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# Intergenerational Transmission of Values in Different Cultural Contexts: A Study in Germany and Indonesia

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The aim of this study<sup>1</sup> is to investigate cultural similarities and differences in the transmission of general and domain-specific value orientations (individualism/collectivism, and value of children) within German and Indonesian families. Supposing that both cultures differ with respect to developmental pathways of independence and interdependence, we asked if the extent of intergenerational transmission of values within families differs between Germany and Indonesia, and we studied possible cultural differences in intergenerational transmission with respect to different value contents. More precisely, we asked if there is a difference in transmission of values that are highly versus not highly endorsed by the members of the respective culture. The sample is part of the cross-cultural study “Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations” and included altogether 610 German and Indonesian mother-adolescent dyads as well as altogether 200 triads of maternal grandmothers, mothers, and adolescents. Results showed intergenerational transmission of values between adjacent generations both in the German and the Indonesian sample, but transmission of individualistic values was higher in the Indonesian sample. The results are discussed under a theoretical framework of cultural specifics of intergenerational transmission.

The intergenerational transmission of values within families has gained more and more interest in the last years. Cultural transmission is important for the continuity of a society as it facilitates the communication between members of different generations and it permits the maintenance of culture-specific knowledge and beliefs over generations (Schönpflug, 2001; Trommsdorff, 2009).

However, the transmission of values from one generation of the family to the next one should not always be taken for granted. In the course of social change the younger generations are confronted with new challenges and new societal values to which they may adapt in order to lead a successful life (Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2006). A full transmission of values from one generation to the next without any change is not always desirable, because new generations may have to adapt to modified living conditions; thus, a complete transmission without any change would be as disadvantageous for the individual person as the complete lack of transmission (Schönpflug, 2001; Trommsdorff, 2009). Both would be a failure for successful socialization.

### *Transmission in cultural context*

Although the transmission of values is a universal phenomenon, there may be culture-specific differences in degree, content and process of transmission. Every culture offers specific developmental niches and socialization practices for the transmission of values. Socialization practices vary according to different cultural values and developmental pathways which may be

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characterized by the culture-specific concepts of independence or interdependence (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003; Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, 2000).

While individualistic cultures emphasize the developmental pathway of independence which highlights the development of autonomy, in collectivist cultures the pathway of interdependence prevails which focuses on family relationships, parental control and obligations. Arnett (1995), in a similar vein, makes a distinction between "broader socialization cultures" which encourage individualism, independence and self-expression of offspring, and the so-called "narrower socialization cultures" which emphasise obedience and conformity to parental and societal values, but which discourage deviation from cultural expectations. Family as primary socialization agent serves as a mediator between these cultural values and the individual in the transmission process (Schneewind, 1999; Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). Apart from that, other socialization agents as school, teachers, peers and the media influence the value orientations of offspring.

Thus, a question arises if the transmission process and its results differ depending on the cultural context. More precisely, one may ask to what extent the family transmits its value orientations to the next generation in individualistic compared to collectivist cultures. In cultures which follow the developmental pathway of independence, offspring is exposed to many different influences outside the family and is free to choose among different models: these different socialization agents do not necessarily share the same value orientations. In cultures which follow the developmental pathway of interdependence, conformity to parental values is highly encouraged. Parents are highly motivated to transmit those values that are most preferred by society (Arnett, 1995).

Yet, it is not clear whether a specific cultural context promotes or hinders family influences in intergenerational transmission of values. Previous research has provided evidence for the intergenerational transmission of several value orientations from parents to offspring in individualistic as well as collectivist cultures (Boehnke, 2001; Georgas, 1991; Knafo & Schwartz, 2001, 2003; Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001; Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004; Schönplflug, 2001). However, studies that compare different socialization contexts with respect to value transmission are still rare and mostly refer to immigrants in different cultural contexts and in comparison to the values of their culture of origin (Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001; Schönplflug, 2001).

To conclude, one can say that for the study of socialization and the transmission of values it is essential to consider the cultural context in which it takes place (Arnett, 1995). So far, the role of the cultural context as transmission belt is not yet clear.

