



Perceptions of Parents' Attitudes towards Activism and its Impacts on the Political Behavior of Undergraduate Student Activists

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Abstract: This paper seeks to study student activism by focusing on how parents' perception of their activism affects their political actions and decisions. Six students from three undergraduate student activist organizations across Metro Manila were purposely sampled to participate individually in a semi-structured interview developed around the concept of attitudes categorized into three components: the behavioral, the cognitive, and the affective. Thematic analysis reveals that parents generally tend to negatively perceive activism, which does not necessarily affect students' decision to continue activism despite accompanying emotional burdens. The findings ascertain that parents employ various parenting styles from rational to authoritarian and emotions such as worry and rage in reaction to their child's activism. Moreover, the participants were found to apply values such as tireless persuasion and discretion to negotiate conflicting perceptions of their activism with their parents.

Key Words: student activism; political socialization; political behavior; perception; parental attitudes

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

In the 21st century, there has been substantial growth in the number of youth political activists; however, due to a heating political climate nowadays, adults – especially the parents of youth political activists – have second thoughts on this rapid uprising (Madarang, 2019; Pedrajas, 2021). It has been common knowledge that parents have a significant role in shaping and guiding their offspring's political views and involvement (Davies, 1965). The directness in youth political activism has paved the way for notable contributions to Philippine independence (“APPENDIX: A history,” n.d.; Palafox, 2012). In the present, numerous student protest organizations still exist in pursuit of nationalism by expressing their stand on social issues (“Akabayon Youth,” n.d.; “Anakbayan PH,” n.d.; Moreno, 2020; “SALiGAN sa CSSP,” n.d.). Several different factors influence political activism on the youth; however, participation in such activities may also be affected by how parents perceive their children's actions (Gordon, 2008). This paper seeks to study the phenomena of student protests from the context of the Filipino family with a focus directed at the perceptions of student protesters towards their parents' attitudes.

1.2. Participants

The researchers seek to answer their research questions by conducting a semi-structured interview

with purposive sampling targeting the population of undergraduate activist organizations in Manila. Four participants were from Anakbayan PLM, one from Akbayan Youth - UP Diliman, and one from SALiGAN sa CSSP, accounting for a sample of $n = 6$. Five participants had parents who were aware of their activism, while one had parents who were unaware.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study will benefit the following people and institutions: student activists and their parents, schools, and future researchers. It will provide student activists' accounts of their parents' attitudes towards activism. Thus, it may help both parents and students understand each others' insights so both parties can communicate better. Schools may disseminate findings from this study regarding student activism to their student's parents and the student body. Moreover, future researchers may use this study as a reference as it contains new insights from student activists in prominent universities in the Philippines.

1.4. Research Questions

Socialization has piqued the youth's interest in political activism and even led to significant contributions to the country's independence. Davies (1965) postulated that this molding occurs in childhood mainly through their family --- and as the youth get older, they usually disassociate themselves from the mindsets of their family and engage more



with their peers. Montiel and Chongbian (1991) deduced that parents had influenced their children's political values during the Martial Law period. However clear it may seem, there are still gaps left in understanding the prominence of parents' attitudes to their children's political interests. The following research questions serve to clarify the gaps:

- R1: How do parents' attitudes towards activism affect political actions and behaviors?
- R1.1: How do parents of undergraduate student activists perceive "activism"?
- R1.2: How do these perceptions impact the decisions of undergraduate student activists?
- R1.3: How do undergraduate student activists negotiate conflicting perceptions with parents?

2. METHODOLOGY

Data was gathered in a semi-structured interview format, with each participant interviewed separately. The interview format makes for more in-depth discussions about personal and social issues that may be more difficult to discuss in a group setting (Di Cicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to comprehend the experiential data by identifying common themes observed across most of the interviews (Braun et al., 2019). Two main processes were used under thematic analysis: coding and theme searching. Codes were developed through individual interpretations of the researchers, with one meeting to finalize the codes and assign them to their respective themes. The criteria for codes to be considered relevant are present in at least two out of the six interviews. The questions asked in the interview require the respondents to provide personal information about family issues. Therefore, the researchers provided an informed consent form to prevent any ethical breaches in data collection.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Synthesis Table for Codes and Themes

