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Explaining parent-child similarity in different types of prejudice:

The role of family socialization mechanisms

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Abstract

The mechanisms behind the consistent finding of intergenerational similarity in prejudice between parents and adolescents remains a ‘black box’. The present study aims to extend previous research that predominantly focused on the size of intergenerational similarity in prejudice and its moderators, by focusing on the mechanisms that underlie intergenerational similarity. We examine how family socialization processes can explain parent-child similarity in prejudice, and test if our model holds for prejudice toward multiple groups: immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, and women. We take the adolescents’ own intergroup experiences into account in order to distinguish the unique contribution of family socialization, i.e. degree of open communication within the family, an authoritarian parenting style, a positive relation with the parents, and parenting values. We make use of the Parent-Child Socialization Study 2013, which is a representative survey of 1,536 majority group family triads with direct measures of 16-year old adolescents and both their parents. Structural equation modeling revealed a mediating effect of parenting values between the parent’s prejudice and their child’s prejudice for most groups. The extent to which parents lay the emphasis on hard values (i.e. ambition, working hard, independence, and obedience) or soft values (i.e. tolerance, respect, and solidarity) was a significant mediator for intergenerational similarity in prejudice toward immigrants, Muslims, and women, but not for homosexuals. Hence, not the parenting style as such, but the *content* of an adolescent’s upbringing is a significant underlying mechanism of intergenerational similarity in prejudice.

Keywords: prejudice, intergenerational similarity, family socialization, adolescents, parenting styles

Explaining parent-child similarity in different types of prejudice:

The role of family socialization mechanisms

One of the core topics of social psychological research is to explain the origins of prejudice (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, 2010). Although researchers have been very effective in explaining prejudice in adults, relatively little is known about the acquisition of prejudice during adolescence, while this is a crucial age for attitude development (Gniewosz & Noack, 2015; Rodríguez-García & Wagner, 2009; Sears & Funk, 1999; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001). Theorists have highlighted the role of parents as one of the main sources of influence on children's prejudice (Allport, 1954; Bandura, 1997; Barrett, 2007; Nesdale, 2004; Killen, Richardson & Kelly, 2010). A recent meta-analysis of parent-child similarity in intergroup attitudes revealed a significant medium-sized correlation between parents and their children (Degner & Dalege, 2013). However, there is still a need for identifying underlying processes to strengthen theoretical explanations for parent-child similarity in prejudice (Degner & Dalege, 2013; Gniewosz & Noack, 2015; Meeusen, 2014), because it remains unclear how parent-child similarity in prejudice can be explained. The significance of the present study is to extend previous research that predominantly focused on the size of parent-child similarity in prejudice and its moderators, but without examining the underlying processes, by bringing forward and examining a combination of mechanisms (i.e. mediators) that underlie parent-child similarity in adolescents' prejudices toward other groups. Herewith, we focus primarily on the unique contribution of family socialization and how these mechanisms (i.e. degree of open communication within the family, a positive relation with the parents, an authoritarian parenting style, and parenting values) can explain parent-child similarity in prejudice toward different groups.

The present study aims to add to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, we examine multiple mechanisms from the family socialization literature, such as different

parenting styles. The parenting styles have been hypothesized as underlying mechanisms for intergenerational similarity in various theories, but have to our knowledge not been tested in combination. Second, although adolescence has been identified as an essential period in which individuals start to shape and unveil their intergroup attitudes (Flanagan, 2013; Meeus, 1996), most research has focused on young children or adults (Miklikowska, 2015). It is especially during adolescence that individuals are susceptible to information on social groups, because it is a formative period for social identities and corresponding intergroup attitudes (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). We make use of the Parent-Child Socialization Study 2013, which is a new representative survey of 1,536 family triads consisting of 16-year old adolescents and both their parents. The survey was especially designed to study the intergenerational transmission of attitudes and behavior and therefore includes direct measures for the adolescents and both their mother and father. Third, we take into account that adolescents' prejudices are also influenced by their own intergroup encounters (Katz, 1976). We aim to integrate the adolescents' own intergroup contact experiences into our socialization model to get a better picture of the unique contribution of parental influence for the adolescents' prejudices. Last, whereas most studies have focused on prejudice toward one group (but see Meeusen & Dhont, 2015 and O'Bryan, Fishbein & Ritchey, 2004), we test if our model holds for prejudice toward multiple groups; immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, and women.

Allport's theory of parental socialization of prejudice

In his seminal work *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), Allport was among the first to ask how prejudice is learned during childhood and adolescence. He considered a broad range of influences that are likely to shape prejudice of which learning, conformity, and intergroup experiences (i.e. contact) are the main components (Aboud, 2005). These three social

mechanisms of acquisition of prejudice were argued to be influenced by the parents, yet peers were more likely to provide the adolescent with intergroup experiences. Allport predominantly emphasized the acquirement of prejudice as a *learning process*, distinguishing between the direct transfer of parental attitudes by taking over parental words, gestures and beliefs, or a more indirect process in which the child develops prejudice as part of his/her style of life (p. 297, Allport, 1954). The latter process is much less about directly expressing or discussing prejudice with the parents, but more based on parenting or the handling of the adolescent by the parents. For example, it has been hypothesized that a strict upbringing focused on obedience, discipline, and unquestioned authority leads the adolescent to become fearful and angry, which could (even later in life) be directed toward outgroups (Adorno, Fenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950; Allport, 1954). In reality, both the direct socialization of parental attitudes as well as the indirect socialization processes in the family environment are likely to go hand in hand. A second mechanism through which prejudices can be shaped is *conformity*. Especially during adolescence, children become aware of the attitudes and norms prevalent for one within their family concerning outgroup members to which they (unconsciously) conform in order to gain approval and affection from their parents (Allport, 1954). The last mechanism Allport identified for the acquirement of prejudice during adolescence are *intergroup experiences*. Although intergroup contact and cross-group friendship have received much support as very effective buffers for prejudice among adults (for a review see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011), intergroup experiences may be of less importance for adolescents: Allport emphasized that “the home influence has priority, and that the child has excellent reasons for adopting his ethnic attitudes ready-made from his parents” (p. 297, Allport, 1954); thus family socialization is likely more influential than the adolescent’s intergroup experiences. Other authors have argued that adolescents may turn away from their parents regarding their attitudes and beliefs (Katz, 1976), but a recent

meta-analysis clearly shows a considerable similarity between adolescent children and their parents' intergroup attitudes (Degner & Dalege, 2013). In addition, parental influence is even found to increase as children become older, especially during adolescence when the cognitive capacity to pick up on parental norms and attitudes is better developed (Aboud, 1988; Degner & Dalege, 2013).

