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Intergenerational transmission of values over the family life course

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ABSTRACT

Literature consistently shows that parents transmit their values to children, but less is known about the persistence and timing of value transmission over the life course, how the quality of intergenerational relationships moderates the strength of transmission, and how transmission may be sensitive to the type of value considered. We addressed our research questions using 1971 and 2000 waves of the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG). The sample consisted of 775 parent–child dyads in which parents averaged 44 years old in 1971 and their offspring averaged 48 years old in 2000. Religious beliefs and gender role attitudes were the two values considered. We found intergenerational value similarity with regard to children's values in 2000 were mostly the result of early transmission. The quality of the parent–child relationship strengthened the contemporaneous transmission of religious beliefs and the lagged transmission of gender role attitudes. The transmission of gender role attitudes was considerably weaker and less stable over time than it was for religious orientation but tended to have a lagged impact under conditions of high solidarity. We discuss the role of parents' influence on their children's value orientations in terms of a relational, life course, and societal process.

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1. Introduction

Research on the intergenerational transmission of values has consistently shown that the social values of children are strongly associated with those of their parents, suggesting a process by which parents intentionally influence the values of their off-spring (Acock & Bengtson, 1987; Copen & Silverstein, 2008; Miller & Glass, 1989; Vollebergh, Iedema & Raaijmakers, 2001). Whether intergenerational transmission of values occurs directly through socialization, didactic training, modeling, classical and operant conditioning, or indirectly through status inheritance, evidence is clear that values are perpetuated through the generations even when accounting for cohort differences resulting from historical change in values (Glass, Bengtson & Dunham, 1986). However, less is known about the persistence and timing of intergenerational value transmission over the family life course, the role that family dynamics play in the transmission process, and the sensitivity of transmission to the type of value considered. Almost all studies of intergenerational value transmission have examined the issue in cross-sectional data where it is not possible to examine whether transmitted values endure or even emerge in children as they grow up and adopt adult role statuses.

This investigation addresses three primary questions. First, we ask whether the timing of transmission matters. Do values get transmitted early in the family life cycle, and then persist in children over time, or is transmission lagged such that children adopt their parents' values and beliefs when they reach middle adulthood? Second, we ask whether values are more powerfully transmitted when intergenerational cohesion is strong in the early years of family life when sensitivity to value adoption is considered to be strong. Third, we ask whether intergenerational transmission is stronger with respect to (1) belief systems that are privately held, such as those associated with religiosity, or (2) social attitudes that are

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guided by changing public opinion, such as gender role attitudes.

1.1. Pathways of intergenerational transmission

Socialization theory suggests that early experiences with parents directly shape the values and beliefs of children. Parents can affect their children's values through modeling (learning through observation of parents' behavior and expressed attitudes) and formal training (such as religious instruction and verbal discipline that enforces conformity). Classical and operant conditioning are examples of how parental training of attitudes may be achieved; value adoption can be occur not only by neutral stimuli and observation but also by reward and punishment (De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001).

Adolescence is considered a critical period for the development of values and identity, when parents serve as important agents of socialization of their children (Alwin, 1984; Smith & Self, 1980; Starrels, 1992). However, parents compete with other socialization agents (e.g., peers, teachers, and media) such that adolescence marks a turning point when parental influence begins to wane (Younnis & Smollar, 1985). Adolescents begin to remove themselves from their parents' sphere of influence and expand their own identity and values (Hoffman, 1984; Kroger & Haslett, 1988). The process of individuation accelerates as children experience important life transitions such as moving out of their parents' home, marrying, and having children of their own, which lead to greater divergence from the values of their parents (Bucx, Raaijmakers, & Van Wel, 2010). Because timing appears to a key feature of value socialization, it is important to consider both pre- and post-adult children when studying the transmission of values between generations (Acock & Bengtson, 1980; Bengtson, 2001; Erikson, 1950; Hitlin, 2006).