### *Content of transmission*

Another important aspect to be considered is that transmission is selective depending on the content to be transmitted. It can be argued that values that are in line with the respective culture-specific developmental pathway are transmitted more effectively than other values (Greenfield et al., 2003; Rothbaum et al., 2000). Hoge, Petrillo and Smith (1982) state that values that are important for family life and for the family members are more effectively transmitted. Goodnow (1997) also assumes that in general, parents want to transmit those values that are important for them. Thus, parents' personal values and their socialization values often are correlated (Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). Some empirical findings support these ideas. For example, Schönplflug and Silbereisen (1992) found that those values which were held as more important by adolescents also showed a stronger similarity between parents and adolescents. Knafo and Schwartz (2001) found that parental values were perceived more accurately the more important these values were for the parents. Also the parents' motivation to transmit certain values is important for their successful transmission. Schönplflug (2005, July) reports that the motivation of parents to transmit conservative values enhanced the success of transmission. However, some values (such as self-transcendence values) were transmitted even when there was no specific motivation of the parents.

Although it seems quite clear that the willing of parents to transmit values is important for the success of transmission, some contradicting results have been found as well. Boehnke (2001) states in a study on German students and their parents that there was more parent-child similarity for those values that were rated as less important by the cohort of the parents (aggregate). He concluded that value orientations that are not shared by the society as a whole are more effectively transmitted within families. This suggests that not the adherence to, but the rejection of certain values may be influential for transmission. Apart from that, the study showed that the *Zeitgeist* (which Boehnke defines as the modal current value climate of a society) influences value orientations of the offspring apart from the parental influence (Boehnke, 2001). In a recent study by Boehnke, Hadjar, and Baier (2007), the role of the *Zeitgeist* in the transmission process was further addressed. Analysing parent-child similarity in German families with adolescents, they found that similarity with regard to hierarchic self-interest as a core value of modern society was greater for families distant to *Zeitgeist* compared to mainstream families. Furthermore, Trommsdorff, Mayer, and Albert (2004) found that traditional collectivist values were the most powerful predictor for domain-specific values in Germany, although one would think of Germany as a rather individualistic culture. In a similar vein, Bardi and Schwartz (2003) found that values which are not shared in society as a whole (not normative ones) predicted behaviour best. Hoge et al., (1982) finally report that the more homogeneous a group, the weaker were the correlations between parents and offspring. Everybody shared the same value orientations anyway. Furthermore, group membership had a greater impact on values of adolescents than their parents' values. Boehnke (2001) also underlines the importance to distinguish between value transmission and value change which are often studied in a confounded way. Values that are stable over time within a society are not always the same values which show the greatest similarity between parents and children (Boehnke, 2001). It is also important to distinguish between individual and population level when studying values and value transmission (Hofstede, 2001, 2007; Smith & Schwartz, 1997). The individual importance for parents to transmit a specific value has thus to be distinguished from the relative importance of a value orientation in society as a whole.

#### *Aim of the study*

The aim of the present study was to examine the role of cultural context for the transmission of values within families over three generations. In particular, cultural similarities and differences in the intergenerational transmission of general and domain-specific value orientations within German and Indonesian families (adolescents, mothers and maternal grandmothers) were investigated.

The following research questions were addressed: First, it was asked if the extent of intergenerational transmission of values within families differs between cultures with different developmental pathways of independence versus interdependence. Second, we studied possible cultural differences in intergenerational transmission with respect to different value contents. We asked if there is a difference in transmission of values that are highly versus not highly endorsed by the members of the respective culture.

A correlational strategy was employed to measure intergenerational value similarity as it was most adequate regarding our data structure. Three- and two-generation samples were 'matched' for the within-family generations, i.e., each specific grandmother was the mother of the specific family mother, whose son or daughter was the third generation member within the same family in our data. Bivariate correlation and regression analysis are widely used analytic strategies to assess intergenerational value transmission (e.g., Georgas, 1991; Schönplflug, 2001). As bivariate correlations do not permit any interpretations regarding causalities and directions of influences, some authors prefer the notion of value similarity instead of transmission in cross-sectional studies (e.g., Boehnke, 2001; Knafo & Schwartz, 2001).

### *Selection of cultures*

In order to address the questions outlined above, two cultures were chosen that were assumed to differ significantly with respect to prevalent value orientations and socialization practices. These were Germany and Indonesia, two cultures holding rather modern versus rather traditional values and following a developmental path of independence versus interdependence in terms of value socialization.

