



A HEURISTIC ENQUIRY EXPLORING THE INTERGENERATIONAL PATTERNS

Tavishi Sanghi^{1*}

^{1*}St. Xavier's College

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the intergenerational patterns through heuristic enquiry. Understanding the intergenerational patterns can help the future generation to have a safer and empowered life along with providing directions in terms of development of future interventions. The primary objective of the research was to explore the embodied emotional experience of recollection of memories related to parenting styles of extended family. In addition, the objective was to explore the impact of intergenerational transmission of patterns on peer relationships and the belief system. The material was processed largely according to the framework suggested by Moustakas research stages of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. Through recurrent journaling, art work and role play, a set of themes were discovered. The themes which were observed through repetition and similarities were fear, relationship and self-concept. The results reinforced the importance of identifying one's intergenerational patterns as a means to heal and grow oneself and the future generations.

Keywords: intergenerational patterns, parental behavior, heuristic enquiry

"Intergenerational trauma – of any kind – is not just about what happened in the past; it's about what's still happening and what will continue to happen in the future."

-Emily Wanderer Cohen

The aim of this study is to explore the intergenerational patterns through heuristic enquiry. It is well established that the quality of parenting is associated with a wide range of child outcomes, including adjustment, emotional and behavioural problems and physical health, as well as subsequent mental health problems later in life. Warm and supportive parenting is associated with academic achievement, psychosocial development and emotional stability. Conversely, harsh parenting is associated with child aggression and conduct problems. As such, it is important to understand the factors that influence these parenting behaviours so that these factors may be targeted in interventions.

One important influence on parenting is its intergenerational transmission, that is, the influence of parents' own experiences as a child on their later childrearing practices. By breaking this cycle in addition to ending years of abuse and trauma, one is also preventing it from happening to the generations to follow. Thus, understanding the intergenerational patterns can help the future generation to have a safer, more whole, and empowered life along with providing directions in terms of development of future interventions.

Intergenerational Patterns

Intergenerational transmission of patterns refers to a wide range of patterns getting transferred from one generation to another. For example, between those in older generations, such as parents and

grandparents, aunt, uncles, and those in younger generations, such as children and grandchildren. Intergenerational patterns may involve both positive and negative impact.

Theories to Explain Intergenerational Patterns

Several theories have been cited to improve our understanding of intergenerational patterns (Thornberry & Henry, 2013). Social learning theory proposes that individuals' behavior is shaped through observation and imitation. Therefore, this theory suggests that adults' parenting will be influenced by childhood experiences of their own parents' behaviors. If individuals experience abusive or neglectful parenting, then they may develop beliefs that these behaviors are acceptable or effective and replicate them with their own children.

Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of a quality, early attachment with a caregiver. If a caregiver is not caring and sensitive to an infant's needs (as is the case when early maltreatment occurs), the affected individual struggles to form healthy attachments into adulthood. This is theorized to increase the likelihood of abusive behavior as an adult.

Trauma-based models suggest that maltreatment, like other forms of violence, produces trauma symptoms. If untreated and unresolved, these symptoms may increase the likelihood that the individual will engage in violent behavior, including child maltreatment, as an adult.

Ecological or transactional theories view child maltreatment as the result of multiple influences and systems, including family, community, and societal factors. Research grounded in these theories looks for specific risk factors or pathways to better explain intergenerational patterns

Baranosky et al. (1998) discuss the theory of empathic traumatization. This term is used to describe the offspring's attempts to understand their parents' experiences and pain as a means of establishing a connection with them. In doing so, the offspring imagines scenes that they attempt to successfully escape or survive. The offspring literally maintains familial ties by integrating their parents' experiences. It states that the Children adopt their parents' trauma through one of two types of parental communication, namely an obsessive retelling of stories,

and silence. It states that the intergenerational transmission of trauma occurs when the traumatized parent implants his or her own emotional instability into their children. Often time, survivor parents attempt to teach their children how to survive in the event of further persecution; thus they inadvertently transmit their own traumatic experiences. These children then often act out the trauma-survival behavior adopted by their parents and become highly sensitive to trauma imagery during same-age anniversaries of their parents' trauma (Baranosky, 1998).

Ancharoff et al., (1998) proposed the four working models. According to this model, silence, overdisclosure. Identification and re-enactment by the care givers might result in intergenerational transmission of patterns.

