

“B*tch, Be Humble!”: Cultural Transmission of Value Systems Through Narrative Art

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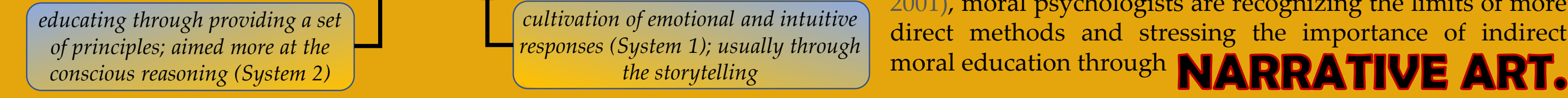
CULTURAL ANIMALS & MORALITY

Although lately there has been some success in uncovering the universal features of moral cognition (e.g., Curry et al., 2019; Gray, Young & Waytz, 2012; Greene, 2013), morality is not a static system with a fixed and universal set of moral norms. It (1) differs across cultures (Graham et al., 2013; Henrich et al., 2005) & (2) changes over time (Bloom, 2010a; Pinker, 2011). The reason is that we live in a diverse and unstable environment that requires flexible behavioral responses for an animal like us to prosper in it (Boyd, Richerson & Henrich, 2011). Crude and inflexible moral intuitions that have been fixed in us by the forces of natural selection need to be supplied with some update based on the local needs and challenges that given habitat presents itself with (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Therefore, fixed behavioral pattern is abandoned in favor of a more flexible solution in the form of **cultural transmission of moral information through the means of social learning** backed up by the suit of adaptations for selective social learning – so-called **natural pedagogy** (Csibra & Gergely, 2009) and **transmission biases** (Berger, 2011; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Mesoudi, Whiten & Dunbar, 2006; Nichols, 2002; Stubbelsfield et al., 2019).

TYPES OF (MORAL) LEARNING

SETTINGS
 In the educational sciences literature, one can often encounter a distinction between the **formal vs. informal setting of learning** (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). At the same time, reviews of what is and is not working in value education show that formal mode is not very effective and instead recommend the use of informal or “stealthy” modes of moral education (Meindl, Quirk & Graham, 2018).

METHODS
 On the other hand, in the moral psychology literature, one can find another distinction (Haidt & Joseph, 2004), this time concerning the methods of moral education: **direct vs. indirect route** to it. Based on the relative dominance of intuitive processes in moral cognition (Haidt, 2001), moral psychologists are recognizing the limits of more direct methods and stressing the importance of indirect moral education through **NARRATIVE ART**.



INTRODUCTION

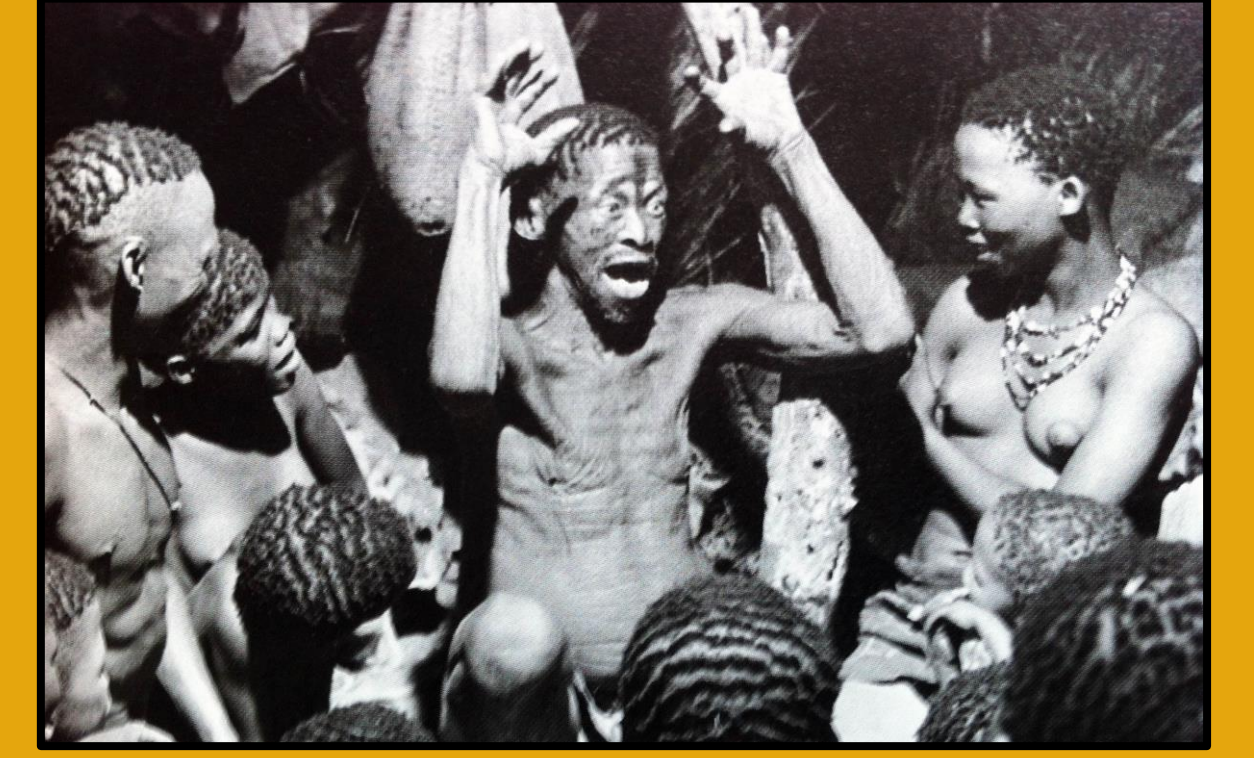
That said, is storytelling (and narrative art in general) fit to fulfill the task that moral psychologists and educators envision for it? Does it lend itself easily to be a vehicle for the transmission of moral information? Is its primary function? **What is narrative art for anyway?**

