

# Social Inheritance in the Context of Psychology

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**How to cite this paper:** Manolov, M., Stoyanov, I., Georgieva, Z. and Trifonova-Dimitrova, P. (2019) Social Inheritance in the Context of Psychology. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 7, 50-59.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.77005>

**Received:** June 5, 2019

**Accepted:** July 12, 2019

**Published:** July 15, 2019

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## Abstract

The aim of this report is to present the theoretical framework for studying the social inheritance as a problem of psychology. The study is funded under Contract No KII-06-M25/4 of 12.17.2018 concluded with the Research Fund of the Republic of Bulgaria. The studies of social inheritance position it in the context of sociology and economics. Thus, it is placed in the setting of confirmed scientific facts. The main question that should be answered is about the exact course of the processes that make it possible. The points of reference, set for its study in the context of psychology, are assumed to be the facts in child development, accompanied by the relevant characteristics on one hand. On the other hand is the social nature of man, which is also the reason that makes the existence and development of this phenomenon possible. Assuming that movement is an essential element of development, we can derive the statement that major importance should be given to processing of social facts in the context of human individuality and returning them back into the social context, which results also in an update of the social world and respectively—of the objective world. This work lays the basis of the theoretical framework of social inheritance in the context of sociology and derives the hypotheses that define the next steps in the research.

## Keywords

Social Inheritance, Social Comparison, Transgenerational Transmission, Social Development, Family Influence

## 1. Motivation for the Selected Topic

The leading reason for choosing this topic lies in the need to predict the child's explanatory patterns in relation to reality. To the extent that these patterns are social, they can be inferred from an in-depth knowledge of the child's family/background. The way in which reality is explained is also the reason for a significant portion of the subsequent behaviors. On the other hand, the under-

standing of the specific mechanisms and periods that are related to intergenerational transmission make possible the preventive impact on possible negative influences.

The present work is a theoretical study on social inheritance and the findings of other areas of science. Studies have been selected which, on the one hand, provide evidence of the relevant influences and, on the other hand, present the model of the relevant social transmission. Given the lack of specific research in the context of social and developmental psychology, the theoretical part needs to be more thorough. Although this may aggravate the current work, it is the basis for drawing on our leading hypotheses and a method of researching social inheritance and the way it happens in the context of social psychology.

## 2. Theoretical Frame

The social inheritance has been transformed into something that is a major sociological factor. There are a lot of evidences that social origin influences the chances of life both today and in the past. This is related to mobility, professional class, belonging, educational achievement [1] [2]. Taking into account, that communication and family contact are the leading reason of these social facts. Subject to social psychology is communication, social processes and interaction between people. It is assumed that the perception of the world, the attitudes, the respective behavior of the same are the reason for the emergence of social facts. They, in turn, are communicated through in-house communication and relevant specifics in relation to the development of the child. Therefore, social inheritance, as conceptualized, should be studied and conveyed in the context of social psychology and developmental psychology, with the guiding hypothesis that: attitudes, language constructs, family affiliation are transferred through social-psychological processes into the child's mind and into a large degree pre-determine his behavior.

Present days may generally be related to the hypermodernity, resulting from hyperconsumption, freedom of individuality and relocation of cultural values in a global and accessible world. Based on that, the family background may be defined as an essential aspect of individual development. The family perceives, processes, brings out, synthesizes, trains and mentors a child regarding the natural need to integrate in society and to learn a maximum number of life skills, techniques and strategies to tackle the challenges of reality. Ultimately, the way an individual interprets reality is the way this reality has been placed and presented before him/her.

The majority of models for passing resources between generations are based on bigenerational transmission (from father and mother to child). In the course of this transmission, in addition to the immanent socio-economic status and ethnicity, both educational ambitions and life skills are managed. The main types of resources are economic, cultural and social. The economic capital exerts influence on the skills for financial and material prosperity. The cultural capital

leads to awareness of the dominant cultural code and the ability to use relevant knowledge, whether internalized through knowledge and behaviour, or objectified through employing cultural objects to one's own advantage. The social capital refers to the scope and quality of meaningful social networks [3].

In its essence, this model has positives features, which impart quality to the content of social inheritance in the context of sociology. Mare, however, claims that the bigenerational model is not able to cover the various ways in which family background affects children's development and their social heritage in particular [4]. He emphasises that resources and benefits are not passed consecutively from one generation to another. On the contrary, it is confirmed that the extended family, and grandparents in particular, play a crucial role in the lives of most children. What they give to children has a direct effect on children's achievements, which are related to long-term success (cognitive development, academic success). This influence on the child can be direct, "passing over" the parental figure.