Underlying mechanisms of parent-child similarity in prejudice

Since Allport's framework, researchers have found varying results for the size of parent-child similarity in prejudice (Degner & Delege, 2013). One of the explanations put forward for this inconsistency in results is that researchers are overlooking the underlying mechanisms of intergenerational similarity of prejudice (Sinclair, Dunn & Lowery, 2005). The current study will focus on indirect family socialization mechanisms derived from previous studies and developmental theories, predominantly based on Allport's learning process hypothesis.

Especially among the lay public, open communication within the family seems crucial for intergenerational similarity (Katz, 2003), but empirical evidence is ambiguous. The Family Socialization Model (White & Gleizman, 2006) proposes communication as an important family process that is likely to lead to similarity between parents and their offspring. Earlier studies found that open family communication is linked to higher levels of similarity with regard to moral judgements (White, 2000), voting behavior (Hooghe & Boonen, 2015), environmental concerns (Meeusen, 2014), and different forms of prejudice (Meeusen & Dhont, 2015; White & Gleizman, 2006). In a recent meta-analysis, there was no direct test of family communication between parents and their offspring, but based on their overall findings they deemed it unlikely that open family communication would lead to a higher parent-child similarity (Degner & Dalege, 2013). However, these inconsistent findings

may be in part derived from different operationalizations of the concept of family communication. Hence, we focus on the quality or openness of family communication rather than the frequency of communication between parents and their offspring, which refers to a climate in which adolescents are encouraged to express their own opinions and where there is room for dialogue (Aspy, Vesely, Oman, Rodine, Marshall, & McLeroy, 2007). In this case, family communication is not a direct process of communication but more an indirect process or parenting style in which parents and their offspring feel comfortable to share their beliefs.

Another indirect process through the handling of the child underlying intergenerational similarity is proposed by Adorno and colleagues (1950). The authors suggested that when parents respond in a threatening and punishing manner toward their offspring, this could produce an authoritarian personality which relies on the use of defense mechanisms to release aggressive impulses, such as projection of anger toward outgroups rather than toward parents (Sears & Levy, 2003). It is likely that an authoritarian parenting style with a rigid set of rules is more susceptible to producing prejudiced children (Altemeyer, 1998; White & Gleitzman, 2006).

A positive bond between adolescents and their parents, based on emotional responsiveness and closeness, is also likely to lead to more intergenerational similarity in prejudices (Miklikowska, 2015; Sinclair, Dunn & Lowery, 2005; White & Gleitzman, 2006). Attachment Theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) suggests that children and adolescents internalize their parents values and beliefs to the extent that they are securely attached (Bretherton, Golby, & Cho, 1997). In a similar vein, Social Learning Theory proposes that children develop attitudes by mimicking important others, which are likely the parents in case of a strong bond (Bandura, 1997). Based on these theories, the Family Socialization Model (White & Gleizman, 2006) has proposed that emotional closeness with parents is related to racial prejudice transmission between adolescents and their parents. So far, studies seem to

generally support this hypothesis: Emotional closeness was linked to intergenerational similarity in racial attitudes (White & Gleitzman, 2006). Children or adolescents who had a stronger bond (i.e. high identification) with their parents were more similar in both implicit as well as explicit racial attitudes (Sinclair, Dunn & Lowery, 2005). Moreover, adolescents' attitudes were influenced by parental attitudes to the extent to which adolescents perceived their parents as supportive (Miklikowska, 2015).

An underlying mechanism of intergenerational similarity that focuses more on the *content* of parenting rather than style of parenting is the parental teaching of certain values to their offspring. Values are desirable, abstract goals that apply across situations that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Knafo & Schwartz, 2003), such as values of obedience, tolerance, and respect. The importance of parental values has been demonstrated for the transmission of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (Duriez, Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2007, 2008), which are related to prejudicial reactions toward other groups (Altemeyer, 1998).

The present study

The present study aims to further our theoretical understanding of intergenerational similarity by testing mechanisms that underlie parent-child similarity in adolescents' prejudices toward immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, and gender roles. We consider four potential mechanisms for parent-child similarity in different types of prejudices, namely the degree of open communication within the family, an authoritarian parenting style, a positive relation with the parents, and parenting values. Moreover, we examine the parental influence on the child's prejudices while yet encompassing the role of the child's own intergroup experiences. By taking into account the adolescent's cross-group friendships, we aim to distinguish the unique contribution of parental influence vis-à-vis the child's own intergroup

experiences on the development of prejudice. We hypothesize that family-socialization mechanisms play a significant mediating role for intergenerational similarity in prejudice toward other groups, even while taking the adolescent's own intergroup experiences and the direct effect of parental attitudes into account. Moreover, we expect that the underlying mechanisms should be quite stable for prejudice toward immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, and gender roles.

The Parent-Child Socialization Study 2013 (PCSS) allows us to examine the underlying mechanisms of intergenerational similarity in prejudice with direct measures from the adolescents and both their parents. Direct measures have been recognized as an improvement over studies where children are asked to report their parents' attitudes, because children may not know their parents' attitudes very well or assume their parents hold more similar attitudes to their own (Aboud & Doyle, 1996, Degner & Dalege, 2013). Even though adolescents are likely to assess their parents' attitudes more correctly than younger children, direct measures appear the best procedure to avoid the mere measurement of egocentric projection (Gniewosz & Noack, 2006). In sum, the present study adopts a design where adolescents' prejudices toward immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, and women are the dependent variables, mothers' and fathers' prejudices and the adolescents' intergroup experiences are the predictor scores, and family socialization factors (i.e. open communication within the family, a positive bond with the parents, an authoritarian parenting style, and parenting values) are the mediating variables.

