

READING POSTMATERIALISM

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'I belong to the blank generation
and I can take it or leave it each time
I belong to the generation
but I can take it or leave it each time'

Richard Hell 1976

INTRODUCTION

One of the liveliest debates in modern political science concerns the postmaterialism hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, formulated by Ronald Inglehart, Western societies are undergoing a period of major value change. Whereas older generations, and specifically pre world war two generations, could be described as having materialist value orientations, new generations are moving more and more towards postmaterialist value orientations, that is they assign a greater importance to, for instance, freedom of speech than to economic growth. This on-going process will eventually lead to societies where the dominant value orientation will be one of postmaterialism (Inglehart, 1977, 1984).

In this paper, I will question the universality and inevitability of the postmaterialist hypothesis, as outlined above. This will be done in a quite straight forward manner. I will try to show that, in Sweden in the mid 1980's, the value orientations of especially young people cannot fruitfully be contained inside a postmaterialist/materialist value construction.

The theoretical arguments, and the reasons behind this 'change of direction' on behalf of Swedish youth, are to be found in more detail in 'Postmodern Structures of Feeling. Values and Life Styles in the Postmodern Age' (Reimer, 1988). Here, I will restrict myself to a brief discussion of the empirical results in relation to the ideas of the German socialization theorist Thomas Ziehe (Ziehe and Stubenrauch, 1982; Ziehe, 1986) and to a discussion of values in relation to life styles. In this latter context, the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1985) will be of relevance.

MATERIALIST AND POSTMATERIALIST VALUES

The 'culture' of postmaterialism is an internalized culture, where differences in values can be reduced to two types of value orientations, or one dimension. One cannot, according to the theory, be equally postmaterialistic and materialistic at one point in time. Empirically, this is forced upon respondents through a ranking approach. Twelve value items, concerning societal goals for the next ten years, are normally included in surveys.

In the Swedish national election study of 1985, the short, original four item postmaterialism/materialism question battery was included (Inglehart, 1977). Each respondent, out of four goals, had to choose the most important and the second most important goal for the country for the next ten years. Two of the goals were postmaterialist, two were materialist (table one).

Taken at face value, according to this representative Swedish sample, it would seem that roughly fifteen percent of the Swedish population between eighteen and eighty years of age may be considered postmaterialists, whereas twenty five percent may be considered materialists. About sixty percent belong to a mixed group. There is a high proportion of postmaterialists among younger people, among people with a high level of education and among females. People voting for the Communist party tend to put higher priority on postmaterialist values than do people voting for other parties.

In a comparative perspective, these results fit rather nicely into an overall pattern for Western European countries. The Swedish respondents, in this context, 'behave' very well (cf Inglehart, 1984, 1985; Dalton, 1981; Lafferty and Knutsen, 1985).

The results may be problematized a bit further, however. The ranking approach used restricts the possible ways of orienting one self to the different goals or values. Besides statistical limitations (cf Reimer, 1985), the ranking approach does not permit the individual respondents to be both postmaterialists and materialists or, theoretically equally plausible, to be neither postmaterialists nor materialists. An alternative approach, while still using the Inglehart value items, is to let respondents rate

TABLE 1. The Postmaterialist/Materialist Value Dimension
Swedish National Election Study 1985 (percent)

	Material- lists	Post- material- lists	Mixed group	N
TOTAL	25	16	58	1161
GENDER				
Male	24	14	61	616
Female	26	19	55	545
AGE				
18-30	19	19	62	287
31-50	23	20	57	468
51-	32	11	57	406
EDUCATION				
Low	34	8	58	524
Medium	23	17	60	435
High	9	37	54	197
OCCUPATIONAL CLASS				
Manual workers	32	10	58	513
Office workers	19	22	59	466
Farmers	30	12	58	40
Employers	21	21	58	95
PARTY				
Communist Party	16	30	54	57
Social Democrats	30	15	55	474
Agrarian Party	30	12	57	129
Liberal Party	20	22	58	167
Conservative Party	21	12	67	228

the items separately. This has been carried out in another national Swedish survey. On a seven point scale, respondents rated those twelve value items normally included in the Inglehart value battery. Through exploratory factor analysis, two factors were found in the responses (table two)¹.

