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Democratic Parenting: Parental interpretation of parent education messages in the USA and Israel.

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The study examines the process of globalization of cultural knowledge as it occurs in the parent education system. The research explores, through comparative analysis and qualitative methods, how the same global knowledge regarding democratic parenting, produced by USA experts and imparted through parenting classes to parents in the USA and Israel, is interpreted and implemented by the parents. Although parenting theories are similar, parents in the two countries interpret and implement the theories differently, according to their cultural beliefs and socio-political background.

Keywords: Parenting, Education, Democracy, Globalization, Israel, USA.

Introduction

Parent education has been a growing educational field in many countries over recent decades (Butt, 2009; Davidson, 2000; Epstein, 2010; Ogden, Forgatch, Askeland & Bullock, 2005; Skrypnek, 2002). In this field, experts such as therapists, counselors, and parent educators instill in parents in various countries democratic ideas and practices that endeavor to help parents raise their children as future autonomous and responsible democratic citizens(Chang & Ritter, 2004; Oryan & Gastil, 2013).

While previous research has analyzed the parent education messages that experts instilled in parents (Cohen, 2012; Borenstein, 2006; Davidson, 2000; Fiske, 1997; Oryan & Gastil, 2013; Thompson, 2000; Tokateli, 2000), and parental beliefs and child rearing practices in different cultures (Goodnow,2002; Harkness & Super,2006; Sigel &Mc Gillicuddi-De Lisi, 2002), analysis of how parents in different cultures interpret and negotiate expert's messages has been sparse.

The present study focuses on this cultural perspective of parental beliefs. It will analyze how parents in two different countries - the USA and Israel -interpret and implement the same global knowledge regarding democratic parenting that is instilled in them by experts (parenting class instructors), according to their culture-based beliefs.

Concern with this cultural perspective arises from theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, it contributes knowledge to a wider educational-sociological debate regarding the effects of the process of globalization of knowledge: does the dissemination of similar knowledge to parents from diverse cultures create cross-cultural homogenization or is cultural heterogeneity retained? In practice, and especially in societies experiencing increasing multiculturalism, the understanding that parents interpret and implement new knowledge presented to them according to their cultural beliefs is essential for parent educators, teachers, and other practitioners who work with parents.

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Theoretical Framework

Parent Education and the Global Diffusion of Democratic Parenting

Parent education is a major educational system that has massively expanded since the 1980sin many countries around the world (Davidson, 2000; Epstein, 2010; Fine, 1980,1989; Fiske, 1997). While many countries established systems of democratic schooling for youth, the idea of education for democracy includes the notion that it must also be taught in the home, where family members are supposed to model democratic relations with each other (Cameron, 1986; Ferguson-Dreikurs,2004; Ferguson-Dreikurs et al.,2006). This idea encouraged many countries, including the USA and Israel, to support private and public efforts to establish parent education systems (Cohen, 2012; Davidson, 2000; Fiske, 1997; Thompson, 2000; Tokateli, 2000).

As parent education system simpart concepts and practices based on the democratic values of freedom, equality and mutual respect, it opposes authoritarian parental control and strongly encourages parenting which focuses on mutual consideration and fewer restrictions (Beekman, 1977; Cable, 1975; Cleverly & Phillips, 1986; Dor, 2004; Hardyment, 1983; Hulbert, 2003; Merdler & Rosenbaum, 2012; Shahar-Deitch, 2012; Stearns, 2003).

Parenting classes are one of the most prevalent forms of the parent education systems around the world. In the classes parents learn new psychological, educational and communication concepts and skills, and share and discuss their child rearing difficulties (Borenstein, 2006; Croake & Glover, 1977; Fine, 1980, 1989;McVitte & Best, 2009; Wyatt-Kaminski, Valle, Filene & Boyle, 2008).

The goal of these classes is to offer expert advice as well as group support[1] in order to help parents improve their family relations and make these more respectful and tolerant, and to reduce parent-child conflicts (Borenstein, 2006; Wyatt-Kaminski, et al., 2008; McVitte & Best, 2009).