Method

Data

Data stem from the Parent-Child Socialization Study (PCSS 2012-2013), a two-wave panel study among a representative sample of adolescents and both their parents in Flanders

(the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium). We used the data of the second wave (collected in 2013) as only this wave included all required measures. Sixty-one Flemish schools were randomly selected by means of a proportional stratified sample based on province (five Flemish provinces and Brussels Capital) and education track (general, technical, artistic, and vocational education). For Wave 2 in 2013, all students in the fourth year of secondary education (i.e. US equivalent of 11th grade) ($N = 3,598$) filled in a self-administered questionnaire about their social and political attitudes and behavior during class hours. Students who have switched schools since Wave 1 or repeated their third year received the questionnaire by mail ($n = 3,296$ in school, $n = 302$ by mail). To properly assess the correspondence within families, the students were handed an almost identical questionnaire for their mother and father. Parents were asked to fill in the survey at home and to send it back to the university in a pre-stamped envelope. Confidentiality was assured. After two reminders (by telephone and/or by mail), full information was obtained from 1,943 (54%) mother-father-child triads (Age mother $M = 45.51$; Age father $M = 47.77$; Age child $M = 16.37$). For the purpose of this study, only majority group members (i.e. both parents are born in Belgium) were included in the analyses. For 160 triads, information about the country of birth of the parents was missing. A total of 247 triads had a migration background and were deleted from the sample as well, resulting in a sample of 1,536 native triads.

Measurement. The four specific types of prejudice were measured with multiple items on a four-point Likert scale (1 = ‘Totally not agree’, 4 = ‘Totally agree’). Items were formulated in opposite direction to avoid acquiescence bias. Scores on each of the prejudice scales were computed by averaging the scale items and were coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of prejudice. *Prejudice toward immigrants* was measured with eight items. Exemplar items are ‘the presence of too many immigrants is a threat to our way of life’ and ‘immigrants take advantage of our welfare system’. The scale is one-dimensional and

reliable for mothers ($\alpha = .89$), fathers ($\alpha = .89$), and children ($\alpha = .88$). A second type, *prejudice toward Muslims*, was assessed with five items, e.g. 'the Muslim and Western-European way of life not go together' and 'Muslims abuse their religion for religious purposes'. The scale proved to be one-dimensional and reliability was satisfactory for mothers ($\alpha = .85$), fathers ($\alpha = .85$), and children ($\alpha = .82$). *Prejudice toward homosexuals*, was operationalized with four one-dimensional and reliable items (mothers $\alpha = .83$, fathers $\alpha = .83$, children $\alpha = .88$). Examples of the items are 'homosexuals make me nervous' and 'it does not matter whether my friends are gay or straight' (reverse scored). The sexism scale to test *prejudice toward women* consisted of five items, was one-dimensional and reliable (mothers $\alpha = .72$, fathers $\alpha = .75$, children $\alpha = .70$).

Next, children and parents were asked to evaluate their relationship, parenting styles and values. First, children evaluated the way in which their parents communicate with them. The scale of *open family communication* consisted of three items including 'if I have problems, I discuss them with my parents', 'my parents try to understand my point of view', and 'my parents answer my questions honestly' (four-point Likert scale, 1 = 'Never', 4 = 'Always') ($\alpha = .76$). Second, *positive parenting*, or the responsiveness of and positive bond with the parents, was operationalized by asking the children to evaluate three items: 'my parents help me to understand myself', 'if my parent notice I am troubled, they ask me about it', and 'my parents respect my feelings' (four-point Likert scale, 1 = 'Never', 4 = 'Always') ($\alpha = .70$). Third, children evaluated the *authoritarian parenting style* of their parents education style with three items: 'at home, there are clear rules about what is possible or not', 'even if I have a different opinion, I will still do what my parents ask', and 'I know my parents will punish me if I violate the rules' (four-point Likert scale, 1 = 'Never', 4 = 'Always') ($\alpha = .52$). Finally, with regard to *parenting values*, parents were asked to evaluate to which extent they emphasized a range of values in their education: independence, hard

work, creativity, tolerance, respect, solidarity, obedience, and ambition. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in two scales: hard values (independence, hard work, obedience and ambition) (mother $\alpha = .74$; father $\alpha = .78$) and soft values (tolerance, respect, and solidarity) (mother $\alpha = .77$; father $\alpha = .77$). ‘Creativity’ loaded in both factors and was therefore deleted from the scale.

Finally, we also included important *control variables*: Gender (54.1% boys, 45.9% girls), education level of the child (49.3% general education vs. 50.7% technical, artistic or vocational education), education level of the parent (5-point scale, running from primary education to university education, Mother $M = 3.57$, $SD = .89$, Father $M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.00$), and cross-group friendship. The latter was operationalized depending on the type of prejudice considered. In case of prejudice toward immigrants, we controlled for cross-ethnic friendships: ‘how many of your close friends have a different origin than your own?’ (seven-point scale ranging from 1 = None to 7 = All of them, $M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.08$). Similarly, in case of prejudice toward Muslims, we controlled for cross-religious friendships: ‘how many of your close friends have a different religion than your own?’ (seven-point scale ranging from 1 = None to 7 = All of them, $M = 1.79$; $SD = 1.01$). For privacy reasons, the sexual orientation of the adolescents was not registered and there was no direct question on friendships with gay or lesbian peers. However, the PCSS does contain an item that can be used as a proxy for intergroup contact: ‘I avoid contact with homosexuals (four-point Likert scale 1 = ‘Totally not agree’, 4 = ‘Totally agree’; $M = 1.77$, $SD = .77$). Because women are not a minority group and cross-gender contact is self-evident, we did not control for intergroup friendship in case of the intergenerational similarity of prejudice toward women.

