

## **INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION WITHIN THE FAMILY**

### **A SPECIAL ISSUE**

Guest Editors: Isabelle Roskam & Marie Stievenart

In this special issue, we wanted to gather a diverse range of psychological points of view concerning the question of intergenerational transmission within the family. It was on this topic that we asked for contributions from systemic family therapists and developmentalists. It is such an important topic from both a research and a clinical perspective that our colleagues were full of enthusiasm for the project.

One of the main advantages of this special issue is that it first offers a theoretical article highlighting the processes of intergenerational transmission (De Mol, Lemmens, Verhofstadt, & Kuczynski), and then four empirical studies showing whether and to what extent parenting behaviours (Roskam), attachment (Stievenart & Roskam), psychosocial risk (Bouvette-Turcot, Bernier, & Meaney), and interpersonal influence (Migerode, Buysse, Maes, de Mol, & Verhofstadt) are transmitted from one generation to the next. The theoretical contribution is based on Social Relational Theory, which involves the construction of novel meaning in each generation rather than just the reproduction of old meanings (De Mol et al.). It provides a good conceptual framework for the empirical section.

The four empirical studies give an overview of the main questions that can be raised in the topic under consideration, but also of the methodological approaches that can be used to answer these questions. Several differences between these four empirical contributions are worth commenting on.

First, the papers differ from each other with regard to whether transmission is described from an objective or subjective viewpoint. From an objective viewpoint, data collected from participants from consecutive generations are compared, correlated or regressed. This is the case in the studies of attachment patterns (Stievenart & Roskam) and maternal adversity (Bouvette-Turcot et al.). Conversely, the transmission of interpersonal influence (Migerode et al.) is explicitly studied from a subjective viewpoint, since each of the family members reports on how they perceive influence within their family. The study of parenting behaviour (Roskam) is a mix of the two points of view, since the participants in each generation report on both how they feel they

were parented and how they themselves parent. It is interesting to note that in several empirical studies, the validity of the subjective point of view is questioned and addressed with shared-method variance concerns, while in others it is considered the best way to appraise the intergenerational processes.

Second, the studies differ from each other with regard to the way in which the same variables are measured in consecutive generations or in which the variable to be predicted in the last generation differs from the predictors considered in the previous generation. In the studies of attachment patterns (Stievenart & Roskam) and of parenting behaviours (Roskam), the same variables are measured in parents and children. Conversely, in the study of the transmission of maternal adversity (Bouvette-Turcot et al.), the outcome is the child's temperament at two years, with attachment security as the moderator in the model. Finally, in the study of interpersonal influence (Migerode et al.), both perspectives are present, with perceptions of influence and subjective quality of life being measured in each generation and related to each other.

Third, the studies differ with regard to the number of generations under consideration and the number of participants in each generation. Two generations are considered in the study of attachment transmission (Stievenart & Roskam) and in that of interpersonal influence (Migerode et al.). These two studies were also both conducted in two-parent, two-child families. In the study of maternal adversity transmission and its effect on children's temperament (Bouvette-Turcot et al.), the mothers were first asked to rate their childhood attachment experiences with their own parents (G1-G2), and then 18 months later they were asked to rate their children's temperament at two years (G3). Finally, in the study of the transmission of parenting behaviour (Roskam), grandparents, parents and young adults were asked to rate both their parents' parenting behaviour (G4-G3; G3-G2; G2-G1) and their own parenting behaviour towards their child (G3-G2; G2-G1; G1-G0).

Fourth, differences appear in the way in which each generation is supposed to be influenced by other generations. In the study of parenting behaviour (Roskam), for example, the prediction is unidirectional from G3 to G2 to G1. The same is true for the transmission of psychosocial risk from G2 to G1 (Bouvette-Turcot et al.), and in the transmission of attachment, also from G2 to G1 (Stievenart et al.). However, the study of intergenerational influence and quality of life (Migerode et al.) is much more systemic, addressing the bidirectional influence on which a theoretical commentary is provided in the conceptual contribution (De Mol et al.). It is concluded that the influence between G2 and G1 can be reciprocal.

These differences in how intergenerational transmission is questioned, conceptualised and operationalised in the four empirical studies provide readers with a range of means for understanding and interpreting the results in favour of continuity/transmission and those in favour of discontinuity/absence of transmission that are presented in this special issue. We hope that reading it will prove an enriching experience and that it will contribute to the debate on the intergenerational transmission phenomenon.

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