
Combating Conflicting Messages of Values: A Closer Look at Parental Strategies

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Abstract

This study examined how parents respond when their children encounter values outside the home that conflict with family values. Forty-eight middle-class European American parents completed questionnaires consisting of 11 vignettes asking how they would respond to hypothetical situations where outside sources posed potential conflicts with parental values to their adolescent child (M age of child = 13.33 years). We identified five strategies that parents might use: controlled cocooning, reasoned cocooning, compromise, pre-arming, and deference. Parents in the study enlisted all five strategies, with reasoned cocooning and pre-arming occurring most frequently. The self-reported importance of values to parents was the most important predictor of which strategy parents used, with parents using more controlling strategies to defend values that were most important to them. Importance of values also mediated the relation between religion and the parent's self-reported desire for the child's compliance on personal issues, and parental strategy choice. This study is among the first to examine alternative parental strategies for regulating children's values acquisition outside the home, and shows that the extent of parental control is related to the importance of specific values to the parent.

Keywords: parenting; values; conflict

In the past socialization has been described as a one-way process, with parents having a direct, unidirectional influence on their children. As socialization research has progressed, not only has the child been perceived as having a more active role in the interaction, but socialization influences have greatly expanded to include friends, teachers, media, and society. With parents no longer considered the sole important socialization influence on children, questions are raised about how multiple socialization influences interact with one another. For example, do these multiple influences provide children with similar or consistent messages concerning values, or do they send potentially conflicting messages (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998)? If potentially conflicting messages are encountered, what role do parents play in clarifying the differing messages or ensuring the pre-eminence of their influences?

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When examining how parental influences interact with societal influences, Parke and Bhavnagri (1989) have described parents as mediators of children's encounters with the broader social world. Parents of young children, for example, arrange playdates with mothers of other young children, and at older ages provide permission, transportation, and financial support for children's interactions with peers and other adults. Parents are mediators not only of children's personal encounters with extra-familial influences (in child care, school, neighborhood, and community) but also of children's susceptibility to the values promoted by individuals and agencies outside the home. How do parents respond to values conflicts between the beliefs they seek to instill in offspring and the values that children encounter outside of the family? The current study focused on this question, and also sought to identify parental attitudes and beliefs that might influence parental responses.

One way that parents may try to bridge the gap between their values and competing values from different socialization agents is by expressing their attitudes and beliefs within the context of the discipline situation (Holden, 1995; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). However, parents also devote effort to preventing or avoiding misbehavior before it occurs. Holden (1983) called this proactive parenting, and claimed that by leading children through these situations, parents help them to better understand the values involved by making behavioral expectations, and the parent's reasons, more explicit. Parental need to proactively socialize children outside of the discipline situation may be particularly relevant when children encounter values from outside of the family that conflict with parental values.

It is important to note that proactive parenting strategies used to combat potentially conflicting values are not the same as the usual distinctions made between reactive parental discipline strategies such as parental power-assertion, love-withdrawal, and induction. The strategies we target in the current study reflect different avenues for conveying parents' values to youth who are bridging the values of the home and those found elsewhere, and thus of balancing the exercise of parental authority with the growth of a young person's autonomy. These strategies are not necessarily in response (or a reaction) to discipline situations involving past misbehavior, but are a parent's proactive attempt to communicate family values to the child in the face of conflicting values presented by sources outside of the family.

Parental Strategies for Combating Conflicting Messages

Consistent with research on parenting practices (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980), we expected that parents would use more than one strategy when socializing their children in the face of conflicting values, and that these strategies would vary depending on the context of the situation (e.g., the specific value being targeted) or the potential violation that might result when the child acts inconsistently with that value. Although there is very little research on how middle-class European American families deal with conflicting values outside the home, there is relevant research on immigrant and ethnic minority families for whom the question of conflict between family values and values from other sources is particularly salient.

Cocooning. Cocooning is shielding children from influences of the larger society by restricting children's access to alternative values or their ability to engage in behavior that conflicts with parental values (Goodnow, 1997; see also Harrison, Wilson, Pine,

Chan & Buriel, 1990; Ou & McAdoo, 1993). Nanji (1993) described this strategy among Muslim families in the United States. For example, a young girl has friends who party on the weekends, but Friday is the day of congregational prayer in Islam, so she must be with her family. Although Nanji recognized the child's anxiety about not being allowed to date and attend dances, he noted the self-confidence, awareness, and close family ties that resulted from the child spending time with the family and complying with parental wishes.

