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What is This?
Intersubjective Model of Value Transmission: Parents Using Perceived Norms as Reference When Socializing Children

Kim-Pong Tam1, Sau-Lai Lee2, Young-Hoon Kim3, Yanmei Li4, and Melody Manchi Chao1

Abstract
What values do parents want to transmit to children? The intersubjective model of value transmission posits that parents want to transmit not only the values they personally endorse but also the values they perceive to be normatively important in the society. The present research shows support to this premise. Furthermore, Studies 1 and 2 revealed that the use of perceived norms is moderated by families’ social contexts and parents’ personality: It was particularly pronounced among parents who were immigrants, who had a stronger need for closure, and who were more conforming. In addition, Studies 3 and 4 demonstrated that parents’ perceived norms can explain actual value transmission: Values parents perceived to be normatively important were to some extent internalized by children. The intersubjective model paves some new directions for value transmission research, contributes to the understanding of cultural transmission and cultural change, and extends the intersubjective approach to culture.

Keywords
value transmission, perceived norms, immigrant, need for closure, conformity, intersubjective approach

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[Socialization] practices can be seen as preparations for children’s successful entry into society . . . parents’ understanding of society is essential to their practices and beliefs and gives them a definable goal beyond personal preference or children’s well-being.

Youniss (1994, p. 37)

Values are broad, desirable goals that serve as guiding principles in people’s lives (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Family is a crucial context in which children’s value development takes place (Rohan & Zanna, 1996). Researchers are therefore interested in this question: What values do parents want to transmit to children? A handy answer is that parents prefer values they personally endorse (e.g., Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). However, as the opening quote expresses, parents may also use their understanding of society to guide their socialization practices. To capture this psychological process, the present research proposes the intersubjective model of value transmission. The basic premise of this model is that parents want to transmit to children not only the values they personally endorse but also the values they perceive to be normatively important in the society. The present research provides supportive evidence for this premise as well as two extensions: (a) The use of perceived norms is moderated by families’ social contexts and parents’ personality and (b) the values parents perceive to be normatively important explain not only their socialization practices but also children’s value internalization.

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The “Fax Model”

Extant research has demonstrated similarity between the value profiles of parents and children (e.g., Schönpfügl, 2001; Taris, 2000). For example, Rohan and Zanna (1996) found a moderate correlation between parents’ and children’s values (average $r = .54$). Some other studies have shown that parents’ socialization values (values they want their children to endorse) are strongly correlated with their personal values (e.g., Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). In one study, this correlation exceeded .70 (Knafo & Schwartz, 2001). Apparently, parents want their children to acquire values they personally endorse, and their children to some extent internalize these values.

The above view of value transmission can be described as the “fax model” (Strauss, 1992), as it implies that parents want to transmit a full copy of their own values, presumably a product of their own socialization history, to their children. Nevertheless, parents do not always consider complete acceptance of their own values by their children as necessary (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000). Sometimes, parents even want to differentiate their own values from their socialization values to help their children adapt to society (Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997; Youniss, 1994). In all, parents’ personal values alone cannot fully explain their socialization practices.

The Intersubjective Model of Value Transmission

In response to the aforementioned problem, the intersubjective model of value transmission is proposed. Its basic premise is that parents want to transmit not only their personal values but also the values they perceive to be normatively important. This view has two theoretical bases. The first one concerns the meaning of socialization. Socialization is a process through which individuals are inculcated with a society’s values and thereby become its adaptive members (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997). Parents understand that they need to prepare their children for social life as it exists now and in the future (Alwin, 1988). By definition, parents must consider what is widely regarded as important in the culture they envision to be relevant to their children’s eventual adaptation (Youniss, 1994).

The second basis concerns the role of norms in people’s behavior. Social psychology has demonstrated that norms are major drivers of behavior (e.g., Asch, 1951; Ajzen, 1991). As pointed out by Rokeach (1973), the meanings of values reside not only in what people believe personally but also in what they impute to other society members. People’s perceived norms can be different from actual norms (Prentice & Miller, 1993; Wan et al., 2007), and individuals’ private attitudes and perceived norms have reliable, independent influence on behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The role of perceived norms is further elaborated in recent research on culture. Culture is often conceptualized as internalized values (e.g., individualism), and cultural influence on behavior is often assumed to operate through these values (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, and Wan (2010) recently proposed an alternative view—the intersubjective approach (see also Wan et al., 2007; Wan, Tam, & Chiu, 2010). According to this approach, cultural members do not always passively internalize cultural values; they sometimes actively construct and share knowledge of what is widespread in the culture. This knowledge is referred to as intersubjective perceptions (Chiu et al., 2010). Cultural members’ behavior is guided by their internalized values as well as their intersubjective perceptions (Chiu et al., 2010). A number of studies have shown support to this view (e.g., Shteynberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009; Tam & Lee, 2010). For instance, Zou et al. (2009) found that Polish and American participants’ perceptions of normative collectivism in their society, but not their personal collectivism, explained their compliance with different persuasion strategies.

