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Parents' and Children's Perceptions of Privacy Rights In China

A Cohort Comparison

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This study employs a Chinese sample to explore children's privacy rights within the family. For the purpose of comparison, parental views of children's privacy rights and children's own perceptions are examined. Privacy rights are defined to include three spheres—spatial, physical, and mental. Results show that age differences in perceptions of privacy rights exist not only between generations but also between the junior high and senior high school students. However, the three cohorts are relatively consistent in their ratings of aspects of privacy rights. Gender differences are manifest in the mental sphere of privacy and move in the opposite directions, with the male students valuing their privacy rights less but the male parents respecting them more. Perceptions of privacy rights also differ dependent on whether *privacy* is defined as rights or secrets. Developmental and cultural perspectives are employed to examine these findings.

Keywords: *privacy; secrecy; comparative; family; Chinese*

Privacy is getting increasing attention in today's world. Privacy is studied as a behavioral concept, as a cross-cultural universal, and as an implicit variable in social psychological research (Margulis, 1977). Privacy is also examined in relation to various social perspectives and issues. It is studied in association with political systems (Engelhardt, 2000; Lubonja, 2001), the American Constitution (Garrow, 2001; Gerber, 2000; Tushnet, 2000), information control (Stefik, 1999; Cho & LaRose, 1999; Lyon, 1998), and health and social care (Bayer, 1989; Kagle, 1984; Manuel et al. 1991; Reamer, 1991).

As an important aspect of privacy study, family privacy has also captured attention from social scientists. The interests in family privacy culminated in 1998, when the *Journal of Family Issues* devoted its whole January issue to the family privacy topic. The six included articles covered a variety of subjects, ranging from the discussions of family privacy issues and concepts to the comparison of family privacy and secrecy. These articles have made tremendous contributions to the study of family privacy. Research on family privacy in various settings and frameworks, however, is still lacking. This is especially true with Asian societies where privacy and privacy rights are oftentimes considered of little importance. Hence, "In light of the limited research on family privacy, an expansion of conceptual and empirical efforts in this important area is called for" (Berardo, 1998, p. 5).

Children's privacy rights have turned out to be such an area. Past research in this respect tends to place privacy in the framework of children's developmental needs. Privacy is viewed as a prerequisite for the development of a self (Parke & Sawin, 1979), a process of regulating the boundaries between self and society (Simmel, 1971), and a mechanism that facilitates the development of independence and responsibility (Hanson, 1992; Miller, 1986). Few of the privacy studies, however, have included a parental view of children's privacy rights and a comparison between children's and their parents' perceptions.

The importance of parental views in the study of children's privacy rights should never be overlooked. As Munro and Madigan (1993) pointed out, privacy is a process of negotiation that takes place within the realm of home. It involves the physical constraints and the differences of opportunities relating to social roles of family members. Because children always play the role of dependents within the family, their rights for privacy are substantially constrained by their parents. To obtain a complete picture of privacy within the family, it is, therefore, essential to study children's privacy as a developmental need and their parents' viewpoints.

McKinney's (1998) research on children's privacy needs is one of the few studies that focus on parental perspectives. After conducting in-depth interviews with 12 parents of preschoolers enrolled in a local day care center, McKinney found that parents perceived their children's privacy needs in spatial terms, less often recognized their need for body privacy, and rarely valued their need for mental privacy. In addition, although parents are partially aware of children's privacy needs based on age and gender development, they tend to perceive their children's motivations for seeking privacy in relatively negative terms. Privacy is generally associated with anger, a desire to hide something, or parental discipline.

McKinney's research has added an important piece to the family privacy literature. However, the group of parents she studied is small in number, and the children involved are preschoolers who are situated at the initial stage of their development. A cohort comparison of parents' views versus their children's perceptions, therefore, is not possible.

To help fill this void in the area of family privacy study, the current research examines children's privacy rights within the family from the perspectives of children and their parents. Three Chinese cohorts, defined to be parents, their junior high school children, and senior high school children, are compared in terms of their perceptions of privacy rights that children are entitled to at home. Given that privacy is a developmental need for children, the current study examined not only aspects of privacy in which parents and children differ but also the age and gender effect that might exist regarding children's privacy rights at home.

