Raising a Moral Child
By Adam Grant APRIL 11, 2014

What does it take to be a good parent? We know some of the tricks for teaching kids to become high achievers. For example, research suggests that when parents praise effort rather than ability, children develop a stronger work ethic and become more motivated. Yet although some parents live vicariously through their children's accomplishments, success is not the No. 1 priority for most parents. We're much more concerned about our children becoming kind, compassionate and helpful. Surveys reveal that in the United States, parents from European, Asian, Hispanic and African ethnic groups all place far greater importance on caring than achievement. These patterns hold around the world: When people in 50 countries were asked to report their guiding principles in life, the value that mattered most was not achievement, but caring.

Despite the significance that it holds in our lives, teaching children to care about others is no simple task. In an Israeli study of nearly 600 families, parents who valued kindness and compassion frequently failed to raise children who shared those values.

Are some children simply good-natured — or not? For the past decade, I've been studying the surprising success of people who frequently help others without any strings attached. As the father of two daughters and a son, I've become increasingly curious about how these generous tendencies develop.

Genetic twin studies suggest that anywhere from a quarter to more than half of our propensity to be giving and caring is inherited. That leaves a lot of room for nurture, and the evidence on how parents raise kind and compassionate children flies in the face of what many of even the most well-intentioned parents do in praising good behavior, responding to bad behavior, and communicating their values.

By age 2, children experience some moral emotions — feelings triggered by right and wrong. To reinforce caring as the right behavior, research indicates, praise is more effective than rewards. Rewards run the risk of leading children to be kind only when a carrot is offered, whereas praise communicates that sharing is intrinsically worthwhile for its own sake. But what kind of praise should we give when our children show early signs of generosity?

Many parents believe it's important to compliment the behavior, not the child — that way, the child learns to repeat the behavior. Indeed, I know one couple who are careful to say, "That was such a helpful thing to do," instead of, "You're a helpful person."

But is that the right approach? In a clever experiment, the researchers Joan E. Grusec and Erica Redler set out to investigate what happens when we commend generous behavior versus generous character. After 7- and 8-year-olds won marbles and donated some to poor children, the experimenter remarked, "Gee, you shared quite a bit."

The researchers randomly assigned the children to receive different types of praise. For some of the children, they praised the action: "It was good that you gave some of your marbles to

those poor children. Yes, that was a nice and helpful thing to do." For others, they praised the character behind the action: "I guess you're the kind of person who likes to help others whenever you can. Yes, you are a very nice and helpful person."

A couple of weeks later, when faced with more opportunities to give and share, the children were much more generous after their character had been praised than after their actions had been. Praising their character helped them internalize it as part of their identities. The children learned who they were from observing their own actions: I am a helpful person. This dovetails with new research led by the psychologist Christopher J. Bryan, who finds that for moral behaviors, nouns work better than verbs. To get 3- to 6-year-olds to help with a task, rather than inviting them "to help," it was 22 to 29 percent more effective to encourage them to "be a helper." Cheating was cut in half when instead of, "Please don't cheat," participants were told, "Please don't be a cheater." When our actions become a reflection of our character we lean more heavily toward the moral and generous choices. Over time it can become part of us.

Praise appears to be particularly influential in the critical periods when children develop a stronger sense of identity. When the researchers Joan E. Grusec and Erica Redler praised the character of 5-year-olds, any benefits that may have emerged didn't have a lasting impact: They may have been too young to internalize moral character as part of a stable sense of self. And by the time children turned 10, the differences between praising character and praising actions vanished: Both were effective. Tying generosity to character appears to matter most around age 8, when children may be starting to crystallize notions of identity. Praise in response to good behavior may be half the battle, but our responses to bad behavior have consequences, too. When children cause harm, they typically feel one of two moral emotions: shame or guilt. Despite the common belief that these emotions are interchangeable, research led by the psychologist June Price Tangney reveals that they have very different causes and consequences.

Shame is the feeling that I am a bad person, whereas guilt is the feeling that I have done a bad thing. Shame is a negative judgment about the core self, which is devastating: Shame makes children feel small and worthless, and they respond either by lashing out at the target or escaping the situation altogether. In contrast, guilt is a negative judgment about an action, which can be repaired by good behavior. When children feel guilt, they tend to experience remorse and regret, empathize with the person they have harmed, and aim to make it right.