The postmaterialist/materialist dimension, when using the less restrictive rating approach, turns up as the second factor, a factor showing the highest correlation with age and education.

¹ The survey was conducted as part of the 'Internalized Culture program (Rosengren, 1985, 1986; Reimer, 1986; Rosengren and Reimer, 1986).

TABLE 2. The Postmaterialist/Materialist Factors
 Swedish National Study 1986 (Factor Loadings and
 Product Moment Correlations²)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Progress toward a less impersonal, more humane society	.71	.17
Progress toward a society where ideas are more important than money	.71	-.08
Trying to make our cities and country- side more beautiful	.61	.11
Seeing that the people have more say in how things get decided at work and in their communities	.61	-.01
Protecting freedom of speech	.61	.27
Giving the people more say in important government decisions	.60	.06
Fighting rising prices	.55	.47
Maintain a stable economy	.43	.59
The fight against crime	.32	.65
Maintaining order in the nation	.29	.72
Maintain a high rate of economic growth	-.07	.67
Making sure that this country has strong defense forces	-.23	.62
<u>Correlations³</u>		
Gender	.21	-.05
Age	.07	.23
Education	-.09	-.20
Class	-.16	.00
Party	-.22	.16
Household Income	-.07	.02
<u>Variance explained</u>	27 %	20 %

N 1583

The first factor, the clearest pattern in responses and 'explai-

² Principal Component Analysis, Rotation = Varimax.

³ A positive correlation on gender means high female values on the variable in question. Age = 15-75. Party is dichotomized between socialist and non-socialist parties.

ning' twenty seven percent of the total variance, is, however, more of an 'anti-factor', with the goals 'Making sure that this country has strong defense forces', and to a lesser extent, 'Maintaining a high rate of economic growth', loading in opposition to other goals. This factor correlates the highest with choice of party and with gender.

Table two thus presents a somewhat different picture than table one. If we are to find value dimensions in these goals, then at least one other factor is stronger than the factor interpreted as the postmaterialist/materialist dimension.

Factor analysis is a technique that should always be used with the utmost care. Underlying these factors are of course the original, separate items. Let us look at their correlations with different background variables.

Table three presents a rather interesting picture, a picture that leads us to an alternative hypothesis to that presented by Inglehart.

The background variable with the greatest importance for a hypothesis of value change is age. Value change, if it occurs, should do so between different age cohorts. We do not have time series data here, which of course is a restriction. But this is what table three tells us about people in different age groups: It is not the case of younger people being more postmaterialistic than older people, it is more the case of younger people being less interested in all of the goals. With the one exception of the item concerning influence at work, all items correlate positively with age. The table shows us what is not important for young people rather than what is important. All items concern societal goals ten years ahead. Such goals may not be terribly important to new generations growing up.

Thomas Ziehe (1986) has described three cultural tendencies that affect young people in present day society. First, a growth in reflexivity. Knowledge and experience reach young people through our culture, through media, as a secondary experience. Everything has already been experienced. The problem is not so much not possessing enough knowledge of what is 'out there'. Instead, it is knowing too much, realizing all possibilities. It is as if a blueprint already existed, inscribed in each indivi-

TABLE 3. The Postmaterialist/Materialist Value Items
 Swedish National Study 1986 (Product Moment
 Correlations⁴)