Results

Structural equation modeling was used to assess the mediating effects of different parenting styles and values on the intergenerational similarity of different forms of prejudice. A Maximum Likelihood estimator was used with robust standard errors to calculate the parameters. Figures represent standardized coefficients. Only significant parameters are shown. Endogenous variables are correlated (not shown).

Figure 1.1. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward immigrants MOTHER (N = 1,239, RMSEA = .013, CFI = .996)

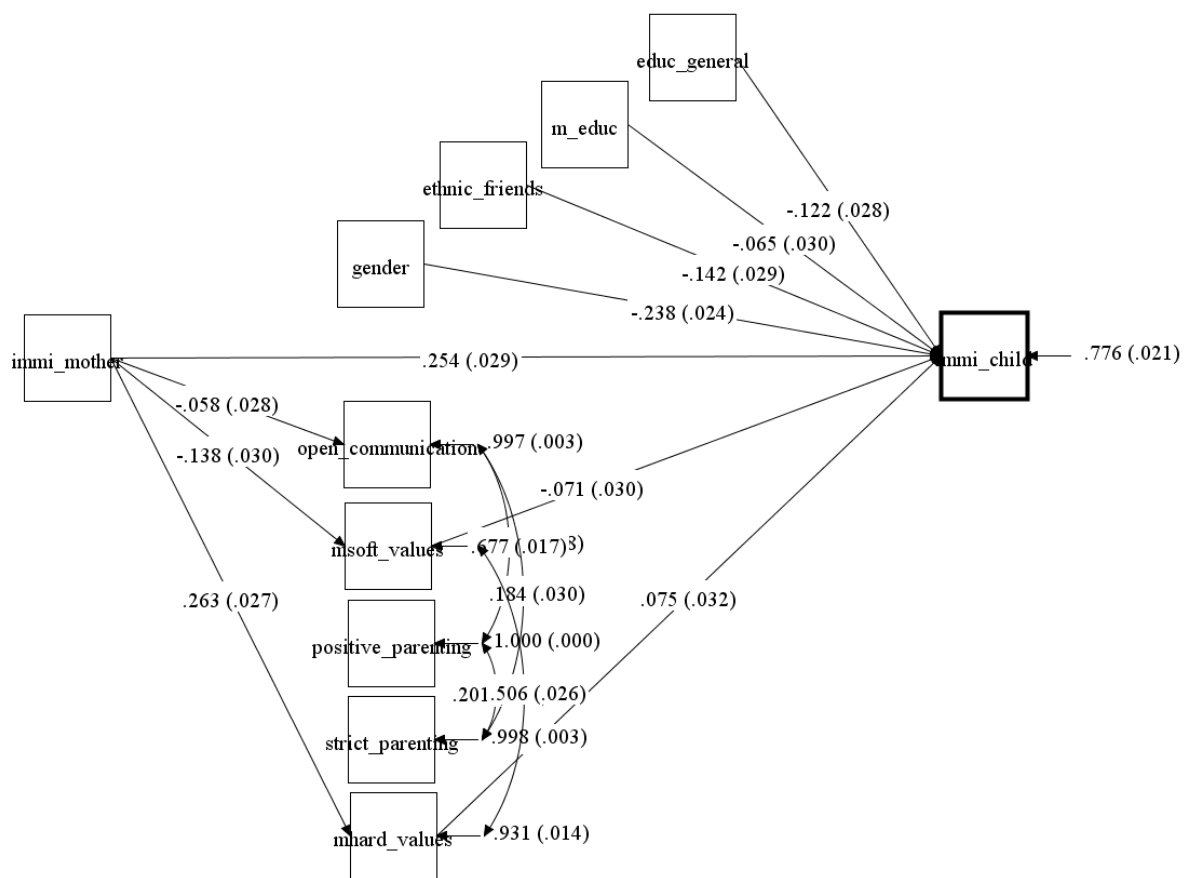


Figure 1.2. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward immigrants FATHER (N = 1,284, RMSEA = .030, CFI = .983)