Cocooning may exist on at least two levels. On one extreme, parents may persuasively cocoon their children by shielding them from outside influences, encouraging in them the values that the family endorses, and providing reasoned explanations for those values. We labeled this parental approach 'reasoned cocooning.' On the other extreme, some parents may forcefully cocoon their children in order to promote discipline and compliance and offer no explanation or rationalization for their prohibition. We labeled this parental approach 'controlled cocooning.'

Pre-arming. Pre-arming is anticipating conflicting values and preparing children to deal with them in their encounters with the broader world (Goodnow, 1997; see also Harrison *et al.*, 1990; McAdoo, 1993). A study by Thornton, Chatters, Taylor and Allen (1990) suggested that African American families anticipate that their children will encounter hostility outside the home, so parents utilize various socialization processes that prepare their children for these situations and help them to endure, while retaining their racial pride. Pre-arming exists in a variety of forms, from parents offering helpful strategies about how to resist harmful situations, to deliberate putdowns of the threatening group in an attempt to lessen a child's fascination.

Compromise. Compromise is allowing considerable exposure to potentially conflicting values, while still maintaining an element of family values and a sense of parental control. We termed this strategy compromise because it results in the parent granting flexibility on family values in order to maintain a balance between parental control and the growing desire for autonomy on the part of the child. In one study, African American families attempted to balance the values of their own ethnic group with those of the larger society in order to help their children meet the challenges they would face as members of a minority (Boykin & Toms, 1985).

Deference. Deference is the parent relenting to the demands of children and allowing them to make their own decisions, even if they are contrary to family values. We termed this strategy deference because it may occur after a struggle between parent and child and is sometimes a last resort tactic for the parent, after more active methods of combating conflicting messages have failed. This strategy is illustrated in Gold's (1993) description of a Vietnamese immigrant family in which the father attempted to make important career decisions for his daughter: he wanted her to be a doctor. However, the daughter wanted to study management, and after much conflict, he allowed her to do so. The motivation to use deference may originate from the parent feeling a lack of control and a need to accede to the will of the child and allow exposure to potentially conflicting values. Alternatively, deference may be the parent's attempt to avoid conflict or to make the autonomy of the child a priority due to confidence in the child's ability to withstand the outside influence or a desire for the child to experience the consequences of his or her actions.

Current Study

The current study was an attempt to understand how regularly these parenting strategies occur in typical middle-class families of the dominant culture in the United States who do not face the same kinds of acculturation and discrimination pressures that immigrant and ethnic minority families do, but who still face situations in which children encounter values outside the home that conflict with the parents' own values. We asked, 'What strategies are being utilized by parents to combat conflicting messages from sources outside the home?' In addition, based on previous socialization research (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998), we identified three factors that might affect which strategies parents used: gender of the child, parental beliefs regarding the degree of perceived threat, and parental desire for compliance. As evidenced from the immigrant and ethnic minority literature suggesting that socialization messages which parents utilize are directly related to childrearing beliefs and values (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio & Miller, 2002), we expected that how important the values were to the parent would be a direct and central predictor of which strategy parents used.

Child Gender. The strategies which parents use are likely to differ as a function of the gender of the child. Parent-child interactions are shaped differently based on the child's gender due to gender-stereotypes that are present from birth (Rubin, Provenzano & Luria, 1974). Mothers and fathers treat their children differently in ways related to protectiveness for the perceived greater dependency and vulnerability of daughters (Fagot, 1995). Therefore, we studied whether the strategies which parents used to help their children combat conflicting messages varied according to the child's gender or the parent's gender.

Degree of Threat. The strategies which parents use are likely to differ as a function of the degree of perceived threat from outside influences. Bugental and Goodnow (1998) have suggested that when socializing children, parents may react very differently if they perceive the outside world as threatening, as opposed to seeing the outside world as supportive. A study by Thornton *et al.* (1990) suggested that families were more likely to utilize proactive strategies (e.g., pre-arming) if they felt it was probable that their child would face negative influences outside the family. This is particularly salient in minority populations because of discrimination that children may face, and parental desire to prepare children for this hardship while instilling ethnic pride.

However, socialization is guided not only by the reality of the world, but also by how the world is perceived by the parent (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Therefore it is likely that parents in the mainstream society also feel that their values are threatened by systems outside of the family, particularly if they feel that their values are in some way inconsistent with those of the dominant society, or if they have negative perceptions of the world as being hostile or as undermining their value system. Therefore, we attempted to understand the association between parents' perceptions of how threatened their values are by society and the strategies they choose to combat conflicting messages. If parents feel their values are less threatened or if they perceive their values as being supported by society, they may be more likely to give in to a child's demands or to negotiate (e.g., deference, compromise). On the other hand, if parents feel their values are highly threatened, or if they feel their values are not supported by society, they may be more likely to actively prepare their child for

these influences (e.g., pre-arming) or to shelter their child from these influences (e.g., cocooning).