Literature Review

Parenting behavior has been associated with both child competence and child maladjustment (Collins et al., 2000). For example, supportive parenting practices have been linked to higher levels of psychosocial well-being during childhood (Baumrind, 1991; Zhou et al., 2002), while harsh and inconsistent parenting has been associated with higher levels of children's externalizing problems (Forman & Davies, 2003; Shaw et al., 1998). Less is known about how parents come to behave in different ways toward their children. Recent evidence, however, suggests that an important influence on parenting may involve continuities in childrearing practices across generations (Belsky et L., 2005; Scaramella et al., 2003) Despite the growing evidence that the style of parenting in one generation influences parental behaviour in the next, as yet there is little understanding of the specific mechanisms that may promote such continuities. Moreover, some researchers have proposed that evidence for continuity may be reduced if child effects on parenting are taken into account (Belsky et al., 2005).

Many researchers have found that harsh parenting in the first generation is associated with harsh parenting practices by the next generation (Pears & Capaldi, 2000). One hypothesis for explaining

the intergenerational transmission of parenting proposes that children develop childhood characteristics that foster intergenerational continuity in harsh childrearing practices. For example, Caspi and Elder (1988) reported that hostile parenting predicted aggressive behaviour of the child. In contrast, it may also be the case that childhood behaviour influences the type of parenting received. For example, Kerr and Stattin (2003) demonstrated that parents' behaviours were reactions to problem behaviours exhibited by their child. Similar conclusions were drawn by Wells et al., 2006 and Stice et al., 2006.

The study of how patterns are transmitted is still in the early stage (Baranosky, Young, Johnson-Douglas, Williams-Keeler & MacCarrey, 1998). Baranowsky et al., (1998) explains the phenomenon of pattern transmission in Holocaust-survivor offspring as follows: "These offspring, the 'second generation' from the trauma, may thus bear 'the scar without the wound'" (p.248).

Research studies suggest not just transmission of harsh parenting styles but also, positive parenting styles. Belsky et al., (2005) reported that mothers who experienced more supportive parenting throughout their own childhoods were more supportive during interactions with their children. Chen and Kaplan (2001) found evidence for intergenerational continuity in constructive parenting.

Academic achievement and attainment may be key elements in the process of intergenerational continuity of positive patterns. For example, earlier research demonstrates that better educated parents are more involved, supportive, and engaged in their children's lives and children of such parents have greater success in school (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). In turn, academic achievement during childhood and adolescence is highly predictive of eventual academic attainment. Furthermore, Conger and Donnellan (2007), concluded that parents likely feel proud of their children's successes and more competent themselves as parents, such positive feelings likely spill over into their interactions with their children. In addition, family income or socioeconomic status is related to positive parenting, harsh parenting, adolescent externalizing problems and children's educational attainment (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).

Methodology

Research Question

1. What is the embodied emotional experience of recollection of memories related to parenting styles of extended family?
2. What is the impact of this embodied experience on the belief system of the individual?
3. What is the impact of intergenerational transmission of patterns in the current peer relationships?

Objectives

1. To explore embodied emotional experience of recollection of memories related to parenting styles of extended family.
2. To understand the impact of the embodied experience on the belief system of the individual.
3. To unearth the impact of intergenerational transmission of patterns in the current peer relationships.

Research Design

The design used for the present study was heuristic research design. Heuristic methodology encourages the researcher to explore and pursue the creative journey that begins inside one's being and ultimately uncovers its direction and meaning through internal discovery (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Heuristic enquiry was used in order to retrieve this detailed and highly subjective information on intergenerational patterns. It involves using artistic methods for gathering, analyzing, and presenting data. It acknowledges the creative process and is integrated with the aesthetic values of the researcher (Hervey, 2000). This research methodology allowed the researcher to take advantage of aesthetic preferences and creative ways of processing.

Sample

The researcher is required to have a direct experience of the phenomenon in question in order to

discover its essence and meaning in heuristic research design (Moustakas, 1990). Thus, the study is being conducted on the researcher itself. The concerned researcher is a 23- year-old, female and a student of Post Graduate Diploma in Expressive Arts Therapy.

