

INTERGENERATIONAL INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENTS' PROENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR

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We investigated the process of intergenerational influence on adolescents' proenvironmental behavior in Chinese families. By differentiating 2 types of social influence (i.e., informational and normative influence), we found that adolescents' proenvironmental behavior was positively related to both informational and normative influence in Chinese families. Furthermore, when we tested the contextual variable of parental power, we found that it moderated the 2 main effects, but in different directions. That is, the relationship between informational influence and adolescents' proenvironmental behavior became stronger when adolescents perceived higher levels of parental power, with the opposite result with respect to normative influence. We have contributed to the literature on intergenerational influence, social influence, and adolescents' proenvironmental behavior.

Keywords: intergenerational influence, adolescents' proenvironmental behavior, social influence, parental power, informational influence, normative influence.

Intergenerational (IG) influence, or transmission of attitudes, values, and behavior from parents to children within families, is a prominent theme in social science literature. Recent researchers have demonstrated that IG influence is a potential and powerful driver of the proenvironmental behavior of children (Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2009; Leppänen, Haahla, Lensu, & Kuitunen, 2012; Meeusen, 2014). Researchers have found that adopting a social norm perspective is useful in understanding the IG transfer process. For instance, Matthies, Selge,

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and Klöckner (2012) used the norm activation theory to demonstrate how children develop proenvironmental norms and behavior in a family context. Similarly, Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2012) adopted the social norm theory to explain how normative influence within the family impacts on adolescents' proenvironmental behavior.

However, researchers have generally not considered informational influence as a potential mechanism. This omission needs to be rectified, particularly in view of findings that informational influence, such as through intrafamily communication, is important in promoting children's social behavior (Grusec, 2011; Hastings, Utendale, & Sullivan, 2007).

It is, perhaps, more important that the effect of informational influence should be distinguished from that of normative influence, because the two types of influence may act as different mechanisms. In general, *informational influence* occurs without overt intention, leading the individual to internalize and privately accept the influence naturally (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2009). In contrast, *normative influence* occurs through interpersonal pressure, leading the individual to publicly conform to others' expectations (Nolan, Shultz, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2008). This type of conformity results in public compliance with the group's beliefs and behavior, but not necessarily in private acceptance (Aronson et al., 2009). These conceptual differences can generate distinctions in mechanisms, particularly in the context of IG influence. However, because there has been little research, scholars' understanding of the topic has remained limited.

To fill this void, we used the social influence theory, which provides an integrated framework of informational and normative influence. However, in related studies, researchers have generally adopted the perspective of the social norm theory, which consists of descriptive and injunctive norms, and which acts as a role model and a set of social sanctions, respectively (Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012; Matthies, Selge, & Klöckner, 2012). In both situations, the role of family communication is neglected. Therefore, we applied a fresh perspective from the social influence theory to comprehensively advance understanding of the IG transfer process. The two perspectives are not in conflict. Injunctive norms follow the normative social influence described by Deutsch and Gerard (1955) quite closely and descriptive norms (role model) can be both normative and informational. In this study, we viewed role models, as well as family communication, as informational influence because observation of others' behavior is also an important source of informational influence.

To further advance the understanding of the two mechanisms, we examined parental power as a boundary condition for the two main effects of social influence: Firstly, the parent-child relationship is a basic element in successful family functioning (Grusec, 2011), and parental power is an integral feature

reflecting the heterogeneity of this relationship (McDonald, 1980). It is therefore highly likely that the heterogeneity of the relationship will impact on the IG transfer mechanism (Mittal & Royne, 2010). Secondly, parental power is a form of social power. Researchers have shown that when individuals experience social power, they may respond to external stimuli differently (Pitesa & Thau, 2013). Informational and normative influence can be viewed as two salient external stimuli which trigger different reactions to parental power in a family. Therefore, we examined the moderating effect of parental power on the relationship between social influence and proenvironmental behavior within the IG context. The moderating effect, if supported, should be helpful in substantiating our argument regarding the role of informational influence vis-à-vis normative influence.