Perceptions of Parents Attitudes			Impacts on Political Behavior
Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral	
Acknowledgement of Red Tagging of NDMOs	Passive Acceptance of Children's Activism	Conditional Recognition of Children's Activism	Risks on Mental Health
Limited Understanding/ Experience of Activism	Developing Sense of Inquiry and Curiosity to Activism	Emotionally Detached Parenting Style	Tireless Persuasion
Perception of Activism as "Brainwashing"	Fear for Children's Safety	Rational Parenting Style	Activism as Fulfillment of Parents' Teachings
Activism as a Public Nuisance	Rage over Children's Decisions	Authoritarian Parenting Style and Emotional Blackmail	Discretion and Lying to Parents
			Family having little to no impact on Political Decisions

The researchers developed four themes based on thematic patterns seen among the codes of the six interviews: the cognitive, affective, and behavioral

components of the parents' attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977) and their impacts on the political behavior of their children. The cognitive discusses the beliefs and perceptions of parents towards activism. The affective deals with their emotional reaction while the behavioral addresses their actions. The impacts on political behavior mainly deal with psychosocial effects and the political decision-making of the activists.

3.1. Cognitive Component

Almost all interviewees mentioned their parents' immediate negative perception of activism fueled by the prominence of red-tagging. First, they believe there is an underground movement that creates terrorists. Hence, they develop a weariness for their children to join rallies, as they consider it a slippery slope into the movement. These are similar to the beliefs of anti-communist, parent-based organizations, League of Parents in the Philippines (LPP), and Hands Off Our Children. Second, parents have a limited understanding and experience of activism, which leads them to reiterate popular stereotypes. Their children usually face resistance in political discussions due to their pro-administration, centrist, or apolitical leanings. Third, parents perceive activism as "brainwashing" rather than as a legitimate political choice. This perception leads to the belief that their child is in a danger they are not aware of, supported by Filipino parental ethnotheories that conceive the child as unable to develop self-control and reason yet (Alampay, 2014). Furthermore, similar to Di Cicco's (2010) public nuisance paradigm, parents perceive activism as a nuisance to the country, questioning why activists look for problems when there are none.

3.2. Affective Component

Participants who perceive that their parents' overall feelings concerning the participants' activism are generally positive indicate that their parents respond passively. Some parents expressed this in the following manner:

...basta raw 'di nakakaapekto sa acads ko and 'di ako nadidistract masyado. (trans. ...as long as it does not affect my academics and I don't get too distracted.)

Kebs lang naman sila. (trans. They're usually just fine with it). [Kebs is an affirmative slang term that refers to "whatever".]

Parents' feelings were also in the form of curiosity. Some participants indicated that as time progressed, parents became accepting towards their children's activism and eventually acquired a sense of inquiry regarding what specific activities their children participated in.



Regarding those who declared that their parents have a generally negative feeling towards their children's activism, some participants stated that their parents usually have a sense of fear or worry when faced with the prospect of their children being youth political activists. One of the parents quotes: "Baka barilin ka ng mga sundalo. (trans. Soldiers might shoot you.)"

Another emotion expressed is rage, which is usually in the form of confrontational questions, threats, and ad hominem. As one participant said, "Minsan nagkakaroon ng mga argument na may kasamang ad hominem. So hindi nagiging maganda yung effect ng differing political stance dito sa bahay. (trans. Sometimes there would be arguments with ad hominem. Thus, differing political stances in this house do not have a positive effect.)"

3.3 Behavioral Component

The respondents discussed their parents' behavior towards their activism positively and negatively based on the amount of freedom they were afforded. Parents generally allow their children to join activist organizations and related activities as long as they ensure their safety and maintain good academic performance.

The difference in parenting styles also affected the quality of freedom and support given. A respondent's parent who has a "rational parenting style" allows them to have independent political views and tries to listen and share their child's feedback and opinions, even if they have contrasting ideologies. On the other hand, emotionally detached parents do not get involved with their children's activities but still try to show affection in subtle ways, such as supporting their children financially and occasionally checking upon them. This is viewed as positive by the respondents because, ultimately, they still have the freedom to join mass organizations. An authoritarian parenting style is judged negatively by respondents as parents warn their children not to join activist organizations. They also mentioned that they got emotionally blackmailed by their family for being part of movements.