An alternative perspective considers the conditions that produce value congruence between generations (Cooper, Grotecant, & Gondon, 1983). As adolescent children transition to early adulthood and beyond, they acquire new roles that may put their values in alignment with those of their parents. From this point of view, the establishment of intergenerational transmission is sensitive to life stage. Children may need to reach a certain level of maturity or social status before adopting the values to which they were earlier exposed to by their parents. Cunningham (2001) found that values become 'activated' when children enter a specific life stage such as marriage or parenthood, when their susceptibility to early socialization is maximized as something akin to a sleeper effect. In this framework, one might consider that there is a lag between the socialization of children and the emergence of values. A similar perspective is offered by proponents of the status inheritance model proposing that parents indirectly transmit their values to children through the transmission of their social status (Acock, 1984). Adult children are more likely than not to share the socioeconomic status of their parents and thus share the attendant values associated with those social positions. Therefore, it is possible to argue that parental influence is delayed and becomes activated when children come to occupy similar social roles and socioeconomic positions as their parents.

Value transmission is also likely to be enhanced by the quality of early family relationships. Research on family relationships has provided strong evidence that positive family relationships can facilitate value transmission between generations (Bengtson, Biblarz, & Roberts, 2002; Pearce & Axinn, 1998; Tarvis, 2000). However, the timing and persistence of parental influence over the life course is less understood. We ask whether value transmission in higher quality parent–child relationships is stronger than it is in lower quality parent–child relationships.

1.2. Types of transmissible values

The term "values" is used to represent a diffuse set of standards, ideals, and goals. We use the term in the current research to refer to *social attitudes* and *belief systems*, specifically attitudes toward women's equality and religious beliefs. These two types of values were chosen because the transmission of each is proposed to require varying levels of parental effort (Vedder, Berry, Sabatier, & Sam, 2009). Research suggests that values are differentially transmitted across generations (Glass et al., 1986; Roest, Dubas, & Gerris, 2010; Rohan & Zanna, 1996). Schwartz (1992) proposed that values that are more widely shared within the community require less effort to transmit to children, whereas values that are more heterogeneous require more effort. The speed of social change has been little investigated with regard to intergenerational transmission, but it would be reasonable to speculate that values undergoing the most rapid transformation would be less strongly transmissible across generations.

The values of gender egalitarianism diffused most rapidly through the population during the 1970s and 1980s but were adopted most vigorously by the Baby-boom cohort (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). As the main factors that influence gender role attitudes are educational attainment and working status (Moen, Erickson, & Dempster-McClain, 1997), it is likely that parents have relatively minor direct influence on their children but may be *prospectively* important through status inheritance, the effects of which would not be observed until education is completed and careers are developed.

In contrast to social attitudes, religious beliefs are rooted more in family culture. The family is the primary agent of socialization with regard to religious beliefs, identity, practice, and salience (Bengtson, Copen, Putney, & Silverstein, 2009; Glass et al., 1986; Myers, 1996, 2004). As religious values are shaped first by family members, we expect that these values will be more strongly transmitted during the younger and more impressionable phase of life, and once established exhibit greater stability over time when compared to gender role attitudes. Thus, we expect parents to more strongly transmit religious beliefs than gender role attitudes as their children mature into middle adulthood. We also expect gender role attitudes to be transmitted in a lagged manner such that entry into adult roles will trigger latent predispositions resulting from earlier family relationships.

Table 1
Descriptive characteristics of parents ($N = 519$).

Variables	*M*	SD	Range	Number of valid cases
Parents				
Mother (vs. father)	.54	–	0–1	519
Age (W-1)	44.25	5.20	30–67	519
Education (W-1)	4.86	1.41	1–8	514
Religious beliefs (W-1)	3.07	.85	1–4	480
Religious beliefs (W-7)	2.79	.75	1–4	255
1. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve	2.61	.99	1–4	
2. Every child should have religious instruction	3.05	.63	1–4	
3. God exists as in the Bible	2.74	.96	1–4	
4. The United States would be better if religion had more influence	2.95	.86	1–4	
Gender role attitudes (W-1)	2.51	.74	1–4	395
Gender role attitudes (W-7)	2.97	.74	1–4	277
1. Wives should obey their husbands	2.90	.75	1–4	
2. Husbands should have the main say in marriage	2.98	.81	1–4	
3. Women's liberation ideas make a lot of sense to me	2.69	.70	1–4	
4. Women should not have authority over men	2.92	.69	1–4	

Although evidence for value congruence between parents and children is well established, the current study adds to the literature by examining (1) the timing and persistence of intergenerational influence based on theories of socialization and status inheritance, (2) the role of early family cohesion as an accelerator of the transmission process, and (3) variation in the rates and timing of transmission depending on whether social attitudes or belief systems are studied. This analysis addresses these issues using longitudinal data from parents and their adolescent children over a span of almost 30 years.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