In Chinese culture Confucian filial piety, which is a virtue of respect for one's father and elders (Liu, 2013), plays an important role in how family dynamics work (Liu, 2013; Yeh, Yi, Tsao, & Wan, 2013). We aimed to show how adolescents in China perceive parental power, and the way that normative influence works in the Chinese cultural context. We sought to contribute to the literature in two ways. Firstly, we attempted to clarify the role of information influence in children's proenvironmental behavior, an issue that we believe has received little attention. We have thus expanded the understanding of the process underlying the IG influence from the normative mechanism to the informational mechanism. Moreover, by adopting the social influence perspective, we have provided a framework comprising both informational and normative mechanisms. This enabled us to derive a better understanding of the IG transfer process underlying environmental behavior in the Chinese cultural context. Secondly, responding to calls to examine the family environment in the IG transfer process (Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012; Mittal & Royne, 2010), we tested the moderating effect of parental power, which identifies a boundary condition delineating variations in informational and normative influence. We expect our findings to help in gaining a better understanding of which type of social influence works well with different levels of parental power, especially in the Chinese cultural context.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Intergenerational Influence

The IG influence concept, which is derived from the theory of socialization, is generally defined as the transmission of information, beliefs, and resources from one generation to the next within the family (Moore, Wilkie, & Alder, 2001; Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002). Deviating from socialization, which focuses on the continuity between generations, IG influence emphasizes similarities between the parent-child dyad in terms of socialization outcomes. More recent researchers have stated that IG influence leads to a correspondence between

environmental attitudes and behavior between generations (Leppänen et al., 2012; Matthies et al., 2012; Meeusen, 2014), highlighting the importance of IG influence in the proenvironmental behavior domain.

IG influence is a bidirectional transmission involving not only the process of transmission from parents to children, but also a reciprocal process of transmission from children to parents (Gentina & Muratore, 2012). However, with respect to proenvironmental behavior, there is reason to believe that parents have more knowledge and experience than do children, and that they can provide behavior guidance for children. Therefore, parental influence is stronger and more salient than children's influence. In this study, we assumed IG influence to be a one-way process of parental influence.

Informational and Normative Social Influence

As we as individuals are social by nature, our behavior is highly susceptible to social influence (Bargh, 2006; Cialdini, 2005). Deutsch and Gerard (1955) distinguished between two focal types of social influence: informational and normative. *Informational social influence* leads us to accept the influence because we see it as a source of information to guide our behavior (Aronson et al., 2009). In contrast, *normative social influence* leads us to conform because we want to be liked and accepted by other people (Aronson et al., 2009). These types of social influence operate in different ways. Informational social influence generally takes the form of direct communication and discussion with, or observation of, others (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). The acceptance of informational social influence depends on the credibility of the source (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). However, normative social influence happens through the process of compliance (Park & Lessig, 1977). Compliance occurs when an individual behaves in accordance with the expectations of others to gain rewards or to avoid punishment (Bearden et al., 1989).

Parents are the primary channels of information and are lifelong referents in a family (Moore et al., 2001). Parents typically serve as a source of expertise because they have more social experience and knowledge than do adolescents (Moore et al., 2002). As adolescents can obtain information via communication and observation, they are likely to accept and internalize their parents' beliefs, preferences, and behavior.

Parents are also agents of social pressure (Moore et al., 2002). At the top of the parent-child relationship hierarchy, parents possess and control the supply of the child's emotional and material needs, and administer punishment, such as harsh criticism. It should be noted that normative influence may have two opposite effects simultaneously. On one hand, children comply with normative influence to avoid criticism, and to receive praise or maintain a good relationship with parents (i.e., *conformity effect*). On the other hand, because normative pressure constrains the psychological independence and autonomy that are extremely

important for adolescents in the transition to adulthood (Hoffman, 1984), normative influence can have a negative effect (i.e., *autonomy effect*).

