



The Aspirations' Transmissions from Father to Children

Takuma Nishimura

Tokyo University of Science, Center for Teacher Education, Japan

Abstract

The mechanism of aspirations' transmissions from father to their child is a remaining topic in the developmental field of psychological research. Grounded in self-determination theory, a motivational framework that explains psychological well-being or healthy personality, this study examined the relation between fathers' and their children's aspirations and the factors that influence the transmission process. A total of 310 Japanese junior high school students in the 9th grades (boys = 155, girls = 155; Mage = 14.98) and their fathers (Mage = 47.95) participated in this survey. Correlation analysis revealed positive associations with medium effect size between fathers and their children's aspirations. Additionally, moderation analysis highlighted the following two findings. First, children who received autonomy support from their fathers strengthen the connections of intrinsic aspirations which is related to affiliation and social contribution value between father and thier children. Second, in the transmission of extrinsic aspirations, which contain financial success, attractive appearance, and social recognition, a child's life satisfaction played a crucial moderating role. Specifically, higher life satisfaction in children was associated with a greater ability to resist adopting their fathers' extrinsic aspirations, whereas lower life satisfaction was linked to a greater likelihood of adopting them. The discussion interprets these findings and outlines directions for future investigation.

Keywords: aspirations, parent-child relationship, self-determination theory

1. Introduction

Parents play a pivotal role in developing and shaping their children's aspirations, which can have long-lasting impacts on their psychological well-being. Among various parental influences, the transmission of aspirations from fathers to children remains underexplored in developmental and social psychology. This research gap is particularly notable given the growing recognition of fathers' unique contributions to their children's psychological development. Additionally, the current sociocultural landscape underscores the importance of understanding how family dynamics shape aspirations. With increasing societal emphasis on

achievement and external success, it is critical to examine how children adopt or resist such aspirations from their parents, particularly their fathers.

This study aims to address these gaps by revealing the mechanisms underlying aspiration transmission using the framework of self-determination theory. By investigating the fathers' involvement in aspirations transmission, this research seeks to provide novel insights into how fathers' aspirations impact their children's intrinsic and extrinsic goals, contributing to a deeper understanding of parental influence and offering practical implications for fostering healthier family dynamics.

1.1 Parent-Child Similarity of Aspirations

Aspirations have been a central concept in social sciences since the inception of the fields. In psychological research, aspirations, often used interchangeably with “values” or “life goals” that explain the motivational bases of behavior providing purpose, meaning, and direction. Particularly, aspirations have been a focal point of research due to their profound implications for life satisfaction, well-being, and healthier personality traits. Researchers have also explored how aspirations can shape individuals' psychological health in terms of a developmental perspective (Nishimura, Bradshaw, Deci & Ryan, 2020). Understanding the developmental roles of aspirations is particularly relevant for adolescents, as this period is critical for establishing the foundations of adult value systems (Schwartz, 2012).

Regarding the developmental pathways of child aspirations, Knafo-Noam, Arni, and Schwartz (2020) argued that the parent-child relationship plays a crucial role. They identified four pathways to parent-child aspirations similarity: (a) parental influence, (b) child influence, (c) common environmental antecedents, and (d) shared genetic antecedents. Among these, parental influence has attracted particular interest due to its role in family education and child development. This is because parents act as primary role models and sources of guidance during children's formative period. They convey values, priorities, and goals through direct and indirect communication, shaping their children's aspirations. Research has consistently shown that parental aspirations significantly impact children's goals, influencing not only what children strive for but also how they approach challenges and define success (Lekes, et al., 2010).

