



Intergenerational association of environmental concern: Evidence of parents' and children's concern



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ABSTRACT

To understand how young people develop environmental concern, this article investigates the relationship between parents' environmental concern and those of their children. Using 2006 survey data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), featuring nationally representative samples from 16 countries, this study provides evidence that parents' environmental concern has an important influence on children's environmental concern. The influence of parents in this realm reflects the parent equivalent socialization hypothesis and applies for both boys and girls. However, girls are more sensitive to the intergenerational association of their mothers and fathers. Informative campaigns about the environment in schools also contribute to increase children's environmental concern. These results offer interesting implications for both research and practice.

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1. Introduction

Human activities have significant effects in terms of degrading the environment and altering ecosystems, and increasing awareness acknowledges both these environmental problems and human responsibility for them (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000; Rodríguez-Barreiro et al., 2013). To protect the natural environment from further degradation, a key goal is to change people's environmental attitudes, defined as psychological evaluations of the natural environment expressed with some degree of favor or disfavor (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010), as well as their behaviors (Boeve-de Pauw & van Petegem, 2010). Analyses of environmental attitudes are widespread in research, because of their likely influence on environmental behaviors, as predicted by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). However, the effects of attitudes tend to be indirect, such that they influence behavioral intentions, which in turn influence behavior.

The growing research into environmental attitudes in recent decades features two broad perspectives. First, some authors investigate possible causal relationships between pro-environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviors

(Kaiser, Oerke, & Bogner, 2007; Kaiser, Wölfing, & Fuhrer, 1999; Levine & Strube, 2012; Ritter, Borchardt, Vaccaro, Pereira, & Almeida, 2015; Rodríguez-Barreiro et al., 2013). Second, some studies focus on explaining differences in environmental attitudes, often by identifying predictors of attitudes and then inferring new ways to influence them (Boeve-de Pauw, 2011; Boeve-de Pauw & van Petegem, 2010; Duarte, Escario, & Sanagustín, 2016; Shen & Saijo, 2008; Zelezny, Chua, & Aldrich, 2000). Whether explicitly or implicitly, such studies predict that attitudes determine behavior, so improving environmental attitudes improves environmental behaviors. Building on this analysis, we explicitly investigate the role of intergenerational associations as determinants of the environmental attitudes of children. With this exploratory study, we test empirically whether parents' environmental attitudes, along with other contextual variables, can predict their children's environmental attitudes. We use nationally representative survey data across several countries and also consider the possible effect of sex patterns on this intergenerational association, such that we investigate whether the related socialization process depends on the sex of either the parent or the child.

In turn, the present study offers an initial investigation of the relationship between parents' environmental concern and the environmental concern of their children using a homogeneous, nationally representative, international sample. The data came from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006 survey, developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). We focus on environmental

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concern because the PISA 2006 contains detailed information about environmental concern, but not about attitudes, among children and one of their parents. In addition, environmental concern is generally considered a close concept to attitude (Rhead, Elliot, & Upham, 2015). Subsequent PISA reports do not include information about parents' environmental concern, so the 2006 surveys are the most recent versions that contain this specific information.

We extend the scarce research focused on the transmission of environmental attitudes from parents to children (Grønhoj & Thøgersen, 2009; Leppänen, Haahla, Lensu, & Kuitunen, 2012; Meeusen, 2014) by considering the specific element of environmental concern and using a homogeneous and representative survey data for several countries; we also investigate how the sex of the parents and their children affect this relationship. Specifically, we evaluate (1) the influence of parents' environmental concern on the environmental concern of their children, (2) whether boys and girls exhibit different levels of environmental concern, (3) whether one sex is more sensitive to the influences of mothers and fathers, (4) whether the influences of fathers and mothers differ depending on the sex of the child, and (5) the influence of school characteristics and family socioeconomic characteristics on environmental concern. With this expansive exploration, we clarify how children's environmental concern builds and how to promote it, which may help increase children's willingness to contribute to environmental solutions (Dunlap & Jones, 2002).