As parenting classes were found to be one of the most efficient forms of parent education in the USA, many other countries began to follow suit, including Israel. (Cohen, 2010; Tokateli, 2000).

Global Democratization and Education.

The worldwide dissemination of similar democratic concepts and practices in the parent education systems around the world arouses the sociological question - does this create global cultural homogeneity? John Meyer, an educational sociologist, focuses in his work on examining the processes of globalization and its effects on educational systems. Meyer and his colleagues (Meyer, 2000, 2006; Meyer, Kamens, & Benavot,1992; Rosenmund, 2006) showed how various mass education systems, following modern democratic ideas of human rights and equal opportunity for each child, spread rapidly throughout the world after World War II. In this globalization process, peripheral nations adopted core states' curricula, organizational practices, and bureaucratic structures, creating global standardization in different parts of the mass education system (Meyer, 2000, 2006; Meyer et al., 1992; Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal,1992; Rosenmund, 2006).

Following the lead of Meyer and his colleagues, this study examines whether the same democratic knowledge that is imparted to parents in the USA and Israel is interpreted and implemented by them in the same way, and thus creates global cultural homogenization. However, given that this knowledge interacts with basic cultural beliefs regarding children and families, the next section addresses these beliefs as they apply to the two different cultural settings of the US and Israel.

Parental Beliefs Regarding the Child and Family in Various Cultures

Previous research that examined parental beliefs shows that parents in different countries subscribe to different beliefs according to their local cultural belief system (Goodnow, 2002; Harkness& Super, 1996, 2006; Chang & Ritter, 2004; Sigel & Mc Gillicuddi-De Lisi, 2002).

Parenting beliefs about the child and family life can be seen as essentially derived from individual experience. However, parents also develop their ideas about childrearing, within broader social and cultural communities. Therefore, their beliefs are also shared and filtered through the cultural lens of more general beliefs, values, and practices (Goodnow, 2002; Harkness & Super,1996, 2006; Chang & Ritter, 2004; Sigel &Mc Gillicuddi-De Lisi, 2002).

[1] The group support that parents get in the classes transform these classes into a unique form of parent education, substantially different from parenting books, magazines, lectures and family counseling in which parent can meet and discuss their parenting difficulties only with experts.

The USA and Israel are two Western democratic countries in which the parent education system conveys to parents the same theories regarding democratic parenting. However, although both USA and Israeli cultures are based on similar democratic values, their socio-political sources and cultural beliefs regarding the child and the family relations are different, as will be described in the next section.

Socio-political Background and Cultural Beliefs Regarding the Child and the Family of American Parents.

The USA is dominated by a liberal-capitalistic model of democracy. Influenced by the enlightened ideas of freedom and equality envisioned by philosophers such as John Locke, Adam Smith and Thomas Jefferson, the socio-political system of the USA was based from early years on individualistic values (Allik & Realo 2004; Bozeman, 2007; Forman, 1974; Hartz, 1991; Waligorski, 1997). Although contemporary USA is an immigrant society comprised of newcomers from various nations and cultures, it is unified by the idea of the individual and his inalienable right to pursue life, liberty, happiness as well as his natural right to property ownership.

Accordingly, society is a free market, and individuals are free agents who constantly pursue their own good and welfare. A successful society is one in which each individual works hard to pursue his or her own progress and welfare (Bozeman, 2007; Forman, 1974; Hartz, 1991; Putnam, 2000; Waligorski, 1997), thus ensuring the welfare of the nation.

The contemporary American family also evolved from these individualistic-utilitarian values (Cherlin, 2004; Coleman, 1993; Hearn, 1997; Popenoe, 1993), and parents raise their children to become independent individuals. American parents know that their children's own nuclear family may live far away from their extended family, and that they may see their parents only a few times a year.