LITERARY DARWINISM & COGNITIVE NARRATOLOGY

A dominant position in the literature on the evolution of narrative art (e.g., Dutton, 2009; Oatley, 2008; Pinker, 1997; Sugiyama, 2017) views it precisely as an **adaptation by natural selection**, the purpose of which is the **acquisition of new information about the physical and social environment** (e.g., moral norms). Several features of narrative art make it plausible to argue for this conclusion:

- (1) universality**
 - present in every known culture (Brown, 1991; Carroll, 2009)
- (2) stable developmental trajectory**
 - emerges between the ages of 2½ and 3; children as young as 30 months can distinguish it (Boyd, 2009; Sugiyama, 2001)
- (3) strong affective reactivity**
 - it evokes strong, life-like emotional responses, see the *paradox of fiction*
- (4) high consumption rate**
 - over 4 hours a day by an average American (Bloom, 2010b)
 - among hunter-gatherers, a large portion of night-time conversation is devoted to it – 81% among the Ju’hoansi Bushmen (Wiessner, 2014)

MORAL STORYTELLING & EVOLUTION



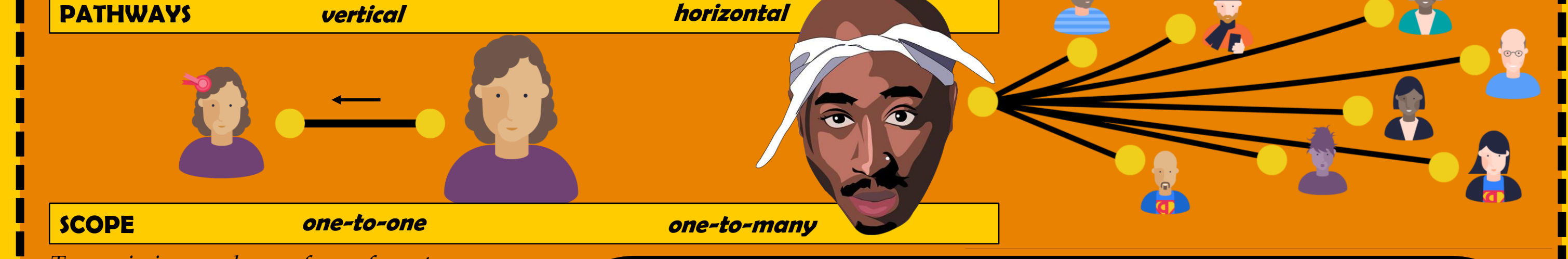
SUMMARY: It seems that evolutionary and cognitive narratologists are in agreement with moral psychologists about the role of narrative fiction in the finetuning of ancient moral intuitions with the local cultural input through the means of cultural transmission/social learning. Next, as a case study, I will take a closer look at one such form of narrative art – **RAP MUSIC**.

RAPPERS AS “INFORMATION DISPATCHERS” (Chang, 2005)

AIM Despite the bad rap that it has received over the years as supposedly being the force corrupting the youth (e.g., McWhorter, 2003; see also Rose, 2008), I would like to argue that hip hop culture is actually a perfect source for the study of informal moral education as specified above.

The rest of the poster will be dedicated to arguing for this position. The theoretical toolkit of cultural evolutionary studies (Mesoudi, 2011) will be used to assess the social learning potential of rap music. The focus will be on three main topics, that is on:

PATHWAYS & SCOPE OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION



CULTURAL DOMINANCE OF (RAP) MUSIC

- an average American spent **32 hours a week listening to music** in 2018 (Nielsen Report, 2017)
- since 2017 hip hop is the **most popular genre of music** in the U.S. (21,7% of total music consumption in 2017)
- rappers as **modern-day griots** with **massive audience and influence** in dissemination of moral information

KENDRICK LAMAR (*1987, Compton CA)

- 13 Grammy awards; multi-platinum artist; Pulitzer Prize winner;
- socio-moral criticism as an integral part of mainstream pop music

monthly listeners on Spotify

CULTURAL SELECTION; TRANSMISSION BIASES

Transmission biases cause some cultural information to be copied preferentially. There are **three main types** of these biases, based on cultural attractiveness of: (1) **frequency of the given information in the cultural pool**, (2) **characteristics of the cultural model**, and (3) **content of the information** (Mesoudi, 2011).