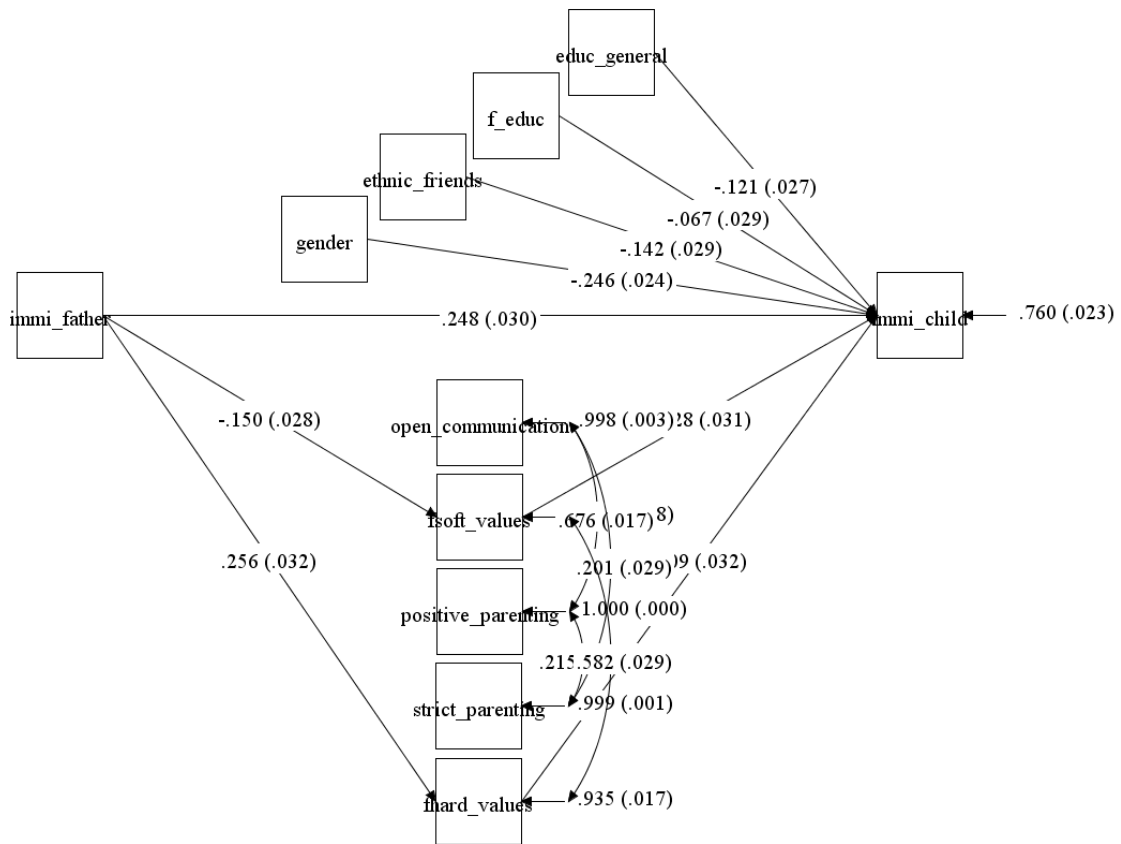


Figure 2.1. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward Muslims MOTHER (N = 1,238, RMSEA = .021, CFI = .996)

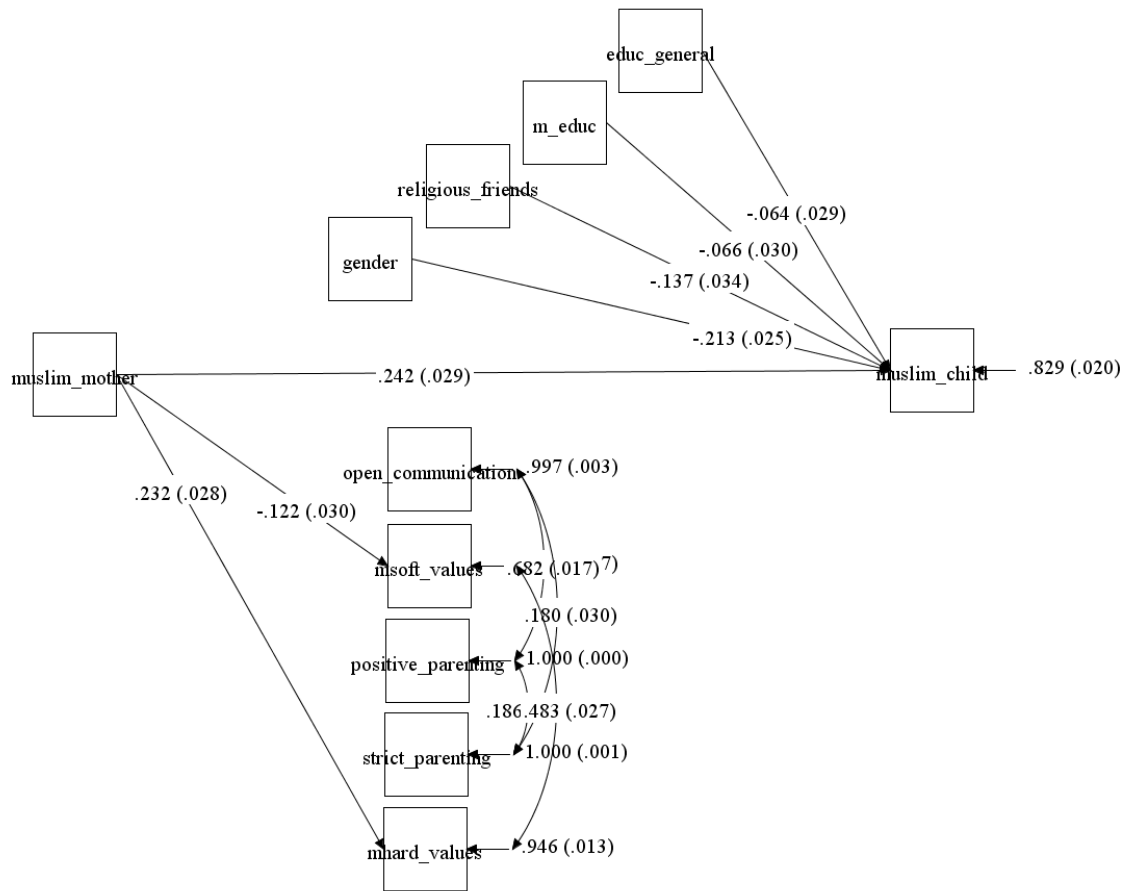


Figure 2.2. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward Muslims FATHER (N = 1,286, RMSEA = .028, CFI = .983)