Procedure

Data Collection

As primary data collection, the researcher engaged in journaling and collage making. It involved reading various literature on intergeneration patterns and engaging in activities to delve deeper. I completed the journal entry and collage making by recording and reflecting perceptions and experiences of intergenerational patterns. In total, 15 journal entries and 15 collages were made reflecting and integrating the various intergenerational patterns. As a response to the primary data, the researcher clustered the primary data into units based on similarities and differences. In this phase, the researcher reflected on the respective units and

responded with visual art. Consequently, the researcher began to cluster the visual images and responded through the role play technique of drama therapy. In addition, a title was given to each role play which later helped in understanding the various themes of the data collected. Once the themes emerged, journaling was used to delve deeper.

Data Analysis

The material was processed largely according to the framework suggested by Moustakas (1990). Moustakas's (1990), research stages of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis, followed along with utilization of thematic analysis to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning or themes within the artistic data.

Ethical Considerations

Heuristic research differs considerably from other methodologies in that it views the researcher as a participant. As such, it allows the researcher to experience the intensity of the phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Since, the topic under investigation, intergenerational patterns might invoke past distressing events, the researcher engaged in personal therapy sessions in order to support the increasing vulnerability.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the study is to explore the intergenerational patterns through heuristic enquiry. Understanding the intergenerational patterns can help the future generation to have a safer and empowered life along with providing directions in terms of development of future interventions. In addition, it might provide a better understanding of the factors influencing care givers behavior and further the factors essential for psycho-social well-being.

The study primarily looked at the following research questions 1. What is the embodied emotional experience of recollection of memories related to parenting styles of extended family? 2. What is the impact of this embodied experience on the belief system of the individual? 3. What is the impact of intergenerational transmission of patterns in the current peer relationships? The themes which were observed through repetition and similarities were fear, relationship and self-concept which also answered the research questions.

The material was processed largely according to the framework suggested by Moustakas (1990). Moustakas's (1990), research stages of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis, followed along with utilization of thematic analysis to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning or themes within the artistic data.

Six Phases of Heuristic Research

Initial engagement is the beginning phase of heuristics. "The task of the initial engagement is to

discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). In this phase, the researcher immerses into self- dialogue and extensive self-exploration in order to discover the tacit knowledge and ultimately arrive to the research question.

My initial engagement with intergenerational patterns began much before the study through psychology classes, continued through journaling and travelling. Through it I discovered some aspect of my past and new perspective on the present and future.

Immersion is the second phase of heuristics. In the immersion phase, the researcher becomes one with the topic and question. According to Moustakas (1990), the researcher must live the question. In order to be fully connected with the question, the researcher engages in

“spontaneous self-dialogue and self-searching, pursuing intuitive clues and hunches, and drawing from the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension” (p. 28).

As I was becoming rapidly immersed with the questions around intergenerational patterns, I began looking at the world through a new and somewhat different lens. Interestingly, I began explaining everything in my life through intergenerational patterns and I became truly immersed in it. It was an exhausting process and after a while I noticed that I need a break from exploring and understanding the intergenerational patterns. The experience of immersion was so strong that I finally realized that I needed to put my research on hold.

My realization that I needed a break from my experience brought me to the third phase of heuristics – incubation. In this phase the researcher moves away from intense immersion with the question and becomes detached from it. “The period of incubation allows the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).

Illumination is the fourth phase of heuristics. As the researcher becomes more receptive to the tacit dimension of knowledge and intuition, the illumination phase unfolds freely (Moustakas, 1990). In this phase, the researcher illuminates themes from within. This phase requires a certain level of reflection but still allows for mysterious workings of knowledge and in that fosters the new awareness, modification of the existing understanding, and a new discovery of an experience that was not directly present in the researcher’s consciousness (Moustakas, 1990).

Indeed, as I was examining the common themes extracted, I began noticing that these themes are not static and linear processes but ever- changing and long-lasting.

The fifth phase of heuristics, explication refers to the process of deep examination of themes and qualities that have surfaced during the illumination phase. Moustakas (1990) points out that in the explication phase, the researcher engages in focusing, indwelling, self exploration, and self-disclosure, which in turns allows him/her to recognize the uniqueness of experiences. In explication, the complete picture of the phenomenon begins forming. In addition, new views, alternative explanations, and new patterns are identified. Experiencing this phase was a wonderful adventure for me. It was amazingly interesting to notice how some themes belonged together and how some did not make any sense.

