

BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES AND SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF SOCIAL DARWINISTS AND HUMAN-RIGHTS ADVOCATES

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the characteristics and specific features of supporters of two ideological currents: social Darwinism and the human-rights-based model. The aim of the study is to examine the socio-psychological adaptation of students with different ideological orientations and the behavioral strategies they display in conflict situations, as well as to identify the behavioral differences between them. The study was conducted with 91 undergraduate students, from first to fourth year, enrolled in the academic programs of Khachatur Abovyan Armenian State Pedagogical University. In the course of the research, testing and survey methods were applied, including the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, the C. Rogers and R. Diamond method for diagnosing socio-psychological adaptation, and an author-developed questionnaire designed to determine the ideological orientation of the participants and reveal whether their views align more closely with social Darwinism or with the fundamental values of human rights. The results of the study indicate that behavioral strategies in conflict situations differ depending on the students' ideological orientation. Supporters of social Darwinism predominantly employ a competitive strategy, while adherents of the human-rights-based model tend to rely on accommodation, collaboration, and compromise. Differences in socio-psychological adaptation were also identified: proponents of human rights demonstrate a higher level of adaptability, show empathy toward others, and place importance on their emotional comfort. For supporters of social Darwinism, the primary focus is achieving superiority over others. Social Darwinists and supporters of human rights are equally characterized by self-empathy and an internal locus of control.

Keywords: social Darwinism, human-rights-based model, behavioral strategy, conflict situation, collaboration, compromise, dominance, socio-psychological adaptation, locus of control.

INTRODUCTION

People's perceptions of social relations and forms of communication are shaped by different

ideological systems, in particular by approaches based on social Darwinism and the protection of human rights.

Social Darwinism is an ideological current based on the social application of Charles Darwin's principle of "natural selection." According to this concept, society should be governed by competition, where the strongest and most capable achieve success, while the "weak" are pushed aside (Darwin, 1859). This approach emphasizes individual superiority, power, and efficiency, yet it is often criticized as an ideology that justifies social inequality (Hawkins, 1997).

Herbert Spencer, one of the main theorists of social Darwinism, argued that societies evolve in the same way as organisms—through continuous competition and adaptation. According to Spencer, any intervention in the natural course of social development, particularly mechanisms of social assistance, hinders the process of "natural selection" (Spencer, 1864).

Richard Hofstadter and Michael Hawkins, in their works, examined the historical application of social Darwinism, noting that it was widely used to justify social, economic, and racial inequalities, especially at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Hawkins, 1997).

Paul Crook emphasized the influence of social Darwinism on the formation of war-related ideologies (Crook, 1994).

The protection of human rights represents a fundamentally different ideology, centered on the respect for the inherent rights of every individual (Donnelly, 1989). This model was formed on the basis of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and aims to ensure individual freedoms, equal opportunities, and social justice. It rejects the organization of public life according to principles of force or domination and promotes peaceful coexistence.

This theory developed during the Enlightenment period—particularly through the works of John Locke (Locke, 1689) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau, 1762), and later through modern thinkers such as Amartya Sen (Sen, 1999) and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2011). John Locke emphasized the inviolability of natural rights to life, liberty, and property (Locke, 1689), while Rousseau advanced the idea of the social contract as the basis of political legitimacy (Rousseau, 1762).

From the second half of the 20th century onward, the human rights ideology became a cornerstone of global legal and moral systems, reflected not only in legal documents but also in social consciousness as a foundational set of values (Hofstadter, 1944).

Behavioral strategy in social or conflict situations is a system of conscious or spontaneous responses used by an individual (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976). In psychology, several behavioral strategies are distinguished: collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, competition, and compromise. The choice among them is determined by a person's value system, worldview, and ideological orientation.

K. Thomas and R. Kilmann classify these strategies according to two dimensions: the degree to which individuals pursue their own goals and their willingness to cooperate (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976).

Behavioral strategies manifested in conflict situations vary, ranging from power-based solutions to mutual agreement. Albert Bandura presents the social learning model, according to which an individual's behavior is shaped through observing external models and through internal beliefs (Bandura & National Inst. of Mental Health, 1986).

Julian Rotter demonstrated that behavioral choices are often determined by whether a person perceives the control over their own behavior as internal or external (Rotter, 1966).

Walter Mischel emphasizes the key role of an individual's cognitive factors in shaping behavioral strategies (Mischel, 1973).

M. Rahim highlights the importance of conflict management strategies within organizational settings (Rahim, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The study was conducted among students of Khachatur Aboyan Armenian State Pedagogical University. The sample consisted of 91 undergraduate students from the first to the fourth year of study.