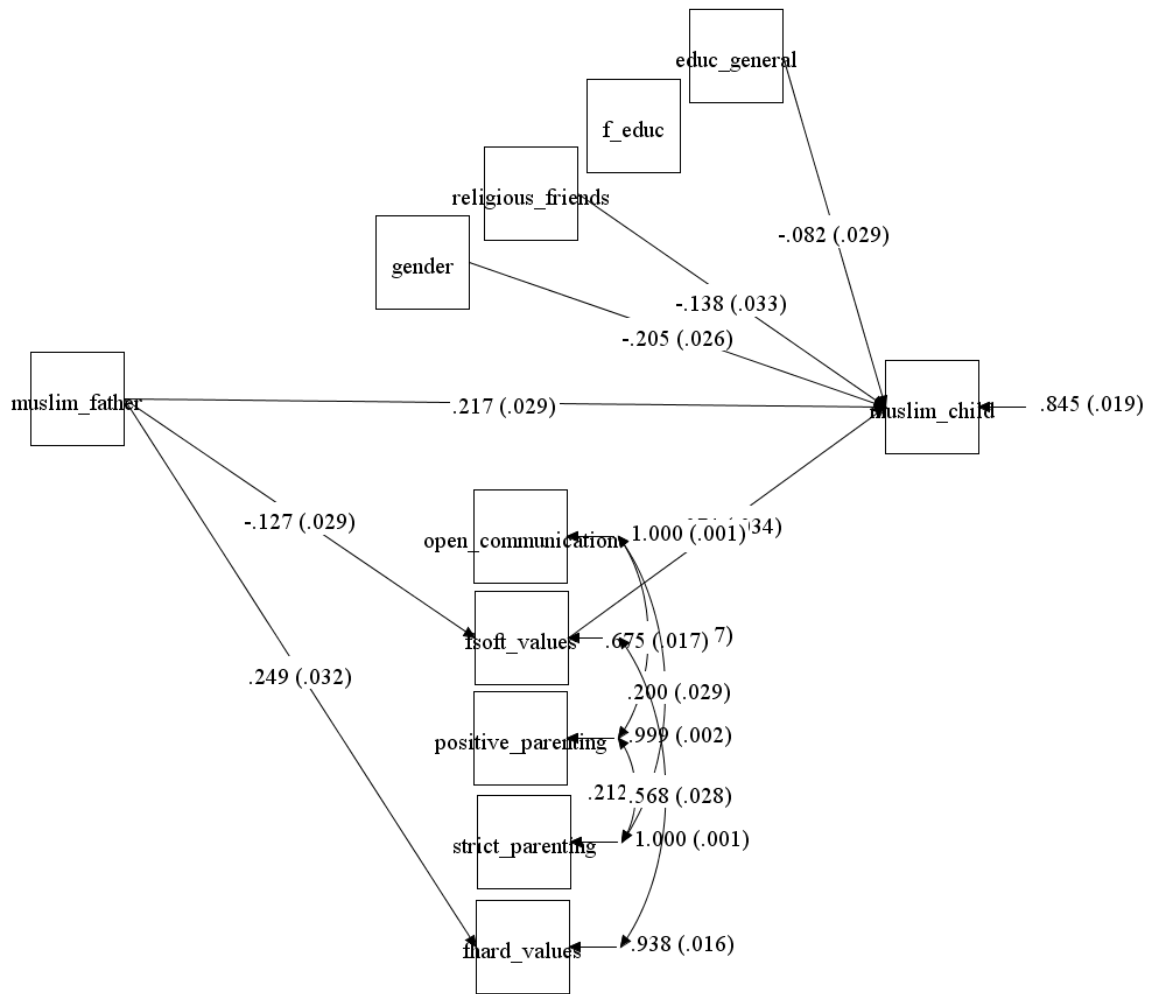


Figure 3.1. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward homosexuals MOTHER (N = 1,470, RMSEA = .031, CFI = .986)

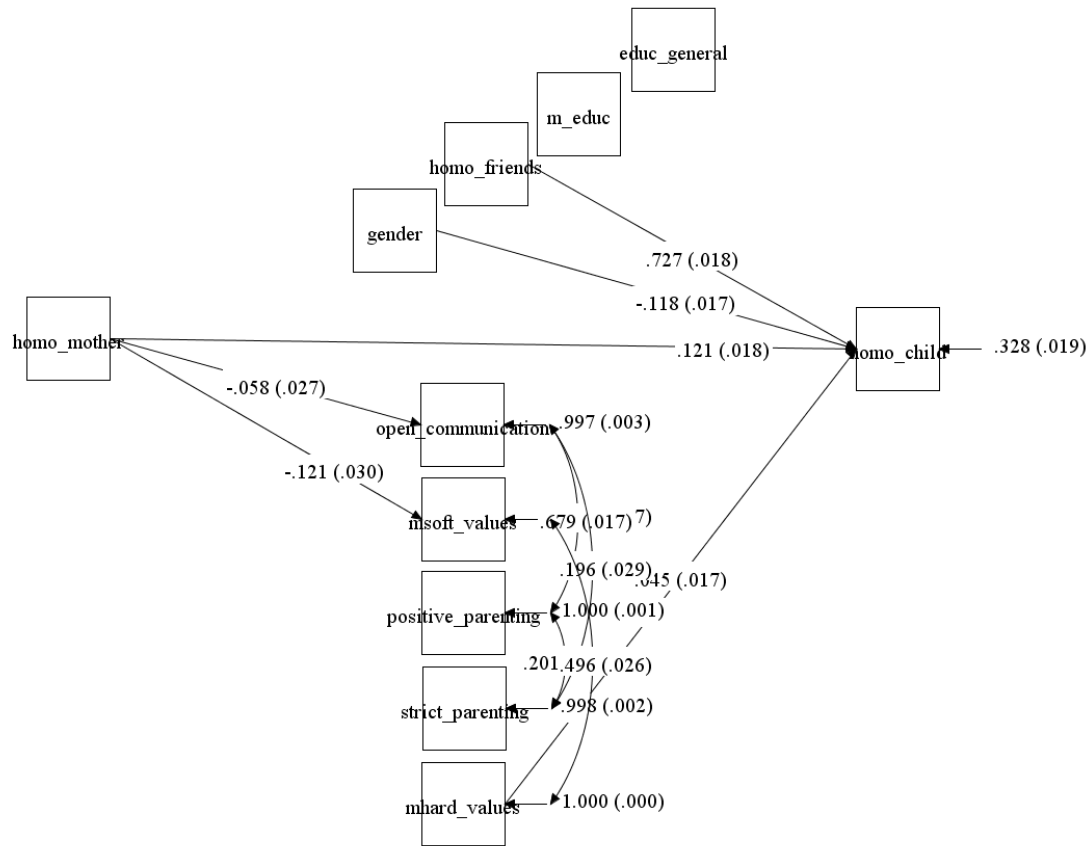


Figure 3.2. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward homosexuals FATHER (N = 1,474, RMSEA = .033, CFI = .985)

