Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology

What Values Do Parents Want to Socialize in Their Children? The Role of Perceived Normative Values

Kim-Pong Tam and Sau-Lai Lee

The online version of this article can be found at:

Published by:

⑤SAGE

On behalf of:

⊀ IACCP

International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology

Additional services and information for *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://jcc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://jcc.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://jcc.sagepub.com/content/41/2/175.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Feb 4, 2010

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Jan 4, 2010

What is This?

What Values Do Parents Want to Socialize in Their Children? The Role of Perceived Normative Values

Kim-Pong Tam[1] and Sau-Lai Lee[2]

Abstract

This study concerns what values parents prefer in their children. Documenting similarity between the value profiles of parents and children, past studies implicitly assumed that parents want their children to acquire a direct, full copy of their personal values. Incorporating social psychology research on social norms, the authors obtained initial evidence from a study of 80 Singaporean mothers that, apart from referencing what they personally value, parents have ideas about what is normatively important in the society (perceived normative values), and they also want their children to acquire these values. This study highlights the need to consider the concept of norms in understanding familial socialization. Implications for cultural psychology research are also discussed.

Keywords

socialization values, intergenerational transmission, social norms, culture

It is widely accepted that parents play a crucial role in children's development of social and moral values. Researchers are therefore interested in intergenerational, parent-to-child value transmission. One past finding is the similarity (i.e., significant positive correlation) between the value profiles of parents and children (e.g., Rohan & Zanna, 1996). Such an approach implicitly assumed that parents want their children to value what they personally value. Indeed, when explicitly asked what they want their children to value (i.e., *socialization* values; e.g., Knafo, 2003), a strong positive correlation between parents' socialization values and their personal values was found (Knafo & Schwartz, 2001). Parents do want their children to value what they themselves personally value, and their children do, to some extent, value what their parents personally value.

The above assumption was described as a "fax" model by Strauss (1992; cited in Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997), because it implies that parents want their children to acquire a direct, full copy of their own personal values. Nevertheless, sometimes parents see the need to differentiate between their personal values and what they want for their children (Knafo, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 1997). Parents do not merely dub what they value into their socialization values. This is perhaps because parents understand that they need to prepare their children for

[1]Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
[2]Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Corresponding Author:
Kim-Pong Tam, Division of Social Science, Rm 3383, Academic Building, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Clear Water Bay, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Email: kevintam@ust.hk

social life as it exists in the present and in the future (but not when they themselves were reared) (Alwin, 1988; cited in Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997). Parents' socialization values cannot be totally accounted for by parents' personal values.

Past research indicates that parents also consider what is prevailing in the surrounding society and attempt to help their children adapt to it (Youniss, 1994). Parents do not simply socialize their children only with reference to their own values. They also refer to the surrounding culture, so as to maximize the chance of future social adaption of their children to the society (see also Kuczynski et al., 1997). This view is consistent with social psychology research on the influence of norms on human behavior. It has long been documented that people, in some circumstances, act in adherence to the norms, actual or perceived (e.g., Ajzen, 1991). In particular, perceived social norms can be a reliable, independent predictor of behavior. For example, a recent social cognition study found that perceived normative values and beliefs could independently and directly predict people's social judgment such as attribution (Zou et al., in press).

Surprisingly, past research on familial socialization mainly focused on intrafamilial variables and seldom adopted the normative view in understanding parent-to-child value transmission (Knafo, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 1997). As highlighted by Fischer (2006), the role of the perceived norms should be especially significant in behaviors that are normatively regulated. Arguably, socialization should qualify to be a normatively regulated behavior, because socialization agents (e.g., parents, schools) must consider what is widely valued in the society and hence what can help the children become adaptive in the society. In the present study, we introduce the concept of social norms (in particular, perceived norms) into familial socialization research. We argue that when considering what values are important to their children, parents should refer to not only what they personally value (i.e., *personal values*), but also what they perceive as normatively valued by other people in the society (i.e., *perceived normative values*). Put succinctly, we hypothesize that parents' personal values and perceived normative values each have an independent contribution in predicting parents' socialization values.

Method

Eighty ethnic Chinese mothers were recruited in Singapore. Only ethnic Chinese were recruited because they constitute the majority of Singaporean population (76.8%; Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001). All participants reported Singaporean nationality. All but 6 reported that they had been born in Singapore (5 had been born in Indonesia and 1 in Malaysia). All participants had been living in Singapore for at least 12 years and 4 months ($M = 46.79$, $SD = 7.71$ years). Their age ranged from 38 to 60 years ($M = 48.20$, $SD = 5.41$ years), and their education levels were 5% primary or below, 13.75% primary, 56.25% secondary, 13.75% undergraduate, and 7.5% postgraduate. They completed the Schwartz Value Questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992), which consists of 56 values (e.g., "clean," "a spiritual life," "creativity"), thrice. First, they rated the importance of each value to themselves ("How much do YOU endorse each of the following values? . . ."). Then, they gave their perception of the normative importance of these values ("In your estimation, how much would AN AVERAGE SINGAPOREAN endorse each of the following values? . . ."). Last, they rated how much they want their same-sex offspring (i.e., daughter) to endorse these values ("How would YOU WANT YOUR DAUGHTER to endorse each of the following values? . . ."). Participants responded to the above questions on an 8-point scale (0 = *not important at all* to 7 = *very important*). Their responses to the 56 values were later summarized into 10 value types (e.g., "power," "hedonism," "benevolence"), according to Schwartz (1992). They also reported their cultural identification in 3 items (e.g., "How strongly do you identify with Singaporean culture?") on an 11-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 10 = *very strongly*) ($\alpha = .75$).

