Intergenerational Transmission - Cultural Transmission: Values, Norms, And Beliefs, Social Support, Intergenerational Solidarity, Limitations

Intergenerational transmission is one dimension of the larger concept of intergenerational relations. The term *intergenerational relations* describes a wide range of patterns of interaction among individuals in different generations of a family: for example, between those in *older* generations, such as parents and grandparents, aunt, uncles, and those in *younger* generations, such as children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews. The term is also frequently used to describe behaviors involving older and younger people in society at large, even if they are unrelated to one another. For example, media accounts describe potential issues between the attitudes and behaviors of older members of the *baby boom generation* and younger *generation Xers.*

In the context of family lives, intergenerational transmission refers to the movement, passage, or exchange of some *good* or *service* between one generation and another. What is transmitted may be intangible and include beliefs, norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors specific to that family, or that reflect sociocultural, religious, and ethnically relevant practices and beliefs. Intergenerational transmission can, however, also include the provision of resources and services or assistance by one generation to another. One example of this, illustrated by Barry McPherson (1998) is the issue of transferring the ownership and operation of the family farm from one generation to the next.

Family roles may also be transmitted from generation to generation. For example, Carolyn Rosenthal (1985) describes the roles of headship, kin keeper, confidante, and financial adviser as roles within families. This work documents how not only are these roles in themselves mechanisms for the transmission of information, advice, beliefs, values, and resources between generations, but that the roles are passed through the generations, in a form of *generational succession*. Rosenthal and Victor Marshall (1988) also examine the intergenerational transmission of ritual in families in a study across three generations of Canadian families.

The concept of intergenerational transmission is also used by social scientists who conduct research on family violence. For example, Ann Duffy and Julianne Momirov (2000) utilize the concept of *intergenerational transmission* to explain the social learning of violence within families. In this context, intergenerational transmission refers to the socialization and social learning that helps to explain the ways in which children growing up in a violent family learn violent roles and, subsequently, may play out the roles of victim or victimizer in their own adult families.

Family researchers have also studied the intergenerational transmission of difficult life course transitions like marital dissolution or divorce. In particular, studies in the United States have found that parental divorce increases the likelihood that adult children will experience separation or divorce (Glenn and Kramer 1987; Keith and Finlay 1988; Amato 1996). Even when factors such as the socioeconomic status of both parents and children are controlled for, Nicholas Wolfinger (2000) concludes that the children of parents who have had more than one marriage tend to replicate these patterns of marital instability. Multiple family structure transitions have a negative effect on children; that is, the experience of numerous parental relationship transitions is likely to result in the reproduction of these behaviors by adult children.

Intergenerational Transmission - Cultural Transmission: Values, Norms, And Beliefs

Intergenerational Transmission - Social Support

Intergenerational Transmission - Intergenerational Solidarity

Intergenerational Transmission - Limitations

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Intergenerational Transmission - Cultural Transmission: Values, Norms, And Beliefs, Social Support, Intergenerational Solidarity, Limitations

Intergenerational Transmission - Cultural Transmission: Values, Norms, And Beliefs

The intergenerational stake hypothesis (Bengtson and Kuypers 1971) maintains that children and parents have different expectations and understandings of the filial relationship. While parents are concerned with the continuity and intergenerational transmission of values they have found important in life, children focus on the differences in the two generations' value systems in an attempt to establish independence from their parents.

The importance of gender differences in the intergenerational transmission of roles is highlighted in Alice Rossi's (1993) study on the application of the

intergenerational stake hypothesis in a study comparing men and women. Rossi notes two key reasons why women have a greater investment in maintaining relationships with their children than do men. First, women function as primary family caregivers in later life. Second, different socialization experiences result in motherhood assuming a more central role in the lives of women than fatherhood does in the lives of men; that is, as women are socialized to be more expressive than men and are more likely to assume the "kin-keeper" role in the family.