With the two bases discussed, the intersubjective model of value transmission posits that parents refer to their personal values and perceived normative values when designing socialization practices. The present research’s primary objective is to test this basic premise. Another objective is to test two extensions of the intersubjective model.

Extension 1: When Are Perceived Normative Values More Important?

The first extension concerns the identification of factors that moderate the use of perceived normative values. The intersubjective model assumes that parents want to help their children internalize societal values and thereby function adaptively (Alwin, 1988; Grolnick et al., 1997; Youniss, 1994). If this goal is particularly salient in some social contexts, then it should be expected that the influence of perceived normative values be more pronounced in those families situated in these contexts. Immigation could be one of these contexts. Inkeles (1955) suggested that immigrant parents need to switch their frame of reference to adapt to a new social environment. Compared with native families, immigrant families usually experience stronger, more pressing concern about adapting to the host culture (Phalet & Schönpfügl, 2001; Youniss, 1994). Accordingly, the goal of helping children internalize societal values should be particularly strong for immigrant parents (Inkeles, 1955), as some studies have shown. For instance, Nauk (1989) reported that after immigration, socialization practices of Turkish parents in Germany shifted quickly toward the norms in German society, and those of Croatian parents in the United States shifted toward the American norms. Immigrant parents may even negate themselves to promote the values in the host culture. For example, Cooper (1994) reported that some immigrant Mexican American parents, understanding that achievement and success is important to the culture and their
children’s future, even used themselves as negative examples. In all, it is hypothesized that perceptions of the host culture’s norms are stronger determinants of socialization values among immigrant parents than nonimmigrant parents. This will be tested in Study 1.

Apart from a family’s immigration status, another factor that may moderate the use of perceived norms is parents’ tendency to adhere to norms. One source of variation in this tendency is parents’ epistemic need. Past studies have shown that some individuals are less tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity, and thus have a stronger desire for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 2004; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). For these individuals, intersubjective perceptions can provide the closure they need because these perceptions have high consensual validity and can, therefore, provide behavioral guidance and predictability (Chiu et al., 2010). As such, need for closure affects the tendency to follow cultural norms (Chao & Chiu, 2011), as past studies have demonstrated. For instance, Chiu, Morris, Hong, and Menon (2000) found that individuals with a stronger need for closure are more likely to exhibit the attribution bias typical in the culture. Similarly, Chao, Zhang, and Chiu (2010) showed that need for closure was positively associated with adherence to perceived American norms when participants were responding to conflicts in the United States, and adherence to perceived Chinese norms when they were responding to conflicts in China (see also Fu et al., 2007). Because parenting is generally rife with uncertainty and stressors (Crick & Acevedo, 1995), for parents with a strong need for closure, perceived normative values should be particularly useful. Thus, it is hypothesized that perceived normative values are stronger determinants of socialization values among parents with a stronger need for closure. This will be tested in Study 1.

Another source of variation in parents’ tendency of norm adherence is their conformity disposition. Some individuals are more prone than others to the influence of norms because they are more willing “to identify with others and emulate them, [and] to give in to others so as to avoid negative interactions” (Mehrabian, 2005, p. 2). This willingness, or dispositional conformity, predicts individuals’ attitudes and behavior. For instance, more conforming individuals are more receptive to socialization values. These links will be tested in all four studies. The second extension concerns the utility of the intersubjective model in explaining children’s value internalization. If this model is intended for explaining the whole value transmission process, then it has to be able to explain children’s value internalization as well.

There is a reason to expect that parents’ perceived normative values are to some extent internalized by their children. Past studies have shown that parents’ socialization values predict children’s personal values (e.g., Knafo & Schwartz, 2001; Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). This implies that values parents want to transmit are indeed to some degree accepted by children. Accordingly, if parents want to transmit normatively important values, then these values should also predict children’s personal values, with parents’ socialization values mediating this association. This will be tested in Studies 3 and 4.

Overview

Figure 1 summarizes the basic premise and the two extensions of the intersubjective model of value transmission. To reiterate, the basic premise states that both personal values and perceived normative values predict parents’ socialization values. These links will be tested in all four studies. The first extension states that the use of perceived normative values (and personal values) is moderated by families’ immigration status, and parents’ need for closure and dispositional conformity. These effects will be tested in Studies 1 and 2. The second extension states that parents’ perceived normative values also predict children’s personal values, with parents’ socialization values as the mediator. This is Studies 3 and 4.

It is necessary to check the cross-cultural validity of the intersubjective model because past studies have shown that receptiveness to the influence of norms is stronger in collectivist societies than individualist societies (Bond & Smith, 1996). Accordingly, samples from individualist and
collectivist societies (the United States, and Hong Kong and Singapore, respectively; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002) will be used.