Results

For each value type, we computed the zero-order correlation between personal values and socialization values and that between perceived normative values and socialization values. We found that maternal personal values were strongly associated with socialization values; in nine value types (except hedonism), the correlation was statistically significant (see Table 1). Maternal perceived normative values were also strongly associated with socialization values; in nine value types (except hedonism), the correlation was statistically significant (see Table 1). We then examined if perceived normative values has independent contribution (beyond that of personal values) in predicting socialization values. We did a two-step hierarchical regression analysis for each value type. In Step 1, we predicted socialization values with maternal personal values. In Step 2, we added perceived normative values as an additional predictor and examined the change of R^2 (i.e., the added prediction power of the regression model). In seven value types (power, achievement, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, tradition, security), there was a significant increase in R^2 (see Table 1). We further examined if the association between personal values or perceived normative values and socialization values are moderated by age, educational level, or cultural identification. In Step 3, we thus entered an interaction term between personal values and a moderator and another one between perceived normative values and the moderator and examined R^2 change. Only 2 out of the 30 R^2 changes were statistically significant, and the directions of the respective interactions were not consistent; we thus decided not to further explicate these results.[1]

Discussion

The results of this study provide initial support to our proposal: Maternal perceived normative values were indeed (though less strongly than were personal values) associated with socialization values for daughters. This association held even when maternal personal values were considered. Unexpectedly, no significant prediction by personal values was found for hedonism; and no significant prediction by perceived normative values was found for hedonism, benevolence, and conformity. One possible explanation is that hedonism in general is not preferred in children's socialization, regardless of how parents personally value hedonism or see others value it. On the contrary, benevolence and conformity are in general regarded as imperative, regardless of how parents see others value it. Indeed, in our sample, hedonism ranked at the bottom, conformity at the top, and benevolence as the third in terms of socialization values among the 10 value types. This, however, remains a post hoc speculation and needs further evidence.

As Strauss (1992; cf. Kuczynski et al., 1997) nicely put it, past parent-child value transmission research can be characterized as a "fax" model, describing parents as wanting their children to acquire a whole copy of their own values. But the findings here suggest that parents also reference their perceived normative values, though to a smaller extent. It shows the utility of the normative view in understanding intergenerational value transmission. It also echoes the call for more focus on social contexts in familial socialization research (Knafo, 2003).

One of the major research perspectives in the social psychology of culture, the cultural self perspective, assumes that culture influences behaviors through internalized cultural values (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). But the cultural knowledge perspective argues that people acquire certain representations of cultural ideas, and they may use these representations to guide their behavior (Wan et al., 2007; Zou et al., in press). The present study adds to this discussion. Parents may want their children to acquire their personal value, which may have been internalized from the culture (i.e., the cultural self pathway). But parents may also want them to acquire what they perceive as important in the society (i.e., the cultural knowledge pathway).

The findings here imply that there are some values that parents do not personally endorse but that they regard as normatively important and important to be transmitted to their children. *In*

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations and Hierarchical Regression Results Concerning the Association Among Personal Values, Perceived Normative Values, and Socialization Values

	Power	Achievement	Hedonism	Stimulation	Self-direction	Universalism	Benevolence	Tradition	Conformity	Security
Zero-order r between personal values and socialization values	.63****	.60****	.12	.59****	.62****	.75****	.81****	.63****	.68****	.72****
Zero-order r between perceived normative values and Socialization values	.39****	.51****	.12	.53****	.52****	.50****	.37****	.49****	.21*	.44****
Step 1 β of personal values	.63****	.60****	.12	.59****	.62****	.76****	.81****	.63****	.68****	.72****
Step 2 β of personal values	.56****	.48****	.12	.47****	.49****	.67****	.78****	.52****	.67****	.65****
Step 2 β of perceived normative values	.18**	.31****	.12	.39****	.32****	.19**	.07	.30***	.05	.16*
R^2 change (Step 2 over 1)	.03**	.08****	.02	.14****	.08****	.03**	.00	.08***	.00	.02*

*$p < .07$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$. ****$p < .001$.

practice, how do parents transmit these values? In past studies, it is often assumed that parents teach their children these values by themselves. This view however excludes the possibility that parents are cognizant of the influence of other socialization agents (e.g., schools, grandparents) and may rely on these agents. Parents do possess a set of socialization values, but they may choose to teach their children these values by themselves or, for instance, let the school do it (see Knafo, 2003). It is plausible that for values that parents personally endorse, they teach their children by themselves; whereas for values that they see as normatively important but do not personally endorse, they may rely more on other socialization agents. We suggest future studies testing this hypothesis to differentiate parental socialization practice (e.g., "How important it is for you to teach these values to your children?") from desired socialization practice by other socialization agents (e.g., "How important it is for schools to teach these values to your children?").

