



Value change in men and women entering parenthood: New mothers' value priorities shift towards Conservation values[☆]



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ABSTRACT

There is little research on how life transitions influence value priorities. Our purpose was to investigate, within the framework provided by Schwartz's Values Theory, the effects of entering parenthood on personal values. Study 1 ($N = 12,850$), employing cross-sectional European Social Survey data, showed that Finnish mothers, as compared to non-mothers, were closer to the Conservation pole of the value dimensions that opposes Conservation values with Openness to Change values. Study 2 longitudinally followed Finnish couples ($N = 292$) entering parenthood from the first weeks of pregnancy to three months after childbirth. Both self- and spouse-ratings of values showed that new mothers' value priorities shifted towards Conservation values. New mothers perceived a similar shift in new fathers' personal values, but no changes occurred in men's self-ratings. Neither study suggested change on the value dimension that opposes Self-Transcendence values with Self-Enhancement values. Across the cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, and across self- and spouse-ratings of values, our results consistently suggest that new mothers' shift their value priorities in the direction of increased Conservation over Openness to Change. These results are consistent with the notion that value change may facilitate adaptation to life events.

1. Introduction

Entering parenthood, widely regarded as one of the most definitive stages of life, has been documented to have a plethora of psychological consequences. However, there is almost no empirical research on how parenthood influences our values; that is, what we think of as important in our lives. We explored the associations between parenthood and values within the framework provided by Schwartz's (1992) Values Theory. First, in a nationally representative sample of Finns, we compared the values of parents and non-parents. Second, in a longitudinal study on Finnish parents-to-be we investigated how values change from the onset of pregnancy to three months after childbirth.

1.1. Values

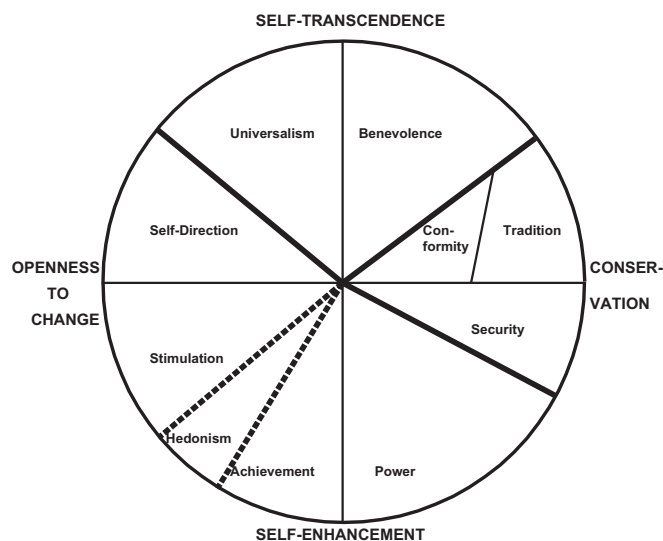
Values tend to be defined as abstract ideals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. Typical examples of values considered highly important – both as prescriptive principles and as intrinsically valuable ideals – are equality, freedom, and helpfulness. Much of the most recent research on value priorities employs the framework

provided by Schwartz' (1992) Values Theory. Based on his review of the prior literature, Schwartz (1992) defined values as self-imposed criteria that help maintain a delicate balancing act between basic motives that arise from our needs as individuals and as members of larger social groups. Schwartz proposed that these motives can, more or less universally, be organized along the two dimensions depicted in Fig. 1.

The two-dimensional taxonomy that organizes the ten basic values opposes Self-Transcendence values (Universalism and Benevolence) with Self-Enhancement values (Achievement and Power; see, e.g., Schwartz, 1992; Verkasalo, Lönnqvist, Lipsanen, & Helkama, 2009). The Self-Transcendence values emphasize acceptance of others as equals and concern for their wellbeing, whereas the Self-Enhancement values emphasize own relative success and control over others. The second axis opposes Conservation values (Conformity, Tradition, Security) with Openness to Change values (Self-Direction and Stimulation). The Conservation values emphasize self-restriction, preservation of traditional practices, and protection of stability, whereas the Openness to Change values emphasize own independent thought and action and favor change. The tenth value, Hedonism, is located between the Openness to Change and the Self-Enhancement poles. This structure

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Schwartz' two dimensional model of values

Fig. 1. Schwartz's model of the relations between values. Note: From "Universals in the context and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries," by S. Schwartz, 1992, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, p. 45. Copyright 1992 by Elsevier. Adapted with permission.

follows from the fact that action in pursuit of any value has consequences that conflict with some values but are congruent with others.