The final phase of heuristics is creative synthesis. It represents the final integration of the data, qualities, and themes discovered in the explication phase (Moustakas, 1990). I decided to write a journal entry or a poem on each of the theme that emerged. The process of writing these journal entries allowed me not only to finish my study but also to reach a sense of closure by creating personal healing statements and rituals.

Themes

Through recurrent journaling, art work and role play, a set of themes were discovered. The themes which were observed through repetition and similarities were fear, relationship and self-concept which also answered the research questions.

Relationship

“The distance from your pain, your grief, your unattended wounds is the distance from your partner”.
– Stephen and Ondrea Levine, *Embodying the Beloved*

A prominent theme in my journal revolved around my relationship with others. I was continuously asking myself questions such as what is my greatest complaint about my

relationships? Is this the same complaint I have about my parents? These questions continuously found their way in my journal entry and poems. I discovered that the major complaint about my partner is the same complaint I have about my father. While I was doing role play, I embodied the role of a daughter more than a girlfriend. Many of the problems experienced in a relationship do not originate in the relationship itself. They stem from dynamics that exist in our families. Grayson (2008) concluded that father-child relationship has a direct impact on the child’s relationship.

In addition, during the creative process one of my poems had a line “Ah! The irony...what I hate is what I attract”. The emotions, traits and behaviours one rejects in a parent are likely to live unconsciously within.

We might project the complaints we have about the parents onto our partner (Zurenda, 2008). During the role play between my mother and father I recognized how I over empathize with my mother which translates into similar complaints towards my partner. A similar finding was suggested by Wolynn (2016) which stated if the child is merged with the feeling of a parent for example, if one parent feels negatively towards the other, it is possible that the child will continue these feelings towards his/her partner.

Self-concept

In many of my journal entries, I commented on the ways in which I see myself. In further integration, I made multiple collages highlighting how I see myself as compared to how I want others to see me. I gained insight of linkage between my self-concept and my early childhood experiences. This can be explained through the conversational model based which states that our sense of self develops out of the relationship with our primary caregivers. Optimal psychic development or emotional maturity occurs when these relationships are stable

and sufficiently responsive. More specifically, our concept of self develops through relational experiences with the external world (Hobson, 1985).

The artwork symbolized both the positive and negative influences of intergenerational patterns on self. In addition to deepening my understanding of my own experiences, I have increased my understanding of how I see myself in others eyes. As I wrote in my journal entries about these moments, I further reflected on the need for validation. Conley and Rudolph (2005), examined the hypothesis that there is a tendency to base one's self concept with positive and negative aspects of relationship with parents.

Fear

Through the processes of writing journal entries, discussion, and embodiment, I uncovered a series of factors that highlighted my fears. This repeated itself almost identically throughout my analysis. The embodiment of parental roles during the role play highlighted the fears of one of my family members and how I was reliving the family member’s fear. In a similar finding by Debiec & Sullivan (2014) concluded children witnessing their parent expressing fear to specific sounds or images begin to express fear to those cues.

The communication patterns of caregivers are often pervaded by fear of having a negative impact on the lives of their offspring. This commonly leads to silence, secrets and points left unsaid concerning traumatic experiences. As parents did not address their traumatic experiences, the second generation finds it more difficult to achieve integration of these events, as indicated by the following excerpts in my journal: “I wish you would have told me what you were going through, I fear your fear. I knew what was happening at that day, I remember everything...you acted as if nothing happened.”

Conclusion

The research aimed to explore the intergenerational transmission of patterns through heuristic enquiry with the primary objective to explore the embodied emotional experience of recollection of memories related to parenting style of extended family. The material was processed largely according to the research stages of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. Through recurrent journaling, art work and role play, the themes which emerged in terms of repetition and similarities were fear, relationship and self-concept. The results reinforced the importance of understanding the intergenerational patterns that can help people to have a safer and empowered life.

Limitations

The current study may have limited generalisability due to its subjective nature. In addition, the data was collected in a short time span. Therefore, a much more detailed and in depth data collection might be helpful.

Implications of the Study

The study can help in providing the importance of intergenerational patterns. Furthermore, the study can be used in planning interventions to understand and break the intergenerational patterns thereby, breaking years of negative patterns.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies can consider additional ways to understand intergenerational patterns. Additionally, researchers should consider a larger population pool working in a variety of settings to develop more generalizable data regarding participants experience of intergenerational patterns.