**Study I**

**Method**

A total of 149 parents in Hong Kong participated. All participants were ethnically Chinese whose children were studying in junior grades in secondary school. Only mothers were recruited because maternal care is usually more significant than paternal care (Geary, 1998). Eligible parents were contacted through three schools and four social service agencies, which serve immigrants and locals. Parents who showed interest in participating received a questionnaire from a schoolteacher or agency officer and returned it through mail.

The participants’ age ranged from 32 to 59 years ($M = 41.86$ and $SD = 4.66$ years). The number of children they had ranged from one to five ($M = 2.22$ and $SD = 0.80$). Five participants (3.4%) reported having received no formal education, 32 (21.5%) reported completion of elementary school, 89 (59.7%) reported completion of secondary school, 5 (3.4%) reported holding a bachelor’s degree, and 1 (0.7%) reported having postgraduate education. Seventeen participants (11.4%) did not report education level.

Overall, 32 participants (21.1%) were born locally in Hong Kong, and 117 participants (77.0%) were born in mainland China. The length of their residence in Hong Kong ranged from 0.25 to 57 years ($M = 15.38$ and $SD = 15.30$ years). Seven participants who were born in mainland China immigrated into Hong Kong during their childhood and had been living in Hong Kong since. Following the procedures in some previous studies (e.g., Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003), these participants were considered to be nonimmigrants because they had spent the most formative period of their social development and received their formal education in Hong Kong. Only mainland China–born participants who immigrated into Hong Kong during adulthood (after age 18) were considered to be immigrants. With this categorization, 39 participants were nonimmigrants, and 110 were immigrants.

Participants completed the following measures in Chinese. They were presented with a shortened, 28-item version of the Schwartz Value Questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992). Selection of items was based on the study by Bernard, Gebauer, and Maio (2006). Participants reported their personal values (“How much do you endorse each of the following values?”), their perception of the normative importance of these values (“In your estimation, how much would an average Hongkonger endorse each of the following values?”), and how much they wanted their children to endorse these values (“How would you want your children to endorse each of the following values?”). Order of these three questions was randomized. Participants provided their answers on an 8-point scale (0 = *not important at all* to 7 = *very important*). Participants also completed the Need for Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). To avoid participants’ fatigue, a shortened, 15-item version was used: Three items with the highest factor loadings from each of the five facets in the original 42-item scale were adopted (see Roets & Van Hiel, 2011, for a similar item selection method). Sample items include “I tend to struggle with most decisions” and “I dislike unpredictable situations.” Participants answered on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). This shortened scale was reliable in the present study ($\alpha = .70$).

**Results and Discussion**

Because each participant’s value profiles were nested within person, the multilevel analytic approach was used. Level 1 units were values and Level 2 units were participants. No centering was used for Level 1 predictors (because the number 0 was meaningful), and grand centering was used for Level 2 predictors.

A random-coefficient model was constructed to test overall if participants’ personal values and perceived normative values predicted socialization values. The Level 1 equation contained personal values and perceived normative values as predictors. In Level 2, no predictor was included, and the intercepts and the slopes of personal values and perceived normative values were allowed to vary randomly. This model revealed a significant slope of personal values, $B = .41$, $SE = .02$, $t(145) = 19.20$, $p < .001$, and a significant slope of perceived normative values, $B = .10$, $SE = .02$, $t(145) = 5.03$, $p < .001$.

A slopes-as-outcomes model was constructed to explore whether participants’ age, education level, and number of children moderated the effects of personal values and perceived normative values. These variables were included as predictors in the Level 2 equations for the slopes of personal values and perceived normative values. This analysis revealed only significant effects of education level on the slope of personal values, $B = .06$, $SE = .02$, $t(127) = 2.65$, $p < .01$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = -.07$, $SE = .03$, $t(127) = -2.63$, $p < .01$.

To examine whether participants’ immigrant status and need for closure moderated the effects of personal values and perceived normative values, another slopes-as-outcomes model was constructed. Immigrant status was dummy coded (0 = *nonimmigrants* and 1 = *immigrants*). Education level was included as a control variable. Immigrant status had significant effects on the slope of personal values, $B = -.06$, $SE = .03$, $t(125) = -1.92$, $p = .05$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = .07$, $SE = .03$, $t(125) = 1.99$, $p < .05$. Need for closure had a marginally significant effect on the slope of personal values, $B = -.05$, $SE = .03$, $t(125) = -1.78$, $p = .07$, and a significant effect on the slope of perceived normative values, $B = .10$, $SE = .02$, $t(125) = 2.54$. The significant effects of immigrant status and need for closure on the slopes of personal values and perceived normative values are discussed below.
values, $B = .07$, $SE = .03$, $t(125) = 2.26$, $p < .05$. Education level still had significant effects on the slope of personal values, $B = .05$, $SE = .02$, $t(125) = 2.00$, $p < .05$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = -.06$, $SE = .03$, $t(125) = -2.26$, $p < .05$.³

As hypothesized, Hong Kong Chinese parents refer to both their personal values and perceived normative values (though to a smaller extent) in constructing their socialization values. As predicted, perceived normative values (personal values) are stronger (weaker) determinants of socialization values for immigrant parents and parents with a stronger need for closure. In addition, more educated parents refer to perceived normative values (personal values) to a smaller (larger) extent than do less educated parents.