Desire for Compliance. Socialization research often focuses on the discipline situation and the parent's desire for compliance from the child. However, Grusec, Goodnow and Kuczynski (2000) have stressed that how a parent understands a child's need for autonomy is also an important aspect of socialization. Thus, in the current study we sought to understand how a parent's emphasis on compliance versus autonomy was associated with the strategies they chose to combat conflicting messages. Parents who value compliance highly (e.g., who are more controlling and less willing to negotiate) are more likely to insist that their child follow family values without dissension or explanation (e.g., controlled cocooning). In contrast, parents who highly value their child's autonomy are more likely to negotiate with their child or to allow them to make decisions independently (e.g., compromise, deference). Many parents prefer a degree of both autonomy and compliance. For this reason, we asked a number of questions in an attempt to tease apart this association and determine where parents generally fell on this continuum.

However, because parental reactions to children's behaviors are significantly influenced by the context of the situation, it is important to consider context when examining a parent's desire for autonomy and compliance. Researchers from the social domain perspective suggest that parental socialization goals derive from a number of coexisting domains (e.g., personal, conventional, moral), and that each domain should be considered when parental behavior is explored (Nucci, 1996; Smetana, 1997). Nucci (1996) found that parents and children had different expectations for different types of behavior, and that they often disagreed over which decisions were moral, social conventional, and personal, with implications for who should exert authority in making these decisions. They also reacted differently to behavior as a function of social domain, with children more likely to comply with moral demands and parents more likely to give in to personal requests (Nucci, 1996; Smetana, 1997). In the current study we attempted to determine how parental desires for autonomy or compliance might vary based on the domain of behavior (personal versus moral). Parents who require children's compliance in both moral and personal domains will likely react with more controlling parental strategies than parents who allow a greater degree of autonomy in the personal domain.

Importance of Values

Parents approach socialization with a number of goals in mind (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Consistent with research on ethnic minority parenting (Bogenschneider, Wu, Raffaelli & Tsay, 1998), research on mainstream populations has found that the goals and values parents hold for their children have an impact on parenting behavior (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The degree of personal investment that the parent has in the value is likely to play a role in how vigorously the value is defended. Thus, values that are more important to the parent will be defended with more controlling strategies, such as cocooning, because they are values in which the parent has more personally invested. In turn, values that are less important to the parent are more likely to be defended by less controlling strategies, such as deference, because they are values in which the parent has less personal investment. In order to assess how the importance of values might impact the strategies parents used, we looked at self-reported

importance of values measures as they related to a broad index of parental control. We sought to understand whether the overall importance of the values to the parent (i.e., the severity of the potential offense if the child acts contrary to the parental value) influenced the overall exercise of parental control.

The relation between parental beliefs and parental behaviors is not a direct one, but is influenced by parental knowledge, affect, desires, and values (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). As one reflection of this, in the current study we expected that how important certain values were to parents would be influenced by broader parental attitudes, reflected by demographic characteristics such as religiosity, as well as parental beliefs about the degree of threat from society and parental desire for compliance from their children. Further, we expected that the relation between parental beliefs and attitudes and overall parental control would be mediated by the importance of values, which would be a direct predictor of parental control.

Methodological Considerations

The current study used hypothetical vignettes to obtain information regarding what parents might do in situations of conflicting values. The use of hypothetical situations has been a common practice in numerous areas of research (Kochanska, Padavich & Koenig, 1996; Kohlberg, 1969; Skoe, Eisenberg & Cumberland, 2002) and has been effective at obtaining information that provides an approximation of how individuals act in given situations. In an attempt to make the hypothetical situations as realistic as possible, we asked a number of pretest parents to describe situations they commonly faced in their families, and designed the current vignettes with these responses in mind. However, because we wanted vignettes that varied in severity, we enlisted situations that were less common than others in parents' everyday lives. To address this issue, after each hypothetical vignette we asked parents whether they had ever experienced a similar dilemma in their own family, and if so, what they had done in response.

Method

Participants

Forty-eight parents—38 mothers and 10 fathers (M age = 42.51, SD = 5.64)—drawn from different families in a mid-sized Midwestern community, participated in the study. Most of the parents (95%) were European American, 83% were married for the first time, and 79% had a family income of \$50,000 or above. Each of these is consistent with the demographic profile of families in this region. Participants also provided information about their early adolescent child and their family. The mean age of children was 13.33 years (SD = .57), and there were slightly more female (n = 28) than male (n = 20) children. Almost half (44%) of children were first-born, and 40% were second-born. Over half (69%) of mothers had a four-year college degree or above, and 65% of fathers had a four-year college degree or above.