References

1. Besemer, S., Axelsson, J., & Sarnecki, J. (2016). Intergenerational transmission of trajectories of offending over three generations. *Journal of Developmental and Life Course Criminology*, 2(4), 417-441. doi:10.1007/s40865-016-0037-2
2. Bird, D. (2016). undefined. *The Self in Performance*, 169-179. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-53593-1_12
3. Carturan, L. (2020). Review of the paper from Shaw et al. doi:10.5194/tc-2020-198-rc2 Copping, V. (2018). Introduction: The intergenerational trauma treatment model. *Re Circuiting Trauma Pathways in Adults, Parents, and Children*, 1-9.
4. doi:10.4324/9781315392066-1
5. Djuraskovic, I., & Arthur, N. (2014). Heuristic inquiry: A personal journey of acculturation and identity reconstruction. *The Qualitative Report*. doi:10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1361
6. Donnellan, M. B., Conger, R. D., & Burzette, R. G. (2007). Personality development from late adolescence to young adulthood: Differential stability, normative maturity, and evidence for the maturity-stability hypothesis. *Journal of Personality*, 75(2), 237-264. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2007.00438.x
7. Etherington, K. (2004). undefined. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 4(2), 48-63. doi:10.1080/14733140412331383973
8. Forman, M. C., Davies, N., & McCormick, M. (2003). Continuous parallax in discrete pixelated integral three-dimensional displays. *Journal of the Optical Society of America A*, 20(3), 411. doi:10.1364/josaa.20.000411
9. Henriques, M. (n.d.). Can the legacy of trauma be passed down the generations? Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190326-what-is-epigenetics>
10. EXPLORING INTERGENERATIONAL PATTERNS
11. I am the cycle breaker in my family. (2020, October 21). Retrieved from <https://www.scarymommy.com/cycle-breaker>
12. family/#:~:text=By%20breaking%20the%20cycle%20inside,legacy%20you%20leav

e%20your%20children

13. Intergenerational continuity in parenting behavior: Mediating pathways and child effects. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2748920/> Intergenerational transmission of parenting: Findings from a UK longitudinal study. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4668327/> Jeon, S. (n.d.). undefined. doi:10.31274/etd-180810-3735
14. Kerr, M., Stattin, H., Biesecker, G., & Ferrer-Wreder, L. (2003). Relationships with parents and peers in adolescence. *Handbook of Psychology*.
15. doi:10.1002/0471264385.wei0616
16. Khazan, O. (2018, October 16). Inherited trauma shapes your health. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/10/trauma-inherited-generations/573055/>
17. The legacy of trauma. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/02/legacy-trauma>
18. A letter to the cycle breakers. (2018, December 8). Retrieved from
19. <https://www.racheous.com/respectful-parenting/cycle-breakers/>
20. Library_. (2021, January 10). Retrieved from <https://icmglt.org/library-2/> Liefbroer, A. C., & Elzinga, C. H. (2012). Intergenerational transmission of behavioural patterns: How similar are parents' and children's demographic trajectories? *Advances in Life Course Research*, 17(1), 1-10. doi:10.1016/j.alcr.2012.01.002
21. A love letter to the cycle breakers. (n.d.). Retrieved from
22. <https://www.motherhoodandmore.com/a-love-letter-to-the-cycle-breakers/>
23. EXPLORING INTERGENERATIONAL PATTERNS
24. Lüscher, K., & Hoff, A. (n.d.). Intergenerational ambivalence:. *Intergenerational relations*, 39-64. doi:10.2307/j.ctt9qgmk2.8
25. Parents' emotional trauma may change their children's biology. Studies in mice show how. (2019, July 18). Retrieved from <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/07/parents-emotional-trauma-may-change-their-children-s-biology-studies-mice-show-how>
26. Van Ijzendoorn, M. H. (1992). Intergenerational transmission of parenting: A review of studies in nonclinical populations. *Developmental Review*, 12(1), 76-99. doi:10.1016/0273-2297(92)90004-1
27. Yehuda, R., & Lehrner, A. (2018). Intergenerational transmission of trauma effects: Putative role of epigenetic mechanisms. *World Psychiatry*, 17(3), 243-257. doi:10.1002/wps.20568