Study 2

Method

To explore whether parents’ gender matters, mothers and fathers were recruited in Study 2. Eighty-nine parents (30 men, 59 women) residing in the United States participated through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk.⁴ Their age ranged from 18 to 56 years ($M = 33.52$ and $SD = 9.39$ years). The number of children they had ranged from one to six ($M = 1.85$ and $SD = 1.13$). For each parent who had more than one child, the average age of children was computed. Across all participants, the average age of children ranged from 0 to 30 years ($M = 7.87$ and $SD = 6.69$ years). All participants reported that they had completed high school at least. Among them, 36 participants (40.4%) had studied some college, 25 (28.1%) had a bachelor’s degree, and 9 (10.1%) had postgraduate education or above. Sixty-eight participants (76.4%) reported that they were Caucasian. Among the remaining, 5 (5.6%) were African Americans, 4 (4.5%) were Asian Americans, and 8 (8.9%) were Hispanic Americans. Four participants (4.5%) did not report their ethnicity.

Only six participants (6.7%) reported being born outside the United States. Length of residence in the United States ranged from 2 to 56 years, but the distribution was skewed to the left ($M = 32.15$ and $SD = 10.82$ years). Among the six participants born foreign, three immigrated into the United States before age 2, and three did so after age 18. Taken together, there were just a few immigrants. The effect of immigrant status would therefore not be tested.

Participants completed the following measures. The value measures were identical to those in Study 1, except that an average American was used instead as the referential target in the question about perceived normative values. Participants also completed the 11-item Conformity Scale (Mehrabian & Stefl, 1995). Sample items include “I often rely on, and act upon, the advice of others” and “I am more independent than conforming in my ways.” Participants responded on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This scale showed internal consistency and construct validity (e.g., negative correlation with dominance, positive correlation with internalization of social norms) in past studies (Mehrabian & Stefl, 1995; Vartanian & Hopkinson, 2010). This scale was reliable in the present study ($α = .77$).

Results and Discussion

Because participants’ ethnicity did not moderate the effect of any predictor, it was collapsed in the following analyses.⁵ As in Study 1, the multilevel analytic approach was adopted.

A random-coefficient model revealed a significant slope of personal values, $B = .61$, $SE = .04$, $t(88) = 16.58$, $p < .001$, and a significant slope of perceived normative values, $B = .08$, $SE = .03$, $t(88) = 2.23$, $p < .05$. A slopes-as-outcomes model exploring the effects of participants’ gender, age, education level, number of children, and age of children revealed only significant effects of education level on the slope of personal values, $B = .08$, $SE = .03$, $t(83) = 2.82$, $p < .01$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = -.08$, $SE = .03$, $t(83) = -2.63$, $p < .05$.

To examine whether participants’ dispositional conformity moderated the effects of personal values and perceived normative values, another slopes-as-outcomes model (with education included as a control variable) was performed. This model revealed significant effects of dispositional conformity on the slope of personal values, $B = -.09$, $SE = .04$, $t(86) = -2.23$, $p < .05$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = .09$, $SE = .04$, $t(86) = 2.27$, $p < .05$. Education level still had significant effects on the slope of personal values, $B = .08$, $SE = .03$, $t(86) = 2.84$, $p < .01$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = -.07$, $SE = .03$, $t(86) = -2.62$, $p < .05$.

As hypothesized, American parents refer to both their personal values and perceived normative values (though to a smaller extent) in designing their socialization values. In addition, as predicted, perceived normative values (personal values) are stronger (weaker) determinants of socialization values for more conforming parents. The effects of education level identified in Study 1 were also found.

Studies 1 and 2 together evidenced the validity of the basic premise of the intersubjective model: Parents want to transmit normatively important values to their children. In addition, these studies demonstrated that the influence of perceived normative values is moderated by families’ immigrant status, and parents’ need for closure and dispositional conformity. Moreover, as expected, these factors moderate the influence of parents’ personal values in the opposite direction. Studies 3 and 4 turn to the second extension: Are values parents perceive to be normatively important transmitted to children?

Study 3

Method

Eighty mother–daughter dyads in Singapore participated. The mothers’ data came from an earlier study (Tam & Lee,
The daughters’ data were collected subsequently. The mothers’ age ranged from 38 to 60 years ($M = 48.20, SD = 5.41$ years). The daughters’ age ranged from 18 to 22 years ($M = 19.43, SD = 0.98$ years). Four mothers (5.0%) reported having received no formal education. Among the remaining, 11 (13.8%) had completed primary school, 45 (56.2%) had completed secondary school, 11 (13.8%) reported holding a bachelor’s degree, and 6 (7.5%) had postgraduate education. Three mothers (3.8%) did not report education level.