The aim of the research is to determine how ideological orientation (social Darwinism and the human-rights-based approach) influences an individual's choice of behavioral strategies in conflict situations.

Testing and survey methods were used in the course of the research. The following instruments were administered:

1. **Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI).** Developed by American social psychologists K. Thomas and R. Kilmann in the 1970s, this instrument is widely used for diagnosing interpersonal conflict behavior. It identifies which behavioral strategy participants predominantly employ in conflict situations, based on their internal preferences and individual orientations.
2. **C. Rogers and R. Diamond's Method for Diagnosing Socio-Psychological Adaptation.** This method is designed to assess the individual's level of adaptation to the social environment, as well as to evaluate internal states and self-esteem. In this study, it was used to measure the degree of socio-psychological adjustment among individuals with different ideological orientations.
3. **Author-Developed Questionnaire for Determining Students' Ideological Orientation (10 items).** The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify students' orientation toward the ideas of social Darwinism or the fundamental values of human rights (e.g., *"What is more important to you: individual success or social well-being?"*). The questions are derived from the core principles of the two ideologies, and based on this logic, students who provided positive responses and corresponding explanations were placed into the respective groups. Examples of questions reflecting the human-rights-based ideology include: *"How do you view the concept of universal human rights?"*; *"Should human rights be protected even in cases where doing so might conflict with the interests of society?"*; *"What is your attitude toward the idea of equal opportunities and inclusion for all members of society?"*. Examples of questions reflecting the ideology of social Darwinism include: *"Should society intervene in people's economic activities to promote equality?"*; *"Do you consider competition to be important in society?"*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first phase of the study, the author-developed questionnaire assessing students' ideological orientation was administered. According to the results, **75.8%** of the students support active societal intervention in individuals' economic activities in order to promote equality. In their view, people, based on their rights, may regulate or balance economic processes. In contrast, **24.2%** believe that market forces themselves should determine the rules of the game and define the model of resource distribution.

Additionally, **93.4%** of respondents expressed a positive attitude toward the idea of equality for all members of society, while **7.6%** expressed a negative attitude.

By grouping the data obtained from the questionnaire, the participants were divided into two groups: 40 supporters of social Darwinism and 40 supporters of the human-rights-based ideology. The responses of 11 students did not allow for a clear determination of their ideological orientation; therefore, they were not included in the next phase of the study.

In the second phase of the research, the socio-psychological adaptation and behavioral strategies in conflict situations of supporters of social Darwinism and the human-rights-based ideology were examined.

The data from the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument are presented in **Figure 1**.

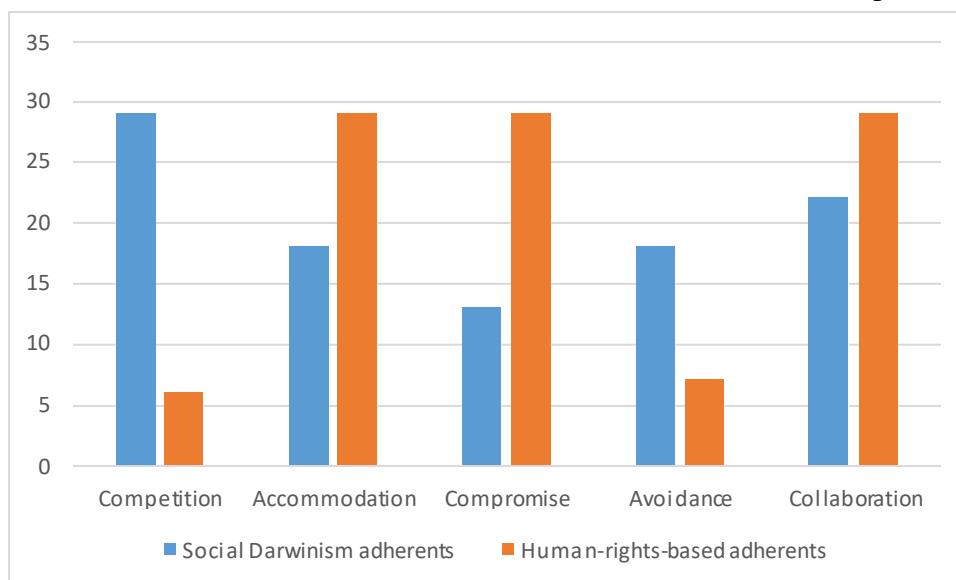


Figure 1. Behavioral strategies in conflict situations among supporters of social Darwinism and the human-rights-based ideology

The results indicate that among supporters of social Darwinism, competition is the most prominent behavioral strategy (29%), while accommodation (18%) and avoidance (18%) show moderate levels, and compromise is the least expressed strategy (13%).

