On the relation between adolescents’ emerging cultural identities and anticipated life choices

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Adolescence, India, Today

- Identity development is the focal life-task of adolescence. It is a personal, social and intergenerational process initiated by puberty.

- India, especially in the cities, is going through historical changes that make both parenting and adolescents’ “coming of age” more challenging.

- The changes India is experiencing, in conjunction with the bio-psycho-social changes of adolescence, can pose a particularly powerful set of risks to, and opportunities for, healthy parenting and adolescent identity development.

- A key tension facing parents and their adolescent children in urban, middle class Indian households today revolves around the maintenance of traditional cultural values and practices and the rejection / accommodation / assimilation / transformation of newly introduced ones.
Heuristic Model

Cultural-historical changes

- Parenting Practices
- Adolescents’ Cultural Identities
- Family Decision Making
- Life Choices
Some dimensions of adolescents’ cultural identities

- Internalized parent-child authority roles
- Self-construals
- Economic attitudes
- Value orientations
- Future time perspective
- Spirituality / religion
- Language and ethnicity
Basis of study

Identifying theoretically-justified subgroups of male and female adolescents whose emerging cultural identities could be described as either “traditional” or “less traditional”? 
Study Design and Sample

- Cross-sectional, school-based study
- Focus on early adolescents (7th - 9th graders)
- Private English-medium schools in Pune, India (n = 6); middle class samples
- Surveys, interviews, focus groups (verbal data)
  - N = 1485 surveys
  - N = 270 students interviewed in 35 focus groups
  - N = 12 teacher and 6 principal interviews
- Video and observation (visual data)
- Documents (historical-archival data)
Conceptualizing and operationalizing traditional vs. less traditional cultural identity subgroups

### Traditional identities
- Obedience to parents as a core value
  - 59% (n = 876)
- Interdependent self-construal
  - (Relational self)
- Family value orientation
  - (Familism)
- Frugal

### Less traditional identities
- Obedience to parents **not** a core value
  - 41% (n = 609)
- Independent self-construal
- Fun value orientation
  - (Hedonism)
- Materialistic

References: Das (2002); Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni & Maynard (2003); Markus, Mullally & Kitayama (1997); Mascolo, Misra & Rapisardi (2004); Saraswathi (2005); Verma & Saraswathi (2002)
Creating subgroups of adolescents with different cultural identities

“Looking over the 28 values listed on this page, which four of these values are the most important to you in your life?”

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Obedience to parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Wealth (material possessions, money)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Being down to earth</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Non-competitiveness</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Working hard</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Self-discipline</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Knowledge and education</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Respect for tradition</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Pleasure (gratification of desires)</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Leading a spiritual life</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Leading an exciting life</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Kindness / compassion</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Tolerance of others</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Caring for others</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Freedom (in thought and action)</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Fame and recognition from others</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Having a sense of shame</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Supporting parents in their old age</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>A world at peace (free of war and conflict)</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Being a responsible member of society</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Respect for elders</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Honoring one’s ancestors</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Honest</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Having a lot of fun</td>
</tr>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Being good looking physically</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Have social power and influence</td>
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Adapted from Marshall (2000)
Creating groups from adolescents’ self-reports: “Obedience to parents” as important life value

- More males and less females rate *obedience to parents* in their top 4 values.
- Youth who rate *obedience to parents* in their top 4 values are less likely to have rated *independence* in their top 4 values.
Self construal measures
(adapted from Singelis, 1994)

Independent self-construal (alpha = .46)

“I like being unique and different from other people.”

Interdependent self-construal (alpha = .67)

“My relationships with people I care about are more important than my own accomplishments.”

How true are these statements for you?
(1 = not at all true of me, 5 = very true of me)
Comparisons of two *self-construals* by adolescents’ cultural identity group

- ANOVA results show significant main effects for identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) on each self-construal at $p < .05$ level after controlling for youths’ English language ability, sex, and SES. Girls more interdependent. No sex by identity group interaction effects.
Life values measures
(adapted from Kasser & Ryan, 1996)

**Family values orientation** (alpha = .67)

“I will remain close to my family.”