Only six mothers (7.4%) reported being born outside Singapore. Length of residence in Singapore ranged from 12 to 60 years, but the distribution was skewed to the left ($M = 47.03$ and $SD = 7.72$ years). Among the six participants born foreign, only three immigrated into Singapore after age 18. The effect of immigrant status would therefore not be tested.

The mothers completed the full, 56-item version of the Schwartz Value Questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992) thrice. The questions used were identical to those in Study 1, except that an average Singaporean was used instead as the referential target in the question about perceived normative values. The daughters reported their personal values only.

### Results and Discussion

The multilevel analytic approach, with mediation testing, was used. Previous research has given no preference to a specific centering method in testing multilevel mediation. However, Zhang, Zyphur, and Preacher (2009) showed that grand mean centering or no centering may produce confounded estimates. In light of this, following the suggestion by Zhang et al. (2009), group-mean centering with the substracted means reintroduced into the Level 2 intercept equation was used.

A random-coefficient model using parents’ socialization values as the outcome variable revealed a significant slope of personal values, $B = .40, SE = .03$, $t(77) = 15.31, p < .001$, and a significant slope of perceived normative values, $B = .11, SE = .03$, $t(77) = 4.30, p < .001$. A similar model using children’s personal values as the outcome variable instead also revealed a significant slope of personal values, $B = .33, SE = .03$, $t(77) = 12.60, p < .001$, and a significant slope of perceived normative values, $B = .08, SE = .02$, $t(77) = 3.68, p = .001$. A slopes-as-outcomes model constructed to explore the effects of participants’ age and education level revealed no significant result.

Baron and Kenny’s (1986) procedures were followed to test whether parents’ socialization values mediated the effects of their personal values and perceived normative values on children’s personal values. The models reported already fulfilled the first two steps of these procedures. The last step was a model in which antecedents and the mediator were included as predictors. This model revealed a significant slope of socialization values, $B = .22, SE = .03$, $t(77) = 7.36, p < .001$. The slope of parents’ personal values was smaller than before, though still significant, $B = .24, SE = .03, t(77) = 8.92, p < .001$. The same was true for perceived normative values, $B = .05, SE = .02$, $t(77) = 2.89, p < .01$. Sobel tests revealed that socialization values significantly mediated the effect of personal values, $Z = 6.63, p < .001$, and that of perceived normative values, $Z = 3.71, p < .001$.

As hypothesized, Singaporean Chinese parents’ perceived normative values predict their children’s personal values, and this effect is mediated by parents’ socialization values. These findings suggest that parents want to transmit normatively important values to children, and to some extent, these values are indeed internalized by children.

One may question whether the association between parents’ perceived normative values (and personal values) and socialization values reported earlier was inflated by common method bias (Doty & Glick, 1998). However, that this association was moderated by immigrant status, need for closure, and dispositional conformity indicates that this association is psychologically meaningful (unless one assumes that immigrants or individuals with stronger need for closure or dispositional conformity are more susceptible to common method bias). Yet, one way to more directly rule out common method bias is to collect data for the same construct from multiple informants, and examine whether the hypothesized relationships concerning this construct are consistent across the data from different informants (Doty & Glick, 1998; Van Bruggen, Lilien & Kacker, 2002). Accordingly, Study 4 replicated Study 3 but operationalized socialization values by parents’ self-report and children’s perception (see Knafo & Schwartz, 2001; Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988).

Most previous socialization studies opted for using same-sex parent–child dyads (e.g., Phalet & Schönpflug, 2001; Schönpflug, 2001). In Study 3, only mother–daughter dyads were used. For robustness check, Study 4 used male and female same-sex parent–child dyads.

### Study 4

#### Method

Sixty-nine parent–child dyads (22 father–son dyads, 47 mother–daughter dyads) in Hong Kong participated. The parents’ age ranged from 40 to 68 years ($M = 51.22, SD = 5.62$ years). The children’s age ranged from 19 to 24 years ($M = 21.06, SD = 1.43$ years). One parent (1.4%) reported having received no formal education. Among the remaining, 19 (27.5%) had completed primary school, 41 (59.4%) had completed secondary school, 6 (8.7%) reported holding a bachelor’s degree, and 1 (1.4%) had studied graduate school. One parent (1.4%) did not report education level.

