

Intergenerational Transmission of the Environment: How Parents and Non-Parents Convey the Environmental Knowledge to Next Generation

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Background

Global climate change and other environmental issues have been a growing concern for future generations (UNESCO, 2022).

Therefore, adults' role in teaching children about environmental issues is crucial for ensuring the intergenerational transmission of protecting the environment.

Even though past studies have examined the parental influence on children's pro-environmental behavior (Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2009, 2012, 2017) and how important the parent-child interaction in shaping children's values (Schwartz, 1994), none of the previous studies focused on the context of the message itself.

How children learn from their parents about the environment is still relatively unexplored.

Research Questions:

In what ways do parents engage their children at home? How do parents communicate with their children through these activities? how these environmental activities affected parents' communication with children?

Research Goal

The purpose of this study was to investigate how parents convey their environmental knowledge to the next generation.

We sought to find the context of the message being transmitted between parents (and non-parents) and the next generation by examining the stories, different themes, and how adults' environmental involvement affects their communication with children regarding these issues.

Sample

The study included 112 participants (71% women); Mage = 31.59, SD = 0.87.

N for parents = 57; N for non-parents = 55.

Of these women, 51% of these women had at least one child, 95% were employed, and 74% had graduated from college or university.

Measures

The study included both survey and interview.

The Environmental Inventory of Involvement Scale (Matsuba et al., 2012) consisted of 11 items rated, on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 4 (a lot), the frequency with which they engaged in each of the 11 environmental activities such as "Bought rechargeable batteries" and "signed a petition or participated in a campaign to make policy or actions more environmentally friendly" within the last year. Cronbach's α for the scale was .91.

Environmental Identity Scale (Clayton et al., 2003) consisted of 14 items rated on agreement on a 7-point scale from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (completely true of me). Items included statements such as "I like to spend time outdoors in natural settings (such as woods, mountains, rivers, fields, local parks, lake or beach, or a leafy yard or garden) ". Cronbach's α for the scale was .92.

Semi-Structure Interview: All participants were asked to relate a story about how they teach the next generation about the environment

"Describe a scene in which you have tried to teach a child about caring for the environment.". If you have not done this, please describe how you might do so in the future. So, describe what would happen, where it would happen, who would be involved, what you would do, what you would be thinking and feeling, what impact this experience would have on you and what it says about who you are or were?"

Results

Three undergraduate research assistants coded the stories thematically regarding the environmental tasks, the meaning of the events, and the impact.

To compare the environmental questionnaires of parents and non-parents, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

There was no significant difference between parents and non-parents in terms of individual environmental identity and involvement ($ps > .05$).

Qualitatively, the results indicated that the parenting and non-parenting groups approach teaching about the environment in similar yet somewhat different ways to the younger generation.

Both groups agreed:

- Hands-on experience is the best way to teach the younger generation about the environment.
- The younger generation must be shown how to care for the environment in addition to being told.
- Caring for the environment was more than a personal responsibility.

Differences between the groups:

- Most parents explained stories based on their own experiences with their children. Often, these stories were detailed and specific.
- Non-parents used more hypothetical examples that are not as specific, on average (although some non-parents provided detailed stories about their students, nephews, nieces, etc.).
- Based on their own experiences, parents tend to explain how and why children should understand and care about the environment.
- *Qualitative examples can be found in the handout.*