In this study, however, we argued that, in general, the conformity effect surpasses the autonomy effect in the Chinese family context. This is because according to the Chinese Confucian philosophy of filial piety, it is a virtue for adolescents to show respect for their parents. Because of the strong impact of traditional Chinese culture, adolescents usually have a high level of filial piety, resulting in them conforming to their parents' expectations (Liu, 2013). Therefore, parental normative influence will, in general, promote children's proenvironmental behavior, despite the fact that adolescents have the motivation to seek autonomy (Hoffman, 1984; Liu, 2013). Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1.1: In a Chinese family, parents' informational social influence will have a positive influence on adolescents' proenvironmental behavior.

Hypothesis 1.2: In a Chinese family, parents' normative social influence will have a positive influence on adolescents' proenvironmental behavior.

Moderating Role of Parental Power

Social power is a central feature in all interpersonal associations (Henry, Wilson, & Peterson, 1989). Power, which is defined as the ability of an individual within a social relationship to influence the behavior of others, is a contextual variable (McDonald, 1980). In the family setting, *parental power* refers to the ability of one or both parents to change or control adolescents' behavior (Henry et al., 1989).

Adolescents experiencing parental power generally view their parents in two ways: One is viewing their parents as having credible expertise, whereas the other is viewing their parents as a normative pressure agent. This is consistent with the argument that a powerful parent acts as the primary source of information as well as the source of social pressure (Moore et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2002). The two views of parental power are chronically accessible (Aronson et al., 2009), because of adolescents' frequent and close interaction with their parents. In this study, we argued that informational influence and normative influence act as two external stimuli that trigger children's views of parental power.

The credible expertise view is more easily triggered by informational influence. Knowledgeable parents are more likely to be viewed as a credible role model in a high parental power situation. As a result, adolescents driven by the goal of taking appropriate action are more likely to internalize informational influence naturally in a high parental power situation (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2.1: In the Chinese cultural context the positive relationship between informational social influence and adolescents' proenvironmental behavior will become stronger when adolescents' perception of parental power is higher.

However, the role of parental power becomes more complex when its moderating effect on normative influence is taken into consideration. Of the two possible opposite effects of normative influence, conformity and seeking autonomy, the conformity effect generally surpasses the autonomy effect, especially in the Chinese cultural context (Hypothesis 1.2). In this study, however, we argued that the gap between the conformity effect and the autonomy effect would become smaller when parental power is higher. Our rationale was that as adolescence is a time of change and transition (Henry et al., 1989), adolescents have a stronger leaning toward psychological independence (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). An exhibition of high power on the part of normative influence arouses adolescents' desire for autonomy while, at the same time, it attenuates their motivation to conform. This implies that higher parental power may result in a narrower gap between the conformity effect and the autonomy effect in the response to normative influence, or it may even lead to children's rebellious behavior. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2.2: In the Chinese cultural context the positive relationship between normative social influence and adolescents' proenvironmental behavior will become weaker when adolescents' perception of parental power is higher.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected the data at a middle school in the Henan Province of China in September 2014. Before we started the survey, we communicated with the school administrators about our research purpose. With their help, we recruited adolescents aged 12 to 14 years who were students in the 7th to the 9th grade to participate in the survey in two waves with a lag of 2 weeks. We chose these students because adolescents of their age are more easily influenced by their parents (Hoffman, 1984). We assured the respondents that their answers were confidential. In Wave 1, the respondents reported on informational and normative social influence within the family context, parental power, and demographic information. During Wave 2, they answered items regarding proenvironmental behavior. Before the respondents filled out the survey form, we asked them to pay attention to the first question: "Father or mother, who influences you much more in daily life? Choose one." We then instructed them to answer the subsequent items according to their choice (father or mother).

Of the 242 distributed pairs of questionnaires, we received 213 pairs of responses. Of these responses, 172 pairs of complete data only were valid because of missing values in the others, for a final response rate of 80.75%. Of the respondents, 46.5% were boys and 53.5% were girls, and they had an average age of 12.8 years.

