	.02	.23	.03									
O	.59	.07	-.11	.02	.00	.12								
SA	.24	-.04	.09	.17	-.02	.14	.31							
IND	.05	-.31	-.08	.12	-.11	.06	.12	.59						
SOC	-.05	.05	.39	.22	.03	.06	-.07	.46	.38					
UT	-.04	-.36	.11	.15	-.13	.15	.00	.52	.55	.49				
ADV	-.01	-.08	-.09	.15	.12	.01	-.06	.27	.30	.22	.25			
ICC	.15	.08	-.03	.21	.05	.14	.34	.17	.04	.00	.01	.06		
SES	.00	-.09	-.20	.09	.00	.05	.12	.12	.13	-.10	.07	-.01	.40	
PAO	.06	.00	-.03	.03	.02	.03	.08	.01	-.04	-.09	-.04	-.06	-.14	.08

Notes. Correlations greater than .20 are printed boldface. For all $r \geq .06$ observed $p < .05$. ART= artistic interests, H = Honesty/Humility, E = Emotionality, X = Extraversion, A = Agreeableness, C= Conscientiousness, O = Openness to Experience, SA = Self-Actualizing Value Orientation, IND = Individualistic Value Orientation, SOC = Social Value Orientation, UT = Utilitarian Value Orientation, ADV = Adventurous Value Orientation, ICC = Family Intellectual-Cultural Climate, SES = Family Socio-Economic Status, PAO = Parental Artistic Occupation.

Table 2

The importance of personal and contextual determinants of artistic interests (results of hierarchical regression analysis)

	step 1		step 2	
	β	p	β	p
Honesty/Humility	.00	.96	.00	1.00
Emotionality	.09	.00	.09	.00
Extraversion	-.13	.00	-.12	.00
Agreeableness	.00	.93	.00	.90
Conscientiousness	-.05	.06	-.05	.07
Openness to Experience	.56	.00	.57	.00
Self-Actualizing Value Orientation	.16	.00	.17	.00
Individualistic Value Orientation	-.04	.25	-.04	.27
Social Value Orientation	-.05	.13	-.06	.10
Utilitarian Value Orientation	-.08	.04	-.07	.05
Adventurous Value Orientation	.05	.09	.05	.08
Family Intellectual-Cultural Climate			.03	.26
Family Socio-Economic Status			-.04	.21
Parental Artistic Occupation			.03	.28
	R	.63	.63	
	R^2	.39	.40	
	adjusted R^2	.39	.39	
	p	<.001	<.001	
	ΔR		.00	
	p		<i>n.s.</i>	

According to the results of regression analysis presented in Table 2, it is obvious that artistic interests can be well explained with the considered determinants. When all predictors are taken into account, the total of 40% of variance of artistic interests is explained. The first and most important predictor of artistic interests is openness to experience, due to its regression coefficient ($\beta = .57$). People with greater artistic interest are also more open to new experiences, as expected. Among other personality traits, extraversion ($\beta = -.12$) and emotionality ($\beta = .09$) also contributed to explanation of the artistic interest variance, indicating that people with stronger artistic interests are also less extraverted and more emotional. Among personal values, important predictors of artistic interests turned out to be self-actualizing value orientation ($\beta = .17$) and utilitarian value orientation ($\beta = -.07$). People of higher artistic interests also tend to place greater value on self-actualizing values and lower importance on utilitarian (materialistic) values. However, it should be noted that contribution of emotionality and utilitarian value orientation is almost negligible, as indicated by

small values of standardized regression coefficients. None of the family constructs contributed to explanation of artistic interests ($\Delta R = 0$). According to the results of regression analysis, personal determinants showed strong importance for explaining artistic interest variance (in particular openness to experience), while contextual determinants had no contribution at all.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly show the importance of personality traits and personal values for explaining artistic interests of adolescence. Results have stressed the great importance of openness to experience, which was most closely related to artistic interests. Regression analysis also revealed the importance of self-actualizing values (positive) and extraversion (negative), and also very small contribution of emotionality (positive) and utilitarian values (negative). According to the present results, people with higher artistic interests also have more open, less extraverted and more emotional personality, and place greater importance on self-actualization and lesser importance on utilitarian (material) values. Observed results are in line with majority of empirical and meta-analytical studies that stressed the importance of similar personality traits and personal values (Barrick et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2002; Holtrop et al., 2015; McKay & Tokar, 2012; Pozzebon et al., 2010, Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Šverko & Babarović, 2006; Šverko et al., 2017).