In addition to gender, ethnicity is another important factor in the investigation of intergenerational transmission over the life course. For example, much research on Asian immigrant family values has been based on the conception of Asian North Americans as having ideal families. This conception has emerged from the "model minority" myth, a stereotype that attributes the educational and occupational success of Asian North Americans to adherence to traditional Asian cultural value systems (Takaki 1989). The ideal family myth *Research on intergenerational transmission has yet to fully explore grandparent-grandchild relationships, which may have a greater potential for the transfer of generation-distinct information.* MICHAEL S. YAMASHITA/ CORBIS assumes that Asian North Americans, regardless of generation or ethnocultural group, greatly revere older family members and feel strongly obligated to provide support to them (Ishii-Kuntz 1997; Osako 1979). Asian–North American families are believed to have been particularly successful in the intergenerational transmission of the values associated with reverence for elders and filial piety.

Yoshinori Kamo and Min Zhou (1994) attributed the prevalence of Asian-American coresidence among married adult children and older parents to the strong influence of filial obligation. Co-residence, however, is only an example of behaviorally oriented and intergenerationally transmitted values of filial piety (Sung 1995); that is, coresidence alone does not provide support for the hypothesis that Asian–North American adult children necessarily provide more love and affection (emotionally oriented filial piety) to their aging parents than do adult children in other ethnic groups. In addition, these findings do not take into account generational differences in the intergenerational transmission

retention of traditional values in post-immigrant Asian–North American families.

An early example of intergenerational value transmission research, Minako Maykovich's (1980) study of acculturation and familism in three generations of Japanese Canadians, found significant intergenerational differences in the retention of traditional family values. Her conclusions support Gordon's theoretical proposition that acculturation is a multiphase process, whether it is measured by the retention of traditional familism or the adoption of "new world" values. Similarly, Pamela Sugiman and Harry Nishio's (1983) study of socialization and cultural duality among aging Japanese Canadians concludes that, in contrast to the traditional age-related norms of the *issei* (first generation), middle-aged *nisei* (second generation) parents demonstrate a decreased dependence on their children for support in later life. Victor Ujimoto (1987) attributes this change in support expectations to generational differences in the retention of traditional first generation values.

In a study on intergenerational relationships in Japanese-Canadian families, an exploration of the factors affecting social support from children to parents, Karen Kobayashi (2000) finds that adherence to the traditional issei value of *oya koh koh* (filial obligation) has a significant effect on children's provision of emotional support to parents in later life families. She concludes that despite the cultural transformation of values such as oya koh koh by successive generations of nisei and sansei children, filial obligation still remains important in the decision-making process around support for aging parents.

According to Tamara Hareven (1994), generational differences in value perceptions are due to changes in the timing of life-course events for parents and children. Instead of timing events in concert with the family's collective needs, children now display a more individualized timing regulated to their specific age norms. Hareven's (1994) research indicates that if parents and children have a strong filial relationship characterized by satisfaction on the part of both parties, it is more likely that children will use the collective needs of the family to guide

the timing of their life-course events and hence, minimize the differences in value system perceptions. This may be especially true in adult children's adherence to filial obligation.

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Intergenerational Transmission - Cultural Transmission: Values, Norms, And Beliefs

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Intergenerational Transmission - Social Support

Much of the mainstream literature on family relationships in later life has examined the intergenerational transmission of the tangible services or support that adult children, particularly daughters, provide to older parents as caregivers (e.g., Burton 1996; McMullin and Marshall 1995). Given this focus, it is not surprising that many studies report a negative relationship between parental dependency and quality of the parent-child relationship (Baruch and Barnett 1983; Brody 1985; Mindel and Wright 1982). In a study on the factors that predispose adult sons and daughters to provide support to older parents, Merril Silverstein and colleagues (1995) found that intergenerational affection was the

factor that most motivates daughters, while sons are primarily motivated by filial obligation, legitimation of inheritance, and frequency of contact.

Research on the transmission of support in ethnic minority families has focused on varying issues depending on the ethnic group(s) under study. For example, many studies on African- and Hispanic-American intergenerational relations in later life families have examined social support according to such demographic indicators as socioeconomic status (Mindel et al. 1988; Moynihan 1965; Mutran 1986). This focus has excluded the exploration of key intergenerational issues, such as the impact of changing value systems on supportive attitudes and behaviors in adult children. A growing body of comparative research on later life support in Asian-Canadian families is promising in that it acknowledges intergenerational differences in the intergenerational transmission of, and adherence to, values such as filial obligation (Sugiman and Nishio 1983; Ujimoto 1987).