Thirty-six parents (52.2%) reported being born outside Hong Kong (all were born in mainland China). Length of residence in Hong Kong ranged from 7 to 62 years, but the distribution was skewed to the left ($M = 37.76$ and $SD = 13.72$ years). Among the participants born foreign, only three immigrated into Hong Kong after age 18. The effect of immigrant status would therefore not be tested.
The measures used were identical to those in Study 3, except that an average Hongkonger was used instead as the referential target in the question about perceived normative values. Apart from personal values, children participants also reported their perception of the socialization values by their same-sex parent (“In your estimation, how much would your mother/father want you to endorse each of the following values?”).

Results and Discussion

A random-coefficient model with parents’ self-reported socialization values as the outcome variable revealed a significant effect of personal values, $B = .33$, $SE = .03$, $t(67) = 11.81$, $p < .001$, and a significant effect of perceived normative values, $B = .10$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 4.29$, $p < .001$. A similar pattern was found with children’s perceived socialization values as the outcome variable instead: Parents’ personal values, $B = .31$, $SE = .03$, $t(67) = 9.61$, $p < .001$, and perceived normative values, $B = .10$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 4.38$, $p < .001$, were significant. In addition, the same pattern was found in a model with children’s personal values as the outcome variable: Parents’ personal values, $B = .22$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 11.40$, $p < .001$, and perceived normative values, $B = .16$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 7.28$, $p < .001$, were significant. A slopes-as-outcomes model exploring the effects of participants’ age, gender, and education level revealed no significant result.

Baron and Kenny’s (1986) procedures were followed to test whether parents’ socialization values were the mediator. The models reported already fulfilled the first two steps of these procedures. The last model using parents’ self-reported socialization values as the mediator revealed a significant effect of socialization values, $B = .26$, $SE = .03$, $t(67) = 8.67$, $p < .001$. The slope of parents’ personal values was smaller than before, though still significant, $B = .13$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 7.67$, $p < .001$, and the same was true for perceived normative values, $B = .12$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 6.52$, $p < .001$. Sobel tests revealed that parents’ self-reported socialization values significantly mediated the effects of personal values, $Z = 6.99$, $p < .001$, and perceived normative values, $Z = 3.85$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the model using children’s perceived socialization values as the mediator revealed a significant effect of socialization values, $B = .29$, $SE = .03$, $t(67) = 10.13$, $p < .001$. The slope of parents’ personal values was smaller than before, though still significant, $B = .14$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 8.71$, $p < .001$, and the same was true for perceived normative values, $B = .12$, $SE = .02$, $t(67) = 6.05$, $p < .001$. Sobel tests revealed that parents’ socialization values significantly mediated the effects of personal values, $Z = 6.93$, $p < .001$, and perceived normative values, $Z = 4.00$, $p < .001$.

Implications for Value Transmission Research

Some researchers have called for attention to the role of societal factors in familial value transmission (Knafo, 2003; Kuczynski et al., 1997). In addition, some have argued for the need to emphasize parents’ understanding of society in research on parental practices (Youniss, 1994). The intersubjective model of value transmission responds to these calls by showing how societal factors and parents’ understanding of society can be conceptualized and operationalized in empirical studies.
The intersubjective model opens some new pathways for future value transmission research. For example, it offers a new angle to understanding what constitutes effective value transmission. Existing research tends to consider low levels of parent–child value similarity to be proof of failed value transmission (Knafo, 2003; Schönspflug, 2001). Some studies have, therefore, attempted to identify factors that enhance transmission efficiency. Some of these factors include parent–child relationship quality (Taris, 2000), family environment (Roset, Dubas, & Gerris, 2009), and parenting style (Rohan & Zanna, 1996; Schönspflug, 2001). The intersubjective model offers a different conceptualization of transmission effectiveness. Going beyond the “fax model,” it implicates that parents’ influence on children’s value development does not necessarily manifest in how successful they are in transmitting a full copy of their own values; it can also manifest in how competent they are in understanding the prevailing values in the society and helping their children be inculcated with these values. Future studies should investigate whether transmission effectiveness conceptualized this way affects familial or individual adjustment outcomes. Given that parenting practices can have significant impact on children’s social adjustment (e.g., Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000), it is possible that the more competently a parent perceives cultural norms and transmits values accordingly, the less culturally estranged and more socially adjusted his or her child will become.

The intersubjective model may be able to contribute to explaining cross-cultural differences in socialization values too (e.g., Baer, Curtis, Grabb, & Johnston, 1996). From the cultural self-perspective (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), such differences are rooted in the cross-cultural differences in parents’ internalized values. However, according to the intersubjective model, such differences could also be explained by the cross-cultural differences in parents’ perceptions of what is widespread in the culture. This possibility is subject to future investigation.

**Implications for Understanding Cultural Transmission and Cultural Change**

Parent-to-child value transmission can be considered as a channel of cultural transmission (e.g., Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982; Schönspflug, 2001). In the universe of ideas in a culture, which ideas are selected to be transmitted? Viewed from the cultural self-perspective (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), those ideas people have internalized are transmitted. This is consistent with the basic assumption in the “fax model” (Strauss, 1992). However, the intersubjective model of value transmission offers a novel perspective: Some cultural ideas, even though they are not widely internalized, may still be selected for transmission because they are commonly perceived to be widespread in the culture. Future research may examine the validity of this perspective in explaining other socialization agents’ practices. For instance, do schoolteachers design school curricula in accordance with their understanding of societal norms?