This study used two waves of data from the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG). The LSOG began in 1971 with 2044 original respondents who were members of 341 three-generation families. Grandparents (G1) were selected via a multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure from a population of 840,000 individuals enrolled in southern California's first large HMO (see Bengtson & Schrader, 1982 for further details). Adult children (G2) and adolescent grandchildren (G3) of the grandparents were also invited to participate in the survey. Follow-up surveys were administered in 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, and 2005. All data have been collected by mail-back surveys (see Bengtson et al., 2002 for detailed information).

The data for the current study derived from G2 and G3 generations in 1971 (W-1) and 2000 (W-7). The sample at baseline consisted of 519 G2 parents and of whom 396 (76.3%) were surveyed at W-7, and 556 G3 children of whom 454 (81.7%) were surveyed at W-7. When parents and children were matched to each other within families, the operational sample at baseline consisted of 775 parent–child dyads (208 mother–daughter dyads, 209 mother–son dyads, 181 father–daughter dyads, and 177 father–son dyads).

Tables 1 and 2 show characteristics of parents and children, respectively, in the operational sample. The average age of parents was 44.3 years at W-1 and 73.3 at W-7. The average age of children was 19.2 years in W-1 and 48.2 years at W-7. Slightly more than half of both parents and children in the sample were female. Parents have greater levels of education that their children at W1 but children surpass their parents by W-7.

2.2. Measures

The two outcomes of interest were religious beliefs and gender role attitudes. Each was assessed with multiple indicators at both W-1 and W-7 for each generation. Factor

Table 2
Descriptive characteristics of children ($N = 556$).

Variables	*M*	SD	Range	Number of valid cases
Children				
Daughter (vs. son)	.51	–	0–1	556
Age (W-1)	19.23	2.67	15–26	556
Education (W-1)	4.19	1.13	1–8	552
Education (W-7)	5.60	1.32	1–8	312
Solidarity with parent (W-1)	4.25	1.06	1–5	553
Religious beliefs (W-1)	2.71	.92	1–4	501
Religious beliefs (W-7)	2.63	.86	1–4	262
Gender role attitudes (W-1)	2.57	.84	1–4	404
Gender role attitudes (W-7)	3.21	.55	1–4	267

analysis found the measures of each to be unidimensional when tested by generation and time period, as well as within the pooled sample.

Religious beliefs are measured with four items assessing the strength of beliefs in conservative religious orthodoxy and biblical literalism. These items and their factor loadings for the pooled sample were: *Every child should have religious instruction* (.859); *God exists as in the Bible* (.944); *The United States would be better if religion had more influence* (.908); *We are all descendents of Adam and Eve* (.916). Reliability coefficients for these four items were $\alpha = .837$ at W-1 and $\alpha = .870$ at W-7 for G2 parents, and $\alpha = .836$ at W-1 and $\alpha = .888$ at W-7 for G3 children. The four items were averaged to form a scale representing the intensity of religious conservatism.

Gender role attitudes were assessed using a scale comprised the following four statements each rated on a four-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: (1) *Women who want to remove the word "obey" from the marriage service don't understand what it means to be a good wife.* (2) *Husbands should have the main say in family matters.* (3) *Women's liberation ideas make a lot of sense to me.* (4) *It goes against nature to put women in positions of authority over men*. Reliability α coefficients for these four items were $\alpha = .68$ at W-1 and $\alpha = .73$ at W-7 for G2 parents, and $\alpha = .79$ at W-1 and $\alpha = .70$ at W-7 for G3 children. The four items were averaged (reverse coding the second item) to create a scale representing the strength of traditional gender role attitudes.

To measure the strength of emotional cohesion between generations, we used children's reported of affectual solidarity with each parent at W-1 (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). The scale comprised the following five items, measured for mothers and fathers separately: (1) *Taking everything into consideration, how close do you feel is the relationship between you and your mother/father?* (2) *How well do you and your mother/father get along at this point in time?* (3) *How well do you feel your mother/father understands you?* (4) *How well do you feel that you understand your mother/father?* (5) *How is communication between you and your mother/father?* Responses ranged on a six point scale from strongly negative to strongly positive. Reliability for these five items was $\alpha = .89$. An additive score was calculated and then dichotomized into those having high solidarity with a parent (indicated by being above the average emotional cohesion score) ($N = 409$), and those having lower solidarity with a parent (below the average emotional cohesion score) ($N = 366$).