Procedures

Participants were parents of students between the ages of 11–14 attending a local middle school. We mailed a total of 100 questionnaires to parents of students who

were randomly selected from a school list. Of the 100 mailed, we received 52 in return, 48 of which were filled out completely and correctly.

Materials

Participants were asked a number of demographic questions, as well as questions about their family. Demographic questions regarded age, gender, level of education, marital status, and ethnicity. Self-reported importance of religion and religious activity were also assessed.

Religiosity. To assess the importance of religion, participants were asked to rate, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*), how important religion was in their lives. To assess religious activity participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*at least once a week*) how often they attended church or synagogue. Because importance of religion and religious activity were highly correlated ($r = .62, p < .001$), they were summed during final coding to represent total *religiosity*, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-reported religiosity.

Values Threatened by Society. Following these demographic questions, participants were asked to rate on a 7-point scale, with values ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*), how threatened they felt their values were by society. Higher scores indicate higher degrees of perceived threat.

Desire for Compliance. Participants were asked to report on their desire for compliance from their children, with higher scores indicating greater desire for compliance. These questions were asked as they related to both personal and moral issues in an attempt to tease apart a parent's desire for both autonomy and compliance in different contexts. Parents were asked two questions pertaining to each domain. First, to target the *personal domain* parents were asked to rate on a scale from 1 (*not important*) to 7 (*very important*), 'In regards to personal matters (hair style, clothing, etc), how important is it to you that your child comply with your wishes?' Second, parents were asked to indicate where they fell on a continuum from 1 (*make own decisions*) to 7 (*comply with my wishes*), 'In regards to personal matters, is it more important to you that your child comply with your wishes or is it more important to you that your child make his/her own decisions?' Because the two questions regarding compliance were highly correlated within the personal domain ($r = .67, p < .001$), the final *desire for personal compliance* score is the sum of the two questions. The *moral domain* was assessed in a similar manner. Parents were asked the same two questions as above, but regarding moral matters (honesty, kindness, etc). Because the two questions regarding compliance were highly correlated within the moral domain ($r = .68, p < .001$), the final *desire for moral compliance* score is the sum of the two questions.

Importance of Values. Participants were asked to rate 11 different statements regarding the importance of values on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not true*) to 7 (*very true*) (e.g., 'It is important that my child not participate in violent behavior' and 'It is important that my child follow household rules'). Higher scores indicated greater *importance of values*. These 11 values mirrored the values represented in the following vignettes.

Vignette Questionnaire. The remainder of the questionnaire consisted of 11 vignettes, each centered around a specific value and representing a potential conflicting influence relating to that value. A number of vignettes were piloted on independent families to assess validity, and themes were chosen based on pre-testing (see Table 1 for themes and brief description of each vignette). Each vignette presented a situation involving potential conflict between parental values and influences from one of the following outside sources: peers, school, teachers, television, internet, or music. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in each hypothetical situation with their child, and then to respond to a number of questions.

Participants were given five options as to how they would respond to the situation, with each option representing a different parental strategy. For example, an option representing *controlled cocooning* involved prohibiting the child from being exposed to a potentially conflicting value with no explanation; an option representing *reasoned cocooning* involved prohibiting the child while offering an explanation or reminder of family values; an option representing *compromise* involved allowing the child to be exposed to a potentially conflicting value to some degree while still maintaining family values; an option of *pre-arming* involved allowing the child to be exposed to a potentially conflicting value while offering an explanation or reminder of family values; and an option of *deference* involved allowing the child to be exposed to a potentially conflicting value with no explanation or reminder of family values. Participants were asked to choose their most likely response to each situation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed and coded in several ways. First, we explored the proportion frequencies of parental strategies in order to assess whether or not all five strategies were, in fact, being used. Second, we calculated modal parental responses in an attempt to isolate parental characteristics that might have influenced which strategy was adopted most consistently by the parent. Although examining frequencies and modal responses was effective in assessing the prevalence of parental strategies, these qualitative approaches did not provide us with the statistical power needed for more complex multivariate analyses. Consequently, strategies were ranked from most to least controlling, and participants were given a value of control ranging from 1–5 for each of the 11 vignettes based on which strategy they chose for that vignette (i.e., 5 = controlled cocooning; 4 = reasoned cocooning; 3 = compromise; 2 = pre-arming; 1 = deference). For example, if a parent chose controlled cocooning (the option with the most implicit control) for their strategy on a particular vignette, they received a control score of 5 for that vignette. Then participants' scores were calculated as a sum of their control scores across all 11 vignettes, creating a *Parental Control* variable with a maximum possible score of 55.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive analyses were used to determine how many parents reported having personally experienced situations similar to the hypothetical dilemmas presented in the questionnaire. Analyses revealed that over 50% of parents reported having experienced each situation, with the exception of the most severe cases of violence, shoplifting,