Measures

All the perceptual measures were rated based on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 6 (*agree strongly*), with measures of proenvironmental behavior ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*always*). We averaged the items to create the scores for the multi-item constructs.

Dependent variable: Proenvironmental behavior. *Proenvironmental behavior* refers to behavior that harms the environment as little as possible, or even benefits the environment (Steg & Vlek, 2009). Like researchers such as Aronson et al., (2009), we selected littering as the target behavior. We used the self-report approach that has been widely used in environmental psychology studies, and asked the respondents the following questions: (1) How well do you behave in regard to not littering? (2) When your family or friends are littering in public settings, how often do you tell them to pick it up? (3) When you accidentally drop some garbage, how often do you pick it up? (4) When there are no trash cans nearby, how often do you carry the litter in your hand until you find a trash can?

Independent variable: Informational influence. We used five items to measure informational influence, with the scale highlighting two key components: communication and observation (role model). These sources of informational social influence have also been emphasized in the Social Influence Scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989). The communication section had two items: (1) My parent reminds me not to litter; and (2) My parent talks with me about the importance of environmental protection. The observation section had three items: (3) I notice my parent drops litter into trash cans on many occasions; (4) Even if there were no trash cans nearby, I find that my parent will not throw away the litter until he/she finds one; and (5) When we are at public places such as the cinema or tourist attractions, I notice that my parent always drops the litter into the trash cans.

Independent variable: Normative influence. We used five items to measure normative influence. In line with previous normative influence researchers, we separated normative influence into utilitarian influence and value expressiveness (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Bearden et al., 1989). *Utilitarian influence* is reflected in individuals' attempts to comply with others' expectations to achieve rewards or avoid punishment (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). *Value expressiveness* is motivated by individuals' desire to support or enhance their self-concept through a process of identification (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). We asked the respondents to rate the degree to which they agreed with six statements divided into two sets. The utilitarian influence set comprised three items: (1) If I dispose of litter in trash cans, my parent will praise me; (2) If I litter, my parent will warn or criticize me; and (3) If I litter, my parent will ask me to pick it up. The value expressiveness set also comprised three items: (4) My choice not to litter reflects my sense of responsibility; (5) I want to follow the lifestyle of my parent, because

this could contribute to family harmony; and (6) My parent has the good habit of not littering. I wish I could behave like him/her.

Moderator variable: Parental power. We adopted *perceived parental power* (Henry et al., 1989), because it is the perceived reality that affects adolescents even though the perception may be inaccurate. We used 15 items adapted from McDonald (1977, 1980) to measure parental power. Sample items are "When I have to make a decision, I sometimes consider what my father/mother would want me to do," and "When I have a decision to make, the ideas of my father/mother are almost always worthy of careful consideration."

Control variables. We controlled for the following variables: adolescent age, adolescent gender, family income, parent gender, and parent education, following previous researchers (Chawla & Cushing, 2007; Klineberg, McKeever, & Rothenbach, 1998). Because Grønhoj and Thøgersen (2012) pointed out that an IG age gap could influence the norm effect on adolescents' proenvironmental behavior, we also controlled for IG age gap.

Data Analysis and Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the key study variables are shown in Table 1, in which the reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of each instrument appears on the diagonal in parentheses. With regard to validity, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the constructs were distinct. The expected four-factor model fit the data well, χ^2 (314 = 429), normed fit index (NFI) = .81, nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = .93, comparative fit index (CFI) = .94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05. We tested other models to examine whether or not they could achieve similar fits: The following results were displayed by a three-factor model, χ^2 (321 = 632), NFI = .71, NNFI = .82, CFI = .83, RMSEA = .08; a two-factor model, χ^2 (323 = 670), NFI = .70, NNFI = .80, CFI = .81, RMSEA = .08; and a one-factor model, χ^2 (324 = 752), NFI = .66, NNFI = .75, CFI = .77, RMSEA = .09. Chi-square difference tests showed that the expected four-factor model had a significantly better fit.