Among supporters of the human-rights-based ideology, accommodation (29%), collaboration (29%), and compromise (29%) clearly dominate, whereas competition (6%) and avoidance (7%) are weakly expressed.

It is evident that in conflict situations, the behavioral strategies of supporters of social Darwinism and advocates of human rights show no similarities. Unlike social Darwinists, human-rights advocates predominantly exhibit accommodating, collaborating, and compromising strategies. In contrast, social Darwinists show a predominance of competing and avoiding strategies compared to human-rights

supporters.

Using the Rogers–Diamond method, the socio-psychological adaptation characteristics of the participants were identified (see **Figure 2**).

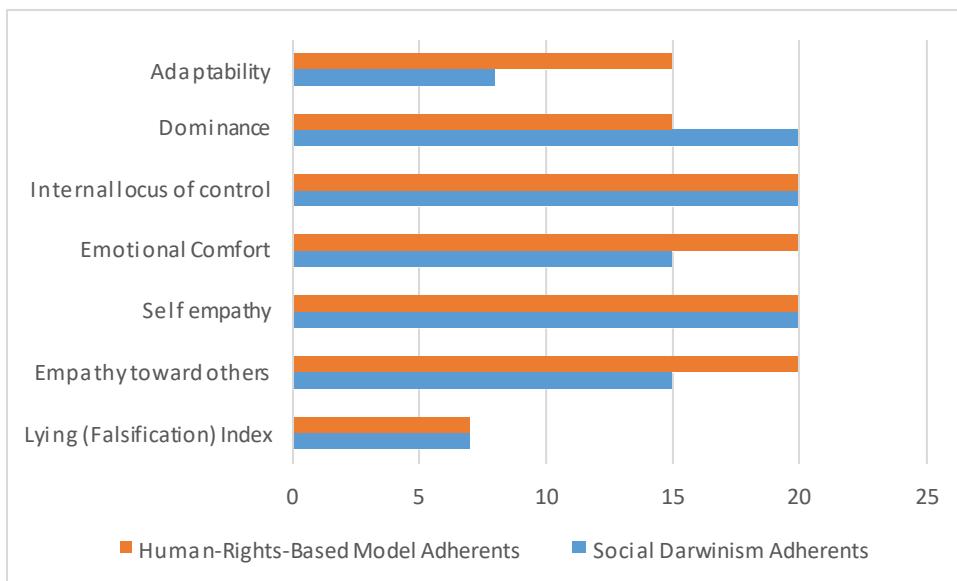


Figure 2. Socio-psychological adaptation of supporters of social Darwinism and the human-rights-based ideology

According to the data from the method, among social Darwinists, dominance (20%), self-empathy (20%), and internal locus of control (20%) are strongly expressed, while emotional comfort (15%) and empathy toward others (15%) show moderate levels, and adaptability is the least expressed characteristic (8%).

Among supporters of the human-rights-based ideology, internal locus of control (20%), emotional comfort (20%), self-empathy (20%), and empathy toward others (20%) are equally strongly expressed. Adaptability (15%) and dominance (15%) are moderately expressed.

A comparison of the data from the two groups shows that human-rights advocates exhibit higher levels of adaptability, emotional comfort, and empathy toward others than social Darwinists. In contrast, social Darwinists demonstrate higher levels of dominant behavior than human-rights supporters. The levels of internal locus of control and self-empathy are equal in both groups.

The falsification index obtained through the method is also identical for both groups at 7%, while the acceptable range is 18–36%. Therefore, the results obtained using this method are considered reliable and valid.

CONCLUSIONS

The behavioral strategies exhibited by students in conflict situations differ depending on their ideological orientation. Among supporters of the human-rights-based model, **collaborating**, **accommodating** and **compromising** strategies prevail. Among social Darwinists, **competitive** strategies are prominent, and in the absence of such opportunities, **avoiding** strategies are employed. **Compromising** is the least expressed strategy in this group.

Students' ideological orientation significantly affects their level of socio-psychological adaptation.

Human-rights advocates exhibit higher levels of **adaptability**, placing importance on **emotional comfort** and **empathy toward others**. Social Darwinists, being less adaptable, display **dominant behavior**, guided by the values of **power** and **individual dominance**. **Locus of control** and **self-empathy** show similar levels in both social Darwinists and human-rights supporters.

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