Symposium for INTERFASOL conference in Milan on
“Family values in intergenerational transmission”
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Chairs: Isabelle Albert & Dieter Ferring

University of Luxembourg

The intergenerational transmission of values from one generation to the next is essential both for the continuity of a society as well as within families as it permits the maintenance of culture- and family-specific knowledge, beliefs and meanings and thus facilitates the communication between members of different generations. Although the last years have seen a growing interest in research on intergenerational value transmission, open questions remain, in particular with regard to the process of transmission as well as its outcome.

The present symposium brings together three researchers from different European countries who have been carrying out research on this and related topics for several years, starting with their joint involvement in the cross-cultural interdisciplinary research project on “Value of Children and Intergenerational Relations” (e.g., Trommsdorff & Nauck, 2010).

First, Boris Mayer (Switzerland) will present his work on different aspects of the transmission of family values and intergenerational solidarity in a cross-cultural perspective.

Then, Isabelle Albert (Luxembourg) and colleagues will have a closer look at the process of transmission, focusing on aspects of motivation, communication as well as bidirectionality.

Finally, Daniela Barni (Italy) and colleagues will have a new look at the outcomes of intergenerational transmission. They will widen the perspective by putting forward the notion of intergenerational continuity which might be more important for intergenerational relationships than actual parent-child value similarity.

Dieter Ferring will then provide a discussion where the different theoretical approaches and results will be integrated and future perspectives will be presented.
Cultural and Individual Determinants of (Changing) Family Values and Intergenerational Solidarity

Boris Mayer

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The current paper will focus on cross-cultural differences and similarities as well as cultural change processes with regard to family values and intergenerational solidarity. First, I will summarize our research from the Value of Children-study regarding the cultural determinants of patterns of family values (family models) and regarding the intergenerational transmission of these patterns. The implications of these findings for Kagitcibasi’s Theory of Family Change will be discussed. Second, we will focus on the role of religiosity and affluence for different kinds of adolescents’ family orientations (traditional values versus personal future orientation), both at the cultural and at the individual level. Third, we explore how parent-reported parenting goals and behaviors are related to adolescents’ intergenerational solidarity across 14 cultures, and how these effects differ between cultural groups according to specific cultural characteristics.
Adult child-parent value similarity and the process of intergenerational value transmission revisited

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Intergenerational value transmission occurs as part of social learning when members of different generations interact with each other. Earlier studies have often conceptualized the process of intergenerational transmission--by drawing on the two step model of internalization by Grusec and Goodnow--with an accurate perception of the parental message and the acceptance of the message by the child as prerequisites for successful transmission. Several recent studies in the framework of the filter model proposed by Schönplug and Bilz or the intersubjective model of transmission by Tam and colleagues have provided evidence in particular for the importance of parental socialization values and parental motivation for intergenerational transmission. In spite of these intense research activities, it seems however that a missing link remains in explaining actual child-parent value similarity.

Going back to early theories such as Bühler’s model of communicative functions as well as Bandura’s social learning theory, we will have a closer look at processes within the intergenerational value transmission. Taking aspects of motivation, communication and bidirectionality into account, we argue here that apart from the explicit motivation to transmit values from one generation to the next, also more implicit processes on both sides of the transmitter and receiver may be at play in intergenerational value transmission. Our theoretical assumptions are illustrated by findings from quantitative as well as qualitative data collected within the framework of the current research project IRMA (“Intergenerational Relations in the Light of Migration and Ageing”) as well as earlier studies of our group.
Value transmission between parents and children is unanimously considered the essence and hallmark of successful socialization. It is an ongoing and bidirectional process, where the parent and the child are both active and interdependent agents. Nevertheless, to date most of the empirical studies on the parent-child relationship treat intergenerational transmission as a top-down phenomenon in which parents transfer their own values to their children (see De Mol et al., 2013 for details). Consistently with this view, the association between parents’ and children’s values and parent-child value similarity have often been used by researchers as the only indicators in evaluating the outcomes of transmission.

In this paper we propose a dialectical perspective of dynamics in parent-child relationships, based on the concept of continuity, and we discuss alternative indicators of the outcomes of transmission which could reflect the dialectical nature of this process (e.g., True endorsement of one’s values? Feelings of generativity?). With the help of the data from our previous research, we move from the analysis of parent-child value similarity into the broader concept of continuity. Etymologically, “similarity” means “to be basically identical”, whereas “continuity” refers to “tying together, linking” (Pianigiani 2004). “Tying together” the values of parents and children, incorporating them into inherently worthy, coherent systems, and “linking” the generations together may be the most significant outcome of a successful transmission. This may imply a certain degree of similarity in values, but the most influential element becomes the relationship itself and its quality (Barni, Rosnati, & Ranieri, 2013). In other words, even in the presence of intergenerational differences in value content there can be continuity from one generation to the next as long as parents and children feel to be in a “valued” relation to each other.