Most of the support literature on the later life family focuses on the one-way flow of support from adult children to older parents, neglecting issues around the intergenerational transmission of support that parents provide to children (Connidis et al. 1996; Ishii-Kuntz 1997; Kahn and Antonucci 1981). In an attempt to address this imbalance, Teresa Cooney and Peter Uhlenberg (1992) examined the changes in three types of parent-to-child support (emotional, financial, and service) that occur as parents and adult children age over the life course. They report a decline in transmission of support from parents to children after children reached the age of thirty, but that the pattern of decline varied according to the type of support. In addition, they stated that while parents, "may not assume active, regular supportive roles in their children's lives, they are widely viewed by their children as valued and dependable sources of support should a need for help arise" (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1992, p. 82). This view holds true for adult children across the life course, and reflects a difference between actual versus potential or latent intergenerational transmission of support.

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Intergenerational Transmission - Social Support

Intergenerational Transmission - Intergenerational Solidarity

The concept of family solidarity or cohesion, as proposed by Vern Bengtson and his colleagues (1985), has been the focus of much research into intergenerational transmission over the past two decades. Theoretically grounded in the life-course perspective, it focuses on six dimensions of solidarity: family structure; associational solidarity (the degree to which members of a lineage are in contact with one another and engage in shared behavior and common activities); affectual solidarity (the degree of positive sentiment expressed in the intergenerational relationship); consensual solidarity (the degree of consensus or conflict in beliefs or orientations external to the family); functional solidarity (the degree to which financial assistance and service exchanges occur among family members); and normative solidarity (the norms of familism held by family members, in terms of expectations of proximity and assistance.

A number of studies have attempted to address some of the shortcomings of the original solidarity model. Robert E. Roberts and Bengtson's (1990) examination of intergenerational family relationships includes a number of additional dimensions of family cohesion. In adding filial responsibility, dependency needs, experiences not shared across generations, residential propinquity, gender linkage of pair, and helping behavior, they acknowledge the complexity of parent-

child relationships in later life. The results indicate that intergenerational solidarity in later life is not a unidimensional construct, and that each component is determined by different variables. Also, Leora Lawton and her colleagues (1994) use a gendered analysis to examine family solidarity in intergenerational pairs of family members. Their study finds that gender, marital status of parent, education, and race are key factors in cohesion between parents and children, and that the influence of a grandparent during childhood is "associated with more frequent contact, emotional closeness, and shared opinions in the child's adult years" (Lawton, Silverstein, and Bengston 1994, p. 42). Inasmuch as these studies attempt to explain later life patterns of intergenerational family solidarity, however, they are limited by their inattention to the historical, cultural, and social structural forces that shape family relationships and patterns of intergenerational transmission along solidarity dimensions.

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Intergenerational Transmission - Intergenerational Solidarity

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Intergenerational Transmission - Limitations

As it is often used in the literature, the concept of intergenerational transmission is frequently narrow in its application. For example, it is often used to imply a one-way flow: the transmission of resources *from* an older generation *to* a younger, or the intergenerational transmission of beliefs and attitudes *of* one generation *to* another. This is by no means the case, however. While reciprocity is a distinct concept, it is an integral part of intergenerational relations and intergenerational transmission.

A second limitation is that the concept of intergenerational transmission is almost exclusively applied to flows and transfers, particularly financial, *down* the generations, from older to younger generations. Except in the extensive gerontological literature on caregiving (which focuses almost exclusively on what family members in mid-life do to assist their frail and aging parent or parents), there is little consideration of the intergenerational transmission of values *up* the lineage from younger to older generations.

A third limitation is the infrequency with which the concept of intergenerational transmission is utilized to describe relations between generations that are non-contiguous, or that represent "skipped" generations. For example, while there is considerable research on parent-child relations, there is much less research on grandparent-grandchild relations (although there is some literature on the role of grandparents in raising grandchildren in families where the middle generation is, for reasons of divorce, addiction, or disability, unable to do so).

See also: ACCULTURATION; ELDERS; ETHNIC VARIATION/ETHNICITY; FAMILY FOLKLORE; GRANDPARENTHOOD; INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING; INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS; SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

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