Conceptualization of Privacy

Definitions of *privacy* tend to fall into one of the two categories: conceptual or dimensional. Within a conceptual framework, *privacy* is defined as a state of separateness, which an individual or group can choose to protect, give up or break down (Kelvin, 1973). Similarly, *privacy* is described by Altman (1976). Similarly, *privacy* is described by Altman (1976) as a fluid boundary that separates a person from others, an interaction process in which individuals disclose information of their own choice when they accept external stimuli. Following Altman's lead, Burgoon et al. (1989) viewed privacy as "how people close themselves off to others and regulate their degree of accessibility, either individually or as members of dyads and other social units" (p. 132). In contrast, Westin's (1970) definition of *privacy* is dimensional. Privacy includes four states: (a) solitude: the state of being alone and unobserved; (b) intimacy: the establishment of intimate relations with others, across various small social units; (c) anonymity: the capability to remain unrecognized in public; and (d) reserve: the ability to protect personal information and to maintain psychological barriers. Also taking a dimensional approach, Laufer and Wolfe (1977) suggested privacy has three main dimensions. Self-ego dimension "refers to a developmental process that, in our society, focuses on individuation (autonomy) and, by implication, personal dignity" (p. 26). The environmental dimension "is composed of a series of elements that act as boundaries of meaning and experience" (p. 28). They refer to "cultural meanings, the interaction between the social arrangements and the physical settings, and the stage of the life cycle" (p. 28). The last

dimension, the interpersonal dimension, is about the acting out of interpersonal relationship on a daily basis, composed of information and interaction management.

Because Laufer and Wolfe's (1977) approach takes into consideration the developmental perspective commonly employed in the family research, the current study adopts their definition of privacy. Children's privacy is thus considered a boundary issue relating to children's development stages, their autonomy over personal information, and their interaction management strategy. Following McKinney's (1998) precedent, *children's privacy* is further defined to include spatial, mental, and physical spheres where "spatial and body privacy were conceptualized as aspects of interaction management, whereas mental or emotional privacy was seen as information management" (McKinney, 1998, p. 97).

It should be made clear here that privacy shares overlapping zones with secrecy. As Warren and Laslett (1977) pointed out, privacy and secrecy share a structural feature. Both can be considered strategies of information control. In addition, both concepts are culturally defined: "That which is secret or private has various meanings to different families and/or to different family members" (p. 45). It is, therefore, important to distinguish between privacy and secrecy at an operational level. In the current study, the distinction was made by suggesting that privacy is the right not to disclose personal information while a secret is something that one would like to hide from others.

Privacy in Chinese Family

Family privacy has many aspects. It could include spousal privacy, parents' privacy from their children, children's privacy from their parents, a child's privacy from his or her siblings, family privacy from other social institutions, and nuclear family privacy from extended family members. Most types of family privacy, including children's privacy from their parents, are individual privacy. Family privacy in the Chinese culture, however, is largely based on the family unit. Some Chinese scholars even argue that the traditional Chinese culture does not have the concept of individual privacy (or privacy rights) as is delineated by Western scholars. Jin (1994), for instance, stated that the definition of *individual privacy* in Chinese society is conceptually unclear and ambiguous. According to Jin, individuals in China are submerged into a system of ethics that takes the family as the basic unit. In such a system, the family head enjoys the highest authority that is not to be challenged by other members in the family. While in the Western world, individuals achieve privacy objectives primarily by means of space manipula-

tions. Thus, the Chinese tend to define *public* and *private* in abstract ethical terms, while the Westerners tend to define them in sociospatial terms. Similarly, Liang (1987) argued that members within the Chinese family are clearly differentiated from nonfamily members. Holding back family information from nonfamily members is considered a virtue in the Chinese culture. On the other hand, holding back information from family members, especially from the family head, is considered a violation of family tradition. Hence, privacy in China is not an issue for individuals but an issue for the family.

Different viewpoints exist. Based on his survey of 355 Hong Kong urban residents, Traver (1984) found that privacy for Hong Kong people is composed of five aspects: solitude, disclosures privacy, escape, domestic privacy, and reserve, where the disclosures privacy is defined to be the concern with the information collected by the government. Of these five dimensions, domestic privacy takes up a central place in Hong Kong people's concept of privacy. It regulates social interaction and serves as a means to achieve solitude. Chan (2000) also suggested that *individual privacy* as defined by Western culture exists in the Chinese culture. Of the four states of privacy delineated by Westin (1970) "the Chinese place high values on three of the four states: solitude, reserve and intimacy" (Chan, 2000, p. 2). "Only anonymity, the capability to remain unrecognized in a public, does not apply to the Chinese conception of privacy" (p. 2). Chan has also found that privacy in the Chinese family has a hierarchical and asymmetric nature. In the parent-children relationship, a parent can "acquire the information he/she wants from the other party because it is considered justifiable and natural to do so. A reversal of this is an offence" (p. 5).