FREQUENCY-DEPENDENT BIASES
conformity bias
 Frequency of given information is taken as a guide in whether to adopt it. **More frequent = higher probability of emulation.**
 RAP We have already established the popularity of rap music in the previous section.

MODEL-BASED BIASES
ADAPTIVE PROBLEM: From whom to selectively copy when there is an abundance of potential cultural models?
SOLUTION: Characteristics of the teacher as a proxy of her **knowledgeableness, success**, or **trustworthiness**, making her more attractive as a cultural model. Minimizing the risk of acquiring **false or irrelevant information.**

CREDs: (Henrich, 2015; see also Chivaja & Reznicek, 2019)
taboo (especially face) as costly signaling
otherwise risk of threatening moral comparison (Morris, 2007)

similarity bias (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Han et al., 2017)
need for attainable & relevant (moral) exemplars
prestige bias (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001)
emulating excellent individuals
"started from the bottom" trope
success is easy to spot, conspicuously displayed

CONTENT BIASES
 Some features of a given idea make it more “attractive,” and it is preferentially copied because it is easier to remember and recall.

WHAT FEATURES ARE ATTRACTIVE FOR HUMAN MIND?
(1) AFFECTIVELY VALENCE & AROUSING CONTENT
 It seems that especially so-called *core disgust* (Haidt, McCauley & Rozin, 1994) boosts transmission of normative beliefs (Nichols, 2002). Also arousal seems to affect memorability (Berger, 2011).

(2) SOCIO-MORAL CONTENT
 Information that is socio-moral in nature (Mesoudi, Whiten & Dunbar, 2006; Stubbelsfield et al., 2019) seems to have an advantage in the cultural attractiveness.

RAP
 It seems plausible that transmission is boosted by the **repetitive consumption** of songs and by the fact that it is sometimes consumed in **quasi-religious and arousing settings** (i.e., at the shows). As for the presence of the socio-moral content in rap music, see the last section.

NATURAL SELECTION; MORAL CONTENT

(VERY BRIEF) HISTORY
 Starting with *Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's* song *The Message* (1982) – criticizing the devastation of the post-70' Bronx and indifference of the city officials – socio-moral criticism become common theme in the rap lyrics (so-called *conscious rap*) continuing the tradition of social commentary one can find in works of such artists as Bob Marley, James Brown, Nina Simone, Marvin Gaye, etc. (Sullivan, 2011). In 2010', with such interprets as Kendrick Lamar or J. Cole, the moral element is an integral part of the mainstream pop music.

THEMES
 Rap is usually used both to deal with moral issues of **global** (human rights, violence, racism, police brutality, drugs, etc.) and **local importance** (legacy of slavery, mass incarceration, etc. in the USA; rise of far-right, plight of Roma people, etc. in the Czech Republic and Slovakia), effectively covering all five moral foundations (*moral foundation theory*; see Graham et al., 2013). A lot of these concerns seem to have an adaptive element to it (see examples below).

DATASET
 To have a better idea about the broad of moral concerns that can be found in rap songs, I have started to build a dataset, conducting a content analysis of almost 200 songs (using 73 analytical moral categories).

LIFE HISTORY THEORY (Hill, 1993)
 „The DO's and DON'Ts for the transition from fast life history to slow life history are passed.

Both more traditional (**reciprocity, racism & slavery, snitching**) but also more modern (e.g., **taxation**) issues are commonly included in rap lyrics.

FAIRNESS/CHEATING
 I'll write a check to the IRS, my pockets get slim
 Dama, do I even have a say 'bout where it's goin'?

CARE/HARM
 I bought every V12 engine
 Wish I could take it back to the beginnin' 'cause I lost value (...)

LOYALTY/BETRAYAL
 Tell me who you loyal to
 Do it start with your woman or your man? (Mmm)
 Do it end with your family and friends? (Mmm)
 Are you loyal to yourself in advance?
 I said, tell me who you loyal to
 Is it anybody that you would lie for?
 Anybody you would slide for?
 Anybody you would die for?
 That's what God for

MALE & FEMALE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR
std
 a lot of rhymes about condom use in the early 1990's rap

RELIGION
 atheist rappers almost non-existent in the U.S.
 Christianity and Islam (Five Percent Nation) most prevalent
 present in lyrics

group cohesion & loyalty is common

AUTHORITY/SUBVERSION!
 Nigga, and we hate po-po
 Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho'

KENDRICK LAMAR/Humble PURITY/DEGRADATION

KENDRICK LAMAR ft. RIHANNA//LOYALTY

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