On the other hand, the elders exert also a passive influence on the child, since they are in direct relationship with his/her parents, who are at the same time the result of the grandparents' parenting efforts. The "investment" of resources in children may be passed along all axes—economic, cultural, social—and in all forms; and given the considerable time spent in direct communication between children and grandchildren, there is a possibility for direct influence along all axes through parents as well.

A study on the choice of education [3], confirms that the cultural investment made by parents and grandparents affects to a greatest extent the choice of quality education. One way to explain this fact is that the extended families share one cultural and social environment (not necessarily their social network and benefits) for longer periods of time, which leaves an "imprint" on the children. Another explanation is that the cultural investment made by the elders requires considerably less effort, since their energy is not directed to creation and expanding their social network or to accumulation of personal wealth.

Basically, it is confirmed that the cultural capital is a latent characteristic feature, which is passed through several generations. And this is quite logical, bearing in mind that language is the medium that both socializes children and passes the cultural capital through the generations. Language is used to explain reality here and now, and that explanation determines the individual's skills to function in a certain period of time that is his/her active age, at which he/she pursues aspirations consistent with the spirit of the times. In this period of time, every individual archives certain amount of information, which he/she passes on to the offspring that he/she shall "teach to live".

The acquired cultural awareness is also the perception which people are able to pass on to the next generations—it primarily depends on the respective individual development of those who pass it on. In case of poor vocabulary, inability to understand abstraction and metaphor, the eventual consequence would be

poor cultural development and respectively—poor “picture” of reality, which will make it difficult for the individual to integrate in the social environment, considered as primary for “point A” in one’s own life.

In order to conceptualize it, however, in the context of psychology, the development of the family in contemporary times should also be studied as a substrate of social inheritance. The earliest hypothesis of a nuclear family having structural and objective functions, in contemporary times is replaced by the hypothesis that the family rather performs emotional and subjective functions. A suitable concept that may be associated with this is “camaraderie” and “friendship” based on marriage. And the term usually used is “unity between interacting individuals”.

This gives rise to three assumptions: first—the “family” in its essence is a process, an interacting system influenced by each member, and it is not a structure or a household; second—the behaviour of family members, such as a problematic child, estranged father, cannot be understood and considered outside the relationships with other family members, their current interaction models and personalities, which are being developed and altered by these interactions; third—the central functions of families have changed from mainly structural units of social organization to relationships that support the individuals’ needs. Marriage is transformed from a primarily economic union into one based on feelings and friendship [5]. Female emancipation and economic independence does not correspond to the nuclear family from the past, “dominated by the husband”. There is an increase in divorces and step-parenthood, for which the term binuclear family is used.

Popenoe defines the family as “a relatively small home group of relatives (or people in kinship relations) consisting of at least one adult and one dependent” [6].

At present, family diversity and “liquefaction” are normal and the post-modern family offers the possibility for egalitarian, democratic forms of intimacy, as well as for potentially threatening levels of uncertainty. Based on the above, the assumption may be drawn that firstly, the demographic changes between generations (changing social and family age structures, creating possibilities for longer years of “shared life”) lead to increased possibilities and needs for interaction, support and mutual influence in more than two generations. Secondly, in the course of time, a solidarity force is generated between the generations, as well as greater diversity of cross-generational relationships. Thirdly, the undermined marital stability and the increased number of divorces in recent decades have weakened the ability of nuclear families to provide the socialization, care and support that the family members need.

In this sense, in the society of the 21st century, the family functions are increasingly assigned to relatives of several generations [5]. Naturally, the resulting interactions have certain consequences. The divorce, remarriage and unification of families expand the number and types of “step-relatives”, which provide the

individual with wide kinship networks that are both varied and problematic. At the same time, these processes generate prolonged life in the context of inter-generational communication, which could potentially lead to negative consequences from the “long years of life shared” between generations. One of them involves long-term care for dependent adults, and the other is related to a “lifetime confrontational relationship” with the elderly.

The development of the family in contemporary society, redefining the relations from objective and economic to subjective and emotional, create the prerequisite for social inheritance in the very context of the emotional and personal world. The influence of social background includes two mechanisms, first comes the impact of family conditions and parental stimulation, which are particularly important in early childhood, followed by the decision-making processes that young people go through at a later stage.

The family, however, is only the nucleus, which sets the beginning. Shortly after a child is born and the family has defined its models and expectations for the child, there comes the social environment in which the child verifies the respective models and gets “feedback” from a micro-model of the world where he/she will live.