The current study took Chan (2000) and Traver's (1984) viewpoints and findings as premises. In other words, it was assumed that individual privacy exists in contemporary Chinese culture. Children's privacy within the family, therefore, was treated as a personal boundary issue with their parents, not as a nonexistent concept in the Chinese culture as suggested by Jin (1994) and Liang (1987).

Sample and Measurement

The sample for the current study was collected from seven classes in one junior high school and two senior high schools in Shanghai, China. The sample included 141 junior high school students, 197 senior high school students, and 256 parents of the students attending these three schools. Student responses were collected from questionnaires handed out during class time. Because data were collected from different classes simultaneously, multiple

submission of questionnaires from the same student was not a problem. Parent responses were collected during several teacher-parent conferences. Because of the absences on some parents' part, the parent subsample size was smaller than the student subsample. The assurance of anonymity was written on the questionnaire and provided verbally before the questionnaire distribution.

The 141 junior high school students have an average age of 13.4 years, compared to an average age of 16.94 years by 197 senior high school students. Parents of these students are placed in the same sample regardless whether their children are attending junior or senior high schools. The age of parents ranged from 34 to 61 years, with an average of 44.69 years ($SD = 4.62$). The male-to-female ratio for the three subsamples are not perfectly balanced. The ratio for junior high school students was 44.7 to 55.3, the senior high school students 52.3 to 47.7, and the parent sample 41.4 to 58.6.

The questionnaire was composed of two parts: questions about children's privacy rights and questions about the respondent's background information. For the purpose of comparison, the same questionnaire was used for the students and their parents. The questionnaire was prepared and translated into Chinese by the authors.

The current study follows McKinney's (1998) example in the operationalization of family privacy. Perceptions of privacy rights are specified in three spheres: spatial, physical, and mental. Two statements were used to tap respondents' perceptions of spatial privacy: "Teenage kids should not be allowed to be with their friends at home behind a closed door" (door), and "Parents should knock before entering their teenage kid's room if the door is closed" (knock). Physical privacy was also measured by two statements: "When a teenage kid is in the bathroom and the door is open, parents can enter" (broom), and "Parents should not hug or kiss their teenage kids if they do not like it" (kiss). Because mental privacy is about access to personal information and sources of information vary, eight statements are related to this sphere: "Parents have no right to examine teenage kids' rooms, backpacks or purses without their knowing" (sack), "Parents should have the right to read their kids' personal correspondence (letters) or their e-mails" (mail), "Parents have the right to know how their teenage kids spend their pocket money" (money), "Parents have no right to listen to or read their teenage kids' telephone or online conversations" (telep), "Parents have the right to read their teenage kids' diaries to know what is going on" (diary), "Parents have no right to know how their teenage kids spend time with friends" (peer), "Parents have the right to know what video tapes teenage kids are viewing and what Web sites they are visiting" (web), and "Parents have no right to

know their kids' examination and test grades" (exam). These 12 variables were then combined to form a composite scale to be used in statistical analysis. The reliability coefficient for the scale was .7821. All 12 statements are presented in the Likert-type scale format, with 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (disagree), and 4 (strongly disagree). Responses were recoded so that 1 reflects the lowest level of privacy orientation whereas 4 denotes the highest.

The questionnaire for the current study contains another important question. Respondents are asked to choose between two statements that read like simple definitions of privacy. The first statement equates privacy with secrets: "People who are concerned about their privacy are usually people with secrets to hide from others." The second statement perceives privacy as right to control personal information: "People who are concerned about their privacy are usually people who would like to keep their right not to disclose personal information." Thus, it was possible to find out whether the way respondents define *privacy* was related to their perceptions of children's privacy rights.

Results

Descriptive statistics for junior high school students, senior high school students, and their parents have revealed that high school students give highest rankings to the 12 privacy statements while their parents assign the lowest scores to these statements. Of the three age cohorts, the senior high school students valued their privacy the most. They scored 3 and above for 8 of the 12 statements. Their composite privacy score for the scale was also high at 2.98. The junior high school students scored 3 and above on 6 statements with a composite privacy score of 2.81, immediately following the senior high school students. The lowest composite privacy score goes to the parents at 2.42. They achieved 3 on only 1 statement. Clearly, an age effect was present in terms of respondents' perceptions of privacy rights (see Table 1).