Striving for self-fulfillment and self-autonomy for each family member creates complex parent-child relationships, that can be seen as contractual[2] (Bellah et al., 1985) and emotionally restricted (Stearns, 1994, 2003)[3]. As utilitarian ideas from the marketplace penetrated the family realm, family relations were influenced by the need to regulate cooperation with others for the sake of personal achievement. According to this assumption, the family unit will stay intact only insofar as it fulfills the needs of each family member (Cherlin, 2004; Coleman, 1993; Hearn, 1997; Popenoe, 1993), at the same time weakening the individual's commitment to other family members and to the family as a whole (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bellah et al., 1985; Stearns, 1994, 2003). Following these values, family members call for a show of respect for the independence of others and focus on securing the autonomy and self-respect of each participant (Katriel & Philipsen, 1990).

Socio-political Background and Cultural Beliefs Regarding the Child and the Family of Israeli Parents

Israel's socio-political life derives from a socialistic-communal model of democracy, and the state, established in 1948, was based on strong collectivist values of solidarity and mutual care. The Zionist movement believed that the country should be founded on the principle that the Jewish people are one gigantic extended family, with each Jew responsible for the welfare of his fellow Jews (kol Israel 'arevim ze laze). (Doron, 2003; Eizenstadt, 1989; Sternhell, 1999).

Collectivist cultural values of solidarity and mutual involvement also evolve in the private sphere of family and parent-child relationships. Jewish Israeli society is mainly an immigrant society, and despite the diverse geographical origins, traditional Jewish family-focused norms prevail. These norms include establishing a family, having children, and valuing education (Fogeil-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavi & Katz, 2003; Peres & Katz, 1990; Samoocha, 2005; Stahl, 1973). As a persecuted people, Jews perceive the family as a strong and unified shelter for its members from all external threats. Nuclear and extended family relations are based on inter-dependence and

[2] Bellah et al identified these relations in the book 'habits of the heart': "For highly individuated Americans, there is something anomalous about the relations between parents and children, for the biologically normal dependence of children on adults is perceived as morally abnormal" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 82).

[3] Stearns claims in *American Cool*: "The new emotional standards [that dictate less emotional intensity] often seemed bent on defending individual autonomy... while immunity from overweening love was explicitly portrayed as an essential step in the process of individuation" (Stearns, 1994, p. 190).

mutual care (Linzer, 1972; Schlesinger 1971; Zborowski & Herzog, 1952). Family members are often intensely involved in each other's lives and are obliged to help each other when needed, all done, in most groups, with a high degree of emotional expressiveness (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Howe, 1976; Samoocha, 2005).

The stereotypic model of the over-protective Jewish mother and close parent-child relations dominates contemporary Israeli family (Almog, 2004). Despite the effect of individualistic, liberal Western values of autonomy and free choice, familism is still highly valued in modern Israeli society (Beystrov, 2012; Fogeil-Bijaoui, 2002; Lavi & Katz, 2003; Samoocha, 2005)[4]. Furthermore, despite Western influences, the Israeli family is still a relatively stable institution[5].

In this regard, the present study examines how parents in the USA and Israel interpret and implement the democratic concepts and practices that are disseminated to them in the parent education systems, according to their different cultural beliefs and socio-political backgrounds.

Research scope and Method

The study was conducted over an eleven-year period (1995-2005, 2013). Ten different classes were observed, while this study analyzes five of them - two in Israel, and three in the USA, (for a total of 115 hours).

The analyzed classes in the US and Israel followed two of the most prevalent approaches in the parent education systems in both countries - the Adlerian and Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T) approaches (Cohen, 1998; Fine, 1980,1989)[6].

The Israeli classes were held from 1995 to 2000, and the American ones from 2000 to 2005. All classes consisted of 6-20 weekly two-hour meetings held in the evening. They were held in community buildings (schools, community centers, and a building serving as a non-profit parents' organization), located in middle-class neighborhoods. In Israel the locale was a large city in the north of Israel, and in the USA a middle-class neighborhood in a large city in the Northwest. All classes were taught by female parent educators, who were mothers themselves.