Control variables: we included as control variables the following characteristics for each generation: age (in years), gender, (0 = male, 1 = female), and education (1–8). Because education of children continued to increase over time, we included an updated education variable for this generation at W-7.

2.3. Procedure

To address our research questions, we tested a cross-lagged structural equation model representing religious beliefs and gender role attitudes as latent constructs. The basic model presented in Fig. 1 represents shows the latent constructs with their manifest indicators and measurement errors and the proposed inter-relationships among them. This model proposes that parents influence the values of their children at T-1 and at T-7. The influence at T-7 can occur directly as a lagged or sleeper effect on children and indirectly through stability of earlier formed values over the life-course. While we assume that values are transmitted downward from parents to children at T-1, we, leave open the possibility that children as they mature influence their parents over time. Contemporaneously measured values parents and children at W-7 are considered to be mutually determined so no direction of influence is specified.

Attrition diagnostics revealed that parents and children lost to follow-up had less education than those who were retained; fathers and sons were more likely to be lost to follow-up than mothers and daughters, respectively. To account for biases associated with systematic attrition we estimated our models using all available data such that respondents with only W-1 data were included in the analysis, as were follow-up data from parents and/or children whose cross-generational partners were not followed-up at W-7. Full information maximum likelihood provided unbiased estimates by simultaneously incorporating missing data patterns and their predictors into the estimation process (Graham, 2003).

Estimated models are assessed by goodness of fit statistics. Since the chi-square test rejects otherwise good fitting models in larger samples, we rely on other fit

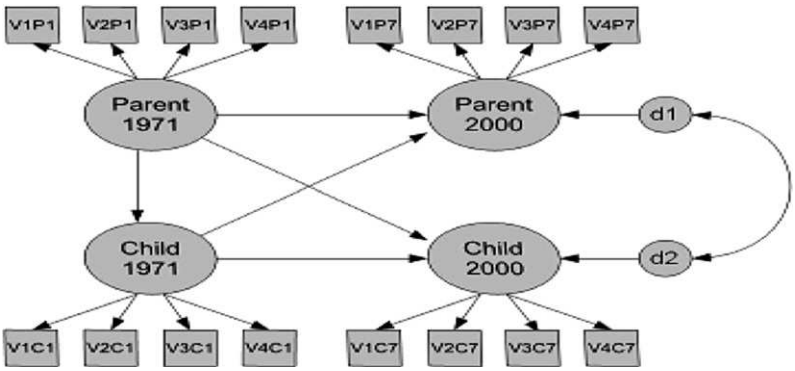


Fig. 1. Measurement and longitudinal structural model of value transmission between parents and children.

Table 3
Correlations between the latent variables for religious beliefs and gender role attitudes.

		Parent's value W-1	Child's value W-1	Parent's value W-7	Child's value W-7
Parent's value	W-1		0.524**	0.790**	0.455**
Child's value	W-1	0.261**		0.453**	0.635**
Parent's value	W-7	0.657**	0.244**		0.423**
Child's value	W-7	0.212**	0.420**	0.203**	

Note: $N = 723$. Correlations for religious beliefs appear above the diagonal; those for gender role attitudes appear below the diagonal. W-1 = 1971; W-7 = 2000.
** $p < .01$.

indexes that are free of the influence of sample size, including the comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) where CFI > .9 and RMSEA < .05 generally indicate a good model fit (Maruyama, 1998). We use a chi-square difference test when testing parameter constraints in nested models. Finally, because the same children and parents could appear multiple times across dyads in the same families, robust standard errors were used to adjust for family clustering in multivariate models.

Our decision to estimate separate models for each of the two value orientations rests on consideration of the trade-off between model complexity and parsimony. A comprehensive model would have estimated many parameters, some of which have little theoretical relevance (such as correlations across the value domains), producing more estimates than would be advisable given the sample size. Thus, we estimated the models separately to obtain more targeted results and improve interpretability. Although religious ideology and gender role ideology are correlated, we maintain that gender role ideology is more likely to be sensitive to social change in way that interferes with transmission. Thus, it is transmission strength that is proposed to vary between the two constructs even as they maintain a low to moderate but non-trivial association with each other ranging from .28 to .38.

