



Research Paper

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The Role Parents Play in Transmission Values and Meanings to Their Children

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Article Info.	Abstract
<p>Received: 19.02.2023</p> <p>Accepted: 23.06.2023</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>Values and Meaning Transfer,</i></p> <p><i>Family,</i></p> <p><i>Children,</i></p> <p><i>Parents</i></p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>In many research studies, it has been pointed out that parents are effective in raising their children. Parents have always sought to transfer their lives' values and meanings to their children. But, in the literature of Persian research, there has not been an in-depth study of the way this effect has been done. The present study aimed to analyze how parents play this role through a qualitative research method and an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). To this end, a semi-structured interview was conducted with ten parents of Iranian families. Moreover, data analysis was carried out by Smith's IPA. The analyses' results led to two main themes (i.e., "Different strategies of parents to transmit values and meanings to children" and "Affectability of transmission strategies"). Furthermore, the sub-themes included "transmission through verbal and non-verbal behavior", "relationship control as a strategy", "control of the environment as a strategy", "effect of parents' trust in children in strategy selection", "effect of parents' personal experience about their parents", "effect of children personality differences in strategy selection", "effect of gradual changes in parents personalities in strategy selection", "effect of child's developmental stage in strategy selection", "effect of psychological teachings in strategy selection", "parental discord in strategy selection", and "effectiveness of importance of a value in strategy selection". This study's results revealed that the process of transferring values and the meaning of life was influenced by the content the parents intended to transfer; moreover, the parents' strategies in the path of transfer were affected by various factors, from the parents' inner thoughts to the children-related variables.</p>
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Introduction

The factors influencing the formation of each individual's identity have always been among the topics of interest for researchers in the fields of Psychology and Sociology. From among these factors, some consider the family (i.e., the first and smallest social system) as a source which plays a special and essential role in raising and training people (Nichols & Schwartz, 1984). However, there is a need for a more scrutinized investigation in order to determine the exact structures and processes through which the family facilitates maturity and identity formation.

Researchers believe that the search for achieving values (Bardi et al., 2014) and finding the meaning of life (Negru-Subtirica et al., 2016) are two important processes in the path of identity formation. The concepts or beliefs which shape each individual's choice or judgment about behaviors or events are called values (Schwartz, 2017). The meaning of life, according to a conceptual model (Martela & Steger, 2016), includes three domains (i.e., how to understand the world, the purpose of life, and mattering in life). These two important processes of identity which are passed from parents to children have a close relationship with each other. In such a way that examining one process requires considering the other. According to the latest studies, the effect of parents on the formation of values in children includes two processes. The first is the process of transmitting the content of values from parents to children, and the second is the process of children's decision in accepting the content transmitted by parents (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997). The process of transmitting and accepting the values and meaning of life in parents and children is important in two ways, including the role which this process plays in shaping the identity of people, and the role which this process can play in strengthening or weakening family relationships.

Since most of the studies in this field have been carried out quantitatively, and there is a void of a qualitative and comprehensive review about the process of transmitting values and meanings to children in the literature, the aim of the current research was to deeply examine the experience of parents in this regard through a qualitative and phenomenological study.

Methodology

The current research study is of qualitative nature, and was conducted through interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA). Since the use of this approach allowed for a more detailed examination of how parents experienced the process of transmitting values and meanings of life, this approach was chosen for the study.

Samples were selected through purposive sampling method. In this research study, 10 parents were interviewed. The inclusion criteria of the samples were the children's age range (between 18 and 29 years), the minimum educational level of diploma, and the residence of parents and their children, who are the parents' own children, in the same house. The exclusion criteria were long-term and repeated absence of parents in the past or current years (e.g., regular multi-month work missions).

In the next step, the main interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way. During the interviews, the questions were revised to bring the researcher closer to the relevant material. Finally, by checking the data several times, the obtained data was analyzed; the main themes and sub-themes were extracted, and the final report was written.

For data analysis, the method proposed by Smith and Osborn (Smith & Osborn, 2012) was adopted. In the first stage, the text of the interviews was read several times so that the researchers mastered the nature of the content. In the next step, the collective review of the assigned notes and codes was done. Finally, relying on the extracted descriptive and interpretive materials, the themes were formed and arranged in clusters. The aforementioned analyses were carried out in the platform of MAXQDA software.

Results

According to the analysis of the interviews conducted, two main themes and 11 sub-themes were identified.

Table 1. Main themes and sub-themes

Main themes	Sub-themes
Transmission through verbal and non-verbal behaviors	Different strategies of parents to transmit values and meanings to children
Child relationships' control as a strategy	
Child's context as a strategy	
The effect of parents' trust in their children on the adopted strategy	
The effect of the parent's personal experience regarding his own parents	The affectedness of transmitting strategies from multiple factors
The effect of children's personality differences on the adopted strategy	
The gradual changes of the parent's personality and its influence in his strategy	
The effect of the developmental stage of the child on the adopted strategy	
The effect of psychological instructions on the adopted strategy	
There difference between the parents in adopting a strategy	
The effect of the importance of a value on the adopted strategy	

Different strategies of parents to transmit values and meanings to children

Considering the sense of duty and the responsibility of parents to their children, parents try various ways to convey their desired values to their children.