	Gender	Age	Edu- cation	House- hold Income	Party	Class
Maintain a high rate of economic growth	-.11	.15	-.08	.02	.04	.01
Making sure that this country has strong military forces	-.04	.15	-.09	.03	.31	.11
Seeing that the people have more say in how things get decided at work and in their communities	.13	-.03	-.06	-.05	-.29	-.20
Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful	.15	.03	-.05	-.08	-.03	-.08
Maintaining order in the nation	.06	.21	-.20	-.05	.04	-.09
Giving the people more say in important govern- ment decisions	.10	.09	-.07	.00	.00	-.04
Fighting rising prices	.08	.19	-.21	-.05	-.15	-.16
Protecting freedom of speech	.05	.03	.00	.05	-.03	-.01
Maintain a stable economy	.00	.12	-.17	.01	-.07	-.08
Progress toward a less impersonal, more humane society	.16	.17	-.07	-.02	-.07	-.06
The fight against crime	.09	.18	-.18	-.02	.01	-.09
Progress toward a society where ideas are more important than money	.20	.08	-.09	-.11	-.16	-.11
N	1503	1503	1500	1513	1240	1537

dual through media, raising expectations of what could be accomplished. Second, an increase in what Ziehe calls makeability, including looks, life styles and communication abilities.

⁴ See table two.

These areas no longer are as pre-determined. And third, following this, an increasing individualization: Social background and traditional ways of living do not give the same help anymore in guiding the creation of one's own reality. Decisions have to be made on an individual basis. The subjective, inner life takes on a force of its own, instead of acting as an appendix to the social reality. All in all, the possible directions to take are almost limitless, but the journey will have to be taken based on a cultural classification of one self - made by one self.

In a period where the cultural possibilities collide with the socio-economic realities, where distrust may be found toward earlier solutions, new formations, such as environmental parties or anti-nuclear movements, may be an alternative. This would fit in with the postmaterialist theory. But, as Ziehe argues, that may not be enough. There seems to be a discourse outside the former, a discourse concerning life itself, concerning what a successful, happy life style would look like - including or excluding solutions to economic and environmental problems. This culture could be called narcissistic; a culture or life style where individual values and individual solutions become important.

What values are important for young people, then? It could be argued that table three only shows that young people in surveys tend to find everything less important than do older people, in a sense an effect of the questionnaire. This is not the case, however. Table four presents another set of values, used in the same survey as the Inglehart value items. It is the set of values compiled by Milton Rokeach (1973, 1979).

The table quite clearly shows that young people consider some values to be more important than do old people. This is true especially for the values 'pleasure', 'an exciting life', 'a comfortable life', 'mature love' and 'happiness'. It seems as if the Rokeach value set, including individual values, better captures young people's values than do the Inglehart value battery.

Implicit in the discussion carried out here is a dynamic relationship between the 'inner self' (Ziehe) and the outer reality. Thus far we have mainly discussed an internalized

TABLE 4. The Rokeach Value Survey
 Swedish National Study 1986 (Product Moment
 Correlations⁵)

	Gender	Age	Edu- cation	House- hold Income	Party	Class
A comfortable life	-.02	-.21	-.08	.02	-.03	-.07
Family security	.07	-.03	-.03	.07	.00	-.03
Freedom	-.06	-.07	.05	.02	.08	.01
Salvation	.07	.21	-.14	-.14	.08	-.05
Inner harmony	.11	.11	.11	.09	.01	.09
Equality	.16	-.02	-.06	-.10	-.25	-.15
Wisdom	.04	.07	-.02	.01	.05	.06
Mature love	.07	-.20	.07	.08	.03	.03
Happiness	.06	-.20	-.03	.02	-.01	-.04
Pleasure	-.01	-.33	.01	.06	-.03	-.03
True friendship	.10	-.13	.01	.02	.02	.00
Self-respect	.07	.06	.07	.07	-.03	.06
A sense of accomplishment	.01	-.09	.01	.04	-.05	.00
Social recognition	.07	.07	-.11	-.05	-.04	-.04
An exciting life	-.04	-.31	.06	.02	.03	-.02
A world of beauty	.08	-.05	-.10	-.10	-.05	-.04
National security	.10	.14	-.14	-.04	.03	-.03
A world at peace	.10	.04	-.06	-.03	-.03	-.03
N	1528	1528	1527	1535	1253	1500

culture. But following Pierre Bourdieu, it is in daily life, in the field of life styles, that individuals create and re-create their reality.