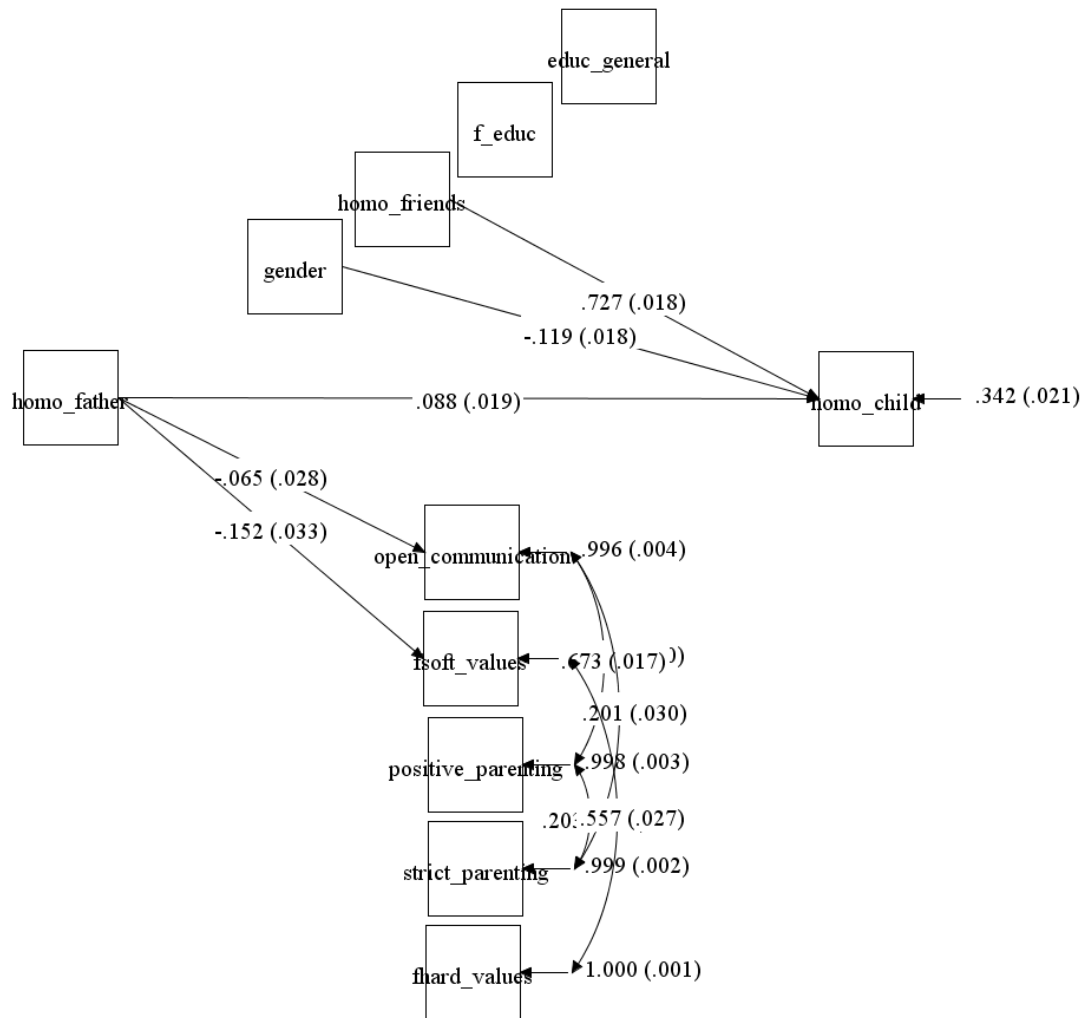


Figure 4.1. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward women MOTHER (N = 1,473, RMSEA = .031, CFI = .981)