Transmission through verbal and non-verbal behaviors

The first and the most frequent tool used in the transmission process is the verbal behavior. Another important strategy is transmission through non-verbal behaviors. Of course, an important point in this strategy is that if there is a conflict between the verbal and non-verbal strategies, the child will notice it and will react to it.

Child relationships' control as a strategy

One of the basic strategies of parents is to influence their child's relationship network. This control has several forms: controlling the amount of relationship of the child with his friends, rejecting or confirming verbally those with whom the child is in contact, communicating with the child's friends, identifying the child's friends, and choosing a special environment for the child.

Child's context as a strategy

The next strategy is the effect of parents on the child's growth environment. Parents have learned that children are not just in contact with them; they enter contexts outside the home from childhood. Thus, they should use the data received from the environments in which they live to form their desired values and prevent the formation of other values.

The affectedness of transmitting strategies from multiple factors

This topic deals with issues which have had an effect on what and how to adopt transmission strategies. These factors are effective in two ways, including the content of the values to be transmitted and the manner of transmission.

The effect of parents' trust on their children in the adopted strategy

An effective factor is the trust that parents have in their children. In other words, one of the factors which affect the level of control, strictness and type of parental interventions in the values is the amount of parents' trusts in their children.

The effect of the parent's personal experience regarding his own parents

Another factor affecting the adoption of different strategies in the transmission process is the experiences which parents had in relation to their parents. This influence is sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious.

The effect of children's personality differences on the adopted strategy

Sometimes the strategies of transmitting values and meanings by parents in the same family are different considering to different children. This difference can be caused by the individual characteristics (e.g., his temperament or gender) of each child.

The gradual changes of the parent's personality and its influence in his strategy

Parents, like any other human being, undergo changes during their lifetime; these changes definitely affect their parenting strategies and transmission of values. This factor, like other factors, sometimes affects the method and sometimes affects the content.

The effect of the developmental stage of the child on the adopted strategy

One of the factors affecting the parents' transmission strategies and the way they interact with their children on value issues is the age range of the children.

The effect of psychological instructions on the adopted strategy

In some cases, specialized help (e.g., visiting a psychologist, participating in parenting classes, and reading relevant books) plays a role in shaping or modifying transmission strategies.

There difference between the parents in adopting a strategy

Since parents, despite all their similarities, are two different individuals, it is inevitable that they do not consider the values similarly, and their strategies are also different. If these possible ambiguities are not managed properly, they can have negative consequences.

The effect of the importance of a value on the adopted strategy

From the viewpoints of parents, the quality of transmission of some more basic values is different from other values. By comparing children and parents, many differences may be observed. However, in those basic values, the difference is probably much less. The existence of these basic values in the child makes it easier for parents to deal with other value differences. An important point about these basic values is that they are usually values which are shared by both parents. Even in the creation of parents' trust, which was formerly said to affect the adoption of different transmission strategies, the existence of these basic values is a determining factor.

Conclusion

The first main theme was related to parents' diverse strategies in transmitting values and meanings to their children. Among these strategies, according to the children's viewpoints, the effect of non-verbal strategies was more than that of mere verbal strategies. In other research studies (e.g., Dollahite & Marks, 2009), the importance of observational learning in the family was mentioned. In the findings, factors affecting the adoption of different transmission strategies were also mentioned. Some of these effective factors have been mentioned in the research literature. For example, the experience of parents during their growth and development and in relation to their own parents was mentioned. This finding can be understood under the concept of intergenerational transfer which is proposed in the theory of family systems (Brown, 1999). It was also found that the certainty of the existence of certain values in children makes the mean opinion of parents about the path of their children's values to be positive, despite all the differences. Considering the success factors of the transmission process in the literature, it was concluded that these values were presented to the children in a more transparent way (e.g., Knafo & Schwartz, 2003) and with a more stable step (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). By step stability, it is meant that during the children's transformation, the parents' emphasis on value transmission has not changed. Moreover, there has

been more concordance between parents' verbal and non-verbal behaviors about those values (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003).

The analysis of the results of this research study showed that the degree of strictness and control of parents was also under the influence of trust. In other words, it can be said that parents do not behave in a unified way in giving freedom and defining its limitations; the limitations of this freedom vary according to the danger which they imagine an issue creates for their child and the certainty regarding the internalization of certain values in their child (which is considered as children protection from the viewpoints of parents). In conclusion, the results of this research study showed that the process of transmitting values and the meaning of life is not just affected by the content intended by parents to transmit. In fact, the strategies of parents in the path of transmission are influenced by factors ranging from parents' inner thoughts to variables related to the children.

This research study was limited to a specific structure of the family; as a result, there was a limitation in generalizing the explanations made to families with different conditions. Thus, it is suggested that researchers conduct interviews with parents from families with different conditions to further understand the issue.

Conflict of interest

This study is a part of a master's thesis of Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran, and there is no conflict of interest.

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