We then conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses to test our hypotheses. We first examined Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2, in both of which we posited a positive relationship between each type of social influence and proenvironmental behavior. The results of Model 2 in Table 2 supported Hypotheses 1.1 ($\beta = .239$, $p < .01$) and 1.2 ($\beta = .184$, $p < .05$). In Hypothesis 2.1 we predicted that the positive relationship between informational influence and proenvironmental behavior would be stronger among adolescents who perceived higher levels of parental power. The results of Model 3 in Table 2 supported Hypothesis 2.1 ($\beta = .215$; $p < .05$). Likewise, in Hypothesis 2.2 we predicted that the positive relationship between normative influence and proenvironmental behavior would

be weaker among adolescents who perceived higher levels of parental power. As predicted, Model 3 in Table 2 supported Hypothesis 2.2 ($\beta = -.222$; $p < .05$). To facilitate the interpretation of these results, we plotted the simple slopes for the relationship of informational influence (see Figure A1) and normative influence (see Figure A2), respectively, against proenvironmental behavior at one standard deviation above and below the mean of parental power (see Figures A1 and A2).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Informational influence	5.12	.71	(.71)								
2. Normative influence	4.87	.79	.54**	(.75)							
3. Proenvironmental behavior	4.46	.77	.30**	.30**	(.72)						
4. Parental power	4.66	.60	.39**	.36**	.07	(.71)					
5. Adolescent age	12.85	.94	-.28**	-.22**	.08	-.35**					
6. Adolescent gender	0.53	.50	.09	.11	.09	.01	.25**				
7. Parent gender	0.66	.48	-.15*	-.20**	-.23**	-.11	.03	.06			
8. Parent education	2.29	.87	.17*	.17*	.11	.25**	-.12	.11	-.20*		
9. Family income	1.92	.50	-.08	-.1	.04	-.08	.10	.13	-.02	-.12	
1. IG age gap	27.33	4.02	.22**	.14	.01	.15	-.23**	-.09	-.26**	.06	-.07

Note. *N* = 172. IG = intergenerational. Cronbach's alphas appear on the diagonal in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Regression Analysis Results

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controls			
Adolescent age	.067	.174	.116
Adolescent gender	.071	-.003	.006
Parent gender	-.228**	-.170*	-.187*
Parent education	.073	.039	.031
Family income	.023	.053	.036
IG age gap	-.031	-.071	-.094
Independent variables			
Informational influence		.239**	.280+
Normative influence		.184*	.166*
Moderator			
Parental power			-.099
Interactions			
Parental power × Informational influence			.215*
Parental power × Normative influence			-.222*
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.039	.146	.173
<i>R</i> ²	.073	.186	.226
<i>R</i> ² change	.073	.114***	.040*

Note. *N* = 172. IG = intergenerational. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, + $p < .10$.

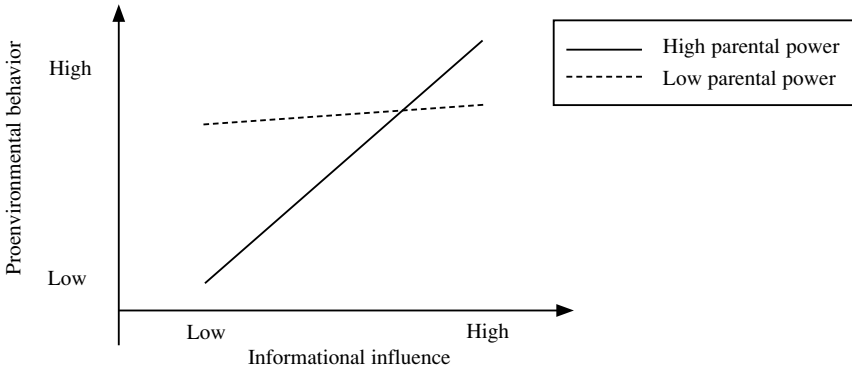


Figure A1. Moderating effect of parental power on informational influence.