Table 1. Percentage of Parents Reporting Experiencing the Situation, Importance of Values, and Percentage of Parents Endorsing Parental Strategies by Vignette Value Theme

Vignette Value Theme	% of Parents Reporting Experiencing Situation	Mean Importance of Values Mean(SD)/Range	% of Parents Endorsing each Strategy				
			Controlled Cocoon	Reasoned Cocoon	Compromise	Pre-arm Deference	
Shoplifting—Child encouraged to shoplift by a friend's example	7	6.96(.20)/6.00–7.00	10	42	27	19	2
Underage Smoking and Drinking—Child influenced by friends who smoke and drink	25	6.77(.86)/2.00–7.00	23	42	21	6	8
Following Household Rules—Child influenced by rebellious friend who does not follow household rules	90	6.54(.58)/5.00–7.00	6	10	15	67	2
Sexual Content on Internet—Child potentially exposed to sexual content on internet	83	6.52(.80)/3.00–7.00	4	10	33	48	4
Listening to Violent Music—Child exposed to violent music	88	6.17(.88)/4.00–7.00	17	48	6	23	6
Obedying Curfew—Child has friends with earlier curfew	98	6.17(.95)/4.00–7.00	10	19	19	33	19

Table 1. *Continued*

Vignette Value Theme	% of Parents Reporting Experiencing Situation	Mean Importance of Values Mean(SD)/Range	% of Parents Endorsing each Strategy				
			Controlled Cocoon	Reasoned Cocoon	Compromise	Pre-arm Deference	
Aggression—Child exposed to violent television program	79	5.96(1.37)/2.00–7.00	17	44	0	33	6
Viewing Rated R Movies—Friend is showing R rated movie at sleepover	85	5.79(1.18)/2.00–7.00	15	23	19	31	13
Physical Violence—Child encouraged by teacher or friend to fight back when teased	35	5.63(1.54)/1.00–7.00	10	15	17	50	8
Sexual Education o/s the Home—Sex education class offered by school	95	5.42(1.40)/2.00–7.00	4	13	0	54	29
Dating—Child encouraged to go on group date by friends	80	4.17(1.73)/1.00–7.00	4	8	8	50	29

Note: Parents were given hypothetical vignettes associated with each of the above issues and were asked if similar situations had occurred in their family, and how important the underlying value was to them.

and drinking/smoking (see Table 1). We created a composite variable, giving each parent a score representing the number of vignettes for which they had personally experienced similar circumstances in their own families ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 2.04$). A univariate ANOVA was conducted to determine whether parental modal strategies varied as a function of whether or not parents reported experiencing the hypothetical dilemmas within their own family, and did not produce statistically significant differences, $F(4,41) = 1.62$, $p = .19$. In addition, whether or not parents reported having experienced the dilemmas in their own family was not significantly correlated with total control scores, $r = -.24$, $p = .11$. That is, parents did not use different control strategies based on whether the situations described in the vignettes were personally familiar to them.

Chi-square analyses revealed that modal parental strategies did not vary significantly by gender of the parent, $\chi^2(4, N = 48) = 2.47$, $p = .96$, or gender of the child, $\chi^2(4, N = 48) = 4.96$, $p = .55$. Univariate ANOVAs also revealed that overall parental control did not vary significantly as a function of gender of the parent, $F(1,46) = .10$, $p = .91$, gender of the child, $F(1,46) = 1.02$, $p = .31$, or the interaction between the two $F(1,46) = .381$, $p = .54$. Thus, we collapsed gender (both for parents and children) for all subsequent analyses. There were no additional differences in modal parental strategy or total control scores as a function of any other demographic variables measured (e.g., birth order, income, education).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 contains the proportion frequencies with which parental strategies were used across the 11 vignettes. These values represent the mean number of times each parental strategy was used, divided by the total number of vignettes. Parents used all five strategies, and responses of pre-arming and reasoned cocooning occurred more frequently overall than any other strategy. Responses of controlled cocooning and deference occurred the least frequently overall, with compromise in the middle.