The study was conducted using a comparative qualitative approach (Ragin, 1982). This approach claims that the best way to conduct a cross-national research project is to restrict the investigation to a few significant case studies and compare them to one another using qualitative methods. Unlike quantitative-cross-national research, which compares a big population of participants in a wide range of countries/cultures, qualitative case study research is more sensitive to complexities and can relate better to each case's historical-social experiences and processes. Following this approach, I compared two case studies - American and Israeli parenting classes, using qualitative methods.

Participants and data collection

All classes were attended by parents aged 25-45, mostly parents of young children (2-13 years). The two Israeli classes included 20 participants. The Israeli participants were mostly middle-class, secular Jewish parents. Seventy percent of the Israeli parents were Israeli-born, 15% came from Western countries and 15% from Arab countries. The three American classes included 51 participants. Similarly to the Israeli classes, most

[4] Israeli society is composed of heterogeneous population including Arab, Druze and other ethnic groups. Family values and commitment to the family is a common denominator, a characteristic clearly also shared by these two ethnic groups (Sagi, Or, & Bar-on, 2001; Seginer, Shoyer, Hossessi & Tannous,2007). A recent survey (Zuriel, Harari, 2013) exemplifies the strong Israeli parental commitment to their children. It claims that 87% of Israeli parents financially support their adult children (who are married and have children). 66% of the parents support their children and their families on a monthly basis even if this decreases their pension and lowers their own standard of living. They do it because they believe they should do all they can for their children's welfare. (retrieved in 27 June 2013 from http://www.calcalist.co.il/local/articles/0,7340,L-3606096,00.html)

[5] The 2011 divorce rate in Israel was 26% versus 49% in the USA. (www.newfamily.org.il/info-center/data-statistics, retrieved in 8 Feb 2013), with 2.4 children per family in 2013, versus 0.94 in the USA (www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3847007,00.htmland; retrieved in 8 Feb 2013).

[6] Both approaches provide parents with a specific set of educational concepts as well as communication skills, that are meant to help parents improve their discipline style and their relationship with their child, while training their children to become cooperative and contributing family members (Mcvitte& Best, 2008; Kerby, 1994)

of the American participants were middle-class and secular, Christians. Seventy percent were Caucasians, 10% African-Americans, 15% Asian Americans and 5% belonged to other ethnic groups. Gender division in the parenting classes in both countries was similar – 60%-80% of the participating parents were women.

The data were collected through field research over an eleven-year period (1995-2005, 2013) through participant observations. The classes were hand-recorded, and the written materials (flyers, papers and workbooks) distributed in the classes, were collected. Field notes were taken after the lessons ended. In addition, informal conversations were held during breaks and after classes with the participants, and interviews with the class instructors were conducted. During 2013 additional interviews were conducted with 10 Israeli class instructors, in order to validate and update the data.

Data analysis

The research data were analyzed using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to this approach the researcher does not impose his/her own ideas, but rather attempts to reveal the participants' concepts, interpretations and main concerns, and the manner in which they continually try to resolve them (Shkedi, 2003). (Gibton, 2001; Shkedi, 2003). Following this approach, data was analyzed in three stages. The first stage included identification of the concept of 'democratic parenting' as a 'core concept' of the parenting classes. The second stage was mapping the practices that were offered to parents in order to apply the 'democratic parenting' concept. The third stage was an analysis of the meanings and interpretations that parents attribute to the practices, as well as the parents' reports regarding their implementation of these practices.

Trustworthiness

One of the main obstacles a researcher might face while conducting a qualitative study is becoming too subjective and enforcing his/her academic and cultural (etic) categories over the indigenous (emic) concepts and categories (Glaser & Strauss,1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).In order to cope with this difficulty, three strategies were used: (a) An eleven year study was conducted, thus was exposed to 'chains of events' and not only single events, obtaining a wider perspective of the research field and the participants' insights and concepts (Gibton, 2001);(b) multiple data collection tools were used: observations, informal conversations, interviews and written materials, which assisted in cross checking information obtained from different sources and verifying insights (Guba & Lincoln, 1994);(c) as a native Israeli, researching the American classes helped the author to 'alienate' familiar Israeli culture and make the alien American culture' more familiar' (Lavi & Swidenberg, 1995), thus obtaining a closer understanding of American culture and also a more objective point of view of Israeli culture.