**Fun / hedonistic values orientation** (alpha = .62)

“My life will be full of good times, excitement, and fun.”

How important are these future goals for you?
(1 = not at all important to me, 9 = extremely important to me)
Comparisons of the importance of two *life values* by adolescents' cultural identity group

- ANOVA results show significant main effects of identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) for each life value at $p < .05$ level after controlling for youths' English language ability, sex, and SES. Girls lower on both values. No sex by identity group interaction effects.
Economic attitudes
(adapted from Kasser, 2005)

Economic frugality (alpha = .64)

“I believe in being careful how I spend my money.”

Economic materialism (alpha = .68)

“It is important to make a lot of money when I grow up.”

(1 = not at all true of me, 5 = very true of me)
Comparisons of two *economic attitudes* by adolescents’ cultural identity group

- ANOVA results show significant main effects for identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) on each attitude at $p < .05$ level after controlling for youths’ English language ability, sex, and SES. No sex main effects. No sex by identity group interaction effects.
Research Question 2

- How do male and female adolescents with traditional vs. less traditional cultural identities compare in terms of their subjective well-being?
Well-being measures
(Original single items)

Life stress

“Overall, how stressed out would you say you are right now?”

Life satisfaction

“Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with your life right now?”

Happiness

“Overall, how happy would you say you are in your life right now?”

(1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = very)
Comparisons of *life stress* by adolescents’ cultural identity group and sex

ANOVA results show a significant sex by identity group interaction effect for life stress at $p < .05$ level after controlling for youths’ English language ability and SES. Nature of interaction = TG < LTG; LTG > LTB.
Comparisons of life satisfaction by adolescents’ cultural identity group and sex

ANOVA results show a significant sex by identity group interaction effect for life satisfaction at $p < .05$ level after controlling for youths’ English language ability and SES. Nature of interaction = LTG < LTB
Comparisons of *happiness* by adolescents’ cultural identity group

ANOVA results show a significant main effect for identity group on happiness at $p < .05$ level after controlling for youths’ English language ability, sex, and SES. No sex main effect or sex by identity group interaction effect.
Research Questions 3-4

- How do youths’ emerging cultural identities relate to their anticipated life choices concerning education, jobs, and marriage?

- How do youths’ emerging cultural identities relate to the relative fit between their ideal life choices and their parents’ desired choices for them?
What stream of study do your parents want you to take up after your 10th standard?

Coded as:

1. Non-professional course of study (33%)
2. Professional course of study (52%)
3. Whatever I wish (14%)

If you could study anything you wanted, what stream would you ideally take up after your 10th standard?

Coded as:

1. Non-professional course of study (44%)
2. Professional course of study (56%)
Course of educational study

Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis showed a significant two-way relation between adolescents’ identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) and their parents’ desired educational major for them (non-professional course vs. professional course vs. youth can decide)

\[ \chi^2 (2, 1114) = 14.67; p < .001 \]

Male and female adolescents with less traditional identities were over-represented, and those with traditional identities were under-represented, among those who said that their parents let them decide their own course of educational study.
Fit between youths’ and parents’ ideal educational major

- Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis showed a significant three-way relation between adolescents’ sex (male vs. female); identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) and the fit between the kind of course they ideally want to study and the course their parents’ want them to study (congruence vs. difference).

- Results were only significant for boys

\[ \chi^2 (1, 609) = 3.90; \ p < .06 \]

Male adolescents with traditional identities were over-represented among those showing a “congruence” between their ideal major and their parents’ desired major for them.

Male adolescents with less traditional identities were over-represented among those showing a “difference” between their ideal major and their parents’ desired major for them.
Future jobs

What jobs would your parents like you to have in the future? (list 3 jobs)

Realistically, what jobs do you think you will end up doing in the future? (list 3 jobs)

Coded as:

Same = Youth job 1 and parent job 1 are exactly the same (19%)

Similar = Youth job 1 is in parents’ top 2 list (22%)

Different = Youth job 1 is not in parents’ top 2 list (59%)
Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis showed a significant two-way relation between adolescents’ identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) and the fit between their expected job and their parents’ expected job for them (same vs. similar vs. different) \( \chi^2 (2, 836) = 6.30; p < .05 \)

Adolescents with traditional identities were over-represented among those wanting to do “the same job” as their parents wanted them to do (e.g., congruence).