3. Results

For descriptive purposes mean scores for each of the values were calculated for both generations at W-1 and W-7. These means, found in Tables 1 and 2, show that at both waves children were less religiously inclined and more egalitarian regarding gender roles than their parents. Cross-generational and cross-time correlations for the summed scales are shown in Table 3. Correlations between generations were stronger at W-1 than at W-7 suggesting greater correspondence earlier than later in the family life course. Stability in both generations was stronger for children than their parents, showing that children are more prone to change their values over time. Correlations of religious beliefs, both across generations and over time, were about twice that of gender role attitudes, suggesting

Table 4
Measurement models imposing generation and time constraints on measurement coefficients for latent variables of religious beliefs and gender role attitudes.

		Religious beliefs		Gender role attitudes	
Model comparisons		Model fit increment		Model fit increment	
Generation-constrained vs. unconstrained		$\Delta\chi^2[df] = 7.214$ [3], $p > .05$		$\Delta\chi^2[df] = 2.043$ [3], $p > .05$	
Generation- and time-constrained vs. generation-constrained model		$\Delta\chi^2[df] = 12.537$ [6], $p > .05$		$\Delta\chi^2[df] = 3.964$ [6], $p > .05$	
Generation- and time-constrained model	Measurement structure			Measurement structure	
	Item	Unstandardized measurement coefficient		Item	Unstandardized measurement coefficient
	We are all descendents of Adam and Eve	1.000		Wives should obey their husbands	1.000
	Every child should have religious instruction	.496		Husbands should have the main say in marriage	.959
	God exists as in the Bible	.965		Women's liberation ideas make a lot of sense to me	.755
	The United States would be better if religion had more influence	.673		Women should not have authority over men	.758

Note: $N = 775$. Generation equality constraints force measurement coefficients to be equal across parents and children within each wave of measurement. Generation and time constraint force measurement coefficients to be equal for parents and children within and across waves of measurement.

Table 5
Standardized estimates for structural equation models predicting transmission religious beliefs.

	Full sample ($N = 775$)	Multi-group	
		Low solidarity ($N = 366$)	High solidarity ($N = 409$)
Stability effects			
Parents [W-1] → [W-7]	.909***	.948***	.826***
Children [W-1] → [W-7]	.491***	.381***	.616***
Synchronous effects			
Parent [W-1] → child [W-1]	.877***	.741***	.963***
Parent [W-7] ⇔ child [W-7]	.014	−.017	.022
Cross-lagged effects			
Parent [W-1] → child [W-7]	.112	.150	.065
Child [W-1] → parent [W-7]	.003	.024	.048
Exogenous variables			
Parent [W-1]			
Age	−.003	−.003	−.002
Female	−.067	−.063	−.070
Education	−.080***	−.076**	−.084**
Number of children	.018	−.041	.009
Parent [W-7]			
Age	.004	.001	.007
Female	−.013	−.079	.163*
Daughter	−.058	−.140**	.034
Child [W-1]			
Age	−.007	−.010	−.004
Female	.209**	.259**	.162*
Mother	−.014	−.006	−.021
Child [W-7]			
Age	.015	.036**	−.003
Female	.142*	.108	.171*
Mother	−.023	.064	−.105*
Education	−.062*	−.092**	−.033
R^2 Parent [W-1]	.089	.093	.076
R^2 Child [W-1]	.314	.260	.446
R^2 Parent [W-7]	.783	.829	.701
R^2 Child [W-7]	.518	.439	.603
χ^2 (df)	881.45 (436)***	836.27 (416)***	
CFI	.895	.901	
RMSEA	.051	.051	

Note: W-1 = 1971; W-7 = 2000.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

that the former has a stronger familial basis and more enduring nature than the latter.

Before estimating the structural model, we ran tests to determine if the measurement model for each latent construct was consistent between generations and over time. Table 4 shows the results for comparisons of models that imposed equality constraints on measurement coefficients to one that allowed none or fewer constraints. The first test showed that for each set of values imposing equality constraints between generations did not produce a significant decrement in model fit. The second test, adding equality constraints over time showed no decrement in model fit for both values. Thus, the fully constrained model became the basis for the estimated structural models examining transmission effects for religious beliefs and gender role attitudes. Measurement coefficients for this model are shown in the bottom half of Table 4.