The intersubjective model also offers a different angle in understanding cultural change. Intergenerational transmission is often considered to be nonresponsive to environmental variability (Laland, 1993) because when it is efficient, there will be hardly any difference between parents and children, implying the absence of novelty and change (Boyd & Richerson, 1985). However, as demonstrated, parents do not always want complete acceptance of their own values by their children (Grusec et al., 2000; Kuczynski et al., 1997). Viewing from the intersubjective model, parents are wise enough to be cognizant of, and thereby tailor their parenting behavior to, emerging social environment (Youniss, 1994). When they know their own value system is futile or outdated, they may reject it, and change their socialization practices in accordance with the new demands in the society (Cooper, 1994). As expressed by Inkeles (1955), parents make “both purposive and unconscious adjustments in [their] child rearing practices, in mediating the influence of social change to [their] children and consequently in better adapting them for the changed social conditions they may next meet as adults” (p. 2). Parents may act like “cultural middlemen,” keeping abreast of societal changes and channeling new ideas to children. In this view, parent-to-child value transmission actually can facilitate cultural change. Whether this contention can explain rapid cultural changes in history (e.g., the quick decline of foot binding in China in the early 20th century) and in the present is worth future investigation (see Zou et al., 2009).

**Implications for the Intersubjective Approach to Culture**

Informed by the intersubjective approach to culture (Chiu et al., 2010), various studies have shown that intersubjective perceptions have influence on social behavior as diverse as blame assignment (Shhteynberg et al., 2009), conflict resolution (Chao et al., 2010), compliance, attribution, and counterfactual thinking (Zou et al., 2009). The present research adds to this burgeoning body of knowledge by showing that intersubjective perceptions influence parents’ socialization practices too.

One core principle underlying the intersubjective approach is that cultural behaviors are goal directed; they are informed by cultural prescriptions (encoded in the intersubjective knowledge) and help people attain certain valued goals. Consistent with this principle, some studies have shown that the use of intersubjective knowledge may serve communication goals. For instance, in a recent study, American Chinese bicultural participants used their perceptions of the American norm to guide their attribution when interacting with an American investigator and switched to the Chinese norm
when interacting with a Chinese investigator (Zou et al., 2009; Study 4). The present research contributes toward this core principle in two respects. First, it reinforces the view that intersubjective knowledge may help individuals attain their epistemic goals. In one study, Chao et al. (2010) found that individuals, particularly those who have a strong desire for closure, tend to use intersubjective knowledge to guide their conflict resolution behavior. Similarly, Study 1 in the present research showed that parents with a stronger need for closure were more likely to refer to their intersubjective perceptions in designing socialization practices. Second, the present research hints that intersubjective knowledge can help people achieve sociocultural adaptation (see Li & Hong, 2001). One important goal held by parents is to help their children adapt to society (Grolnick et al., 1997). As demonstrated in Study 1, when this goal is particularly pressing, as in immigrant families, the use of intersubjective knowledge in socialization practices becomes more pronounced.

Taken together, it has now become clear that cultural behaviors, including parental socialization practices, are not just manifestations of some internalized traits or values. Rather, cultural behaviors can be viewed as strategic efforts which are informed by intersubjective knowledge and aimed at meeting certain goals in the social environment.

Other Considerations

Although Study 1 showed that immigrant parents are more likely than nonimmigrant parents to refer to their perceived norms, the variation within the immigrant group should not be overlooked (e.g., Cooper, 1994). For instance, Durgel, Leyendecker, Yagmurlu, and Harwood (2009) reported that Turkish immigrant parents who are more integrated into the German culture (as opposed to those who are separated from it) are more likely to adopt dominant values in the German society in their socialization practices. According to Berry (2001), immigrants to a new society are concerned about preserving the culture of origin and adapting to the host culture (see also Bornstein & Cote, 2006). It is possible that for immigrant parents who are oriented toward the host culture, perceived normative values in the host society are particularly important, whereas for those who are oriented toward the heritage culture, their perception of the normative values in their culture of origin is more crucial. This hypothesis is now being tested in an ongoing study in which immigrant parents report their perceived normative values (of the host culture and the heritage culture) and cultural orientation.

Parents’ socialization practices are essentially future oriented (Alwin, 1988; Youniss, 1994). It follows that parents of two families living in the same culture and sharing similar understanding of this culture may show different socialization practices if they have different plans for their children’s future. This can be exemplified by the case of sojourner families. Sojourner families reside in the host culture just temporarily; they will leave the current society some day, either to return to their culture of origin, or to move to a new culture. For parents in these families, values that are normative in the current society should have little utility in their socialization practices because these values will eventually become irrelevant to their children’s future adaptation. Rather, values perceived to be normatively important in their next destination should be more useful. Studies examining this possibility can certainly add more explanatory power to the intersubjective model.