1.2 Aspirations in Self-determination Theory

In recent decades, self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017) has categorized aspirations into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic aspirations are life goals that align with basic psychological needs and contribute to psychological well-being, such as self-acceptance, building meaningful relationships, contributing to the community, and maintaining physical health. These goals are often associated with a deeper connection to one's authentic self and a greater likelihood of achieving overall wellness. In contrast, extrinsic aspirations are life goals that are less likely to fulfill inherent psychological needs and often serve as compensatory mechanisms for unmet needs. These include pursuits such as financial success, physical attractiveness, and social recognition. However, these two types of aspirations should not be viewed as simplistic dichotomies, in which intrinsic aspirations are inherently good and extrinsic aspirations are inherently bad. Instead, an individual's well-being is believed to depend on the relative balance between the two aspirations within the person. Therefore, it is important to note that while an overemphasis on extrinsic aspirations relative to intrinsic aspirations has been linked to ill-being, merely placing importance on extrinsic aspirations should not be dismissed or considered inherently negative (Kasser & Ryan, 2001).

SDT and related developmental perspectives suggest that humans have an inherent tendency to internalize ambient values present in their environment. This means that individuals, particularly children, tend to adopt and incorporate the values and goals of the people around them. Based on this theory, children's life values and goals are likely shaped by the values and goals of important figures such as parents or other role models, who serve as key influencers. For example, if a father places more importance on material wealth and social success (more extrinsic values) over contributing to the community or social well-being, his child is likely to adopt a similar orientation. Conversely, if he prioritizes personal relationships and personal growth (more intrinsic values) over superficial traits like physical attractiveness, the child may internalize similar orientations with intrinsic values. In other words, the theory suggests that the values and priorities a father holds will strongly influence the way his child forms their own beliefs and goals, as children internalize these values through interaction with their parents (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006).

Additionally, SDT adds a qualifier to this general expectation, suggesting that value internalization is more likely to occur when children perceive their parents as an autonomy-supportive and nurturing environment (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997; Ryan, Deci, & Vansteenkiste, 2016). Specifically, when parents consistently provide understanding to their children, opportunities for choice, and meaningful rationale, children are more inclined to internalize their parents' aspirations. Conversely, if there is less satisfaction in the parent-child relationship, children may be less willing or even resistant to receiving parental life values, particularly for future intrinsic aspirations. This is because values and life goals that satisfy basic psychological needs are more easily internalized, as they involve less internal conflict and are perceived as more congruent with the authentic self (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, with respect to such moderating effect, individuals with experiences that evoke feelings of insecurity, often pursue extrinsic rather than intrinsic aspirations. This is because of that extrinsic goals are often perceived as an alternative, if not essential, means of satisfying basic psychological needs (Kasser et al., 2004).

1.3 Aims and Hypotheses

The current study examines these SDT hypotheses in the context of fathers' aspirations and their relationship with the aspirations of their early adolescent children. Specifically, the study explores both the content of fathers' aspirations (intrinsic versus extrinsic emphasis) and moderating factors, such as adolescents' perceptions of their fathers' autonomy support, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and life satisfaction. These factors are considered in terms of how they may shape or influence the adoption of aspirations among adolescents. The research hypotheses are outlined as follows:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Aspirations will be similar between parents and children, with a positive correlation between aspirations serving as indirect evidence of their transmission.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Affiliative relationships, including the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, autonomy support, and promoting higher life satisfaction, will facilitate the transmission of aspirations, particularly intrinsic aspirations.
- **Hypothesis 3:** When basic psychological needs are unmet or life satisfaction is low, less autonomy-supportive relationships will lead children to place greater importance on extrinsic aspirations.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

A survey company in Japan recruited the participants online platform. A total of 310 Japanese father-child dyads participated in the survey and provided data; 310 fathers ($M_{\text{age}} = 47.95$) and their 310 children, who were 9th grade, junior high school students (155 boys and 155 girls, $M_{\text{age}} = 14.98$).

2.2 Measures

All measures and instructions for the survey were completed in Japanese.

Aspirations. Fathers and children completed the 32-item Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; translated version by Nishimura & Suzuki, 2016a). This measure has been widely used and validated measure consists of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. Items were rated on a 5-point scale, based on personal importance, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very important*). McDonald's omega coefficients for intrinsic aspirations were .95 for both fathers and children, and for extrinsic aspirations were .96 and .95 for fathers and children, respectively.

Satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Fathers and children completed the need satisfaction subscales of the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration scale (BPNSFS) developed by Chen et al. (2015) and translated into Japanese by Nishimura and Suzuki (2016b). The original scale also includes 12 items assessing need frustration, but these were not included. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). McDonald's omega coefficients for the total satisfaction of basic psychological needs for fathers and children were .94 and .95, respectively.

Autonomy support from fathers. Fathers and children completed six items from the Perceptions of Parents Scale (Robbins, 1994) to assess their perceptions of the autonomy support provided by fathers. Fathers self-assessed the autonomy support they provided to their children. While the original scale comprised nine items, three reverse-coded items were excluded from this study. The scale was translated into Japanese by the author under the supervision of a professional English translation service. Respondents rated each item on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). McDonald's omega coefficients of the scale for fathers and children were .95 and .97, respectively.

Life satisfaction. Father and children responded the Satisfaction with Life Scale consisted of five items (Diener et al., 1985), rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). McDonald's omega coefficients were .91 for both fathers and children.

Demographics. Information regarding fathers' educational background, marital status, annual income, and children's birth order was collected as demographic data.

2.3 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

A web survey company in Japan recruited participants to provide dyadic data. Fathers who agreed to participate provided both their consent and parental consent for their children to participate. Two days later, participants received questionnaire packages. The participants were informed of several key points: (a) their privacy would be protected, (b) participation was voluntary, and there would be no disadvantages regardless of their response or level of completion, and (c) responding to the questionnaire was considered as agreement for data usage. The ethics committee of the institution with which the author was affiliated exempted the project from a formal review, as the data collection process involved a third-party web survey company. The institution delegated ethical oversight to the web survey company.

2.4 Analysis Plan

All analyses were conducted by R version 4.2.2. In order to test the Hypothesis 1, a correlation analysis was performed. For testing Hypotheses 2 and 3, hierarchical regression analysis, including moderation analysis, was employed.

3. Results

3.1 Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables. As shown, children's both aspirations were strongly and positively correlated with their fathers' intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations, respectively. Additionally, fathers' intrinsic aspirations were more positively correlated with children's perception for autonomy support from fathers, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and life satisfaction than their extrinsic aspirations. Furthermore, both father's and children's intrinsic aspirations were more positively correlated with own evaluation of autonomy support, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and life satisfaction than extrinsic aspirations.

3.2 Moderation Analysis

Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis using children's aspirations as the dependent variable, showing sufficient explanatory power in both models. In Step 1, all independent variables were included in the models, and in Step 2, interaction terms were added. As shown, fathers' intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations were positively correlated with children's intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations, respectively, even after controlling for other potential variables and related demographics to account for their influence on the dependent variables. Furthermore, focusing on the interaction between aspirations and potential moderating factors, the two interaction terms reached marginal level of significance in relation to children's aspirations. First, the interaction between fathers' autonomy support and fathers' intrinsic aspirations was positively correlated with children's intrinsic aspirations. Second, the interaction between children's life satisfaction and fathers' extrinsic aspirations was positively correlated with children's extrinsic aspirations. For further clarification, paternal autonomy support, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and life satisfaction were excluded from the regression due to their high correlations with the children's corresponding variables, which could have caused multicollinearity issues.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients among variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
Father's variables											
a. father's intrinsic aspirations	3.23	0.73	.35 ***	.40 ***	.25 ***	.19 **	.57 ***	.34 ***	.28 ***	.25 ***	.25 **
b. father's extrinsic aspirations	2.07	0.70		-.06	.13 *	.13 *	.26 ***	.50 ***	-.02	.05	.07
c. autonomy support	4.66	0.85			.41 ***	.28 ***	.38 ***	.09	.55 ***	.37 ***	.23 ***
d. satisfaction of basic psychological needs	4.15	0.86				.72 ***	.24 ***	.25 ***	.34 ***	.36 ***	.32 ***
e. life satisfaction	3.75	1.06					.12 *	.12 *	.22 ***	.27 ***	.31 ***
Children's variables											
f. children's intrinsic aspirations	3.20	0.75						.65 ***	.40 ***	.45 ***	.25 ***
g. children's extrinsic aspirations	2.59	0.83							.12 *	.32 ***	.19 ***
h. perceived autonomy support from father	4.59	1.03								.63 ***	.43 ***
i. satisfaction of basic psychological needs	4.29	0.84									.69 ***
j. life satisfaction	3.97	0.99									