VALUES AND LIFE STYLES

Without discounting the importance of the field of economic production, it is in other fields that positions are being kept and strengthened in an invisible way. In 'Distinction. A Social

⁵ See table two.

Critique of the Judgement of Taste' (1984), Bourdieu has drawn up what he calls the social space, a hierarchy of social positions based on the amount and composition of economic and cultural capital possessed by each individual. In the social space, individuals and groups of individuals struggle to improve their positions. Juxtaposed on the social space is the field of life styles.

Class solidarity rests on both social and ideological cohesion. Social cohesion exists when class members are united by networks of acquaintanceship, friendship, and inter-marriage. Ideological cohesion is present when class members share common political and social perspectives and values. The maintenance of both forms of class solidarity requires the erection of barriers of inclusion and exclusion: members of the cohesive group must have their ideological and social unity continuously reinforced, and non-members must be excluded from sharing in either (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978).

Having different life styles may seem natural and innocent. But by being able to define what is a totally arbitrary taste as the superior taste, available for enjoyment only to the chosen few, then the field of life styles functions as a field of distinction, as a field upholding distinctions.

In table five, a first picture is given of what a Swedish field of life styles may look like. It consists of six factors or groupings of interest based on twenty five different leisure activities and interests. And, as can be seen, these life styles show rather strong relationships with some background variables, or with different positions in the social space.

The first factor consists of interests typically associated with the socially active. The second is a 'female' factor, consisting mainly of home activities. The third factor consists of physical, body oriented activities, without any strong relationships to the background variables employed here. Factor number four is a high culture, intellectual factor. It is followed by a male sports- and stocks factor. The last factor is, much as factor number two, home oriented.

Reducing the number of factors to exactly six, as has been done here, is in a sense somewhat arbitrary. Using more interests and activities would have given another construction. All factors

 TABLE 5. Leisure Activities and Interests
 Swedish National Study 1986 (Factor Analysis⁶)

<u>Factor 1</u>							
Going to the restaurant							
Listening to popular music							.74
Going dancing							.73
<u>Factor 2</u>							
Handicraft							.70
Fashion news							.61
<u>Factor 3</u>							
Exercises							.81
Outdoor activities							.75
<u>Factor 4</u>							
Reading fiction							.77
Going to the theater							.63
Discussing politics							.61
<u>Factor 5</u>							
Stocks and bonds							.72
Golf							.69
<u>Factor 6</u>							
Having your own home							.82
<u>Correlations⁷</u>							
	<u>F 1</u>	<u>F 2</u>	<u>F 3</u>	<u>F 4</u>	<u>F 5</u>	<u>F 6</u>	<u>N</u>
Gender	.09	.62	-.06	.11	-.33	.00	1532
Age	-.63	.17	.09	.10	.05	.00	1532
Education	.14	-.12	-.03	.32	.00	.07	1532
Class	.00	-.03	-.08	.19	.05	.06	1565
Party	-.04	.04	-.07	.06	.14	.13	1284
Income	.11	-.14	-.01	.16	.05	.22	1536

intuitively make sense, however. And they paint a picture of very traditional patterns of living.

Is it possible to find any signs of new life styles among young people in this data? In other words, what dimensions are to be found if we look only at youth? Will we find other formations? In fact, with this construction, the answer is no. An exploratory

⁶ See table two.

⁷ See table two.

factor analysis on respondents up to the age of thirty gives almost exactly the same groupings, in the same order. Already at this stage in the life cycle we can find the traditional life styles.

There is a connection between values and interests yet to be discussed. What is the function of values in relation to people's daily life? One interpretation is that values function as a mediator between background variables and interests. This may be noted in table six, where the correlations between the Rokeach set of values and the six life style patterns are given.