Findings

As democratic values of equality, freedom and mutual respect underpin parenting education in both the USA and Israel, instructors in both cultures asked parents to allow their children experience their freedom and autonomy (when possible), and to set rules and boundaries (when needed). We can see this clearly in the instructors' explanations given at the beginning of two classes:

American instructor: Today, equality is important, as are mutual respect and cooperation. I would not treat a child the way I would not like to be treated myself. Children have life just like we do, and they have an agenda which we want to respect. (American Adlerian class, 2 Nov. 2004).

Israeli instructor: A democratic atmosphere includes sharing, consulting [with the child], and asking for his help. It includes rules and boundaries. In our family every child knows what is OK to do and what is forbidden. And the rules should always be flexible and should be checked together with the child (Israeli Adlerian class, 28 Jan. 1996).

In order to imply these democratic ideas, instructors in both the USA and Israel presented to parents various practices that they can apply during their interactions with their children. The next part focuses on two of these practices that American and Israeli instructors offered parents in the parenting classes, and will describe how parents in the two cultures interpreted and talked about their daily implementation. The first practice is 'Identifying who owns the problem', (created by the PET approach), the second practice – 'Setting logical consequences', (created by the Adlerian approach). These two practices were taught in all the observed classes.

Who Owns the problem?

Developing the child's autonomy was an essential goal in the parenting classes in both countries. One means that instructors in the two countries suggested to parents in order to gain this educational goal, was to let children solve their problems independently. The practice "Who owns the problem?" calls for parents to decide whether a problem is theirs or the child's to solve. If it is the parents' or other family member's problem (when their feelings and interests are not considered by the child), they should step forward, and try to react, in order to solve the problem. However, if it is the child's problem, then parents should step back, and let the child solve it.

To teach this practice, instructors listed daily problems, and parents were asked to identify the owner: the child, the parent, or both.

Although all parents in both countries admitted to pampering and doing things for the children rather than letting the child do them, American parents usually did not have a big problem accepting the instructors recommendation of separating themselves from their children and letting them solve their problems independently. In contrast, Israeli parents struggled with this idea and resisted it. This distinction is illustrated by the following class conversations.

American instructor: Who owns the problem? Let me present a few problems and you tell me who owns them. The child lost his baseball. Parents (in chorus): The child.

Instructor: The child does not want to talk to his step parent.

Lyn[7]***: Both child and parent.*

Instructor: A child does not want to go to sleep before the test.

Parents: The child.

Instructor: A child has an argument with a friend.

Ann: The child.

Instructor: A child has a problem with his teacher.

Diane: Both of us?

Instructor: It is the child's problem. You cannot solve the problem for him, but you can help him find a solution, like writing a letter to the teacher.

(American Adlerian class, 8 Oct. 2004).

This example shows that American parents usually felt comfortable stepping back, and letting the children solve their problems independently. Even in cases in which they had uncertainties, when the instructor explained that they had to stay uninvolved, they accepted her explanations with no arguments and discussions. In the next dialogue we can see that their Israeli counter parts reacted completely differently:

Israeli instructor: We'll first identify who owns the problem, which is very

important in order to help [the child solve the problem]. A child is rejected

by his friends. Whose problem is it?

Adina: The child's.

Talya: It is hard for me. The child's and the parent's?

Shirly: I also think like Talya.

Adina: It's his [the child's] problem.

Talya: It's hard for me to see that the child is rejected.

Instructor: That's what we said that the parents are disenabling the child, but the truth is that it is the child's problem.

Adina: But technically, it is also the parent's problem, isn't it?

Instructor: If he [the parent] eagerly wants to [own it]. At the moment that the parent is emotionally involved, he is not able to help; he also becomes the problem's owner, and then he can no longer help.

Shirly: It is clear that in every case here you can say that it is the child's problem, but I wrote in all cases it is the parent's and the child's problem. Of course, from a rational standpoint, all the problems that are mentioned here belong only to the child.