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

Table 2 Hierarchical multiple regression analysis for children's aspirations (unstandardized coefficients)

	children's intrinsic aspirations		children's extrinsic aspirations	
	step 1	step 2	step 1	step 2
	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b</i>
Father's variables				
father's intrinsic aspirations (1)	.44 ***	.46 ***	.16 *	.15 *
father's extrinsic aspirations (2)	.11 *	.11 *	.50 ***	.51 ***
Children's variables : potential moderators				
perceived autonomy support from father (3)	.09 *	.08 *	-.09 †	-.08 †
satisfaction of basic psychological need (4)	.30 ***	.32 ***	.39 ***	.41 ***
life satisfaction (5)	-.08 †	-.07	-.06	-.07
Control variables				
father's marriage status (married = 1, divorce = 0)	-.50 *	-.50 *	-.33	-.19
father's educational background	.00	-.01	-.08	-.07
familial income	.00	.00	.00	.00
childrens' gender (boys = 1, girls = 0)	-.02	-.02	.13 †	.15 *
childrens' birth order	-.01	.00	.00	.00
Interactions				
(1) × (3)		.09 †		
(1) × (4)		-.02		
(1) × (5)		-.10		
(2) × (3)				.04
(2) × (4)				-.07
(2) × (5)				-.14 †
<i>R</i> ²	.46	.47	.38	.40

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

Figures 1 illustrates the content of these interactions. Regarding the transmission of intrinsic aspirations, paternal autonomy support strengthens the association between fathers' and children's intrinsic aspirations. In contrast, regarding the transmission of extrinsic aspirations, children's life satisfaction attenuated the association between fathers' and children's extrinsic aspirations. These findings suggest that the transmission of values between fathers and children is moderated by the quality of their relationship and children's satisfaction.

4. Discussion

The present study explores the complex dynamics of value transmission between fathers and children, highlighting the role of relational context and children's life satisfaction. Correlation analysis showed a strong alignment between children's and fathers' intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations, supporting Hypothesis 1. Additionally, fathers' intrinsic aspirations were positively correlated with autonomy support, basic psychological needs satisfaction, and life satisfaction. In contrast, extrinsic aspirations did not positively influence children's aspirations or psychological indicators. These findings highlight the crucial role of intrinsic aspirations in fostering supportive and fulfilling father-child relationships, aligning with previous research on the benefits of autonomy-supportive parenting (Lekes et al., 2010).