Structural models testing pathways of intergenerational value transmission were estimated for the entire sample of dyads and then stratified by high and low intergenerational solidarity in a multiple group model to test whether early emotional closeness moderated possible transmission effects. The results of the structural models are found in Table 5 for religious beliefs and Table 6 for gender role attitudes. In each set of models, all exogenous control variables were free to correlate with each other with no a priori assumptions or expectations. We note that models for both sets of values met the criteria for an adequate model fit based on CFI and RMSEA goodness-of-fit indexes.

Turning first to transmission effects in religious beliefs, Table 5 shows that religiosity is transmitted downward from parents to children at W-1 when the children are adolescents and young adults and then remains stable over time as the children matured. The indirect transmission effect, an indicator of transmission persistence (derived by multiplying the early transmission effect by the children's stability coefficient) was .431. There were no cross-lagged effects between generations in either direction, nor was there a cross-generational correlation at W-7. Since we

Table 6
Standardized estimates for structural equation models predicting transmission of gender role attitudes.

	Full sample ($N = 775$)	Multi-group	
		Low solidarity ($N = 366$)	High solidarity ($N = 409$)
Stability effects			
Parents [W-1] → [W-7]	.688***	.687***	.699***
Children [W-1] → [W-7]	.280***	.263**	.292***
Synchronous effects			
Parent [W-1] → child [W-1]	.398***	.335**	.486***
Parent [W-7] ⇔ child [W-7]	.014	−.008	.005
Cross-lagged effects			
Parent [W-1] → child [W-7]	.095	−.089	.243*
Child [W-1] → parent [W-7]	.005	−.059	−.022
Exogenous variables			
Parent [W-1]			
Age	.004	−.006	.013
Female	.402***	.350**	.440***
Education	.187***	.209***	.165***
Number of children	−.036	−.041	−.026
Parent [W-7]			
Age	−.003	.003	−.007
Female	.000	.090	−.062
Daughter	.038	.096	−.004
Child [W-1]			
Age	.047**	.034	.055**
Female	.054	−.030	.131
Mother	−.071	−.220**	.050
Child [W-7]			
Age	−.027	−.038	−.011
Female	.076	.160	−.002
Mother	.041	.019	−.106*
Education	.122	.105**	−.028
R^2 Parent [W-1]	.175	.183	.169
R^2 Child [W-1]	.149	.117	.209
R^2 Parent [W-7]	.759	.787	.988
R^2 Child [W-7]	.282	.288	.439
Chi-square fit (df)	629.857 (436)***	591.067(416)***	
CFI	.893	.903	
RMSEA	.034	.033	

Note: W-1 = 1971; W-7 = 2000.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

found a significant zero-order correlation between generations at W-7 (see Table 3), it can be inferred that this similarity resulted from an earlier correspondence in religiosity that then remained stable over time. When the model was stratified by high and low solidarity, there were no differences in estimated coefficients that would indicate differential rates of transmission between the two groups.

Comparable models for gender role attitudes are shown in Table 6. Gender role ideology was transmitted from parent to child at W-1 and then remained stable in children over time. No cross-lagged effects are observed, nor was there a cross-generational correlation at W-7. The indirect transmission effect of parents on children was .111, substantially smaller than the transmission persistence of religious beliefs (.431). Multiple group analysis based on solidarity group revealed that in the high solidarity group there was a lagged effect whereby early parental values produced an effect on gender role egalitarianism more than three decades later in the lives of their offspring. In the low solidarity group, no such effect was observed. A test comparing this model to one with equality constraints imposed on the lagged coefficient produced a significant decrement in model fit ($\Delta\chi^2[df] = 39.6$ [19], $p < .01$), affirming that the model specifying different effects for each group is preferable to one specifying the same effect.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to examine the transmission of values from parents to children in order to identify the timing, persistence, and family context of intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and attitudes toward gender equality. Using a unique longitudinal dyadic design we were able to trace whether transmission of values (1) occurred early and was persistent over three decades in the lives of children, (2) became evident later in the life course of children when they achieved mature adult statuses, and (3) was more powerful when intergenerational relationships were emotional close. We also proposed that personal values of religiosity would be more strongly transmitted across generations than social values of gender role ideology.