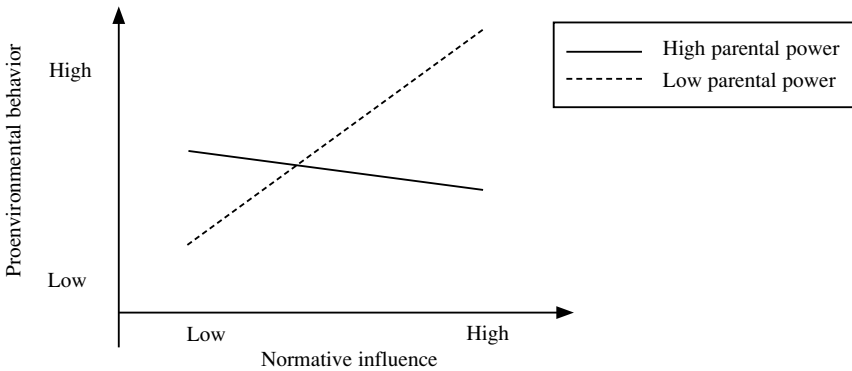


Figure A2. Moderating effect of parental power on normative influence.

Discussion

To achieve our objective of understanding how IG influence within families affects adolescents' proenvironmental behavior, we used social influence theory and linked two components of social influence (informational and normative influence) to adolescents' proenvironmental behavior. We found that parental power was a boundary condition for the effect of informational and normative influence. The empirical results support our theoretical expectations.

With an integrated framework combining both informational and normative influence, we adopted a social influence perspective to discuss how IG transmission facilitates adolescents' proenvironmental behavior in a Chinese cultural context.

We found that both informational influence and normative influence in the family context exerted a positive effect on proenvironmental behavior. We contributed to the proenvironmental literature by empirically demonstrating that IG influence is a potential and powerful driver of environmental practices (Leppänen et al., 2012; Matthies et al., 2012; Meeusen, 2014). In practice, our results imply that IG influence within Chinese families can be used as an important means for promoting adolescents' proenvironmental behavior. Parents can exert informational or normative influence to facilitate their children's environmental practices. Exerting informational influence means that parents, as role models, should exhibit responsible behavior themselves, and make their behavior visible to their adolescent children, who will observe and imitate their parents. Normative influence is also an efficient way to promote adolescents' proenvironmental behavior. Parents can make good use of praise and criticism to promote their children's proenvironmental behavior.

Parental power, as an integral feature of the parent-child relationship and a basis of social influence (Grusec, 2011), has been neglected in IG research. To address this gap, we highlighted the moderating role of parental power in the effectiveness of two forms of social influence. We found that parental power moderated the two main effects, but in different directions. Specifically, the relationship between informational influence and adolescents' proenvironmental behavior became stronger when adolescents perceived higher levels of parental power, whereas the opposite was true with respect to normative influence. Our findings suggest that in a family with a high level of parental power, parents can use informational influence to promote their children's proenvironmental behavior. In contrast, in a family with a low level of parental power, normative influence can be more effective. It is important that although our results show that parents' normative influence, in general, was positively related to the adolescents' proenvironmental behavior, we should be cautious that in some family circumstances (especially high parental power families), normative influence may result in an effect of more autonomy than conformity, leading to children's rebellious behavior.

There are several limitations in this study. Firstly, we investigated littering behavior, which is low cost and common to every age group. Future researchers should focus on whether or not, and how, IG influence impacts on other environmental practices, such as energy conservation and recycling. Secondly, our findings support that family context variables can moderate the IG effect on adolescents' proenvironmental behavior. Future researchers should examine other potential moderators that reflect the heterogeneity of the family context, for example, parental style, communication orientation, or strength of family relationships. These could affect adolescents' susceptibility to social influence when they engage in proenvironmental behavior.

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