A research [7] demonstrated that the high levels of interaction between parent and child increase the expectations of parents and children; an agreement between parents and children about educational expectations improves the academic results of children. In other words, the educational expectations of students will be undermined, if parents reduce the interaction with their children in learning activities, such as discussion of expectations and school issues between parents and students, involvement of parents in the school life, and academic contact between parents and schools. The positive link between encouragement by parents and educational expectations can build up students’ “confidence in their ability to achieve good results, so that they appreciate education and see the learning process as something positive and rewarding”.

Researches on children’ educational achievements are also considered in terms of sex. Sex is indicated as a factor that affects social inheritance. The explanations for these differences in parental encouragement are that there are two different types of interpersonal influence: model and definitive [8]. It is more likely for parents to play a definitive role for boys; girls, however, are more likely to see their parents as a model. Definitive parents assume that there is a tension between boys and parents, and therefore boys would oppose to their parents’ participation and expectations. On the contrary, girls are more conformable than boys and are more likely to accept encouragement from parents, which in turn urges parents to encourage girls. Sex is also a factor in peer relationships, in contrast to girls, boys prefer and get more social support and information from adults. And girls are more inclined than boys to receive social support from peers.

In other words, it is more likely for peers to become a source of information for girls than for boys. Boys believe, more than girls, that advice from teachers is

more serious [9]. Regarding class distribution, teachers and friends have stronger influence on children from working class families than on children from the middle class. This is explained by the fact that in terms of children's development and future, parents who belong to the middle class can provide more reliable information and sufficient resources than parents from the working class.

Ultimately, the individual may fall under influence when in need of information for action in a certain situation, where the necessary information should be received from others. A prerequisite, however, for that influence is the will to get the necessary information from others. The will to accept the necessary information is determined by the individual's trust in the source [10].

### 3. Social Inheritance in Psychological Field

The above leads to the conclusion that during his/her development, the child is influenced by various sources, which are defined by both family and socially—by a teacher or a circle of friends. With regard to their influence and the possibility for social inheritance, however, trust comes in the first place and is a function of the relations within the family. If trust is absent, deviations may be expected to raise distrust to the world and others. It leads to inadequate social adaptation and behaviours. For that reason, the fundamental assumption considering social inheritance in the context of psychology involves examination of the development on one hand, and on the other—the different types of crises and the ways in which social awareness is acquired while children are building their personality and behaviour in the setting of their own living.

Social inheritance may be conceptualized on two levels. The first one is the common level associated with overpersonal aspects—social identity, ethnic identity, which are historically determined. From that level on, the conductors of social inheritance are the institutions that integrate the same values in the new generations. On the other hand are the parents, who reduce the reality to their own one, integrating the general reality the way it was experienced.

The respective beliefs are transferred through the social relationship between parent and child. Here, the stress is on the mechanism that creates awareness and on the interaction between the two components—the abstract and the objective. These assumptions are considered in development. From the very birth onwards, the individual has his/her own natural needs—need for attention, physiological needs, need for love. In view of the limited needs, their forms for explanation of reality are “attached” to the way they are satisfied. The spectrum of needs, determines the spectrum of emotions, and the respective experience obtained from reality is associated exactly with them. Emotions arise as a result of accommodating the child into reality, as well as the experiencing security and insecurity.

In view of this algorithm, it may be assumed that emotions are the effect, and they are limited to fear and love. It may be assumed that all other emotions experienced as a consequence are secondary and socially determined. To the extent

that the child is symbiotically connected with his/her mother, the only possible empathy in the context of subject-subject relations is precisely the age before the individual wants to be a self-distinct person.

Until the age of about three years, the formation of child's awareness goes through the limited explanations of reality as satisfying the needs on one hand, and on the other—the comprehensive examination of reality as something connected predetermines also the way experience is related to the whole, and not to its fragments. That is why we may assume that the formation of awareness and the overall attitude towards the world happens at this age. After that the separate components are examined, but in terms of sequence. According to Jean Piaget, intelligence develops in the following order—sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, stages of concrete and stages of formal operations. The development of intelligence can be seen as passing from the bodily to the symbolic, from the whole to the detail. In the preoperational stage, it is notable that the intellect is characterized by transductive thinking. The reason for that may be the difficulties that are still experienced with separating the details from the whole, which is also typical for this age. The child learns to break the reality into its component parts.