Table 2 also contains modal parental strategies, or the number of parents who used each strategy most frequently across all 11 vignettes. It should be noted that modal responses of pre-arming and reasoned cocooning were used more consistently than

Table 2. Proportion Frequencies, Modal Parental Response, and Frequency of Modal Response

Strategy	Proportion Frequency (Range)	Modal Response
Controlled Cocoon	.11 (.00-.73)	$n = 4$
Reasoned Cocoon	.23 (.00-.64)	$n = 12$
Compromise	.16 (.00-.64)	$n = 7$
Pre-arming	.35 (.00-.82)	$n = 22$
Deference	.11 (.00-.91)	$n = 3$

Note: Proportion frequency refers to the mean number of times each strategy was chosen divided by the total of 11 vignettes. Numbers in parentheses are ranges of individual proportions. Modal response refers to the number of parents for whom the strategy was their most frequent response.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range of Parental Characteristic Measures

	Mean	Std Dev	Range
1. Religiosity	7.65 (10.00)	2.27	2.00–10.00
2. Values Threatened by Society	5.19 (7.00)	1.47	1.00–7.00
3. Desire for Personal Compliance	9.21 (14.00)	2.03	3.00–13.00
4. Desire for Moral Compliance	11.81 (14.00)	1.77	8.00–14.00
5. Importance of Values	65.03 (77.00)	6.65	45.50–74.50

Note: Number in parentheses represents the maximum possible score on that variable.

any other strategy, and that controlled cocooning and deference were hardly ever used as modal strategies. The vast majority of parents had only one modal strategy, and modal strategies were generally used only about 50% of the time. This suggests that although there is a degree of consistency across vignettes for each parent, parental response largely depended upon the context of the situation.

Modal Parenting Strategies

Table 3 contains the means, standard deviations and ranges of the measures of parental characteristics. Parental characteristics include religiosity (sum of importance of religion and religious attendance), values threatened by society, desire for child compliance (both in personal and moral situations), and importance of values. Univariate ANOVAs were conducted to determine if there were differences in modal strategies based on these background characteristics. Of the five ANOVAs, only two produced significant differences between modal parental strategies. The first was religiosity, $F(4,43) = 2.63$, $p < .05$, with a LSD post hoc follow-up (with a $p < .05$ criterion) revealing that parents who chose reasoned cocooning as their modal strategy rated religion higher than parents who chose pre-arming, and parents who chose compromise rated religion higher than parents who chose pre-arming or deference. The second significant ANOVA was importance of values, $F(4,42) = 2.58$, $p < .05$, with a LSD post hoc follow-up (with a $p < .05$ criterion) revealing that parents who chose controlled cocooning as their modal strategy rated values higher than parents who chose deference, parents who chose reasoned cocooning rated values higher than parents who chose pre-arming or deference, and parents who chose compromise rated values higher than parents who chose deference (see Table 4).

Parental Characteristics Predicting Importance of Value Ratings

A multiple regression analysis was used to determine if parental characteristics would significantly predict parental importance of value ratings. Parental characteristics (religiosity, values threatened by society, personal compliance and moral compliance) were entered simultaneously, and the model accounted for a significant amount of systematic variance, $R^2 = .48$, $F(5,41) = 7.44$, $p < .001$. Parental characteristics contributing

Table 4. Differences Between Modal Parental Strategies Based on Religiosity and Importance of Values

	<i>F</i> -Test <i>df</i> = (4, 43)	Mean Religiosity (14)	Pairwise Comparisons
Controlled Cocooning (CC)	2.63*	7.50	RC > PREA*
Reasoned Cocooning (RC)		8.50	COMP > PREA**
Compromise (COMP)		9.29	COMP > DEF*
Pre-arm (PREA)		6.00	
Deference (DEF)		7.65	

	<i>F</i> -Test <i>df</i> = (4, 42)	Mean Importance of Values (77)	Pairwise Comparisons
Controlled Cocooning (CC)	2.58*	67.00	CC > DEF*
Reasoned Cocooning (RC)		68.13	RC > PREA*
Compromise (COMP)		67.50	RC > DEF**
Pre-arm (PREA)		63.07	COMP > DEF*
Deference (DEF)		58.00	

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent the maximum possible score on that variable, and letters in parentheses represent shortened code for each parental strategy used for pairwise comparisons: CC = controlled cocooning, RC = reasoned cocooning, COMP = compromise, PREA = pre-arming, and DEF = deference.

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

Table 5. Parental Characteristics Predicting Importance of Value Ratings

Predictor	β
Religiosity	.29*
Values Threatened by Society	.34**
Personal Compliance	.32**
Moral Compliance	-.04
Multiple R^2	.48**
<i>F</i> test	7.44**

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

to the model independently were religiosity, values threatened by society, and personal compliance (see Table 5). Parents who were high on self-reported religiosity, who perceived their values as being threatened by society, and who sought the compliance of their children on personal issues (although not on moral issues) were more likely to rate the 11 values reflected in the vignettes as being important to them.

