

Singapore Management University
Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Research Collection School of Social Sciences

School of Social Sciences

11-2015


Enriching the Perceived Norms Perspective of Intergenerational Cultural Transmission: The Roles of Norm Reference Groups and Norm Adherence/Deviance Motive

Angela K. Y. LEUNG

Singapore Management University, angelaleung@smu.edu.sg

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115600075>

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research

 Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Citation

LEUNG, Angela K. Y. (2015). Enriching the Perceived Norms Perspective of Intergenerational Cultural Transmission: The Roles of Norm Reference Groups and Norm Adherence/Deviance Motive. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46(10), 1353-1356.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research/1911

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Sciences at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection School of Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email libIR@smu.edu.sg.

Enriching the Perceived Norms Perspective of Intergenerational Cultural Transmission: The Roles of Norm Reference Groups and Norm Adherence/Deviance Motive

Angela K.-y. Leung¹

Keywords

intergenerational cultural transmission, norms, value change, complexity theory

The functionalist account of subjective norms discussed by Morris and Liu (2015) illuminates important insights for enriching Tam's (2015) perceived norms perspective to the understanding of intergenerational cultural transmission. According to Morris and Liu, norm-based thinking and behavior are intricately linked with the type of reference groups where norms are derived (peer vs. aspirational groups) and what individuals' reactions norms induce (norm adherence vs. deviance). This account allows us to probe into an important implication that the perceived norms perspective can shed light on how intergenerational cultural transmission can enlarge parent-child differences as opposed to producing similarities. To the extent that parents who personally endorse peer group norms choose to socialize their children with the norms of the aspirational groups (vs. mainstream peers) adhered to by successful elites in the culture, intergenerational transmission has taken place albeit the parent-child value gap widens. To the extent that parents socialize their children with the value of norm deviance (vs. norm adherence), intergenerational transmission has taken place albeit it departs from the cultural preservation goal. It is reasonable to foresee that if considerable number of parents in a given culture opt for transmitting to their children aspirational group norms and a norm deviance motive, then intergenerational cultural transmission can act as an important source to fuel (vs. suppress) novelty and change.

What determines parents' transmission preferences of whether they reference on peer or elite groups or they tend toward norm adherence or deviance? Research suggested that socioeconomic demographics of the parents might affect their transmission preferences regarding aspirational group versus peer-based norms. Among Turkish families, Nauck (1989) found that with lower levels of parental education socialization emphasizes the transmission of collectivism and conformity norms. Supporting this finding, Phalet and Schönplflug's (2001) investigation of Turkish immigrant families in Germany and Turkish and Moroccan families in the Netherlands showed that parental education positively predicts the socialization of academic achievement and aspiration-related values, but negatively predicts the socialization of filial collectivism and conformity

¹Singapore Management University, Singapore

Corresponding Author:

Angela K.-y. Leung, School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University, Level 4, 90 Stamford Road, Singapore 178903, Singapore.
Email: angelaleung@smu.edu.sg

values. To the extent that aspiration-related values are more prevalently endorsed by elite groups to promote success and achievement, and filial collectivism and conformity are more prevalently endorsed by typical Turkish (see Schwartz, 1994), it is reasonable to infer that more educated parents are more likely to emulate the norms of aspirational elite groups as a reference in their norm transmission; in contrast, less educated parents are more likely to adhere to peer-based norms as a reference. One might reasonably ask how parents as migrants can necessarily pinpoint the relevant norms of the esteemed aspirational groups in the host culture to transmit to their children. Notably, the elite-based norms these migrant parents transmit may be those fundamental values that highlight the importance of educational achievement, an upward orientation, an aspiration for success, and so on, as opposed to the specific norms that the elites adhere to per se.

In earlier sociological research, evidence showed that the different working conditions constantly experienced by middle-class and working-class workers shape their value transmission related to norm deviance versus conformity (Kohn, 1963, 1969). Specifically, middle-class workers performing work that demands self-choice and autonomy will transmit similar values in their child-rearing practices, but working-class workers performing work that demands obedience and conformity to authorities will expect their children to adhere to these similar values. In this regard, if we presume that an endorsement of autonomy and agency provides a motivational drive toward fulfilling a self-expressive or distinctiveness need, then parents in higher status middle-class occupations will tend to pass on to their offspring norm deviance in addition to norm conformity as an alternative behavioral repertoire in reaction to norm activation.

In formulating the perceived norms perspective of intergenerational transmission, Tam puts a heavier focus on the norm adherence motive, and therefore we see much consonance between Tam's discussion of the goals of cross-generational transmission of perceived norms and Morris and Liu's discussion of the functionality of norm adherence. They both highlighted that norms confer epistemic validation to reduce uncertainty and insecurity; they both referred to the consequence of securing external incentives by socializing children with or enforcing norms that are widely shared (e.g., acquiring esteem, exchange opportunities, and skills for becoming an adaptive and efficient member of the society). I argue that we can enrich understanding of intergenerational cultural transmission by recognizing that parents have a choice to construct their transmission preferences that include norms of a nonmainstream reference group and that support a norm deviance motive. Acknowledging these variants could better inform the intergenerational cultural transmission process as a means for parents to instill *uniqueness* among their children, to show *distancing* from the mainstream culture, or to exhibit *defensiveness* for an identity that they hope their children can aspire to (see Morris & Liu, 2015).