Equally obvious was the consistency in the importance rating of privacy statements by the students and their parents. "Knocking before entering children's rooms and searching children's rooms, backpacks, or purses" ranks relatively high for all the respondents while the right to know about "how children spend their pocket money, what video tapes children view and what Web sites they visit as well as children's examination and test grades" ranks low across all the three cohorts. Overall, spatial and physical spheres of privacy are highly valued while mental sphere of privacy displays a mixed pattern. One-way ANOVA shows that the differences in means for the three cohorts are statistically significant for all of the 12 statements.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Junior, Senior High Students
and Parents and One-Way ANOVA Comparison

Variable	Junior High			Senior High			Parents			Significance
	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	
Door	2.82	.928	141	3.01	.792	197	2.40	.750	256	.000
Knock	3.47	.639	141	3.45	.642	197	3.20	.544	256	.000
Broom	3.31	.863	141	3.22	.731	196	2.77	.623	256	.000
Kiss	3.16	.798	141	3.19	.660	197	2.84	.584	256	.000
Sack	3.45	.806	141	3.58	.647	197	2.71	.676	256	.000
Mail	2.98	.906	141	3.46	.610	197	2.53	.656	256	.000
Money	2.10	.777	141	2.35	.717	197	1.88	.557	256	.000
Telep	3.15	.878	141	3.24	.862	197	2.62	.640	256	.000
Diary	3.16	.905	141	3.42	.638	197	2.54	.667	256	.000
Peer	2.43	.839	141	2.49	.740	197	2.05	.544	256	.000
Web	1.78	.794	141	2.16	.717	197	1.77	.514	256	.000
Exam	1.86	.907	141	2.21	.696	197	1.78	.706	256	.000
Scale	2.81	.404	141	2.98	.361	196	2.42	.247	256	.000

Table 2 shows the *t* test results when the male and female are compared in terms of their privacy scores. For the students, four statements displayed statistically significant gender difference; however, only two statements received high privacy ranking from the male and female (compared to the scale mean values). The higher scores by the female students regarding parents' rights to read children's correspondences and diaries indicate that they would like to have more control over the access to their personal information. For the parents, a general consistent pattern was that the male parents respect their children's privacy rights more than the female parents. Of the five statements on which significant gender differences are observed, the male parents achieved higher privacy scores without exception. They respected children's feelings more when it comes to kissing and hugging and are more likely to regard their children's rooms, backpacks, purses, letters, e-mails, telephone conversations, and diaries as personal matter deserving respect. For the students and the parents, gender differences mainly exist in the area of mental sphere.

Considering it is possible that the way respondents define *privacy* will affect their perceptions of children's privacy rights, the respondents were divided into two categories: those who believe privacy is similar to secrecy

Table 2
Gender Comparison of Privacy Scores

Variable	Students						Parents							
	Male			Female			Significance	Male			Female			
	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N		\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	Significance
Door	2.88	.907	166	2.98	.802	172		2.41	.701	106	2.40	.785	150	
Knock	3.43	.690	166	3.48	.587	172		3.19	.536	106	3.21	.550	150	
Broom	3.18	.826	166	3.34	.745	171		2.69	.638	106	2.83	.607	150	
Kiss	3.22	.725	166	3.14	.715	172		2.92	.511	106	2.77	.625	150	.041
Sack	3.46	.701	166	3.59	.732	172		2.90	.616	106	2.58	.688	150	.000
Mail	3.14	.840	166	3.37	.709	172	.009	2.66	.689	106	2.44	.618	150	.008
Money	2.25	.820	166	2.24	.683	172		1.91	.610	106	1.86	.519	150	.000
Telep	3.20	.854	166	3.20	.885	172		2.80	.608	106	2.48	.631	150	.000
Diary	3.13	.854	166	3.48	.635	172	.000	2.68	.684	106	2.44	.640	150	.005
Peer	2.62	.843	166	2.33	.692	172	.001	2.08	.547	106	2.03	.543	150	
Web	2.07	.839	166	1.94	.698	172		1.78	.569	106	1.76	.473	150	
Exam	2.17	.892	166	1.96	.708	172	.021	1.72	.700	106	1.83	.709	150	
Scale	2.89	.441	166	2.92	.332	171		2.48	.255	106	2.39	.234	150	.004

and those who regard privacy as the right not to disclose personal information. These two categories of people were compared in terms of their privacy scores (see Table 3).