Adolescents with less traditional identities were over-represented among those wanting to do “a different job” than their parents wanted them to do (e.g., difference).
Decision to get married

When you get older, do you want to get married? (tick one)

___Yes 49%
___No 8%
___I’m not sure yet 19%
___I have never thought about it 24%
Decision to get married

- Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis showed a significant three-way relation between adolescents’ sex (male vs. female), identity group (traditional vs. less traditional); and whether or not they wanted to get married in the future (yes vs. no vs. haven’t decided vs. never thought about it)

- Results were only significant for females

\[ \chi^2 (3, 604) = 10.64; p < .01 \]

Female adolescents with traditional identities were over-represented among those who said they had “never thought about getting married” and under-represented among those who said “yes they wanted to get married”

The opposite pattern was true for female adolescents with less traditional identities.
Type of marriage

For those who know they want to get married, do you think you will have an arranged marriage, a love marriage, or are you not sure yet? (tick one)

___ Definitely an arranged marriage  
___ Probably an arranged marriage  
___ Definitely a love marriage  
___ Probably a love marriage  
___ Not sure right now

16%  
50%  
35%
Type of marriage

- Cross-tabulation and chi-square analysis showed a significant two-way relation between adolescents’ identity group (traditional vs. less traditional) and the type of marriage they wanted to have in the future (love marriage vs. arranged marriage vs. haven’t decided) among those who knew that they wanted to marry.

\[ \chi^2 (2, 651) = 20.94; p < .0001 \]

Male and female adolescents with traditional identities who said they wanted to get married in the future were over-represented among those who said they would have an arranged marriage.

Male and female adolescents with less traditional identities who said they wanted to get married in the future were over-represented among those who said they would have a love marriage.
Anticipated life choices: Results summary

- Male and female adolescents with less traditional identities report having more input into their educational decisions, are more likely to have educational and occupational plans that diverge from their parents’ plans for them, and report more of a desire for love marriages than their adolescent peers with more traditional identities.

  [Evidence for emerging and/or desired youth-input into life choices]

- Male adolescents with traditional identities had ideal educational plans in close alignment with those of their parents; while both male and female adolescents with traditional identities had occupational plans in close alignment with those of their parents.

  [Evidence for continuing and/or desired parental input into life choices]

- Both male and female adolescents with traditional identities report more of a desire for arranged marriages compared to their adolescent peers with less traditional identities.

  [Evidence for continuing and/or desired parental input into life choices]
Conclusions

- Diversity of types of cultural identities among youth today

- “Coming of age” today in a globally-linked, economically open, fast-changing India is a challenge for adolescents and their identity development. Adolescents whose emerging identities are more traditional reported less stress, more life satisfaction, and greater happiness. Female adolescents with less traditional identities reported the greatest life stress and the lowest life satisfaction.

- Anticipated life choices are adolescents’ extension of their (cultural) identities into an *imagined future*. For a significant proportion of youth in this study, this *imagined future* includes a significant role for the adolescent him or herself in making life decisions. The aspirations of many young woman in this regard are noteworthy. One wonders if this *imagined future* of youth is a marker of an *actual future* in India that has already begun.
Implications for counseling

- Changes in family decision-making and family stress
- Focus on female adolescents and life stress
- Consider similar issues facing immigrant Indian families in places like the USA
Thank you

Questions?
Rank-order of 28 Life Values
(Gender differences)

Boys more:
- Obedience to parents
- Self-discipline
- Down to earth
- Kindness
- Sense of shame

Girls more:
- Obedience to parents
- Wealth
- Working Hard

Boys more:
- Obedience to parents
- Wealth
- Working Hard
References