These two countries differ on macro as well as micro variables. Germany has 82 million inhabitants, most of which are living in urban areas (86%). In comparison, Indonesia with around 218 million inhabitants is one of the most populated countries in the world; only 42% of the population lives in cities. Fertility rate (children per woman) also differs with 1.3 children per woman in Germany and a much higher number of 2.5 children on average per woman in Indonesia (the World Factbook, 2007). As far as religion is concerned, the population of Germany belongs to almost equal parts to the Roman Catholic or Protestant Church (about 34% each); about 28.3% of people are unaffiliated with a religion, and 3.7% are Muslim. Indonesian population, on the other hand, is mostly Muslim (about 88%), apart from that 8% of the population belongs to the Protestant or Roman Catholic Church; 2% are Hindus and 1% is Buddhist (the World Factbook, 2007). According to the seminal work of Hofstede (2001), Germany is lower than Indonesia on the power distance index (score 35 versus 78) and higher on individualism (score 67 versus 14). Regarding parent-child relations and socialization practices, in Germany the parenting goal of independence as well as self-actualization of the offspring are valued very highly, while obedience and control are less prominent (Deutsche Shell, 2002; Keller & Lamm, 2005; Trommsdorff, 1995). In Indonesia, in contrast, learning of cultural rules and obligation to family members are important socialization goals; parents foster obedience, politeness, respect, harmony and conformity and a paternalistic style of parenting prevails (Mulder, 1992, 2000; Schwarz, Albert, Trommsdorff, Zheng, Shi, & Nelwan, in review).

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The present study is part of the cross-cultural "Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations" Study (Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2001; Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2005). Participants were 310 German and 300 Indonesian mothers as well as their 14-17 years old children (females and males), and in 100 cases per country, the maternal grandmothers also participated. The German sample was recruited in three different places: a middle size university town in East Germany (Chemnitz), a middle size university town in Southern Germany (Konstanz), and a large city from an urbanized industrialized region in North-Western Germany (Essen). The Indonesian respondents were recruited in the city of Bandung and its rural surroundings. Half of the respondents were living in rural areas, and half were living in urban settings.

The German grandmothers were on average 69.6 years old ( $SD = 5.9$ ), and Indonesian grandmothers were 63.6 years old ( $SD = 7.8$ ). The mean age of German mothers was 44 years ( $SD = 4.9$ ) and for Indonesian mothers the mean age was 39.8 years ( $SD = 5.4$ ). Adolescents were on average 16 years old ( $SD = 1.1$ ) in Germany and 15.3 years old ( $SD = 1.0$ ) in Indonesia. In Germany, 44% and in Indonesia 45% of the adolescents were male. In Germany 96% of the adolescents currently attended school and had on average completed 9 years of schooling ( $SD = 1.2$ ) so far. In Indonesia, in total 92% of the adolescents attended school, most of them junior (52.4%) or senior (45.5%) high school. German mothers had attended school on average for 11 years ( $SD = 1.5$ ) and Indonesian mothers had on average completed 8.9 years of schooling ( $SD = 3.95$ ) with seven percent having only an incomplete primary school experience. German grandmothers had attended school on average for 9 years ( $SD = 1.81$ ) and Indonesian grandmothers averaged 5.1 years ( $SD = 3.08$ ). Fifty-three percent of Indonesian grandmothers had either none or only incomplete primary school experience. German mothers had on average 2.3 children ( $SD = 0.9$ ), while Indonesian mothers had on average 3.2 children ( $SD = 1.3$ ). Thir-

ty-two percent of the German participants were Roman Catholic, 25% were Protestant and 37% indicated to have no religion or to be atheist. Ninety-nine percent of participants in the Indonesian sample belonged to Islam. These indicators are in line with the country-specific aspects described earlier.

### Procedure

The standardized face-to-face interviews were carried out by trained interviewers separately for each mother, grandmother and adolescent in their homes and lasted between 1 and 1½ hours. Each respondent (adolescents, mothers, grandmothers of each family) answered all questions in the assigned sequence.

### Measures

**Individualism/Collectivism** was measured by the COLINDEX (Chan, 1994) along the dimensions individualism [“an exciting life (stimulating experiences)”] with 7 items and collectivism [“honour of your parents and elders (showing respect)”] with 6 items.

**Value of Children (VOC)** (Arnold, Bulatao, Buripakdi, Chung, Fawcett, Iritani, Lee, & Wu, 1975) was measured by several items asking for the advantages of having children. Two scales used were based on confirmatory factor analysis (Mayer & Trommsdorff, 2008, June). One dimension contains emotional VOC (“feeling of love between parent and child”) with 7 items, the second dimension comprises socio-economic VOC (“to help your family economically”, “standing/reputation among your kin”) with 8 Items. A summary of reliability indices (internal consistency) is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Internal consistency indices (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ ) for all measures

Measure	Germany			Indonesia		
	GM ( <i>n</i> =99)	M ( <i>n</i> =310)	Ad. ( <i>n</i> =310)	GM ( <i>n</i> =100)	M ( <i>n</i> =300)	Ad. ( <i>n</i> =300)
Individualism	.80	.68	.71	.82	.71	.70
Collectivism	.67	.74	.76	.75	.71	.74
VOC Emotional	.79	.75	.76	.80	.68	.77
VOC Socio-Economic	.81	.78	.78	.63	.61	.76

*Note.* All scales range from 1 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“very important”).