Results show that the difference in privacy definitions does not matter much for the students. Only two statements displayed significant differences between the two definition categories in privacy scores, and they are related to the spatial and/or physical spheres of privacy. The privacy definition, however, plays an important role in the parents' views of children's privacy rights. Privacy scores differed across all the three spheres on six statements. The consistent pattern was if the parents regard privacy as the right not to disclose personal information, they respect their children's privacy more. On the other hand, if the parents match privacy to secrecy, this was a sign that they will not respect their children's privacy rights.

Although the identification of predictors for privacy rights was not a major purpose of the current study, variables that might be related to privacy perceptions are explored by regression analysis, in which the privacy scale serves as the dependent variable. Because the junior high and senior high school students were close in age and displayed a similar pattern in their privacy perceptions, they were combined in the same regression analysis. The independent variables for this model include the statement distinguishing between two types of privacy definitions, the number of family members, respondent's sex, respondent's reported monthly income, respondent's reported relationship with father, and respondent's reported relationship with mother. Only respondent's relationship with father emerges significant. The better relationship a child has with his or her father, the less privacy rights he or she demands in general.

Because the parents in the sample have a wide age range, age was added as an independent variable in the regression model for the parents. Three predictors come out significant from this regression analysis: the number of family members, the definition statement, and sex. Generally speaking, the larger the family size, the less likely the parents value their children's privacy rights. The directions of the sex variable and the statement variable in relation to the privacy rights were consistent with the results demonstrated in Table 2 and Table 3. Namely, the male parents respected their children's privacy rights more than the female parents, and those parents who regarded privacy as rights respected their children's rights more. Although age effect in privacy perceptions was present among the children, it was not a significant factor to be considered among the parents (table not shown).

Table 3
Category Comparison of Privacy Scores (Privacy Defined as Secret vs. Privacy Defined as Rights)

Variable	Student						Parents							
	Secret			Rights			Secret			Rights				
	\bar{X}	SD	N	\bar{X}	SD	N	Significance	\bar{X}	SD	N	Significance	\bar{X}	SD	N
Door	2.72	.934	64	2.98	.832	268		2.24	.564	62	.028	2.45	.792	165
Knock	3.38	.604	64	3.47	.649	268		3.02	.461	62		3.28	.558	165
Broom	3.28	.745	64	3.25	.803	268		2.76	.694	62		2.78	.598	165
Kiss	2.92	.783	64	3.24	.690	268	.001	2.71	.710	62		2.89	.529	165
Sack	3.44	.794	64	3.54	.704	268		2.50	.620	62		2.76	.679	165
Mail	3.14	.889	64	3.28	.756	268		2.40	.613	62		2.61	.650	165
Money	2.11	.645	64	2.28	.775	268		1.85	.507	62		1.89	.595	165
Telep	3.16	.801	64	3.21	.890	268		2.45	.591	62		2.67	.637	165
Diary	3.19	.710	64	3.33	.786	268		2.40	.689	62		2.60	.651	165
Peer	2.42	.832	64	2.49	.776	268		2.03	.511	62		2.03	.522	165
Web	1.94	.710	64	2.02	.791	268		1.79	.449	62		1.79	.539	165
Exam	2.05	.843	64	2.07	.809	268		1.82	.641	62		1.76	.717	165
Scale	2.81	.363	64	2.93	.394	268		2.33	.216	62		2.46	.257	165

Discussion

The current study was the first attempt to study Chinese children's privacy rights within the family from the perspectives of children and their parents. The results confirmed the premises on which this article is based, namely, familiar privacy was not confined to the family unit in the Chinese society. The findings that children have strong desires for individual privacy and that their desires are somewhat respected by their parents indicate that the concept of privacy as defined by Western scholars does exist within the Chinese family. The comparison of the parents and their high school children shows that age was an important factor to consider in perceptions of privacy rights. Age differences in perception exist not only between generations but also between the junior high and senior high school students. Overall, this age effect displays a nonlinear pattern. The highest privacy orientation was associated with the senior high school students, followed by the junior high school students, then the parents.