To summarize, the awareness of reality by way of decomposition represents something general that the individual subjects to decomposition during development, and after acquiring the experience and information about the decomposed reality, the individual can again compose new whole structures, based on creativity. In terms of development, the decomposition may not be followed by construction, but by new decomposition, hatred of the whole, rejection of the whole and search for the detail, or feeling horror of the whole leading to destructive behaviour.

The experience gained in the early stages of development, given the characteristic integrity and the limited range of emotions, leads to the explanation of human relations as a result of familiar experiences. Thus, the surrounding social reality, the relationships between the people who integrate the child into the world, can be explained by love and fear. In other words, the child interprets the attitude towards him/her as love, since this is the only possible explanation in view of the experience of integrity and symbiosis.

In this period, each event is a new experience that is virtually impossible to interpret through anything other than the existing integrity and the narrow emotional range. Everything is unknown, and the inability to satisfy one's needs independently due to the lack of control in infancy, presupposes reliance on others. This in turn creates also the conditions for establishment of social awareness. The unknown has to be put into specific words, given that the symbolic has yet to be developed. In the very beginning of development, things around exist as an "object", but the social aspect should reveal that they also exist "symbolically". Children do not know they are hungry, they experience discomfort in the body, which should be explained to make them feel secure next

time they experience such discomfort, because they will know what happens to them. This is related to “fragmentation” and learning about reality. What is important from that point of view is that the differentiation of one detail of the whole is related to the awareness of the detail, so that it is realised as something different from the rest.

Representing the symbolical facilitates the development and orientation of the child in reality, but it also results in duality in terms of the existence of things, which duality may become symmetrical in the future, but may also turn out to be asymmetrical. The duality related to the symbolic and the experience of the objective creates also a precondition for emergence of internal conflicts. In view of the inherent trust in adults, this develops also as a form of loyalty. The male and the female aspects are also part of the individual and an example of this are the parents. Both parents exist in the child’s life as the concept of the other parent and as a direct consequence of the relationship with that parent. The child’s personality is formed in this sense and in view of this parallelism, depending also on his/her own biological sex. If we assume that the child is a boy, whose father is represented as a loving and caring person by the mother, and at the same time the child experiences the same attitude towards himself, then there is no conflict.

This may be linked to individuation, which Dobrev considers as a “movement toward the wholeness through the integration of the conscious and unconscious parts of personality ... This implies recognition and acceptance of these parts by oneself, which have initially been rejected or seem negative, but also discovering the possibilities contained in the elements of the opposite sex (anima/animus), and which can serve as an entrance or conductor to the unconscious” [11]. The harmonious existence of the male in the boy, in terms of experience and symbolically, will not result in a certain attitude towards his own sex, as well as in attempts to differentiate from his own self.

In the end, and regardless of his own experience, which to a great extent is given a secondary place, in view of seeking an explanation of reality, the symbolic representation, at least to the age of 11 - 12 years, prevails in the formation of the consciousness. Only then it is possible to form one’s own concept, which is related to the experience already acquired as a mindset and conditioned by the given explanations.

The above described, as well as the sociological confirmation of the social inheritance, justifies the search of the particular connection between the explanation provided by the environment and the formation of the individual as a personality, in order to fit the same individual into the social environment. In view of this theoretical overview, the need is identified for conducting a specific research—an explanatory model for the role of the mental in the process of social inheritance.

Methodically, we’ll search the common about society and the constructs on the first—national, cultural, linguistic level. With content analysis, we will search the main messages from fairy tales, cultural integration of the family, explana-



tions of the reality, family conversations. We'll search the main emotional status of children when the parents share their attitudes toward reality, and what are their "little" explanations and behaviors when they are in the same situation. We'll use interviews and projective methodic. We accept that crises are key moments in child development, when "one life part" ends and there are stable attitudes and behaviours toward their selves and the world. So we'll search about these things which are part of their characters (as they are explained by parents/grandparents) and those which are at the process of the experimenting. We will search that with questionnaire for parents/grandparents. The surveyed will be three generations that are directly related to children between 3 and 8 years of age. The age of children is selected in the context of age-related crises and dynamic development.

The understanding of the relevant processes as well as their content will expand the conceptual field of social psychology on the one hand. On the other hand, it is a prerequisite for consideration of the overall dynamics of modernity (cultural, political, linguistic, virtual) to be seen in the context of what will be "inherited" by the next generation and where the investments will be targeted by the institutions. In connection with the study in Bulgarian context, the main objective is to present the leading deficits in the social development of the children, and then institutionally to make investments for the respective compensation.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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