The exploratory analyses in Studies 1 and 2 showed that education level moderated the influence of perceived norms (this effect was not significant in Studies 3 and 4). There are several interpretations of this finding. Less educated parents generally are more conforming (e.g., Tuddenham, 1959) and less confident in influencing the development of their children (e.g., Coleman & Karraker, 2000). In addition, it is possible that highly educated parents generally believe that it is not necessary for their children to adopt societal values to live adaptively, because they possess more resources (e.g., knowledge, financial resources, social networks) to cope with the stress arising from cultural adaptation (e.g., Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987) and because their own attainment suggests that success can be achieved by virtue of autonomy and self-reliance (e.g., Kohn, Slomczynski, & Schoenbach, 1986). Future studies need to consider how to disentangle these possible explanations.

Although perceived normative values appear to be important across cultures, detailed examination of the regression weights in the studies reported reveals that perceived normative values (personal values) seem to be less (more) important for American parents than Asian parents. It is possible that although the influence of perceived norms is important for parents from different cultures, its magnitude is culturally variant. An exploratory analysis was performed to test this possibility. Data from Studies 1 and 2 were combined. Culture was dummy coded (0 = American and 1 = Hong Kong Chinese). A slopes-as-outcomes model revealed significant effects of culture on the slope of personal values, $B = -12.05, SE = .03, t(236) = -4.05, p < .001$, and that of perceived normative values, $B = .11, SE = .03, t(236) = 3.70, p < .001$, indicating that perceived normative values (personal values) were indeed less (more) important for American parents than Hong Kong Chinese parents. This finding is consistent with the view that conformity is more prevalent in collectivist societies than individualist ones (Bond & Smith, 1996). Nevertheless, it is premature to draw any definite conclusion because the two cultural samples might differ in many unknown or unmeasured aspects. Future research needs to more stringently examine the role of culture by using multiple cultural samples that are matched in as many aspects (e.g., family structure, acculturation experience) as possible. Findings from such studies enable researchers to understand the possible interplay between culture and the use of perceived normative value.

The present research focuses on transmission from parents to children. The finding that parents’ socialization values
mediate the effect of their personal values and perceived normative values on children’s personal values is suggestive of this direction. Nevertheless, it should be noted that dyadic family relationships are mutually influential. Value transmission from children to parents is possible too (Kuczyński et al., 1997; Roset et al., 2009; Taris, 2000). Future studies adopting the intersubjective model should consider the possibility that children’s perceived normative values are transmitted to their parents. Instead of studying family dyads at one single time point, as some past studies (e.g., Knafo, 2003; Schönpfugl, 2001) and the present research did, cross-lagged longitudinal designs (e.g., Roset et al., 2009; Taris, 2000) should be considered.

Concluding Remarks

For the sake of their children’s adaptation, parents understand that they need to transmit to their children not only what they personally value but also what they perceive to be widely valued in the society. From this perspective, parents’ influence on children’s value development is realized also in how accurately they understand what is considered important in the society, and how competently they incorporate this understanding into their socialization practices. It is believed that this perspective can open a novel arena for researchers interested in familial socialization processes, offer new insights for understanding cultural transmission and cultural change, and extend the intersubjective approach to culture.

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Notes

1. In a preliminary analysis, an interaction term (Personal values × Perceived normative values) was also included. This interaction term was not statistically significant. The same was found in all subsequent studies. This interaction term was therefore dropped from the main analyses.

2. One past study showed that need for closure interacted with immigration context in predicting acculturation experience (Kosic, Kruglanski, Peirro, & Mannetti, 2004). Informed by this finding, in a preliminary analysis, an interaction term (Immigrant status × Need for closure) was also included as a predictor in the Level 2 equation. This interaction term was not statistically significant. It was therefore dropped from the main analysis.

3. To check the robustness of this finding, this analysis was repeated with another operationalization of immigrant status: years of residence in Hong Kong. This model also revealed a significant effect of residence length on the slope of personal values, \( B = .002, SE = .000, t(113) = 1.92, p = .05 \), and a marginally significant effect on the slope of perceived normative values, \( B = -.001, SE = .001, t(113) = -1.73, p = .08 \). The significant effects of need for closure and education level still held.

4. Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (http://www.mturk.com) is a website that allows researchers to recruit participants, collect data from them, and monetarily compensate them, all through the Internet. Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011) showed that data collected via this method are at least as reliable as those collected using traditional methods.

5. Dropping the non-Caucasian participants did not affect the results.

6. Only Studies 1 and 2 were combined because they used the same shortened, 28-item version of the Schwartz Value Questionnaire (Schwartz, 1992).

References