As noted by Maio (2010), values overlap with other constructs - goals, attitudes, and personality traits - that are currently more dominant in personality psychology: (1) values and goals express basic human motivations, (2) values and attitudes are evaluative, and (3) values and traits are at least somewhat stable over time and situations. Values thus have something in common with all three constructs (for a review on the empirical research on these connections, see Maio, 2010), but cannot be reduced to any one of these constructs.

1.2. Value change

Value change has typically not attracted the interest of psychologists. One reason for this may be the high test-retest reliabilities obtained with values questionnaires (Bardi, Lee, Hofmann-Towfigh, & Soutar, 2009). High rank-order stability; that is, individuals maintaining their positions relative to each other, does not, however, exclude the possibility of mean-level change. A group of people may change in the same direction while maintaining their order on the relevant dimension. Some empirical results are indeed suggestive of mean-level change across the life-course. One method to study this issue has been to correlate age with values. For instance, employing European Social Survey data, Verkasalo et al. (2009) showed that Conservation and Self-Transcendence values are more important in older age groups. However, a recent longitudinal study on value development over the life span suggests that these effects may in part be cohort effects rather than developmental effects (Milfont, Milojev, & Sibley, 2016), emphasizing the need for more longitudinal studies.

There is overall very little longitudinal research on value change, and especially little on whether major life-transitions can produce value change. One of the few exceptions is a longitudinal study by Bardi et al. (2009) in which the extent of life changing events (e.g., death of a spouse, change to different line of work, marriage) that participants experienced during a two-year period was positively associated with greater overall intra-individual value change. Presenting a theoretical model in which environmental primes may either with or without our awareness activate certain values and lead to value change, Bardi and

Goodwin (2011) argued that "if the same concept is primed repeatedly by a new life situation (e.g., parenthood) or by the environment (e.g., a new culture) a more permanent change in values may take place" (p. 277). Such change, they argued, "facilitated adapting to living in a new country and adapting to parenthood" (p. 278).

The little empirical research on the specific life-transitions that could elicit value change has indeed identified migration as a context in which values may change in a predictable manner. In a sample of Ingrian-Finnish migrants from Russia to Finland, the importance of both Universalism and Security values increased after migration, whereas the importance of Power and Achievement values decreased (Lönnqvist, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Verkasalo, 2011). These changes were such that they could, consistent with the arguments set forth by Bardi and Goodwin (2011), be interpreted as facilitating adjustment. The notion that value change is adaptive was also put forth by Gouveia, Vione, Milfont, and Fischer (2015). Building on the functional theory of human values (Gouveia, Milfont, & Guerra, 2014), Gouveia et al. (2015) argued that age differences in values across the life-span are consistent with theories on adaptive aging - values may serve different adaptive functions at different developmental stages. For instance, existence values, such as stability and survival, could be expected to become more important upon entering parenthood because parents have to take care of the survival of their offspring.

1.3. Sex differences in value change

Value change cannot be assumed to be uniform across men and women (Gouveia et al., 2015). A study by Ferriman, Lubinski, and Benbow (2009) - to the best of our knowledge the only previous study to have longitudinally investigated how parenthood changes values - reported on very different effects for men and women. In a sample of profoundly gifted individuals, the study replicated the typical finding that for women, relatively to men, family, friends, and social well-being outside of work tended to be more dominant life themes. More pertinent to the present research, the study reported larger gender differences among parents than among non-parents. Men with and without children responded very similarly to most items. Women, by contrast, showed more variation. The responses of the non-parent women were more similar to the responses of men than to the responses of mothers. Whereas men and non-parent women had a more agentic, competitive and individualistic perspective, women with children favored a more communal, holistic perspective, which emphasized community, family, and friendships.

The above results are consistent with a recent longitudinal study by Milfont et al. (2016) on the life-span development of values, according to which women show higher temporal variability in Conservation values. The authors suggested that women are expected to play different social roles at different points in life, including taking on the majority of parenting and housekeeping tasks, which are inherently somewhat protective and conservative. Such distinct social roles, less likely to pertain to men, may temporarily affect the importance women attribute to Conservation values.

The more general literature on the impact of parenthood on men and women suggests that parenthood continues, even in the current age of supposed gender equality, to shape the lives of men and women in very different ways. Most pertinent to the present research, parenthood typically reinforces traditional gender roles and behaviours (Baxter, Buchler, Perales, & Western, 2014; Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010). In terms of values, and given that parenthood would be expected to have more of an impact on women (Ferriman et al., 2009; Gouveia et al., 2015; Milfont et al., 2016), this implies that women could be expected to emphasize existing sex differences by shifting further towards the Conservation and Self-Transcendence poles of the two value dimensions (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005; Verkasalo et al., 2009).

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