Instructor: Maybe our starting point is really the point in which we enable the child to be the problem's owner. Maybe that is what I want you to direct your thoughts to – where it is easier not to be the problem's owner (Israeli P.E.T. Class, 4 Apr. 1998).

In this conversation we saw that Israeli parents struggled with the idea to stay uninvolved emotionally and practically when the child faced a difficulty/problem, while the instructor tried to convince the parents that they held a mistaken over-protective attitude. The same difference applied also to the next practice - 'logical consequences'.

[7] All the names in the article were changed and are pseudonyms.

Logical consequences

To develop the child's identity as a responsible group member, instructors asked parents to respectfully teach the child to follow social rules. When children misbehave, and do not consider their own or others needs and interests, Instructors advised parents to avoid traditional authoritarian disciplinarian methods (like punishing, preaching, criticizing, scolding, and threatening) that enforce parental power in a direct way. Instead they offered parents a substitute tool - the logical consequences practice.
Logical consequence calls parents to set boundaries for the child without exercising their power over the child in a way that would hurt his/her feelings or cause fear or humiliation. When the child misbehaves the parent does not impose an arbitrary punishment, but sets logical consequences whose connection to the original misbehavior is clearly understandable to the child. Unlike punishment, then, logical consequences help children understand reasons for the parent's firm reaction, so that even though their freedom is restricted, they do not feel confused and hurt:

American instructor: "You can set consequences. It's important to have a clear connection between the act and the consequences... For example, you can say: 'You cannot play with your computer until you finish your homework'." (STEP class, 24 Jan. 2001)

Parents from the two cultures reacted differently to the idea of boundaries and consequences. American parents had no problem implementing this practice. They felt comfortable with setting "time out" (sending the child to his/her room), grounding their children when they misbehaved, or even sending them to school in their pajamas if they were not ready for school on time, as we can see in the next conversation:

Amanda (American parent): We have a huge power struggle when my daughter doesn't want to get ready for the school bus in the morning. I told her that if she was not ready the next time, she will have to go with her pajamas onto the school bus.
American instructor: Well, it is very important to come to an arrangement and to set clear plans with these kids in advance. These kids want to be involved and independent. So it is important to think with them in advance. You can make the plan together. How much time do you need to get ready in advance?... the best way is to try to discuss this issue again with them and to arrive at a new agreement. (American Sanity Circus class, 9 Nov. 2004)

In this example we can see that American parents were so enthusiastic about these practices that they occasionally implemented them too firmly. Therefore, instructors often had to remind them not to be too firm with their children and to consider their children's feelings and thoughts when they set these consequences.
Unlike American parents, Israeli parents differed in their reaction to the boundaries and consequences approach. They often refused to set boundaries and apply consequences. They especially rejected actions that involved physical separation from their children, as an Israeli father explained during a class discussion about sleeping time:

Just don't tell us to close our doors, because we're not going to follow this advice. My son used to sleep with us. He was eight years old, and my wife was stressed. So we went to Dr. B., a famous professor, and he told us to close the door and to let the child sleep on the rug [outside the door]. But I didn't have the heart to do it to the child. I would rather sleep on the floor next to him (Israeli Adlerian class, 25 Feb. 1996).

Israeli parents explained their refusal to set strict boundaries saying that they did not want to make life harder for the child. They often linked this refusal to the child's safety to the context of the tense security situation in Israel, as a result of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, as an Israeli instructor told me:

An Israeli parent hesitates before he sets strict consequences and boundaries for his child, because he thinks to himself, from the day that the child is born: "why should I make life harder for my child? Life is going to be very tough for him anyhow. In few years he will have to join the army. There he will suffer for three years. He might be hurt or even die there, (especially if he is a boy). He might even get blown up in a terror attack on a bus tomorrow morning. So, I cannot make life harder for my child, and should let him enjoy life as much as possible today". (Interview with Einat, an Israeli instructor, 2013)

In response to these worries, Israeli instructors often tried to convince parents that boundaries would not hurt the child, but would rather create a safe, structured, and predictable reality for him:

Israeli instructor: "You have to say to yourself: 'I have a job to do. I have to teach my daughter.' Nothing bad will happen to her if you are angry with her. Nothing will happen if you will set boundaries. Nothing will happen to her... because that is what she has to learn" (Israeli Adlerian class, 9 Dec. 1995).