In one study spearheaded by the psychologist Karen Caplovitz Barrett, parents rated their toddlers' tendencies to experience shame and guilt at home. The toddlers received a rag doll, and the leg fell off while they were playing with it alone. The shame-prone toddlers avoided the researcher and did not volunteer that they broke the doll. The guilt-prone toddlers were more likely to fix the doll, approach the experimenter, and explain what happened. The ashamed toddlers were avoiders; the guilty toddlers were amenders.

If we want our children to care about others, we need to teach them to feel guilt rather than shame when they misbehave. In a review of research on emotions and moral development, the psychologist Nancy Eisenberg suggests that shame emerges when parents express anger, withdraw their love, or try to assert their power through threats of punishment: Children may begin to believe that they are bad people. Fearing this effect, some parents fail to

exercise discipline at all, which can hinder the development of strong moral standards.

The most effective response to bad behavior is to express disappointment. According to independent reviews by Professor Eisenberg and David R. Shaffer, parents raise caring children by expressing disappointment and explaining why the behavior was wrong, how it affected others, and how they can rectify the situation. This enables children to develop standards for judging their actions, feelings of empathy and responsibility for others, and a sense of moral identity, which are conducive to becoming a helpful person. The beauty of expressing disappointment is that it communicates disapproval of the bad behavior, coupled with high expectations and the potential for improvement: "You're a good person, even if you did a bad thing, and I know you can do better."

As powerful as it is to criticize bad behavior and praise good character, raising a generous child involves more than waiting for opportunities to react to the actions of our children. As parents, we want to be proactive in communicating our values to our children. Yet many of us do this the wrong way.

In a classic experiment, the psychologist J. Philippe Rushton gave 140 elementary- and middle-school-age children tokens for winning a game, which they could keep entirely or donate some to a child in poverty. They first watched a teacher figure play the game either selfishly or generously, and then preach to them the value of taking, giving or neither. The adult's influence was significant: Actions spoke louder than words. When the adult behaved selfishly, children followed suit. The words didn't make much difference — children gave fewer tokens after observing the adult's selfish actions, regardless of whether the adult verbally advocated selfishness or generosity. When the adult acted generously, students gave the same amount whether generosity was preached or not — they donated 85 percent more than the norm in both cases. When the adult preached selfishness, even after the adult acted generously, the students still gave 49 percent more than the norm. Children learn generosity not by listening to what their role models say, but by observing what they do.

To test whether these role-modeling effects persisted over time, two months later researchers observed the children playing the game again. Would the modeling or the preaching influence whether the children gave — and would they even remember it from two months earlier?

The most generous children were those who watched the teacher give but not say anything. Two months later, these children were 31 percent more generous than those who observed the same behavior but also heard it preached. The message from this research is loud and clear: If you don't model generosity, preaching it may not help in the short run, and in the long run, preaching is less effective than giving while saying nothing at all.

People often believe that character causes action, but when it comes to producing moral children, we need to remember that action also shapes character. As the psychologist Karl Weick is fond of asking, "How can I know who I am until I see what I do? How can I know what I value until I see where I walk?"

Adam Grant is a professor of management and psychology at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the author of "Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our

Success."

-- --

Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance.

Mueller, Claudia M.; Dweck, Carol S.

Abstract

Praise for ability is commonly considered to have beneficial effects on motivation. Contrary to this popular belief, six studies demonstrated that praise for intelligence had more negative consequences for students' achievement motivation than praise for effort. Fifth graders praised for intelligence were found to care more about performance goals relative to learning goals than children praised for effort. After failure, they also displayed less task persistence, less task enjoyment, more low-ability attributions, and worse task performance than children praised for effort. Finally, children praised for intelligence described it as a fixed trait more than children praised for hard work, who believed it to be subject to improvement. These findings have important implications for how achievement is best encouraged, as well as for more theoretical issues, such as the potential cost of performance goals and the socialization of contingent self-worth. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2012 APA, all rights reserved)