**Key:** GM: Grandmothers, M: Mothers, Ad.: Adolescents

## Results

To assess the dominant cultural value orientations, i.e., the modal value climate with respect to individualism-collectivism and VOC in Germany and Indonesia, the mean importance and variances of the different value orientations were compared between the two countries in the first step. We used the overall sample consisting of the members of all three generations in order to have a view on the importance of these values in each society as a whole<sup>2</sup>. As expected, individualism was more highly valued by the German compared to the Indonesian participants of the study. All other measured value orientations were more highly valued by the Indonesian sample.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> One restriction has to be made here: the analyses only give an indication as far as the values of two- and three-generation families –respectively for Germany and Indonesia– with at least one adolescent child are concerned, not with respect to the whole country. A similar strategy to compose a variable measuring *Zeitgeist* was employed by Boenke, Hadjar, and Baier (2007).

<sup>3</sup> The cross-cultural differences persisted also in covariance analyses controlling for age, socioeconomic status and educational level of respondents.

As a further indicator for the general endorsement of value orientations in each country, we analysed the variances of the value orientations by applying Levene's *F*-test. Results showed differences in variance between the countries for several values: variance on individualism was higher for the Indonesian compared to the German sample. This provided further evidence that individualism was more uniformly shared as a value by the German participants. For collectivism and emotional VOC the variance was higher in Germany compared to Indonesia. With regard to socio-economic VOC no difference in variance between the two countries was found (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Analysis of variance results and homogeneity of variance hypothesis testing, for all value orientations by culture (overall samples)

	Germany ( <i>N</i> =723)		Indonesia ( <i>N</i> =700)		Levene's Test		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	<i>F</i> -criterion	<i>t</i> -test	<i>df</i>
Individualism	3.91	.52	3.73	.61	14.84	6.07	1380
Collectivism	4.03	.59	4.49	.42	50.84	17.34	1307
VOC Emotional	3.74	.67	4.22	.47	43.43	15.76	1303
VOC Socio-Economic	2.02	.63	3.91	.60	2.91	57.92	1421

Note. All *t*-criteria and Levene's *F*-criteria (except for VOC Socio-Economic) were statistically significant at the .01 level.

For the next step, in order to assess value similarity across generations, we analysed the bivariate correlations of value orientations among generations. The hypothesis regarded intergenerational transmission of values and whether this would differ in strength between the two cultures for the different value contents. As far as intergenerational transmission of individualism in Germany is concerned, there was only a small, though significant, bivariate correlation of individualism between mothers and adolescents [ $r(311)=.13, p<.05$ ]. In Indonesia, in contrast, individualism was correlated for all three generation combinations, with a significant correlation between grandmothers and mothers of  $r(100)=.31 (p<.01)$ , and of  $r(300)=.23 (p<.01)$  between mothers and adolescents as well as  $r(100)=.23 (p<.05)$  between grandmothers and adolescents. As far as collectivism in Germany is concerned, this value was only weakly, but significantly, correlated between mothers and adolescents [ $r(311)=.17, p<.01$ ]. In Indonesia, collectivism was moderately correlated between grandmothers and mothers [ $r(100)=.28, p<.01$ ]. The emotional value of children was only correlated between both German and Indonesian grandmothers and mothers [ $r(99)=.38, p<.01$  and  $r(100)=.25, p<.01$ , respectively] and to a small extent also between German mothers and adolescents [ $r(311)=.13, p<.05$ ], but not between Indonesian mothers and adolescents or between grandmothers and adolescents in both cultures. As far as children's socio-economic value is concerned, this was correlated for all three generation combinations in Indonesia with correlations ranging from .19 to .36, as well as between adjacent generations in Germany [ $r(99)=.33, p<.01$ , between grandmothers and mothers;  $r(311)=.23, p<.01$ , between mothers and adolescents] (Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 3.** Intergenerational correlation indices for value orientations in Germany

	Germany			
	Individualism	Collectivism	VOC Emotional	VOC Socio-Economic
GM / M	.13	.15	.38**	.33**
M / Ad.	.13*	.17**	.13*	.23**
GM / Ad.	-.11	.00	-.07	.00