Discussion

The findings show that Instructors in American and Israeli parenting classes imparted a similar concept of democratic parenting and taught similar practices in order to help parents manage their families in a democratic manner and raise their children to become effective, self-governing democratic citizens.

Focusing on the parents' reactions to two of the offered practices -'identifying who owns the problem', and 'setting logical consequences' the study shows that American and Israeli parents interpreted and implemented these practices differently.

These differences stem from the fact that the theories and practices taught in the classes were developed in the USA, and are based on the values that are held by American parents. American parents cherished liberal-capitalistic democratic perception that is based on individualistic and utilitarian values. Therefore they easily accepted the main concepts and practices offered to them in the classes. In contrast, Israeli parents come from a different socio-political culture of socialist democracy based on collectivist values. Thus, they struggled with the practices that were offered to them, as the next section describes in more detail.

American Parents

American socio-political life and the private sphere of the family, is based on individualistic values. USA is dominated by liberal-capitalistic values and model of democracy. This model perceives society as a free market, in which each citizen is a free agent who constantly pursues his own welfare.

This perception evolves also in the private sphere of the family and parent-child relations (Cherlin, 2004; Coleman, 1993; Hearn, 1997; Popenoe, 1993). USA parents generally subscribe to a more autonomous vision of the family and the child as an individual. Perhaps because of competitive capitalistic values that ask individuals to fulfill their potential, American parents perceive their children as people who will grow up to become self-sufficient and self-reliant (Varenne, 1977).

The family role is to fulfill the needs of each child. However, family members are committed to the family unit only as long as it serves their needs. This perception dictates more distant family relations, and American parents are asked to display their love and care feelings less intensively (Bellah et al., 1985; Besser at al., 2007; Stearns, 1994).

Furthermore, American parents raise their children to become citizens who live in a society that highly values the 'law and order' concept: the idea that order must reign and misbehavior has consequence. Americans and their English ancestors historically believed that "crime does not pay," that violators should be punished, and that punishment serves as a deterrent (Blomberg & Lucken, 2000; Dumm, 1987; Hawes, 1979). As USA parents are influenced by this mindset, they willingly accept the practice of setting boundaries, consequences, and deterrence to maintain family order.

As a consequences of these beliefs about the child as an autonomous individual who can make self-decision and knows how to obey the law, American parents perceive their role as being their child's *coaches,* whose role is to help the child acquire new skills in order to qualify him/her to cope with his/her daily problems, as a competent separated individual (Wolfenstein, 1955). Consequently, American parents did not have any problem to adopt the practices that asked them to follow an individualistic-separated attitude, expressed by letting their children solve their problems independently, and setting strict consequences and boundaries when the child misbehaves.

Israeli Parents

In contrast, Israeli socio-political life, as well as family life and parent-child relationship is based on collectivist values of solidarity and mutual help (Samoocha, 2005).

Due to Jewish tradition Israeli parents perceive the family as a united social unit. The Israeli parents perceive family relations as being based on mutual help, strong emotional involvement, and care for other family members. Thus the individual is a person who can always seek family help, and especially his/the parents are obliged to

offer (Katriel, 1999; Samoocha, 2005; Shilo, 2011; Zuriel-Harari, 2013).

This communal attitude is intensified by the parents' perspective of the child's safety. Deeply influenced by the experience of persecution of the Jewish people in previous generations (Almog, 2004; Besser et al., 2007), and the current political situation - the ongoing Arab Israeli conflict - Israeli parents claimed that their intense feelings of care and over-protectiveness stem from their constant worry that their child would be a random victim of terrorist attacks or military operations, (as in Israel military service is mandatory at the age 18).