Value Hierarchies Across Cultures
Taking a Similarities Perspective

Shalom H. Schwartz ,Anat Bardi

Abstract

Beyond the striking differences in the value priorities of groups is a surprisingly widespread consensus regarding the hierarchical order of values. Average value hierarchies of representative and near representative samples from 13 nations exhibit a similar pattern that replicates with school teachers in 56 nations and college students in 54 nations. Benevolence, self-direction, and universalism values are consistently most important; power, tradition, and stimulation values are least important; and security, conformity, achievement, and hedonism are in between. Value hierarchies of 83% of samples correlate at least .80 with this pan-cultural hierarchy. To explain the pan-cultural hierarchy, the authors discuss its adaptive functions in meeting the requirements of successful societal functioning. The authors demonstrate, with data from Singapore and the United States, that correctly interpreting the value hierarchies of groups requires comparison with the pan-cultural normative baseline.

Cultural Bases for Self-Evaluation
Seeing Oneself Positively in Different Cultural Contexts

Maja Becker,Vivian L. Vignoles,Ellinor Owe,Matthew J. Easterbrook,Rupert Brown,Peter B. Smith

Michael Harris Bond,Camillo Regalia,Claudia Manzi,Maria Brambilla,Said Aldhafri,Roberto González

Diego Carrasco,Maria Paz Cadena,Siugmin Lay,Inge Schweiger Gallo,Ana Torres,Leoncio Camino

Emre Özgen,Ülkü E. Güner,Nil Yamako Iu,Flávia Cristina Silveira Lemos,Elvia Vargas Trujillo Paola Balanta,Ma. Elizabeth J. Macapagal,M. Cristina Ferreira,Ginette Herman,Isabelle de Sauvage

David Bourguignon,Qian Wang,Márta Fülöp,Charles Harb,Aneta Chybicka,Kassahun Habtamu Mekonnen

Mariana Martin,George Nizharadze,Alin Gavreliuc,Johanna Buitendach,Aune Valk,Silvia H. Koller

Abstract

Several theories propose that self-esteem, or positive self-regard, results from fulfilling the value priorities of one's surrounding culture. Yet, surprisingly little evidence exists for this assertion, and theories differ about whether individuals must personally endorse the value priorities involved. We compared the influence of four bases for self-evaluation (controlling one's life, doing one's duty, benefitting others, achieving social status) among 4,852 adolescents across 20 cultural samples, using an implicit, within-person measurement technique to avoid cultural response biases. Cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses showed that participants generally derived feelings of self-esteem from all four bases, but especially from those that were most consistent with the value priorities of others in their cultural context. Multilevel analyses confirmed that the bases of positive self-regard are sustained collectively: They are predictably moderated by culturally normative values but show little systematic variation with personally endorsed values.

Position and Disposition: The Contextual Development of Human Values
Kyle C. Longest, Steven Hitlin, Stephen Vaisey

Abstract

Research on the importance of values often focuses primarily on one domain of social predictors (e.g., economic) or limits its scope to a single dimension of values. We conduct a simultaneous analysis of a wide range of theoretically important social influences and a more complete range of individuals' value orientations, focusing both on value ratings and rankings. Results indicate that traditional institutions such as religion and parenthood are associated with more concern for the welfare of others and maintaining the status quo, whereas more individually oriented occupational factors like higher income and self-employment are linked to achievement and change-related values. Yet several factors, such as education and gender, have complex associations when individual values are examined as part of a coherent system rather than in isolation.

Carolina at Chapel Hill

What Defines the Good Person? Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Experts' Models With Lay Prototypes

Kyle D. Smith ,Seyda Türk Smith , John Chambers Christopher

Abstract

"Good" is a fundamental concept present in all cultures, and experts in values and positive psychology have mapped good's many aspects in human beings. Which aspects do laypersons typically access and consider as they make everyday judgments of goodness? Does the answer vary with culture? To address these questions, the authors compiled prototypes of the good person from laypersons' free-listings in seven cultures and used experts' classifications to content-analyze and compare the prototypes. Benevolence, conformity, and traditionalism dominated the features that laypersons frequently attributed to good people. Other features—competence in particular—varied widely in their accessibility across cultures. These findings depart from those obtained in research using expert-designed self-report inventories, highlighting the need to consider everyday accessibility when comparing cultures' definitions of the good person.