Importance of Values as a Mediator Between Parental Characteristics and Parental Control

As indicated earlier, parental strategies (controlled cocooning, reasoned cocooning, pre-arming, compromise, and deference) were recoded based on level of parental control. The resulting variable, Parental Control, had a mean score of 31.33, $SD = 5.99$, with scores ranging from 13.00 to 43.00 (with a maximum possible score of 55). In order to assess mediation, Baron and Kenny (1986) suggest the need for three regression analyses: (1) a regression analysis establishing a relation between the independent variable and the mediator, (2) a regression analysis establishing a relation between the independent variable and the dependent variable, and (3) a regression analysis establishing a relation between the mediator and the dependent variable after controlling for the independent variable. The first requirement was tested above by regressing parental characteristics (independent variables) on importance of values (mediator). The second and third requirements were tested by conducting a hierarchical regression analyses (see Table 6). In step 1, religiosity, values threatened by society, personal compliance, and moral compliance (independent variables) were entered simultaneously as predictors of overall parental control (dependent variable). Parental characteristics of the model accounted for a significant amount of total variance, $R^2 = .35$, $F(5,41) = 4.45$, $p < .01$, with religiosity and desire for compliance on personal issues making significant independent contributions to the model. In step two, importance of values (mediator) was added to parental characteristics as a predictor of overall parental control. Importance of values scores in the second step significantly increased the amount of variance accounted for, R^2 change = .08, $F(6,40) = 5.07$, $p < .01$. Parents who endorsed strategies enlisting greater control reported that the values reflected in the vignettes were important to them. In this regression, religiosity and desire for compliance on personal issues were no longer significantly related to parental control. Because the addition of the mediating variable made the relation between the independent variables and the dependent variable non-significant, we

Table 6. Importance of Values as a Mediator Between Parental Characteristics and Parental Control

Predictor	β at first step	β at final step
1. Religiosity	.42**	.30
Values Threatened by Society	-.13	-.27
Personal Compliance	.32*	.19
Moral Compliance	.14	.16
Multiple R^2		.35**
R^2 change		.35**
F change		4.45**
2. Importance of Values		.39*
Multiple R^2		.43***
R^2 change		.08*
F change		5.07*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

concluded that the importance of parental values mediated the relation between religiosity and desire for personal compliance, and overall parental control.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to explore proactive parenting strategies used by parents of the majority culture to defend family values from potentially conflicting values posed from socialization agents outside of the family. The findings of this study support several conclusions that also offer directions for future research. First, we found that parents from middle-class homes enlisted all five of the strategies we identified, although they did not use each strategy to the same extent. Pre-arming and reasoned cocooning were strategies used most commonly, while controlled cocooning and deference were enlisted much more rarely, with compromise in the middle. Pre-arming and reasoned cocooning are mid-range strategies in the exercise of parental control: they affirm the importance of family values but also permit children opportunities to explore alternative beliefs and values that might be encountered outside of the home. By contrast, controlled cocooning emphasizes parental control over the child's autonomy, while deference does the reverse. It is also important that pre-arming and reasoned cocooning most emphasize parent-child communication and the sharing of viewpoints and perspectives between adult and offspring. To the extent that open communication shared by parents and children in early adolescence is valuable (Collins, 1990), these parental strategies are likely to enhance communication about differing values and the perspectives of adult and child. By contrast, both controlled cocooning and deference minimize parent-child communication: the former does so by the forceful assertion of parental preferences, and the latter does so by acceding entirely to the child's wishes. As a consequence, neither of the latter strategies enables parents and children to share perspectives concerning family values and alternative values that might be found outside the home. To be sure, it remains for future research to more fully explore the extent to which parents who use pre-arming and reasoned cocooning do, in fact, communicate more openly with their children about family values compared with parents who more often enlist controlled cocooning or deference.

Second, we found that parental use of control was related to the importance of the values parents are seeking to defend by exercising control over offspring. Whether our analyses focused on specific parental strategies or the broader index of parental control, parents who exercised strategies entailing greater control over children reported that the values reflected in the questionnaire vignettes were more important to them compared to parents using strategies that involved less exercise of parental control. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that parenting practices are influenced by the values of parents (Bogensneider *et al.*, 1998; Darling & Steinberg, 1993), and suggests that a parent's personal investment in the values they seek to convey to offspring significantly influences the extent of control they exercise in safeguarding children from exposure to conflicting values perspectives outside the home.