As a consequence of these beliefs of the child as a vulnerable individual, and of the importance of family solidarity, Jewish parents do not aim to raise a totally self-reliant and autonomous child (Seginer et al., 2007). Instead, they strive to raise a connected group member, one able to consider other family members' needs and help them out (Wolfenstein, 1955).

As a consequence of these socio-political setting and cultural beliefs Israeli parents thus perceive their role as being the child's *protectors,* and express the intensity of their care and love by identifying with their children's difficulties and helping them solve their problems (Almog, 2004; Besser et al., 2007; Wolfenstein, 1955). Therefore, when the instructors asked them to follow a more individualistic attitude while reducing their emotional involvement, and let the child solve his problems independently, Israeli parents refused.

In addition, one conspicuous characteristic of the Israeli society is a flexible approach towards rules and laws (Negbi, 2004, Samoocha, 2005). Unlike Americans who view the law as inflexible authority, Israelis socialize their children to live in a society that perceives laws as being flexible and negotiable. Adhering to the Jewish tradition of Talmud[8] argumentative style, Israelis perceive negotiations and arguments as a positive way to create sociability and display cooperation and closeness (Schifrin, 1984; Tannen, 1984).

Because many Israeli parents perceive law enforcement in this flexible way, and are used to negotiating settlements, they are more comfortable negotiating with the child about their consequences and more compliant to the child's requests. Furthermore, they often admit that they feel a sense of pride to see the child argue and express his/her opinions. Because of these cultural beliefs, regarding the child as a future negotiator, when instructor advised them to set strict consequences and boundaries for the child, they often refused.

Conclusions, Research Limitations and Future Directions

The study findings demonstrate that regardless of how standardized and homogenized the educational knowledge that parent education experts in various countries attempt to impart are, this knowledge is interpreted and implemented differently in each country according to the parents' cultural beliefs and socio-political experiences.

These findings present a departure from previous research, that examined the macro level (official curricula and structures) of various educational systems, and found resounding global homogeneity (Meyer, 2000, 2006; Meyer, Kamens & Benavot, 1992; Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal, 1992). In contrast, the current study shows that when relating to the micro-level (face-to face interactions) of knowledge dissemination, the receptors for global messages filter in only those that match the individual's cultural belief systems, and reject all others.

In other words, these findings teach that the diffusion of expert knowledge in the global parent education system is not a manifestation of cultural globalization and standardization but of glocalization – a blend of global knowledge with local beliefs, values and practices (Robertson, 2012).

The practical conclusion of these findings for parent educators and other practitioners who work with parents is that they must always remain aware that their advices need to be adapted to address the social norms and cultural values of

[8] The Talmud (the collected rabbinical interpretation of third-century religious and moral codes of conduct that Jewish people have considered for thousands of years to be a sacred religious and moral source) includes the discussions and arguments of hundreds of rabbis who debated issues, weighed alternative explanations, and ventured logical conclusions and generalizations. This source modeled for the Jewish people a desirable way of thinking. It taught them to highly value the argumentative style as a tool of learning (Schifrin,1984).

their audience. As many contemporary societies experiencing increasing multiculturalism, when professionals instill new knowledge in a various audience of parents in their society, they should not perceive the dominant cultural norms in their society as a given, and should be aware that parents from different cultures deal with situations in different ways.

As the present research outlines the importance of cultural perspective when dealing with parent education on global scale, its methodology of comparison between middle-class, secular parents in two countries includes two limitations, that can lead for future research directions: First, since the USA and Israel are two heterogeneous societies, it would be desirable to examine within these countries, parents from different social backgrounds: different socio-economic classes (working class and upper-middle-class), different religious affiliations or levels of religious observance (such as Ultra-Orthodox Jewish and practicing Christians), and different ethnic origins (such as Israeli-Arabs or Asian-Americans) within these countries. Second, basing research on two countries alone, as a model for global knowledge dissemination, is necessarily limiting. To extend the cross-cultural perspective, it would be interesting to examine parenting classes in other countries that have differing cultural and political contexts.

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