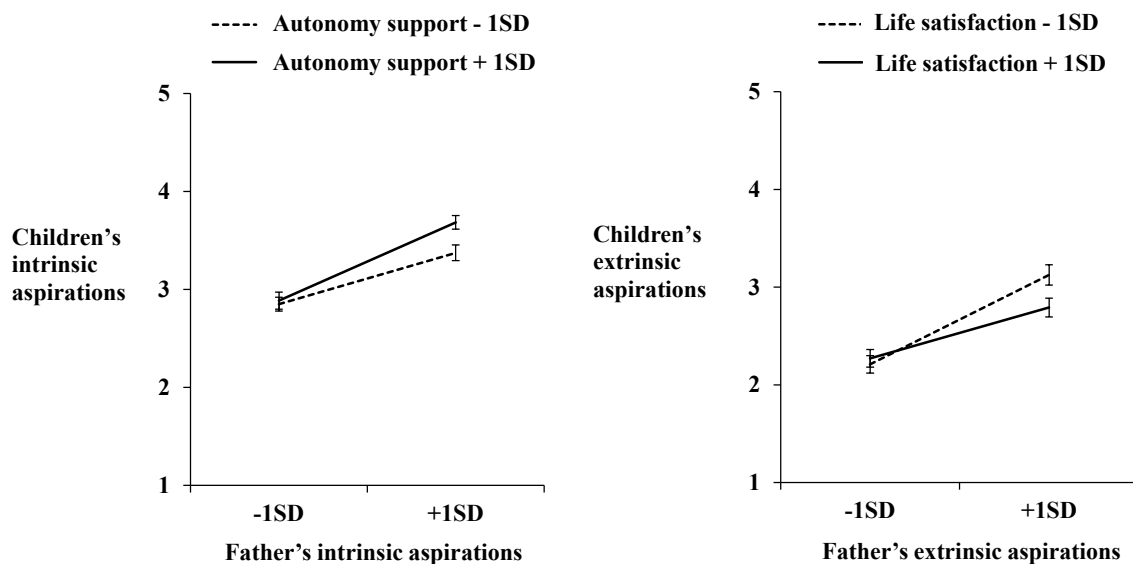


Figure 1. Contents of the interaction for children's intrinsic (left side) and extrinsic aspirations (right side)

Moderation analysis further emphasized the critical role of the father-child relationship in shaping children's aspirations. Fathers' autonomy support strengthened the alignment of intrinsic aspirations between fathers and their children, suggesting such parenting encourages the internalization of intrinsic values. Conversely, children's life satisfaction weakened the association between fathers' extrinsic aspirations and children's extrinsic aspirations, indicating that higher life satisfaction may reduce children's reliance on external, materialistic goals passed down by their fathers. Alternatively, when children's life satisfaction is low, their extrinsic aspirations may align more closely with their fathers. This suggests that individuals with lower life satisfaction may perceive extrinsic aspirations as a means of fulfilling their needs. However, this interpretation does not fully align with the premise of SDT, which emphasizes the role of basic psychological needs and autonomy-supportive parenting in shaping aspirations, rather than children's life satisfaction. Therefore, it is more accurate to conclude that Hypotheses 2 and 3 are partially supported.

These findings highlight the dual pathways through which distinct factors transmit and moderate intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. Autonomy support appears to play a pivotal role in strengthening the transmission of intrinsic values, promoting alignment and mutual understanding between fathers and children. By contrast, children's life satisfaction may act as a buffer against the internalization of extrinsic aspirations, potentially fostering resilience against external pressures or materialistic value orientations. In other words, the dual pathways suggest that the moderation of value transmission occurs through parental influence in the case of intrinsic aspirations, and through the child's psychological state in the case of extrinsic aspirations. Although this study primarily focused on fathers, previous research indicates that mothers' contingent self-esteem may also moderate the transmission of extrinsic future goals (Soenens et al., 2015). Therefore, further research is required to enhance our understanding of these dynamic models of transmission, by incorporating the processes involving both parents.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of fostering high-quality relationships and supporting children's psychological status to facilitate the positive transmission of values. These findings are particularly relevant given the crucial role of family relationships in shaping children's aspirations, which have long-term implications for their personal development. As an educational implication for developing healthier aspirations, it is beneficial for fathers to openly discuss their values with their children, while respecting their children's opinions. Specifically, when parents sincerely communicate their values and demonstrate a willingness to accept their children's opinions, it helps children gain confidence in their own intrinsic values.

Future research could further explore how contextual factors, such as cultural norms and socioeconomic status, shape these dynamics. Exploring these factors is vital for understanding how broader societal conditions influence family relationships and contribute to the development of children's values and aspirations. Additionally, examining the role of mothers and comparing their impact with that of fathers, as well as the combined effects of both parents, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of family dynamics and transmission of values. Understanding how parental roles and their interactions shape children's aspirations would provide a more comprehensive perspective on family dynamics, with implications for promoting healthier and more supportive family environments. Longitudinal studies are crucial for tracking changes in parental influence and children's aspirations over time. Examining these processes across developmental stages may reveal how aspirations evolve and how long-term relational patterns shape value transmission throughout childhood and adolescence.