2. Background and hypotheses

2.1. Environmental concern

According to the impressionable years hypothesis, people are highly susceptible to attitude changes during their adolescence and early adulthood, but this susceptibility drops precipitously thereafter and remains low throughout the rest of the person's life (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). If this hypothesis holds, research on attitude development seemingly should focus primarily on adolescents and youth (Meeusen, 2014), for whom family has significant influences on attitude development and formation and education (Noller & Callan, 1991). Therefore, many researchers analyze the intergenerational transmission of various attitudes and behaviors, including political party preferences, religious affiliation (Duriez & Soenens, 2009; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009), education (Mendez, 2015; Remmerswaal, Muris, & Huijding, 2015), tobacco consumption (Escario & Wilkinson, 2015), and well-being (Carlsson, Lampi, Li, & Martinsson, 2014).

Despite such interest in both intergenerational transmission and environmental attitudes, few studies consider their combination, that is, the intergenerational transmission of environmental attitudes (cf. Grønhoj & Thøgersen, 2009; Leppänen et al., 2012; Meeusen, 2014). We seek to address this gap by investigating environmental concern, which in Meeusen's (2014) terminology represents a postmaterialist attitude, in the sense that this is a concern that moves beyond simply economic or physical security issues. Dunlap and Jones (2002) regard environmental concern as a broad concept, reflecting the degree to which people are aware of environmental problems, support efforts to solve the problems, and are willing to contribute personally to the solution. Despite some different perspectives on environmental concerns and attitudes in previous literature, environmental concern generally is regarded as attitudinal (Rhead et al., 2015; Vining & Ebreo, 1992), which makes it an appropriate variable for the current study.

2.2. Intergenerational association of environmental concern

Children's concern about environmental issues could be

influenced by their parents' opinions and behaviors. If intergenerational transmission occurs, some similarity arises in the values, attitudes, and behaviors expressed by parents and their children (Grønhoj & Thøgersen, 2009). Younger people have less stable beliefs and are more susceptible to others' messages (Hess, 1994; Sears, 1986); the strongest influence comes from their close reference groups, such as their immediate family (Sancho, Miguel, & Aldás, 2011). As a reference group, parents generally have more experience with and knowledge about environmental issues, so they can influence their children's beliefs and behaviors, largely through their own routines. This influence might reflect an internalization of information from relevant sources (e.g., observing parents' behaviors, communication within the family) or a need to comply with parents' expectations (Belanche, Casalo, & Flavián, 2012). Grønhoj and Thøgersen (2009) affirm that specific pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors are positively correlated between parents and children. Therefore, we propose:

H1. Parents' environmental concern is positively associated with children's environmental concern.

2.3. Role of parents' and children's sex

Previous studies suggest that although men usually show a greater knowledge about environmental problems (e.g. Schahn & Holzer, 1990), women exhibit stronger environmental concerns, attitudes, and behaviors than men (e.g., Arcury & Christianson, 1990; Arnocky & Stroink, 2010; Maineri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, & Oskamp, 1997). This distinction may be explained due to sex differences in terms of personality traits, roles, and socialization (Zelezny et al., 2000), including the greater levels of emotional empathy among women (Arnocky & Stroink, 2010). Sex differences may also appear in personality traits, starting in early childhood (Else-Quest, Hyde, Goldsmith, & Van Hulle, 2006) and persisting throughout adolescence (Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999) and adulthood (Feingold, 1994). Specifically, women appear to be more tender-minded and agreeable and less risk-taking than men (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999; Feingold, 1994; Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008). Other values linked to femininity include caring for others and quality of life (Belanche, Casalo, & Guinaliu, 2015), and women are also socialized to value the needs of others (Zelezny et al., 2000), such that they often show more helping behavior and altruism (Rand, Brescoll, Everett, Capraro, & Barcelo, 2016). Compared with men, women exhibit a stronger ethic of care and are more socialized to be other-oriented and socially responsible, which may motivate them to be more worried about environmental issues and develop greater environmental concern than men (Zelezny et al., 2000). Taking all these factors into account, we propose:

H2. Children's environmental concern is greater among girls than among boys.

In addition, men and women may process information differently (e.g. Wolin, 2003). In this line, in a meta-analysis of 148 studies, Eagly and Carli (1981) found that women are slightly more persuadable than men are. This may be explained by the fact that whereas men tend to be more assertive (Schmitt et al., 2008), women consider others' opinions and social information to a greater extent (Sun & Zhang, 2006; Venkatesh & Morris, 2000), potentially because women are more oriented toward social relationships and motivated by affiliation needs (Belanche et al., 2012; Eagly & Carli, 1981; Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). As Guadagno and Cialdini (2002) note, while men often attempt to demonstrate one's independence from others (for example, through assertiveness in their interactions); women are more

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