The present study purposes to initiate the consideration of social norms (perceived norms in particular) in familial socialization research. More research is needed due to some limitations of this pioneering effort. First, readers should be cautious about the cross-culture validity of the findings here, because only one culture was studied. On one hand, it is reasonable to expect that the role of perceived normative values should be similarly important across cultures, because essentially parents from any culture face a similar goal in socialization. On the other hand, given that conformity is valued more in collectivist societies (e.g., Bond & Smith, 1996), it is also reasonable to expect that perceived normative values play a stronger role in collectivist cultures than in individualist ones. Future cross-culture studies are needed to empirically pit these two hypotheses against each other. In a related vein, it is possible that parents who have a stronger conformity tendency would be more likely to reference their perceived normative values. This also should fall into the scope of future studies. Second, only mothers were included in the present study. Mothers were chosen because the average amount of maternal care is higher than that of paternal care (Geary, 1998). Although there has been evidence showing that couples share very similar values (Rohan & Zanna, 1996), we do think that it is worthwhile to include both parents in future studies. In a related vein, only socialization values for daughter were assessed. Socialization of sons and daughters could be different (e.g., Boehnke, 2001). We specified socialization of daughters here because previous socialization studies also opted for using same-sex parent dyads (e.g., Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001; Schonpflug, 2001). Future extension of the present study may explore whether the role of perceived normative values varies across socialization of daughters and that of sons. Third, children's actual personal values were not measured in the present study. We could not examine if there is a correspondence between parents' socialization values and their children's personal values and if parents' perceived normative values are directly related to children's personal values. Although the primary focus of the present study is parents' socialization values (and what predicts them), we do consider the inclusion of children's actual personal values to be needed in future studies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

Funding

Note

1. Considering that the pattern of results obtained may be different among participants who were born locally than among those who were not, we therefore repeated the analysis, dropping the six participants who were not born in Singapore. The same pattern of results was found.

References

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *50*, 179–211.

Alwin, D. (1988). From obedience to autonomy: Changes in traits desired in children, 1924-1978. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 52*, 33-52.

Boehnke, K. (2001). Parent-offspring value transmission in a societal context. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *32*, 241–255.

Bond, R.A. & Smith, P.B. (1996). Culture and conformity: A meta-analysis of studies using Asch's (1952, 1956) line judgment task. *Psychological Bulletin, 119,* 111-137.

Fischer, R. (2006). Congruence and functions of personal and cultural values: Do my values reflect my culture's values? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*, 1419–1431.

Geary, D. C. (1998). *Male, female: The evolution of human sex differences*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Knafo, A. (2003). Contexts, relationship quality, and family value socialization: The case of parent-school ideological fit in Israel. *Personal Relationships*, *10*, 371–388.

Knafo, A., & Schwartz, S. H. (2001). Value socialization in families of Israeli-born and soviet-born adolescents in Israel. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *32*, 213–228.

Kuczynski, L., Marshall, S., & Schell, K. (1997). Value socialization in a bidirectional context. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and the internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 23–50). New York: Wiley.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, *98*, 224–253.

Phalet, K., & Schonpflug, U. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of collectivism and achievement values in two acculturation contexts. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *32*, 186–201.

Rohan, M. J., & Zanna, M. P. (1996). Value transmission in families. In C. Seligman, J. M. Olson, & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *The psychology of values: The Ontario Symposium* (Vol. 8). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Schonpflug, U. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of values: The role of transmission belts. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32,* 174-185.

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 1–65). New York: Academic Press.

Singapore Department of Statistics. (2001). *Singapore census of population 2000: Statistical Release 1: Demographic characteristics*. Singapore: Author.

Strauss, C. (1992). Models and motives. In R. G. D'Andrade & C. Strauss (Eds.), *Human motives and cultural models* (pp. 1-20). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wan, C., Chiu, C. Y., Tam, K. P., Lee, S. L., Lau, I. Y. M., & Peng, S. Q. (2007). Perceived cultural importance and actual self-importance of values in cultural identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *92*, 337–354.

Youniss, J. (1994). Rearing children for society. In J. G. Smetana (Ed.), *Beliefs about parenting: Origins and developmental implications*. *New direction for child development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Zou, X., Tam, K. P., Morris, M. W., Lee, S. L., Lau, I. Y. M., & Chiu, C. Y. (2009). Culture as common sense: Perceived consensus versus personal beliefs as mechanisms of cultural influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97,* 579-597.

Bios

Kim-Pong Tam received his PhD from the University of Hong Kong and is currently an assistant professor at the Division of Social Science, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He is interested in understanding how people perceive their own culture and other cultures and the psychological implications

of such perceptions. His other research interests include forensic attitudes and judgments, happiness, and human-nature relationship.

Sau-Lai Lee received her PhD in social psychology from the University of Hong Kong. She is currently an assistant professor at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her research interests include cultural psychology and human technology interaction, specifically the role of communication on culture formation and transmission and human-robot interaction.