Knowing the meaning of the openness to experience personality trait (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Ashton et al., 2006), which is the most important predictor of artistic interests, artistic types have greater *aesthetic appreciation*, as they enjoy beauty in art and in nature; they are *inquisitive*, as they tend to seek information and experiences about natural and human world; they are *creative*, as they express preference for innovation and experimentation which they manifest through originality and expressiveness in art; they are *unconventional*, as they have the tendency to accept the unusual. As artistic interests are negatively related to extraversion and positively related to emotionality, they also have to some extent expressed aspects of these two personality traits (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Ashton et al., 2006). Regarding extraversion, it may be concluded that artistic types somewhat lack social self-esteem and social boldness, that they prefer solitary activities and do not seek out conversation, and that they tend not to feel especially cheerful or dynamic. Concerning emotionality, artistic types tend to be emotionally sensitive, deeply feeling different emotions, feeling empathic sensitivity and strong emotional bonds, which can also lead them to seek emotional support from others. Further, as artistic interests are positively related to self-actualizing values and negatively related to utilitarian values, according to the meaning of the two personal values (1995), more specific descriptions of artistic types may be derived. Artistic types tend to value aesthetic, creativity, and personal development, while they place lesser importance on economic security, prestige, and advancement. Considering Holland's description of artistic type, our results are fully in line with his proposal. Holland explicitly stated their creativity, sensitivity,

introversion, importance of aesthetics, and lessened the importance of economic matters (Holland, 1996).

On the other hand, results indicate that the importance of family context for development of artistic interests in adolescence is very weak, and also likely indirect, through personality traits. On the correlational analysis level, the only observed relation was the one between artistic interests and family intellectual-cultural climate, that indicates that people who have artistic interests have been raised in families which were more oriented to intellectual and cultural contents. On the regression analysis level, the named relation vanished, as family intellectual-cultural climate was also related to openness to experiences, which took lead in explaining the variance of artistic interests. In other words, the importance of family intellectual-cultural climate lies primarily in raising children who are open to new experiences, which further gives rise to their artistic interests. Therefore, Holland's suggestion that family has an important role in development of artistic interests was also supported with our data to some extent.

However, it is important to have in mind that in this study we have considered only several potential sources of family influence. Artistic interests, as all RIASEC interests, develop under the influence of biological heritage, parents, peers, social status, and cultural characteristics of the environment in which the individual finds himself (Holland, 1997). To better grasp the role of the family and wider environment in the process of development of artistic interests, it would be important to rely on a research design that would encompass more sources of environmental influences.

Conclusion

The results of this study conducted on an adolescent sample indicate that the total of 40% of variance of artistic interests is explained by personality traits and personal values, while the importance of family contextual variables is negligible. Among personal factors, openness to experience was observed to have the most prominent role, followed by extraversion, emotionality, self-actualization values and utilitarian values. People with greater artistic interest are also more open to new experiences, less extraverted, more emotional, and they also place greater importance on self-actualizing values and lower importance on utilitarian (materialistic) values. Further, the importance of family intellectual-cultural climate for development of artistic interests in adolescence is very weak, and is primarily indirect, realised through personality traits. Our results indicate that personal determinants have strong importance for explaining artistic interests in adolescence, while the importance of contextual determinants should be more thoroughly explored.

Acknowledgement

This work has been fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project number 1229.

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Odrednice umjetničkih interesa u adolescenciji: važnost osobnih i kontekstualnih faktora

Sažetak

Potreba za umjetničkom kreativnosti urođena je svoj djeci, ali tijekom odrastanja značenje umjetničkoga izričaja i interes za umjetničko stvaranje se mijenjaju. Ulaskom u period adolescencije umjetnički izričaj prestaje biti dio igre i počinje predstavljati djetetovu osobnost i njegove trajne interese, zbog čega samo neka djeca ostaju zainteresirana za umjetničku kreativnost i umjetnost. U ovom radu proučavamo važnost odrednica umjetničkih interesa u adolescenciji na uzorku od 981 učenika završnih razreda srednje škole (67,2 % djevojčica, prosječna dob 18 godina). Rezultati su pokazali da osobine ličnosti i osobne vrijednosti objašnjavaju ukupno 40 % varijance umjetničkih interesa, dok je važnost varijabli obiteljskoga konteksta bila zanemariva. Među osobnim faktorima najznačajniju ulogu ima otvorenost prema iskustvu, nakon čega slijede vrijednosti samoostvarenja i ekstraverzije te do neke mjere emocionalnost i korist. Ljudi s većim umjetničkim interesom otvoreniji su za nova iskustva, manje su ekstrovertirani, nešto više emocionalni. Također, pridaju veću važnost vrijednostima samoostvarivanja te nešto manju važnost utilitarističkim (materijalnim) vrijednostima. Nadalje, važnost obiteljskoga intelektualno-kulturološkoga ozračja za razvoj interesa u adolescenciji vrlo je slaba i vjerojatno ostvarena indirektno, kroz osobine ličnosti.

Ključne riječi: *adolescencija; obitelj; odrednice; osobine ličnosti; umjetnički interesi; vrijednosti.*