 TABLE 6. Values and Life Styles
 Swedish National Study 1986 (Product Moment
 Correlations⁸)

	F 1	F 2	F 3	F 4	F 5	F 6
A comfortable life	.26	.01	.03	-.18	-.02	.13
Family security	.02	.05	.07	-.04	-.05	.25
Freedom	.05	-.08	.09	.07	-.03	.07
Salvation	-.26	.35	.04	-.02	.20	-.07
Inner harmony	-.08	.09	.10	.23	-.11	.08
Equality	.05	.09	.13	.07	-.12	.01
Wisdom	-.01	.07	.11	.08	-.02	.14
Mature love	.22	.05	.05	.01	-.08	.19
Happiness	.25	.05	.05	-.10	-.05	.16
Pleasure	.40	-.04	.04	-.09	-.04	.14
True friendship	.17	.02	.07	.02	-.14	.10
Self-respect	.03	.01	.05	.19	-.13	.10
A sense of accomplishment	.18	.00	.05	.08	-.06	.11
Social recognition	.09	.15	.07	-.03	.08	.06
An exciting life	.42	.02	.05	-.05	.11	.04
A world of beauty	.16	.12	.12	-.04	-.04	.13
National security	-.05	.12	.09	-.04	-.03	.08
A world at peace	-.02	.07	.12	-.04	-.09	.06

 N 1528

⁸ See table two.

The correlations between the values and the life style factors are in many cases higher than between background variables and interests. This could be taken as an indicator of the mediating function of the values. Most correlations turn out roughly as expected⁹.

In contrast to these results, the postmaterialist/materialist values do not seem to inhabit the same mediating position. The correlations between these values and the life style factors are, with a few exceptions, low¹⁰.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have situated the postmaterialist/materialist value battery in a Swedish context. Empirically, it may initially be argued that this replication of earlier studies conducted in other West European countries demonstrates the merits of the question battery - and the strength of the hypothesis. 'Reading' the matter a bit closer, things seem a bit more complicated.

When discussing the postmaterialist hypothesis, the question of generational change is of primary importance. Objective societal changing conditions, such as an over all rise in levels of education and safer environments in which to live, will, according to the hypothesis, automatically lead young people towards one specific value orientation. The value transformation may temporarily be delayed, but in the long run the process cannot be stopped.

One problem with such a statement is that it leans towards a both ahistorical and deterministic portrayal of youth. Objective

⁹ The pattern in table six is not altogether simple, however. Somewhat 'unexpected coalitions' between, for example, 'salvation' and the home activity factor, as well as between 'inner harmony' and the high culture factor, cause high correlations.

¹⁰ The strong relationships that do exist between life styles and Inglehartian values are mainly those between 'Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful' and the outdoor activity factor, and between 'Protecting freedom of speech' and the high culture factor.

societal conditions impose meaning on young people. These conditions must, however, be seen only as parts of a framework, inside which young people make sense of their reality - in a way that is not pre-determined. Other, historically specific, factors of importance, altering the meaning of these objective conditions, must also be taken into account.

Following this, the results in this paper seem to point out two disparate tendencies: First, the tendency of a 'new feeling', an individualization. Instead of treading the rather straight postmaterialist path, young people seem to move in a multitude of different, personal directions. Second, the tendency of a continuation of the traditional, structurally based ways of living. Both tendencies are of course simultaneously valid. They do not go along with the postmaterialist hypothesis, however.

Thomas Ziehe reminds us of the difference between the potentials of this age and the actual realization of these potentials. Old traditions, rituals, have to be worked at, demystified, in order to be overcome. And that is a slow process.

It seems that a further analysis into the questions raised here must take into account the dialectics of the structurally based conditions of existence and the emancipatory forces working inside this framework. It has to analyse how objective conditions are incorporated as mental structures, and then acted out, almost paradoxically, as something both unique and shared.

What may we then finally hope to find? Perhaps that the blank generation may turn out to be not so blank after all. In this age of ambiguity, it seems only logical to realize that Richard Hell, in coining the phrase, never intended it to mean confused, dispirited, etc.

It means 'blank', as in 'Fill in whatever you want. It is your generation. You decide'.

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