3.4 Impact on Political Behavior

Two interviewed participants described their behavior is motivated by their mental health. One participant's veteran grandfather called him to say, "You will be targeted and you will be killed." because of his activism. This led the participant to break down crying, and he adds that he would sometimes avoid political discussions with his parents because of the toll on his mental health. Another participant describes fears that "Papalayasin ako ng magulang ko." (trans. My parents would disown me.) after coming out to her parents as an activist, which is

consistent with Dela Cruz's (2001) and Jocano's (1970) research on "disiplina" and punishment

Participants with parents who are non-supportive about their activism and who hold control over their movement talk about how they have practiced being discreet about their activism. One participant frequently lied about going to her friend's house when attending organization meetings and activities, while another described slipping away from their home to join a rally. If they do not choose to be discreet and decide to tell the truth, some fear that they will not be allowed or that they would be grounded as a result. The use of discretion and lying replicates the findings of Gordon (2008) regarding the similar strategies of young female activists; however, this does not mean that they hold ill intentions towards their parents.

As another participant says, "Hindi tinuturo sa pagiging aktibista ang pagiging suwail na anak." (trans. Being an activist doesn't teach you to be a disrespectful child). He brings up how his organization has a specific educational discussion entitled "Parents and Activists" based on writings by Constantino (1971). He adds that he sees his activism as fulfilling his parents' teachings to him. One interviewee expresses her desire to become emotionally closer to her parents after coming out as an activist.

Most of the activists interviewed see tireless persuasion as their response to the conflict. They progressively explain their organization, activities, and political ideology while engaging in discussions about social issues with their parents. This is in line with Mcdevitt and Chafee's (2002) model of trickle-up socialization, where children can influence the political socialization of their parents. Part of the persuasion is also proving how the activists can maintain their grades, do their chores, as one participant puts it, "kahit member ako" (trans. even if I'm a member) which is in line with Medina's (2001) conceptualization of the numerous practical responsibilities of the child to the family based on "utang na loob."

Despite family influencing political behavior, most participants believe that family opinion has little to no impact on their decision to continue activism. This is because those interviewed either live separately from their parents, have parents with rational or detached parenting styles, or are discreet about their activism. These reasons are either strategies that address the authoritarian influence of Filipino parents (Dela Cruz et al. 2001; Jocano, 1970; Sicat, 1976), or circumstances that avoid it altogether.

4. CONCLUSIONS

An overview of the results and discussions shows the conflicting nature of parents' attitudes towards activism. Their cognitive perceptions are



susceptible to being informed by black propaganda and red-tagging activists as terrorists due to their limited understanding of activism. This is likely due to their Filipino socio-cultural environment, which informs their psychological processes and attitudes (Torney-Purta, 2004). This is supported by the general prominence of red-tagging in the Philippines by parent-based organizations and state efforts, and parental cultural beliefs.

As a consequence of their cognitive perceptions, parents behave and emote accordingly with the strictness or looseness of their parenting style, while their emotions towards activism constitute a range of passive acceptance, fear, or rage. Although the interviewed activists feel that their parents' attitudes burden their mental health in the form of anxiety and increased emotional burden, these attitudes have little impact on their overall decision to continue as active members of their organization.

In navigating the conflicting perceptions of their parents, most of the participants applied a strategy of discretion and tireless persuasion to pursue activism despite their parents' opposition and to challenge the political beliefs of their parents contrary to traditional Filipino family beliefs and power structures (Alampay, 2014; Montiel and Chongbuan, 1991). In their tireless persuasion, they see their parents as part of the masses rather than adversaries, and they understand activism as an extension of their parents' teachings. The researchers conclude that even as the conflict may further separate activists from their parents, the intentions of activists are rooted in mending this conflict rather than exacerbating it with their love and respect of their parents underlying their actions.

4.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings, there were several recommendations that researchers can consider for future studies and application.

Since all participants were situated in Metro Manila only, it is suggested that researchers widen the scope to undergraduate student activists in different universities across the Philippines to understand the national situation regarding student political activism and parents' perception of such.

This study merely focused on identifying the phenomena of student activism and political attitudes through parents' perceptions. Thus, the researchers call future researchers to consider several other social relationships that influence the behavior of student activists concerning their activism.

Lastly, the researchers submit that succeeding research should focus on whether parents' perceptions significantly affect Filipino student activists' tendency to participate in the different levels of activism, which may include dutiful, disruptive, and

dangerous dissent, as stated by O'Brien et al. (2018).

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