5. Conclusion

Fathers and their children exhibited similar aspirations, with these connections influenced by parental involvement and children's health. This study advances the comprehending of value transmission by providing empirical evidence on the role of fathers' aspirations in shaping children's intrinsic values and well-being. It lays the groundwork for future studies on how family dynamics influence child development, offering valuable insights into how supportive father-child relationships shape children's aspirations.

Acknowledgment

The present study involved secondary analysis for the published data provided by Nishimura et al. (2021). This work was supported by JPSP KAKENHI Grant number JP21K03031.

References

- Chen, B., Vansteenkiste, M., Beyers, W., Boone, L., Deci, E. L., Van der Kaap-Deeder, J., ... Verstuyf, J. (2015). Basic psychological need satisfaction, need frustration, and need strength across four cultures. *Motivation and Emotion*, 39(2), 216-236.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49(1), 71-75.
- Grolnick, W. S., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1997). Internalization within the family: The self-determination theory perspective. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 135-161). Wiley.
- Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (2001). Be careful what you wish for: Optimal functioning and the relative attainment of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. In P. Schmuck & K. M. Sheldon (Eds.), *Life goals and well-being: Towards a positive psychology of human striving* (pp. 116-131). Hogrefe & Huber.
- Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (1996). Further examining the American dream: Differential correlates of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(3), 280-287.
- Kasser, T., Ryan, R. M., Couchman, C. E., & Sheldon, K. M. (2004). Materialistic values: Their causes and consequences. In T. Kasser & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Psychology and consumer culture: The struggle for a good life in a materialistic world* (pp. 11-28). American Psychological Association.
- Knafo-Noam, A., Arni, A., & Schwartz, S. H. (2020). Parent-child value similarity: Broadening from intergenerational transmission to reciprocal influences, genetics, and environmental antecedents. In L. A. Jensen (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of moral development: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 164-185). Oxford University Press.
- Lekes, N., Gingras, I., Philippe, F. L., Koestner, R., & Fang, J. (2010). Parental autonomy support, intrinsic life goals, and well-being among adolescents in China and North America. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(8), 858-869.
- Nishimura, T., Bradshaw, E. L., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2021). Satisfaction of basic psychological needs in an interdependence model of fathers' own aspirations and those of their adolescent children. *Social Development*, 30(1), 293-310.
- Nishimura, T., & Suzuki, T. (2016a). Aspirations and life satisfaction in Japan: The big five personality makes clear. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 97, 300-305.
- Nishimura, T., & Suzuki, T. (2016b). Basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration in Japan: controlling for the big five personality traits. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 58(4), 320-331.
- Robbins, R. J. (1994). An assessment of perceived parental autonomy support: The development and validation of a measure reflecting the self-determination theory construct. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*, University of Rochester.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Publications.
- Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2016). Autonomy and autonomy disturbances in self-development and psychopathology: Research on motivation, attachment, and clinical

- process. In D. Cicchetti (Ed.), *Developmental psychopathology: Theory and method* (3rd ed., pp. 385–438). John Wiley & Sons, Inc..
- Schwartz, S. H. (2012). Values and religion in adolescent development: Cross-national and comparative evidence. In G. Trommsdorff & X. Chen (Eds.), *Values, religion, and culture in adolescent development* (pp. 97-122). Cambridge University Press.
- Soenens, B., Wuyts, D., Vansteenkiste, M., Mageau, G. A., & Brenning, K. (2015). Raising trophy kids: The role of mothers' contingent self-esteem in maternal promotion of extrinsic goals. *Journal of Adolescence*, 42, 40-49.
- Vansteenkiste, M., Lens, W., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents in self-determination theory: Another look at the quality of academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(1), 19–31.