TITLE: SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE AND BELIEF SYSTEMS OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS IN RUSSIA

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SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE AND BELIEF SYSTEMS OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS IN RUSSIA

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Executive Summary

Background

The goal of this project was to provide a better understanding of the development, formation, and change in belief systems of children and their parents in a rapidly changing Russian society. The study allows us to conclude that some shift toward a more socialist economy is imminent; however the depth of this change cannot be concluded.

As it is well known, Russian society is undergoing a period of rapid social change and transformation. Change and transformation in Russia are most evident at the macrosocial level—at the level of the country’s political, social, and economic systems. The old Soviet Union has been replaced by 15 independent states. Structures of power that once represented the old regime, such as the Communist Party Central Committee, the Congress of People’s Deputies, and the Soviet Government have been replaced by new structures and institutions. Symbolic attributes of statehood, including the name of the country, its flag, and the national anthem have changed; concepts of the country’s history, roots, national heroes, national interests, and international alliances have changed; the socialist economy based on central planning of production output has been transformed into a market economy, and state property has been privatized; state censorship of mass media has been removed, leading to the emergence of a free press; and the educational system that was once responsible for the development of communist and collectivist values in young members of the society has dramatically changed its focus (e.g., Sobkin, 1993; Wertsch & Rosin, 1994). However, in order to be able to predict future directions of change and its potential outcomes, it seems important to understand if social change at the macrosocial level, at the level of social institutions, has been accompanied by change at the level of the family and individual. One of the most important aspects of the individual level that affects a variety of social behaviors (e.g., voting behavior or political behavior), is individual belief systems. Individual belief systems include values, beliefs, life plans, attributions, attitudes, and expectations. It has been established in social-psychological research that belief systems affect the ways humans process,
store, and assess incoming information, form intentions, and act in their social environments. Therefore, people's individual belief systems could be predictive of their social and political behaviors.

Our data suggest that while profound changes have been apparent at the macrosocial level, individual belief systems have exhibited amazing stability. Findings indicate the existence of stable patterns in belief systems of Russian children and their parents, and high levels of intergenerational agreement with respect to these patterns. These patterns have an emphasis on interrelatedness, service to others, and idealism, thus fitting definitions of collectivism and allocentrism. Similar patterns have been reported in research conducted in Russia prior to this period of rapid social transformation.

These findings also suggest that there is a disparity between the rapidly changing macrosocial organization, and the relatively stable individual belief systems. The macrosocial organization has been moving toward a capitalist economy, whereas individual belief systems have continued to exhibit collectivist patterns.

In the course of the study, 380 children and parents have been extensively interviewed. These families differ across their living environments (e.g., urban vs. rural), socioeconomic status, and their child's age. All measures were obtained through a series of in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Children and parents were interviewed within their homes. Interview data have been coded and analyzed. In the sections to follow, we will describe (1) overall patterns in belief systems of Russian children and their parents, (2) inter-generational congruence in beliefs of Russian children and their parents, (3) differences and similarities in belief systems across living environments, and (4) differences and similarities in belief systems across socioeconomic and educational lines.

I. Patterns in Belief Systems of Russians

Research on belief systems of children and adults conducted in Russia prior to this social revolution largely reported the prevalence of collectivist belief systems at both the microsocial and individual levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1973; Lawler, 1980; Novikova, 1978; Porshnev, 1978; Suchev, 1978). Both individuals (e.g., children and parents) and institutions (e.g., schools and workplaces) have emphasized group-oriented, service-oriented, and compliance-oriented beliefs. Our findings demonstrate that these patterns of individual belief systems have not changed much. This analysis includes only those respondents who provided definite responses. Those interviews where respondents did not provide a clear response were treated as missing data and were excluded from the analysis. Missing data accounts for approximately 15%-20% of all responses.
• There exist discernible patterns in belief systems of Russian children and their parents. These patterns exhibit similarity across children's (a) age, (b) gender, and (c) educational levels of their parents.

• The majority of Russian subjects exhibit patterns that are idealistic; service-oriented; and concerned with the common good, social well-being, and compliance. Such patterns have been traditionally described as the collectivist pattern (Markus, & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Triandis, 1994) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Patterns of Belief Systems of Russian Children and Their Parents.

A more microscopic analysis of the occupational, educational, social, and political beliefs of children and their parents reveals the following:

• The majority of the respondents (more than 50% of the children and more than 65% of the parents) have expressed their preferences for qualified educated professional occupations, including those of physician, teacher, and engineer.

• The majority of the respondents (more than 70% of the children and more than 65% of the parents) have referred to service-oriented beliefs (as opposed to achievement-oriented beliefs) as reasons for their occupational preferences. Among the most frequent were responses of the type, "I would like to have this job in order to better help people," or "I think that this is a very interesting job; on this job I could fully realize my potential and better serve other people." On the other hand, pragmatic and achievement-oriented concerns comprised less than 15% of children's and parents' responses.

• The majority of the respondents (more than 80% of children and parents) have expressed a strong preference for a college degree education.
• The majority of the respondents (more than 70% of children and parents) have expressed their preferences for idealistic personal qualities (e.g., to be kind, fair, and honest) as opposed to more pragmatic qualities that comprise only 22% of the responses.