The observed differences between the junior and senior high school students in their perceptions of privacy rights can be analyzed from the developmental perspective. According to Wolfe and Laufer (1974), "at various developmental stages and ages individual needs, abilities, activities, desires, and feelings change, and thus the concept and patterns of privacy should also change" (p. 32). Similarly, Althen (1988) suggested that successful development can be considered a process of individuation and the achievement of autonomy, which is expected to lead to a sense of personal dignity. For this to occur, children must separate themselves from the people and things in their environment. The senior high school students, being 3 years senior to their junior counterparts, aspired to have more autonomy over their life, more personal space to enjoy, and more control over their own personal information, hence a higher level of privacy awareness. This developmental perspective can also be used to explain the generational differences between the children and their parents. The desire for privacy rights by the Chinese children in the sample was an indication that Chinese high school students, following the example of their Western counterparts, have started to seek development by valuing individual independence and autonomy. Their parents, however, seem to disagree that developmental needs should be defined in these terms. Therefore, what underlies this generational difference in perceptions of privacy rights was a generational difference in the concept of "child development."

Besides the age effect, a consistency in the importance rating of privacy dimensions by the parents and the students was present. This consistency should be examined in the light of the cultural environment in which the

respondents were raised. Altman (1976) and others (Hall, 1966; Roberts & Gregor, 1971) have shown that different cultures have different patterns and forms of privacy. "Even in highly complex societies, . . . the dominant perspectives of the community play a decisive role in the way an individual defines privacy situations" (Laufer & Wolfe, 1977, p. 28). In the current study, this observed consistency might directly result from certain cultural traits characteristic of Chinese situations. For example, the privacy rights regarding the videos that children watch and the Web sites that they visit received the lowest ratings across all the three cohorts. Considering that the Chinese government has a very strict censorship over pornographic materials, it was expected that neither the parents nor their children have shown much concerns over these privacy rights. Similarly, the Chinese educational system might be the direct cause of the low-level privacy awareness associated with examination and test grades. Up till today, a common practice in Chinese high schools has been that students are publicly ranked in terms of their test and examination grades. Under such a situation, one can hardly develop a sense of privacy regarding his or her academic records.

As has been mentioned earlier, a gender effect in the perception of privacy rights was observed in the current study. This gender difference goes in the opposite directions for the children and their parents with the male children valuing their privacy rights less but the male parents respecting them more. In addition, gender effect was only manifest in aspects of information management. The two common areas where significant gender effect exists for the parents and the students were mail and diary. This can probably be explained by the gender traits associated with the male and female. It has been widely suggested that men tend to be "instrumental" while the female tend to be "expressive." Given that the statement carries some truth, female students might have put their most personal and private thoughts and feelings in their diaries and correspondence. Hence, they do not want others, even their parents, to have access to this information that reveals their innermost self. Following this speculation, it can also be suggested that mothers, being girls themselves once, have a full knowledge of what a wealth of emotional information is contained in diaries and correspondence. Hence, they are more curious and anxious to read their children's diaries and correspondence than their husbands.

A unique finding made by the current study was that different definitions of *privacy* result in different perceptions of children's privacy rights. Although privacy and secrecy share some overlapping zones, the general consensus among scholars is that privacy and secrecy can be differentiated by the moral dimension of the behaviors to which they refer (Brown-Smith, 1998; Kelvin, 1973; Laslett, 1973; Margulis, 1977; Warren, 1974), that is,

“there is a ‘right to privacy’ but no equivalent ‘right to secrecy’” (Warren & Laslett, 1977, p. 43). This difference in moral dimension might explain why perceptions of privacy rights differ dependent on whether *privacy* is defined as rights or secrets. McKinney (1998) pointed out that parents tend to perceive children’s privacy as a desire to hide something. This might explain why those parents who match privacy to secrets have chosen to undervalue their children’s privacy rights.

Although an important issue in psychology and sociology, children’s privacy rights have not been studied thoroughly. The current study found that wide discrepancies exist between the children and their parents in the perceptions of children’s privacy rights and that a gender difference was manifest regarding privacy rights in the aspect of information management. In addition, the definition of *privacy* as a right or as a secret might spell the differences between respecting children’s privacy needs or ignoring them. Some questions, however, are still left unanswered. Do parents’ attitudes toward their children’s privacy needs change dependent on children’s age and gender? Will different operationalization of the concept of privacy and secrecy yield similar results? What variables will best predict children and their parents’ privacy perceptions? Are the wide discrepancies existing between the children and their parents regarding privacy rights also present in Western cultures? To answer these questions, new variables, new measurement instruments, new samples have to be developed and employed. Considering that the conceptualization of privacy might vary dependent on the culture involved, it is specifically recommended that cross-cultural samples be employed for the purpose of comparative study. Only by doing this, cultural-specific and cultural-universal elements of privacy can be identified, and a thorough understanding of privacy issue can be eventually achieved.

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