What influences the personal importance of values to parents? Our findings suggest that parents who reported that values were more important to them tended to be higher in self-reported religiosity (i.e., religious attendance and importance of religion), believed more strongly that their values were threatened by society, and sought their child's compliance on personal issues, such as hairstyle and clothing. Thus, consistent with the research literature on immigrant and ethnic minority families, parents may

feel more strongly about the values shaping family life if they perceive these to be threatened by the culture in which the family lives. Values may also be more salient to parents if they are tied to religious beliefs, although further research is needed to better understand the constellation of beliefs and attitudes that are associated with more controlling parental strategies.

A striking feature of these findings is that parents who rated values as more important reported emphasizing the child's compliance on personal issues but not on moral issues like honesty, sexuality, and fairness. One would expect the opposite pattern, since moral values are seen as central to issues involving the importance of values. The failure of the desire for compliance on moral issues variable to predict importance of values and overall control may reflect the more limited variability of this measure in the current sample (see Table 3). This is consistent with research suggesting that parents and children are less likely to disagree on moral issues than on personal issues (Larson, 1972), and that parents hold moral issues as more important than personal issues (Nucci, 1996). It is possible that there was greater variability on the measure of desire for compliance in the personal domain because this is where greater disagreement occurs between parents and their older children, therefore, by comparison with moral issues. The parents desiring greatest compliance on personal issues reported that values were more important to them and were likely to utilize more controlling parenting strategies to defend these values. These findings may reflect a parent who values control and does not place great emphasis on a child's autonomy. Adolescents often desire greater independence on personal issues than on moral issues (Nucci, 1996), suggesting that parents who desire control from their children on personal issues are more likely to meet resistance. We believe that future research which focuses on the perceptions of these proactive parenting strategies by adolescent offspring is also critically important to more fully ascertain the effectiveness of these strategies at meeting socialization goals.

Third, consistent with our predictions, our findings suggest that importance of values was a strong and direct predictor of parental control, even after controlling for the other variables. The importance of values was also a mediating variable between religiosity and parental desire for personal compliance, and overall parental control (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This is consistent with research suggesting that the influence of parental attitudes and beliefs on behavior is mediated by how important those values are to the parent (Kohn, 1969; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & Sigel, 1995). This finding suggests the need for future research that more carefully examines parents' values and how they relate to parental strategy choice and use of parental control.

It is important to emphasize that parents used several different strategies in their responses to the 11 questionnaire vignettes, suggesting considerable flexibility in their overall approach to balancing the needs for parental control and child autonomy in differing contexts. This is consistent with the research on parental discipline strategies, which likewise shows that parental responses in discipline situations are likely to vary as a function of the situation and the misdeed (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980). One reason for our decision to create an overall index of parental control was to try to capture the main theme of a parent's responses to the vignettes in the context of this variability, but another important topic for future study is to understand what the features of specific circumstances of potential values conflicts are that result in greater or lesser exercise of parental control. As socialization research increasingly calls for examination of the impact of parental strategies on children and the factors influencing strategy choice (Parke & Buriel, 1998), future research

is needed to understand more fully the parental reasoning and motivation behind specific parental strategies, as well as additional factors that might influence strategy choice, such as perceived vulnerability of the child and the amount of control parents feel they have over the situation (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). It is important also to study parental strategies in the context of different parental populations who vary in their values orientation and the extent to which they perceive their beliefs to be consistent with, or challenged by, the broader culture.

The current study had a number of limitations, namely the reliance on self-report data and the small sample size. Future research is needed using in-depth interviews and observations of both parents and adolescents to understand more fully parental motivations behind differential strategy use, as well as adolescents' perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies. It would also be helpful to have parents generate examples of conflicts they have experienced in their family and to assess how frequently conflicts occur in order to understand more fully the applicability of these results to the larger population. More sophisticated research methods coupled with more diverse populations would help us assess whether additional proactive parenting strategies are utilized, why parents utilize these strategies, and what factors influence a parent's decision to choose one strategy over another. In addition, it would be helpful to examine similar questions using a longitudinal study design in order to infer direction of effects.

Like the discipline encounter, the strategies enlisted by parents in conditions of potential values conflicts entail variation in the exercise of control and parent-child communication. However, as an example of proactive (versus reactive) parenting, how a parent responds to circumstances in which children encounter values that are contrary to those of the family is ripe with opportunities to clarify family practices, the relation of the family to the broader culture, and how the child can bridge the worlds of home and society. That these encounters are more likely to occur with older children and adolescents, who were the focus of this investigation, reflects the salience of these issues when offspring are seeking independent access to the world outside of the home and other expressions of autonomy. The conclusions of this study provide a reminder that even at an age when older children are independently engaging the broader world, parents remain important mediators of the influence of extrafamilial agencies on their offspring.

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