• The majority of children and their parents tended to evaluate overall changes in the country as relatively profound ones. More than 80% of the children and around 70% of their parents reported that overall changes in the country were moderate to large. However, macrosocial changes (e.g., overall changes in the country, changes in the economy, and changes in the sociopolitical system) were evaluated as more profound than changes at the microsocial level (e.g., changes in the family or changes in the school), or at the individual level (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent of Respondents Who Evaluate Changes as Moderate-to-Strong

These findings suggest that (a) there is a disparity between the rapidly changing macrosocial organization, and the relatively stable microsocial and individual psychological organization; and (b) Russian children and their parents perceive changes at the macrosocial level (in the economy and political system) as greater and more profound than changes at the level of the family and the individual. The macrosocial organization has been moving toward a capitalist economy, whereas individual belief systems have continued to exhibit collectivist patterns. However, in general, the capitalist market economy is typically associated with individualist belief systems, whereas socialist types of economic order are typically associated with collectivist belief systems (Hofstede, 1980). These findings suggest the following possible future developments in Russia. First, patterns of individual belief systems could shift towards individualism, thus becoming consistent with the capitalist macrosocial organization. Second, capitalist macrosocial organization could regain a socialist orientation, thus becoming consistent with collectivist patterns of individual belief systems. Third, the capitalist macrosocial organization and collectivist belief systems could converge, thus becoming more consistent
with one another. The results of recent elections in Russia, suggest that the second and the third options are more plausible than the first one.

II. Inter-Generational Congruence in Belief Systems of Russian Children and Their Parents.

In order to understand the formation of individual belief systems and to predict directions of change in individual belief systems of Russian children, it seemed important to examine the agreement between children and their parents on their beliefs. Our findings can be summarized as following:

- Children and parents exhibit high levels of agreement on their belief systems. Strong associations were found between beliefs of the children, their mothers and their fathers (Sloutsky, 1994b; Sloutsky & Leighty, 1994) (See Table 1).

Table 1. Associations Among Family Members' Patterns of Beliefs Aggregated within Belief Domains (Cohen's kappa is used as a measure of association) (Sloutsky, 1994b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief domains</th>
<th>Children vs. Mothers</th>
<th>Children vs. Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers vs. Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupational beliefs</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality beliefs</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational beliefs</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients within the cells represent measures of similarity of belief systems among children, mothers, and fathers. These coefficients can differ from 0 (total lack of similarity) to 1 (identical belief systems). Findings suggest that there is a strong agreement between generations in Russia. This level of intergenerational agreement is comparable to the levels of intergenerational agreement found in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia, Poland, and the United States. Thus, it can be concluded that patterns of intergenerational agreement in the rapidly changing Russia are similar to intergenerational agreement in more stable societies.

III. Belief Systems Across Living Environments

One of the important questions was to determine if patterns of belief systems differ across rural and urban living environments. If these patterns differ, one could predict significant differences in political behaviors of rural and urban residents. Findings, however, do not suggest that individual belief systems differ across the living environments.
Preliminary findings indicate the existence of comparable patterns in belief systems of rural and urban subjects. However, the small number of subjects in the rural settings requires that this finding be treated with special caution.

IV. Belief Systems Across Socioeconomic Lines

It was also important to understand whether the observed patterns of individual belief systems differ across socioeconomic lines. Do families of different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds differ in their belief systems? It was found that:

- Mothers and fathers at all educational levels exhibit strong similarity in their parental beliefs (Sloutsky, 1994a) (See Table 2).
- Children from families that differ in their educational backgrounds exhibit strong similarity in their beliefs.

Table 2. Associations Among Patterns of Beliefs of Mothers and Fathers by Their Educational Levels Aggregated within Belief Domains (Cohen’s kappa is used as a measure of agreement) (Sloutsky, 1994a).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief domains</th>
<th>Low educated mothers vs. Highly educated mothers</th>
<th>Low educated fathers vs. Highly educated fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupational beliefs</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality beliefs</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational values</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients within the cells represent measures of similarity of belief systems among high and low educated parents. These coefficients can differ from 0 (total lack of similarity) to 1 (identical belief systems). Findings suggest that people of different educational backgrounds largely have similar beliefs with respect to education, occupation, and desired personal qualities of their children. This similarity, however, was significantly lower for educational values of low and high educated mothers.

Conclusions

The dramatically changed macrosocial organization in Russia coexists with relatively stable patterns of individual beliefs, and high congruence of belief systems across generational and socio-economic lines. The macrosocial organization has been changing into a capitalist economy, whereas individual belief systems have remained relatively unchanged, continuing to exhibit collectivist patterns. Some researchers have argued that a capitalist market economy
fosters individualism, whereas various socialist types of economic order foster collectivism (Hofstede, 1980). However, this view has been disputed by the emergence of new economies in the Pacific Rim, including Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and some others. These economies are based on capitalist principles, yet the societies and individuals maintain traditional collectivist belief systems at the cultural, microsocial, and individual levels (e.g., Lebra, 1976; Kim, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Stevenson, Azuma, & Hacuta, 1986; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). The existence of such economies suggests that individual belief systems may not be totally consistent with the more global level of social organization.

Therefore, in order to be able to predict future developments in Russia, it seems important to answer the following questions. First, will patterns of individual belief systems shift towards individualism, thus becoming consistent with the capitalist macrosocial organization? Second, will the capitalist macrosocial organization regain a socialist orientation, thus becoming consistent with collectivist patterns of individual beliefs? And third, will the capitalist macrosocial organization and collectivist belief systems converge, thus becoming more consistent with one another? The reported study suggests a negative answer to the first question. However, in order to answer the second and the third questions, additional longitudinal studies will be required. The current study allows us to conclude that some shift toward a more socialist economy is imminent; however the depth of this change cannot be concluded from the reported study.

Notes:

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