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What values do parents want to socialize in their children:

The role of perceived normative values

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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, we 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.

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

Past research do indicate 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, Marshall, & Schell, 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, Tam, Morris et al., in press).

Surprisingly, past research on familial socialization mainly focused on intra-familial variables and seldom adopted the normative view in understanding parent-to-child value transmission (Knafo, 2003; Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997). As highlighted by Fischer (2006), the role of the perceived norms should be especially significant in behaviors which 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 has its 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 ($M = 46.79$, $S.D. = 7.71$ years). Their age ranged from 38 to 60 years ($M = 48.20$, $S.D. = 5.41$ years), and their education levels were: 5% primary 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 9 value types (except hedonism), the correlation was statistically significant (see Table 1). Maternal perceived normative values were also strongly associated with socialization values; in 9 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 7 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. We thus in Step 3 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 two 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 tradition. One possible explanation is that hedonism in general is not preferred in children socialization, regardless of how parents personally value hedonism or see others value it. On the contrary, benevolence and conformity are in general regarded imperative, regardless of how parents see others value it. Indeed, in our sample, hedonism ranked the bottom, conformity the top, and benevolence 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, Marshall, & Schell, 1997) nicely put, 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, Chiu, Tam et al., 2007; Zou, Tam, Morris 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 which parents do not personally endorse but they regard as normatively important and important to be transmitted to their children. *In 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 they 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 which parents personally endorse, they teach their children by themselves, while for values which they see as normatively important but they do not personally endorse, they may rely more on other socialization agents. We suggest future studies testing this hypothesis to differentiate parental socialization practice (“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 the 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 that of daughters could be different (e.g., Boehnke, 2001). We specified socialization of daughter 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 predict them), we do consider the inclusion of children's actual personal values to be needed in future studies.

Notes

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 6 participants who were not born in Singapore. The same pattern of results was found.

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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 ⁺

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ⁺ $p < .07$