This enriched perspective could also unify an analysis of the processes of value transmission and value change, which is rarely achieved (Boehnke, 2001). As Boehnke (2001) pointed out in an earlier special issue on *Cultural Transmission—A Multidisciplinary Research Field* in this journal, research on value transmission tends to focus on value congruence between parents and their children, whereas research on value change usually assumes increased socioeconomic prosperity to automatically produce societal change (see also Inglehart, 1990). Therefore, value transmission and value change studies are rarely theoretically positioned to inform each other. In fact, as a channel to afford both value transmission and value change, intergenerational cultural transmission can be viewed as a complexity theory. According to Gao, Qiu, Chiu, and Yang (2015), complexity theory has the merits of explaining how some nonrandomly selected communication partners engage in maintenance of normative opinions, the construction of new meanings, and the seeking of psychological divergence or nonconsensual agreement. Intergenerational cultural transmission attests to a dynamic system where nonindependent and nonrandom parent and child agents engage in a continuous interplay of transmission and reception of norms (or antinorms). There are substantial individual differences in communication goals both between dyads and between the parent and child agents within dyads. While some parents adhere to the norms endorsed by prototypical peer groups and value norm conformity, other parents serve as

“cultural middleman” (Tam, 2015), who seed value changes in their transmission endeavors by orienting to the nonmainstream reference group and practicing some degree of norm defiance. With successive repetition of the norm diffusion process occurring across generations, the equilibrium is likely to fall somewhere between exact replication and complete contrarian of parent–child values (Schönpflug, 2001). This equilibrium gives rise to a somewhat optimal situation where culture is largely stabilized by maintaining normative, coordinated practices across generations, while leaving the door open for constructing new meanings, permitting cross-generational divergences, and initiating novelty and change.

Specifically, drawing upon the tenet that intergenerational cultural transmission can be viewed as a complexity theory, there is much potential to bridge the study of value transmission and value change if we take into consideration (a) the psychological characteristics of the parent–child agents; (b) the principles governing value communication; (c) the presence of parents-to-child, as well as child-to-parents transmissions; and (d) the over time occurrence of value transmission. To elaborate, embedded in a complex system the parent and child agents exhibit psychological properties that include, but are not limited to, their socioeconomic demography, immigrant status, cognitive-motivational characteristics, and goals. The parents’ adherence to peer-based versus elite-based norms as well as their reliance on norm conformity versus norm defiance motive can be seen as two of the principles governing their value communication preferences. Furthermore, acknowledging bidirectional transmissions between parents and child over time, we will also “capture the interactive, non-linear, recursive, and dynamic processes” (Gao et al., 2015, p. 1255) that underlie intergenerational value transmission. Grounded in a complexity theory, systematically testing how these variables offer new insights to understanding intergenerational value transmission not only explains the construction and transmission of shared meanings in a given culture but also adds nuances to make sense of the occurrence of reduced consensus and cognitive diversity in the cultural system (see Gao et al., 2015).

The recognition of value transmitters’ differing norm reference targets and response directions to norm activation reveals new opportunities to unite disparate streams of research on value transmission and value change. Furthermore, integrating existing scholarships on value transmission and value change under an overarching complexity theoretical framework with the use of new simulation technique opens up highly promising research avenues to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what perpetuates and renews culture.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Boehnke, K. (2001). Parent-offspring value transmission in a societal context: Suggestions for a utopian research design with empirical underpinnings. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32*, 241-255.
- Gao, W., Qiu, L., Chiu, C.-y., & Yang, Y. (2015). Diffusion of opinions in a complex culture system: Implications for emergence of descriptive norms. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 46*, 1252-1259.
- Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kohn, M. L. (1963). Social class and parent-child relationships: An interpretation. *American Journal of Sociology, 68*, 471-480.
- Kohn, M. L. (1969). *Class and conformity: Study in values*. Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press.
- Morris, M. W., & Liu, Z. (2015). Psychological functions of subjective norms: Reference groups, moralization, adherence and defiance. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 46*, 1279-1360.

- Nauck, B. (1989). Intergenerational relationships in families from Turkey and Germany. *European Sociological Review*, 5, 251-274.
- Phalet, K., & Schönplflug, U. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of collectivism and achievement values in two acculturation contexts: The case of Turkish families in Germany and Turkish and Moroccan families in the Netherlands. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 186-201.
- Schönplflug, U. (2001). Intergenerational transmission of values: The role of transmission belts. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 174-185.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Beyond individualism/collectivism: New dimensions of values. In U. Kim, H. C. Triandiz, C. Kagitçibasi, S. C. Choi, & G. Yoon (Eds.), *Individualism and collectivism: Theory application and methods* (pp. 85-119). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Tam, K.-P. (2015). Understanding intergenerational cultural transmission through the role of perceived norms. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46, 1260-1266.