Note. \* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$

Key: GM: Grandmothers, M: Mothers, Ad.: Adolescents

**Table 4.** Intergenerational correlation indices for value orientations in Indonesia

	Indonesia			
	Individualism	Collectivism	VOC Emotional	VOC Socio-Economic
GM / M	.31**	.28**	.25**	.36**
M / Ad.	.23**	.08	.02	.25**
GM / Ad.	.23*	-.02	.07	.19*

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

Key: GM: Grandmothers, M: Mothers, Ad.: Adolescents

The correlation of individualism between grandmothers and adolescents was significantly higher in Indonesia than in Germany (compared through Fisher's  $z$ -transformation with  $z=2.40$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### Discussion

As expected, the results showed that German participants of the study held more individualistic, but less collectivist values than Indonesian participants. As far as intergenerational similarity of values is concerned, the results showed that values were related between generations in both cultures, but to different degrees depending on the content. Particularly, intergenerational correlations were higher for individualism in Indonesia compared to Germany. One possible explanation for this cultural difference is that the relative importance of values in a specific society does matter. In line with this hypothesis, the results showed that individualism which was not as highly emphasised by the Indonesian participants of this study (on the aggregate level) was more strongly transmitted within Indonesian families across three generations. On the other hand, individualism was highly valued by German participants, but less strongly transmitted within German families.

With respect to the other values examined, evidence was less clear. However, as far as socio-economic VOC is concerned, participants of both countries did not emphasise the importance of this value, but pronounced intergenerational similarities through correlations as found for German as well as Indonesian families. Another important factor may be the variation of a specific value within a society; i.e., how far do members of a society rate a value in a similar or in a rather non-uniform way. In fact, results revealed larger variance with respect to individualism in Indonesia vs. Germany. Thus, one may suppose that values which are less highly valued by society as a whole and less clearly defined in society are more strongly transmitted within the family. This could be an artefact, since correlations may be higher when the variance of a value is higher (Hoge et al., 1982). Another explanation though might be that in contexts where no clear cultural orientation concerning a specific value is evident, parents may have a distinct impact on values of offspring for those specific values which society does not necessarily transmit. Parents –as socialization agents– may be more differentiated from other socialization agents and may be more important for the transmission of these values to their offspring. At the intracultural level, Boehnke, Hadjar, and Baier (2007) have reported a similar effect. They claim that families that do not conform to the modal value climate of a culture may have a more distinct effect on the value orientations of their children, because they may communicate more about their values compared to families which are close to the *Zeitgeist*.

There may be also some more freedom for parents to transmit their personal preferences in the case of values which are not clearly defined by society. This is in line with the findings by Bardi and Schwartz (2003) who report that values which are not normative have a larger effect on individual behaviour than normative value orientations. This is not to say that parents have no effect on value orientations that are highly shared in society. Parents are mediators of cultural values in the transmission process. However, the transmission of those values is ensured by many socialization agents as well as by the *Zeitgeist* which influences both parents and offspring (Boehnke, 2001).



### Summary and Outlook

One may conclude on the whole that transmission occurs in different socialization contexts which may be characterized by a developmental pathway of independence as well as of interdependence, i.e., cultural context *per se* does not promote or hinder intergenerational transmission of values. However, it makes a difference which content is to be transmitted in which cultural context.

The limitations of this study were that it was not longitudinal, thus we were not able to consider bidirectional effects. Also, further socialization agents apart from mothers and grandmothers were not taken into account here. One shortcoming of correlation analysis in the framework of transmission studies is that it compares the relative positions of members of two generations with regard to their respective generational sample. In order to arrive at more specific conclusions it would be helpful to examine dyadic respectively *q*-correlations here (Griffin & Gonzalez, 1995, cf. Knafo & Schwartz, 2001 and 2003; Roest, Dubas, Gerris, & Engels, in press), i.e., the similarity of value rankings within the family dyads. The combined analysis of correlations on individual and dyadic level will shed further light on the role of cultural context and of relative importance of value orientations for value transmission. Apart from that, socialization values of the participants should be considered in future studies. Furthermore, the role of religion as well as socio-economic and socio-structural factors in the transmission process should be studied in more detail; especially if we consider that Indonesian religion may be an important transmission belt.

Value orientations that are highly emphasized by the society as a whole and do not show great variability, thus being part of the *Zeitgeist*, may show less intergenerational similarities. They may be transmitted by several socialization agents at the same time, thereby reducing the influence of the family. On the other hand, values that show high variability in society may be transmitted within family in a more distinct way. This phenomenon will be the focus of future analyses within the framework of the "Value of Children" study which includes further cultures representing both the independent and the interdependent developmental pathway.

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