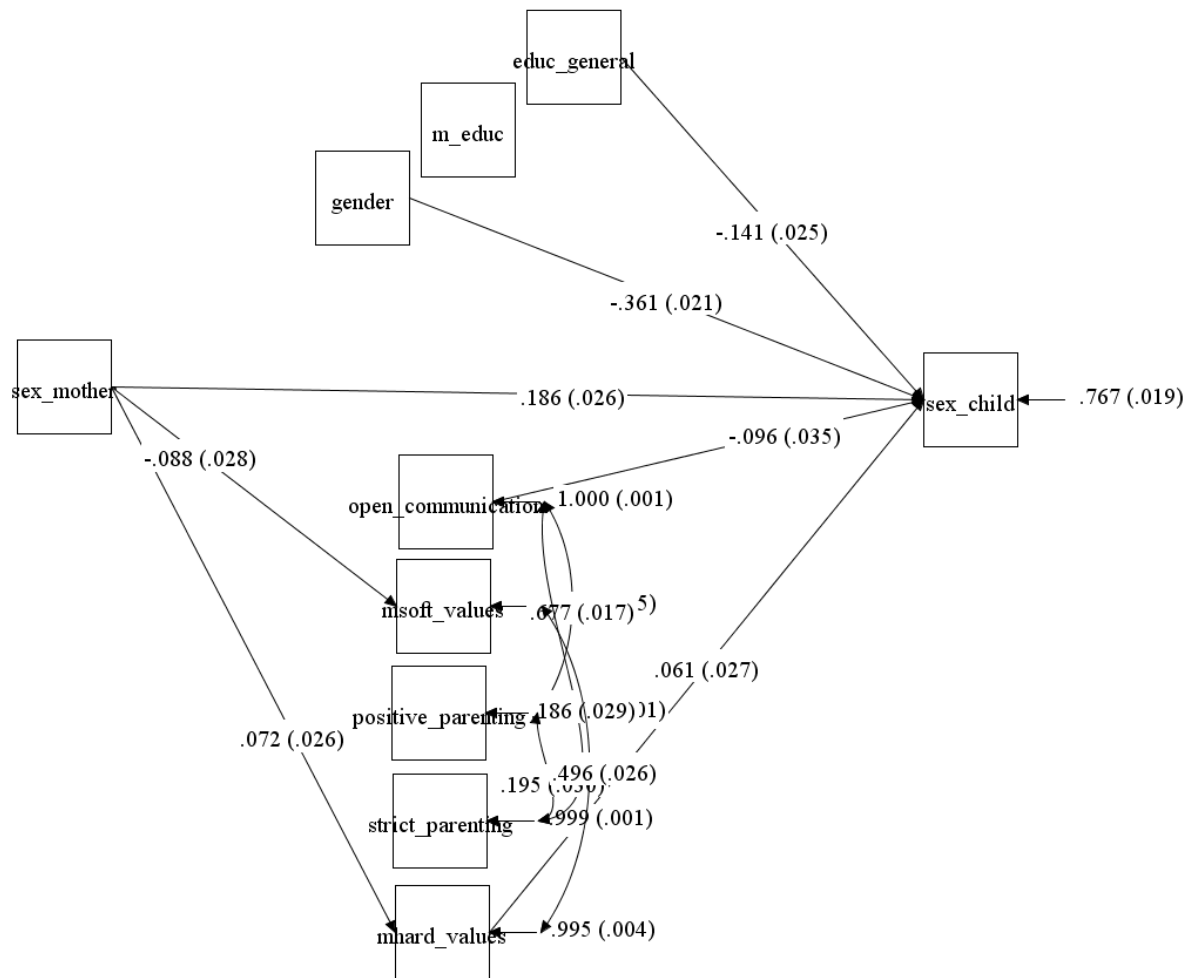
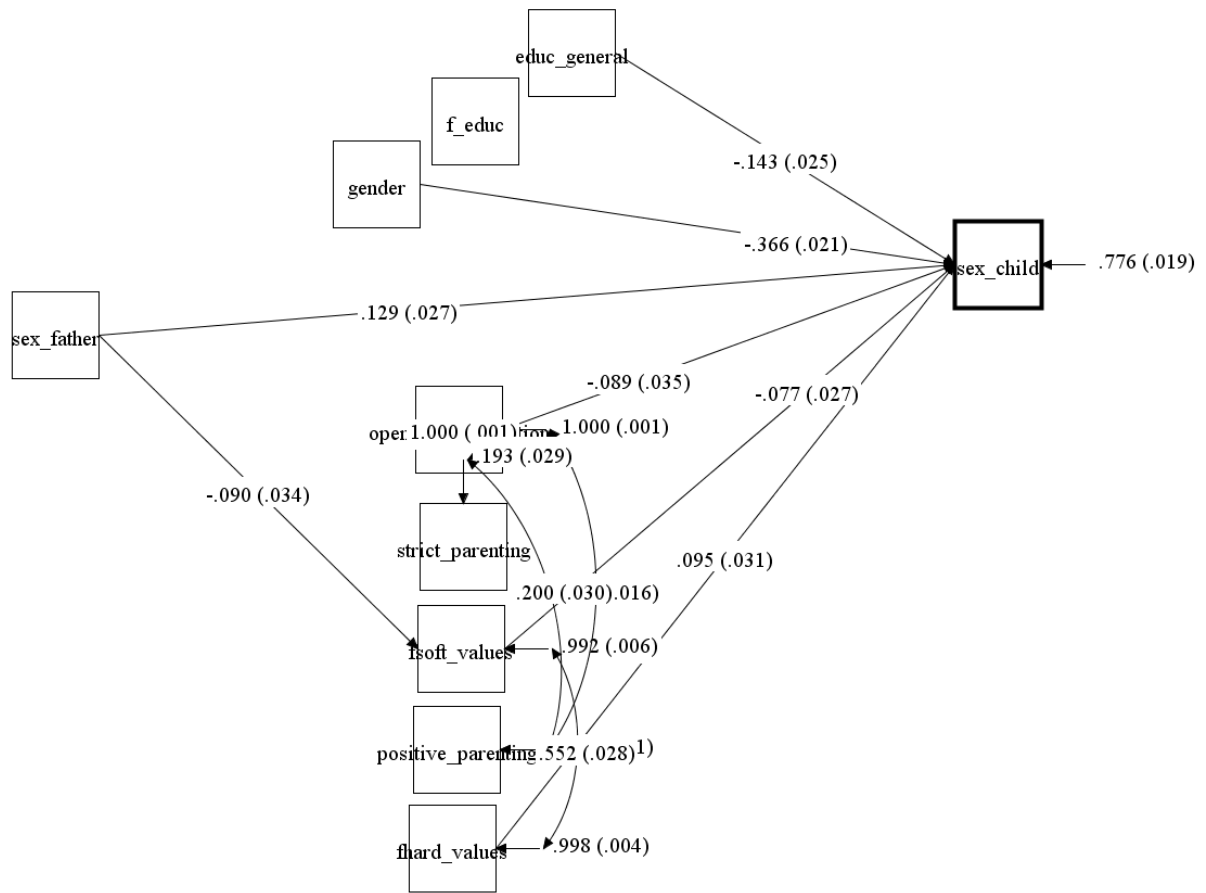


Figure 4.2. Intergenerational similarity prejudice toward women FATHER (N = 1,494, RMSEA = .035, CFI = .976)



Preliminary conclusion

The present study aims to extend previous research that predominantly focused on the size of intergenerational similarity in prejudice and its moderators, by focusing on the mechanisms that underlie intergenerational similarity. We examine how family socialization processes can explain parent-child similarity in prejudice, and test if our model holds for prejudice toward multiple groups: immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, and women. In contrast to most other research, we focus on adolescents, which has been identified as an essential period in which individuals start to shape and unveil their intergroup attitudes (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Flanagan, 2013; Meeus, 1996). Moreover, we take the adolescents' own intergroup experiences into account in order to distinguish the unique contribution of family socialization, i.e. degree of open communication within the family, an authoritarian parenting style, a positive relation with the parents, and parenting values. In line with our hypothesis, we find that type of values parents aim to convey in their child's upbringing play a significant mediating role for intergenerational similarity in prejudice toward immigrants, Muslims, and women, but not for prejudice toward homosexuals. The mediating effect of parenting values was significant even while taking the adolescent's own intergroup experiences and the direct effect of parental attitudes into account. The other proposed family-socialization mechanisms (i.e. open family communication, authoritarian parenting style or a positive parenting style) were not significant mediators for parent-child similarity in prejudice. Apparently, not the parenting style as such, but the *content* of an adolescent's upbringing is a significant underlying mechanism of intergenerational similarity in prejudice. Even as adolescents expand their social networks and gain intergroup experiences, the values they were thought during their upbringing still underlie their intergroup attitudes.

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