



Value transmissions between parents and children: Gender and developmental phase as transmission belts

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A B S T R A C T

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This study applied the gender role model of socialization theory, the developmental aging theory, and the topic salience perspective to the investigation of parent–child value transmissions. Specifically, we examined whether the bi-directionality and selectivity of value transmissions differed as a function of parents' and children's gender and children's developmental phase (adolescence versus emerging adulthood). Transmissions between parents and children from 402 Dutch families on the topics of work as duty and hedonism were studied across a 5-year period using structural equation modeling. As expected, we did not find convincing support for the general models of gender socialization and developmental aging. Instead, parent–child value transmissions appeared to be qualified by value salience. Particularly, high salience of work as duty for fathers was related with great paternal involvement in transmissions on this value orientation and high salience of hedonism for sons and adolescents was linked to transmissions from these groups to parents.

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Parent–child value transmissions appear to be complex, bi-directional and selective processes channeling through various pathways or transmission belts (Kohn, 1983). In order to elucidate how and when value transmissions across generations occur, research needs to take into account these components. The goal of the present study is to investigate bi-directional parent–child transmissions across value domains examining the influence of two basic individual characteristics that should play a prominent role as transmission belts (Schönpflug, 2001): parents' and children's gender and children's developmental phase. Thus far, the influence of both gender and developmental phase on parent–child value transmissions is mainly approached in terms of general processes without drawing a distinction between different value types or domains (e.g., Glass, Bengtson, & Dunham, 1986; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 1999). However, not only may the *transmission process* be gendered and related to children's developmental stage, but in addition, *values* may be gendered (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005) and related to children's developmental stage (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004) influencing transmission patterns among parents and children. We use the salience perspective (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004) to guide our predictions as to how gender and developmental phase serve to facilitate parent–child transmission processes on these value orientations down and up the generational ladder.

The present study examines value transmission processes among Dutch parents and adolescent and emerging adult children across a 5-year period focusing on two social–cultural value orientations tapping rather contrary areas, namely

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work as duty and hedonism (Felling, Peters, & Schreuder, 1983; Felling, Peters, Schreuder, Eisinga, & Scheepers, 1987). Work as duty captures the valuation of the importance and enjoyment to work hard and of working as a generally accepted part of life for everyone, while hedonism captures the valuation of the pursuit of having fun and pleasure in one's life, experiencing new things, and eating and drinking well. These two value orientations are derived from the work of Felling et al. (1983, 1987), Dutch sociologists, who attempted to map out which value complexes became less or more dominant in the Dutch culture at the end of the 20th century. They verified the assumptions (e.g., Inglehart, 1977; Middendorp, 1979) that traditional and work orientations became less important in favour of individualistic and hedonistic orientations.

Gender of parents and children

The first aim of this study is to investigate the influence of the parent–child gender constellation on parent–child value transmissions. According to gender schema theory (Bem, 1985), people learn and internalize society's cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness in early childhood. The influence of gender is often expressed when both the gender of the parent and child are considered (Maccoby, 1990; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003). The dominant theory regarding the influence of gender in value transmissions among parents and children is the sex role model of socialization that stresses that fathers transmit their values mostly to their sons and mothers mostly to their daughters (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 1999). Thus, more parent-to-child value transmissions are expected to take place within same-sex compared to cross-sex dyads. Consistent with this, adolescent boys and girls appear to identify more with their same-sex parent than with their opposite-sex parent (Starrels, 1994).

We located only one longitudinal study that examined the influence of gender constellation on value transmissions between parents and children (Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 1999). Using a Dutch sample across a 3-year period, Vollebergh, Iedema, and Raaijmakers (1999) found same-gender parent–child bi-directional transmissions on the valuation of alternative forms of family life (cultural conservatism), whereas gender constellation did not play a consistent role for the transmission on the valuation of equality of income, status, and possession (economic conservatism). Cross-sectional studies examining the role of gender in value similarity have found mixed results with some studies reporting more value similarities for same-sex compared to opposite-sex parent–child relations (Boehnke, Ittel, & Baier, 2002), while others found no effect of gender (Boehnke, 2001; Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988) or only found same-sex similarities for father–son relations (Kulik, 2002). The lack of consistency across studies suggests that there may be moderators of this effect and as noted by Vollebergh, Iedema, and Raaijmakers (1999), the content of the value or attitude under investigation may play a role. The salience of the topic may be particularly important in understanding whether values are sent, received, and most importantly, successfully transmitted.

Gender and value salience

According to the salience hypothesis, parents or children transmit values to each other that are salient to them (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004). Early to mid adolescents appeared to influence their parents on the importance of the usefulness of technological innovations, beliefs regarding traditional ways of life, and belief in God, while they did not influence their parents on the importance of work and a strong national defence (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004). Pinquart and Silbereisen (2004) argue that the former three topics are more salient for the adolescents than the latter two. Therefore, the adolescents may show more related behaviors thereby more concretely 'communicating' their values and attitudes to their parents which might trigger parents to change their values. As an additional condition, parents may have to regard their children as 'experts' on the topic making them more willing to accept their children's values (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004). The salience of specific values may be gender-related due to social–structural processes (e.g., the division of labor and prevalence of patriarchy in society) in combination with individual social-interactive (e.g., experience of gender-typed practices) and cognitive–motivational processes (e.g., formation of gender schemas during childhood), and biological processes (e.g., women physically bear children) (Leaper & Friedman, 2007).

In the Netherlands, a general trend toward less traditionalism and more individualism and permissiveness took place in the last decennia of the 20th century (Felling, Peters, & Scheepers, 2000; SCP, 1998). Men and women did not keep pace with each other, however. Whereas gender differences were not found in the seventies, at the beginning of the nineties, women appeared to be less traditional on cultural orientations regarding life styles and male–female role models than men (Vollebergh, Iedema, & Meeus, 1999), even when gender differences in social positions were controlled. Consistent with this finding, studies on values among youth in the Netherlands showed that girls are less traditional on comparable value orientations than boys (e.g., Raaijmakers, 1993). The general increased acceptance of emancipation for women (SCP, 1998) may be related to this development. However, by the end of the 20th century, men continued to be the primary breadwinner, while women had no or a part-time job and mainly cared for the children (SCP, 2000). Furthermore, congruent with findings in other Western countries, a recent investigation in the Netherlands found that men attribute more importance to power, achievement, and hedonism compared to women, whereas women value benevolence, universalism, and tradition more so than men (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). Based on the salience of values in the current Dutch society and in light of gender differences reviewed above, we expect more father–son transmissions than mother–daughter transmissions on work as duty and hedonism as these value orientations tend to be more male specific.

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