Overall, we found that values were transmitted by parents at an early stage in the lives of their children and subsequently remained stable in those children over almost three decades. The correspondence of values between parents and their mature children was due to transmission that occurred at an earlier life stage. That is, parents influence the values children and children tend to maintain their similar values acquired at an early stage over the life course into middle age. This supports the socialization theory's basic tenet that individuals more or less permanently acquire value orientations from important social agents at critical stages of development. That we found strong stability in values over time is not say that these values have not changed in the aggregate over time. Indeed, there has been considerable social change in both religion and gender orientations over three decades even as individuals have temporally maintained their rank order with respect to each other.

Transmission was also manifest in a lagged manner for gender role attitudes, but only under the condition of strong intergenerational affectual solidarity. That is, transmission of gender role egalitarianism did not emerge until the child reached midlife and only for those who earlier had close relationships with their parents. We can presume that as children reach midlife they are likely to acquire specific gender roles (becoming wives and husbands) as their parents and this can be a trigger to activate the impact of parents' earlier values. However, it is important to note that values and attitudes can further change as people enter into later life stages. In addition, it is possible that this sleeper effect is more likely to be found among mother–daughter dyads than among other gender configurations, as gender role attitudes have been found to become more salient when women enter work and family roles (Cunningham, 2001).

Both the strength of early transmission and the extent of stability were noticeably weaker for gender role attitudes than they were for religious beliefs, suggesting that social attitudes are less family-based than are beliefs, as well as more changeable in younger generations. This result supports a separation–individuation perspective emphasizing the decline of parents' influence when their children achieve residential, financial, and emotional independence (Hoffman, 1984; Kroger & Haslett, 1988). Turbulent social transformations in values, such as that occurring with regard to women's rising educational attainment and participation in the labor market beginning in the 1970s, eroded the influence of parents whose values were adopted at an earlier time. Here it is important to note that even when attitudes change substantially on average, stability can still be strong within individuals over time. Our findings support the notion that Baby-boomers were swayed by an emerging Zeitgeist of gender egalitarianism rendering their earlier expressed social values less deterministic of later outlooks.

On the other hand, religious beliefs are core values that are more powerfully transmitted early in the lives of children, and, despite change in the religious landscape of society, remain the province of training and socialization within the family unit. These values are less susceptible to outside influences and consequently more stable across generations and over one's lifetime than are social attitudes.

This study had several limitations that deserve mention. First, gender differences in intergenerational transmission should be considered for future research. We know from other research that intergenerational value transmission is stronger between same sex relationships than between opposite sex relationships. Although we controlled for gender in our analyses, we did not examine how gender interacts with value transmission and intergenerational solidarity. Second, we relied on the reports of children to assess emotional closeness, yet there can be differences between parents' and children's perspectives in evaluating intergenerational relationships, with parents generally reporting stronger and children generally reporting weaker affectual solidarity. Third, this paper did not disaggregate state and trait aspects of value formation but examined total transmission regardless of whether parents' values were dispositional or derived from environmental influences. We assumed that children adopt the values of their parents regardless of parental origin. We do note that state and trait are represented implicitly in the model; if children have lower stability than their parents we assume it has to do with state fluctuations unique to the younger generation and their transition to adulthood, for instance life events of marriage, family formation, and labor market entry. Future research can address this issue more definitively with more than two time points for each generation. Fourth, future research in this area would benefit from including a wider assortment of socioeconomic factors such as income occupation, and employment status to examine more precisely the relative contribution of direct transmission vs. status inheritance in value similarity between generations. Finally, we note that value transmission may not become manifest until life stages that extend past the 30 years observed in the lives of adult children. For example, early religious training in the family may not emerge in some individuals until later life when free time and existential crises may mark a return to earlier religious forms.

In conclusion, this study showed values were robustly transmitted from parents to their adolescent and young adult children, and then tended to remain stable over the life course. This pattern of intergenerational influence and intra-individual stability was most strongly observed for religious beliefs. Close family relationships served as facilitators of value transmissions but only in the lagged transmission of gender role attitudes. We hope these findings serve as an impetus to consider a wider assortment of values along the personal–social continuum when investigating how parents and early family dynamics, in conjunction with social change, shape children's values into adulthood.

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